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Erratum

Une erreur d'impression s'est glissée dans l'article de Sophie Bastien, « Les Grandes Marées, dans le roman de Jacques Poulin », paru dans le numéro 198. Les deux premiers paragraphes de la première note à la fin du texte, à la page 55, constituent la conclusion de l'étude et n'auraient pas d'être mis en note. Nous nous excusons de cette erreur auprès de l'auteure, des lecteurs et des lectrices. La revue en assume l'entière responsabilité.

Editorial

Strategic Cultural Nationalism

Laura Moss

We love our hockey. We love our beer. We love our arts.
—Advertisement for CBC Radio's "Q," 2009

In September 2008, a most extraordinary thing happened in Canada. Culture became *the* central issue in a federal election campaign, briefly eclipsing discussions of climate change and the economy. It ignited, in the bellicose language of the day, the latest rendition of "Canada's culture war." National attention was sparked by the announcement of 45 million dollars in cuts from the government arts and culture budget. Speaking in Saskatchewan, Prime Minister Stephen Harper clearly miscalculated public opinion on the importance of the link between culture and national identity when he called culture a "niche issue": "You know, I think when ordinary working people come home, turn on the TV and see a gala of a bunch of people, you know, at a rich gala, all subsidized by the taxpayers, claiming their subsidies aren't high enough when they know the subsidies have actually gone up, I'm not sure that's something that resonates with ordinary people" (qtd. in O'Malley). Opposition leaders seized the topic in the televised debates, particularly in reference to the specificities of Quebec culture, with Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe asking Harper: "How can you recognize the Quebec nation and then cut culture [funding], which is the soul of a nation?" Further emphasizing the issue in the context of Quebec, the NDP launched an ad campaign calling Harper's party the "*Conserva-tueur de la culture*" or "Culture killers." However, the issue was by no means limited to Quebec, as the outrage sparked across the country clearly demonstrated. "Ordinary people" responded in droves on radio phone-in shows and in editorial blogs, in classrooms and coffee shops, on doorsteps with canvassing politicians and in town hall meetings with concerned citizens defending the welfare of culture in Canada. If Harper was trying to tap into what Scott

Bakker calls the "low-brow resentment" of culture, he appears to have failed. Instead, he resurrected a longstanding ideological debate about government support for the arts.

Canadians were once again engaged in a public dialogue on the role of public funding of the nation's creative communities, as they had been in the 1850s (when Thomas D'Arcy McGee proclaimed "no literature, no national life—that is an irrevocable law"), the 1880s (when writers lamenting the lack of local publishing outlets called for government intervention), the 1930s (when the Aird Commission made recommendations that led to the creation of the National Film Board and the Canadian Broadcasting Company), the 1950s (when the Massey Report supported the creation of the Canada Council and increased funding for the National Library), the 1960s (when Canadian content regulations were introduced for radio and television broadcasters), and the 1980s (with the debate around the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement). Traditionally, artists have been on both sides of the open market versus protectionism debate (as Frank Davey illustrates in his discussion of free trade in *Post-National Arguments*), but this time the side arguing that aesthetic merit alone should guide culture was remarkably quiet in the noise occasioned by the cuts. Harper's "niche" comment triggered a country-wide discussion of creativity, the allocation of resources, and state policy. The message was clear: culture is important to Canadians as Canadians. What was a little less clear was the role contemporary Canadians would prefer the government to play in supporting the arts.

Some cultural commentators focused on the economic benefits to the nation of a vibrant arts community and others concentrated on the devastating effects funding cuts to arts programs would have on the constantly shifting views of Canadian identity. In a *Globe and Mail* article running under the heading "To be creative is, in fact, Canadian," Margaret Atwood summed up the sentiments of many artists as she aligned Canadian identity squarely with Canadian artistic production—high, low, and middle brow—poems, songs, gardens, quilts, costumes, operas, and origami included. She continued: "For decades, we've been punching above our weight on the world stage—in writing, in popular music and in many other fields. Canada was once a cultural void on the world map, now it's a force." She persisted, "Canadians, it seems, like making things, and they like appreciating things that are made." Still, there was some dissent. For instance, writing in the *National Post*, D'Arcy Jenish countered arguments about the value of public support of the Canada Council by pointing out that "Canada produced many

fine writers, painters, composers and other artists in those apparently dreary pre-council times."[1] And yet, the dominant mood in the country seemed to strongly favour a renewed sense of commitment to the arts as a national priority. When ordinary people came out swinging in response to Harper, they repeatedly made the link between identity, culture, and a mandate for government support of the arts. This is the key: popular cultural nationalism in Canada means, at least in some part, institutional and public support of culture.

But cultural nationalism is not a static concept, or, at least in this recent iteration, necessarily a celebratory one or one based on nostalgic longing for coherence or national commonality. Canadians showed that they were invested in national culture without resorting to an uncritical celebration of all things red and white. Ordinary Canadians championing public support of the arts set aside the well-known Canadian tendency toward self-deprecation in their comments on the merits of contemporary Canadian art, but they did not relinquish a sense of irony or skepticism in their discussions of the social role of culture. The cultural nationalism voiced by many Canadians during the election showed that as a national characteristic creativity, in Atwood's sense, and the concomitant commitment to public funding of arts programs and artists, was something that the government should feel obliged to get behind.

The cultural nationalism that came to the fore in Canada in response to Harper's comments in 2008 differs from past iterations of cultural nationalism. Echoes of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent's introduction of the Massey Commission in 1949 could be heard: "it is in the national interest to give encouragement to institutions which express *national feeling*, promote *common understanding* and add to the variety and richness of Canadian life, rural as well as urban" (my italics, *Order in Council*). However, the current round of cultural nationalism no longer seems to be driven by a desire for a common understanding of Canada. Canadians appear to widely recognize that such a singular version of Canada is untenable in a multicultural, multiracial, multilinguistic, and multi-ethnic society. Popular cultural nationalism reflects the values of the new millennium in other ways as well. It is not focused on defining Canadian culture through negation (whereby Canadian art is Canadian because it is emphatically not American or British), not motivated by fear of cultural annexation (as St. Laurent and the authors of the Massey Report were), not provoked by the anxiety of influence, and not predicated on exclusionist notions of identity (as it has been in the past). Cultural nationalism is no longer aligned with radical 1960s anti-establishment thinking and decolonization movements around the globe either. Such a

sense of radical nationalism no longer holds the moral weight many thought it carried in the 1960s. The increasing recognition of Canadian colonial exploitation of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities has dampened celebratory and uncontested nationalism. The more exclusionary nationalism of the past has been replaced by popular cultural frameworks that allow room for a multiplicity of Canadas. Over the past few decades, Canadian writers and critics have moved beyond a desire for a unified nationalism in favour of more ethnic, regional, gender, and class diversity. Instead of the tired image of the mosaic, I think of such intersecting nationalisms in Canada (cultural, ethnic, civic, and imagined) as oscillating circles of nationalism—nations within nations and nations overlapping with nations in the same space. An individual can be located within several spheres at the same time. Perhaps this is all wishful thinking on my part and I am ventriloquizing my own position onto ordinary Canadians, but I don't think so. The displays of popular cultural nationalism during the election were not predicated on ethnic affiliation or constructions of coherence, but on assertions of the value of art and culture in multiple national imaginaries within Canada.

The story about the election and the culture war complicates the relationship between cultural nationalism and civic and ethnic nationalisms, forcing us to consider them in conjunction. I return to Atwood, one of Canada's most vocal nationalists, to consider the implications of her public support of Gilles Duceppe in the last election. The separatist leader was adamant about the need for federal support of culture for the survival of the Quebec nation. Atwood chose to back his position in the culture wars even though his stance on Quebec sovereignty so clearly opposes her own. Making clear the link between the limitations of globalization and the need for strengthened nationalism, Duceppe maintained that, "In Quebec, and I think in Canada, the presence of Ms. Atwood reminds us, not only is culture the backbone of our national identity, it is also a huge part of our economy" (qtd. in Friesen). He continued to address the problems of economic globalization and its threat to culture: "Our culture cannot be outsourced to China. Culture is our future, as much to nourish our souls as to nourish our stomachs. We don't want to live on Planet Hollywood" (qtd. in Friesen). While he adheres to the romantic notion of culture as a window to the soul, he also warns that the cuts to cultural funding fuel the threats of China and America to economic and cultural sovereignty. Remember the context out of which Duceppe is speaking. While supporting the link between art and nationhood, Duceppe was also drawing on the motion that was passed in parliament in 2006,

under the leadership of Prime Minister Harper: "That this House recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada." So in 2008 when Duceppe was arguing for government support of culture, the reminder to Harper of Quebec cultural nationalism was a reminder of how tenuous Quebec's position within the larger nation really is. Throwing her own cultural capital behind Duceppe, Atwood admitted how "ironic" her choice was (qtd. in Friesen). In a move that parallels strategic voting, or voting for the candidate who seems most likely to beat the party you least want in power, it seems that Atwood strategically chose cultural nationalism over a more patriotic nationalism. Indeed, the *Globe and Mail* headline points to such strategic voting as it announces, "Atwood rallies anti-Tory votes by backing Bloc." Atwood's response to the present danger of the Conservative government's dismissal of culture as a niche interest trumped the possible future dangers of a separatist victory, even the one being signalled by Duceppe.

If I had been in doubt about the lasting nature of cultural nationalism before the debate sparked by Harper's comments in September, I certainly couldn't be afterwards. The response solidified my growing sense that nationalism is making a popular comeback, not just in cultural terms and not just in Canada. Trade barriers loosened by globalization are being tightened in the economic slowdown of today, and border security is being beefed up in countries around the globe. The resurgence of the nation as the primary affiliation in much contemporary public discourse is evident in the protectionist language in the United States that comes out of the bolstering of national pride in the new Obama administration (note that President Obama used the word "nation" more than any other word in his inauguration speech—18 times). It is also getting louder in Canada. However, one need only think of the continued debate over sovereignty in Quebec or, in another framework, the strength of indigenous nationalisms to realize how complex "nationalism" is in Canada. Indeed, long before Confederation many "nations" coexisted—albeit with widely divergent degrees of power—within the geographic spaces of Canada. In many ways, the multiple cultural nationalisms of Quebeckers, immigrants and migrants, or First Nations citizens challenge coherent definitions of both a broader Canadian culture and the Canadian state itself.[2] Whether we think in terms of borders or passports, laws or flags, nationalism is irrevocably part of the practice of everyday life.

During the 2008 election, the public marked culture as the responsibility of the state and firmly linked it to nationalism. However, controversies like that sparked during the election campaign remind us that state practice does

not always equal public opinion. And precisely because of the ubiquity of civic nationalism in what threatens to become a post-global age as the recession deepens, I want to argue here that we need to be especially attuned to the realities of newly invigorated cultural nationalisms as well.

In Diana Brydon's terms, new directions in Canadian culture necessitate overturning the myth of the "national dream" in favour of imagining Canada within a "planetary" context (16). I think that while the dream is dispensable and the myth can use an overhaul, the nation isn't going to go away. Just as we have had to ask where the local and the national sit in globalization, we also have to ask where the globe sits in the current climate of increased nationalism. Even global citizens are located somewhere, grounded even, within a state (or moving between states) governed by laws and priorities. If popular cultural nationalism is as strong as I suspect it is, it is also imperative that we historicize it and critically engage in the study of nations in their legal and social contexts. We should learn the lessons of diasporic theories about group formation and the significance of group affiliation as we consider how ethnic, racial, and social identities might overlap, of theories of critical race studies about the ideologies that have dominated national priorities, and of studies of multiculturalism that are skeptical of government-directed notions of community. Even as we talk about the interconnectedness of humans in a planetary context and we study the arbitrariness of borders and the impact traversing those borders has on people, it is still necessary to locate national cultures in the framework of a history of laws, practices, and preferences. If context contains memory, then it is also vital to consider social, political, and historically specific contexts to remember what is, or has been, done in the name of the nation.[3]

In registering their disagreement with the Prime Minister during the election campaign, many Canadians were contesting the way that their values and preferences were not reflected by the current Canadian government. Harper won a minority government (rather than the majority that was predicted), some say, in part because of his stand on culture. Certainly, many ordinary Canadians voted for Harper. But I would argue that because of the way in which public support of the arts became an election issue, strategic cultural nationalism was practiced by a large number of Canadians. The response to Harper often focused (sometimes in rhetorical terms verging on hyperbole) on how unethical it was for the government to abandon culture. Turning the tables, one should ask about the ethics of cultural nationalism as well. Further, what does it mean to also be a cultural citizen? In her

response to Harper, Atwood asks "What sort of country do we want to live in? What sort of country do we already live in?" These are important questions for artists and activists but also for bankers and politicians and voters. Indeed, it seems many Canadians asked just such questions in conversations about culture, national identity, and institutional support of the arts during the election of 2008. I suspect that such questions led to conversations about Native self-determination, Quebec sovereignty, individual rights and freedoms, and Canadians' positions in the world as global citizens.

In 1857, a decade before Confederation, Irish-settler-cum-politician Thomas D'Arcy McGee wrote with passion about the link between nationhood and culture in an essay provocatively titled "Protection for Canadian Literature": "Every country, every nationality, every people, must create and foster a National Literature, if it is their wish to preserve a distinct individuality from other nations. If precautions are not taken to secure this end, the distinctive character and features of a people must disappear" (305). McGee was advocating Canadian nationalism (as opposed to the more extreme forms of Fenian nationalism he had been involved with that advocated armed resistance and the forced annexation of British Canada to the independent United States), perhaps because Canada seemed like a place where many nationalities could (and should) get along. As it happened, in the fall of 2008 I was teaching McGee's essay in my Canadian literature class the week after Harper's comments spawned such controversy. My students sat up and took notice. What, I suspect, had been a rather dull historical essay suddenly became a timely intervention into contemporary debates. The students read McGee against Harper, and McGee won. McGee was among the first in a long line of cultural nationalists who argued vociferously about the important role a strong literature plays in nation building. While I doubt a "distinct individuality" is possible, or even remotely desirable, in Canada now and I am certain that there is no singular National Literature, McGee's commitment to sustaining the link between creative work, public support, and communal identity clearly endures with ordinary Canadians in contemporary iterations of strategic cultural nationalism.

In the spirit of opening up Canadian literature to a variety of visions of the nation, several articles in this issue address changing concepts of Canadian culture, canonical texts, complex Canadian identities, and cultural institutions. A flourishing national debate about literature, public support of arts and culture, and sharp critical analyses of that culture are crucial to a nation where different perspectives do not lead to extremist positions, but to more

carefully articulated ones. Examining the effects of technology on literary community, Tony Tremblay and Ellen Rose ask whether the "literary ethos in the relatively closed, high-modern nationalist world of the printed little magazines of mid-century is transferable to the more open, polysemous postmodern spheres of today's digitized online magazines." Erica Kelly carefully reads the ambiguities in E.J. Pratt's long poem *Towards the Last Spike* and, questioning the "price of national unity," shows how the poem is much more than the uncritical celebration of the national dream it has often been read to be. Focusing on ambiguity from another direction, Janice Fiamengo revisits Sinclair Ross's fraught depictions of Christianity in *As For Me and My House* and investigates the ramifications of a rejection of faith. Tim McIntyre closely reads Alice Munro's story "The Moons of Jupiter" to consider Munro's cathartic use of language and form. In another vein, troubling the closed identities of "la francophonie de souche," Eileen Lohka theorizes "les écritures de la migrance" by looking at "la notion de frontière(s) et de territoire" and suggests how literature reflects the interstitial spaces of "les ecrivains sans frontières" who write in Manitoba and in Quebec. Finally, Joubert Satyre examines the fictional work of Émile Ollivier and Gérard Étienne, "des écrivains migrants d'origine haïtienne établis en Quebec," to consider exile, nostalgia, and the haunting nightmares that often accompany recountings of migration in literature. Thus, even those papers not specifically grappling with nationalism in this issue forward our thinking about evolving visions of Canadian culture, society, and writing.

NOTES

1 See also "Readers' Forum: Culture, the Government, and the Public Good." *English Studies in Canada* 33.3 (Sept. 2007).

2 Thanks to Jennifer Delisle for making this point and for her many other helpful comments on this editorial.

3 Over the years, there is no question that some forms of Canadian nationalism have been exclusionary and narrow-minded. You were Canadian if you were "this" and not "that." Often the "this" and "that" were configured in racialized terms. Such exclusions were cemented in law in the Indian Act, the Chinese Immigration Act, and the Immigration Act, to name a few. In my Canadian Studies class, I teach case studies from the legal history of racism in Canada because I want to show the ways in which the more abstract concepts of racism were grounded in very real terms in the law within the borders of the nation and how these laws differed from those in the United States or France or New Zealand.

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Russell Thornton

The Shapes They've Made in the Sky

the shapes they've made in the sky
cannot be reduced
—Pat Lowther, "Coastal Range"

Drive and vault north over the Lions Gate Bridge,
you see the houses going higher and higher
up the forested mountainsides west and east—
teeth chewing away on their own, pants both ballooning
and cinching themselves. Traffic lights, as on stilts,
cars like speeding briefcases, follow.
Through it all,
the mountains still lay down their vast shadows
and still lift their dark blue-green and silver.
They are patient, they do not move—beyond anger,
they weigh in with a heavy peace. They halt huge clouds,
array them like canopies, and rest. They ravel rain,
and unravel it in rivers and creeks. At the same time,
they sit seemingly lost, gone blank, imperturbable.
For the months they are snow-covered, you see
their inscrutable white smile.
Somehow you know
that inside them, they are your picture of them—
they forgive you that much. You hitch chair-lifts,
ski-tows, skyrides, up and over them, ski down them,
as if trying to open a safe. The safe will not open—
it is a pure, endless lock. Longer ago than you
can imagine, the sky here was shaped to their bulks.
Their faces that are no-faces—the closer you go to them,
the more they recede from you. You go up to the tops
of them, and they reduce you. You are all of you
the insects you saw from below—binoculars prove it.

Tony Tremblay and Ellen Rose

The Canadian Little Magazine Past and Present

Can Digitizing a Literary Subculture Make a Movement?[1]

When Louis Dudek, one of the pioneers of small-press publishing in Canada, examined the role of the little magazine[2] in the wider history of print culture, he noted the form's differences from market-driven periodical media of the late nineteenth century. He observed that because the content of newspapers and popular magazines was derivative of structural capitalism, these instruments of the marketplace were "oblivious to the . . . spreading corruption" that imaginative prose and poetry always saw clearly in their crosshairs ("The Role" 87). Central to his observation was that, by the 1920s, commercial media had given much of the space once allocated to creative expression to editorial content. The little-magazine culture he saw emerging in response to this takeover was a formal departure in the ongoing history of printing, "a retreat into intimate, or *cénacle* publication . . . [that marked] the embattled literary reaction of intellectual minority groups" to coercive market-driven journalism (86). For Dudek, that emergent movement was a classic subculture as Dick Hebdige would later define it: "an independent organism functioning outside the larger social, political and economic contexts" (76). As importantly, it was a movement made "nationalist" in its capacity for social provocation, creative autonomy, and linguistic re-construction, thus, as Lionel Trilling observed, a "union of the political . . . with the imaginati[ve]" (96). Though insular and unapologetically elitist, the literariness of the movement was moral and reactionary in ways now associated with the modernist impulse to use language and language systems to contest normative forms of institutionalized discourse.

This essay will investigate the literary subculture of Canada's little magazines as a pretext to asking a timely question about media and reception:

namely, whether the cultivation of voice, readership, and literary ethos in the relatively closed, high-modern "nationalist" world of the printed little magazines of mid century is transferable to the more open, polysemous, postmodern spheres of today's digitized online magazines. We use the terms high-modern and postmodern with admitted risk, but do so to highlight what appears to be a fundamental difference in consolidation functions (the ability to cultivate and sustain readership) between print and digital forms. Do conventions associated with print and digital form and distribution, then, alter the characteristics and engagements of the author/reader that produces/receives little-magazine text, the most important of those characteristics in any subculture being the ability to use language with ideological intent? In short, to paraphrase Ezra Pound, can online little magazines create a literary subculture in the ways that print magazines did?

I

To understand the recent history of the small-press subculture[3] in Canada, a distinction must be made between what Brian Trehearne identified as two waves or generations of modernism, the first (A.J.M. Smith's and F.R. Scott's) largely aesthetic, the second (Dudek's and Raymond Souster's) more formally activist, "class-conscious," and, especially important in this context, high-modernist (313). Applying the "two modernisms" theory to Canada's small-press subculture would seem to prove Trehearne's argument, for there existed two distinct moments in the evolution of small-press alternatives to commercial publishing: the moment of the little magazine as an isolated, short-lived, or nomadic instrument of experiment or protest and the more lasting duration of little-magazine *culture*, which was a larger gathering of intellectual energies that coalesced into a movement in mid-century. So, while *The Canadian Bookman* (1919–39), *The McGill Fortnightly Review* (1925–27), and *The Canadian Mercury* (1928–29) were precursors to a more unified subcultural wave that gradually coalesced—each magazine as integral to the larger movement as "Aestheticism to the birth of Modernism" (Trehearne 314)—the influence of their *avant-garde* was not fully felt until the 1940s, when A.G. Bailey, John Sutherland, and Dudek, the principals of the more unified movement, began thinking about the role of little magazines in definably *modernist*, particularly social, terms. [4]

That shift in thinking—from reactionary to activist, aesthetic to functional, anarchic to civil—reflected the high-modernist dicta of one cultural worker that Bailey, Sutherland, and Dudek had studied closely: the American

expatriate poet Ezra Pound. It was Pound's brand of *republican* constitutional modernism (modernism that was bottom-up, non-aligned, non-commercial, and radically socially democratic, aimed, that is, at the emancipation of the *polis*) that would come to dominate the field of Canada's little magazines, a subculture that discovered in his polemics a way "to break out of literature toward the reality of the moment" (de Man 162). Dudek would make the point succinctly in attributing Pound's "revolutionary modernism" to the "spring cleaning of Victorian dust and cobwebs" in the Canadian poetry of the time (*Dudek* 125–26).

Even a brief glimpse into the apprenticeships of Canada's mid-century little-magazine modernists establishes the connection to Pound. A.G. Bailey's grandfather, Loring Woart Bailey, studied at Harvard under Louis Agassiz, the Swiss naturalist whom Pound revered as a champion of close observation and clear expression. Agassiz's principles of exposition became a cornerstone of Pound's poetics and the elder Bailey's annotated typologies of natural science (adopted as the method of ethno-history by his grandson). As a student in Toronto in the 1930s, A.G. Bailey encountered Pound more directly via Robert Finch and the landmark *New Provinces* anthology of modernist poems (1936). When Bailey learned from A.J.M. Smith that Pound was the model for Finch's fastidious winnowing (Smith 136), he became a devotee of Pound's forms, introducing them to John Sutherland a short time later in Saint John, New Brunswick. (P.K. Page, another pioneering Canadian modernist in Saint John at the time, attributed Sutherland's modernist provenance to Bailey.) Bailey had a hand in Dudek's conversion to Pound's aims as well, introducing Dudek to J.B. Brebner, the historian under whom he worked at Columbia while acting as a foot soldier for Pound, then incarcerated at St. Elizabeths in Washington, DC.[5] This short history clearly places Pound's influence at the scene of Canada's little-magazine modernist revival of mid century, the period of Sutherland's founding of *First Statement* (1943), Bailey's founding of *The Fiddlehead* (1945), and Dudek's critical involvement in Raymond Souster's *Contact* (1952). In identifiable ways, each magazine attempted to recreate the energy and social reform of *Blast*, *Exile*, *The Little Review*, and *Transition*, the little magazines Pound most often cited as models of resistance and civilization building.

Beyond the intellectual lineage, though, what were the governing poetics of the modernist, little-magazine culture in Canada? In Sutherland's view, those poetics were in the broadest sense *transformative*, thus placing the magazines of the 1940s in a continuing tradition of cultural renewal

that had always asserted itself in times of orthodoxy. (In Canada, as he gleans from Archibald MacMechan, the subcultural models of renewal were Joseph Howe's *Novascotian*, which provided a vehicle for Haliburton and McCulloch; Goldwin Smith's *The Week*, which did the same for Roberts and Carman; and Saint-Denys Garneau's *La Relève*, which pioneered a way for Quebec intellectuals to speak against an Ultramontane Church.) Magazines, concluded Sutherland, were creative incubators where small groups of cultural renegades perfected a means to challenge orthodoxies while building toward a uniquely Canadian civility: "literature in Canada, for rather obvious reasons, depends on the existence of magazines. . . . in no other way can close connection be drawn between the writers and the people, or a literary growth be stimulated that is rooted in Canadian soil" (23). The transformative intent that Sutherland identifies, and that Dudek saw embedded in Pound's idea that modernism must simultaneously liberate and civilize, was essentially communitarian, as much an embrace of utopian ideals aimed at social change as a rejection of the atomism of anarchy. Sutherland did not mean to imply that communitarianism extended to consensus, for editorial rivalries were common (the *First Statement*/*Preview* rift offers the best example of the time), but that social responsibility among small, self-governing editorial collectives was paramount. Dudek, especially, felt that as long as social responsibility was foremost, then diversity was healthy. He expressed this high-modernist view in the epigram, "A revolution is a good thing as long as it doesn't succeed" (*Epigrams* 11).

These communitarian little-magazine ideals were rapidly transformative in a mid-century Canada that Dorothy Livesay famously declared "a narrow place" (195). The reason for this rapidity was threefold: first, because the sites of modernist renewal were few and their ferment radically distinct from what E.K. Brown identified as the dominating moods of philistinism and Puritanism in Canadian culture at the time (21–23); second, because Bailey, Layton, and Dudek were teachers, each of whom brought their literary activism into classrooms comprised of students, the writers of the 1960s, who appeared with frequency in their magazines; and, third, because little-magazine readers were also little-magazine writers, editors, and publishers, a unique feature of the movement that consolidated its activism in powerful nodes of quite-uniform alternative literacies. (Again, this is not to suggest that little-magazine editors of the period were consonant in their view of what constituted the literary *avant-garde*, but that most saw the need for it.) Though their numbers were small, their rhetorical volume and sense of

cultural mission was disproportionately felt across the country, so much so that Frank Davey has observed that the view of reform they shared—"not only enter[ing] into an existing institutional structure but becom[ing] part of that structure, both shaped by what it enables . . . and shaping what it does" (68)—served to institutionalize cultural engagement in Canada in mid century, thereby moving *avant-garde* modernism from the margins closer to the centre of literary concern.

The clash of sensibilities (Victorian/"maple-leaf" and reformist) accelerated the cultivation of a highly literate private audience while also popularizing the subversive modernist notion (Pound's constitutional republicanism) of democratizing access to literature, ideas, and publication. The rather quick result, as Marshall McLuhan later identified, "[made] every man a publisher." That is, the small-press "nature of mass production of uniform volumes" produced "habits of universal reading" and "reading elites" that "exert[ed] large corporate power" across the country (*Understanding Me* 23). Because that which this power served was literary and "imaginative," the modernist activism of little-magazine editors contributed to mythologizing the nation, thus reversing what Desmond Pacey observed about the Canada of mid century: that "it [was] a peculiarly difficult society to reduce to order" (328). The Canadian little-magazine reader/writer/editor/publisher involved in this project could therefore not avoid becoming politicized (and nationally engaged) by association, a condition that strengthened fraternities and turned quarrels into exaggerated public spectacles. Canada's celebrity literati of mid century were comprised of these renegades working from the margins to supplant a largely staid Victorian literary ethos. Irving Layton's embrace of this opportunity is well-documented, as is Livesay's, Birney's, and Purdy's. Because of the histrionics of that celebrity, these politicized fraternities were unusually quick in loosening the conservatism of the dominant commercial and Methodist publishing ventures, and thus instrumental in hastening a national literature that was unstintingly original in "explor[ing] total reality" as the writer alone saw it (Dudek, "The Little" 218)—"the writer," that is, not the marketplace or the Church. The new wave of nationally celebrated writers that emerged in the 1960s and 70s (Atwood, Ondaatje, Purdy, and Laurence all apprenticed in little magazines) felt freed of editorial constriction and less like an embattled minority. They were the "serious characters" Pound had championed as custodians of cultural literacy.

Having sought to manufacture the imagined nation through the "communal purpose" (Davey 75) of a little-magazine ethos—what Kizuk views as

"the quick and almost forced development of a compact and self-contained literary tradition" (178)—these writers of the new wave shared with the editors who first published them a conception of readers in polemical terms: as similarly independent confreres disadvantaged either by class, canonical hegemonies, or geographic circumstance. Their readers, then, were extensions of themselves, just as their imagined nation extended from the smaller, permissive loci where they started. What is significant about this particular sociology is not that little-magazine culture in Canada was similar to the more ubiquitous literary culture that followed, but how the little magazines functioned as print workshops to "reduce [the nation] to order"—to bring writers, in other words, to ever-widening bodies of similarly disposed readers who, in a post-war spirit, were culturally nationalist, eager for emancipation from imperial identification, and conservatively *avant-garde* (reformers but not anarchists, sympathetic to the civilizing goals of Pound's republican modernism). This is exactly what Terry Eagleton meant when he described how "revolutionary nationalists" used the broad outlines of modernism to forge "a spurious unity out of conflicting class interests" (10). That unity of purpose held that the cultivation of an independent literary culture in Canada was worthwhile, that Canadian nationalism was in the hands of artists, that the country was large enough for a diversity of voices, and that literature could emancipate as well as civilize a population. That unity of purpose powered the cultural nationalism of the 1960s.

It is thus impossible to imagine Canada's new waves of literary talent without the little-magazine culture of mid century that organized the means of production, cultivated a literate and activist and post-imperial readership, and brought an entire generation of writers to national attention. That activist culture was "indispensable" to our nation's "sense of literary selfhood" (Barton 12) and identifiable in how our writers conceived of their reading nation. In Canada, the stewards of Pound's high-modernist aims did manage to make a movement and an imagined nation[6] out of the subcultural energies of the little magazine.

II

Two decades later, in the increasingly post-national sphere of the 1990s, small-press print culture underwent yet another evolution when little magazines began to migrate to and spring from the World Wide Web. According to Henry J. Hughes, "[t]he number of literary magazines online [now] leaps to the tens of thousands" (2). And, although Canada's literary activists of

the previous generation have not been in the vanguard of this movement—partly because one generation's activism becomes the orthodoxy the next generation works to depose (Kizuk 177)—the social experiment of configuring electronic text into recognizable little-magazine form is being swiftly taken up by a new generation of readers and writers. Today, theorists of the little magazine distinguish among *three* dominant formats: paper, online, and mixed. In the latter, content is either "mirrored substantially" in both paper and digital forms (Paling and Nilan 865), such as *The Antigonish Review*, or not mirrored at all, which is the case with *Qwertê*, a Fredericton-based digital publication that is described by editors as "an electronic sibling" of the printed little magazine, *Qwerty*. In the digital world McLuhan predicted (and Dudek resisted[7]), consonance dissipates as forms multiply, a potential challenge to *avant-garde* "*cénacle* publication" that we take up below.

But in the early days of change from one *épistème* to another, as McLuhan also noted, consonance with the old *inheres* in the new. Evidence of this "remediation"—the process whereby "new media refashion prior media forms" (Bolter and Grusin 273)—is found in the oft-stated justification of moving from the "private spheres" of high literacy (the printed magazine) to the more "public sphere" of the networked commons (Internet publication): "where funding for printing and resources for distribution are always in someone else's pocket . . . the temptation of online publication looms large" (Blakeslee 18). As revolutionary as this sounds, students of the history of little-magazine subculture will recognize no difference from the justifications of mid-century modernists, who decried "commercial or material difficulties" as foremost among the reasons for turning to the little-magazine format (Hoffman 5). The echo of justifications, however, is instructive, for it indicates that there is clearly more than economic rationalization behind the practice of alternative literacies, as the mixed format suggests. Whether stapled down the middle or digitally remediated, the little magazine as a generic form is an appendage of low-cost, distributive technology, born from the basement mimeograph machines of Dudek's day and especially adaptable to the capabilities of emergent media, which now extend to kinetic poetry and hypertext fiction. And, although the Internet has become mainstream, the mere act of online publication in an environment where "big" magazines like *Queen's Quarterly* and *Canadian Literature* have "establishment" status continues to constitute an expression of the subversive autonomy of the little magazine in its difference from conventional media. The little magazine's migration to the Internet might thus be said to be overdetermined, less a

cost saving than a continuation of its subcultural function of working at the margins of *avant-garde* literary expression.

Given, however, the unending potential for mutation of electronic forms—evident in the current rapid expansion of Internet cafés, social networking sites, literary blogs, and zines like *InkNoire* and the Edgewise ElectroLit Centre—we feel that the attention of small-press cultural workers must now shift to what the explosion of online publication means for the little-magazine *avant-garde*, particularly in terms of its continued ability to consolidate sufficient consensus to contest orthodoxy, presumably still the central goal of the makers of subculture. In other words, when the digitized little-magazine *avant-garde* becomes atomized to the extent that it now has—to cite Heidegger, almost completely en-framed within culture, thus increasingly hegemonic and uncontestable (35)—does it retain its capacity for social provocation, creative autonomy, and linguistic renewal?

To some, the mere asking of this question will suggest Luddite bias; however, given the revolutionary social program of the mid-century little-magazine *avant-garde* in cultivating voice, readership, and literary ethos in Canada, it is an important question to pose, particularly in light of the homogenizing pressures of new media *un*grounded in the civilizing mission of Pound's republican modernism, or, for that matter, any set of utopian ideals.[8] (This, of course, was what worried Frye, McLuhan, and Heidegger about technology.) In posing the question, we do not mean to privilege the older form (print) over the newer (digital)—both, after all, are technologies—but rather to apply similar criteria to both forms in order to assess the capacity of the latter to affect a similar cultural shift. So, to repeat, can digitizing a literary subculture make a movement in ways that are as sweeping and sustainable as that of the small-press print magazines of mid century?

Readership is the place to focus an answer, for, as in Dudek's day, editors of online little magazines continue to believe that a small, select readership of "no more than a few thousand" (Bixler 68) is a defining and necessarily delimiting characteristic of the form. If, then, as Sutherland suggested, the smaller "'native' tradition promised more for the future [of Canadian literature] than the 'cosmopolitan'" (qtd. in Norris 39), what are the implications for the form when readership opens to millions? Does that potential expansion of audience via an enhanced technology of conversation alter a primary purpose of the little magazine—namely, to cultivate social renewal among an already-disenfranchised group that, as Davey observed, the form helps to mobilize? According to Shapiro, it does, for there appears to be a

point beyond which the size of readership "violates [*avant-garde*] principles" (15), aligning the little magazine too closely with the market-driven periodical media whose commercial interests it traditionally sought to counter. But this worry is not enough to conclude that "online" and "little" ought to be mutually exclusive descriptors, for other little-magazine commentators speculate that Internet delivery will actually *decrease* audience size, either because reduced overhead makes it possible to serve smaller niche readerships (Berry 10), or, conversely, because, lacking print's power to hold and politicize, the digital form simply fails to function as the rallying point for an ideologically consonant or disenfranchised group of artists and readers.[9]

What current theorists of little-magazine readership *do* agree on is the significant shift now occurring from a readership comprised of known individuals, members of a literary subculture or *cénacle avant-garde,* to a largely anonymous readership represented, at base, as visitors on a Web counter. In Dudek's high-modern print culture, most readers were known by name and, as shown above, implicated by association with an activist community of like-minded intellectuals. (Fred Cogswell published many *Fiddlehead* contributors in his Fiddlehead Chapbook series, as did Dudek and Souster in their own *supra*-magazine presses, each aimed at expanding what Robert Darnton called "the communications circuit" [14].) The shift to online publication, however, alters the terms of this communitarian contract, partly because of enhanced access—"anyone with a computer can read an online poetry magazine free" (Shahar et al. 124)—and partly because of the liberalizing tendency endemic to the post-typographic form, a tendency that, said McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, invites dissension without commitment and tribal/local rather than national identifications (220). As a relatively stable readership with roughly consonant civic and reformist goals gives way to a more open field of dispersed and increasingly dissonant readers, it becomes necessary to ask new questions about the allowances of online media: specifically, how digitized little magazines construct new subject positions relative to online reading; and, given these new subject positions, whether the literary subcultures that historically coalesced around little magazines to speed the development "of a compact and self-contained literary tradition" (Kizuk 178) can persist in the age of decentralized Internet delivery and retrieval.

As to the consideration of access, the only thing predictable about post-Gutenberg readers is that they possess technological know-how sufficient to enter the online world, a mastery different in kind and scope than the

basic literacy required for participation in print culture. Since nothing more of online readers need exist—not aesthetic or ideological values, not activist, subcultural intent—they risk being reduced to *users*, a subject position that has structural implications for the online little magazines they read and construct.

Since the advent of computerization in the 1940s, *user* has denoted subordinate status in the hierarchy of technological literacies. The divide it signifies between programming fluency and functional (in)competence persists today, evinced by contemporary references to "user-friendly" systems that, according to *The New Hacker's Dictionary*, "hold the user's hand so obsessively that they make it painful for the more experienced and knowledgeable to get any work done" (Raymond). The pre-condition of this attitude on the Web-enabled frontier is especially relevant to our consideration of readership in light of what Bolter and Grusin describe as one of the "logics" of remediation, namely "immediacy," the near-manic rush to make all manner of hypermedia transparent (22). This drive became evident when the little magazine became digitally remediated in the mid 1990s. Almost immediately, editors began working with designers to construct prescriptive algorithms for user-friendly interfaces attuned for simplification and direction, thus reinforcing the "user" subject position, and thus altering, in the impulse to constrain the moves a user can make, one of the subcultural functions of the little magazine: namely, to break decisively from the straitjacket of form.

Structural constraints attending user-friendly systems open other considerations. Of greater significance for the emergent subject position of the online reader/user is the nature of Web-enabled reading, which, given the inundation of information and the fitful allowances of hypertext, is increasingly an act of movement (surfing, navigating) rather than an occasion for fixity, reflection, and remembrance. While all reading, as Henri-Jean Martin has stated (72, 450), is a gathering wave of irregular connections and cognitive wanderings, electronic text is particularly motley, simulating a conversation and requiring an engagement that is especially unstable. "I suspect," confesses the editor of the digital *Painted Bride Quarterly*, "[that] we hail our readers as cyber flaneurs—we know that they are distracted observers . . . " (Wrenn 98). The editor of the online magazine *Slate* agrees: "Web readers surf. They go quickly from site to site. If they really like a particular site, they may visit it often, but they are unlikely to devote a continuous half-hour or more to any one site the way you might read a traditional paper magazine in one sitting" (qtd. in Tranter 87). The editor who long held the

electronic rights to the McLuhan database puts the differences in reading practices succinctly:

> The by-products of traditional print literacy—detachment and a visually structured inner-space—become endangered species on the electronic veldt. I cannot imagine, on the basis of my experience with computer monitors, that the peculiar pleasures of fiction and poetry can be experienced with the same depth and range and the same cognitive discernment as that yielded by traditional printing on paper. (Sanderson 23)

Because of the dialogic relation of readers and text, the reconfiguration of the reader/user as a nomadic, perpetually distracted, potentially disengaged subject is profoundly influencing the content of online little magazines. As a concession to the new subjectivity of "distraction," for example, the digital magazine *LitBits.ca* publishes only "bite-sized, Internet-speed fiction"—work that fits on a single screen—while *It's Still Winter* cites an editorial policy that, being "web based," favours "pieces of moderate length. . . . " In conceding to a reconfigured readership and set of reading practices, online little magazines increasingly fulfill the prediction of one digital editor that, "as readers [become] invested more diffusely, the writing, generally, will become less weighty, lighter" (Hamilton 71). Yet another editor concurs that "the need for brevity on screen" means that "literary work . . . specifically written to be read on Web magazines [will] tend to be shorter, looser, at times more glib than detailed reflective writing for print" (Morgan 105). As "the power belonging to the writer is handed over to the machine," language itself, predicts Sven Birkerts, will increasingly be "received with a sense of its weightlessness" (156, 155). Such developments beg a slightly modified repetition of our overarching question: can Barthes' unthinkable text of bliss, the text that is always subcultural, be doled out in screenfuls for a distracted reader/user? And will embattled minorities of activist readers ever coalesce in a hypertext environment to form a new wave of, if not nationalist, then ideologically consonant or manifesto-inspired, writers and cultural workers?

III

Because the online, remediated little magazine in Canada is still a nascent form, it is impossible to predict what a reconfigured readership and set of reading practices will mean for Canadian literature and culture in the twenty-first century. Moreover, as cyber theorist Max Dublin argues in *Futurehype*, attempts to prophesize about the social effects of technological developments represent a form of tyranny insofar as they "effectively close

off the possibility of truly open debate" about directions that development should take (32). Rather than making definitive predictions, then, it is more useful to conclude by considering two theoretical perspectives—McLuhan's soft determinism and Andrew Feenberg's constructivism—that are particularly germane to our overarching question, *Can digitizing a literary subculture make a movement?*

The choice of McLuhan may seem suspect, for his opinions on new media have been long debated.[10] Following Levinson, however, we think his position on "soft determinism" is important for "entail[ing] an interplay between . . . technology making something possible, and human beings turning that possibility into a reality" (4). In his own pithy fashion, McLuhan summed up this notion of the reciprocal influences of technology and society in the quip, "We shape our tools, and thereafter they shape us," fashioning the tetrad to facilitate inquiry into the reciprocal effects of new media. We employ the same four-part structure below to ask questions about the remediated online magazine.

The first question McLuhan's tetrad asks is what does the medium or technology enhance. As suggested in the foregoing discussion, the online little magazine enhances access to content under certain conditions, technological means and acumen among those. At its most radical, it models the promise of democracy. This does not mean, however, that the remediated, democratic form necessarily enhances cultural custodianship, which, as we also suggest, entails communitarian and political engagement—dissension *with* commitment, manifest in a mid-century Canadian context as a conservative *avant-garde*. Rather, the more typical demographic on the electronic frontier tends to be amorphous and nomadic, its identity, to cite a recent ad for the iPod media reader, merely "a useful accessory" to the technology. To borrow from Michel de Certeau, many online readers are deracinated textual poachers who raid the literary preserve to take away those things they deem useful or pleasurable.

The second question McLuhan's tetrad asks is what does the medium retrieve from the past. Beyond the logics of remediation already discussed, online little magazines recuperate what George Steiner refers to as "Seventeenth-century Adamic and millenary dreams of all men as artists and equal singers of the moment" (73). Eliding the boundaries between experts and amateurs (high and low culture), these new Web-enabled media hail the amateur poet—the heretofore dilettante—through decentralized portals of increasingly open Internet delivery and discussion, both of which belie

Dudek's, Pound's, and McLuhan's belief that the artist is master, the sole antenna of the race.[11] Thus, as Steiner elaborates, readership

> is no longer an informed echo to the artist's talent, a respondent to and transmitter of his singular enterprise; it is a joint creator in a conglomerate of free-wheeling, participatory impulse. Away with the presumptions of permanence in a classic *oeuvre*, away with masters. (73)

The tetrad's third question asks what the new medium will likely reverse into when taken to its limit. Given the reconfiguration of reading practices in the online world, as well as what Heidegger saw as that world's subsuming appetite for commercial homogenization under the conditions of decentralization, a soft determinist would foresee the digitized little magazine becoming a repository or database of story, a sort of Wal-Mart of vast textual inventory on the periphery of the *avant-garde*. In the absence of editorial authority or communitarian vision—according to Sutherland (23) and Davey (75) the essential consolidation functions of the printed little magazine—the users who troll these little-magazine databases will be required to perform their own editorial operations.

Finally, the fourth question in McLuhan's tetrad asks what the new medium obsolesces. As the last two points suggest, editorial and artistic standards, those whipping posts of the old culture, risk diminishment, as do the aesthetic and ideological ground around which an activist readership and subculture coalesce. In a worst-case scenario, the rise of online little magazines, catering increasingly to amorphous, nomadic end users rather than disenfranchised authors of subculture, will render impossible anything but a populist *avant-garde*, forcing traditional forms of high and canonical literacy into retreat (for some, not a bad outcome). As it morphs into an outlet for postmodern multiplicity, becoming more an instrument of anarchy than protest, thus more atomized than contiguous, the online Canadian little magazine may forsake its traditional role of nurturing a small, select audience for texts of bliss and become instead a massive big-box repository for "texts of pleasure"—writing that does nothing to contest orthodoxy, but rather "comes from culture and does not break with it" (Barthes 14).

An altogether different way of thinking about the future of the online little magazine is to consider Feenberg's constructivist view that "many paths lead out from the first forms of a new technology" (10), with those chosen reflecting the interests and negotiations of a variety of social agents. To illustrate Feenberg's notion of "interpretative flexibility"—the role that social agents play in giving meaning to new media and technologies—Pinch and Bijker

describe the development of the bicycle. In the 1890s, proponents of two designs vied for predominance: women and mature riders favoured two low, equal-sized wheels (the "safety" model) while sportsmen preferred the high-wheeler, with its large front wheel (the "racer"). The fact that the slower, more stable design gained dominance had nothing to do with its superiority but with the constructivist premise that, "in the real world all sorts of attitudes and desires crystallize around technical objects and influence their development," with the resulting negotiations bringing an emergent technology "into conformity with the dominant social forces" (Feenberg 80, 89). In the case of the bicycle, safety, as a social value, won out over speed.

The constructivist perspective clearly begs a consideration of the social embeddedness of new media. Asking whether a digital subculture can make a literary movement from this perspective must therefore entail identifying the stakeholders who play formative roles in the development of online magazines and anticipating the kinds of negotiations likely to occur between their competing values and ideologies.

Though the nomadic, heterogeneous readership of online little magazines resists analysis, foremost among stakeholders are editors and artists, whose interests are largely unchanged from the print tradition. They, too, confirm the editors of the digital *Painted Bride Quarterly*, are motivated by communitarian ideals (Wrenn 98) and, as Paling and Nilan observe, a desire to showcase innovative art that has lasting cultural capital. Paralleling moves editors made in the 1950s, their turn to the Web temporarily circumvents existing publishing hegemonies and other constraints on creative endeavour (class, canonical, and geographic). We use the term "temporarily" deliberately, however, because of the tendency of all new media to become institutionalized, thus inhospitable to the *avant-garde*. Innis' work on communications empires offers insight into the kinds of negotiations in which these two stakeholder groups enter in a digital world.

According to Innis, each new mode of communication gives rise to new monopolies of knowledge that harden into empires. As these become increasingly dominant and inflexible, new media arise on the fringes to challenge their hegemony. Web publication thus now challenges the print establishment—just as basement mimeograph machines once challenged commercial publishing—but can do so only insofar as the costs of online publication are deferred by Web hosts and met by corporate sponsors, such as Storm Internet Services and Chapters, underwriters of *Bywords.ca*. Given the Web hosts' and sponsors' values of efficiency and accrual of market

power (values that, as Feenberg and Innis remind us, shape the social acceptance of all new media), it is likely that they will increasingly seek to impose their own demands for advertising, content control, hyperlinking, and other branding on the autonomy of online little magazines and the artists who publish in them. While the immediate effect may be to diminish the communitarian and political functions of the online little magazine, the eventual outcome of negotiations between the competing interests of editors/artists and their corporate Web hosts may very well be that the former will take up another medium or even return to a newly deinstitutionalized print format as an outlet for the free expression of the *avant-garde*.

What do these theoretical perspectives tell us, then, about the implications of the digital distribution of the little-magazine *avant-garde* for Canadian culture? McLuhan's soft determinism suggests that in the total environment of decentralized Internet delivery and retrieval—that space of absolute autonomy where pluralities create nomads where once were bands of revolutionaries—the little magazine will lose the capacity for social provocation, creative autonomy, and linguistic renewal. With that loss will go the forum for a uniquely Canadian galvanizing capacity, once cultivated and nurtured by the subcultural literacies of the little magazine. Feenberg's constructivism conjures a similar scenario, as editors and authors are increasingly disempowered by rising communications monopolies, but also offers the possibility that, as opportunities for free expression are diminished, new groups of the disenfranchised will coalesce to explore alternative means of publication that circumvent the Web's hegemonies. In this scenario, digitizing a literary subculture may indeed provide the indirect impetus for a movement, one that paradoxically refashions itself in old media.

Because the online, remediated little magazine in Canada is still a fledgling form in a media environment that is shifting and unstable, it is impossible to predict what will occur. Two things are clear, however. First, that the "revolutionary nationalism" Terry Eagleton spoke of as "the most successful radical tide of the twentieth century" (11) was rooted in the little-magazine *avant-garde* of mid century and is not transferable, for structural reasons, to online media, where democracy is rendered so diffuse that it is largely mitigated as a force of consolidation. And, second, that at a time when "[l]iterature" lives "in the age of machines" (Dudek, *Literature and the Press* 238), the modernist impulse to seek a freshness that is bottom-up, noncommercial, emancipating, and radically socially democratic, will continue apace, whatever the structural constraints. Remediation alone is evolutionary,

constantly seeking new forms. The Web is the latest host, but its demands and limitations are every bit as confining as those manufactured by "coercive market-driven journalism" (Dudek, "The Role" 86). As Frye observed in *The Modern Century*, "The triumph of communication is the death of communication: where communication forms a total environment, there is nothing to be communicated" (38), and so the literary *avant-garde* moves on.

NOTES

1 A shorter version of this essay was presented as a paper at Beyond the Book: Contemporary Cultures of Reading, held between 31 August and 02 September, 2007, in the Department of American and Canadian Studies, University of Birmingham, UK.

2 For the purposes of this essay, we are using the term "little magazine" to denote the broad range of mostly literary, non-commercial alternatives to mass media and popular periodical forms. In adopting the generalized term, we are following the lead of Dudek, Hoffmann, *et al.*, and Norris. Because of space limitations, we cannot consider the differences among the forms of the little magazine, though many differences do exist. For a cogent overview of those differences, see Frank Davey's "English-Canadian Literature Periodicals: Text, Personality, and Dissent."

3 We are using the terms "little magazine" and "small press" somewhat differently in this essay. From the example of Ken Norris' *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80*, we use "small press" to denote a larger function, including both book and periodical publishing. "Little magazine," by contrast, denotes only periodical publishing, what Davey considers "counter-culture" (68).

4 In Alex Kizuk's description of Canadian little-magazine pioneers as "a small group of like-minded writers who regard[ed] themselves as a visionary elite locked in heroic struggle with the past and an indifferent present" (174), we have a glimpse into the differences between the first-generation modernism of Smith/Scott and the second-generation modernism of Bailey/Sutherland/Dudek. Though Smith and Scott in *The McGill Fortnightly Review* were on the cutting edge of modernism in Canada, they were nevertheless pioneers, still isolated in their embrace of a literary *avant-garde*. Smith makes this clear in his rejected preface to *New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors* (1936), when he writes about his hopes for the future: particularly that new Canadian modernists "may play [their] part in developing mental and emotional attitudes that will facilitate the creation of a more practical social system" (qtd. in Moss & Sugars 102). Ten years later, the "faintest foreshadowing" (102) of Smith's hope is indeed apparent in the wider acceptance of a modernism that is not only literary and avant-garde but also social and cultural in application—evident, that is, in social policy, support for the arts, and post-war reforms in post-secondary education, publishing, and community development. We wish to thank Laura Moss for pointing us to this important distinction.

5 For a more detailed explanation of Dudek's relationship with Pound, of Pound's transfer of the principles of republican modernism to Canada, and of Pound's interest in Canadian poets, see Tony Tremblay, "'a widening of the northern coterie': The Cross-Border Cultural Politics of Ezra Pound, Marshall McLuhan, and Louis Dudek." *The Canadian Modernists Meet: Essays on Modernism, Antimodernism, and Modernity*. Ed. Dean Irvine. Reappraisals: Canadian Literature. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2005. 153-77.

6 For a more general pan-Canadian theory of this phenomenon, Frye (1980) is useful. Culture, he writes, consists of the "total structure of human creation conveyed by words, with literature at its centre. . . . It is designed to draw a circumference around human society and reflect its concerns, not to look directly at the nature outside" (7). This is to say that literature, in this case the little magazine, is not a window but a mirror.

7 On the different tolerances McLuhan and Dudek had for the *avant-garde*, see Tony Tremblay, "Unrepentant Idealist: Louis Dudek's Quarrels with Marshall McLuhan." *Eternal Conversations: Remembering Louis Dudek*. Eds. Aileen Collins, Michael Gnarowski, Sonja A. Skarstedt. Montreal: DC Books, 2003. 129-41.

8 It bears pointing out here that while Dudek grew increasingly suspicious of Pound's political views, with the result that his brand of republican modernism went into decline, other modernisms came into fashion in Canada at the time, notably through Souster's contact with Cid Corman and Layton's contact with Robert Creeley. For more on these other modernisms, see *Irving Layton & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, 1953-1978*. Eds. Ekbert Faas and Sabrina Reed. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1990.

9 The point here is not to deny that communities of devoted readers form around particular blogs and web magazines—they do—but to say that those communities are so atomized they are structurally incapable of sharing consonant aims.

10 While McLuhan advocated the importance of approaching new media with scientific objectivity—what he refers to in *The Medium is the Massage* as "the technique of the suspended judgment" (69)—he has often been described as a zealot, offering a "utopian vision of a 'retribalized' humanity, of universal harmony and the emergence of a collective unconscious" (Babe 298). Others find in his oblique references to media effects evidence of an anti-technology stance (Miller, for example, asserts that he is clearly "[r]evolted . . . by the Godless rationalism of science" [19]) and a fundamental determinism (Gordon observes that he is frequently charged with "mak[ing] mankind a prisoner of media" [302]).

11 This view has been challenged by some critics as leading to an elitist, male preserve. For more on this, see Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.

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Richard Harrison

Now is the Winter

With the last ounces of his grace
my father stands up from his wheelchair,
turns towards the bed as though
the floor is ice; he tilts his spine,
knees bent, and waits to shift
his weight to mine, and
I lay him on the blanket
and kiss his lips. We talk
of Shakespeare who carried him
line by line through tropic wars
to the final surgery on his failing hips.
Now is the winter of our discontent,
he recites from the inerasable pages
of his brain, the words the prayer
of one who has no god to hear
his cries, his powers spent.
When he asks, I promise
to be with him when he dies,
and winter stirs in the broken fingers
of my left hand that healed
the cold into mended bone.
My father sleeps as the land sleeps—
to teach us that nothing is immortal
and awake forever. Outside,
the young gods, green, and
knowing only what they see,
take their sticks and pucks and
lean into their shots while
the god of winter dreams the water
beneath their feet as
final and beginning as his will.

Erica Kelly

"Was Ever an Adventure Without its Cost?"

The Price of National Unity in E.J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*

In December of 1939, the Canadian government appointed a committee to begin planning for the end of the Second World War, chiefly through consideration for the eventual return and rehabilitation of Canadian forces. The collective quickly realized, however, that their recommendations would have to move beyond the scope of the individual soldier: what needed to be researched and addressed was the changing nation to which veterans would return. In 1941, the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction began the work of "explor[ing] the whole field of Canada's post-war reconstruction policy" (1) and of Canada's post-war identity in general. Much was changing in mid-century Canada: the Bank of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and Trans-Canada Airlines, all creations of the late 1930s, demonstrate Canada's desire to establish itself in the eyes of its citizens and in the eyes of the world as an independent, self-sustaining nation. Despite the success of these projects (and others on the horizon, including the Trans-Canada Highway, the Trans-Canada Pipeline, and the St. Lawrence Seaway, large-scale construction projects initiated in the decade after the war's end), the Advisory Committee's 1943 Report betrays fears that the country may be losing its grasp on independence.[1] The Report calls on the government to "safeguard [Canadian] resources for the use of the people of Canada" (2.3) and warns that "[u]nless adequate precautions be now taken, much of our natural wealth will rapidly disappear" (2.4). The end of the war would present possibilities of national re-creation, and the Advisory Committee wanted to ensure the strongest Canada possible.

Six years later, in 1949, focus on national re-construction had broadened to include not only physical but also cultural autonomy, and the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences

(known as The Massey Commission, for its chair, Vincent Massey) began a cross-country tour to take stock of Canadian access to and attitudes toward national culture. Like the Advisory Committee of 1941, the Massey Commission understood the country as positioned at a turning point: if Canadian culture was not immediately bolstered and celebrated, the Canadian public would be abandoned to American cultural influences, already pervasive in Canadian border towns (23). In championing an all-Canadian approach, the Report attempts to inspire its audience with a reminder of the nineteenth-century national railway project:

> The historically-minded remembered that half a century earlier, Canadians had resisted the temptation to take the cheap way from Montreal to Winnipeg via Chicago, and had insisted on an all-Canadian railway. This apparently impossible feat was carried through by a remarkable combination of private enterprise and public support and control. The policy was sharply criticized both then and later, but it has since been generally accepted that Canada's complex and costly railway system is the essential material basis of national existence. (23–24)

It was the memory of the railway's success, the Report continues, that encouraged ordinary citizens to support the establishment of the CBC. Had the railway failed, "economic and even political annexation" (24) to the States would have been certain. Support for national cultural endeavours, the report suggests, will have similarly salvational results.[2]

Despite the inevitable erasures of such commemoration (and the consequent overwriting of the Pacific Scandal and subsequent financial difficulty, as well as the displacements and violence enacted in the railway's completion), the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was mythologized in the national imagination. The Canadian railway had become a symbol of all that was possible for a nation united by a common purpose, and a favourite success story for anyone campaigning for the all-Canadian way, whether in construction projects or cultural initiatives. It was this earlier story of nation building, at this moment of national redefinition, that E.J. Pratt chose for his 1952 Governor General's Award winning poem, *Towards the Last Spike*. Pratt's chronicling of the CPR, a chapter of national history that closed almost eighty years before the poem's release, must be considered a response to the cultural and economic climate that precipitated the Massey Report's admonitions.[3] But Pratt does not tell the story with the same unquestioning reverence as does the Massey Report. Instead, through the lens of the railway, *Towards the Last Spike* reconsiders nationalism, and documents not only the profits but also the potential violence of nation building. In

1930, nineteen years before his participation in the Royal Commission on Arts and Letters, Vincent Massey qualified his support for national art with the admission that "[n]ationality has been the excuse for deeds of violence and selfishness since nations were known"; at the same time, he suggested, nationalism, when "rightly understood[,] surely provides the very pillars on which a sound internationalism can rest" (cited in Finlay, 120). Pratt makes the dangerous ambivalence of nationhood the space of *Towards the Last Spike,* and foregrounds the places in which nationalism becomes divisive.

Pratt's articulation of Canada and of Canadian nationalism is a history neither simple nor celebratory. Instead, Pratt allows the ambiguity of the Canadian railway story to stand, so that even the moments of accomplishment in *Towards the Last Spike* are darkened by the sacrifices and erasures underwriting the project's completion. His retelling is tinged with irony, a tactic that W.H. New argues is particularly well-suited to the "Grandchild[ren] of Empire," to those attempting to write themselves and their nations out of the legacy of colonial rule. The return to railway history demonstrates a concern with Canada as the child of Empire, trying to define itself, both in 1880 and 1950, as independent, strong enough to resist American annexation. While Pratt undoubtedly celebrates the achievement of the railway, he refuses a naïve nationalism and instead frames his history in critique. Despite the complexity of Pratt's retelling, critical commentary often flattens the poem by focusing only on the celebratory nature of the narrative, the overall trajectory of a seemingly impossible goal ultimately accomplished. Such readings overlook the irony, "the divergent *relation* between an apparent surface intent and an often political undertow" (13, New's emphasis), that makes *Towards the Last Spike* more than a useful history lesson: the space of ambiguity that the poem explores, the space between the benefits and the costs of nationalism, provides Pratt with room to question, without dismissing, projects of national unification.

Pratt's student (and later a colleague at the University of Toronto) Northrop Frye observes that, in his lifetime, Pratt was the "unofficial poet laureate" (129) of Canada, and suggests that his popularity may have limited the scope of critical readings of his work. Yet despite this observation of a critical lack, Frye, too, saw Pratt as a simple writer. Pratt, Frye argues, recognized his status as "the voice of the community" (127) and attempted to write in the tradition of the oral poet, whose task it was to preserve the community's stories for transmission to the next generation. In accordance with his role, Pratt did not shade his poetry with his own judgments; instead, he merely

catalogued, and "tend[ed] to accept the values of his society without much questioning" (130). Other critics have made similar pronouncements. Frank Davey says that each of Pratt's poems is "no more than itself" (55), and Jed Adams, in a 1959 interview with Pratt, claims that Pratt's work "can be enjoyed as simply as a good meal or a hockey game" (cited in Gingell 53). Pratt's poems, in other words, are easily digestible and offer healthy portions of Canadian content. The tendency to read Pratt as an impersonal and detached recorder of community history has narrowed the realm of engagement between poet and reader, and has resulted in a critical undervaluing of Pratt's subtlety that is at its most obvious in many readings of *Towards the Last Spike*.

Instead of being read in the context of its historical and cultural moment, *Towards the Last Spike* is made to fit into bigger critical pictures of Pratt, and, because it was written near the end of his career, is itself designated the "last spike," nailing together the various frames into which Pratt's poetry has been made to fit. The poem "marked [Pratt's] retirement as Professor Emeritus from Victoria College in 1952" (Djwa 134); as his final epic piece, it is often read as the culmination of his work in Canadian writing. Sandra Djwa finds first and foremost in Pratt an "evolutionary vision," and so *Towards the Last Spike* becomes, for her, a celebration of technological progress: Djwa writes that, "[a]s Pratt whimsically presents it, this co-operative holistic process moves towards the completion of the railway and the good of the nation" (131). To Davey, who understands Pratt as consistently celebrating cooperation, the poem demonstrates the possibility of shared human accomplishment: because he "admires any kind of heroic collective action against long odds" (60), Pratt places emphasis throughout "on the collective nature of the great success of men" (59). Angela McAuliffe, whose book is subtitled "The Religious Dimensions of the Poetry of E.J. Pratt," reads Pratt's writing of the railway as "the construction of a road through the desert" and "the fulfillment of prophetic vision" (38). James Johnson calls *Towards the Last Spike* "triumphant" (149): like the "technological miracle" (149) of the railway itself, Pratt's poem embraces all of Canada, and offers a "statement of faith in the continuity of the human spirit and in the strength of the Canadian will" (147). While each of these readings is helpful in understanding the trajectory of Pratt's writing career, none credits the irony and complexity of *Towards the Last Spike*: none accounts for the poem's fragmented form, for its metaphors of violence, for its proliferating references to war and rebellion, or for the darker moments that tinge what is too often taken to be a purely celebratory history.

R. D. Macdonald, in his 1995 call for a reconsideration of Pratt's poetry, acknowledges that critical readings of Pratt have been "reductive" (18). Macdonald suggests that the railway, and by extension Confederation itself, is portrayed in *Towards the Last Spike* in a manner that cannot be summarized as either celebratory or defeatist. Instead, Pratt's view of "[t]he union of Canada, the triumph of civilization, is genuine, but in Pratt's mock epic and ironic overview, temporary, costly, and fragile" (35). Macdonald's suggestions can be taken as a call to reconsider the nationalistic and celebratory light in which *Towards the Last Spike* is most often recalled.[4] Evidence of Pratt's apprehension and unease with projects of national definition can be found throughout *Towards the Last Spike*: from the opening metaphor to the closing image, the poem troubles a simple celebration of Canadian connectedness.

The opening section of this poem, and especially the twelve introductory lines, are essential to an understanding of Pratt's challenge. Though *Towards the Last Spike* is set almost entirely in the later part of the nineteenth-century, Pratt uses his opening stanza to write of his "now" (1), the mid twentieth-century, placing the contemporary in a position of priority. The opening proclamation—"It was the same world then as now" (1)—suggests that Pratt does not see the history he relates as an isolated event. Instead, these opening lines advocate reading then and now in tandem, reading for points of connection and divergence. The world of "then," Pratt suggests, is like the world of "now," "Except for little differences of speed / And power, and means to treat myopia" (2–3). Myopia, which here reads as both near-sightedness and narrow-mindedness, and represents limited vision in a double sense, is a national affliction in both 1880 and 1950. While Pratt marks a contemporary difference in the treatment of myopia, a difference heightened by the emphatic placement of "Except" at the beginning of the second line, he does not suggest that society has cured itself of its limited perspective. In fact, the catalogue of technological change that follows the observation of "differences" suggests not a correction, but an intensification of the dangers of myopic existence. The world of "now" has developed the technological power "To show an axe-blade infinitely sharp / Splitting things infinitely small" (4–5); the science of "now" could "Provide the telescopic sight to roam / Through curved dominions never found in fables" (6–7). The point of view becomes dizzyingly narrow, as the perspective moves closer and closer to that which it examines, eventually dissecting to view microscopically the internal workings of its object. This is science at its new myopic extreme.

This divisive near-sightedness has permitted the development of new extremities of destruction. As Tom Middlebro' observes in his 1976 "Commentary on the Opening Lines of E.J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*," the "algebraic substitutes for nouns" (9) to which Pratt alludes must suggest "the algebraic equation $E=MC^2$" (242). Djwa, in the Introduction to her new co-edited volume of Pratt's work, similarly suggests that Pratt's focus on the "axe-blade" and his emphasis on science's new capability of "splitting things infinitely small," call to mind "the splitting of the atom" (xix). Djwa reads this focus as suggestive of scientific advancement, arguing that Pratt's charting of science's penetrating vision "implies progress" (xix). Scientific vision's alignment with the "axe-blade infinitely sharp" (4), however, suggests the dangerous and violent potential of such new discovery, and undermines any straightforward celebration of science's new sight.

The instability of Pratt's "now"—North America in the 1950s, caught in the tensions of the Cold War—further undermines the suggestion that Pratt's call to science should be read as a simple celebration. An allusion to the splitting of the atom must, in 1952, call to mind the destructive legacy of the atomic bomb. And here is Pratt's example of science at its most myopic. Pratt's allusion to atomic potential, written in the midst of the Cold War, only five years after the detonation of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, cannot be purely celebratory. Pratt's letters make clear that his thoughts were clouded by worry over war during the writing of *Towards the Last Spike*. In January of 1950, Pratt was "[d]eeply disturbed by President Harry Truman's announcement . . . that the United States would develop a hydrogen bomb" (Pitt 415–16), a weapon with even more destructive potential than its predecessor, the atomic bomb. He "knew of no way, he wrote to [Earle] Birney, 'to get the pressure of hydrogen off my chest,' other than through the medium of verse" (Pitt 416). Poetry is Pratt's direct response to the threats of war, which signals both that Pratt had war, and the potential dangers of scientific myopia, on his mind at the time of writing this poem, and that he saw poetry as a means of challenging science's potentially suffocating presence.[5] Pratt opens his poem with that which worries him most, and invites his reader to consider the national history he presents through the lens of modern-day Canada. Clearly, Pratt does not see the creation of the Canadian railway as a project equivalent to the creation of the atomic bomb; he does, however, draw a connection between the two that is worthy of tracing through the rest of the poem.[6]

Pratt's allusions suggest that the "power" (3) of the new world is potentially self-destructive. Scientific formulas intrude on the imagination. The

scientists are the "sky cartographers" (10) of the day (a fitting label, suggestive of the dreams of the scientific discipline but also the arrogance of presuming to chart the heavens), and their formulas "hang like signboards" (10) in the dreamspace of "our thoughts" (11). Pratt's use of the pronoun here is noteworthy, since the voice of the first person very rarely enters this poem. "Our," then, is significant: Pratt's narrator aligns himself with the tongues silenced by hubristic science. The "signboards" (10) of science "trespass on our thoughts to stop / The stutters of our tongues with their equations" (11–12). This "trespass," Jonathan Kertzer argues, is a "trespass without sin" (81), an overstepping that refers "to the audacity of the human mind as it enlarges its scope" (79). Yet it is arguable that trespass, here, is not innocent: instead, the term carries its traditional negative associations of both sin and intrusion, and its deployment suggests something of a battle between the scientists and the poets.[7] But the magnitude of atomic potential gathers the scientists, too, under the pronoun "our," and the narrator's fear becomes one of complete destruction. Pratt's use of the conditional tense in this figurative fight for territory between the scientists and the poets is important. The scientists "would hang" (10) their formulas in the poets' sky, suggesting that they desire to mark the spaces of poetic thought, but also that they have not yet done so. There is room for change, the narrator avows.

Pratt questions the driving forces behind this national unification. His narrator worries that, like "now," "then" may have been more intent on breaking records than on real and lasting achievement. The world of the railway's creation was "[t]he same world then as now," a world "thirsting for power / To crack those records open" (51–52). This metaphor (which again alludes to the destructive power of atomic warfare) is tellingly violent: this is not a vision of cooperation and building, but a competitive understanding of creation, in which the new must destroy what came before. The battle is endless, and increasingly aggressive: "the tougher armor followed the new shell; / The newer shell the armor" (46–47). This cycle of destruction destabilizes the notions of progress underwriting the railway's construction. Families, too, were sacrificed to the project: the railway's cost was an argument that "rent / God-fearing families into partisans" (33–34). Pratt's narrator asks, "Was ever an adventure / Without its cost?" (41–42). Taken on its own, this question may seem to justify sacrifice as necessary. But sandwiched as it is by references to endless battle and civil war, the weight of the question rests on the costs, which pile up one on top of another. The theme of destructive splitting, begun with the image of the axe-blade, carries throughout the poem.

The nation's planners, all myopic, have risked sacrificing long-term vision for short-term gain.

The men amalgamated for the purpose of the line's construction become an army, divided among ranks. The troops are drawn "From down-and-outers needing roofs, whose hands / Were moulded by their fists, whose skins could feel / At home incorporate with dolomite" (58–60); supervisors will be men "with marshal instincts in them" (61), "[d]irect[ing] their battalions from the trestles" (63). The militaristic metaphors stack up quickly, and are perhaps at their most violent in the workers' battle with the land itself. The construction-destruction troops prepare for an offensive effort: they survey "the bastions of the Rockies" (971)—fortified land—in an attempt to find a weak point, susceptible to attack. In strategizing how to best conquer these mountains, William Van Horne (manager of the CPR, and so chief marshal of the railway troops) wonders whether the range can perhaps be "outsmarted on the flanks" (959). In a passage labeled "Internecine Strife," Pratt's narrator describes the fierce combat that has existed for ages among the forces of nature, between the "Guerrilla evergreens" (1057) and the mountains, "Rock *versus* forest" (1066), forces which "were hammering one another at this moment" (1043). The violence of this language suggests that this is land as it is viewed by railway engineers: this survey is part of the railway army's strategic planning. If the land itself is already under siege, is already a battlezone, its destruction becomes natural and even necessary, legitimating the railway's declaration of war—"Frontal assault!" (1341)—on the mountains.

Language itself becomes both a weapon and a secondary theatre of war in the railway's battle against the land. The railway's proponents fight "against two fortresses: the mind, the rock" (1016): both sites must be gained to win the war. In a section titled "The Attack," Pratt focuses on the warring parliamentary speeches, "the battle of ideas and words" (470). Here, Edward Blake's professed opposition to John A. Macdonald's plan is described as "dangerous" (510); Blake's words become "artillery" (516) and "gunfire" (519) against the railway. His metaphors, perilous "flash[es] of fire" (537), "burn" (534) their way into public consciousness. Blake's speeches are described as "salvos" (517), a word that means both a verbal attack and a discharge of artillery.[8] Language throughout seems to have the capacity for such violence. The repetition of such militaristic metaphors must undermine any attempt to read this poem as light "intellectual comedy" (Smith 151).

The true violence of the attack on the land becomes clear when the land is personified and granted voice. The lizard of the North Shore, meant to

represent the Laurentian range (a region that proved particularly difficult for railway construction), calls attention to the ambiguity of the national project as a whole. This lizard is not the fearsome dragon some critics have made her out to be: she breathes fire only because the men who invade her plant dynamite along "her insides" (945). Before their invasion and her "violation" (913), she "lay snug" (874), satisfied to exist quietly. Pratt suggests that he "wanted a very old form, something reptilian, so I made the Laurentian range a hybrid monster, a lizard held within the folds of the pre-Cambrian Shield" (Pratt, cited in Gingell 147): his creation is multiply "hybrid," "conceived, / But not delivered" (871–2), "too old for death, too old for life" (884), "neither yielding nor resisting" (908) her attackers. Though the narrator later calls her "survival without function" (910), this lizard clearly plays a pivotal role in the maintenance of her home: her tail "swished / Atlantic tides" (875–6). And with increasing efficiency,

> Her back grown stronger every million years
> She had shed water by the longer rivers
> To Hudson Bay and by the shorter streams
> To the great basins to the south, had filled
> Them up, would keep them filled until the end
> Of Time. (894–9)

The lizard regulates the tides and sustains the rivers: without her, the nation will not function. Immediately following this catalogue of the lizard's voluntary contributions to her environment, the narrator asks, "Was this the thing Van Horne set out / To conquer?" (899–900). The line break here emphasizes the questioner's disbelief: the incongruity of the situation takes an extra second to register. The doubt will, in the following lines, be explained in relation to the lizard's enormous bulk, but at the moment of its asking, this question suggests a disbelief not because the war is unwinnable, but because the enemy is a friend.

The personification of the lizard, and Pratt's decision to script this section of the battle from her point of view, make the violence of her invasion all the more extreme. The men who violate her, who make "her insides / The home of fire and thunder" (945–6), attack her despite her passivity.[9] The railway crew's digging and blasting becomes a "consistent punching at her belly," (1256) as day after day their "fire and thunder slapped her like an insult" (1257). When asked why he makes his lizard a "she," Pratt suggests that he is simply following the custom of referring to boats and countries in the feminine (cited in Gingell, 147), but the lizard's status as female also serves to

heighten the violence of the workers' penetration. Perhaps this interaction could be read, on some level, as a rape of the land. Pratt's narrator does not assign clear moral value to the lizard's abuse, but the ambivalence of the lizard's position permits such interpretation. Her only defense "her passive corporal bulk" (951), the lizard sets a muskeg "trap" (1263) to defend herself. While man's invasion has been violent and aggressive, the lizard's response is natural and passive. Just as the "Carnivorous bladder-wort" (1268) swallow the "water-fleas" (1269) that buzz about them, so will the lizard swallow the invading men:

> She took three engines, sank them
> With seven tracks down through the hidden lake
> To the rock bed, then over them she spread
> A counterpane of leather-leaf and slime. (1276–1279)

Though the railway seems to have tamed the dragon, pinning her to her place, her swallowing of her enemy proves that her reign is far from ended. "[S]ome day" (1284), at a moment of her choosing, "She might stir in her sleep and far below / The reach of steel and blast of dynamite, / She'd claim their bones as her possessive right" (1286–88). The construction crews think they have subdued the beast, but their victory is superficial and only temporary.

The lizard disrupts a celebratory reading of this history, but even more unsettling are the allusions to Louis Riel and the Riel Rebellions, which have been largely left out of critical readings of the poem. Kertzer suggests that Pratt "must brush aside competing visions of justice (the Riel Rebellion)," as such opposing views would "contaminate the poem with a different vision of nationhood" (80). It seems, however, that it is not Pratt, but critics themselves who have bracketed Riel's presence in this poetic retelling of Canadian history. Pratt, I would suggest, does not bracket the Riel Rebellion: instead, his allusions have precisely the opposite effect, permitting the Rebellion to creep in from the margins, to which it has been relegated by nationalist histories. Riel was hanged in 1885, the same year the last spike was driven, but this is a connection that moves far beyond similar dates. The railway—the line that would define the nation—was a priority for John A. Macdonald's Conservative government: anything or anyone understood as barring the way would be violently displaced. Such willingness to sacrifice whatever does not align with the national picture is amply demonstrated in the story of the CPR through the history of the Selkirk colony, the site of the Riel Rebellions. The Selkirk land has a complicated history of ownership, making it a fitting

site from which to complicate understandings of nationalism. Lord Selkirk records in his writings that he purchased the title to the Red River colony in 1811; here, he established his colony of Scottish settlers (111). Selkirk bought the land from the Hudson's Bay Company, who had themselves been granted the land by the British government. Despite the British, HBC, and Scottish claims to ownership, the land was inhabited by Native and Métis peoples (Bumstead, *Introduction* 15). This conflicted territory serves in Macdonald's daydreams (lines 178–193) and nightmares (1391–1419) as a gauge of the public relations success of the project of national definition as a whole.

Pratt's Macdonald has two significant moments of remembering Selkirk: one that affirms his goals, and one that undermines the project entirely. Early in the poem and early in the railway's chronology, Macdonald wakes from a nightmare and attempts to calm himself with place names: Selkirk, he said, "had the sweetest taste" (183). Macdonald says that he remembers a time in Selkirk history, "Ten years / before [when] the Highland crofters had subscribed / Their names in a memorial for the Rails" (183–85). "Ten years before" would refer to early 1860, and the memorial to which Macdonald refers is an 1863 document, transcribed by Sir Sanford Fleming, who would later become the Chief Engineer of the CPR. In this document, the "people [read 'white men'] of Red River Settlement" (6) record their support for territorial roads through their colony with the understanding that these will eventually become railways. Moving further back in history, Pratt's narrator, through Macdonald, recalls in brief the violent development of this colony. Macdonald will make use of Selkirk's struggles, incorporating this story into his war of words. Selkirk's Scottish men become brave "pioneers" (200) in Macdonald's propaganda; like the train itself, these men are part of a mission to civilize their rough surroundings. Selkirk's history soothes Macdonald back to sleep because the history of this place reinscribes his own power to erase that which refuses to fit his plan.

Pratt's Macdonald is attempting to comfort himself by remembering that his project has the support of Selkirk. But he is recalling this history in 1871, strategically forgetting the first scene of this Métis uprising, the Red River Rebellion of 1870. In 1869, the Red River was sold to the Canadian government, which was looking to expand west (Bumstead 136). The Métis, in an attempt to defend their homes, took prisoner all trespassers on their land. One such trespasser, Thomas Scott, had been working to plan the new roads in the settlement (Bumstead 103). The Métis were nervous about these roads, since they often ran directly through property and homes. Scott was killed

at Riel's order, executed for trying to incite a riot among fellow prisoners. This is the killing that eventually led to Riel's own death. Meanwhile, in the poem, the railway spikes continue their westward advance, and have reached "across the Red to Selkirk" (419). Fourteen years after the first appearance of Selkirk, Macdonald again cannot sleep. The railway has pinned Selkirk to its place within the nation, but its history continues to trouble the national line. The Red River history is no longer comforting: instead, Macdonald is haunted by the ghosts of those he has silenced, and especially by their representative, Riel. Riel's executioners' "marching choruses" (1403) intrude on Macdonald's thoughts: "We'll hang Riel up the Red River, / And he'll roast in hell forever" (1404–5). This chant Macdonald labels as the echo of the shot that Riel ordered fifteen years earlier. Though Riel's death would seem to put an end to the controversy, Macdonald is acutely aware of the fact that this is only the beginning. Immediately after this haunting nightmare, Macdonald is "sick indeed" (1420): the "Métis' sullen tread" (1417) runs ceaselessly through his mind. Even more worrying, the Riel Rebellion triggers not only troublesome memories, but also nagging concerns of "treaty-wise" (1418) Natives and future land claims to be addressed: this realization makes Macdonald sick.

The connection between the CPR and the Métis of Red River is direct: both claim the same land. Furthermore, the railway promised increased military capability in the quelling of this and future land disputes. The railway was of chief importance in quieting the Red River Rebellion, as troops could quickly arrive at the site to silence dissenters. Sir Sanford Fleming, in his previously cited "Memorial" requesting the government run their railway directly through Red River, wrote "[i]t requires no argument to prove that the Railway and the Electric Telegraph are the most perfect means for concentration of military power that could possibly be desired" (46). These technological advances promised to police the land, keeping the colonizers safe and keeping those colonized quiet. CPR President George Stephen, defending the company's financial record at the 1885 annual shareholders' meeting, praised the military benefit of a national railway: "[t]he speed with which that transport [of military troops to Selkirk] was effected, contributed, in no small degree, to the suppression of the outbreak. This circumstance has drawn attention . . . to the probability that the railway may, upon its completion to the Pacific Ocean, bear a still more important part in the defense of the Empire" ("Canadian Pacific"). Charles Everett, a Conservative Member of Parliament, went so far in noting the connection as to publicly thank the

CPR during a speech in the House of Commons. The defense the railway offered, Everett believed, would be fundamental to new Canadian settlement and civilization: "We have here an enormous quantity of land fit for cultivation, on which we desire to see a large portion of our own people—people from our fatherland" (4). The CPR promised to provide to these pioneers "the fullest protection the law of the country can provide" (4). These military connections helped Macdonald to finally convince parliament that the railway was integral to the creation and defense of the Canadian nation. And yet, Riel's death haunts Macdonald, as the Rebellions have continued to haunt national cohesion. Macdonald's nightmares remind the reader of the many unanswered questions of Confederation. What would be done with those who were in the way? The CPR was granted $25 million and 25 million acres of land from the Canadian government (Hedges 24, 31), land that was gifted, of course, without consultation of its occupants. The story of Red River is only one of many instances of invasion and forced relocation in the history of national development.

The final scene of the poem, perhaps more than any other, undermines national unity. Pratt carefully sets the stage for the driving of the railway's final spike. While "No flags or bands announce this ceremony" (1535) this is, nevertheless, a symbolic moment: the railway runs from coast to coast; "The job was done" (1565) and "well within the pledge" (1564). The battle is finished. This should be the ceremony of victory. Instead, however, Donald Smith (a CPR investor and a founding member of the CPR syndicate who was chosen for the honour of delivering the final blow) missed the last spike. The picture is marred. Catherine McKinnon Pfaff, in her helpful study of Pratt's historical references, notes that only one of Pratt's suspected historical sources mentions that the last spike was missed before it was hit (56). The choice to conclude with this dramatic miss hammers home the poem's cautionary note: national projects are never guaranteed to hit their mark. R.D. Macdonald aptly labels this closing scene Pratt's "triumphant but off-key denouement" (40). The initial miss colours and mars the eventual sinking of the final spike. "Outwitted by an idiotic nail" (1584), Smith, "head bowed" (1583), seeks revenge. In his final blow, a blow which comes to represent the builders' final word on the railway, Smith,

> invoking his ancestral clan,
> Using the hammer like a battle-axe,
> His eyes bloodshot with memories of Flodden,
> Descended on it, rammed it to its home. (1591–94)

Smith's use of a "battle-axe" in this final blow recalls the "axe-blade infinitely sharp" (4) of the poem's introduction, a return that links the historic miss to the contemporary myopia.

It cannot be merely the defiant and "grinning" (1586) missed nail that has motivated such passion in Smith's second blow. This second strike, a vengeful blow, the Scotsman Smith executes with blood in his eyes. Through the allusion to Scotland's loss to English soldiers at Flodden, more than three hundred years earlier (Djwa et. al. 235), the "grinning" nail comes to stand for more than the logistical difficulties of the railway. Instead, the mocking spike stands in for Smith's enemy, his final strike the final blow of battle. The story of the railway closes, as it opened, with allusions to war. But it is the lizard who gets the last word: "To drown / The traffic chorus, she must blend the sound / With those inaugural, narcotic notes / Of storm and thunder which would send her back / Deeper than ever in Laurentian sleep" (1622–26). If the lizard, the land, can incorporate the noise of the railway with the sounds of her natural existence before the intrusion, she will sleep again. There is still the sense that the battle's finale is conditional. If nature and technology can coexist, the land will rest. The railway complete, the "[human] breed has triumphed" (1620) after all. But is this moment truly triumphant?

Pratt does not dismiss the value of this accomplishment, but refuses to label the railway project as an unquestionable sign of progress. Instead, the poem advises caution, suggesting that science that races ahead without vision of its goal inevitably divides and destroys. F.R. Scott, in 1957, writes back to Pratt, asking "Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned? / Where are the thousands from China who swung / their picks with bare hands at forty below?" (1–3). Scott was right to ask: Pratt does not expose the darkest moments of Canadian railway history. He does not write the history of the exploited workers, so often victims of racism in its deadliest form, but he does include a gesture towards their suffering: "Ring, Ring the Bells," a self-contained section of the poem that runs from lines 1132 to 1147, could be read as a muted elegy for the workers sacrificed in the race to build the railway. "Sorrow is stalking through the camps" (1135), and visits everyone involved in the railway, from the "Blackfoot tepee" (1137) to the "coolie's door" (1139). The section ends almost callously, as anonymous men are sacrificed to the project:

> *Ring, ring the bells but not the engine bells:*
> *Today only that universal toll,*
> *For granite, mixing dust with human lime,*

Had so compounded bodies into boulders
As to untype the blood, and, then, the Fraser,
Catching the fragments from the dynamite,
Had bleached all birthmarks from her swirling dead.

Tomorrow, and the engine bells again! (1140–1147)

All but the last line of this section is set off in italics: by the final line, both the font and the construction schedule have returned to normal. Ultimately, the loss of workers' lives is depicted from the point of view of the railway's supporters, and so the sacrifices represented by these deaths become another of the justified costs of the adventure. Pratt's minimization of these losses, and the cold return of the final line, become, when read in context, a critical commentary on the cost of nation building. Though these details are left unexplored, Pratt's focus on the big picture of railway development demonstrates that the frame surrounding the entire project is one of violence and war: in some way, then, Pratt invites these workers' stories to be told on their own terms.

In a 1969 essay, Dorothy Livesay suggested that the documentary poem is a particularly Canadian genre, and Pratt one of the chief examples of the documentary poet.[10] But for Livesay, the marker of the Canadian documentary is not the voice of objectivity and transparency that critics such as Frye see in Pratt. Instead, Livesay argues, Canadian writers manipulate the documentary form, using its conventions to make room for argument and observation. The Canadian documentary strategy uses "the story [as] a frame on which to hang a theme" (269). Pratt's retelling is less a reading of "then" than a comment on "now": he makes use of the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway as a frame on which to hang his theme, his argument for a cautious nationalism, an alliance aware of its risks and benefits. The simplified story of the railway came to stand as a symbol of progress and national unification for the Canadian public, evidence that the country could thrive without taking the American way. But the railway also became the nation's "central devouring obsession" (Frye 22). Pratt's "now" seeks a space of existence between a new and mighty collective dream and a devouring future.

NOTES

1 The Alaska Highway, completed in 1942, just one year before the Advisory Committee's Report was issued, stands as a special case in the list of war-era construction projects intended to mark independence: this project, which would link the lower United States to Alaska by way of British Columbia and the Yukon, was financed by the United States, and

was initiated under the agreement that Canada would take possession of the road once the war had come to an end. The Alaska Highway marks both the desire for Canadian autonomy and the realization of America's existing military and economic authority.

2 Clearly, the railway was idealized in such strategic remembering: railway history was established, Maurice Charland explains, as "the basis for a nationalist discourse" (200), though often a hollow and circulatory discourse which "equates the construction of the CPR with the constitution of Canada and praises each with reference to the other" (197). The CBC, in turn, was "legitimated in political discourse by the CPR" (197). Just what it was that was being unified was generally left unquestioned, as technologies of communication were praised for their own sake.

3 Pratt began work on *Towards the Last Spike* in January of 1950 (Pitt 411). The creation of the Massey Commission was announced in the throne speech of January 1949 (Litt 30), and the Commission's public hearings visited Toronto (where Pratt lived and worked) in November of 1949 (57). Even before the release of the Massey Report, the Commission's concerns were public knowledge, and the issues the Commission set out to address surface frequently in Canadian newspapers and magazines from the late 1940s on (57).

4 Jonathan Kertzer's *Worrying the Nation* (1998) implies, but does not explore, such a rethinking. Kertzer theorizes the tensions and contradictions inherent in the idea of nationality, but then resists locating challenges to nation in *Towards the Last Spike.* Instead, he says, Pratt works "[t]o maintain the spectacle" (85) of national cohesion: *Towards the Last Spike,* Kertzer argues, "exhibits great confidence in civilization and progress, in the myth-making powers of thought, and in the legitimacy of the national dream" (80).

5 Of course, war was not a new concern for Pratt: see his earlier poems, especially "Come Away, Death" (1941), for more on this theme.

6 In his reading of Pratt's letter to Birney, Kertzer suggests that the railway served as a pleasant distraction, "offer[ing] compensation for distressing current events" (81). If this were the case, Pratt's opening twelve lines would have been excised from *Towards the Last Spike* and allowed to stand on their own as a comment on the arms race.

7 "The Truant" (1942), in which a "bucking truant" (3) confronts "the great Panjandrum" (1), is Pratt's quintessential commentary on the battle between science and imagination. C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures* (1959) explores this dichotomy as a popular mid-century theme.

8 Macdonald prays to speed up the production of such cutting metaphors in "Tory factories" (541-2), calling to mind an image of wartime munitions factories. Here it is words, not bombs, that are being manufactured, but they are used to wage war.

9 Armed with "shovels" and "pickaxes" (918), these men echo the actions of Mammon's "Pioneers" of *Paradise Lost*, who, "with Spade and pickaxe arm'd" (676) "and with impious hands / Rifled the bowels of their mother Earth" (686-87). Pandemonium is built in similar cannibalistic fashion. That Pratt's railway construction parallels the building of Hell's capital city is surely significant.

10 Roy Miki criticizes Livesay's own documentary poem, "Call My People Home," as reinscribing the internment of the Japanese-Canadians whose story it claims to represent, and "effectively stripping away the subjectivities of those depicted" (103). *Towards the Last Spike* does not claim to tell the entire story of the railway, but refutes the sanitized version of CPR history that has been claimed for the national imaginary. Rather than resolve the disjunctures it represents, (a closure that Miki equates with assimilation in Livesay's documentary,) *Towards the Last Spike* reinforces the understanding that much is left unresolved.

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Lolette Kuby

The Last Goodbye

Constellations of goodbyes: one
leaps a hurdle on an evening
encrusted with moons and keeps on
running, one aims an arrow toward
unnamed land but never looses
the bow, one pours from an empty
vase into someone who receives
it forever. Our goodbye was
a Rube Goldberg—a foot slammed a door,
a door pulled a cord, a cord cracked
the heart glass, the heart glass let in
the wind, the wind rattled the door,
etcetera, etcetera.
This went on for years. Then again
the hello door was opened.

Statistically, there are an equal
number of hellos—echoing
through canyons, climbing over hills,
coruscating from behind clouds.

But the backs of all the hellos
are goodbyes: one scurries squeaking
into its hole, one slinks into
underbrush, one burrows deeper,
one is an abandoned well
whose first hello, even, was hollow,
was musty, one sends a letter
with no return address, one sends
a letter with a dollar inside.

Janice Fiamengo

"Seeing religiously that his socks were always darned"

Serving Idols in *As For Me and My House*

Friday evening, June 16

We had callers today from Randolph, the next town, fifteen miles from here. The Reverend and Mrs. Albert Downie, to extend a word of brotherly encouragement and cheer. A quaint, serene little pair—piety and its rib in a Ford more battle-scarred even than ours—the parson and his wife in caricature.

He is bald and thin, confident and kindly. Like a just-awakened Rip Van Winkle who was an earnest little Boy Scout when he fell asleep, a lecture still ringing in his ears on *The Abundant Life*. You couldn't imagine him ever racked by a doubt or conflict. He said a word of prayer for us, and finished radiant. I glanced at Philip, and for a minute wished that I were the artist, with a pad and pencil at my hand.

Mrs. Downie has white hair and blue eyes, and a voice like a teaspoon tinkling in a china cup. A frail, tiny woman, with a fussy, beribboned hat too big for her that she has likely salvaged from a mission barrel, and that makes mine in contrast seem quite modish. And supporting it so bravely, with such stalwart, meek assurance. Over the tea and sponge cake I had a few gaunt moments, looking down a corridor of years and Horizons, at the end of which was a mirror and my own reflection. They had heard I was a musician, and wondered would I render something. Perhaps they expected hymns. I played two Chopin waltzes, and they exclaimed politely that all music was sacred. (108–09)

In this little-commented-upon scene in Sinclair Ross's much-commented-upon prairie novel *As For Me and My House* (1941), the narrator and her husband receive a visit from the Reverend and Mrs. Albert Downie, a couple from a nearby town who have come to "extend a word of brotherly encouragement" (108). It is some time in the 1930s. The narrator, Mrs. Bentley, and her preacher husband have recently moved to a new town, Horizon, the last in a succession of small prairie towns where Philip Bentley has ministered, rather unsuccessfully. "In every town [they've] lived in,"

the narrator tells us, they've been "popular at first," then encountered "dissatisfaction and resentment, [and] finally an attitude that called for [their] resignation" (14). They have been in Horizon for a little over two months and are already weary of it, and the visit from the Downies is one more occasion among many for a display of false piety.

The narrator describes the Downies mockingly as "a quaint, serene little pair—piety and its rib in a Ford more battle-scarred even than ours—the parson and his wife in caricature" (108). Her use of the phrase "piety and its rib" to describe the couple suggests her ironic distance both from the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, in which Eve is described as being formed from Adam's rib, and from the earnest couple themselves, who seem to her as simple and predictable as caricatures, theological Rip Van Winkles belonging properly to an earlier era. In fact, one might argue, they aren't so much caricatures as true types, a couple who believe in their vocation and are fulfilled by it. As the scene unfolds, Mrs. Bentley and her husband go through the motions of entertaining the visitors, whose confident faith contrasts with their own confirmed disbelief. The Rev. Downie, Mrs. Bentley tells us wryly, is "confident and kindly. . . . You couldn't imagine him ever racked by a doubt or conflict. He said a word of prayer for us, and finished radiant" (108). Not for a moment do we imagine that the narrator is comforted by this visit, still less that she admires a man—so different from her own husband—able to pray with conviction. On the contrary, even with this serene and simple couple, she is defensive, on the alert for signs of criticism. When she plays them two Chopin waltzes on the piano, she detects an implicit judgment in their polite exclamation that "all music [is] sacred," certain that they expected, and blame her for not playing, Christian hymns.

Even worse than their imagined judgment, Mrs. Bentley is made uncomfortable by the Downies' visit because in them she sees an image of herself and Philip at the end of a few more decades in ministry: poor and worn down, with threadbare, unfashionable clothes. She has "a few gaunt moments" in noting Mrs. Downie's outmoded hat and air of "stalwart, meek assurance" (109). She can only shudder in imagination as she considers the poverty, material and cultural, of the lives of this couple. That they may have spiritual riches to compensate for their sacrifices does not seem to occur to her. She sees and judges partially, her vision determined by the emotional dissatisfactions of her life as a minister's wife. Of Philip's reaction to the visit, we are told only that when she glances at him, she "wished that I were the artist, with a pad and pencil at my hand" (presumably to catch his telling expression—or to

record the contrast between the two men?). Whether his face expresses astonishment, envy, admiration, or discomfort, she does not say.

I taught *As For Me and My House* many times before I considered, at the prompting of a student, Marguerite Wiggins,[1] that this passage, which comes at precisely the halfway point of Ross's novel, might be important, even key, to the interpretation of the whole. Until that point, I had read it only as an example of the narrator's witty malice, her ability to convey disapproval in a humorous description, similar to her mention of how "parts of the portly Mrs. Wenderby . . . kept squeezing through the back and sides of Philip's study armchair" (9). The few critics who have considered the scene have been dismissive of the Downies: Lorraine York refers briefly to Mrs. Downie as "the voice of conventional piety" (168), while Sandra Orser notes that the couple are "reminders of another era when faith in God was unquestioned" (74). According to Orser, their serene faith "has little practical application to the world in which the Bentleys find themselves" (74). But regardless of whether one finds their piety conventional or impractical, we should perhaps take seriously their role as a mirror for the Bentleys' life together.

The passage makes clear that the Downies have faced many of the same material and emotional challenges as the Bentleys, yet they are not wearied or downcast. Untroubled by their battered car and outmoded clothing, they take time to visit fellow ministers and to pray for them; their objective is to encourage and uplift. They praise Mrs. Bentley for her musical talent and call music sacred despite her choice of the scandalous Chopin.[2] In the words of Christian philosopher Charles Malik, the Downies seem to embody "the wonder of being," the title of his essay describing the Christian life. As Malik describes it, a life of being—an "abundant life," in other words—results from knowing the redemption made possible by Christ's sacrifice. It involves "stand[ing] in awe before the wonderful plenitude" of life (338), "mov[ing] about in the world freely and joyously," "rejoic[ing] in every achievement [and] in every truth" (339), and "find[ing] Jesus Christ everywhere—in nature, in history, in art, in . . . personal trials and sufferings, . . . miseries and . . . triumphs, in every human law and culture" (345). Indeed, Mrs. Bentley's description highlights the Downies' joy in their faith and the outward-directed love that springs from it: they are "serene," "kindly," never "racked by a doubt," "radiant," "stalwart," and "meek." Many of these attributes are presented skeptically by the narrator, who finds such virtues questionable, but they nonetheless illuminate, through Ross's skilfully ambiguous presentation, precisely what is lacking in the Bentley household, foregrounding the

Bentleys' self-obsession, inability to forgive, drabness, and fear. In the rest of this paper, I want to consider the difference it makes if we read the Downies and, by extension, the story of the Bentleys, from a Christian perspective.

As befits such a complex and suggestive narrative, *As For Me and My House* has been interpreted in many different ways, with recent interpretations focusing on the ambiguous character of the narrator and on the repressed sexual energies of the plot. Over the years, as is evident from David Stouck's anthology of critical essays, the novel has been read variously as a documentary about small-town life during the Depression and the Dust Bowl (Daniells), as an unreliable narrative by a deceived and self-deceiving wife (Cude, Hinz and Teunissen, McMullen), as a story of gender, power, and creativity (Buss, Compton, Moss), as a reflection on modern art (Stouck, "Mirror"; Godard), as an exploration of postcolonial creation in a new country (Kroetsch), and as an account of repressed homosexuality (Cramer, Fraser, Raoul), to name only the most influential approaches. Critics have long contended over whether the narrator is to be seen as a loving wife wronged by her unfaithful husband or a monstrous manipulator who seeks to destroy him; whether her narrative is coherent, deliberately ambiguous, or simply confusing; and whether the ending offers hope for the marriage or continuing dissatisfaction.

Where readings of the novel have considered Christianity, they have tended to align themselves with Mrs. Bentley, otherwise so dubious an authority, in criticizing the church as a narrow-minded, repressive institution full of outworn ideas and rituals. If the Bentleys have a problem in relation to their religion, most of these critics agree, it is that despite their unbelief they are still too much "prairie Puritans" (Dubanski 89) in thrall to a deadening ideology of rules and self-scrutiny; they need to jettison more fully their repressive religious heritage in order to embrace a new, freer way of being.[3] The most sustained such analysis, by Orser, argues that the narrative rejects the narrow-minded legalism of the Protestant church in favour of New Testament "values" of "selfless concern for others, forgiveness, and equality" (130)—a kind of Christianity without doctrine. The novel has rarely been read as what it purports to be: a story about a man and woman who declare a life-affirming creed ("The Word of God as revealed in Holy Writ—Christ crucified—Salvation through his Grace" [Ross 7]) while living in the conviction that the Bible is only a myth. If we take seriously the example of the Downies in conjunction with the many references to unbelief and false gods, we may find that the novel asks precisely how love, forgiveness, and new life are possible in the absence of God.

Many critics may balk at such an interpretation. There is no evidence that when he wrote *As For Me and My House*, Sinclair Ross was either a committed believer or a skeptic troubled by his inability to believe. On the contrary, he seems to have been an agnostic who did little more than conform to expectations of church attendance and courteous behaviour. But there is some evidence that, at least at a social level, the Christian church, and the theology and conduct of its adherents, were matters to which he paid some attention. From early childhood well into adulthood, the Presbyterian (and then the United) Church was part of his life. As an adult he played the piano or organ in a succession of churches, and he regularly taught Sunday School. According to his biographer David Stouck, he was vividly remembered "nearly seventy years later" as an engaging and serious Bible teacher who "made [his pupils] think about the stories of the Bible in the context of their own lives" and "believed in the value of memorizing passages of scripture" (*Sinclair Ross* 34). He not only knew the Bible thoroughly, then, but had thought deeply enough about its meanings to teach it effectively to others.

Moreover, he was from childhood exposed to different interpretations of the Bible that highlighted the relationship between reader and sacred text, as well as the consequences of belief. Raised a Unitarian by his mother, he felt confusion as a child over whether Jesus Christ should be worshipped as the Son of God or admired as a "remarkable" man (McMullen 3). He frequently contrasted the message of purity and salvation being preached from the pulpit with the everyday meanness and immorality he witnessed around him. Sometimes the most troubling behaviour was exhibited by the preacher himself.[4] It seems likely, then, that he was intimately familiar with Christian teachings (he had certainly sat through many sermons) and had contemplated the difference that faith made, or was supposed to make, in people's lives.

According to Ross, the seed of the novel came from an offer he received as a young man to have his education paid for by the United Church if he would commit to enter the ministry. Though he was not, he claimed, seriously tempted, having never considered the church as a profession, he wondered about the kind of man who might be tempted—and the kind of life he might come to lead, "trapped" in the church (Ross qtd. in Stouck, *Sinclair Ross* 97), preaching a hollow gospel, playing the role of a man of God while surrendering to temptations of the flesh. The way that such hypocrisy might affect a man—affect his conception of himself, his relations with others, and even, if he had any at all, his relationship with God—would furnish plenty of material

for a serious work of fiction. Responding to the modernist questioning of absolute truth that was an important part of his intellectual context, Ross put the problem of "being," in Malik's sense, at the heart of the novel.

In arguing that the novel supports a reading of its overt subject—the rejection of Christian faith and the attempt to find a new truth—as well as of its more covert stories, I am not, then, suggesting that Ross was writing as a Christian intent on warning readers about the dangers of unbelief. A declared agnostic and aspiring modernist writer, he was more interested in posing questions through his fiction than in proffering answers. I suggest that as a keen observer of small-town life, and especially of the false fronts often made of religious piety, Ross turned naturally in his first novel to the subject of belief. To illuminate his theme, he made detailed use of biblical references, especially to the 24th chapter of the Book of Joshua, from which he drew his title. It is possible that his scriptural allusions highlight a purely secular story, as a number of scholars have assumed.[5] Just as likely, however, the scriptural allusions not only evoke secular meanings but also point us to religious concerns with human purpose and meaning. Ross's sustained emphasis on the Joshua intertext invites readers to consider the novel as a portrait of human seeking written from the perspective of a writer for whom the question of Christianity's truth was not yet settled.

From the opening diary entry, Mrs. Bentley reflects on the impact that religious worry has on her husband Philip: "He still handicaps himself with a guilty feeling that he ought to mean everything he says" (6), she notes of an encounter with a parishioner on the day after their arrival in Horizon. The visitor, who leads the choir, wants to discuss hymns to complement the preaching text at the first service, but Philip is too tired to enter into the discussion. Even if we cannot trust all of Mrs. Bentley's interpretations of her husband, the fact of his disinclination to discuss the service suggests a spiritual weariness and aversion to his minister's role. On the afternoon spent at the Finleys' house for mid-day dinner, Mrs. Bentley is struck by the lack of conviction with which Philip reads the Bible, noting that he "sounded like a droney auctioneer" (9). On another occasion, at the funeral for the young son of a farming couple with whom they have been friendly, she wishes "that Philip could preach a sermon with more comfort and conviction in it" and thinks "Philip wished it himself" (143). Critics have perhaps found the implications of such passages too obvious to be worth commenting on in a novel prized for its ambiguity, preferring to read the many signs of emotional dry rot as pointing to Philip's frustrations as an unfulfilled artist or unhappy

husband. But his sense of tiredness seems to be, at least in part, what Mrs. Bentley tells us it is—a result of guilt and incapacitating doubt.

The problem, of course, is that it is always Mrs. Bentley, notable for her self-evasions and misinterpretations, telling us what Philip wishes, believes, or fears. When she half-dreams of Philip in the pulpit, "turning through the pages of the Bible" and finally seizing it and "hurl[ing] it crashing down among the pews" (21), we are not to mistake the evidence of her unease for proof of Philip's spiritual malaise, though it is a suggestive image indeed. Everything we learn of Philip comes to us through a biased narrator for whom pretence and hypocrisy are, as she tells us, sources of satisfaction rather than of guilt—and for whom religious faith seems never to have mattered much: she confesses that she "resigned [herself] to sanctimony many years ago" (81). She seems even to take pleasure in deception. "None of them knows," she gloats on one occasion when she has made the case for adopting Steve, a Catholic boy, bragging that her pious words were "the devil quoting scripture" (81). "They spy and carp and preen themselves, but none of them knows. They only read our shingle, all its letters freshened up this afternoon. As For Me and My House—the House of Bentley—We will serve the Lord" (81). The thundering pronouncement of Joshua the warrior-prophet exhorting the Israelites to "serve the Lord" has become a social sham. Mrs. Bentley's reference to their false appearance as a 'shingle,' like so many other pieces of false advertising in the town, suggests her ease with lies.

Philip's response to their life of lies, however, seems to be far less casual. He is frustrated in his encounters with the townspeople who do not know his hypocrisy (the conversation with the choir leader leaves him "tired" and "heartsick" [6]) and with the wife who shares it. Their differing points of view are made apparent in their past dispute over a pipe that signified Philip's false position: for Mrs. Bentley, the pipe he smoked made them "partners in conspiracy" and was a pleasurable secret; in contrast, he chafed at the "secrecy and furtiveness" (20). Thus he turned to drawing and painting, seeking an escape from his fettered life. That art has become his substitute for religious belief is suggested when he says, of Steve's passionate Catholic devotions, that "'Religion and art . . . are almost the same thing anyway. Just different ways of taking a man out of himself, bringing him to the emotional pitch that we call ecstasy or rapture'" (148). Perhaps only a non-believer could equate religion and art as different but equal routes to joy and self-forgetfulness.

The pictures Philip creates—his watching congregation, with their row upon row of embittered faces; the town huddled against the immensity of

the prairie night; bleak landscapes; an attractive woman from the congregation; horses galloping across a field—fail to produce transcendence, or even comforting illusions. Instead, they convey a sense of arid confinement and hopeless longing for escape; many suggest a religious dimension. The sketch of a "solitary street lamp, pitted feebly and uselessly against the overhanging darkness" (23) suggests existential despair, a surrendering to darkness, while his portrayal of the people in his pews, with their "ugly, wretched faces, big-mouthed, mean-eyed—alike, yet each with a sharp, aggressive individuality" (23), shows a horrified and perhaps empathetic recognition of human depravity. The false fronts of the buildings in his drawings "are buckled down in desperation for their lives" (57), perhaps depicting his desperate struggle for meaning and purpose in a world without God. Entrapment, self-condemnation, and frustrated desire are vividly depicted in images that, as a number of critics have suggested, function as Philip's silent but speaking "diary," the counterpart to his wife's words.[6]

Unable to reach rapture through art, Philip turns to other people for redemption. But his relationships are based on empty need rather than love—and are repeatedly characterized as idolatrous. The first such relationship is with his unknown father, the young student preacher who had more books "on art and literature than theology" (40), and who died after impregnating (and failing to marry) his mother. While he cannot forgive his mother, even after her death, his attitude to his father has been "a kind of worship in which there was an effort perhaps to maintain his own self-respect, a belief in his own importance" (40). It is a defensive self-love, in other words, an attempt to protect his image, to magnify himself through his father: "He was the son of this hero: there was some compensation, at least, for being the son of a common waitress" (40–41). As Mrs. Bentley describes it, he bows down worshipfully before his fantasy father-figure, striving to remake himself in its image: "They say let a man look long and devotedly enough at a statue and in time he will resemble it" (41).

The second needy relationship is with Steve, the boy through whom he hopes to live over again the life he feels he missed. As Mrs. Bentley notes, he both worships Steve and, godlike, strives to "mold him in his own image" (148). Resentful of the town on Steve's behalf and proud when Steve makes a couple of bad drawings (109), he is "wrapped up in Steve" and "jealously devoted to him" (124). Ironically, the part of Steve he can neither understand nor influence is Steve's steadfast religiosity, which he hopes but fails to convert to artistry. Finally, when the boy is taken away by Catholic authorities to

an orphanage, the narrator thinks regretfully that in his absence Steve is "one idol tarnish-proof," now permanently "firm on the pinnacle where Philip set him" (157). Idealized in Philip's memory, he will never be recognized for the ordinary boy he is but will remain a potent figure of desire against which she, a middle-aged woman in a shabby hat, can never compete.

As a number of critics have observed, this pattern of references to idol worship evokes the passage in the Book of Joshua from which the novel's title is drawn and which forms the text of the only one of Philip's sermons named by Mrs. Bentley. In Chapter 24 of Joshua, the Old Testament prophet brings before the people of Israel the choice they must make: whether to serve the false gods whom their ancestors worshipped in Egypt; whether to turn to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land they now dwell; or whether to follow the one true God who has protected them all their lives. After reminding them what God has done for them, Joshua exhorts them to "fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth" (Josh. 24: 14). Giving up their former ways and allegiances, they are to "choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (24: 15).

Ross' reliance on the Joshua text suggests that his title is more than a casual reference to the Bentleys' hypocrisy, and more than an indication that their unhappy house will be the symbolic focus of the novel.[7] The message of Joshua is central to the situation of the Bentleys. The point is not only that they don't serve God. In the world of Horizon, as in the ancient world of the Israelites, it is never a question of serving or not serving, but of whom or what one serves—whether pagan gods or self-flattering illusions, whether idols of material prosperity, artistic achievement, or sexual fulfillment. There is always a choice to be made, always the temptation of idols to be resisted. In the Christian view of both the Old Testament and the New, those who do not dedicate their lives to God cannot help but become servants of the world, for there is no spiritual neutrality or autonomy possible for human beings. Philip and his wife are bound by the spiritual chains they have forged just as much as they are trapped by the church and the town. Idolatry is thus both an allegory for the characters' situation and a theological framework through which their struggles can be viewed.[8]

To take so literally Ross's key allusion is to read, in one sense, exactly as the textual evidence authorizes us to read, for the opposition between pagan and Christian worship occurs throughout the novel. Idolatry is the subject

of the very first journal entry when Mrs. Bentley mentions "the exacting small-town gods Propriety and Parity" (9) to whom Mrs. Finley sacrifices. Being the social leader of the town is more important to her than welcoming the new minister and his wife. Philip preaches on "salvation through [God's] grace" at his first sermon, but few characters seem to base their lives on the hope of heaven: the promise of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden [and I will give you rest]" (Matt. 11:28), has become the occasion of a teenaged prank with the preacher's outhouse (19). References to those who make idols of others—"I've taken a youth and put him on a pedestal" (177), Mrs. Bentley says of her own worship of Philip—or who make themselves gods and mould "in [their] own image" (8, 148) are all strongly reminiscent of the Old Testament context, in which the Israelites fail to honour the one true God, thus becoming subject to "all evil things" (Josh. 12:15). Moreover, the situation of Horizon—that of a nominally Christian community living as non-believers—is not unusual: Mrs. Bentley notes that "There are plenty of others to whom the Church means just bread and butter, who at best assert an easy, untried faith . . ." (25). The Old Testament emphasis on false gods and misguided allegiance provides the novel's primary network of allusions. Why shouldn't it be taken seriously?

It is not surprising that a secular academy has given these biblical references a secular application (while students, more religious as a group than their professors and less formed by critical fashions, are more likely to respond to the overt religious dimension). On a secular reading, the wilderness through which the Bentleys wander is their misunderstanding of one another and of their own needs; their 'salvation' (achieved through the birth of a life-changing, but entirely human, baby) will involve escape from the church into an honest atheism. Sandra Djwa, for whom the novel depicts a search for "the true God within" (54)—arguably a pagan inversion of Christian doctrine—reads the springtime/Easter ending as a fresh beginning for the marriage. In her interpretation of the scriptural imagery, the narrator and Philip undergo "a kind of salvation through grace" in which they will be led by "a little child" (63) who will help them to find their way. Roy Daniells, reading the novel as an affirmation of the narrator's faith in her husband, calls it "a little *exemplum* of faith severely tried and of hope, after long waiting, triumphant" (x). Barbara Godard even argues that Ross defines Mrs. Bentley and Philip as a modern-day "Holy Family": "Though they may follow false gods and create idolatrous images, the echoes of Christ's birth in young Philip's illegitimate origins invoke the Biblical myth of both Israelites and Christians" (73). For such

critics, the scriptural images and language have metaphorical significance only, and personal fulfillment is the only true salvation.

Critics interested in the novel's larger metaphysical concerns have tended to interpret the narrative through an existentialist or stoic rather than Christian framework, in which meaning is created (rather than discovered) through authentic action and self-assertion. Accepting with Mrs. Bentley that the cosmos is indeed indifferent to those "lost" and "abandoned" within it (8), these critics see human value in endurance, self-knowledge, and self-expression—even if these achievements can be claimed only against an undeniable cosmic aloneness. Godard identifies "fear of the void" as "the central factor in the Bentleys' experience," and claims that for Ross, "art alone gives significance to life's meaninglessness" (58). For Laurence Ricou, the Bentleys must learn determination and acceptance, a willingness to "persist despite their vulnerability" while accepting, but not bowing to, "their smallness and isolation" (89). Their achievement, and the metaphysical vision of the novel, consist in recognizing that "one has to face the void and attempt to comprehend it through imaginative creation" (88). T. J. Matheson lays the stress on the Bentleys' need for "self-reliance" (510) in order to reject a suffocating social conformity, seeing the novel as a critique of "respectability" (510) and an argument for freedom through self-determination. The underlying assumption in all such readings is that meaning is what human beings create for themselves, whether through art, sexual and emotional intimacy, or self-assertion: Mrs. Bentley can find freedom only by facing "her worst fears" and honestly claiming her desire (Compton 72); Philip can fulfill himself through art or homosexual love. Few critics consider that the attempt to find ultimate meaning in earthly things may itself be at the root of the Bentleys' problems.

In contrast to the critics, Ross does not foreclose the possibility that the rejection of God explains the Bentleys' aloneness and defensiveness. In the Christian view—as the example of the "radiant" Downies suggests—the knowledge that one is loved and forgiven by God is the foundation of the ability to love and forgive others. In accepting God's offer of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, the believer experiences joy overflowing at unmerited grace; all other privations and disappointments can be withstood. The Bentleys' actions, in contrast, are dominated by fear, and both are shown to suffer the consequences of their unbelief. As Mrs. Bentley describes him, Philip is hindered by a guilty conscience: he is unable to believe in the merciful God he ostensibly serves, but he is also unable to disbelieve in Him entirely. From his weekly Bible reading he has conceived of an angry God

who weighs his merits and finds him wanting, a Nemesis aligned against him. Mrs. Bentley tells us that "he tries to be so sane and rational, yet all the time keeps on believing that there's a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him. . . . a supreme being interested in him, opposed to him, arranging with tireless concern the details of his life to make certain it will be spent in a wind-swept, sun-burned little Horizon" (24). Pursued by this malignant power, Philip is haunted and powerless to love, his back turned like a stone wall to his wife in bed; his study door closed against her and the world in a self-isolation that both protests and accepts his condemnation.

Mrs. Bentley, on the other hand, is worldly enough to analyze dispassionately the delusions of her husband, who with his artistic temperament "has kept seeking a beauty and significance that isn't life's to give" (124). She prides herself on being a clear-sighted realist, accepting life's meanness and emptiness—a self-condemning achievement. Even she, however, is not immune to cosmic fear and pagan speculations. Describing their holiday in the rolling hills of ranch country, she admits to sensing "something inanimate, yet aware of us" in the environment, and explains it away as a consequence of living too long in a little self-sufficient town: "The stillness and solitude—we think a force or presence into it—even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us—for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all" (131). She believes herself modern and intellectual enough to accept this "indifferent wilderness," but her description of her walk through the land at night is characterized by uneasiness bordering on terror: "The close black hills, the stealthy slipping sound the river made—it was as if I were entering dead, forbidden country, approaching the lair of the terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls" (125–26). For all her confident skepticism during the day and in town, she is clearly not immune to fears of a "hostile presence" (131), and she describes her troubled mind in occult terms at least as self-damning as Philip's fear of a Nemesis: "For like draws to like, they say, which makes it reasonable to suppose that, when you've just walked away from a man because you feel he doesn't want to be bothered with you, you're capable of attracting a few ghouls and demons . . ." (126). Walking in the darkness, the narrator imagines herself an appropriate host for demonic spirits.

In her more rational moments, she dismisses belief in God as a sociological phenomenon, an adaptation on the part of human beings to deny their helplessness. "Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of its deity cannot weaken," she comments at the end of one diary

entry in which she describes the yearly service for rain at Philip's country parish church. She then qualifies the statement, calling it "a very great faith, or a very foolish one. Paul and I are tied on it" (110). The claims of faith versus atheism have become a matter for casual debate on a Sunday afternoon; regardless of whether she finds such persistent faith "great" or "foolish," she has concluded that God is indeed "indifferent." While occasionally confessing a wish that she could be "a little less of a rationalist" (194)—especially at Christmas, when the house seems particularly "dead and dry" (195)— she is generally firm in her rejection of biblical religion. Instead, she devotes herself unhappily to an earthly god.

One of the major developments of the novel—though it emerges without any clear resolution—comes in the narrator's gradual realization that she has put an ordinary man "on a pedestal" (177) and made him the measure of all value. She suffers accordingly. She tells us early on that Philip's love has always seemed "what life was intended for" (22) and that to be noticed by him "arranges my world for me, strengthens and quickens it, makes it immune to all other worlds "(23). Such expressions of devotion recall the Psalmist who declares to God that "there is none upon the earth that I desire beside thee" (Psalm 73: 25). For twelve years, the narrator has served Philip with her body and her labour, "seeing religiously that his socks were always darned, his books in order, his dinner hot" (135). She has sacrificed her dream of becoming a concert pianist; even her once-prized piano matters now only as a way to "reach him" (185). Philip, however, seems largely indifferent to her yearnings, making her life with him seem a weary pilgrimage through the desert in search of life-giving waters continually denied. In her walks outside the town limits, she compares the grain elevators to "ancient obelisks" (78), as if she sojourns in pagan Egypt during the period of the Israelite captivity. A hopeless gardener, she plants flowers that she cannot keep alive (59) and sees herself, like them, as withered and shrunken: "I've whittled myself hollow that I might enclose and hold him," she admits ruefully, "and when he shakes me off I'm just a shell" (99). She reflects later, with growing despair, "I haven't roots of my own any more, I'm a fungus or parasite whose life depends on his. He throws me off and I dry and wither" (199). These images echo the many Old Testament passages describing the vulnerability and dryness of human life without God.[9]

As Mrs. Bentley watches the moths hurling themselves at the porch lamps, she recognizes her own yearnings to be a similarly self-destructive embrace of a deadly object mistaken for the sun: "To them," she says of the lamp that

burns the moths' wings, "its feeble light is just as fierce and compelling as the passions we live by" (148). By extension, she sees how her own passion for Philip has damaged her—and is, perhaps, misconceived. Her longing for a man who does not seem to care condemns her to a sterile, selfish loneliness so devastating that despite her desire for a son, she cannot love Steve because she sees him as competition. Her "twisted, hybrid love" for the boy is "half bitterness" (146). Her plans to make herself important to her husband have yielded only a futile, greedy emptiness: "All these years I've been trying to possess him, to absorb his life into mine, and not once has he ever yielded" (84). At times of shattering insight, she is overwhelmed by a sense of "futility," summing up her whole life in the image of herself "alone outside his study door" (136). Such idolatrous longing is portrayed as both devouring and self-destructive. When she discovers that Philip has been unfaithful to her, she thinks of his infidelity either as an opportunity to be free or as a source of power to accomplish her own ends, not as a truth to be confronted and healed. In the starkest moment, she admits to having hoped "all along" that Judith would die in childbirth, noting with a disquieting calm and lack of pity that "it's easier this way" (212).

"That's right, Philip, I want it so" (216). The novel ends with her statement of outrageous need—an appropriately ambiguous ending to a subtle, haunting narrative. Has anything changed for the couple? Philip is leaving his false ministry behind and the truth of his adultery is, at least nominally, in the open. Mrs. Bentley has recognized her situation. But in light of the profound questions of meaning and purpose that Ross has set before them, it seems unlikely that a change of scene will be adequate to their brokenness. It is thus fitting that although the Bentleys arrive in Horizon in early April and leave it in May of the following year, there is no mention of Easter, the central event of the Christian calendar—promising reconciliation with God and new life. The narrator claims to understand how much she "must forget" (and, presumably, forgive—both Philip and herself), but she has shown herself possessed of an assiduous memory for grievance, and it is unclear how a baby who is the living reminder of Philip's infidelity can help her overcome bitterness.

Have she and Philip found a way to be with each other, and with others, with genuine love? Will their yearnings manifest in less destructive ways? Or will they continue to long for an impossible fulfillment? Ross's novel asks enduring questions—religious questions—about the sources of human happiness, identity, and security in a radically unstable world: Can we anchor our self-identity to anything more solid than the opinions of others and the

particularities of our circumstances? How can we respond without bitterness to shattering personal disappointments? Is it possible to love truly when love is not returned? Because it frames these questions so suggestively—drawing on biblical as well as many other resources—it has earned its lasting place in our critical conversation.

NOTES

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Marguerite, a teacher who audited my undergraduate survey course at the University of Saskatchewan, for prompting these reflections on the Christian dimensions of the novel, and for helping me to realize that they were worth pursuing. I have also benefited greatly from the many insights of Kathleen Patchell, a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, who has a chapter on *As For Me and My House* in her in-process PhD thesis. She drew my attention to Ross's Unitarian upbringing and to the description of the grain elevators as "ancient obelisks" (78), as well as to Sandra Orser's doctoral dissertation.

2 I am grateful to the anonymous reader who suggested that Frédéric Chopin, known for his adulterous liaison with George Sand, might have been a deliberate choice on Mrs. Bentley's part to shock her staid visitors.

3 David Stouck, for instance, calls the novel "a vivid exposé of Puritanism" ("Mirror" 146).

4 In Arcola, it was rumoured that a local girl became pregnant after being hired by the United Church minister to provide live-in domestic help while his wife was ill (Stouck, *Sinclair Ross* 46).

5 Stouck has suggested that the title, as a succinct example of a "religious slogan," is itself a "false front" behind which a more subtle meaning is to be sought ("Mirror" 150).

6 Ryszard Dubanski calls Philip's art work "an anti-journal which balances Mrs. Bentley's version" (89).

7 Critics have interpreted the significance of the passage in a number of ways. Sandra Djwa finds that it asserts the distinguishing monotheism of the Israelites against the polytheism of neighbouring peoples, thus highlighting the paganism and false values of Horizon (57-58). In contrast, Wilfred Cude suspects that Philip preaches on the Joshua text as a way to signal to his wife his distress at her hypocrisy: "She alone is Philip's house, and he wants the text to stand for her as well as for him" (43).

8 For one expression of the theology of idolatry, see G. K. Beale's *We Become What We Worship* (2008), in which the author summarizes that "The main idea of this book on idolatry is that people resemble what they revere, either for ruin or restoration" (284). Examining both Old and New Testament examples, Beale defines idolatry as human dependence for security on worldly ideas, people, or institutions rather than on God. Dependence on self alone is not freedom, but self-idolatry.

9 See, for example, Isaiah 40: 6-7, which declares that "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it."

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Helen Guri

Home Remedies for the Terminal Cancer Patient

Not my elderberry aloe cherry arnica olive sassafras
she needs no chili pulver stinging nettle willow whip.
Not my rosemary water buttermilk sour milk brandy milk
my sake milk she needs no ticks burnt blood let.
Not my turpentine no lye she needs no one to fold ladders
jump over cracks. Slice vultures bleach cats she needs
no spice alphabet spell-brew wailing word alone.

Tim McIntyre

"The Way the Stars Really Do Come Out at Night"

The Trick of Representation in Alice Munro's "The Moons of Jupiter"

"The Moons of Jupiter" was one of a number of breakthrough stories for Alice Munro. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Munro "burst forth" into the international literary world "with successive stories that create the feeling of being alive, that replicate for their readers the very sense of being itself" (Thacker 371). This sense of being in "Moons," this feeling of presence, owes much to the story's mimetic precision, yet, paradoxically perhaps, it also co-exists with and is even augmented by a profound skepticism about language and representation. "Moons" is at once highly stylized, highly self-conscious about language, and deeply involved in the real and representational. Its various meditations on consciousness, representation, and death, as well as its temporal disarrangement—its abandoning of a natural chronology in favour of a more stylized presentation—artistically perform a cathartic effect, though one that stops short of offering full consolation. "Moons," like much of Munro's writing that came out of her return to Southwestern Ontario from British Columbia, demonstrates how an understanding of words as more than mirrors for things or containers for thoughts can enable the creation of a powerful and sophisticated, if not absolute and transcendent, feeling of presence, or connection. Its cathartic effect—its movement from a sense of separation, to unity, to separation—draws on the power of language to connect and evoke pathos even as it dramatizes its limited ability to represent the world, and the ultimate failure of consciousness to comprehend fully the world, the Other, and the self.

"Moons" was written after Munro moved back to Huron County, which put her once again "living in the midst of her material" (Thacker 378). The

"enriched awareness of home" that resulted seems to have driven her to draw more on the autobiographical while simultaneously increasing her attention to the problems of representation (Thacker 368). Both trends—toward autobiographical resonances and the questioning of representation—are present in "Moons." Connections between Munro and the protagonist Janet are apparent: their careers as writers,[1] the deaths of their fathers, and even their visits to planetariums. Munro herself has written that this story "has something to do with [her] father's death," as well as a trip she made the following summer to the McLaughlin Planetarium. Both biographers Robert Thacker and Magdalene Redekop note the significance of these autobiographical connections (Munro, Intro. xiv; Thacker 385; Redekop 155). However, running through "Moons"—from the heart monitor on the opening pages, which dramatizes "what ought to be a most secret activity" (217), to the planetarium scene, which Coral Ann Howells identifies "as the dominant narrative image of transcendent patterning which exceeds all human comprehension" (83)—is a sophisticated examination of how the act of naming and patterning at the root of representation and comprehension inexorably carries us away from the real.

Redekop skillfully articulates the unity and poignancy of the naming of the moons scene and adroitly tracks its refusal of an easy elegiac reversal. However, she reads Nichola's absence as "a way of showing respect for Nichola—a way of acknowledging she needs no patron Saint Nicholas and no fussing mother to take care of her" (171). Ildikó de Papp Carrington, in her fine reading, departs from Redekop; Carrington notes that the death of the father and the departure of Janet's daughters are in fact a "double loss" and that "the story is not so much about what Janet gains in perspective as about what she loses from her life" (203). Ajay Heble details the process by which "Moons" (as well as many other Munro stories) displaces and defers the main issue at hand—death—and how its fictional world is subject to change and possibility. Karen Smythe accurately defines "Moons" as a cathartic fiction-elegy which offers a staged performance of grief work, while Howells offers a strong reading of the story's cosmological imagery as an inherently limited attempt to "map patterns of significance on to changing circumstances" (81). The work of these critics, however, tends to lack sustained attention to the story as a whole. Their readings, sophisticated as they may be, fit into some overarching rationale that encompasses Munro's body of work or situates the story in its collection. As such, these readings tend to sacrifice some level of attention to the story's specific form.

By form, I mean not some static structure, easily separable from content or meaning, from its cultural or intertextual context, its author, or individual reader. Rather, I use form in Derek Attridge's sense of the word: not "empirical structure" but "performed mobility," the sequence of linguistic operations that "functions as a *staging* of meaning and feeling," a staging of operations of referentiality, metaphoricity, intentionality, and ethicity," which is realized in the act of reading (111, 109). Attridge is right to point out that "a creative achievement in the literary field is, whatever else it may be, a *formal* one"; it is the "selection and arrangement of words" and the artistry that results, over and above any analytical or representational function of the language, that divides the literary from other modes of writing (107). Form, in this sense, does not exclude context or semantics. "Contextual" information—such as the death of Munro's own father—cannot help but inform our experience of the story and can by no means be ignored. "Moons" has an undeniable stake in the real and also in the realist form, even if its self-consciousness and stylized arrangement challenge any simplistic mimetic understanding of language. It is largely this combination of "formal" features, realist and metafictional, that gives the story its appeal.

The key metafictive moment comes near the story's end, when Janet attends a planetarium presentation while trying to fill the time before her next hospital visit to see her dying father. This scene dramatizes an ambivalence regarding the ordering and patterning of meaning involved in reading and writing narratives, whether artistically or in an attempt to make sense of life. The planetarium presentation draws on, though it also exceeds, realist modes of representation. The show starts within the conventions of realism: the stars "came out not all at once but one after another, the way the stars really do come out at night, though more quickly" (230). The appearance of the stars, realistic though accelerated to suit the needs of the demonstration, produces what Roland Barthes has called a "reality effect." Following the appearance of the stars is a list of scientific, objective facts, which give the size of the universe and provide a sense of scale for the earth's place within it. The style of the presentation shifts abruptly when, as Janet comments, "realism [is] abandoned, for familiar artifice" (231). Here the presentation abandons its realist pretense for a stylized simulation with more drama and excitement. A model of the solar system appears, "spinning away in its elegant style," as does "A bright bug that took off from the earth, heading for Jupiter" (231). Both the reality effect and the departure into stylized simulation, however, are part of the same process: both name and pattern

the facts, make them familiar, intelligible and dramatic, and work to evoke a false sense of awe. "The attraction of any pattern," as Redekop notes, "lies in the illusion of control and the denial of chaos" (150), and the planetarium presentation provides such a pattern by essentially mapping the universe from the earth out. This naming and patterning bears more than a passing resemblance to the act of writing which similarly arranges language into meaningful patterns, and which mixes representation and stylized drama in an attempt to evoke significance. That Janet is a writer and makes her living by constructing artifice through language strengthens this connection.

Janet's reflections on this stylized naming and patterning demonstrate that she finds something inadequate and disingenuous about the presentation and, by extension, with any serene faith in the human ability to know and represent reality. In a line that prefigures the wholesale reorganization of the solar system in 2006 based on a new definition for the term "planet" (BBC, "Pluto"), she challenges the scientific basis behind these apparently objective facts. The new definition of Mercury's orbit, in which the planet rotates three times for every two trips around the sun, not once per orbit, leads Janet to ask "Why did they give out such confident information, only to announce later that it was quite wrong?" (231). As Heble writes of this moment, "even the world of science—which seems to concern itself with measurable facts, with reality—can open up to new possibilities, to alternative versions" (128). Even patterns constructed out of the authority of the scientific method, then, can be plain wrong.

Beyond this error of fact, Janet finds both the goal and the style of the presentation to be wrongheaded. Ostensibly an attempt to give school-children a sense of the scale of the universe, the presentation instead seems to Janet to use its powers of representation only to reduce the terrify-ing insignificance of human life to little more than a cheap thrill. When the presentation fails to tear the schoolchildren in attendance from their pop and chips, Janet states that it is "A good thing" (231). This effort to fix the children's attention "on various knowns and unknowns and horrible immensities" has failed: children have a "natural immunity" to this sort of artifice which "shouldn't be tampered with" (231). For Janet, at this point at least, the artistic pretensions of the presentation—the "echo-chamber effects, the music, the churchlike solemnity"—serve only to give a comfortable artistic gloss to these "horrible immensities," to simulate the "awe that they supposed they ought to feel" at the size of the universe and humankind's relative insignificance, and to reduce this awe to something like "a fit of the

shivers when you looked out the window" (231–32). These "shivers" come as much and perhaps more from the well-wrought artistic elements of the presentation than they do from the knowledge gained about the universe. Real awe, according to Janet, is something more sinister: "Once you know what it is, you wouldn't be courting it" (232). Our relative insignificance in the grand scale of time and space is actually terrifying, just as it is for the protagonist in another Munro story, "Walker Brothers Cowboy" (3). The protagonist of "Walker Brothers" listens to her father describe the formation of the Great Lakes by the gradual movement of ice caps, and finds "The tiny share of time we have appalls" her, though interestingly, her father seems to regard it with tranquility (3). Like the schoolchildren in the planetarium, perhaps, she does "not like to think of it" (3). These schoolchildren, thanks to the pop, the chips, and their own lack of interest in edu-tainment, are spared a confrontation with their own mortality, albeit a confrontation that could only have been domesticated and misrepresented by the artifice of the presentation.

Yet for all Janet's skepticism, and despite its failure to engage Janet and the rest of the audience, the presentation is not without its appeal. In a detail that in a linear story would have immediately followed the presentation, but here is deferred to the end, Janet states that "The planetarium show had done what I wanted it to after all—calmed me down, drained me" (233). Inadequate as it is for coming to terms with the awe-inspiring immensity of the universe and the finite span of human life, the show nonetheless provides real comfort to Janet. This show, this naming and patterning, is one of a list of distractions, or tricks perhaps, that ease the burden of grief weighing on Janet. Fashion, food, crossword puzzles—any trivial thing that allows "Attention [to narrow] in on something," and become "fanatically serious" can provide temporary respite from the more serious matter at hand (229). Janet may recognize the futility of these obsessions, but her recognition does not rob them of their power. As a whole, the stories in the collection *The Moons of Jupiter*, as Redekop points out, "insist on a process whereby we are forced to confront false comforts and recognize them as such" (152). "The Moons of Jupiter" is no exception in this respect, yet as Tracy Ware writes, "We tend to swing too violently from full Christian consolation to a stark sense of its absence in skeptical contexts" (1). He continues, "the importance of minor comforts" in this story is "by no means a commonplace" (1). Meaning-making through naming and patterning provides comfort for Janet and helps lay the groundwork for a real emotional exchange with her father: something that neither food, nor drink, nor fashion can do. Such stylized

representations might fail to evoke immanent meaning, but at the very least, they have the power to distract: to absorb consciousness and temporarily defer anxiety and grief.

The planetarium scene, then, might cast doubt on our power to know and represent, but the story as a whole demonstrates the power of language to connect people and evoke emotion. At first glance, this story appears to be a simple recital of events—a failed shopping trip, a show at the planetarium, a hospital visit—focalized through Janet's consciousness. But the narrative is not linear, and the pattern that emerges from its disarrangement provides a cathartic movement: from Janet's emotional separation from her father, to a poignant moment of unity, and finally, to the inevitable separation at the end, when Janet performs the hard work of mourning by letting her father go into death, and in a parallel process, letting her daughter go into adult life. This movement from separation to unity, and then to a new and more mature separation is also tied to a process in which Janet's naming and patterning of her loved ones—the tricks she uses to keep them spinning neatly in their orbits around her star—collapses and is recognized for what it is: a series of convenient fictions, or representations, with only a tangential relationship to reality. Yet Janet's loss of faith in her ability to narrate her life and define those around her nevertheless exists within this powerful story.

The opening scene demonstrates Janet's desire to define her father as self-contained and resigned to his impending death. Seeing her father as facing death without fear or despair allows Janet to maintain her emotional distance and avoid her own grief. Initially, the father's anxiety regarding his health appears understated: he is merely "pale and closemouthed" when Janet brings him to the hospital, and he seems more concerned with the cost of his room than his failing heart (218). Janet, at this point, is "pleased" with herself "for taking it calmly" and feels none of "the protest [she] would have felt twenty, even ten, years before" (219). Her father's stoicism enables her own emotional distance from his impending death and allows her to believe she can accept his passing without trauma. A momentary lapse in this stoicism forces Janet to a greater emotional distance: when her father's refusal of death "leapt up in him as readily as if he had been thirty or forty years younger," she finds only that her "heart hardened" (219). Then, the day after his admittance, when he says "reasonably" that he will "Give in gracefully" and live out his remaining days without gambling on a high-risk surgical procedure, Janet approves (220). It is what she "would have expected of him," that man of "independence," "self-sufficiency," and "forbearance,"

who "worked in a factory" and "in his garden," who "read history books" and "never made a fuss" (220). His return to her understanding of him as stoic and scholarly, resigned to his fate rather than afraid or desperate, allows her to continue to maintain her own sense of calm and acceptance.

However, mention of her father's childhood and the physical fact of his body trouble her definition of him as ready to face death and momentarily weaken her resolve. "The thought of my father's childhood," Janet observes, "which I always pictured as bleak and dangerous—the poor farm, the scared sisters, the harsh father—made me less resigned to his dying" (219). Janet "didn't care to think of his younger selves," but "Even his bare torso, thick and white—he had the body of a working-man of his generation, seldom exposed to the sun—was a danger to me; it looked so strong and young" (220). Memories of a childhood long past and a body that still bears traces of a vigorous adulthood testify to the possibility of multiple, competing narratives of this man's life and point out the self-interestedness of her chosen definition.

The next scene, a flashback to Janet's arrival in Toronto, further develops her concern with the ability of one's concept of a person to do justice to the actual individual. Her daughters, she realizes, have fixed her into their own concepts: "They would have talked about me. Judith and Nichola comparing notes, relating anecdotes; analyzing, regretting, blaming, forgiving" (222); Janet herself "did the same thing at that age" (222). Janet now recognizes just how false these definitions are: "How thoroughly we dealt with our fathers and mothers . . . how competently we filed them away, defined them beyond any possibility of change. What presumption" (222). After reflecting on the inadequacy of the child's understanding of the parent, she goes on to question her own definitions of her daughters. She observes her daughter Judith's interaction with her partner Don and can feel "her sad jitters . . . predict her supple attentions" (223). Janet asks herself, "Why should I think she wouldn't be susceptible, that she would always be straight-forward, heavy-footed, self-reliant? Just as I go around saying that Nichola is sly and solitary, cold, seductive. Many people must know things that would contradict what I say" (223). Such a dramatization of the arrogance and self-interest behind these limited, one-sided definitions of loved ones comes just before Janet begins to question, in earnest, her understanding of her father, a questioning that ultimately leads to a genuine moment of unity.

Janet loses her faith that her concept of her father is adequate to the full reality of his existence and, shortly thereafter, experiences a moment of connection with him. Back in the hospital, when Janet enters his room, her

father utters a seemingly random phrase—"*Shore*-less seas"—which is in fact a line from a poem, Joaquin Miller's "Columbus," that he had been trying to recall (225). As Redekop notes, this phrase is evocative of the endless oblivion of death, of "a seascape without horizon or limit" like the "'horrible immensities' [Janet] glimpses in the planetarium" (170). This *non sequitur* provokes in Janet incomprehension and worry. She wonders "if he had found out how much, or how little, time he could hope for," if "the pills had brought on an untrustworthy euphoria," or if he has decided he "wanted to gamble" (225). This apparently nonsensical address, haunted by the specter of death, calls her to account in an almost Levinasian sense. The "said," or linguistic content, of this address is at this point largely immaterial, but its "saying," or the underlying relationship that linguistic communication presupposes, is undeniable. The father appears before her as Other: helpless, thanks to his leaky heart, his consciousness completely opaque, but her love and concern for him apparent. Janet then realizes how partial and self-interested her understanding of him had been: "I used to tell people that he never spoke regretfully about his life, but that was not true. It was just that I didn't listen to it" (225).

The inscrutability of the connections his mind makes to recall the line, as well as the tabloid accounts of life-after-death experiences he had been reading, lead the father to reflect on the "great temptation . . . to make a mystery" out of the inexplicability of human consciousness, "to believe in—You know" (226). Janet completes his sentence—"The soul?"—and feels "an appalling rush of love and recognition" (226). The father, like Janet, is haunted by his impending death, tempted, but wary of, as he says, "'playing tricks on yourself'" (226). The "tricks" here are religious, but given Munro's use of the word in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* to refer to storytelling, the parallel between these tricks and those of fiction is interesting. Tricks, in "Material" and "The Ottawa Valley," or being tricked out in "Winter Wind," are those narrative acts that shape the world into the satisfying patterns of fiction. They can be "Lovely" and "honest," as they are in "Material," even if they remain a part of a way of seeing, using, or writing about the world that is enigmatically "*not enough*" (43, 44). They can be part of a process in which a writer or narrator has "used" people, "tricked them out and altered them and shaped them any way at all," as the phrase is used in "Winter Wind" (201). Or they can refer to the techniques—"applying what skills I have, using what tricks I know"—that are part of the narrator's apparently failed attempt in "The Ottawa Valley" to make a "proper story" out of her mother in such a way as "To mark her off, to describe, to illumine, to celebrate, to

get rid, of her" (246). Tricks seem to fix the world into satisfying aesthetic forms that may be celebratory or may be disingenuous yet nevertheless are static, cut off from change and possibility and divorced from the complexity and uncertainty of reality. Religious tricks, perhaps, represent attempts to shunt the facts of life and death into a religious schema for which there is no apparent evidence in the material world. Here, Janet and her father's shared suspicion of, and perhaps longing for, tricks unites them in a moment of love and recognition.

This moment of unity and exchange, in which Janet's father breaks out of her definition and effects a more genuine connection, is not unambiguously positive. In this emotional moment, Janet's father sees fit to pronounce judgment on her life in a way she finds hurtful. He implicitly conveys his disapproval of Janet's divorce, and Janet is "surprised—not just at what he said but at his feeling he had any right, even now, to say it" (228). She considers gently reproaching her father, but stops short when she looks at the heart monitor and sees "the line his heart was writing" (228). As Redekop, Heble, and others have noted, in the opening pages, the father's heart monitor marks a concern with exposure that has metafictive overtones. Its activity is described in textual terms—"On the screen a bright jagged line was continually being written"—and its "dramatizing" of "what ought to be a most secret activity," Janet believes, "was asking for trouble" (217–18). She considers reproaching him by reminding him of his low opinion of her ex-husband, but instead finds herself "looking at the line his heart was writing"—an "'unfair advantage,'" her father says (228). The ethical move, or perhaps simply the gracious move, is to avoid capitalizing on her knowledge and responding to him in kind. This chilly note complicates the previous sense of harmony, but the overall movement has nonetheless been from stoic separation at the beginning to a greater sense of connection.

The planetarium scene, which elicits Janet's skepticism at representation yet still "calmed" her and "drained" her, just as she had wanted, also prepares readers for the penultimate scene, the naming of the moons (233). Redekop notes that this scene is not without ambiguity. Naming the moons is a way of insisting "on the reality of space out there": like the Copernican revolution, it unsettles our belief in the significance of our existence (156).[2] However, the act of naming also reappropriates the moons according to our own mythologies, so "we can pretend that they still do orbit around the earth, that we have mastered them with our classical narratives" (156). Janet and her father name, pattern, and in a sense affirm the existence of the universe at large,

even if this act of agency paradoxically recognizes that they remain in the open, expansive universe of Copernicus and Galileo, a universe in which no transcendent meaning or final purpose appears evident.

Despite this ambiguity, however, the scene has an undeniable emotional resonance. Yet the source of this power is perhaps not readily apparent. Because the scene lacks any overt displays of affection or access to Janet's consciousness, the sense of unity provided can be felt only obliquely. Biographical resonances account for some of the scene's power: Munro's father, Robert Laidlaw, wrote his novel *The McGregors* just before he died, and Alice Munro was indispensable both to its writing (Laidlaw vii) and its publication (Thacker 338). As Redekop notes, that Laidlaw "was writing . . . side by side with [Munro] just before his death adds a poignancy to the father-daughter dialogues in this collection" (155), and this poignancy is never more pronounced than in the naming of the moons. Thacker similarly calls connections to Munro's life "of real consequence to a reader's experience," which is no doubt the case (316).

However there is no easy correspondence, and perhaps no correspondence at all, between the emotional resonance evoked by the story and whatever emotional response we might have to Munro's personal situation. Munro is explicit that this story is not an account of her father's death; such an account would be "quite different, not just in factual detail, in incident, but in feeling" (Munro, Intro. xv). This story, and the others that come from personal experience, as they are crafted into art, "are carried inexorably away from the real," just as the stories based more on observation "lose their anecdotal edges" and are "invaded by familiar shapes and voices" (Munro, Intro. xv). Regardless of Munro's process of artistic creation, readers of "Moons" are relating primarily to Janet, a fictional character, with her own textual history as established both in this story and by those connected to it. The Janet and the father in "Moons" are also the protagonist and the father from the two-part story "Chaddeleys and Flemings," which opens the collection: the story of the father's upbringing, of "the poor farm, the scared sisters, the harsh father" and of "running away to work on the lake boats" is related in greater detail in part two of "Chaddeleys,"—"The Stone in the Field" ("Moons" 219–20, "Stone" 29–30). "Moons," the title story as well as the final piece in the collection, works with "Chaddeleys." Both draw on and refigure elements of Munro's family history and the class-based tensions in her first marriage (Thacker 28–29, 119) to create a feeling of presence, a feeling crafted in and stretching across each story. The fictional world Munro evokes may be

importantly connected to the real, but readers respond to Janet, with her history and her relationship with her father.

Despite the sense that, as Munro writes, people read such "first person, seemingly artless and straight-forward" stories and imagine that "just about all [she] did was write down everything that happened on a certain day" (xv), the power of "Moons," and the planetarium scene specifically, comes from the text itself, regardless of any foreknowledge of Munro's personal situation. "The Moons of Jupiter" is, after all, an artistic, textual achievement: its intricate pattern of flashbacks; its choreographed movement from separation, to unity, to separation; its oblique treatment of the act of loving and letting go, and its metaphoric take on the acts of writing and representing make it one of Munro's best. "Moons," like many Munro stories, might be embedded in her life, but it is by no means reducible to it. The original version of "Moons" accepted by *The New Yorker* was not even first person, but third: Munro later re-submitted it as a first-person story to create this greater feeling of intimacy (Thacker 385).

The formal features at work behind the power of the naming of the moons scene specifically, however, are somewhat difficult to pin down. The text of the passage itself gives little indication as to how to read the scene. In marked contrast to the rest of "The Moons of Jupiter," this scene contains little narrative commentary. The passage is mostly dialogue, and though the narration contains some description and some self-consciousness about diction, it lacks description of Janet's feelings or the state of her relationship to her father. However, it is precisely this *lack* that gives the scene its power. The naming of the moons, shared by father and daughter, is the only comfort, the only distraction, that wholly absorbs the narration. There is none of the skepticism of the planetarium scene and no realization of the triviality of the moment as is the case for Janet's temporary preoccupation with fashion. There is also none of the strain on their relationship caused by the father's teasing, or more seriously, by his subtle condemnation of Janet's decision, years ago, to leave her husband (228). The scene instead provides an absorbing moment of unity before the inevitable separation. This shared naming connects Janet, her father, and the reader in a creative discovery of meaning. The father's recital of the moons of Jupiter, with Janet's encouragement, draws on the discourses of history, science, and mythology, and the solace that comes from insisting on the naming and patterning of the moons invests those discourses with human and secular, if not sacred and transcendent, significance.

The final scene moves definitively to separation. The story flashes back to Janet just after she leaves the planetarium. Sitting in the Chinese garden beside the museum, feeling "calmed" and "drained" after the planetarium show, she contemplates a women who vaguely resembles her daughter Nichola and decides that if it were her, she "might just sit and watch" (233). The anxiety she has felt over her father's health and her daughter's absence is temporarily relieved as Janet experiences a moment of real detachment, feeling "like one of those people who have floated up to the ceiling, enjoying a brief death. A relief, while it lasts" (233). The intimate connection she has had with her father and her daughter is now severed. "My father had chosen and Nichola had chosen," she says, the father choosing his life-threatening operation and the daughter choosing to remain incommunicado (233). Janet has withdrawn to survive, just as she withdrew from Nichola and "measured" and "disciplined" her love during the moment in Nichola's childhood when it was feared she had leukemia (230).

The image of the Chinese garden underscores both Janet's determination to carry on and her continuing skepticism at "tricks" of representation. The Chinese garden is a construction of high culture. It is adjacent to the museum; contains stone camels, warriors, and a tomb; and is surrounded by evergreens and a high-grilled iron fence (233). Yet the garden is also a simulacrum, a reproduction completely displaced from its temporal and geographic context. Significantly, Janet looks away from the garden, through the bushes and the fence to watch the people traveling by on the street (233). The image of the tomb is also relevant. In ancient China, weapons, clothing, and sometimes people were buried along with royals to accompany them into the afterlife (Bush 1). Janet, however, will not throw herself into her father's grave or into a state of despair over her estrangement from her daughter; she will not be, as Redekop puts it, a "keeper," clinging to her attachment to her family, though it is not so much that she "escapes being trapped" in this "role" (172) as it is that she comes to accept these losses. The garden cannot hold Janet's interest and neither can the tomb, with its relief carvings and stone pictures. Janet "always mean[s]" to look at the tomb's intricate carvings, and yet she never has, "Not this time, either" (233). In the final lines of the story, Janet leaves the garden to escape the cold and "to have coffee and something to eat" (233). For the most part in "Moons," representation seems to have a special power. At this moment, however, it fails in the face of food and drink. Like the children in the planetarium, for Janet, this kind of artifice is no match for the tangible pleasure and biological necessity of

nourishment. Here is a final failure of representation linked significantly to the severing, or at least weakening, of her bonds with her daughter and father.

Were the events of the story to be arranged chronologically, the Chinese garden would appear somewhere around the midpoint. The final scene would have to be the naming of the moons, the night before his operation, which Janet refers to as his "last night" (232). To end at this point would be to draw the story to a close on a note of powerful emotional connection, of love and mourning. Yet the final scene moves back to that afternoon to end on a note of separation and of letting go, so the staging of emotion—from separation, to unity, to separation—releases the reader into catharsis.

This chronological *dis*arrangement of the story—its jumbled timeline—is, then, as Rosalie Osmond might put it, not an embracing of randomness as "an end in itself" but rather "part of a quest for new, more viable patterns" (85). Arranging the scenes in non-sequential order might in some sense violate the mimetic effect of the story, yet this stylization gives the story a cathartic emotional resonance it might not otherwise possess. For all Janet's ambivalence around representation, the cathartic power, in the end, depends on readers experiencing these characters and their relationships as somewhat real. In fact, the apparently disordered narrative may itself be a strategy that mirrors the disorder of life, or may also be part of the "rambling nature" of Munro's narrative that, along with the suppression of overt moralizing or thematizing, has been "a mark of the realistic short story since Anton Chekhov" (Canitz and Seamon 68). David Crouse similarly locates Munro's reordering of chronology, as well as her use of multiple epiphanies, in the attempt to navigate the tension between creating a vivid and lifelike world and creating characters who move and change without producing "a kind of neatness which might not ring true to both writer and reader" (51). Munro, he says, displays a consciousness of her work as a fictional artifact yet gives it an "internal consistency the meta-fictionalists denied"—she "play[s] the game of the realist, but use[s] many of the meta-fictionalist's tricks" (64). "The Moons of Jupiter" registers the inadequacy of fiction because of the gap between the representation and the thing-in-itself and because of the futility of representation in the face of death, yet paradoxically it does so while exploiting the power of fiction to engage its readers' emotions and imaginations.

This play between the explicitly metafictional and the more traditionally realist also manifests itself in the complex publication history of the book in which "Moons" was originally to be published. As Helen Hoy and Robert

Thacker have documented, "Moons" was one of several stories, including "Chaddeleys and Flemings," initially slated to be part of a more explicitly metafictional collection to be called "Rose and Janet." The result of "tortuous" evolution, including multiple versions of multiple stories in several different sequences, "Rose and Janet" was to consist of six third-person stories about the protagonist Rose, an actress, and six first-person stories about Janet, a writer (Hoy 60, 69). This collection, edited by Doug Gibson, was for the Canadian market and publishers Macmillan and Company and was distinct from an American version then under the auspices of Norton and editor Sherry Huber, who were "making earnest attempts to turn the same material into a novel" (Hoy 67). In the final pages of "Rose and Janet," Rose would be revealed to be Janet's fictional creation, thereby "transforming all that went before" (Hoy 71). Once Munro realized that a new version of the story "Simon's Luck" and the revision of three Janet stories—"Mischief," Providence," and "Who Do You Think You Are?"—into Rose stories gave her enough material for a strong collection focused solely on Rose, she literally stopped the presses, at a personal cost of $1,864.08 (Thacker 347–48, 350). The Rose stories stand alone in the collection *Who Do You Think You Are*.[3]

"Rose and Janet," with its indirect dramatization of the transmutation of life into art, would have been more obviously metafictional. Hoy calls it a "provocative and complex arrangement" that would require "more engagement in deciphering the silences," more attention to "the gap between and in the interaction between one story and another" (78, 72). Yet Munro backed away from it at the last moment, at significant cost to herself. Munro has said that she rejected this explicitly metafictional arrangement as "just too fancy," as "pretentious or precious" (Hancock 88). Hoy notes that Munro has "shown a growing impatience with the overt metafictional strategies" such as those in "The Ottawa Valley" and "Home" (79). This move away from more open self-reflexivity by no means moves her closer to any naïve realism: shattering the reality effect, after all, can easily become a mere mechanical demonstration of a particular aesthetic of self-consciousness, one with no special dispensation from the regular rules of language to transcend the representational contract of language and pronounce on its inadequacy.

The skepticism of "Moons," which eschews "fancy" or "pretentious" metafictional displays, might well owe more to John Calvin and John Knox than John Barthes and Jacques Derrida. While discussing *The View from Castle Rock* in an interview on CBC radio, Munro stopped just short of drawing a straight line from Presbyterianism to atheism: John Knox's push for an

educated peasantry, she said, led to the development of a critical, practical, intelligent people with no use for rituals or symbols, and their critical reading practice created some inevitable ambivalence toward the Bible (Munro, *Sounds*). This Protestant culture led to a belief in the value of reading and an experience of its power, as well as an eventual and unsettling suspicion that interpretation could not be fixed either by faith or the authority of the church.

Carrington has previously drawn a connection between this ambivalence toward language and Munro's rural, Protestant upbringing. She writes that for Munro's characters, "manipulating and controlling language—the imaginative act of writing itself—somehow becomes a form of shame or humiliation" (15), and she notes an interview in which Munro says although writing was "the only thing" that she "ever wanted to do," she felt "embarrassment" about "doing something" that she could neither "explain" nor "justify" to her hard-working parents (16). Yet as Thacker notes, Munro has said that her father "understood the artist in her" (315). "Always a reader, always a thoughtful man," Robert Laidlaw, in the last years of his life, "became a writer himself," publishing not just *The McGregors,* but also "five memoirs, and a short story" between 1974 and 1976 (315). Perhaps Laidlaw, then, felt a similar ambivalence about literature over the course of his life.

If Munro's cultural heritage bred such an ambivalence, then it might ultimately have been an enabling one. In "Moons," Munro relies on realism—on its capacity for characterization, compassion, and presence—yet does so with a sophisticated understanding of language's inability to represent perfectly either the world or the totality of being. Her sophisticated and even skeptical understanding of the ability of literature and even language to represent nevertheless coexists with and even augments her writing's powerful sense of verisimilitude.

NOTES

1 In the original publication of this story in *The New Yorker*, Janet was a painter—a change made at the suggestion of the magazine's editorial staff but reversed when Munro published the story as part of her own collection (Thacker 341). This decision indicates Munro at least sees Janet's career as a writer as important to the story, even if it does not necessarily strengthen any autobiographical connection.

2 The Copernican revolution, which held that the earth was not the centre of the universe around which all else orbited, was, incidentally, confirmed by Galileo's observation of the moons of Jupiter, the first heavenly bodies shown *not* to orbit the earth (Redekop 156).

3 This collection was titled *The Beggar Maid* for the US and UK markets.

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Richard Harrison

Cell Phone

Don't ring. Little switchblade of language
clipped to my belt, don't sound off, don't
chime, don't sing. Don't ring. I broke my vow
long ago to use you for the momentous call
alone: my wife in labour, come home,
come home, or later our first child
in the hospital. Long ago I ordered pizza
or forgot what we needed in the grocery aisle
and took your space-explorer numbers quite
in vain. Don't ring. Even though the few
who call this number do to say *I love you,*
how's your day, the truth I'm always putting away
is my father lodged among the demented
a mountain chain away, and word of his dying
and the promise that I made. Don't ring.
Every day I put aside my duties
and pretend I am just a child, there's
always play, but you, the perfect measuring tape,
always know the distance bad news needs to
leap from a mouth to the ear in hiding miles away.
I can barely think when I think of what you bring.
Don't ring today. Don't ring.

Joubert Satyre

Fantômes du passé chez Émile Ollivier et Gérard Étienne

De l'écriture comme exorcisme

L'écriture, en tant qu'extériorisation de notre moi profond, peut nous aider à nous débarrasser de nos démons intérieurs, en les nommant, en leur donnant un visage moins terrifiant, car nommer les êtres et les choses, si menaçants soient-ils, c'est les arracher au chaos et à l'indistinct, les soumettre à la rationalité du langage. Bien qu'elle ne puisse complètement extirper de nous l'innommable—sinon on s'arrêterait après un ou deux livres—l'écriture est, en ce sens, un rituel d'exorcisme. Il semble que les romans d'Émile Ollivier et de Gérard Étienne participent de ce rituel. Exercice mémoriel sans cesse renouvelé et ancré dans l'expérience exilique, ces romans portent la hantise d'événements douloureux, qui s'exprime sous des formes cliniques comme la folie et les cauchemars. Chez la plupart des *écrivains migrants* dont font partie ces deux romanciers, l'exil, volontaire ou forcé, est souvent vécu comme une mort symbolique, une perte, un trauma.[1] Il est la blessure originelle qui nourrit l'écriture migrante. Néanmoins, dans le cas d'Ollivier et d'Étienne, le trauma de l'exil vient aviver un trauma plus ancien, celui de la dictature, même s'il est vrai que Gérard Étienne exploite davantage les motifs liés à la dictature, en remontant au temps antérieur à l'exil, à ses causes, tandis qu'Émile Ollivier met davantage l'accent sur la mauvaise conscience de l'exilé, qui semble toujours vouloir se racheter par un retour plus fantasmé que réel au pays natal. Malgré ces différences, l'oeuvre de ces deux romanciers a le ton d'un rituel d'exorcisme par la présence obsédante du passé qui y déploie ses spectres, ses fantômes et ses hantises sous forme de retours impossibles au pays natal, d'hallucinations, de folie et de cauchemars. Le but de cet article est de cerner quelques-unes de ces épiphanies déstabilisantes du passé dans des romans d'Ollivier et d'Étienne.

Omniprésence spectrale du passé

Toute oeuvre littéraire est anamnèse de souvenirs heureux ou malheureux, mais les liens entre souvenirs et création littéraire sont encore plus forts dans les oeuvres des écrivains migrants d'origine haïtienne établis au Québec.[2] Une simple lecture thématique de ces oeuvres permet d'y retrouver des motifs liés de près ou de loin à l'enfance, à la terre natale, ou à l'exil. Le passé remémoré dans ces oeuvres est essentiellement traumatisant, ce qui s'explique tant par l'exil forcé d'Émile Ollivier et de Gérard Étienne que par la dictature qui les y a poussés. Chez Gérard Étienne, qui a été emprisonné et torturé sous la dictature, la violence du passé prend l'allure d'une catastrophe fondatrice et donne à son oeuvre sa tonalité sombre, apocalyptique même. La barbarie du passé chez les deux romanciers semble avoir deux sources : les épisodes traumatisants liés à la dictature et l'exil qui en est la suite logique. Dans ce contexte, bien que l'exil ait permis à ces auteurs d'échapper à la dictature et à une mort certaine, il est loin d'être vécu dans l'euphorie, car il est déchirure, arrachement, et perte. Les traces autobiographiques éparpillées dans les textes de l'un et l'autre romancier nous autorisent à lire ces textes comme une mise en scène d'événements pénibles de leur vie, de sorte que certains personnages migrants fonctionnent comme de véritables doubles fantasmagoriques des deux écrivains[3].

Émile Ollivier : exil et nostalgie, retour impossible au pays natal

Puisque l'exil est perte, le personnage ou le sujet migrant a deux possibilités : accepter cette perte, c'est-à-dire faire le deuil de l'objet perdu, la terre natale, ou la refuser. Les migrants nostalgiques optent pour la seconde. Selon Walter Moser : « Le sujet nostalgique espère et croit pouvoir récupérer l'objet perdu, se rapprocher de l'objet éloigné. Il est animé par le désir de renverser le cours de l'histoire . . . et de retourner en arrière, en deçà de la grande perte, de la Chute, bref d'une catastrophe initiale » (88). Cette définition illustre parfaitement la posture de certains personnages d'Émile Ollivier, qui met particulièrement en scène les effets négatifs de l'exil forcé. Le nostalgique se complaît dans la vénération du passé, et ce comportement est souvent un obstacle à son intégration dans la société d'accueil. La nostalgie empêche le migrant de tourner la page, de s'ouvrir aux nouveaux horizons.

Les personnages nostalgiques sont obsédés par le désir du retour au pays natal, seul moyen, à leurs yeux, de récupérer « l'origine perdue » dont ils ne veulent ou ne peuvent pas faire le deuil. Ils vivent dans une schizophrénie au quotidien, bien qu'ils soient physiquement en terre étrangère, ils ont l'esprit

ailleurs, au pays natal.[4] Pour eux, les souvenirs sont plus importants que le présent. Ils semblent minés par une mauvaise conscience qui les empêche d'y vivre pleinement. Aux yeux du migrant nostalgique, s'exiler, c'est trahir les autres, ceux qui sont restés pour lutter contre la misère ou la dictature. Il n'est jamais satisfait de sa terre d'accueil, ou mieux il n'a jamais le temps d'en découvrir les côtés positifs, parce qu'il a « des comptes à régler avec lui-même [et qu'il se sent] coupable de trahison envers sa famille, envers sa patrie » (Ollivier, *Discorde* 140). La mauvaise conscience du migrant nostalgique, sa « culpabilité dépressive », selon les mots de Simon Harel, est à rapprocher de la culpabilité d'avoir survécu à l'innommable, qui pousse au suicide certains survivants des camps de concentration.

Des migrants nostalgiques donnent leur tonalité élégiaque à des romans comme *La Discorde aux cent voix* (1986), *Passages* (1994), et *Les Urnes scellées* (1995). De tous les romans d'Ollivier, *Passages* est, par excellence, celui de la migration. Il raconte les aventures croisées d'un groupe de *boat people* faisant voile vers la Floride et de Normand Malavy, un immigrant haïtien qui laisse Montréal pour s'établir à Miami. Normand Malavy en a assez du Québec, de l'hiver « qui grillage le fleuve, verrouille la sève des érables et [qui] installe sur la ville un temps caillé » (Ollivier, *Passages* 78). L'hiver est associé à la mort par le narrateur: « La gadoue, peau teigneuse, recouvrait les rues de la ville; sur les arbres et sur les toits, la neige, lange et linceul, emprisonnait la vie, et l'on ne pouvait ouvrir la bouche sans qu'un jet de buée grise ne s'en échappât » (Ollivier 81). C'est aussi une métaphore de l'exil qui enferme le personnage dans un labyrinthe sans issue possible : « Puis il arriva un moment où Normand, à bout de souffle, hors de force et de courage, heurtant partout impasses, culs-de-sac, murs sans créneaux, sans meurtrières, portes sans serrures, toujours les mêmes, aveugles, comprit qu'il n'y avait plus d'issue, nulle part, que sa course était vaine et folle, ses efforts inutiles et tout espoir illusoire » (Ollivier 69). En partie, à cause de ce triste climat, Normand Malavy n'a pu faire le deuil de la terre natale. Son attachement à la patrie se manifeste symboliquement dans une série de revues aux titres qui évoquent l'enracinement : *Semences*, *Jonctions*, et *Poteaux*. C'est dans ces revues que lui et ses amis « restés empoisonnés par l'obsession du retour au pays natal » (Ollivier 80) expriment leur mal du pays. Cette hantise est si forte qu'au moment de sa mort, Normand aurait aimé voir où sont les images de son pays, entre géographie, enfance, et carnaval, dans une vertigineuse accélération. Ce serait pour lui un moyen de retrouver, au seuil de la mort, la terre délaissée, de s'envelopper dans

ses saveurs et ses couleurs; il aurait alors le sentiment qu'il serait enterré dans l'humus où il a grandi et d'emporter dans l'au-delà les souvenirs de son pays adoré.

Dans l'impossibilité de retourner au pays natal, Normand Malavy décide donc de s'en rapprocher en se rendant à Miami. Plus qu'un lieu géographique, cette ville de la Floride, dont le climat rappelle celui d'Haïti, est un substitut de la terre d'origine. Le soleil, les plages et les palmiers ressemblent à ceux que l'expatrié a connus dans son enfance et sa jeunesse. Mais ironie du sort, Normand Malavy meurt dans la ville même où il espérait renaître. Sa mort au seuil du pays natal préfigure le motif de l'impossible retour qui sera amplement développé dans *Les Urnes scellées*, et dont on retrouve aussi l'écho chez un autre personnage de *Passages*, la Cubaine Amparo Doukara.

Contrairement à Normand Malavy dont le retour au pays natal est factice, Amparo Doukara regagne réellement le Cuba de son enfance. Dans ses souvenirs, La Havane est une éternelle fête foraine, une ville toujours ensoleillée. La nostalgie a recréé dans sa mémoire un Cuba « lointain, irréel, onirique » (Ollivier 43). Elle s'attend donc à retrouver la terre de son enfance heureuse, comme si le temps ne s'était pas écoulé. Grande est sa désillusion quand elle confronte ses visions à la réalité :

> [L]a ville sentait le *cani*, une odeur de pourri en suspens dans l'air. Les pierres des statues s'étaient effritées. Tout tenait encore sur pied, très vieux, très fatigué. Le cinéma Habana avait fermé, le Palacio Cuerto, fermé aussi. Qu'étaient devenus les parterres de magnolias, de violettes, d'orchidées toujours en fleurs? Même le plat de riz aux haricots noirs, *le moros y cristianos*, n'avait plus le même goût. (Ollivier 44)

Cet extrait souligne le fossé entre le pays que le migrant nostalgique recrée dans ses souvenirs—pour justifier sa nostalgie, dirait-on—et le pays réel. Aussi, le retour d'Amparo Doukara à la terre de son enfance pend-il l'allure d'un désenchantement. Elle n'a d'autre choix que de quitter Cuba définitivement : « Jamais plus je ne pourrai vivre à La Havane » (Ollivier 45), déclare-t-elle, catégorique.

Alors que le motif du retour impossible au pays natal est secondaire dans *Passages,* il joue un rôle central dans *Les Urnes scellées*. L'archéologue Adrien Gorfoux prend un congé sabbatique pour faire des fouilles dans sa terre natale, mais un ensemble de circonstances modifie ce plan initial.[5] Témoin de l'assassinat en plein jour de Sam Soliman, il déploie toute son énergie pour élucider les causes de ce meurtre, mais en vain. Il est à souligner que son travail d'enquêteur s'apparente à celui de l'archéologue : les deux se

basent sur des indices qui permettent de reconstituer une scène originelle. Migrant nostalgique, Adrien Gorfoux veut par son retour au pays natal retrouver ses racines. Sa quête et son enquête renvoient symboliquement aux fouilles liées à son métier d'archéologue : fouiller dans la terre, c'est chercher à ramener au grand jour les identités individuelle et collective figées dans le temps. On peut risquer une analogie entre la terre et la mémoire : bien qu'elles déforment le passé, elles le préservent chacune à sa manière. Le métier d'Adrien Gorfoux est donc, si l'on peut dire, associé à la nostalgie. Le personnage y trouve peut-être une certaine compensation à son exil.

L'enquête « policière », qui peut-être est aussi une occasion inconsciente pour Adrien Gorfoux de retrouver ses racines, échoue; elle lui permet toutefois de découvrir la vraie histoire de son pays, ponctuée régulièrement d'événements sanglants. Le contact avec la réalité a une valeur pédagogique; il fait découvrir au personnage l'abîme entre l'image romantique du pays que la mémoire exilique a forgée et le visage terre-à-terre du quotidien. D'ailleurs, dès son arrivée dans sa ville natale, Adrien Gorfoux éprouve un sentiment d'inquiétante étrangeté. Cette ville qu'il s'attend à retrouver accueillante lui paraît énigmatique, incompréhensible, menaçante même : « Il lui était arrivé, durant sa longue vie d'errance, de sentir qu'une rue lui échappait, d'avoir l'impression qu'une porte lui était fermée au nez ou qu'une fenêtre s'ouvrait sur le vide, il trouvait toujours une bouée, un point de repère. C'était la première fois qu'une ville entière ne lui offrait aucune prise. Elle lui faisait presque peur » (Ollivier, *Urnes* 50). Déjà, sur la route qui le reconduit au lieu natal, il a pu mesurer toute la distance entre le paysage de ses souvenirs et le paysage réel. Il ne cesse alors de se lamenter sur la dégradation ou la disparition des paysages familiers, selon le modèle du topos *Ubi sunt* : « Que sont devenues les frondaisons dorées de cocotiers, les danses furieuses des bouquets de palmiers en mutinerie contre le vent? Plus de frémissements bruyants d'amandiers, d'étalement des feuilles d'arbre à pain, mains géantes jointes au poignet où venaient se nicher des grappes de fruits. Avaient-ils eux aussi migré du côté de l'hiver? » (Ollivier 43). Les interrogations de l'extrait soulignent la confusion et le désappointement du personnage. Ce sont des cris de désespoir devant le pouvoir destructeur du temps, même si le migrant nostalgique semble souvent oublier qu'il est impossible de retrouver le pays de l'enfance et que le temps est irréversible. Et si ses sanglots sur le pays perdu étaient plutôt sur l'enfance qui s'en est allée à jamais? D'autres événements font tomber les dernières illusions d'Adrien Gorfoux : il est agressé par une foule en colère alors qu'il prend la défense

d'un homme qu'elle lynche. De plus, les élections démocratiques—les premières de son pays— sont noyées dans le sang : des milliers de votants sont assassinés. Suite à ce massacre et à cette agression, Adrien Gorfoux décide de retourner définitivement au Canada.

La confrontation entre le pays rêvé et le pays réel a pour effet d'arracher Adrien Gorfoux à la contemplation nostalgique du passé et de le forcer à retourner en exil. Cette expérience du retour impossible rappelle, par certains côtés, la tragédie d'Orphée, descendu aux enfers à la recherche d'Eurydice, mais qui ne peut pas la ramener au monde des vivants et doit se séparer d'elle à jamais. La terre natale, l'enfance, sont comme Eurydice : on ne les retrouve jamais. L'impossibilité du retour défait dans l'esprit du migrant les visions exaltantes du pays que la nostalgie a suscitées. Adrien Gorfoux en sort-il guéri pour autant du « mal du pays »? Non, parce qu'on ne peut pas vraiment se défaire de son pays natal, comme de sa langue maternelle. Le personnage repart en exil, vers « l'extrême nord de la l'errance » (Ollivier 286), et ses poignants adieux disent l'échec de son rêve et augurent peut-être le début d'une nouvelle entrée en nostalgie :

> Adieu! as-tu dit alors, au pays de tes racines. Ce pays, tu l'avais traîné en tant de lieux . . . Tu errais, tu sortais hors de toi, mais il était là, vivace, avec ses plantes, ses zones sèches . . . Tu étais revenu, prêt à ramasser la boue et à modeler, de tes mains de potier, une image de ton désir. Tu en avais assez d'être égaré, dépaysé. Que possédais-tu en propre sinon tes papiers d'identité? Là-bas, pas de tombe familiale, pas de demeure ancestrale. Ici, tu avais laissé ton chien, ton cheval bai et tes tourterelles. Tu étais revenu les rechercher. Tu les as cherchés longtemps sans les trouver. (Ollivier 284)

Adrien Gorfoux reprend donc une deuxième fois le chemin d'exil, mais déjà il fait le compte de ce qu'il perdra de nouveau. C'est le point de départ d'un autre cycle nostalgique, car déracinement et nostalgie sont liés chez Émile Ollivier : « Il sait que, l'été, il aura beau parcourir l'Estrie, il ne trouvera pas les retables, les reposoirs et rogatoires, ces innombrables temples de prières qui parsèment le chemin des écoliers et les routes de son adolescence » (Ollivier 285). Le personnage migrant ne peut s'empêcher d'idéaliser le paysage natal, en dépit des déceptions que son retour à ces paysages lui cause. Le renoncement d'Adrien Gorfoux semble procéder d'un malentendu, d'un dépit amoureux entre lui et la terre natale. Voilà pourquoi il ne saurait être définitif, malgré sa violence et son aspect tragique : « Où que l'on aille », écrit Simon Harel à propos d'Émile Ollivier, «. . . on traîne nécessairement sa terre avec soi à la manière d'un spectre obsédant » (*Passages* 212).

Hallucinations

Bien que les migrants nostalgiques de Gérard Étienne ne manifestent pas ostensiblement leur désir du retour à la terre natale, ils ne souffrent pas moins de la perte de leur lieu de naissance. Au contraire, le pays perdu impose sa présence sous des formes violentes, à peine dicibles, comme les hallucinations, la folie, les cauchemars. Cependant, ces précipités irraisonnés de la mémoire nostalgique se rencontrent aussi chez Émile Ollivier, du moins dans des romans où aucun personnage n'entreprend le voyage du retour ni ne l'envisage, parce qu'il serait dangereux.[6] Il semblerait que la possibilité même du retour à la terre natale atténue les effets de la nostalgie; dès qu'il n'y a aucune velléité ni possibilité de retour et que le pays semble à jamais perdu, le déracinement tourne au délire, à la folie. Cependant, les migrants nostalgiques chez les deux romanciers se semblent pas affectés de la même manière par cette perte : ceux d'Émile Ollivier semblent intellectualiser leur sentiment de dépossession, ceux de Gérard Étienne le somatisent; ils le vivent dans leur corps et dans leur chair, littéralement. C'est le cas de Maître Clo dans *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo*, qui souffre « de crampe d'estomac, [d']intenses douleurs au ventre . . . des vertiges » (Étienne 11).

Avocat de formation, Maître Clo immigre à Montréal et n'arrive pas à s'adapter à sa nouvelle vie. Il refuse, sans raison apparente, un emploi bien rémunéré grâce auquel il aurait pu aider sa soeur qui l'héberge. Cependant, il n'est pas comme les nostalgiques extravertis d'Émile Ollivier, qui clament haut « leur mal du pays ». Il ne fait nulle comparaison antagonique entre le pays de l'enfance et le pays d'accueil, mais il ne veut pas non plus s'intégrer. Maître Clo croit retrouver en la personne d'une voisine, Erzulie, la déesse du panthéon vaudou qu'il prétend avoir épousée avant de laisser Haïti. Cette femme semble jouer à cache-cache avec lui, car chaque fois qu'il pense pouvoir l'aborder pour lui demander pardon de l'avoir abandonnée, la femme-déesse-Erzulie se dérobe. Exaspéré, Maître Clo entreprend une folle pérégrination dans les rues de Montréal à la poursuite de cette femme qui « lui colle à la peau comme une pieuvre » (Étienne 13). Sa quête désespérée, insensée même, illustre bien ce que Pierre Nepveu appelle une « espèce de fébrilité, d'agitation de la nostalgie : courses folles à travers des traces perdues, confusion entre l'ailleurs et l'ici, le passé et le présent. Nostalgie sans retour possible, dans la conscience qu'il "n'y aura jamais de terre promise" » (Nepveu, *Intérieurs*: 203). L'attitude schizophrénique de l'avocat met en relief la confusion entre l'ailleurs et l'ici, le passé et le présent qu'éprouvent la plupart

des personnages migrants. Le brouillage des frontières entre des mondes hétérogènes, l'indécidabilité entre le même et l'autre l'empêchent d'assumer son exil. Maître Clo superpose deux mondes en amalgamant les réalités du pays d'accueil et celles du pays natal : Montréal est souvent vu à travers les souvenirs réels ou imaginaires du pays de l'enfance. Ainsi, au cours de ses pérégrinations, l'avocat entend des cloches de l'église Saint-Carmel qui semblent lui rappeler son enfance. De même, les jardins du voisinage le ramènent à la Caraïbe des origines. Il nage entre deux réalités :

> Voici des jardinets dans presque tous les coins du quartier . . . De l'eau coule à la bouche de Maître Clo devant les tomates aux formes tropicales. On dirait que la zone qu'il apprend à connaître depuis quelques jours a été faite à sa mesure tellement elle lui paraît familière . . . Pour Maître Clo, cette zone rappelle celle de la maîtresse . . . Ce qui frappe davantage l'attention de Maître Clo, ce sont les objets de sa religion étalés devant chaque magasin selon les dispositions recommandées pour des esprits à la pensée géométrique, telles celles de la maîtresse Erzulie. (Étienne 66)

L'image de la déesse Erzulie que le personnage croit incarnée dans le corps d'une femme étrangère est la métaphore de l'obsession de la terre mère, que tout exilé porte en soi comme sa langue maternelle.[7] Cette femme qui se dérobe chaque fois que Maître Clo l'aperçoit est le pays natal, lointain et proche, subjuguant la mémoire mais absent du réel, une image dans le miroir, à portée des yeux mais insaisissable, mirages d'un rêve, vite évanouis au réveil. Voilà pourquoi il ne peut atteindre cette femme. Maître Clo est donc en pleine hallucination, car ces fantômes surgis des souvenirs affectent ses sens. Comme Normand Malavy, il éprouve ce sentiment de culpabilité qui plonge le migrant dans une angoisse nostalgique. D'ailleurs le mot « culpabilité » est employé à plusieurs reprises dans le roman à propos de l'avocat, dont voici une occurrence : « Maître Clo reconnaît sa culpabilité d'avoir laissé le pays sans s'acquitter de ses devoirs envers la Maîtresse Erzulie » (Étienne 65). On pourrait dire plus simplement qu'il se sent coupable d'avoir laissé la terre natale. La hantise d'Erzulie symbolise l'impossibilité du personnage de sortir de lui-même pour partir à la découverte de l'autre. Erzulie est ici une figure de la nostalgie, du refoulé qui fait retour. Un tel emmurement dans son monde intérieur ne peut que conduire à la folie, état extrême de l'isolement.

Folie

Le comportement, les paroles de Maître Clo paraissent étranges à son entourage et, chaque fois qu'il parle de sa déesse, on cherche à comprendre ce qu'il veut dire. Le pas qui conduit à la folie, à la déchéance est vite franchi.

Un jour, on le retrouve en pleine rue, complètement inconscient. Son mal s'incarne dans son corps sous formes de « convulsion des lèvres, [de] raidissement des traits du visage . . . de violence dans les gestes » (Étienne 132). Sans employer le mot « folie », le médecin qui soigne l'avocat semble y faire allusion pour expliquer sa maladie : « Apparemment, l'homme ne paraît pas atteint de troubles organiques qui nécessitent l'intervention immédiate de la médecine. Les résultats de tests courants en la circonstance sont normaux » (Étienne 131). L'impuissance de la médecine occidentale s'explique par le fait qu'elle prend l'effet pour la cause. Le mal dont souffre l'avocat est psychologique. D'ailleurs, elle finira par en faire le diagnostic exact. Les troubles de Maître Clo sont considérés comme un délire, « une espèce de déséquilibre dû à un déracinement, un exil forcé, le mal de vivre dans un pays étranger » (Étienne 163). Dans ces circonstances, seule une approche médicale qui allie ethnopsychiatrie à une connaissance approfondie des problèmes spécifiques de l'immigrant haïtien peut guérir Maître Clo qui, selon le docteur Hillel, « a toutes les chances d'en sortir, pourvu qu'on lui fournisse les moyens, qu'on l'écoute au plus fort de ses crises, qu'on le confie surtout à un médecin de son pays, familier à son langage et à sa culture » (Étienne 163–164). Le point de vue du médecin sur les moyens de guérir Maître Clo exprime métaphoriquement le repli sur soi de ce dernier. À défaut d'un retour réel à la terre natale, le migrant nostalgique à qui le mal du pays a fait perdre la raison ne peut trouver de l'apaisement que s'il est replongé dans sa culture, une culture déterritorialisée certes, mais qui lui permet de se réapproprier symboliquement la terre de l'enfance, la langue maternelle, l'odeur et la couleur des premiers paysages, toutes ces composantes de l'identité que l'exil fait vaciller.

Le seul personnage migrant d'Émile Ollivier à sombrer dans la folie est Herman Pamphyle de la nouvelle intitulée *Le Vide huilé*, deuxième volet du diptyque *Paysage de l'aveugle*. Lui aussi souffre de problèmes d'adaptation au pays d'accueil dont il n'arrive pas à déchiffrer l'énigme ni les codes. Désorienté, il ignore dans quelle saison il est, entre dans un autobus par une porte sur laquelle est écrit : « Il est interdit d'entrer par cette porte. » (Ollivier, *Paysage* 83) Herman Pamphyle est dérouté, seul et sans repères dans une ville étrangère qui lui fait éprouver un fort sentiment de confusion et d'inquiétude. Rien de cette ville ne lui rappelle ce qu'il a connu dans son pays : « Tu viens d'une contrée où les gens utilisent des mimiques, des gestes, des attitudes, de grands éclats de voix ou de rire; l'écrit a si peu d'importance. Tu te mets à lire et tu es effrayé par la somme d'interdits, rédigés en deux langues . . . » (Ollivier 84). Herman Pamphyle est seul—le motif de la solitude scande le

texte à la manière d'un refrain—dans cette ville où il erre comme un fantôme. Ce ne sont pas seulement la nostalgie et la solitude, mais aussi le dépaysement qui poussent le personnage au désespoir, car il se sent jeté sur une terre complètement inconnue, avec des visages jamais rencontrés auparavant. Blanche, son amante, est le seul être qui aurait pu l'aider à baliser ce territoire inconnu, mais il l'a vraisemblablement assassinée dans un moment de dissociation :

> Blanche, aurais-tu pu m'aider à vivre sans pays et sans racines? Aurais-tu pu m'aider, de toute la force de tes bras, à vivre sur ces terres rythmées par d'autres fêtes, scandées par d'autres cérémonies? D'autres emblèmes flottent sur des monuments qui ne célèbrent point mes morts. Aurais-tu pu m'aider à vivre avec des mots qui ne sont pas les miens? D'autres vêtements, d'autres manières . . . ? Aurais-tu pu m'aider à souffrir le poids de mes agitations vides et de mes paroles sans poids? Aurais-tu pu m'aider à rester un homme parmi les hommes du plus profond de cette coupure d'avec la terre et d'avec moi-même? (Ollivier 128)

Cet extrait développe les principaux motifs de l'exil et de la nostalgie qui en découle. La forme interrogative exprime le désarroi d'un homme, désorienté, perdu dans un milieu hostile. Herman Pamphyle fait face à deux impossibilités : l'impossibilité de s'adapter au pays d'accueil et celle de retourner au pays natal. Les seules issues possibles sont le suicide et la folie. Il choisit la seconde. Mais peut-on vraiment choisir la folie? Dans ce cas, ne serait-elle pas simulée? Il est plus juste de dire qu'Herman Pamphyle a sombré dans la folie. Néanmoins pour le narrateur, ce n'est pas la solution au désarroi de l'exil, car sans porter de jugement sur la démence du personnage, il semble dire que le migrant doit trouver un lieu intermédiaire entre sa nostalgie et les impératifs de la société d'accueil :

> [L]a nuit de son internement, alors que les bras d'Herman garrottés par la camisole, mains ouvertes, doigts écartés, se sont repliés sur ce vide huilé qu'a été jusque-là sa vie, nous avons cru lire, dans la braise de son regard, qu'il avait enfin compris l'urgente nécessité de manger, avec ses mêmes dents fragiles, le côté cornu de l'exil, pour libérer le côté aile du retour au pays natal et alors, seulement alors, il entendra sonner, à toute volée, les cloches de Pâques . . . (Ollivier 142)

Cauchemars

Les visions cauchemardesques des personnages migrants ne procèdent pas d'une posture nostalgique : elles sont les manifestations d'événements traumatisants qu'ils ont vécus avant l'exil, sous la dictature, car c'est toujours la dictature qui pousse au bannissement dans les romans d'Ollivier et d'Étienne. L'horreur de ce temps-là est telle qu'elle semble indicible. Voilà pourquoi ce passé revient sous forme de cauchemar, qui, par son côté

menaçant et monstrueux, rappelle la folie. On peut considérer les délires comme les équivalents verbaux des cauchemars. Le délire est peut-être un cauchemar éveillé comme on parle des rêves éveillés. Les repères familiers qui balisent le monde du sujet et lui donnent sens ainsi que cohérence sont abolis dans les deux cas. Mais, délires et cauchemars peuvent être vus comme des moyens pour dire l'impensé; en ce sens il y aurait homologie entre ce qui échappe au discours et ses épiphanies délirantes et pétrifiantes. Quoi qu'il en soit, c'est encore le pays natal, même négatif, qui revient hanter le migrant.

Dans *Vous n'êtes pas seul* de Gérard Étienne, le désarroi du personnage est renforcé par une effroyable tempête de neige : les éléments déchaînés de la nature, ce « temps de cendres noires », renvoient à l'agitation intérieure d'Yves, personnage principal du roman. Interné à deux reprises dans des établissements où l'on tente de le soigner de ses crises pulsionnelles, Yves est à sa deuxième évasion et, désorienté par cette « tempête parfaite », perd connaissance devant la porte d'un appartement où il est recueilli par deux femmes. Le moi est assiégé, de même que le corps. D'ailleurs, de nombreuses allusions à la prison, à l'asile psychiatrique renforcent ce climat obsidional. Le passé traumatisant finit par s'immiscer dans ce climat propice à la paranoïa et s'y installe. Dans ses délires-cauchemars, Yves revit les persécutions dont il été la victime dans son pays. Les images s'imposent à lui avec la netteté du réel, dans un expressionnisme violent :

> Voilà des heures qu'ils m'attendent dans le brouillard, que montent la garde des centaines de miliciens armés autour d'une civière pleine de menottes. L'ambulance je la vois, remplie de têtes coupées qui se frappent, qui s'insultent, qui se dévorent. Vous pouvez aussi appeler au secours. N'attendez pas que je crève une seconde fois. Je veux me voir saigner sous leurs bottes . . . Ils me prendront, ils me battront, ils me foutront dans le trou une seconde fois. (Étienne 92–93)

L'expression « une seconde fois », employée à deux reprises, souligne l'effroi du personnage devant la perspective de subir de nouveau les tortures qui lui ont été infligées. La répétition du verbe « voir » souligne la force des images qui s'imposent à sa vision, à sa vue. Les deux femmes qui ont accueilli Yves sont déboussolées devant ces mots, mais elles ne désespèrent pas de « recoller entre elles les pièces détachées d'un corps, d'un esprit » (Étienne 95). Cependant, bien que le mot « cauchemar » soit employé plusieurs fois dans le roman pour décrire l'état d'Yves, et en dépit de la puissance des images macabres qui peuplent ses souvenirs, il serait plus juste de parler de délire, d'hallucination que de cauchemar, à moins de parler de cauchemar

éveillé. D'ailleurs, il semble que son esprit confus associe les souvenirs des tortures qu'il a subies comme opposant politique aux mauvais traitements infligés lors de ses internements en asile psychiatrique. Le sort des personnages migrants dans l'oeuvre d'Étienne semble ne pas changer du pays natal au pays d'accueil. Exilés par la dictature, ils sombrent dans la folie, car ils ne peuvent pas s'adapter à la nouvelle société ni envisager, même sous forme de fantasme, le retour au pays natal.

Les cauchemars qui rappellent les expériences tragiques vécues au pays natal sont encore plus forts dans le cas de Normand Malavy. Leur potentiel destructeur est souligné par le fait que le personnage les revoit une dernière fois à la veille de sa mort. On dirait qu'à travers ces images horrifiantes, la mort à venir s'était immiscée dans ce qu'il restait comme vie à Normand Malvavy. Ces cauchemars sont à la fois mis en images du passé et prémonitions, malstroms où passé et futur s'abolissent dans le vertige de la mort toute proche. Leur climat terrifiant pèse même sur Amparo Doukara, la compagne de Normand Malavy. Ce soir-là, elle était éveillée quand elle entendit son amant crier : « Ils reviennent, ils arrivent, ils sont là » (Ollivier 230-231). Elle réveille alors Normand Malavy qui lui raconte son « affreux cauchemar ». Rentré dans un état d'apesanteur, il « se voyait rapetisser jusqu'à n'être qu'un point dans l'épaisseur de la nuit » (Ollivier 231). Puis il s'était mis à nager dans un étang, mais il n'avait pas de prise sur son trajet. Enfin, il parvint à un autel, et c'est de là qu'il voit sortir des flots et marchant sur l'eau des hommes dont l'uniforme et l'accoutrement rappellent les miliciens de la dictature des Duvalier :

> Leur visage est masqué par d'épaisses lunettes aux verres fumés. Ils pointent dans sa direction des mitraillettes au court canon. Aveuglé par la blancheur du soleil, il croit que ces hommes avaient trois visages découpés en plans qui se recoupaient. Ils marchent sur l'eau, ils marchent d'un pas guerrier vers lui, l'arme en joue, dans une clameur menaçante. Alors il s'est mis à crier : « Ils arrivent, ils sont là. » (Ollivier 232)

Les éléments prémonitoires de ce cauchemars sont évidents : l'étang dont on connaît le potentiel crépusculaire depuis les travaux de Bachelard, est ici une métaphore du transbordement, de l'engloutissement.[8] Il est à la fois une réactivation des fleuves mythologiques, l'Achéron et le Styx, que les morts doivent franchir pour atteindre les rivages infernaux, et la mise en récit du potentiel narratif du verbe « trépasser » qui fait aussi de la mort un voyage aquatique. Cependant, à côté de ces aspects qui annoncent la fin du personnage, d'autres sont les résidus d'un événement traumatique auquel ce dernier a assisté à l'âge de six ans : l'assassinat de son père par des hommes armés, en

présence de sa mère et de son frère. On comprend pourquoi ces messagers de la mort reviennent hanter le sommeil du personnage, la veille de son trépas :

> Normand ne se souvient pas de leur visage; leur visière avait pris la couleur d'ombre du salon mal éclairé et l'ombre avait pris la couleur de leur visage. Peut-être étaient-ils infirmes, le visage mutilé. Peut-être n'avaient-ils jamais eu de visage. Leurs mains, leurs doigts sur la gâchette de leurs mitraillettes étaient si crispés qu'ils se confondaient avec l'acier de leurs armes, et celles-ci devenaient le prolongement de leurs corps, volumineux, gigantesques, pareils à des troncs de campêche. (Ollivier 234)

Aux yeux de l'enfant qui assistait à cette scène, ces hommes sont littéralement des monstres, ce qu'ils sont sur le plan moral. Ce portrait compense peut-être l'immaturité éthique du gamin de six ans, qui ne peut pas encore mesurer clairement la scélératesse de ces criminels. De telles images macabres hantent à jamais nos souvenirs et surgissent au seuil de la mort, puisqu'elles y sont intimement liées. D'ailleurs, la mort était peut-être inscrite de manière inconsciente dans le projet de Normand Malavy qui, en se rapprochant d'Haïti, a voulu retourner symboliquement à la terre-mère, tout autant pourvoyeuse de vie que de mort, cette terre qu'il a laissée pour échapper à la mort. Ainsi, loin de trouver cette régénérescence par la mer qu'il espérait en se rendant à Miami, il meurt subitement. On pourrait même ajouter que la mort était venue à sa rencontre dans ces corps de ses compatriotes naufragés vomis par l'océan sur la plage de la Floride où se baigne son amante, alors qu'il la contemple de son appartement.

Conclusion

L'oeuvre romanesque d'Émile Ollivier et de Gérard Étienne illustre la hantise du pays natal, source principale du malaise des personnages migrants. Il n'y a pas de migration heureuse chez ces écrivains, bien qu'elle puisse être une trouée d'espérance; toujours forcée, elle est vécue comme perte, arrachement : voilà pourquoi elle débouche sur la nostalgie, la folie, les hallucinations, qui enferment le personnage dans une spirale sans fin. À ces troubles causés par l'exil lui-même, il faut ajouter les cauchemars, traces mnésiques des traumas subis par le migrant dans son pays d'origine, et qui d'une certaine manière sont des formes de la rémanence envoûtante du lieu natal. Les migrants nostalgiques vivent dans l'obsession du retour à la terre natale, devenue dans leur imaginaire exilique le paradis perdu qu'ils tentent de retrouver, mais ils se rendent compte « qu'il n'y a pas de chemin de retour », ils perdent alors leurs illusions et décident d'habiter définitivement l'exil.

Ces retours impossibles sont des figures du temps qui passe et qui transforme même notre identité. Comme on ne peut jamais recouvrer son passé, on doit se contenter de ses images, de ses traces mnésiques, de ses transformations fantasmagoriques sur le théâtre de la mémoire, « car les lieux de l'enfance perdent leur aura de magie quand on y revient à l'âge adulte » (Ollivier, *Passages* 46). Néanmoins, le retour impossible est une échappatoire grâce à laquelle le trop-plein de la nostalgie et la tension émotive du sujet migrant décroissent. Voilà pourquoi en l'absence de cette possibilité le migrant sombre dans le désespoir. Par la présence constante de personnages migrants angoissés, torturés, les romans d'Ollivier et d'Étienne tentent d'exorciser la rémanence obsédante du pays de ces écrivains. Cette présence ne saurait être sans lien avec leur expérience exilique, et c'est en regard d'une telle expérience qu'elle prend tout son sens.

NOTES

1 La notion de trauma dans l'écriture migrante est largement analysée dans une perspective psychanalytique par Simon Harel dans son livre *Les passages obligés de l'écriture migrante* : « . . . l'écriture migrante est aussi travaillée par le trauma. » (44) Au trauma est associée la mélancolie, l'affect du deuil impossible : « Qu'on pense à la relation que les textes migrants entretiennent avec certains Idéaux étudiés par la psychanalyse : identification et idéalisation du lieu natal, affect dépressif et souvent mélancolique qui traduit un passage difficile, souvent traumatique, au pays d'adoption» (Harel 38). Cependant, selon Harel, le trauma de la migration n'est pas la seule source de l'écriture migrante : « S'il est vrai que le trauma est l'expérience d'une profonde souffrance psychique, il reste qu'on ne peut faire jouer ce trauma comme machination automatique de l'écriture migrante. » (64).

2 Il est difficile de trouver une seule cause à cet attachement au pays natal. Cependant, on peut faire l'hypothèse que les Haïtiens expatriés restent attachés à leur pays, pour des raisons historiques et émotives. Malgré les carences de toutes sortes dont Haïti est affligé, il reste la première terre à offrir un espace de liberté aux Noirs. L'Haïtien—d'ailleurs, comme la plupart des autres peuples—ne se sent bien que chez lui, et quand il est exilé, son rêve est de retourner dans son pays. Ce n'est pas seulement dans la littérature de l'exil qu'on trouve cette posture nostalgique : elle s'exprime dans de nombreuses chansons populaires. Aussi, l'exil « impie » est-il souvent vécu comme une injustice. D'ailleurs, Émile Ollivier a déclaré sans détour qu'Haïti ne l'a jamais quitté, qu'il reste collé à sa peau. Telle est la « puissance mémorielle de la terre » délaissée.

3 Parmi ces doubles, citons Normand Malavy qui rappelle Émile Ollivier lui-même.

4 Ollivier résume bien cette situation du migrant, en déclarant dans *La Presse* du 12 novembre 2002 qu'il est Québécois le jour et Haïtien la nuit.

5 Par son métier d'archéologue, Adrien Gorfoux vit dans le passé, dans la nostalgie.

Néanmoins, à la fin du roman, il accepte sa condition d'exilé, ce qui est la première étape dans le deuil du pays natal.

6 La possibilité et l'impossibilité du retour à la terre natale sont liées chez Émile Ollivier à l'évolution de la situation politique en Haïti. Par exemple, dans son premier texte, *Paysage de l'aveugle* (1977), écrit alors que la dictature triomphait en Haïti, le personnage principal sombre dans la folie, parce qu'il n'a aucune possibilité de retour; *Passages* (1994) évoque la chute de la dictature et la possibilité du retour au pays natal; dans *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), il n'est plus question de la dictature, mais plutôt de ses vestiges : voilà pourquoi Adrien Gorfoux peut retourner au pays natal. Rappelons que la dictature a pris fin en 1986.

7 Une autre lecture du roman peut au contraire interpréter ce fantasme comme un signe d'aliénation.

8 L'eau dormante est partout une paroi fragile de l'au-delà, un miroir de la mort : le lac, un miroir magique qui dans tout le légendaire universel appelle et disperse de sa respiration occulte et profonde toutes les puissances de la mort.

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Dave Margoshes

Ellis Island

after Jan Zwicky's "Robinson's Crossing"
and Robert Kroetsch's "The New World and Finding It"

1.

My father said they walked for seven days sustained by a lunch of sausage, black bread, raw potatoes and cold tea in a can, a feast in the first days, then a meal barely fit to eat. It was summer and they found wormy apples beside the road, so delicious, slept beneath their fragrance. On the brow of hill overlooking the Odessa harbour, his mother, my *buba*, fell on her knees and wept, but my father said "don't cry, mama, it is only wheat," a deep, long field of blue wheat rolling in the wind, that's how the sea seemed to him, his boyish eyes. The Black Sea, blue.

2.

Ellis Island. It's not like Long Island, a place where people live. Not like Coney Island, where you go for the day, to have a good time. More like Devil's Island, for some, right from the ship into quarantine and back again, good riddance.

It's a museum now. My cousin Susanna sends me an email with the website. She has found our mothers' names on the manifest of a ship sailing from Southampton, 1912. A woman, our grandmother, and two children, Berte, 5, and Mars, 4. When I see this on the screen, something stops in my heart.

3.

I grew up only a few miles from it but I've never been there. I never heard my mother mention it and, as for my father, just this tale: "When we came off the boat, they took us aside and gave us showers, made us wash our hair, looking for lice. All the louses they let in," my father said, "but not any on us."

But I have come to understand just lately that it is my home, as much my home as anywhere else I've been or haven't been, this immigrant's life. My friends here in Saskatchewan speak of "the family farm," "the homestead," the place their grandparents came to, their first new home. I have come to think of Ellis Island that way, a homestead, a home instead, a place that will hold me in good stead, should I choose to ever go there.

4.

It is the place we all come from, the place we go, the place where we pause in the moment as we live from moment to moment, the place where the road divides. Ellis Island is the purr of rain on grass, the rumble of rain's knuckles on the tin roof, it is the thrum of cicadas singing the ancient song, the pulse of blood in the well at the base of your lover's throat, the beginning of things and the end, the unexpected metaphor, the period at the end of the sentence. Ellis Island is the place we never reach, never can reach, the point just beyond knowing. It is what we see if we look too long upon the sun, the panoply of stars behind the lids of our eyes, the last sound we hear after we've turned out the light.

5.

Ellis Island. It is not a cry.
Not a map, a blueprint.
It is a footprint. Just one.
In wet sand.
Facing west.

Eileen Lohka

Diaspora, anti-souchitude[1] ou les écrivains sans frontière(s)

Je ne suis pas seul, je suis une multiplicité.
—Émile Ollivier, *Repérages* 26.

La phrase en exergue, que je cite souvent, sous-tend toute la problématique de l'écriture dite « migrante », au Canada comme ailleurs, dans cette ère de migration humaine sans précédent. Et cela, en dépit—ou peut-être à cause—du désir constant de classifier toute forme d'écriture selon une certaine logique critique, souvent reliée au territoire. Ainsi, nous parlons de littérature canadienne, pour ensuite la subdiviser en catégories a priori homogènes (!) : francophone, anglophone, québécoise, acadienne, franco-manitobaine, et j'en passe. Ce scénario, quoiqu'il inclue jusqu'à un certain point les écrivains vivant et écrivant au Canada mais qui viennent d'ailleurs, ne peut tenir compte d'une certaine distance, d'une certaine différence, quant à leur thématique, leur esthétique et leur imaginaire créatif. D'où le besoin de fragmenter encore une fois, par un qualificatif exclusif, l'écriture qui ne cadre pas tout à fait avec les courants établis par les écrivains « de souche ».

J'examinerai d'abord la notion de frontière(s) et de territoire[2] pour souligner les maintes façons par lesquelles la culture globalisante du monde moderne les transgresse. Je parlerai ensuite du magnétisme d'un imaginaire façonné ailleurs pour faire ressortir l'entre-deux de l'écriture propre aux communautés diasporales, entre-deux qui exacerbe l'effet de *push and pull*, de tension créatrice avec la communauté d'accueil. Les propos de François Paré me seront utiles pour tenter de comprendre la « distance habitée » par les écrivains des diasporas francophones au Canada. Je me pencherai enfin sur une vision plus inclusive, telle qu'elle est exprimée par Rosi Braidotti, et qui permet d'effacer les frontières dans et par les mots.

Gommage des frontières

En tant que pays d'immigration, le Canada s'est construit sur les vagues successives de nouveaux citoyens apportant avec eux leur langue, leur culture et leur attachement multi-dimensionnel à leur pays d'origine. En même temps, ces mêmes immigrants forgent, dans le pays d'accueil, « de nouveaux référents subjectifs qui rendent anachroniques les formes d'identification liées au territoire » (Appadurai 19). Maintenant qu'ils vivent à l'intérieur des frontières canadiennes, leur mode de vie inclut aussi bien des traits culturels de leur pays d'origine que ceux qu'ils acquièrent ici. Le processus inclusif s'applique aussi, à divers degrés de traumatisme, à leurs référents spatiaux, linguistiques, et imaginaires.

Nous pourrions parler d'hybridité et de métissage, incontournables en situation de cultures en contact. L'ethnologue Arjun Appadurai, quant à lui, avance plutôt que le phénomène migratoire est si répandu de nos jours que les notions mêmes de frontière et d'altérité radicale s'estompent. Il note ainsi que les « diasporas de publics enfermés dans leur bulle, différentes les unes des autres, constituent les creusets d'un ordre politique postnational. Elles ont pour moteur de leur discours les médias de masse et le mouvement de réfugiés, d'activistes, d'étudiants et de travailleurs » (Appadurai 60).

En sus des mouvements migratoires eux-mêmes, les technologies de la communication jouent un rôle primordial dans la déterritorialisation des communautés. Je ne parlerai pas ici des communications de masse, publicité entre autres, qui privilégient le discours du pouvoir à l'échelle mondiale mais plutôt des développements médiatiques tel l'internet ou les textos. Les diasporas peuvent lire les journaux ou visionner des vidéoclips de leur pays d'origine tout en ayant à portée de main divers moyens d'échanges presque immédiats—et relativement peu onéreux—avec parents et amis au pays. La propagation de ces outils de communication internationale est primordiale dans la création de diasporas qui se permettent de vivre dans une bulle virtuelle, en abstraction—du moins en partie—des courants linguistiques et culturels du pays-hôte. Ces communautés virtuelles renforcent le sentiment d'appartenir à un ailleurs, de vivre dans la différence, hors territoire. De plus, et outre une certaine nostalgie qui sert de cordon ombilical, il arrive que les immigrants proviennent de pays qui font face à des crises économiques ou politiques, voire des guerres qui, malgré la distance géographique, focalisent la diaspora sur son lieu d'origine. L'écrivain n'est pas exempt de ces tendances qui consolident le lien avec le pays natal.

En outre, et toujours selon l'ethnologue, les compagnies médiatiques, les agences de voyage et les maisons d'édition jouent sur le besoin de contact des populations déterritorialisées avec leurs pays. Ces organismes exploitent la nostalgie ou recréent des fragments de réalité, basés sur les images, pour nourrir l'imagination des émigrés. Ceux-ci « voient leur existence à travers le prisme des vies possibles offertes par les médias sous toutes leurs formes » (Appadurai 98) et, à leur tour, se constituent des scénarios de vie, et se reconstruisent des pays d'origine en partie inventés, d'où un brouillage entre vie et fiction(nalisation). Parallèlement, un besoin de comprendre l'étrange-ici du pays d'accueil passe nécessairement par une comparaison avec les balises familières du pays d'origine : ce va-et-vient constant, cet *entre* deux réalités précipite le gommage des frontières entre l'ici et l'ailleurs.

Quelques caractéristiques de l'écriture sans/hors frontière(s)

> En quoi suis-je encore l'enfant de mon pays? *En tout*: pour la simple raison que j'y ai passé mon enfance.
> —Nancy Huston, *Nord perdu* 16.

C'est dans cet espace interstitiel que vit et que crée l'écrivain « migrant ». Et sa littérature le reflète. François Paré souligne que les cultures diasporales se retrouvent « pour ainsi dire sans territoire. Sans espace identitaire réel » (92).[3] Pour cette raison, avance-t-il, « nous sommes tous appelés à vivre dans un univers de signes mémoriels ou prophétiques où nous n'existons plus quotidiennement que dans la "vérité" paradoxale de l'image » (62). La fabrication de l'image donc, qu'elle soit projection du réel, métaphore ou fiction, devient signe emblématique reliant mots et mondes, permettant « d'habiter la distance » (62). Il en découle que l'écriture migrante établit de nouveaux paramètres dans la thématique, les modes d'expression, l'imaginaire aussi bien que la structure de ses oeuvres littéraires lorsque celles-ci sont comparées à celles des écrivains « de souche » du pays d'accueil. Ces écritures de la migrance, de la mémoire, et du questionnement identitaire

> sont celles du corps et de la mémoire; elles sont, pour l'essentiel, travaillées par un référent massif, le pays laissé ou perdu, le pays réel ou fantasmé constituant la matière première de la fiction. . . . Ce sont des *écritures de la perte*, jamais achevées, de l'errance et du deuil (Berrouët-Oriol et Fournier 12).

Les thèmes récurrents d'une telle littérature privilégient le déracinement, l'identité, et le souvenir, et abordent, par ces biais, les idées connexes de la solitude, des référents naturels de l'ici et de l'ailleurs, souvent contrastés. Ce faisant, cette littérature tend à privilégier la métaphore du corps pour

exprimer l'intériorisation de—ou l'insertion dans—l'espace. Prenons un jeune poète du Manitoba, d'origine haïtienne, par exemple. Dans *Manguiers*, Bathélemy Bolivar s'évade de son présent enclavé par tout un continent pour retrouver dans les mots la mer de son enfance îlienne. Dans une migrance inversée, il se réinsère littéralement dans sa mer personnalisée :

> Mains sans contours
> Cheveux en touffes d'îlots
> Buste miroir opaque
>
> . . . Entre tes dents je coule . . . (12)

alors que la mémoire du là-bas efface l'ici dans un arôme de mangues,

> l'errance oubliée
> repeint le mot
> affamé
> du printemps
> de manguiers têtus
> et de douceurs dernières-nées (21)

le qualificatif « têtu » lui-même soulignant la douleur-fantôme de ce membre amputé qu'est l'île natale. De la même manière, Joël Des Rosiers ouvre son recueil de poèmes intitulé *Vétiver* par un long poème en prose qui le relie à son histoire ancestrale personnelle :

> la ville s'appelait Cayes . . .
> *Cayos* lieux amphibies fertiles en dorades et en murènes
> rochers sacrés regardeurs de mer
> image la plus émouvante de l'île la plus petite la plus fragile . . .
> caye est un mot qui hésite un mot qui flotte dans la lumière
> une transparence une résonance de l'air plutôt une parole-
> lumière . . .
> la presqu'île d'où vient le paradis
> à l'extrême bout de la langue (16–17)

Dans cet extrait de poème, c'est le manque de ponctuation qui met en valeur ce lien ininterrompu et indestructible avec son patrimoine personnel et culturel. Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo enfin, pour ne prendre que ces trois exemples emblématiques, loue la fortitude des femmes de son pays. Dans deux recueils de poèmes qui se font écho, elle chante la valeur des « Porteuses d'Afrique », ces « Sahéliennes » par lesquelles elle se lie directement, telle une griotte, à la longue lignée d'ancêtres-femmes africaines légendaires :

> Elle est Debout
> Debout comme vous,
> Mères,

Debout et fière
Comme la digne fille des Mères-courage
Que vous êtes . . . (*Les Porteuses d'Afrique* 34)

Le « berceau de l'Humanité » (42) se dessine ici dans une litanie au rythme de tam-tam, dans la mémoire de ses femmes, Weemba, Pokou, Guimbi Ouattara et Zingha, entre autres. L'Afrique de Bassolé-Ouédraogo se fait entendre dans la répétition scandée des exclamations en mooré

Baalm baalm baalme!	Gloire! Gloire! Gloire! (44)
A Weemb n gombe!	C'est Weemba qui parle!
Ya yiimb uf yaagn ye!	N'oublie pas ta petite-fille! (26)
Yamb yii paog gandaogo! . . .	Vous avez été brave
Yamb yii Burkini!	Vous avez été intègre! (45)

Dans ces trois cas, la déterritorialisation se trouverait peut-être dans le caractère même de l'écriture, dans le sens où l'entendrait Régine Robin, une écriture « dont les images migrent pour déjouer les stéréotypes et les clichés » (Moisan et Hildebrand 206).

À cette thématique propre aux diasporas se greffe aussi une tendance à écrire « à la fois en deçà et au delà » (Landowski 85). Il s'agit d'une position privilégiée pour l'écriture puisqu'elle offre une distance salutaire envers son pays d'origine, permettant remises en question et réévaluations constantes. Ainsi, dans les trois cas cités ci-dessus, l'apparente nostalgie, qui serait à mon avis surtout un désir de préserver la mémoire, de garder en vie,[4] est équilibrée par un regard honnête sur les réalités du pays natal, déchirures douloureuses dans le tissu de la mémoire. Bolivar choisit la litote pour exposer « [l']histoire de carnage / de viols et de vols » (22) dans son île :

le ruban des angoisses
redessine les traces de la mort
récemment travesties
en forêt . . . (23)

Avec les sous-entendus, il reprend la tradition créole qui brouille les frontières entre hommes, animaux, et végétaux. La catastrophe humaine qu'est le règne des Duvalier ne prend de son ampleur que parce que le poète l'élargit aux éléments naturels, les « arbres témoins » et les « lacs cimetières » (51). Parce qu'il évite de nommer explicitement, et par là de blâmer directement, il étend l'opprobre à l'infini : les hommes oublieront peut-être mais les lacs porteront toujours témoignage de l'outrage contre tout un peuple.

Des Rosiers, pour sa part, utilise l'hyperbole pour clamer son horreur du carnage haïtien :

> îles sous le sang
> nul n'a d'yeux pour mesurer
> les affres . . . d'un peuple (*Savanes* 46)

Lui nomme explicitement les tontons-macoutes, « qui ressemblent / typiques aux images qu'on a d'eux / des Uzi des voix des calebasses » (*Savanes* 83) pour assurer à ses lecteurs que, la douleur étant immortelle, rien ne sera oublié. Le crime contre l'humanité est clairement noté par le « rejeton de rosier » qui se veut témoin oral de l'indicible :

> rejeton de rosier langue interdite ainsi exemptez-moi
> de la fulmination des injures morts oubliés il est bien
> connu qu'on vous égorgeait comme des ennemis vaincus
> (*Vétiver* 30)

Bassolé-Ouédraogo, enfin, fustige son continent d'origine :

> La vie de frères et soeurs bradée
> Continent à vendre au plus offrant
> Le prix du sang est lourd à porter
> Quelle gloire à être le bourreau de ses frères et soeurs?
> . . . Continent pillé et saccagé
> Saccagé par les messies menteurs
> Messies menteurs qui ont érigé l'impunité en mode de
> gouvernance (*Vétiver* 51).

En reprenant, tel un écho, les syntagmes-clés de sa diatribe (le continent saccagé d'une part, les messies menteurs de l'autre), Bassolé-Ouédraogo se dresse, comme ses ancêtres, en griotte, en porte-parole pour son peuple. Dans des mots acérés et sans pitié, elle accuse sans hésitation. Ni hyperbole ni litote chez elle, mais tout aussi parlante que les procédés utilisés par les poètes précédents, la simple vérité telle qu'elle la perçoit, dans une langue qui fouette par sa franchise.

Outre cet espace privilégié qui offre la possibilité de remettre en question jusqu'aux valeurs mêmes du lieu d'origine des auteurs, diverses particularités d'écriture se retrouvent dans leur poétique des interstices. Citons, entre autres, la pluralité du « je », dans une construction narrative qui met en valeur l'instabilité identitaire. Relié à ce procédé stylistique, et illustrant la même identité-caméléon, le glissement subtil des pronoms personnels ou des déictiques : du « nous » au « eux », du là-bas-chez nous à l'ici-chez nous, par exemple, dans un va-et-vient de signifiants, symptomatique de la traversée des cultures en présence chez l'écrivain.

Nous ne pouvons parler des caractéristiques de l'écriture des interstices sans mentionner la langue, véhicule de la culture. Le choix d'écrire dans sa langue maternelle ou dans la langue d'accueil, de s'approprier une langue

d'accueil plutôt que l'autre s'il y en a plus d'une, ou de décider, dès le départ, de privilégier une langue hybride, provient justement de cet entre-deux, creuset de l'écriture diasporale.[5] Daniel Sibony explique : « Appliqué à l'entre-deux-langues, cela signifie : il y a pour chacun d'autres langues que ces deux langues entre lesquelles il se débat; et la langue-Une originaire a éclaté en dix mille langues à ajointer bord à bord » (*Entre-deux* 17). La pluralité de l'écriture et les liens transversaux entre les modes d'expression propres à l'immigrant constituent la représentation consciente, signifiée graphiquement, du cheminement esthétique de l'écrivain qui, de par son parcours, s'adresse toujours à des lecteurs divers, souvent spatialement dispersés :

> Cette littérature écrit toujours du transitoire, de la dualité, de la double appartenance, de l'inquiétante étrangeté, de la pluralité, de l'hybridité. Elle est, au-delà de la multiplicité des écritures et de la diversité du travail formel, interrogation sur les stéréotypes, sur les évidences, sur les mythes de la fondation. . . . (Robin 368)

En même temps, l'écrivain venu d'ailleurs, et dont la géographie est inversée—autre forme de représentation d'un espace encore étrange(r) comme, par exemple, le fait de considérer la neige « exotique »—finit, au fil des années, par habiter son nouvel espace et lire le paysage ou la culture comme un (quasi)natif.[6] En effet, rassembler ces oeuvres sous le simple dénominateur commun de l'ailleurs serait se méprendre sur l'importance du pays d'accueil dans l'énonciation du remembrement mémoriel du pays perdu aussi bien que du questionnement, voire de l'accusation—sous-jacente ou explicite—rendue possible par l'éloignement géographique. Comme l'explique Régine Robin, « [l]'écriture permet aux identités de se jouer et de se déjouer les unes les autres. Elle constitue des frontières poreuses, traversées par les rêves. Elle détotalise, elle institue un droit au fantasme d'être autre, d'ailleurs, par-delà, en deçà, en devenir » (373).

Cette pollinisation progressive par la culture d'accueil peut s'avérer mutuelle, créant des « transversal lines of interconnectedness » (Braidotti 127) avec les écrivains de souche. Ainsi, le recueil de nouvelles *Les Aurores montréales* de l'écrivaine québécoise Monique Proulx reprend l'effet mosaïque de l'écriture migrante pour mettre en scène un Montréal imaginé à travers la sensibilité de l'immigrant. La série de courtes nouvelles, dont chaque section est introduite par une lettre à un(e) écrivain(e) venu(e) d'ailleurs, valorise la ville comme lieu d'échange et d'enrichissement mutuel. Pour sa part, Lise Gaboury-Diallo, de Saint-Boniface, se laisse imprégner par ses attaches avec le Sénégal :

j'entends
les voix caverneuses
de ces poètes musiciens
griots jadis ensevelis
aux creux de ces grands arbres
baobabs sacrés
ils me parlent mais je ne comprends pas . . . (*Poste restante* 20)

Les draps blancs qui battent au vent scandent l'Afrique, la sensibilité de la langue-voyage[7] permet à la poésie d'habiter la distance entre les langues pour y faire transparaître la même nostalgie du lieu que ressentirait un exilé :

je le veux ce petit sachet
de jujubes
baies orangées du Sénégal
que je croque
le suc pur
des fruits poudreux et inconstants
dans ma mémoire nostalgique
j'ajoute un noyau
l'insère dans la chair pulpeuse
hors de l'atteinte du temps . . . (25)

L'écrivaine, avec sa « conscience métissée / à fleur d'âme », choisit le langage des sens et des émotions pour chanter « les demi-teintes de deux univers / l'envers et l'endroit / sur un seul globe » et « relay[er] les images / sauvées puis imprimées / sur la paume et sous les cils / de l'oeil du coeur ouvert . . . » (57). Ainsi rejoint-elle ceux dont elle ne comprend pas nécessairement tous les mots-dits.

Dans de tels cas, les écrivaines « de souche » transcendent de la même manière les frontières de l'écriture liée au territoire pour rejoindre « le vaste espace où recollements et intégrations doivent être souples, mobiles, riches de jeux différentiels » (Sibony 13).

L'espace *entre* ou « le village sans mur(s) »[8]

Il en ressort, comme l'expliquent Moisan et Hildebrand, que les écrivains sans frontière(s), même dans leur propre pays, sont les chantres d'une « traversée des cultures en présence, les deux à la fois, une altérité culturelle vécue comme un passage dans et à travers l'autre » (17). Des écrivains *trans*-culturels, *trans*-linguistiques, *trans*-esthétiques, hors norme, hors frontière, refusant toute étiquette, y compris celle de la migrance qui, comme sa racine l'indique, ne peut être ni stable ni figée.

Je pourrais dire, avec Édouard Glissant, que cette littérature fait montre

d'une poétique de la relation rendue possible par un glissement dans la structure du sujet (par opposition à l'objet), d'un devenir rhizomatique qui fait abstraction de concepts tels l'origine, la pureté ou l'homogénéité. Éthique du divers qui aide à accepter et à respecter l'opacité de l'autre, tout en développant des formes de connaissance du soi qui permettent de transcender la différence pour constituer un espace de rencontre et d'échange, une confluence porteuse de sens. Ce serait une façon d'éviter la ghéttoïsation de l'écriture migrante par la doxa littéraire des pays d'accueil, marginalisation qui exigerait une constante thématique et/ou structurale pour la valoriser, et qui pourrait entraîner une éventuelle sclérose de l'écriture. Car il me semble que le propre de cette écriture, c'est justement le dynamisme de ses structures, sa multiplicité intrinsèque, son refus de se laisser enfermer dans des catégories ou classifications.

Pour cette raison, il faudrait arriver à penser, non en termes d'État-nation et de cultures périphériques, de souche et de diaspora, mais en termes de multiples pôles de pouvoir qui exerceraient un mouvement bilatéral d'attraction et de répulsion, tension à l'intérieur de laquelle la culture se transformerait sans cesse. Comme l'explique Rosi Braidotti dans *Transpositions : On Nomadic Ethics*, « [t]he "others" are not merely the markers of exclusion or marginality, but also the sites of powerful and alternative subject-positions » (44). Cette approche permettrait de lutter contre la tendance à une construction factice de sujets nationaux (ou d'une culture, d'une littérature) homogènes.

De la même façon, Françoise Lionnet parle d' « interconnectedness of different traditions » (4) lorsqu'elle postule que la relation entre identité et différence développe, entre les deux, une tension productrice de sens. Si l'on en croit Éric Landowski, il faut garder une distance minimale envers l'autre et « surtout vis-à-vis *de soi-même* » pour « faire vivre, entre Soi et l'Autre, une relation effective de Sujet à Sujet » (38). L'a-territorialité implicite dans le scénario ci-dessus permettrait de « démontrer que l'on peut "appartenir" à un espace géographique commun tout en l'interprétant à partir de divers sensibilités et imaginaires » (Salvatore 20). Idée qu'Hédi Bouraoui traduit par « une mise au pluriel des zones de création puisque le lieu scriptural de l'actuel est de plus en plus localisé dans les interstices des cultures, . . . dans les chevauchements des différences »[9] (53).

Qu'on l'appelle le vide médian, comme le fait François Cheng de l'Académie française, la transpoïétique de la béance, comme Hédi Bouraoui, le *third space*, avec Homi Bhabha, ou le Tout-monde selon Glissant l'interstice

devient riche de possibilités. Ici se tissent interrelations et solidarités, ici se propagent rhizomes, ici s'installe un « discours transnational, qui repose souvent sur l'autorité morale de réfugiés, d'exilés et autres personnes déplacées » (Appadurai 59). Par là, j'entends une attitude proche de celle que préconisent Glissant ou Braidotti, à savoir, une valorisation de la subjectivité du nomade :

> Nomadic subjectivity defined in terms of processes of becoming . . . a structural shift in parameters and boundaries of subjectivity, making subjects into interconnected entities: intelligent matter activated by shared affectivity. (Braidotti 11)

Cette approche implique un glissement du sujet, de son positionnement privilégié—d'écrivain « de souche », par exemple—à une approche plus égalitaire, moins hierarchique. Pourrions-nous concevoir un espace littéraire qui privilégierait le multiple dans son essence, le développement rhizomatique de pôles d'influence et de création? Pourrions-nous trouver un moyen, pour les groupes déterritorialisés, comme pour ceux du centre, de penser leur voie dans un imaginaire à influences multiples, pour former des solidarités translocales, trans- (ou inter-)frontalières? Il est déjà vrai que « la littérature d'aujourd'hui ne désigne pas seulement un territoire, un pays, un peuple mais aussi toutes les tendances, tous les mouvements, tous les apports qui les définissent » (Moisan et Hildebrand 324). Même s'il fait partie de la majorité dans un certain espace, l'écrivain doit se rendre compte qu'il fait partie—une toute petite partie—d'un ensemble, sans en être la totalité ou le porte-parole. Il faudrait se remettre à l'esprit cette belle analyse de Roland Barthes :

> La littérature prend en charge beaucoup de savoirs. . . . [V]éritablement encyclopédique, la littérature fait tourner les savoirs, elle n'en fixe, elle n'en fétichise aucun; elle leur donne une place indirecte, et cet indirect est précieux. D'une part, il permet de désigner des savoirs possibles—insoupçonnés, inaccomplis . . . la littérature ne dit pas qu'elle sait quelque chose, mais qu'elle sait *de* quelque chose; ou mieux: qu'elle en sait quelque chose—qu'elle en sait long sur les hommes. (Barthes 17–18)

Aussi la littérature de tout espace géographique regroupe-t-elle beaucoup de savoirs, y compris les savoirs possibles, sommes totales de la vie. Il serait dommage—voire impardonnable—de jouer au dénominateur commun et de voir disparaître le potentiel.

Nous avons tendance, dans les discussions universitaires de ce genre, d'oublier que l'être humain est aussi une créature parmi d'autres, qu'il vit dans un microcosme naturel aussi bien que culturel. Sur le même format interrelationnel, Rosi Braidotti souligne le rôle primordial de la biodiversité dans la préservation de la planète. Il me semble que ses propos sur la poétique du

nomadisme complètent les constatations d'Appadurai et nous permettraient d'explorer une nouvelle formulation—plus ouverte—des oeuvres littéraires francographiques du Canada (ou du monde). Il devrait être possible de faire ressortir les liens qui relient les écrivains francophones entre eux, de parler de convergences et de divergences, sans pour autant cloîtrer l'écriture dans des compartiments difficiles à décloisonner. Nous arriverions peut-être ainsi à créer une symbiose productrice au sein d'une communauté déjà transnationale et transculturelle. Que le nomadisme de la littérature d'aujourd'hui, s'inspirant des pratiques de représentation des écrivains qui « abordent le mouvement complexe des appropriations imaginatives impliquées dans la construction de l'action dans un monde déterritorialisé » (Appadurai 108), arrive à enfin transcender les dénominations dont l'affuble la doxa. Dans le même mouvement d'attraction et de répulsion, d'appropriation et d'ouverture, l'imagination trouve de nouvelles perspectives. Cela étant dit, je suis tout à fait consciente du paradoxe de ce que je propose ici à la suite des critiques et penseurs mentionnés ci-dessus. Je conviens que tant que le concept d'une identité fixe/immuable perdurera dans le cadre sociétal, la tentation sera de toujours qualifier cette littérature qui transgresse les frontières normatives.

Quoiqu'il en soit, il me semble qu'au delà de nos différences ou des liens qui nous rapprochent, nous devons admettre avec Marco Micone que « [l]es grandes oeuvres littéraires . . . mettent à nu un noyau de désirs et d'angoisses, de rêves et de doutes, enfoui sous chacune de nos singularités. C'est parce que ces similitudes fondamentales entre les êtres humains existent qu'il est possible d'accepter les différences de chacun » (Micone 204–05). Unicité de l'espèce (humaine) qui nous permettra de maintenir la diversité littéraire canadienne, forte de ses assises, son système de valeurs et ses particularismes, mais forte aussi de son désir de se laisser traverser par les flux transversaux qui lui permettent de se développer constamment—l'*étant* prôné par Glissant. Le transculturel déjà à l'oeuvre dans la littérature francophographique (canadienne) du 21e siècle doit lui permettre de continuer à se décentrer pour mieux s'affirmer, dans un espace plus large et inclusif, sans qualificatif supplémentaire. Après tout, les écrivains se disent souvent « écrivain, tout simplement »[10] et tentent de toucher l'humanité prônée par Marco Micone, pour vouloir atteindre, avec Alejo Carpentier, « l'universel dans les entrailles du local ».[11] Faisons en sorte que la langue française de nos écrits nous lie au lieu de nous délier afin « [qu'e]n communiquant nous immigr[i]ons tous vers et dans les autres par la parole » (Bouraoui 66), tout en préservant nos particularités. Une façon, peut-être, de répondre à

cette question d'Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo, écrivaine sans frontière(s): « Comment te dire ce non-lieu que je suis? » (*Burkina Blues* 31).

NOTES

1 *Souchitude* : néologisme utilisé par Pamela Sing au colloque Nancy Huston en 2004 et par Eileen Lohka la même année dans « Albertitude » (publié en 2005 dans *Alberta, village sans mur[s]*) pour parler de la francophonie de souche et, par extension, de ses préoccupations culturelles et littéraires. L'*anti-souchitude* se réfèrerait à une littérature produite les écrivains francophones venant souvent d'ailleurs et dont l'écriture se révèle souvent a-territoriale.

2 Ceci dit, cette discussion s'élargira nécessairement, au fil de l'article, pour considérer la transgression de frontières linguistiques, thématiques, etc., qui découlent du flou spatial/territorial.

3 Paré lui-même est une preuve de l'effacement des caractéristiques—des signes—françaises de son état civil. Bien qu'il soit professeur titulaire à l'université anglophone Waterloo en Ontario, son nom est introuvable lorsqu'on entame une recherche sur le site de l'université: *No match found* pour Paré . . . mais "Pare" existe, ayant perdu son signe diacritique.

4 Homi Bhabha utilise le verbe anglais *to remember* dans le sens que nous concevons ici, de re-membrer, une activité dont il souligne la douloureuse difficulté : "a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (63).

5 Pour une plus ample discussion sur le sujet, voir l'article de Jérôme Ceccon de l'université d'Anvers sur les écrivains italo-québécois dans leur rapport à la langue et à la culture d'accueil.

6 Il faut cependant reconnaître que l'écrivain venu d'ailleurs porte sur son pays d'accueil un regard qui jouit du même recul que celui avec lequel il observe son pays d'origine; il préserve souvent la distance émotionnelle et culturelle d'être autre—ou qui lui est imposée par l'autre/l'hôte.

7 Selon Édouard Glissant qui dit que « le langage est un voyage » (*Tout-monde* 316).

8 Nous pensons au mot « village » dans le sens développé d'abord par Pamela Sing et repris dans l'anthologie *Alberta, village sans mur(s)*, Dansereau et al. (dir.).

9 C'est dans cette optique que nous parlons d'une littérature « postnationale » qui a transgressé les frontières territoriales, linguistiques ou esthétiques spécifiques—s'il se peut—à un État-nation. En effet, la littérature « québécoise » ou « canadienne », comme celle des États-Unis ou de la France, s'ouvre aux apports pluriels qui résultent de la globalisation. Elle devient une littérature *entre*, comme le lieu scriptural dont parle Bouraoui et dans lequel elle s'écrit.

10 Sultan, Patrick, *Ruptures et héritages : entretien avec Ananda Devi* (http://orees.concordia.ca/numero2/essai/Entretien7decembre.html), p. 3.

11 Cité par Ananda Devi dans une entrevue par Indes réunionnaises, p. 2.

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Neile Graham

Aged Black, Morning Green

—Edinburgh—

ever-shifting thin green light
black branches gnarled dark as centuries
(soot on sandstone) islands of green
close to where lives piled high
in the tenements of the Royal Mile
paralleled rail-lines in a hollow once lake

height shifts everywhere we climb
through the post-tenement tourist mill
into St. Giles' Thistle chapel
we almost fall inside (its warm wooden
nest) spend hours lining our sights
to catch the beasts cavorting there

fish & chips brown sauce we eat
in a park on stone steps from bags
smuggled into our room whatever's cheap
(we carry spoons and a knife)
battered sausage meat pies
more fish more chips gooseberry fool

our guidebook *Edinburgh's Antiquarian Bookshops* old pages dry our fingers
dust our noses make our bags so heavy
(no one has the *Carmina Gaedelica*)
we return home to unload before
we hit the streets again

at night we walk as streets go quiet
climb Calton Hill pass the younglings
(nothing there for us) the crowds
come out from the live *Trainspotting*
chat laugh elbow the sophisticate
theatrical turn into smoky pub-light

we return to our room count our
treasures' pages (spoon a fool)
in morning light an artist chalks
the sidewalk swirling colour while
black dust in the wind deviled
his corner peppered my face

explore the small dead-ends of closes
varied light on varied stone the store
and house above called Gladstone's Land
(its kitchen a heart a hearth) bedroom's
painted ceiling repeats in and out of beams
flowers dust dark flash of red flash of green

Total Recall

Marie-Célie Agnant; Zilpha Ellis, trans.
The Book of Emma. Insomniac $21.95

H. Nigel Thomas
Return to Arcadia. TSAR $20.95

Reviewed by Shelley Hulan

"I must tell you a few words about a time that is supposed to be in the past and that is called the old days." So begins the story that Emma, the young Caribbean protagonist of *The Book of Emma*, relates to Flore, the interpreter who translates her Creole French in a Montreal psychiatric hospital. Flore's task is to draw from the patient the details of her infant daughter's murder, but the trail of blood and suffering in Emma's narrative begins well before that tragedy and in places far from the hospital ward.

Western narrative practices often attempt to turn lost Eden, innocence, and childhood into reflective opportunities, with the remembering subject using the past to heal herself and perhaps her community. In *The Book of Emma* and *Return to Arcadia*, the protagonists do not have access to a few parts of the past and deliberately withhold others from their listeners. Yet missing events in these novels only emphasize the characters' predicament as bodily crucibles overflowing with personal, ancestral, and historical memory. Their pasts extend backwards to the horrors of the middle passage, twisting through the slavery and plantation years that mingled races and engendered hatreds that render the protagonist-narrators of these two texts literally strangers in their own skins.

For Emma, this interminable past is an inescapable hell that contaminates the entire present. It supplies no explanations and no chances for healing, only a dismal map of violation retraced on the bodies of every generation of women in her family. In her story, childbearing—her own, her mother's, and her grandmother's—supplies the controlling metaphor for a racism perpetuated by centuries of rape and exploitation. The blue-black colour of Emma's skin virtually guarantees her light-skinned mother's rejection the moment she comes into the world. That rejection, and the abuses her foremothers suffered, may offer a context for her baby's death. Understanding that context would require a comprehensive history of slavery, and Emma spends years trying to complete that gargantuan project in the form of a doctoral dissertation on the West Indies slave trade. What she finds in so doing is an endless global recurrence of the misery she experienced first-hand as a child, and that she had hoped higher education would help her escape.

Readers may not agree that Emma's narrative is as chaotic as Flore thinks it is. They may see it instead as much bigger than its teller, who is herself painfully conscious of its actual dimensions. *The Book of Emma* is an epic story in the abbreviated form of a novel that ultimately underlines not a grand sweep of history but the crushing burden of its repetitions.

That burden is no lighter in *Return to Arcadia*, which like *The Book of Emma* is set for significant periods in the precincts of a Montreal psychiatric ward. It opens with the partial return of the inmate narrator's memory; after the first few pages, the amnesia that has kept Joshua Éclair in the hospital has all but vanished. His main task is the interpretation of his experience, not its recovery. The colour of his skin determines his identity on his Caribbean island home as much as Emma's does hers, though in Joshua's case this is because he passes for white, a circumstance that ensures an upbringing and education denied his half-sister Bita. His inheritance is both racial—a white plantocrat is his biological father, a black fieldworker his birth mother—and material, as he eventually inherits his father's estate. The rare privileges that wealth brings him enhance rather than dilute his awareness of power as a force that implicates everyone, including him, in a seemingly endless perpetration of injustice and cruelty. If his status in the island's racial and economic hierarchies renders him immune to some taunts, it makes him horribly vulnerable to others.

Return to Arcadia is almost Dickensian in its emphasis on redemption, as Joshua, true to his surname, relives his past in a search for enlightenment. This is not to suggest that the resolutions with which the text ends neatly tie up all the narrative threads. Still, what surprises most about this contemporary novel is how extensive its resolution is. At times Joshua makes statements that would not be out of place in a Social Gospel novel. "Unaided," he observes at one point, "so few of us can be idealists; so few can shed their communal clothes"; at the same time, he longs to achieve a decolonized ideal of his own.

Homi Bhabha suggests that the relations between the traumas of a personal past and those that characterize world history in the modern era frequently underpin the appearance of the unhomely in postcolonial literatures. Emma and Joshua's unremitting awareness that so much violent history is indelibly inscribed in and on their bodies constantly dislocates them in the world even as their memories return them in mind and spirit to the places of their childhood. Not surprisingly, their bodies prove to be lingering sources of uncanny uncertainty in the stories they tell.

Forest Memoirs

Mike Apsey; with Ken Drushka and Matt Hughes
What's All This Got to do with the Price of 2 x 4's? U of Calgary P $34.95

Luanne Armstrong
Blue Valley: An Ecological Memoir. Maa $23.00

Reviewed by Laurie Ricou

Professional forester Mike Apsey's autobiography—as its title suggests—frames a history of evolving forest policy (especially in British Columbia) with a puckish practicality. Apsey combines the longer view—a memoir and apologia for Canada's "best on earth" forest management—with diverting anecdotes that often convey a bemused self-debunking. Three narratives intermingle. Primary is the story of Apsey's formulating, and then—as Deputy Minister of Forests in British Columbia (1978–1987)—implementing a whole new forest service. Secondary, but central to shaping many of the anecdotes, is Apsey's mantra that in order to be effective any competent policy maker must get out into the actual forest and find out for himself. Perhaps most interesting to a student of environment and literature is Apsey's storying of sustainable forest management—partly because the reader feels muted tension between Apsey's pro-business resisting of "green propaganda" and his occasional environmentalist boasts and concerns. He (presumably with the help of his co-authors) is at his best

describing sustainable forest management as a process: "Everything . . . from the mountains to the moss on my garden walk is an event. . . . A tree is a process." And, in culminating with the narrative proposition that "A forest is also an event," he moves engagingly to the shifting semantics of the word *forest* itself.

For Luanne Armstrong, forest "was all possibility" in which she could be "hidden and alone. . . ." About midway through *Blue Valley*, she describes such a solitary moment when as a young teenager she watches an insouciant muskrat crawl from a pond to sit on her shoe:

> It picked up a poplar leaf and stuffed it in its mouth bit by bit; chewing along the edges of the leaf until it was done. I could feel its thin warmth, its weight through my muddy sneaker. I tried not to breathe.

Such sensitive versions of nature as solace-and-retreat trope appear variously in this memoir. Engaging as they sometimes are, they are hardly "ecological," as the book's subtitle might imply, certainly not attentive to the intricate interdependence of soil and climate, insect, microbe, and plant that compose a habitat. Indeed, for most of this book, Armstrong's memoir is far less interested in *ecology* than it is in family dynamics. The emphasis and interest for much of the book is on being a young mother, on poverty, on mental breakdown, on the development of a writer (and reader), on walking and seeking refuge, on the gender politics of marriage and child rearing, on the author's evolving feminism. Until, that is, late in the life story, when her teaching at a First Nations college prompts the strongest—if still oblique—ecological awareness and discovery. So, *Blue Valley* seems to be less an "ecological memoir" than a *Bildungs*-memoir about a lifetime of growing and arriving at some ecological *beginning*. Love of place imbues this narrative, but for all its tributes to story-telling, Armstrong's storying has little of the weight or analytical heft of the place-writers—David James Duncan, William Kittredge, Thoreau, Gary Nabhan—whose names she evokes as inspiration and influence.

Core Storytelling

Jo-ann Archibald/Q'um Q'um Xiiem
Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit. U of British Columbia P $85.00

Peter Kulchyski
The Red Indians: An Episodic, Informal Collection of Tales from the History of Aboriginal People's Struggles in Canada. Arbeiter Ring $19.95

Reviewed by Madelaine Jacobs

The English language used in this review cannot fully translate the diverse knowledges of First Nations people; however, the value, integrity, and necessity of understanding First Nations systems of knowledge are increasingly recognized in primarily English-language educational forums. Histories of academic exploitation of indigenous persons and resources have engendered valid questions of access, use, and ownership. The potential for harm is so great that the inability to address these questions can be a barrier to education. Jo-ann Archibald/Q'um Q'um Xiiem's *Indigenous Storywork* works towards reconciling this epistemological alienation and welcomes students to the centre of the educational First Nations circle as she teaches the core principles of ethical "storywork." As she recounts her own journey, Archibald establishes that education occurs when learning becomes being. In his distinctive anti-capitalist writing style, Peter Kulchyski's *The Red Indians* also works against educational estrangement by providing students with a collection of core historical stories about Aboriginal peoples' relationships with the political development of Canada. With guidance rather than restriction, both Archibald and Kulchyski cultivate educational possibilities.

Archibald demonstrates the need for methodological principles for ethical story research. The combination of memorability, particularity, and portability of stories are part of what make them an effective educational medium. First Nations stories are the lived meaning of orally literate cultures: they are powerful. While First Nations stories are meant to be told, they belong to people entrusted with them and trained to ensure that they are told within the right contexts. First Nations stories require long-term connections between Elders and students that foster what Archibald describes as a Stó:lō basket of tools to hear, understand, and tell. Archibald chronicles her Elder-led education in the seven principles of a theoretical framework for storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. As Archibald holistically tells stories connected to her identity as a Stó:lō woman, she digs into the difficult issues of language, colonialism, resources, and interpersonal relationships with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Her discussion of orality, literacy, the concern of loss of stories and story content is especially strong because she follows the Elders' guidance in weighing each of these matters in light of practical considerations for current needs and healthy futures. The Elders themselves embody hope because their life stories are evidence of resistance and persistence, despite colonialism. A central goal of her work is to "make systematic change so that learning institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities appropriately recognize and provide compensation for the knowledge expertise of Elders and cultural teachers." Archibald's candid assessments of the ways in which she and others have sometimes ineptly used stories are impressive because they enrich the warning that stories can be told in destructive ways, by using them as teaching tools for how storywork might be done better.

Kulchyski acts out his theoretical position by writing a book without capitals, indexes, or academic referencing formats. If he refers to a publication, it is usually a recommendation by name and title only. In writing this way, Kulchyski separates his work from "other histories of canada," thereby performing the assertion "in the physical look of these words that history needs to be rethought." As a visual medium brought closer to an auditory experience, the stories told in *The Red Indians* are persuasive because they unapologetically rest on Kulchyski's authority. Kulchyski's episodes balance brevity with constructive detail and, taken together, cover a great deal of history and territory. By detailing the points of continuity that link these stories from early "contact" to the present day, Kulchyski advances his central argument that the First Nations peoples are foundational to the Canadian state.

Both Kulchyski's and Archibald's books draw the reader into core stories in distinctive ways. Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork* is not a rigid manual, if one could be written, for using First Nations stories in Canada. It is far better. Through her hard-work and experience Archibald has accomplished the extremely challenging task of gathering, evaluating, and passing on the gift of a basket of tools that anyone interested in engaging storywork can pick up and draw upon in their own transformative education. Kulchyski's book would be especially useful in a university-level course on Aboriginal issues because it is, in itself, a core story of Canada and a provocative tale that will incite further study. The works of Archibald and Kulchyski break through what can be the most daunting barrier of all: where to start.

Omnia vanitas

Nadine Bismuth
Les gens fidèles ne font pas les nouvelles. Boréal 13,95 $

Nadine Bismuth
Scrapbook. Boréal 15,95 $

Suzanne Jacob
Histoires de s'entendre. Boréal 16,95 $

Nancy Huston
L'espèce fabulatrice. Actes Sud/Leméac 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

Quelles histoires génèrent en nous le mot infidélité? Avec quel bagage, qu'il soit familial, personnel ou religieux, l'aborde-t-on? Quelles valeurs régissent notre interprétation des faits et comment se sont-elles ancrées en nous? Voilà des questions qui, vu leur tournure, auraient pu s'inscrire dans les essais de Jacob et Huston, et qui ont certainement alimenté la réflexion de Nadine Bismuth tant pour l'écriture de son recueil de nouvelles que pour celle de son roman, lesquels partagent ce même thème à la différence près que dans *Les gens fidèles ne font pas les nouvelles* il est examiné sous des angles divers.

On y parle certes du couple et des amants mais il y est également question de l'abandon dans les relations parents-enfants; du sentiment de devoir prendre parti pour la personne trahie; de pattern, lorsque d'une génération à l'autre des veillées de désamour et de rancoeur trouvent écho; de ces croyances qui trompent : l'une voyant une équation entre beauté et désir, l'autre pensant que son dévouement envers sa progéniture lui sera rendu; de l'écart entre les valeurs que l'on considère estimables et celles que l'on a; de la jalousie comme moyen d'attiser la flamme; de l'aigreur; de la crainte d'engagement; de l'envie, du désir de vengeance et de la solidarité entre laissées pour compte aussi.

Scrapbook pour sa part ne va pas aussi loin et pour tout dire déçoit. La multitude des liaisons, qu'elles soient attenantes au personnage principal, à son entourage ou qu'elles ne soient citées qu'à titre informatif, rend le sujet redondant. Laquelle redondance est accentuée par de nombreuses répétitions de lieux et de faits insignifiants.

Annie Brière, étudiante en littérature française à l'Université McGill et romancière, vit sur le Plateau aux crochets de son papou dentiste, est allergique aux cerises, fume, et quand une première peine d'amour l'avachit, elle mange des litres de crème glacée *Häagen-Dazs* en jouant à *Tetris*.

Un brin méprisante, ayant peu vécu, pleine de préjugés, mignonne mais sans plus, on imagine mal une telle mijaurée vouloir cerner l'âme humaine dans ses romans ou encore déclencher de grandes passions.

Considérant comme le drame de sa vie le fait qu'elle ait dû travailler comme réceptionniste à la clinique de son père suite aux difficultés financières de ce dernier; médisant des gens de son département et considérant qu'ils sont tous sans originalité sauf elle-même; profitant des ressources financières ainsi que des sentiments de qui s'y laisse prendre; Annie Brière est une caricature du jeune adulte contemporain, intrinsèquement nombriliste, dont on parle beaucoup mais que, fort heureusement, on croise peu. Une lecture idéale pour qui aime les *reality show* : du train-train quotidien, des déboires amoureux, une escapade parisienne et une aventure rocambolesque.

Les essais qui portent tous deux sur le fait que, comme le dit Jacob, « être est une activité de fiction », m'ont beaucoup plu. La voix d'*Histoires de s'entendre,* plus intime, cite à différents moments des expériences personnelles ou inventées et tente de démontrer comment on peut se rapprocher de cet interlocuteur avec qui l'on s'entretient en pensée : c'est-à-dire ce Même-Autre, cette présence que l'on s'invente d'instinct et qui porte les traces de la manière originale dont nous abordons le monde.

Le but est donc de l'isoler, cet interlocuteur, de manière à distinguer notre voix intérieure ainsi que les logiques narratives qui nous sont propres, la méthode que l'auteure préconise est celle de l'oreille dormante.

Entendons-nous bien, il n'y a point de prêchi-prêcha d'ordre spirituel ici. Il s'agit plutôt de reculer du centre de notre quant-à-soi, c'est-à-dire de ce que l'on tient pour la réalité et qui fait barrière à notre ouverture d'esprit et à notre créativité. Tel un pêcheur venant jeter sa ligne à l'eau sans trop savoir ce qu'il attrapera, l'oreille dormante nous permettra donc de développer la qualité de notre écoute puisque, contrairement à la raison, elle ne discrimine pas a priori les bonnes idées des mauvaises ou les observations sans valeur des autres.

À une époque où on est envahi par les discours médiatiques et où l'on tend à vouloir être universel, c'est-à-dire à n'être de nulle part, ce livre est aussi un plaidoyer pour l'unicité de l'homme.

Partant d'une prémisse selon laquelle le *Pourquoi* est intrinsèque à l'être humain, tout autant que la quête de « pain sensé », Huston nous exhorte à comprendre que, malgré le fait que nous ayons besoin de nos fabulations, il faudrait rester éclectique face à celles des autres, les problèmes commençant dès l'instant où les nôtres sont prises pour la réalité et les leurs pour de simples fables.

Le roman viendrait ici jouer un rôle éthique, en ce sens que l'on accepte plus aisément les différences de valeurs, de religion, et de moeurs d'un personnage que d'une personne qui vient nous confronter dans notre propre système de croyances. Par le biais de ce dernier, l'auteur peut donc parler plus librement qu'avec sa voix de citoyen et dans la multiplicité des textes lus, on peut à la fois nourrir notre imaginaire et cesser en tant que personne de se laisser drainer par ce type de discours que l'auteur nomme Arché-Texte, lequel se résume dans le fait de se grouper contre un autre, soit l'ennemi.

When the World Was New

George Blondin
Trail of the Spirit: The Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed. NeWest $24.95

Morgan Stafford O'Neal, ed.
Tales from Moccasin Avenue: An Anthology of Native Stories. Totem Pole $29.00

Reviewed by Keavy Martin

Trail of the Spirit: The Mysteries of Medicine Power Revealed is Dene elder George Blondin's third book; thirteen years in the writing, it follows in the footsteps of his 1990 *When the World Was New* and his 1997 *Yamoria the Lawmaker*. Medicine power is central to many of the elders' stories contained in these volumes, and Blondin has commented often on the difficulty of explaining it to his readers. His third book, therefore, is an "attempt at doing something no one else has ever done: to define medicine power."

This collection of historical narratives begins with the tale of Yamoria the Lawmaker, who instructed the people that "Elders are to tell stories about the past, everyday." In *Trail of the Spirit*, Blondin obeys this important directive: he works to ensure that the next generation of Dene youth will receive the teachings of their ancestors, and that outsiders will gain a sense of the systems of knowledge and belief that were in place long before Europeans came to the North.

Some readers might be interested in the text's ethnographic properties; others may enjoy it as an account of the extensive history of the Dene homeland. But in the words of Richard Van Camp ("Foreword"), Blondin should be recognized "as an author and lover of great Aboriginal literature." After all, *Trail of the Spirit* is chock full of incredible stories. There is the tale of the bloody feud between Yamagah and Eyonee Cho, and the way in which they eventually unite their families. There is Teleway, who

reincarnates in order to bring his murderer to justice. There is the ruthless Gotaregai, who begs to be put to death by drowning, but emerges ghost-like from the lake with his heart in his hand. There are epic duels, and there are miraculous healings; there are some who use their powers to help their people, and others who only bring trouble.

In 1926, Blondin tells us, a medicine-power war between Bahwar and Becharchy caused a devastating influenza epidemic to sweep through the region. Interestingly, the Dene are portrayed here as victims not of a cultural change imposed by outsiders, but of medicine people who misused their gift. For Blondin, this event marks the beginning of a decline in medicine power, and the end of the time "when the world was new."

At the beginning of *Trail of the Spirit*, Blondin describes his own failure to acquire medicine power from his grandfathers. Nonetheless, he has been able to do a great deal for his people, not only as a political leader, but here, through these stories. Skeptics do not concern him: "[i]t's alright if you find this hard to understand," he says. "It will become clearer as we go along." And when one of the great storytellers has taken thirteen years to share his final tales, readers would do well to listen carefully.

Tales from Moccasin Avenue: An Anthology of Native Stories, a collection of short fiction from Totem Pole Books, is Indigenous storytelling of a different—but related—kind. Edited by Morgan Stafford O'Neal, this anthology highlights the work of emerging Aboriginal writers, with one or two more experienced authors in the mix. While the title may conjure up any number of hokey collections of Native folktales, such as *Tales from the Wigwam* or *Tales from the Igloo*, it does so with a twist: it highlights the urban context (or avenues) in which so many Aboriginal writers are now working, and also their negotiation with signifiers of traditional culture (like moccasins).

Stafford O'Neal's introduction, rather than attempting to tie together the contributions to what he calls "an unapologetically eclectic mix," argues that the range of work included is indicative of the multifold forms that Aboriginal life and identity can take. Some of the stories document the trials of daily life in the city; others are set far outside of the realm of colonial influence. Readers should take particular note of Katherena Vermette's "Nortendgrrl"; this artistic portrait of a struggling woman flags Vermette as a young writer to watch. Sharron Proulx-Turner, meanwhile, weaves a unique and haunting narrative out of a series of recollections by her urban crow-narrator in "Young Crow-Caw Caught in Calgary." Morgan Stafford O'Neal's "The Ballad of Norma Jean One Horse" is a well-crafted and intense portrait of Native life on the streets of Vancouver. The collection also benefits from the presence of Native Lit superstar Richard Van Camp, whose spooky tale of motherly love ("Don't Forget This") displays his characteristic narrative brilliance, and of upcoming writer Niigonwedom (james sinclair), whose clever twist on the Anishnaabe origin story ("Water Scroll") marries a talent for storytelling with compelling social critique.

The other contributions vary widely, but each contains its moments of insight, strength, and fun. One gets the sense that the manuscript editors used a very light touch; indeed, Stafford O'Neal comments that "these pieces often pay little attention to the grammatical and idiomatic conventions of 'correct English.' This is a conscious decision to avoid the language of oppression…." This argument is compelling when the writers employ colloquial style, but is somewhat less convincing in instances of misplaced punctuation.

The introduction to *Tales from Moccasin Avenue* opens with a quote from Wendy Wickwire's book about Okanagan storyteller Harry Robinson: "In Harry's view he is one

of the last storytellers. 'I'm going to disappear,' he says, and there'll be no more telling stories." This nostalgic tone is echoed in George Blondin's book, as medicine power seems to be growing ever more scarce. Yet books like *Trail of the Spirit* and *Tales from Moccasin Avenue* provide an antidote to this sense of loss, as they demonstrate the way in which Indigenous stories continue to be remembered, retold, and created anew.

La mémoire blanche

Stéphanie Bolster; Daniel Canty, trans.
Pierre blanche : Poèmes d'Alice. Noroît 19,95 $

Marc André Brouillette
M'accompagne. Noroît 17,95 $

Michel Pleau
Arbres lumière. David 10,00 $

Compte rendu par Nelson Charest

Voici trois recueils qui, par des voies différentes, associent la blancheur à la mémoire. Contrairement à l'expression éprouvée, le blanc est ici synonyme d'une quête active du temps qui passe et dont le silence n'est pas la moindre des traces : silence des êtres disparus qui nous accompagnent (Bolster), silence des arbres qui ponctuent nos vies en marge de nos rythmes effrénés (Pleau), silence des poèmes accompagnateurs qui forcent la modestie (Brouillette). Chez les trois, la blancheur devient ce silence qui laisse perdurer la sensation du poème.

La prose de Brouillette marque ici une grande maîtrise, une attention précise aux coups de pinceau portés sur la toile, rares mais d'autant plus nécessaires. Brouillette pratique une *ekphrasis* des plus ambitieuses : son but est de nous faire voir les couleurs elles-mêmes, qui se tiennent pour ainsi dire toutes seules, sans l'alibi d'un prétexte qui les dénaturerait. Si le poète prend le relais de l'analogie pour fixer ses couleurs, il revient toujours à des symboles essentiels et universaux : le mauve et le crépuscule, le bleu et l'eau, le rouge et le regard, le blanc et l'origine. C'est peut-être la dernière partie, « L'or », qui est à la fois la plus imagée et la plus surprenante, jouant sur toutes les facettes du mot, d'ailleurs réactivé par la paronomase.

La version originale du recueil de Stéphanie Bolster, en anglais, s'est mérité le Prix du Gouverneur général en 1998. Le recueil, à mi-chemin entre la narration et l'album de photos, présente dans une suite d'instantanés les vies rêvée et réelle d'Alice Liddell, inspiratrice de l'*Alice au pays des merveilles* de Lewis Carroll. L'ensemble est divisé en trois parties et comprend plusieurs « Portraits » auxquels répondent les illustrations. Le recueil se complète d'une notice biographique sur Alice Liddell et sur ses rapports ambigus avec Lewis Carroll. Or tout se joue dans le clair-obscur de cette ambiguïté, avec cette Alice souvent peinte en double, mi-rêvée mi-réelle, d'une époque révolue mais aussi contemporaine, enfant candide mais aussi femme lucide. Le poème « Décès, 1934 », placé au centre du recueil, agit comme un vecteur, « pierre blanche » qui départage tous ces mondes doubles et marque le foyer d'où Bolster considère son héroïne. C'est dire toute la richesse d'une écriture à la fois dense et espacée, qui convoque tant la nature morte que l'allégorie, tant la candeur que l'équivoque, tant la pudeur que l'indiscrétion.

Le recueil de Michel Pleau est le deuxième à paraître dans la collection « Haïku » des éditions David. Il entremêle discrètement la notation précise des effets de lumière sur les arbres et les adresses à la dame, dans un bonheur inégal, la femme devenant prétexte à des remarques plus abruptes. L'ensemble est plutôt marqué par une quête patiente de la rencontre signifiante dans le paysage le plus simple et le plus banal, éveil de l'esprit qui pratique le retournement et voit d'un même coup l'endroit et l'envers des choses. On regrettera par contre l'avant-propos de Pierre Chatillon, qui limite la portée des poèmes plutôt que de les ouvrir à la multiplicité des lectures.

No Escape from the Past

Clare Bradford
Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature. Wilfrid Laurier UP $32.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

Clare Bradford's critical study of children's literature from the settler societies of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States "arises from . . . [her] conviction that indeed 'there is no escape' from the colonial past, that the past enters the present in the form of relations of power, systems of government, modes of representation and myths of national identity." Applying concepts from such canonical postcolonial critics as Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Homi K. Bhabha and Mary Louise Pratt, Bradford explores both representations of colonial and postcolonial contact zones, and of Indigenous people and cultures. Her study covers an impressive range of children's texts published over the last two decades, from picture books through adolescent novels (over 150 works are referenced in the Bibliography).

The title of this work, *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature*, effectively conveys both Bradford's intention of providing "unsettling" readings of texts which embrace conventional imperialist myths and tropes such as the Indigenous "ancient noble spirit" or the Native environmentalist, and her interest in works which challenge the assumptions and dominant discourses of settler societies—yet fails to identify the site of Bradford's study (the four settler colonies listed above), or the most distinctive features of the work: its focus on representations of Indigenous people in children's texts, and the breadth of the author's knowledge of works by Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal writers.

Bradford's award-winning 2001 work, *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children's Literature*, lays the groundwork for the comparative, more theoretical text I review here. While the previous study provides a chronological survey, analyzing discourses of religion, aboriginality, gender, and race in Australian children's literature, this work focuses on a sampling of contemporary texts from four settler colonies, and is organized into two broad sections: "'When Languages Collide': Resistance and Representation" and "Place and Postcolonial Significations." Significantly, Bradford opens the first section with a discussion of texts which resist colonial representations of Aboriginal people through narrative, illustration, humour, and satire, and follows this with a chapter on Indigenous texts and publishers. Only then, in a chapter entitled "White Imaginings," does she take on the perhaps-too-easy task of exposing the racist and imperialist subtexts of representations of Indigenous people in children's books from settler societies, including those written by apparently sensitive, non-racist, yet non-Indigenous writers. Shifting briefly from her focus on written and pictorial texts, Bradford provides a classic dissection of Steven Spielberg's 1982 Disney-animated film, *Pocahontas*, exploring subtly racist aspects of the work as well as its obviously stereotypical representations of Native American culture. A fourth chapter, "Telling the Past," considers the popular genre of historical children's fiction in which, Bradford concludes, "representational and narrative habits and patterns privileging Western over Indigenous perspectives are more entrenched" than any in any other genre.

In the second section of the text, "Place and Postcolonial Significations," Bradford shifts her focus slightly, moving from an analysis of textual representations of individuals and communities to a study of works which explore links between place and identity, which represent borders, boundaries, and cross-cultural

encounters through the trope of journeys, and which confront political issues of land appropriation and self-determination within Aboriginal communities. She argues convincingly for the effectiveness of allegorical texts in providing a counter-discourse to, and critique of, colonial history, and contrasts such works favourably to realist historical novels. Here, as elsewhere in Bradford's study, issues of class and gender remain a subtext. While this is understandable, given the necessary limitations of a broadly based work, the absence of a developed analysis of classist or gendered discourses remains noticeable.

For the most part, the comparative aspect of this work remains understated: Bradford suggests specific links between texts and national/cultural communities, but avoids (with a few exceptions) broad generalizations about the diverse settler societies her texts are drawn from. Perhaps most effective is her tactic of discussing what she describes as a "sampling" of texts chosen for their embodiment of discourses of colonialism and representations of Aboriginal people. Although at times one feels overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the works she cites, her concise summaries and the numerous accompanying illustrations from the children's texts she references help maintain a unity and focus within the study. Bradford's goal—to "to show how 'politics of knowledge' about colonization, relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and the projected futures of postcolonial societies inform contemporary children's books"—is largely achieved and *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* provides a significant contribution to the fields of First Nations/Aboriginal studies and comparative postcolonial studies, as well as to the development of theoretically grounded postcolonial analyses of children's literature.

Global Communities?

Diana Brydon and William D. Coleman, eds.
Renegotiating Community: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Global Contexts. U of British Columbia P $32.95

Stephen Henighan
A Report on the Afterlife of Culture. Biblioasis $24.95

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

When I was asked to write this review, I was surprised to see these two books paired. A tightly edited academic volume on the intersections between community, globalization, and autonomy seemed to be a far cry from the combative criticism and reviews of Stephen Henighan's new collection. As I read, however, I began to see parallels and points for comparison. Ultimately, I think that these books provide a healthy juxtaposition between scrupulously fair and deliberately provocative criticism.

Diana Brydon and William Coleman's *Renegotiating Community: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Global Contexts* issues from UBC Press' Globalization and Autonomy Series, which is linked to the Major Collaborative Research Initiative (through SSHRC) on the topics of globalization and autonomy, directed by Coleman. The Globalization and Autonomy MCRI is an absolutely massive undertaking, with nine currently planned volumes, as well as many other projects. It has been, since 2002, a major gathering ground for critics working on questions of globalization across the disciplines. *Renegotiating Community* needs to be seen within the larger arc of this project. It is a book that takes its focal topic, community, and places it into conversation with the other terms that govern the MCRI. The main interest of the book, Brydon and Coleman suggest in their introduction, is to examine "the extent to which community may be achievable or even desirable under current conditions of globalization." The contributors to the volume examine this

conundrum in a variety of contexts, from Native communities to those of forestry workers, Palestinian activists, transnational women's groups, and, in an intelligent critique by Stephen Slemon, to what he terms the "mountaineering community." The volume extends temporally from Jessica Schagerl's strong critique of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, founded in the early twentieth century, up to the present, and envisions questions of community into the future. Community, Brydon argues in the conclusion, and quoting the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, "has not yet been thought"; "community," she states, "is trying our thinking at this particular time in the West." As globalization calls for a rethinking and critique of, among other things, "the ideals of cosmopolitanism," the notions of community that we have inherited, this book argues, are in need of serious scrutiny.

Brydon further notes in her conclusion that "none of our chapters present globalization as uniformly destructive of communal values, nor do their authors associate community with lost or dying traditions from the past. Our view of modernity and its globalizing pressures finds more complex processes at work." While this even-handedness is certainly fair, *Renegotiating Community* seems to be occasionally limited by this desire for level-headed critique. While most articles do, in one way or another, invoke the concept of the "new" as characterizing the changes wrought by globalization, thereby implicitly arguing for a disjunction with the past, the authors, on the whole, do not follow these invocations with radical claims that would allow for straightforward arguments. Authors like Scott Prudham note that globalization brings with it "a new politics of place"; Amanda White evokes "the new language of rights" under globalization; and Michael Webb and Patricia T. Young invoke concordant "new forms of deterritorialized community." That the new can continue to be evoked—I think rightly—in the context of globalization suggests that directions for the global order can be proposed and that, indeed, many of the critics in this book have a stake and a say in where we are going. Nevertheless, and perhaps owing to the wide array of authors and disciplines represented both in the book and, more generally, in the MCRI (Brydon and Coleman note the level of compromise and negotiation that this sort of organizing involves), this volume stands out from some of the studies of globalization that provide more goal-oriented arguments. This book's conclusions tend to be quite open. This is, in many respects, a good thing, although it leaves this reviewer with a feeling of some uncertainty. That said, *Renegotiating Community* is a meticulously researched, well-composed, and brilliantly edited volume that should join those of scholars working in globalization. It is a serious consideration of what is at stake in today's conversations about community in the context of globalization and autonomy.

There is, conversely, no lack of strong arguments in Stephen Henighan's combative new book of essays *A Report on the Afterlife of Culture*. Henighan has made a career out of irritating Canada's literary establishment with his blistering criticisms of its inner workings and by attacking the global order that would efface local communities. Disliked by the convenors of the Giller Prize (whom he has attacked for their insider-ish and extra-literary nature) and Toronto's publishing scene, this new book by Henighan promises to be grounds for hot-under-the-collar debate. Reviewed early on in very harsh terms in *The Globe and Mail* by Nigel Beale (a review to which Henighan took pains to reply in a subsequent article, dismissing Beale's pose as that of "a crusty fellow"), this book seems to be delivering some of its potential as a follow-up to Henighan's controversial 2002 book *When Words Deny the World*.

The strongest writing in *A Report on the Afterlife of Culture* is to be found at the beginning and end of the book; nearly all of the pieces here have been published previously, so there is a sense that the middle of the book provides mostly a collected works. These pieces provide a demonstration of Henighan's vast reading of Canada's and the world's literatures and languages. But the opening and conclusion of the book push the debates further. Under globalization, Henighan posits, "we live in a world where our experience and our cultures, down to the spiritual depths of our lives, are commodities." Literature, Henighan argues, offers a possibility for "repelling technologized modernity," but this potential is being emptied out through the commercialization of cultural forms. Henighan's focal point for resistance is the local. While *When Words Deny the World* (a book that Henighan often invokes) was criticized in part for its seeming desire to return to the nation in response to globalization, *A Report on the Afterlife of Culture* provides a new way of considering the local in its closing pages: rather than focusing on the nation. "[L]et the local resonate," Henighan argues. "Listen to the rural local and the urban local and all their points of intersection. The vast changes that will overtake us once the oil and the water run out may mire us in local life. Now is the time to forge our aesthetic of the cosmopolitanism of our doorstep." This book both reiterates and furthers many of the debates that have made Henighan a noted figure in Canadian literary circles, and is a worthwhile read in this respect. While I do not always agree with the things that he says, I am profoundly glad that he says them, as he provides a level of argumentative bravado that is otherwise largely absent from recent Canadian letters.

Glorious Lives

Margaret Burgess, ed.
A Glorious and Terrible Life with You: Selected Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1932–1939. U of Toronto P $35.00

Reviewed by Linda Morra

The letters collected in *A Glorious and Terrible Life with You* cover the period of courtship and the first year of marriage of distinguished literary scholar, Northrop Frye, and his wife, Helen Kemp. Selected and edited by Margaret Burgess from the edition prepared by Robert D. Denham, the letters of Frye and Kemp are striking for showcasing their developing intimacy, the "meeting of minds" between two remarkable figures. Their shared intellectual pursuits, mutual respect, and deepening affection over the years bring to mind the Shakespearean sonnet, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments."

And impediments there were. Lack of economic support constantly strained their attempts to cross the country or the Atlantic to see each other. "I am getting a bit impatient," Frye declared in one letter, "with having the Atlantic Ocean sitting on all our Christmases." The seven-year period which the letters cover was one of virtually constant estrangement, hence the steady stream of correspondence. Kemp studied abroad in England at one point, for example, only to return shortly before Frye was to leave to study at Merton College, Oxford. Impatient with the years of waiting, they finally married a year before his final return from Oxford, after which time he assumed a post at Victoria College in the University of Toronto.

On the one hand, the letters are a fascinating view of dimensions of Frye's character—that of the young, burgeoning scholar before the heyday of his more renowned academic career. His letters are

ironic, playful, self-aware, and sometimes even deliciously vulgar. He was also absent-minded, initially sending Helen spiralling off into bouts of sadness because of his inattentiveness: "What *are* you doing?," she demanded in one letter. "I've been watching the postman like a hawk, for days, and there is no word from you."

However infrequent his letters may have initially been, as the years unfold, they gain in frequency and attentiveness, affection and admiration for Helen. Frye, at that stage, clearly depended on her emotional support. Even as he recognized his own intellectual prowess, he was also keenly aware of his vulnerability: "I am easily disheartened by failure, badly upset by slights, retiring and sensitive—a sissy, in short." His letters, by his own confession, come to show less of the "literary flirtation" as he becomes more "painfully conscious" of Kemp's absence, of his need of her.

On the other hand, the letters are also revealing of Kemp's solid intelligence and her artistic talent. Aside from some of her insightful remarks about the art world in Canada and abroad, there are also her drawings, including a remarkable reproduction of the map of the University of Toronto, exquisitely and humorously detailed; many of her letters also commence with small graphic images that provide further commentary upon her interactions with others or the events transpiring around her. At times, she was deferential about her position in relation to Frye—at one point offering, perhaps ironically (and nicely anticipating the current book), to "type out an expurgated edition of your letters for general circulation." But she was also aware that she too was "becoming an independent being, interesting in my own right"—no doubt a challenge issued to Frye, who in a previous letter declared that she was not in possession of "a brilliant mind." And yet it was with Kemp that he discussed a range of topics, including his developing thesis on William Blake (what was to be later published as *Fearful Symmetry*), political matters in Canada and abroad, art exhibits, and his love of music and music performances.

The letters thus also provide an engaging commentary on world-wide events, such as the Second World War and the Depression, during which time their relationship unfolded, and on significant Canadian figures, including poets Earle Birney and Douglas Le Pan; art historian and critic Eric Newton; Eric Brown, the director of the National Gallery and H.O. McCurry, a later director of the National Gallery; Martin Baldwin, director of the Art Gallery of Toronto; artist Charles Comfort; and Group of Seven member, Arthur Lismer, who, Kemp proclaims, "is, almost single-handed, doing more toward awakening an interest in art than any other man in Canada."

The letters that Burgess has judiciously selected thus provide a coherent narrative that serves as evidence of a loving, respectful relationship that develops into maturity, as they also prove to be a significant cultural document that traces Canada's growth as a nation.

Maternal Transformations

Shannon Cowan, Fiona Tinwei Lam, and Cathy Stonehouse, eds.
Double Lives: Writing and Motherhood. McGill-Queen's UP $22.95

Erika Gottlieb
Becoming My Mother's Daughter: A Story of Survival and Renewal. Wilfrid Laurier UP $24.95

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

In her preface to *Double Lives: Writing and Motherhood*, Marni Jackson observes how little has changed since she published *The Mother Zone* in 1992. Although a new generation of mothers seems even more determined "not to let motherhood

change their lives," this determination is futile "because, of course, having children transforms you." The twenty-four personal narratives that make up *Double Lives* suggest that women continue to be surprised by the difference between how they imagined the impact of mothering upon their writing and the reality of the experience. Surprised by motherhood, they write, often in fragments—because who has time?—about themselves, their children, and the world. The editors—Shannon Cowan, Fiona Tinwei Lam, and Cathy Stonehouse—assert that while there are many fictional and poetic explorations of mothering in Canadian literature, there has been little "personal narrative published in Canada on the subject." In filling this gap, their anthology provides "frontline" accounts by women who want/wanted to both mother and write. This notion of a battleground is predictive of what follows, for such women not only war against conventional social expectations; they also fight their own naïve expectations that having children will make no difference to their lives.

The organization of the collection strongly implies that a writer's perspective on writing/mothering is always in process: "There are days when . . . I know that I am not interested in motherhood." Some of the best essays draw attention to temporal questions: for example, the fragmentary nature of Jane Silcott's "Drafts 1–12 (Not Including 11)" and the evolving, self-reflective perspective of Susan Olding's "Mama's Voices." The authors are diverse, not only in their class background, sexual preference, and ethnicity, but also in their perspectives on how motherhood has affected their writing. But all agree that women who want to write and mother should be cautious in listening to other writers. Although many praise the insights of Tillie Olsen and Grace Paley, one contributor recalls how Olsen prefaces one section of *Silences* with the warning, "writers, don't read this." Several contributors recall the traumatizing impact when female artists and writers dismiss the possibility of women being both artists and mothers; many debate the ethics of writing about children even as they do so. A mother who writes is not identical to other female writers. Jane Austen may have managed cultural expectations by hiding her writing whenever anyone visited; Virginia Woolf may have argued for a room of one's own. Neither anticipated Cori Howard's dilemma when her infant children repeatedly interrupt her writing.

Like Howard, mothers who write may worry about how their children view their writing. In contrast, the central mother in Erika Gottlieb's *Becoming My Mother's Daughter: A Story of Survival and Renewal* shocks her daughter by writing that in the midst of World War II her daughters feel no fear. Reading this letter after her mother's death initiates the narrator's writing. The result is a delicate, poetic exploration of three generations of women in the context of a grieving daughter's attempt to understand her relationship to her mother and reclaim the truth of her childhood experience. Gottlieb, an artist and literary critic who died in 2007, initially constructs a fictional protagonist, Eva, who searches for answers to the questions raised by a mysterious dream her mother, Eliza, had just prior to her sudden death. Moving through circles and mazes, Eva ultimately finds the bridge to understanding through an old handbag that her sister was about to discard. Unlike her sister who suppresses any interest in memories of a painful childhood in Nazi-occupied Hungary, Eva views the handbag as a mysterious gift from the dead, for she associates it with her mother's attempts to protect her two daughters and escape deportation/death at the hands of the Nazis and the Arrow Cross.

In her foreword, Marlene Kadar suggests that the inheritance of traumatic suffering is Gottlieb's subject, but this statement

is undercut by the longest chapter, "The Tunnel, 1944–1945," in which Gottlieb switches from third person to first person in order to probe her childhood memories of hiding from the Nazis. There is no longer the pretense of fiction; the tunnel that Eva/Gottlieb must explore is her own. More afraid of separation from her mother than of anything else, she recognizes how this basic terror affects her memories. Regretting that she did not paint her mother's portrait while she was alive, Gottlieb paints a verbal "portrait in time," and realizes that in searching for her mother's portrait, she has been searching for herself. Ultimately there are no answers to some of her questions about mourning, memory, and forgiveness; despite this, *Becoming My Mother's Daughter* provides a valued contribution to autobiographical accounts of Jewish-Hungarian life in the twentieth century and a moving examination of how an adult woman comes to terms with her childhood expectation that her mother be omnipotent and omniscient.

Loving It and Losing It

Ivan E. Coyote
Bow Grip. Arsenal Pulp $19.95

Alan Cumyn
The Famished Lover. Goose Lane $32.95

Reviewed by Karen Crossley

Love: what's it all about? That's the common question that lies at the root of two wildly different novels—Ivan E. Coyote's *Bow Grip* and Alan Cumyn's *The Famished Lover.* Though set in different Canadian cities, at different times, and focusing on vastly different characters, the books are united by their shared interest in the journey of the fallible and failed lover who learns, through heartbreak, that there is some comfort to be had when one stops yearning for the impossible and learns to focus on the possibilities of life left unexplored.

Coyote's *Bow Grip*, a first novel, is set in the here and now, in and around Drumheller and Calgary, Alberta. A light and easy read, *Bow Grip* features a cast of likeable, quirky characters, including a sensitive mechanic, a suicidal drifter, a pair of lesbian lovers, a punk-rock cellist, an air crash survivor, and a single mom working two jobs and living out of a motel. The story follows a few days in the life of Joseph Cooper (the sensitive mechanic) as he takes some time off work to deal with the crises in his life, among which are unravelling the mystery of the suicidal drifter, facing his ex-wife in her new life with her new lover, and finding someone to teach him how to play the cello. The several threads of Joseph's story are linked together thematically as Coyote explores the various ways in which human beings strive to find harmony in life, to make music out of the cacophony of circumstance and fate. Just as Joseph must eventually learn how to properly grip a cello bow, so he must learn how to get a new grip on his life. It's a gentle, human story, both sweet and engaging, and if it doesn't leave its readers feeling as if we have discovered a new truth about life, we at least leave its pages with the realization that there are some truths in our lives we have probably been ignoring.

Cumyn's *The Famished Lover*, set largely in the period between the world wars (1929–1937) in and around Montreal, Quebec, is complicated where Coyote's novel is simple, but some of its themes are strikingly the same. *The Famished Lover* covers many years and many lands as it traces artist Ramsay Crome's journey from newlywed to unfaithful husband, with flashbacks into Ramsay's sufferings as a prisoner during the Great War—sufferings that, Cumyn seems to suggest, are largely responsible for the mess he has made of the rest of his life. A quiet man, prone to silence and secrets, Ramsay seems as baffled by life outside of the chaos of war as he was by the logic

of life lived inside the prison camp. But regardless of where he has been and what he has suffered, Ramsay, like Joseph, is one who seeks solace, and who finds at last that it may not lie in the past, as he thought, but in the future after all.

Where *Bow Grip* is organized around music and harmony, *The Famished Lover* is organized around the idea of hunger and satisfaction as it explores the attractions, the dangers, and the occasional necessity of a life lived outside of reality. Perhaps because of its large scope, or because its story is so much about Ramsay's physical, spiritual, and artistic starvation, none of the other characters of *The Famished Lover,* including Ramsay's wife and other lovers, real and imagined, have the depth or development of the Ramsay character, and as a result the remaining cast seem a little sketchy—their characters only roughed-in and ill-defined. But Cumyn has painted Ramsay in rich oils, creating a compelling portrait of suffering and hope, and if Ramsay and his friends are not as likeable a group as Joseph and his friends are, they are certainly no less human in their desire to have and to hold onto something—whatever "it" is.

A Feast of Literature and a Helping of Literary Criticism

Beryl Mildred Cryer; Chris Arnett, ed. *Two Houses Half-Buried in Sand: Oral Traditions of the Hul'q'umi'num' Coast Salish of Kuper Island and Vancouver Island.* Talonbooks $24.95

Janice Acoose, Lisa Brooks, Tol Foster, LeAnne Howe, Daniel Heath Justice, Philip Carroll Morgan, Kimberly Roppolo, Cheryl Suzack, Christopher B. Teuton, Sean Teuton, Robert Warrior, and Craig S. Womack *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective.* U of Oklahoma P US$24.95

Reviewed by Niigonwedom J. Sinclair

In 1993 Anishnaabe writer Kimberly Blaeser lamented dominant western literary approaches to Native literatures, calling for "a way to approach Native literature from an indigenous cultural context, a way to frame and enact a tribal-centered criticism." Now, fifteen years later, Blaeser's multifaceted vision is coming to fruition in two recently published texts.

The first, Beryl Cryer's *Two Houses Half-Buried in Sand: Oral Traditions of the Hul'q'umi'num' Coast Salish of Kuper Island and Vancouver Island*, is a seemingly odd place to find Indigenous-centred theories and ideas. The text is an ethnographic recording of sixty narratives from several Hul'q'umi'num' Coast Salish storytellers, collected by Cryer in the early stages of the Great Depression and published from January 1932 to March 1935 in Victoria, BC's, *Daily Colonist* Sunday magazine. Covering a wide range of topics, from place names to family trees, origin stories to ceremonial protocols, "*sxwi'em*" (sacred mythologies) to "*syuth*" (true histories), Cryer includes quoted stories and detailed, keen descriptions of peoples and places, lapsing into occasional (and not so surprising) myopic, stereotypical comments on her interview subjects and their stories.

But Cryer also includes elements not often found in ethnographic recordings. Multiple voices and conversations are included, as well as her informants' descriptions of important historical events that impacted their lives, such as a 1782 smallpox epidemic, intertribal wars and treaties, and devastating colonial laws. These all reveal important rhetorical contexts, interpretive lenses, and literary approaches both raw and available in these activist, political, and cultural stories.

Adding a well-researched introduction, archival compiler and editor Chris Arnett makes a compelling case that Cryer's dated commentaries are relative, reflective of her own limitations, and rhetorical pathos for her audience. For the most part, Arnett claims, Cryer profited minimally from the work, "possessed a genuine affection for the elders," and "carried their message, even if inadvertently, to the newcomers." While time and scholarship will tell if Arnett is correct, the many contributions here cannot be ignored. With her inclusion of contextual references, time- and community-based specificities, and political subjectivities, Cryer's collection is perfectly positioned for a Hul'q'umi'num' Coast Salish-centered critical lens to be theorized and historicized from the work.

Scholars can certainly learn from the groundbreaking standard set in *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, a text that will resonate and influence literary criticism of Native literatures for years to come. Asked to describe "an ethical Native literary criticism," these twelve leading Native critics have given the field much to consume, reflect upon, and debate about.

It would be impossible to capture the complexity of each contribution here, but certain pieces stand out. Craig Womack's introduction, "A Single Decade," is a brilliant connection between federal Indian policy, book-length approaches to Native literatures, and the rise of postmodern literary criticism. Womack argues that history, subjectivities, and philosophical productions are deeply interrelated. Later, in "Theorizing American Indian Experience," Womack continues this strand by suggesting that future Native literary theories be based in physical, emotional, and/or spiritual knowledge(s). Phil Morgan's "Who Shall Gainsay Our Decision?" is a dynamic exploration of literary criticism found in letters written by early nineteenth-century Choctaw writer James L. MacDonald, certainly a model for tribally-centred criticism. Cheryl Suzack's "Mapping Indigenous Feminism" is a profound claim that Native womanhood can be viewed as a historical space where gender, racial, and communal identities intersect, meet material realities, and demonstrate Native women's agencies.

Most interesting is how these critics demonstrate what Womack calls "a commitment to grounding literary theory in social practice," and remind us that traditional and today's Native literatures and oratures have continuing intellectual pertinence. For instance, provocative implications found in tribal literary concepts of "relationality" and "kinship" are suggested by Lisa Brooks and Daniel Heath Justice. Janice Acoose makes an impassioned argument for a *Nehiyawiwin-Métis* critical reading position that privileges language and memory. Intertribal and pantribal lenses, historically decried by critics as overly reductive, are defiantly suggested by Tol Foster and Kimberly Roppolo as important ways in which Native storytellers engage projects of nationhood. Native eroticism is suggested as a method of intellectual sovereignty by Robert Warrior, theoretical historical portraits are drawn by Christopher Teuton, and politics are centralized by Sean Teuton as a praxis of real-life Native intellectualism. And, in an all-too-rare display of creative and critical theory-making, LeAnne Howe's contribution is a refreshing reminder that story creation can be life-giving.

Some pieces are stronger than others, with some disappointingly resorting to problematic romanticizations of Indigenous cultures in rejectionist and reductivist modes (especially in binary opposition to hegemonic "western theories"). A bit of editorial sloppiness, such as typographical errors and an incomplete bibliography, detracts from the overall impact of the book. To be honest, though, the strengths of the book's contents far outweigh these errors.

Perhaps the strongest aspect of *Reasoning Together* comes in the second part of the name, *The Native Critics Collective.* This text is an incredible example of academic collaboration, with each contributor sharing co-authorship and co-editing duties (although Womack, Justice, and Christopher Teuton did take over many of the book's final editorial stages). This results in essays that quote generously from others' comments and contributions, as well as powerful reflections upon how critical inter-relationships (sometimes radically) alter approaches. Even critics that didn't make it in, including Blaeser, are included, making the text a powerful model of community creation and expression by Native academics. As seen in many texts that speak about, celebrate, and study Native communal approaches, this text actually engages this discourse in its very makeup, structure, and creation. Without question, *Reasoning Together* is sure to provoke more dialogue and bring more voices and "critical centres" to the literary feast, as the political, historical, and aesthetic beauty of Native literatures is collectively defined, theorized, and employed in the interests of Indigenous social movements and sovereignties.

Trait d'union

Daniel Danis
Le chant du Dire-Dire. Leméac 11,95 $

Wajdi Mouawad
Assoiffés. Leméac 10,95 $

Sébastien Harrisson
Floes et *D'Alaska: suite Nordique.* Dramaturges 17,95 $

Steve Laplante
Le Long de la Principale. Dramaturges 16,95 $

Suzanne Lebeau
Souliers de sable. Leméac 10,95 $

Compte rendu par Eric Paul Parent

Dans ses pièces, Daniel Danis crée un langage qui lui est propre : une « poésie du trait d'union ». Quand les mots se font trop petits, Danis les fusionne l'un à l'autre pour en tirer plus de sens. *Le chant du Dire-Dire* raconte la survie de quatre orphelins qui ont décidé de s'éduquer seuls, envers et contre tous. Les enfants télescopent les mots pour exprimer le sens caché et les sous-entendus dont est constitué le monde des adultes. Le langage de la pièce *Le chant du Dire-Dire* ressemble à la langue qu'on entend tous les jours, mais ce langage transmet mille fois plus de sens et d'émotion. La subtilité du texte de Danis se révèle plus facilement à la lecture qu'à l'écoute. Voir les mots juxtaposés éclaire les intentions de l'auteur et les contradictions qui habitent les personnages. *Le chant du Dire-Dire* est une longue phrase qu'on prononce en respirant à peine, mais si l'auteur manipule la plume avec brio, parfois le lecteur s'essouffle. Le récit de ces quatre enfants est si simple que nous nous demandons si la complexité du langage sert vraiment la pièce. Par contre, on imagine mal comment les quatre orphelins pourraient s'exprimer autrement que par cette poésie où les grossièretés accompagnent les envolées lyriques. On y entend un long cri d'un coeur adolescent.

C'est ce même genre de discours qui anime Murdoch, le personnage central de

l'intrigue d'*Assoiffés* de Wajdi Mouawad. Cette pièce de commande, écrite sans soucis de structure, brise le quatrième mur théâtral ou plutôt le fait reculer jusqu'à inclure le public à la scène. En alternant les discours poétiques et réalistes, Mouawad raconte la cause du suicide de Murdoch et pose des questions fondamentales, presque déroutantes : qu'est-ce que ça veut dire d'être vivant? qu'est-ce que ça veut dire « la réalité »? Comme l'eau qui emprunte les détours les plus tortueux pour atteindre la mer, *Assoiffés* suit ses personnages dans les méandres de leur imaginaire. Ce texte est court comme une vie et il révèle la soif de vivre, la soif d'une vérité, la soif d'unir le réel à l'imaginaire.

À ce sujet, *Floes* de Sébastien Harrisson est un texte touchant de cette vérité qui nous est révélée uniquement lorsque nous sommes confrontés à la mort. Deux amoureux bien réels portés par la glace et la poésie de leurs paroles divaguent entre la vie et la mort, entre le rêve et le délire. Ce testament presque chanté passe du français à l'anglais et du cri de vie au chant du cygne avec la même facilité avec laquelle la glace glisse sur l'eau. Dans sa pièce *D'Alaska*, Harrisson oppose les limites de la vie quotidienne à l'immensité de l'âme humaine. Ce récit captivant qui propose un duel entre Aujourd'hui, jeune homme en fugue, et Madame, vieille dame en peine d'amour, se lit comme une longue phrase sans point, mais ponctuée d'interrogations, d'exclamations, de traits d'union et d'idées laissées en suspend. Comme dans la vie, le temps file parfois vite dans *D'Alaska*, parfois lentement; un trésor qui nous coule entre les doigts.

À l'opposé des personnages de Harrisson, les personnages de *Le Long de la Principale* de Steve Laplante semblent trop blasés pour goûter à la vie qui leur échappe. *Lui* vient de voir son père disparaître dans le plancher, c'est-à-dire, mourir sans laisser de traces. *Le Long de la Principale* se lit comme un texte blanc où le lecteur projette tout le sens. Bien que le texte nous fasse sourire à quelques reprises, l'humour simpliste de l'auteur ne mène nulle part. Les jeux de mots produits par les noms des personnages semblent être la seule occasion où l'auteur ait tenté d'offrir autre chose qu'une structure linéaire dont le propos se limite à décrire la monotonie de la vie quotidienne à *St-Icitte*.

En revanche, Suzanne Lebeau crée un univers qui ressemble à une comptine d'enfant et qui défile au rythme des sabliers. *Souliers de sable* est destiné à un jeune public, mais le message d'espoir que ce texte communique peut toucher tous les gens qui s'acharnent à vouloir contrôler le passage du temps. À travers l'innocence de ses personnages, l'auteur nous explique qu'il faut tout apprendre, même à tomber. La douleur que l'on ressent face aux épreuves de la vie n'est pas une raison de s'enfermer, mais une indication que le véritable monde à découvrir se trouve à l'extérieur de notre personne. Au début de la pièce, les personnages de *Souliers de sable* sont prisonniers de leurs rêves et de leur enfance. Lors des dernières répliques, les enfants sont à cheval entre le monde de l'enfance et l'avenir. Ils doivent choisir, mais sans oublier. Ils doivent grandir, mais sans couper les liens qui les unissent à leur jeunesse.

Notorious Ruby and his Wrecking Crew

Ranj Dhaliwal

Daaku. New Star $21.00

Reviewed by Phinder Dulai

In an interview given shortly after the release of his first novel *Daaku*, Ranj Dhaliwal said the novel was written to raise awareness around the tragic statistics of young South Asian males being recruited to and dying in Vancouver's local drug trade. A fictitious slew of execution-style gang-related murders during the 1990s form the prevailing backdrop to *Daaku*: the title is a

Punjabi/Hindi and Urdu word for bandit.

There have been many kinds of daaku archetypes over the years in popular South Asian mythology. There are those daakus who are at times also known to be victims of their families and caste histories such as Phoolan Devi and certain villainous characters in Bollywood films; while other daakus played roles similar to Robin Hood, targeting the affluent and showing compassion to the poor.

Dhaliwal's *Daaku* does away with any form of textured story telling; instead we are served up a cold, mean, and brutal story of lost youth, extreme violence, murders, rampages in the 'burbs, midnight meetings in school parking lots, a night life filled with low level crooks, drug lords, traffickers, snorting party animals, bouncers, police, shootings, and a slew of young, affluent, attractive South Asian and Anglo Canadian women who are more than ready to slum it and party it down with the devil.

In *Daaku*, the feminine nickname of the novel's amoral protagonist Rubhinder Singh Pandher (Ruby for short) contrasts with the character's brawny masculinity and violent sensibility. Dhaliwal's novel narrates the short and explosive life of Ruby from low-level joy-riding car thief on the make to his attempts to control the cocaine trade in Vancouver; he is a troubled Icarus greedy to reach the highest point of power before being blasted from the sky. With him are what he calls his crews who work in provisional partnerships with other crews and gangs along the supply line and the leadership chain of crime. In *Daaku*, the quieter moments of the novel are found in the split second space between a knuckle and the crack of an opponent's nose; or as Ruby stares at the walls of juvenile prison as he awaits his trials and sentences—yes there are more than one.

As a moral backdrop, Ruby's Punjabi mother, who moves in and out of the story with ominous Punjabi sayings, falls short of becoming a robust character. She remains in the isolated and secluded shadows of their home as an archetypal matriarchal voice in a sad story—a story in which Ruby does not have a single anchor that could pull him back from the darkness and the "daaku" he is becoming.

Daaku works best when Dhaliwal's morally ambiguous protagonist maps the world of drugs and trafficking and shows how many groups benefit from it: biker gangs, Sikh militant leaders, temple leaders, crooked politicians, and Ruby's numerous crew members. What is missing in *Daaku* is a structural depth that could have highlighted in more subtle ways the circumstances of a person's life that might lead to desperation and crime. Dhaliwal spends less than one chapter on the reasons for Ruby's walk to the dark side. Still, the text suggests the problems of broken middle-class families, chauvinistic and violent husbands, boys being treated like princes at home, and ugly racial bullying, like that which occurs in Ruby's early years at school because of his long hair and the *patka ramaal* worn by him and most young Sikh boys.

When *Daaku* succeeds, Dhaliwal captures the workings of Ruby's mind: his power strategies, his quick-thinking mathematics, his high-handed people skills, and his overall ability to apply those qualities to the life of crime. Ironically, transposed to a non-criminal life in civil society, one might equate these skills with effective leadership, creativity, passion, loyalty, mentoring, and thinking long term.

Daaku is an amoral compass that leaves us in the no man's land of crime, inconsequential death, killers, and thugs who are all dressed up but ultimately have nowhere to go.

Holocaust Anonymous

Bernice Eisenstein
I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors. McClelland & Stewart $32.99

Reviewed by Janice Morris

"There is no Holocaust Anonymous to go to, no Ten-Commandment Step Program, no audience to stand before and state, 'Hello, everyone. I am addicted to the Holocaust. Today is my first day of being clean and I don't need the Holocaust anymore to feel like a worthy person.'" Such is the irreverent but revealing humour in Toronto-based writer and illustrator Bernice Eisenstein's illustrated memoir *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. Artfully unsentimental but poignant, dark yet whimsical, Eisenstein's is a deeply reflective and personal journey underwritten by an obsessive, but ultimately impossible, mission—that of the second generation to apprehend, articulate, and heal their parents' Holocaust traumas and in the process finally map for themselves the painfully silent terrain of memory and loss.

At once autobiography, biography, memoir, and therapeutic diary, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* chronicles Eisenstein's experiences growing up as the daughter of Ben and Regina, Polish natives who met in Auschwitz, married soon after Liberation, and eventually settled in Toronto's Kensington Market in the late 1940s. While her parents espouse immigrant ideals and resolve to move on, their household is freighted with the silence of unspoken remorse and disappointment, profoundly burdensome shaping forces that compel young Bernice to search compulsively for even the flimsiest of connections to her parents' tortured past. Obsessed with photographs, books, clothing, food, jewelry, trinkets, and even swastikas, she seeks endlessly—a "Jewish Sisyphus, pushing history and memory uphill"—to unlock her mother's neurotic fears and her father's unpredictable moods. Ben, a stylish but distant figure prone to bouts of rage, contents himself with his own obsessions—gambling, Westerns, and hockey. Their father-daughter relationship is particularly fraught with tension, epitomized by Ben's steadfast unwillingness to form attachments and Bernice's longing to confide in him. Regina, equally unsentimental but less detached, proves a surprisingly spirited character whose testimony for the Shoah Foundation reveals a proud, contemplative woman underneath the many layers of forced domesticity.

Most intriguing, though, is not Eisenstein's quest for parental attention (even as she wryly admits her childhood penchant for trading on the "cachet" of the Holocaust as a means of garnering sympathy and courting favour), but rather her navigation of parental *neglect*, as she delves into the insular world Ben and Regina shared with fellow Holocaust survivors known only as The Group. Immersed in a seemingly endless stream of domestic rituals and family gatherings—always with "an air of reunion"—Eisenstein remains paradoxically isolated, an emotionally barred outsider dispossessed of the shared victimship necessary for admittance into this distinctly closed community (Ben's brother is even married to Regina's sister). Her simultaneous love for and anger at her parents is palpable, at times bordering on self-absorption as she contemplates what it might have taken to draw her parents to her ("Is it funny enough, is it sad enough? Am I too whiny, too angry, too petulant? Boo hoo, poor little survivors' child.") Such frank meditations are reflected in Eisenstein's often tangential narrative style, a blending of adult and child personae, and perspectives that allows her to explore the past's influence in the present. As voices oscillate, so too does the text's prose, employing sketch-like vignettes that

move freely between English and Yiddish, some fully developed and integrated, some fragmentary and anecdotal. Unsurprisingly, Eisenstein's illustrative style is equally dualistic, at once playful and solemn. Drawings have a certain impressionistic, painterly luminosity that evoke a wistful intimacy and affection, even familiarity, while at times their water-coloured, skewed faces lack warmth and provoke emotional distance. Their presentation similarly lacks integration, with an often puzzling variety of sizes, shapes, layouts, positions, and methods—everything from panels that provide no structured order, to graphics that provide no illustration, to seemingly vague, impromptu images that provide the text's most unexpectedly tender moments.

In all, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is a decidedly non-traditional, non-linear account that may appear as patchy, inaccessible, or even awkward for some readers (moving crudely from concentration camps to party scenes), but which ultimately befits a life itself marked by dislocation and detachment, by a memory that "has not been mapped, fixed by coordinates of longitude and latitude." To be sure, Eisenstein's is a bittersweet tale: while the second generation avoided direct contact with the Holocaust and is thus blessed with a degree of forward movement—a tentative release signaled by her title's progressive past tense—so too has it been cursed to grieve for that which it cannot know, consigned merely to soothe what it cannot fully heal.

Reverberating Verse

John Ennis, Randall Maggs, and Stephanie McKenzie, eds.
The Echoing Years: An Anthology of Poetry from Canada and Ireland. WIT School of Humanities
$50.00

Reviewed by Katrin Urschel

In her amusing poem "Reading the Greats," Sinéad Morrissey reflects on her preference of "omnivorous *Completes*" to *Selected Poems*. Any cover-to-cover readers of this anthology will probably ponder this matter often by the time they arrive at Morrissey's poem. With about nine hundred poems by a total of 172 poets (85 from Ireland, 87 from Canada), *The Echoing Years* is a huge book with enormous variety but, as a consequence, only short excerpts from each contributor's oeuvre.

Most of the poems are from the past fifteen years and were written in a similar free-verse style. Thomas Kinsella's "Pause en Route" (1956) stands out because it is not only the oldest inclusion but is also one of very few that rhyme. With the other poems one can hardly tell whether they were written yesterday or in the eighties. The quality is very high throughout: "a compendium of excellence" as editor John Ennis puts it, and the contributors' biographies support this by listing numerous honours, including many Governor General's Awards and even one Nobel prize (Seamus Heaney's).

The Echoing Years is the culmination of a trilogy. While the first two anthologies solely focused on Ireland and Newfoundland and Labrador, and offered little by way of rationale, this one is much wider in scope. As for explanatory material, it contains a "Genesis of the Text" and various French, Irish and English notes on translation, an unfortunately rather weak and short sociological essay by Jonathan Culleton, "Irish Society and Immigration 1995–2006," as well as a dialogue piece in which the three editors

discuss their selections. I agree with Randall Maggs who notes that "one of the common themes linking the literature of our two countries is the complex network of issues arising out of the physical and psychological dislocation of people." Some of the poems by Native and immigrant writers are particularly evocative. Stephanie McKenzie emphasizes feminist issues and must be commended for ensuring that half of the included voices are female.

This anthology is notably multilingual: the majority of the poems are in English, but there many in French, some in translation, and several in Irish. Of the poets who write in Irish, most provide their own translations into English. Liam Ó Muirthile is the only Irish poet who is not translated at all, and Biddy Jenkinson's work is curiously translated into French because, as the bio note says, Jenkinson objects to English translations. Certain frustrations of writing in a minority language echo across the Atlantic. Yves Préfontaine writes about "la gerçure énorme d'un pays sans parole" and Louis de Paor translates from his originally Irish poem "Gaeilgeoir"':

> Every awful word
> of this dumb language
> is a blank landmine
> under the careless earth,
> exploding harmlessly
> beneath our bare feet.

The Irish section includes beautiful poetry from Eastern European poets who have few direct connections with Ireland but whose work had been translated by Irish poets for a translation series commissioned for Cork's 2005 European Capital of Culture celebrations. Of course this provokes the old question— not unfamiliar to Canadians—of who and what belongs to the literature of one country. Sadly, due to the inclusion of so much poetry in so many different languages, there are editorial inconsistencies in the contributors' biographies that may frustrate the non-French or non-Irish speaking reader.

Some of the best known established poets from both sides are assembled—George Elliott Clarke, Leonard Cohen, Lorna Crozier, Eavan Boland, Michael Longley, Medbh McGuckian—but I was equally impressed with some of the newer voices such as Canada's Sue Sinclair and Karen Solie, and Ireland's Alan Gillis and Billy Ramsell. Since this anthology is such a canonical effort, however, I wonder about the absence of Margaret Atwood, George Bowering, and Paul Muldoon (who appears only as Nuala N' Dhomhnaill's translator). By the same token, where are the Irish-Canadian overlaps? Phillip Crumble, a young Irish poet living in Canada, is in the Ireland section, but George McWhirter is notably absent from the Canadian one.

Questions always remain after reading anthologies (why O'Donoghue's *Sir Gawain* translations? why Wershler-Henry's poetry criticism?), but *The Echoing Years* is still a worthwhile collection of some of the best contemporary poetry and can help deciding whose *Completes* to aim for. Margaret Avison, whose "Balancing Out" contains the title for the anthology, will be my start.

Literary Exchanges

Jane Everett, ed.
In Translation: The Gabrielle Roy-Joyce Marshall Correspondence. U of Toronto P $53.00

Daniel Poliquin; Donald Winkler, trans.
A Secret Between Us. Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Reviewed by Louise Ladouceur

Jane Everett has edited a selection of 208 letters that Gabrielle Roy and Joyce Marshall exchanged between 1959 and 1980. Gabrielle Roy was one of the most prominent French Canadian authors of the twentieth century, and Joyce Marshall, an excellent writer herself, was one of Roy's English translators. Instead of analysing this

correspondence, Everett proposes to read them as "thought-provoking glimpses of [their] partnership, as well as of the creative process and the writerly life more generally, with its mix of day-to-day concerns and aesthetic preoccupation." The correspondence is written in English, except for a few sentences in French in Roy's letters and the odd salutation. It is arranged in chronological order, with numerous explanatory notes providing valuable information on the events and people discussed in the letters. In these footnotes, we can appreciate the extensive research Everett has undertaken and her knowledge of the subject.

As stated in Everett's introduction, the correspondence between Roy and Marshall covers a range of topics from the personal to the universal, but they each remain discreet about their most intimate relationships. "Many of the letters recall key moments of the social and political history of Quebec and Canada in the 1960's and 1970's: Expo 67; The October Crisis; changes to health insurance policies, affecting doctors such as Marcel Cabotte, Roy's husband; the rise to power of the Parti Québécois; language legislation; the 1980 referendum on Quebec sovereignty. Roy and Marshall also talk about personal professional concerns, both individual and shared. Though they mention from time to time the satisfactions, joys, and anguish that accompany their *métier*, they do not say much about their writing itself."

One of the self-reflexive aspects of the correspondence is the discussion of lexical, stylistic, and editorial problems encountered during the translation process. Being bilingual, as are most Francophones growing up in a minority setting, Roy would follow closely the translation of her novels and short stories, and discuss it at length with Marshall. Many passages in the letters concern the ways in which the nuances of language are shaped through translation and offer invaluable insight on what is often invisible work. As stated by Everett, it is clear that Gabrielle Roy thought very highly of Marshall's rendering of her prose, as she spoke of its clarity and smoothness. For Roy, a successful translation was a stylistic reconstitution of the original, and a good translator was one who paid particular attention to sentence rhythm and to the expressive values of the word that Roy considered most important in a sentence.

This intensive discussion was stimulating but exhausting for Marshall, especially since Roy's knowledge of English, although technically correct, was not always idiomatic. Eventually she decided to put translation aside and dedicate herself to her own writing. A number of footnotes in the Letters section refer to five appendices providing readers with the context necessary to understand references made by Marshall and Roy to the manuscripts they were working on, including "*Grandmother and the Doll*", *La rivière sans repos, Windflower, The Hidden Mountain,* and *Enchanted Summer*. The book also contains a bibliography of works by Roy and by Marshall, and an index.

The English translation of *La Kermesse* by Daniel Poliquin, *A Secret Between Us,* was nominated for the Giller Prize in 2007. It is a well-deserved honour for the eminent Franco-Ontarian writer and his "achingly moving and darkly funny" novel, as it is described on the back cover. Poliquin's incisive use of language can be fully appreciated in Donald Winkler's translation, which makes for a memorable read in English of one of Poliquin's finest books. His previous work includes the novels *Black Squirrel*, *Visions of Jude*, *The Straw Man*, and *In the Name of the Father: An Essay on Quebec Nationalism*, winner of the Shaughnessy Cohen Award for Political Writing.

Spanning the first half of the twentieth century, *A Secret Between Us* tells the story of Lusignan, a Francophone born in Ottawa, who sets off to the First World War with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light

Infantry after surviving an excruciating childhood and a career as journalist filled with tragicomic circumstances and a great sense of life's irony. His subsequent encounter with an aristocratic officer, Essiambre d'Argenteuil, proves to be a turning point in his life.

Returning from Europe a hollow man, Lusignan is obsessed with the memory of the officer, who was killed in the trenches, and decides to act upon information found in letters he has taken from him. These letters have been sent by D'Argenteuil's fiancée Amalia Driscoll, a woman held hostage to the moral standards and proprieties of high-society Ottawa. At the same time he pursues a relationship with Concorde, a young maid working in the Flats district of Ottawa, who will eventually become the manager of a brothel, and Father Mathurin, who longs for martyrdom in a foreign land.

Each character serves to reveal a piece of a mosaic depicting a specific era in Canadian society and history. It portrays the upper and lower classes, the French and the English, as well as the rural and the urban in a compelling narrative infused with a sense of irony that manages to make you smile through the most atrocious stories, all the while marvelling at mankind's indomitable inventiveness in the face of adversity.

Deficit Disorders

Roger Farr
Surplus. LINEbooks $16.00

Reg Johanson
Courage, My Love. LINEbooks $16.00

Natalie Simpson
accrete or crumble. LINEbooks $16.00

Marita Dachsel
All Things Said & Done. Caitlin $15.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

In their recent appeals for massive government loans and bailouts, banks and corporate industries have blamed their declining fortunes on "the economic crisis," as though they themselves were not only blameless but somehow outside of or apart from the economy *per se*, while their public justifications for these appeals have tended to underline how inextricable their well-being is from that of the economy at large. That is, they have been (or have chosen to be) blind to the fact that they themselves *are* the crisis.

Let the minutes of this board review acknowledge receipt of prior warnings from the Kootenay School of Economics (KSE) and its satellite think-tanks, however unattended such warnings have hitherto been by financial planners. Three slight volumes from the new imprint LINEbooks question, each in its own way, the formulation of exchange values (and the insidious disintegration of use value). Roger Farr's report *Surplus* looks askance at the so-called global market's tendencies

> To subsequently devalue and export, especially
> In respect to common property, to break down
> Into subjects, adjuncts and precarious antecedents
> As in "a climate of general cooperation," or "Network-centric security for Canada-US supply chains"

Almost any of the phrases used here could be strung in quotation marks ("in respect to"; "subjects"; and so on), tagged with prices. The signifiers are offering little return for our investments, or too much. *Surplus* (and especially its jigsaw conclusion, "Secure Channels") reads like a post-9/11 stock report in buzzwords. It offers site-specific research from the Ontario mines that provided the uranium needed for Japanese devastation as well as from the malls and Safeway stores where "capital's symptoms pose as capital's critiques." Having "discarded" thirteen Latin tags as possible epigraphs, Farr demonstrates both brand consciousness and paradox by choosing William Blake: "Enough! Or Too Much."

If the cutting up of one's own credit cards can be a poetic act, Reg Johanson is a poet *in extremis*: "nobody appreciates a class traitor any more." Whatever the implications of its title, *Courage, My Love* is a waspish catalogue of best-laid plans ("I want to join al-Qaeda, / to change it from within"), miseducation ("I had to *learn* to hate / the structure that made me"), and mock-nationalism ("Nothing comes between me and my CBC"). Here are lists and variations. Johanson, or someone who has stolen his identity, lists payday expenditures and concerts attended 1979–2001 (everything from Loverboy and Trooper to Blue Rodeo and Billy Bragg) and glares with a grim, experienced eye at arts funding, somewhat yellowed pop lyrics, Jean Chrétien's remembrances of his eminently, deservedly forgettable efforts in the Ministry of Indian Affairs—all incommodious commodities, declining values not named as such. This is a book of bathos:

> *Jane Rang began a new business called Jane's Reality.* "People are starving" coils around her throat transmitting the instrumental techniques of the culture, in particular its language, with its systems of meaning and logic and ways of categorizing experiences, yet she can still say "I love this job. It gives you a combination of practical skills and a strong theoretical foundation"

Jane can say that, but does she really *mean* it? A road not taken (Johanson's book isn't ultimately as polyvocal as it seems).

Just as there are jokes in *The Wall Street Journal* for the registered accountant, there are laughs in Farr and Johanson, but in both cases it must be said that the sensibility for them is little acquired, let alone adjusted or especially challenged, in the process of reading, but rather it just seems to come with the job. Something different occurs to the reader of Natalie Simpson's *accrete or crumble*, which is a kind of instruction guide turned inside out. "The noun is a creature of fortitude," Simpson avows. "Its lakes breathe darkly. and whole. lark. precipice, meal, dread. hacking, to." Sure enough, some investors are going to balk, if not panic, at such statements. Simpson's coda "Simple Matter" quotes Virginia Woolf, who says that the all-important attainment of rhythm prevents one from using "the wrong words." In search of "the aesthetic pulse," Simpson's book treads a course occasionally parallel to Stein's *How to Write*. So that we might above all *hear*

> how trees root soil out. how the leaves of
> oak trees are distinction.
> when squarely falls on the shoulders of
> massive armies overtake.
> the middle falls through.
>
> that this is a narrative. scrape of boot on
> concrete, squeal of heel
> in full.

Phonemes and morphemes are like stocks, like biosystems: they accrete or crumble. Simpson's structures are puzzlingly economical, the work of production rather than product of unacknowledged work.

And—amid this turmoil—whither the nervous middle class? Let them, o let them eat snacking cake. With strange affection Marita Dachsel's *All Things Said & Done* (from Caitlin Press) screens a slideshow of the customary preoccupations: "orthodontist-approved teeth," gardening ("when he'd rather / be watching *Antiques Roadshow*"), sex on road trips (where one seems the excuse for the other), wondering at the agelessness of flight attendants, mid-life self-surveys at the barbecue. "Mrs. Torrance" (the mousy wife played by mousy Shelley Duvall in *The Shining*) is a valediction sprung from the pages of *Good Housekeeping*:

> You were doomed from the beginning.
> Your son, at five, is smarter than you.
> Pink and gold is an awful combination.
> Your husband, Mrs. Torrance, your husband
> Has anger-management issues, and surely

You are aware that temperance
isn't working well for him:
he will sell his soul for a drink.

Perhaps the Dan Quayle who chastised *Murphy Brown* was a satirist; perhaps not. Either way, wagging one's finger means not having to get up from the couch, and Dachsel's poems live between the couch and the motel bed. Sometimes comes the wish "to drive, / drive away, / just go"; the persistent strain of small-town escapism punctuated by sighs of defeat and "unfortunate farts."

Perhaps by definition poetry is aware of itself as a crisis (of meaning, of language, of making), or perhaps it simply ought to be; but even this is not enough, or too much, to ask.

L'écho humain

Michèle Gagné
L'autre corps. Noroît 14,95 $

Agnès Riverin
Ce tremblement singulier. Noroît 15,95 $

Denise Desautels
L'oeil au ralenti. Noroît 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Michèle Gagné publiait récemment *L'autre corps*, son deuxième recueil, dans lequel elle écrit une poésie du désir où le corps occupe une place centrale. Entre l'origine et l'art, elle s'intéresse aux « fins de monde dressées dans le sang / dérobant le désir et l'attente ». Elle évoque la mémoire multiple, le va-et-vient de la vie, les blessures, les tremblements de vie, tout autant que l'absence de l'autre.

On note dans sa poésie la présence du fleuve, la volonté de surmonter les épreuves du quotidien. Dans sa marche langagière, on devine la souffrance occasionnée par la perte d'un enfant à naître, « le vide s'étendant partout, accompagnant la mère qui ne sait plus où aller parce que l'immensité ne suffit pas à l'avancée de la solitude ». Malgré tout, il y a au sein de sa poésie la présence du désir ainsi que l'envie de traverser la déception et la douleur; la volonté de « vouloir être de ce monde »; le besoin de murmurer amoureusement le corps de l'écrit, celui qui est proposé dans ce magnifique ouvrage.

À l'instar de Gagné, la poète et artiste en arts visuels Agnès Riverin s'intéresse au langage du corps. Elle en fait la matière première de son troisième recueil, intitulé *Ce tremblement singulier*, dans lequel les traces des expériences s'accumulent sur la peau d'une personne comme des bandelettes.

Riverin illustre son idée à l'aide de peintures dont des détails sont reproduits sur la quatrième de couverture et en ouverture du recueil, et que l'on peut observer sur son site Internet (agnesriverin.com). L'artiste y explique sa démarche en ces mots : « Mon travail récent s'inspire d'une séquence d'autoportraits photographiques. On y voit mon corps recouvert de bandelettes de coton ou de plastique. Étendu sur le sol, il se cambre, s'enroule et s'abandonne dans une suite de replis et d'extensions. La gestuelle s'inspire de la marée, de son flux et reflux . . . L'emballement du corps évoque, pour moi, tous ces filtres perceptifs dont il faut se libérer pour communiquer avec l'autre. »

Au long du recueil, le lecteur constate la présence de cet autre ainsi que la douleur brûlant la chair, le vide trop pesant et le besoin, parfois, de trouver quelqu'un avec qui il est possible de se laisser aller, de se laisser emporter, de s'ouvrir à l'inattendu, à ces moments qui finissent par transformer l'être; quelqu'un avec qui il est possible de se questionner et de partager sa vie, quelqu'un pour qui émerge le désir de combattre l'usure et « les ombres fuyantes que nos peurs inventent ».

La poésie de Riverin est un souffle d'espoir, où être habité par l'autre signifie aimer avec cette liberté de l'accueillir à tout moment, de prendre le large seul quand il le faut. Une poésie où il est possible de se relever de ses blessures.

Pour sa part, Denise Desautels publie avec *L'oeil au ralenti* un recueil de textes écrits entre 1989 et 2005 pour des projets de collaboration avec des concepteurs et des artistes. Comme le souligne Lise Lamarche, « dans ce recueil, Denise Desautels réclame l'entièreté de la page pour les mots en faisant le pari audacieux qu'ils sauront se tenir, ses mots, tout seuls. Au lecteur, à la lectrice de convoquer les images ».

Desautels réunit des textes touchants où elle aborde, entre autres, les thèmes de la création, du voyage, du dépaysement et de l'autre. Elle fait aussi référence aux petits riens du quotidien tout en évoluant dans une perpétuelle recherche de la beauté et de la vie, tout cela pour empêcher de retenir « l'écho humain sur les toiles ».

More About Anne

Irene Gammel
Looking for Anne: How Lucy Maud Montgomery Dreamed Up a Literary Classic. Key Porter $32.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

It might appear that little remains to be discovered about *Anne of Green Gables*, L.M. Montgomery's hundred-year-old literary classic. A perennial best-seller, it has for the past two decades received much scholarly attention in conferences, monographs, multi-authored volumes, and journal articles, which together attest to its double status as a much-loved, iconic story, and a finely wrought textual construct. One could be forgiven for thinking that everything has already been said. Yet Irene Gammel begins *Looking for Anne: How Lucy Maud Montgomery Dreamed Up a Literary Classic* with the counter-intuitive claim that despite all the popular and academic interest, we know surprisingly little about the novel's creation: how it came to be written, and what materials—biographical, cultural, and literary—Montgomery drew on for inspiration. Pursuing these sources with scholarly enthusiasm and a light narrative touch, Gammel has produced a readable and informative study that, despite dealing in part with familiar biographical evidence, offers fresh perspectives throughout and a number of original discoveries.

Searching for origins can be a dangerous endeavour, sometimes blinding a critic, in her determination to find a work's "essence," to the element of the incalculable. Gammel's discussion might have followed the recipe approach, in which a novel is blended from two parts pent-up anguish plus two parts prior reading, with a peck of spring sunshine after a long winter and a pinch of visual stimulation (the Nesbit photograph of the Chrysanthemum girl, framed and hung in Montgomery's den). Fortunately, Gammel is too intelligent a critic, and far too cognizant of the complexities of artistic first causes, to follow that path. Her book offers a multi-layered meditation on the "unique blend" of seasonal change, life experiences, moods, memories, emotional preoccupations, and literary influences that made its way into *Anne*; and for its elegant synthesis and subtle analysis of the forces that shaped the novel, the study is well worth reading. Confident in the abundance of visual and textual sources she has uncovered—and these are striking—Gammel shows us that the novel did not spring out of nothing; she finds solid evidence of direct influence, as for example in a 1905 article in the *Delineator* on Hans Christian Andersen, author of "The Snow Queen," to which the novel alludes when Anne renames the cherry tree outside her window. Gammel is aware, too, of the way that a lifetime of associations, fears, and fantasies is distilled in a powerful book.

To trace the novel's genealogy, Gammel has sifted through everything that is known about Montgomery's life, examining every experience and reference through the lens of *Anne* for possible correspondences—from family quarrels to girlhood loves, school rivalries, and contemporary cultural

practices—and also reconstructing, as precisely as possible, Montgomery's reading and environment. She shows us how, from the time she was an unhappy child in her grandparents' stern Presbyterian household to the year prior to writing *Anne*, Montgomery used the losses and regrets of her life, and her increasing fear of old age and dread of the irrecoverability of joy (she was thirty when she began *Anne*), to fuel her imaginative work, transforming loneliness and frustration into compensatory wish-fulfillment narratives in which children create families anew and discover kindred spirits. These powerful themes at the centre of *Anne* had already begun to be articulated by Montgomery in such magazine stories as "The Understanding of Sister Sara" (1905), a version of Anne's parents' courtship, and "The Running Away of Chester" (1903) about a freckled orphan boy desperate for a home. Painstaking research enabled Gammel to find the story behind *The Metropolitan Magazine*'s photograph of Evelyn Nesbit, which, with its quality of combined sensuality and innocence, summoned Anne before Montgomery's eyes at the same time that she was re-reading the journal of her time in Prince Albert, remembering her youthful passions, and brooding over the losses of her parents.

There is much of interest in Gammel's reconstruction of how Montgomery's Cavendish experiences, loves, and hates were (often comically or conservatively) transformed in her first novel; but what is perhaps most exciting for Montgomery scholars is her discovery of two source texts for the character of Anne: the first, "Charity Ann" in *Godey's Lady's Book* (to which Montgomery's grandmother subscribed), and the second, "Lucy Ann" in *Zion's Herald*, a Boston Methodist newspaper in which Montgomery published stories. Both are narratives of skinny, big-eyed orphans making homes for themselves with the aid of love and determination. Both contain phrases that are strikingly echoed in Montgomery's novel, and "Lucy Ann" is particularly significant for its focus on the "developing emotional bond between Lucy Ann and her adoptive mother, a middle-aged spinster." Montgomery never mentioned these precursors, and although there is, of course, no question of plagiarism—Gammel is clear that *Anne of Green Gables* is an entirely different order of story—their existence demonstrates something of the depth of Montgomery's borrowing and reshaping of the materials she found to hand. None of Gammel's research minimizes the inspired invention at the heart of Montgomery's novel; rather, it helps us think anew about its lasting achievement.

Capturing CanLit

Faye Hammill
Canadian Literature. Edinburgh UP US$32.00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Faye Hammill's *Canadian Literature* is part of the Edinburgh Critical Guides series, which aims to help readers navigate the confusing range of areas of study that are now called "English." I do not envy Hammill's task, which is to produce a book "primarily intended for undergraduate students and lecturers planning courses in Canadian literature." Such books will inevitably come under fire from specialist readers for including particular authors and excluding others, for dividing literary history into particular periods, or for focusing on particular themes to the exclusion of others. This is to say that Hammill's book is most likely not the one that you or I would have written; still, it makes a valiant attempt to render an extremely diverse and complicated field accessible to general readers, and for that it deserves considerable credit.

The book is divided into four broad themes: Ethnicity, Race, Colonisation; Wilderness, Cities, Regions; Desire; and

Histories and Stories. Each section includes five authors, with Hammill providing a general introduction to the topic and then several pages of discussion of each text. Selection leans heavily towards novels. Questions for readers are provided in an appendix, so lecturers can frame a discussion or readers can test themselves. (Some of the questions are more productive than others: a question like "in what ways do Canadian literary texts resist racist stereotyping?" is more hopeful than helpful.) In keeping with the idea that this text is a study guide, each section concludes with a series of bulleted statements that summarize key points. The discussions themselves are competent—and we might want to pause a moment to consider the challenge of summing up either *Green Grass, Running Water* or *Beautiful Losers* in five or fewer pages—but they are of necessity both brief and general. The most recent book that Hammill discusses in detail is Dionne Brand's *Land to Light On*, published in 1997.

The book's first section illustrates the difficulty of Hammill's task. Limited to only five authors with which to discuss Ethnicity, Race, and Colonisation, she chooses Frances Brooke, Tekahionwake/E. Pauline Johnson, Joy Kogawa, Tomson Highway, and Thomas King (later chapters do include Brand and Michael Ondaatje). The publication dates of these texts range from 1769 to 1993; while comparisons between Brooke and Kogawa are possible, they do seem a bit of a stretch. Part of the challenge in text selection here may be the way in which the themes are divided: while Hammill does suggest that some texts could be used for more than one section (*Ana Historic* might appear in all of them, not just "Stories and Histories," for example), the thematic divisions do encourage reading a text through only one lens, and the bullet points at the chapter's end give the impression that discussions are finished. Books by Aboriginal authors are discussed in detail only in this chapter.

The section in this book that many readers may find surprising (in a good way) is "Desire." As an organizing theme, it is unexpected, at least to this reader, and it gives Hammill the opportunity to look at a relatively unpredictable group of writers: Martha Ostenso, John Glassco, Leonard Cohen, Anne Michaels, and Dionne Brand. Highlighted here are women's and queer sexuality, as well as the ways in which geographic space becomes erotically charged in a number of texts.

The book closes with a number of reader aids: a list of electronic resources and reference sources; questions for discussion of each text; a list of alternative texts that could be used in each section; a glossary; and a guide to further reading. The alternate titles suggested are often much less canonical than the ones Hammill chooses to focus on, and also may be more recent; quite a different picture of Canadian Literature could emerge were these texts in the spotlight.

Women Writing Celebrity

Faye Hammill
Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars. U of Texas P US$45.00

Reviewed by Lorraine York

Faye Hammill's book on popular women writers between the two World Wars offers the critically dated term "middlebrow" a whole new lease on life. For scholars working on literary celebrity, the very term is a difficult one to use with any degree of precision in a critical climate animated by the approaches of cultural studies and popular-culture analysis. Hammill makes a persuasive case for the resurrection of the middlebrow as, in her words, "an effective position from which to negotiate [the] relationship to contemporary culture both elite and popular."

As Hammill convincingly shows in chapters devoted to Dorothy Parker, Anita Loos,

Mae West, L.M. Montgomery, Margaret Kennedy, Stella Gibbons, and E.M. Delafield, these works—among them the social parodies of Parker, Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Mae West's three novels, Kennedy's *The Constant Nymph*, Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm* and Delafield's series of novels beginning with *Diary of a Provincial Lady*—all trouble readerly attempts to situate them on one brow or another. Hammill notes that all of these works have in common a keen self-consciousness about the very subject of critical taste and literary culture. It's not uncommon, for instance, for these writings to launch satirical jibes at both intellectual elites like Bloomsbury and popular taste makers like Hollywood. She concludes that "[w]hat is needed is a concept of the middlebrow which allows for the slipperiness, complexity, and multiple satiric targets" of such texts. With *Women, Celebrity and Literary Culture Between the Wars*, we are well on our way to developing one.

For scholars of Canadian literature, Hammill's book is noteworthy for the way in which she places one such inter-war celebrity woman author—L.M. Montgomery—amidst her British and American counterparts. (Some sleight of hand is needed to consider Montgomery in the inter-war time period; her first success came in 1908 with *Anne of Green Gables*, though Hammill explains that she is interested in Montgomery's greater circulation as a celebrity figure in the 1920s and 30s.) She intentionally locates Montgomery in the exact centre of her study, surrounded by three chapters on American writers and three on British, because she sees Montgomery as pivotal in a number of ways. Near the end of her book, Hammill ponders the national patterns that she has discerned in these writers, the Americans Parker, Loos, and West tending to self-consciously direct their celebrity personae, whereas the Britons Kennedy, Gibbons, and Delafield were typically more reticent. It's a tricky sort of claim to make, and Hammill wisely makes it tentatively.

Montgomery becomes, in this context, a classic Canadian compromise: "Her fiction and her personal writings negotiate between the democratic notion of celebrity as meritocratic and the rather aristocratic idea of an elite being naturally set apart." Hammill also notes that Montgomery steered a middle course between participating willingly in promotional culture and seeking refuge from it (in her guise as Mrs. Ewan Macdonald, for instance). These tensions are palpable in Montgomery; it's true, though, that the choice of another mid-war female Canadian literary celebrity would yield different results, as Hammill recognizes. (Mazo de la Roche, creator of the Jalna series, for instance, had little difficulty with self-promotion or with aristocratic notions about virtually anything.)

This is an admirable contribution to the ongoing study of literary celebrity because of its determinedly international cast, its critical self-reflexiveness about the terms and methods at our disposal, and, not least, Hammill's evident enjoyment of and respect for her texts, no matter which "brows" they raise.

In The City

Maggie Helwig
Girls Fall Down. Coach House $20.95

Steven Galloway
The Cellist of Sarajevo. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Greg Doran

In the late seventies, Paul Weller sang, "In the city there's a thousand men in uniforms / And I've heard they now have the right to kill a man." While the cities in both Maggie Helwig's and Steven Galloway's novels are far removed from the London that inspired Weller's punk anthem, all three explore the relationship between a city under siege and

its inhabitants. In each novel, it is through the relationship between the main characters and their city that the author explores the central theme: the effect of a besieged urban environment on the human spirit. Both novels present a bleak portrait of a city; however, Galloway suggests a hopeful resolution for Sarajevo's citizens, while Helwig's citizens of Toronto continue unaffected.

In *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, Steven Galloway has created an intimate portrait of three people living in wartorn Sarajevo. Each of the characters takes a different approach to dealing with and surviving the conflict. Arrow has become a sniper, defending the city from the "men in the hills." Kenan is a father who struggles to ensure his family's survival, making regular, potentially fatal, trips to collect fresh water. Dragan, whose wife and son left before the conflict began, also risks the streets of the city in search of food to feed his sister and her family. In each case, the character has made choices about how to survive the siege of Sarajevo, and through these choices, Galloway explores how the human spirit responds to conflict.

Galloway has written an exceptional novel that explores the lives of these three people who refuse to sacrifice their humanity despite the inhumanity that surrounds them. In exploring this thematic terrain, he adopts a mytho-poetic style that elevates the characters' struggles beyond the mundane. In all of their struggles, the characters ask the same questions. Will Sarajevo return to its former glory? Is the city worth saving? Galloway offers potential answers through the one thing that, albeit loosely, ties the characters together: the cellist and his daily vigil.

The cellist of the title is inspired by Vedran Smailovi , who played Albinoni's *Adagio in G Minor* for twenty-two days at the site where a bomb killed twenty-two people waiting for bread. Throughout the novel, Galloway's cellist is a topic of conversation for all of the characters. However, he affects Arrow the most, for she is assigned the task of ensuring that he is kept alive to complete his memorial service. Despite the horrors of the conflict, the cellist's music lifts all of the characters out of their difficult situations and transports them back to a time when Sarajevo was a vibrant city, full of life. The music offers the possibility that all is not lost; there is hope that the conflict will end and that the city will be rebuilt by its people.

While Galloway's Sarajevo is trapped in an armed conflict, Helwig's Toronto is gripped by paranoia and fear. Toronto has often been described as a cold city, and Helwig uses this stereotype as a leaping-off point in her novel. Her main character, Alex, is a photographer at a Toronto hospital. Through his job, which requires him to photograph patients' ailments and surgeries, he has become desensitized to and detached from the suffering in the city. Even when he is faced with "the first girl who fell," he passively offers help but does not get involved. His detachment is also highlighted through his relationships with Suzanne, a former lover from university, and his camera. Through the course of the novel, the reader learns that Alex destroys all of his relationships intentionally, preferring to live an isolated existence. When it appears that he is about to break this trend with Suzanne, he goes out of his way to continue keeping her at a distance.

Similarly, Alex keeps all of the city at a distance through his camera lens. However, when he decides to look for Suzanne's brother, Alex has to engage with the city. Through his enquiries, he stops and talks with the man on his corner who asks for spare change because he is being "held by terrorists." Not only does this man provide him with the information to find Suzanne's brother, who is homeless, but he also forces Alex into acknowledging an aspect of the

city that he previously ignored. Instead of going on his regular trek to photograph the city's changing landscape, he goes to the church's drop-in centre to photograph and talk with the people on the city's margins.

While the focus is on Alex, several other narrative threads are woven through the novel. Every time another person "falls" from supposed poison, the reader experiences the city's cold and detached reaction. More people are concerned with the delay to the subway than the cause of it. Helwig vividly captures the sense of paranoia in and the detachment of the city in the sequences about the burn victim, who is assaulted by a group of drunken young men because he looks as if he could be the supposed "poisoner." The burn victim is not named, and the young men are never caught. In the end, a senseless act destroys the man's life, and the city continues unaffected.

While the two novels employ different styles and use different cities, both explore the complex relationship between a besieged urban environment and its inhabitants. Galloway elevates the struggles of his characters to express a view that the conflict can be overcome through art and human contact. In contrast, Helwig's characters overcome the paranoia and fear gripping the city by trying to ignore it. In the end, the books serve as excellent companion pieces exploring how to survive and what it means to be human in the urban environment.

YA First Person Narratives Uneven

Polly Horvath
My One Hundred Adventures. Groundwood $12.95

Marthe Jocelyn
Would You. Tundra $19.99

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

First person narrative seems to be the favourite voice in young adult literature right now. It has, of course, been used for decades, but it is difficult in children's or YA writing to successfully capture the true voice of the young protagonist. Both Polly Horvath's *My One Hundred Adventures* and Marthe Jocelyn's *Would You* are written in first person. However, only one of them succeeds with an authentic-sounding voice for her designated age-group.

Horvath has won many awards for her writing over the years, including the prestigious Newbery and National Book Awards. However, her latest novel for young teens does not have the same authentic voice as some of her earlier books, including the well-loved *Everything on a Waffle.* Jane, the twelve-year old protagonist in *My One Hundred Adventures*, is growing up in an unusual but plausible family. She is about to enter puberty and begins to long for something beyond her peaceful life on the seashore with her mother and three younger siblings. She prays for a hundred adventures for the summer, and gets a series of "adventures" apparently in response to her prayer.

That is where the book begins to break down. Unfortunately, most of Jane's adventures will leave urban teenagers shaking their heads in disbelief as few of these experiences even begin to fulfill the usual definition of the word. Then, although some of the members of the small town she and her family live close to are acceptably eccentric, a few of them are too eccentric to be believed, especially the very important Nellie Phipps, the local minister, whose

excursions into things occult with very shady characters are more irritating than humorous. Even a young child could see through the tricks being played upon the gullible Nellie by the shifty bunch she pursues, and the inconsistencies in her character are not convincing. Further, Jane's diction is too advanced for her age, especially given her background, even though her mother is purportedly a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. Her mother is also inconsistent, quite happily mothering four children she has had from various affairs and seeming to have no interest in even letting the fathers know that they have children. Yet, after twelve years of silence, suddenly she announces the fact to a man she sees every week in church and then to another itinerant lover who shows up unexpectedly. No explanation of her change of heart is ever given, and it is irritating to all but the children, seemingly, that we are never told which father belongs to which child. Overall, this book is typical of Horvath's quirky plots and characters, but neither are up to Horvath's usual high standards.

Jocelyn's *Would You* is also written in the first-person voice of sixteen-year-old Natalie. Nat adores her older sister Claire, and cannot imagine a life without her when Claire leaves for college in the fall. The trouble that Nat and her friends get into is typical of bored sixteen-year-olds, and their conversations are scripted in the mid-teen idioms which make this book completely accessible to the readership. The mid-teen reader will be able to connect completely with their idea of fun. When Claire is seriously injured in a car accident, Nat's responses are also credible, and her falling in love with a friend is convincing, despite her grief and her condescending treatment of her parents.

The subject of this book is grim, yet Jocelyn's writing style prevents the darker moments from becoming overwhelming. Nat cycles through grief with denial and sarcastic teenage humour. The family's decision to take Claire off life-support once the doctors have declared her brain-dead is heart-wrenching yet also realistic. Nat's life continues at the end of the novel, despite the grief and loss, and her persistence affirms the strength of a survivor.

Fluidity on Ice

Helen Humphreys

The Frozen Thames. McClelland & Stewart $24.99

Reviewed by Myrl Coulter

Helen Humphreys' books acknowledge their author's English heritage. Now a longtime resident of Canada, Humphreys' affinity for the iconic Thames River first emerges in her 2002 novel *The Lost Garden*: "I have stood beside the Thames and felt it there, twining beneath my feet like a root." As *The Lost Garden*'s protagonist admits, for a Londoner, the Thames is a root not easily forgotten: "I close my eyes and think of the river. . . . grey at night, a shiver of grey beneath [Waterloo] bridge."

The Frozen Thames is an understated compact book that illustrates how people live within nature's realm, not on top of it. Whether meandering, free-flowing, or frozen, rivers are magnets for human societies, drawing communities of all sizes to their banks and surrounding lands. Because of its key location, the Thames holds an important position in many historical events and countless human lives whether ordinary, famous, or infamous. Following William Blake's 1793 wanderings "Near where the chartered Thames does flow," writers have often taken London's famous waterway as inspiration, using its powerful aura to map out their ideas and concerns. Humphreys now joins their ranks.

With several books of poetry and five novels to her credit, Humphreys is a versatile writer, open to and adept at

experimentation. Definitely not a novel but not quite non-fiction, *The Frozen Thames* is filled with forty portraits of London's famed river at forty unusual moments in its long history. If this book were a novel, the river would be its chief protagonist. If classified as historical non-fiction, its portrayals of royalty might take precedence, populated as it is by a series of monarchs: Matilda, arguably the first female ruler of England although she is rarely mentioned on royal lists; Henry VIII, using the frozen river as a highway a few days after Catherine of Aragon died; Elizabeth I, youthfully striding out onto the ice to practise shooting her longbow; Charles I, remaining surprisingly calm and serene at the moment of his execution; George III, ill and insane, living out his final days locked in his Windsor Castle apartment.

These immediately recognizable historical figures mingle with anonymous ordinary people, realistically imagined through Humphreys' cultural critique as they cope with the challenging circumstances their frozen river presents them. Fourteen young men abandon their regular Sunday morning church service to play football on the ice. Hitting a weak spot, the players plunge into the cold water: eight die. In his next sermon, their vicar depicts their deaths as a judgment from an angry God. Twenty-seven years later, a more sensitive vicar leaves his church for good, resisting the edict that priests must be "servants of the Church of England instead of being servants to God." In his sorrow, he turns to the frozen river, watching people skating on it, soaring freely despite the burdens of their overtaxed lives.

Overtaxed and freezing, the ordinary people of the Thames deal with unusual situations. Two brothers make a business opportunity out of selling frozen ale by weight rather than volume. A worker coaxes his team of oxen onto the frozen expanse and suddenly sees the animals as "brothers who understand one another in a way [he] envies." A caged hare is set loose on the river, doomed because there is no place to hide from the greyhound dogs that will tear it to pieces. The servant waits as long as possible to release the dogs, giving the hare a longer than usual head start unnoticed by his masters because the ice distorts distance. Separated lovers find each other on the ice, one carrying telltale marks of the Black Death, yet still embraced by the other thus ensuring a death sentence for them both. A would-be explorer challenges himself to walk on the ice until he breaks through "because he needs that feeling of danger to keep the image of himself as an explorer alive." When the ice finally gives way, he sinks only to his knees and climbs out easily. A young girl wakes up in the nest-like bed she shares with her sisters and listens for the two robins they have sheltered from the cold inside their house.

In its forty vignettes, *The Frozen Thames* covers more than seven centuries of life beside this avenue of commerce and transportation. A navigable living body never the same and always going somewhere else, a river governs the daily flow of human life. When it unpredictably turns to ice, the lives of the people near it are inevitably altered until the river returns to its fluid form. With this unique book, Helen Humphreys demonstrates that her writing form is anything but frozen.

Voracious for Life

Annie Jacobsen with Jane Finlay-Young and Di Brandt
Watermelon Syrup. Wilfrid Laurier UP $24.95

Sally Armstrong
The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor: The First Woman Settler of the Miramichi. Random $34.95

Reviewed by Linda Quirk

In two recent historical novels, Annie Jacobsen's Aleksandra and Sally Armstrong's Charlotte are women who struggle to live life on their own terms. Both women are as hard-working as they are independent and each finds herself struggling to find her own life against controlling and, at times, abusive male influences. In *Watermelon Syrup,* her clever younger sister observes that Aleksandra is one of those who are "voracious for life." Aleksandra shares this quality with Charlotte Taylor; each woman has a voraciousness which leads her into terrible challenges and remarkable triumphs. Each is the hero of her own life.

Watermelon Syrup is a coming-of-age story about a young woman torn between a deep connection to her family's rich but tragic history and her own need for a fulfilling life. It is a story illustrating the challenges faced by the many young Mennonite women who were sent to work in urban centres as domestic servants to help provide for their families during the Depression. Not only were they ill-prepared to deal with those who would try to take advantage of their innocence, they were ill-prepared for the heady challenge that new freedoms offered to respected family traditions.

Part of the "Life Writing Series," published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press to "promote autobiographical accounts, diaries, letters, and testimonials written and/or told by women and men whose political, literary, or philosophical purposes are central to their lives," this is a fictionalized version of Jacobsen's mother's life story based on extensive oral history, family journals, and historical research. Just before she died of cancer in 2005, Annie Jacobsen finished a third draft of the novel and turned it over to her friend and colleague Jane Finlay-Young for revision. Finlay-Young took the novel through two more drafts with assistance from Di Brandt. The product of this collaboration is a poignant story told in beautifully evocative language (at times reminiscent of Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*) with a powerful sense of local history.

The story, which is set mostly during the Depression, explores the divided world that teenaged Aleksandra inhabits: her family life in a rural Mennonite community in Saskatchewan and her life as a domestic servant in urban Waterloo. Through flashbacks, it also offers a compelling historical portrait of a thriving Mennonite community in Russia during the 1920s. This is a celebration of the simple pleasures of family and community, but it is also a portrait of religious persecution by successive regimes and, eventually, the flight to religious freedom and terrible poverty in Canada. *Watermelon Syrup* shows a deep respect for the Russian Mennonite tradition, but it also reveals the terrible burden born by its women. While her tyrannical father threatens to destroy Aleksandra's spirit in a manner which recalls the relationship between Caleb and Judith Gare, the advice that she receives from her defeated mother is transcendent. Although her mother never finds a way to do so, Aleksandra's story is her struggle to make peace with internalized but conflicting value systems and to live without bitterness.

While *Watermelon Syrup* is the story of a young woman's struggle to weigh the appeal of freedom against its terrible price, *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor* begins after Charlotte has made her escape. Charlotte leaves behind a life of privilege

in eighteenth-century England in favour of an uncertain future in Jamaica with her lover: the family's black butler. When her lover dies shortly after their long sea voyage, Charlotte finds herself pregnant and imperilled but undefeated. Taking advantage of the trade routes operating between the West Indies and British North America, Charlotte soon becomes the first British woman to settle in what is now northern New Brunswick.

Despite the death of her young lover and the eventual deaths of her three husbands, Charlotte manages "to keep her ten children alive through the American Revolution that was fought on her doorstep, the Indian raids that burned out her neighbours and the droughts and floods and endless winters that challenged her wit and tenacity." Her ability to survive and even to thrive is due, in no small part, to the survival skills she learned from her first women friends who were either Mi'kmaq or Acadian. Indeed, it is one of the great strengths of this novel that it is not merely the story of British settlers, but one which reveals the conflicting aspirations, the extraordinary courage, and the sometimes remarkable generosity of many of the local peoples. It includes compelling descriptions of Acadian and Loyalist history, and it is peppered with powerful re-enactments of Mi'kmaq legends and traditions. It may be tempting to regard this as a contemporary author's enlightened historical perspective, but it is clearly one which arises out of Charlotte's own historical relationships.

Award-winning journalist Sally Armstrong researched the life and times of her great-great-great-grandmother, Charlotte Taylor, over a period of ten years. The story took shape as she consulted archival records, collected family legends, and pursued local histories, but it is Armstrong's richly imagined world that gives the story life. *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor* is a compelling novel about a truly remarkable Canadian woman. It is a gripping historical saga, one which deserves to be widely read and studied.

21st Century Fantasy

K.V. Johansen
Beyond Window-Dressing? Canadian Children's Fantasy at the Millennium. Sybertooth $24.00

Reviewed by J. Kieran Kealy

Expanded from a paper which won the IBBY Canada 2004 Frances E. Russell Award, Johansen's *Beyond Window-Dressing* provides an expansive overview of children's fantasy with a particular emphasis on the growth of this genre in Canada in the new millennium.

She begins by providing a rather brief discussion of the history of Canadian children's fantasy, focusing on those texts foregrounded by critics such as Egoff and Saltman as seminal works in this genre. Quite rightly, Johansen points out the paucity of Canadian texts that one finds throughout the twentieth century, and dismisses most, if not all, of these early efforts as rather inferior, particularly when compared to the richness of the American and British traditions during this same period. Though the conclusions drawn from this analysis are generally quite laudable, her rather abrupt condemnation of writers such as Catherine Anthony Clark and Ruth Nichols fails to recognize the hesitant yet clear emergence of a uniquely Canadian "otherworld" in such writers.

But these early fantasies are not the true focus of this text. Rather, the text explores what has appeared recently, beginning by dividing the fantasy genre into eight different sub-genres (time travel, primary world magic, speculative fantasy—like science fiction—re-imaginings of traditional tales, historical fantasy, animal fantasy, dual-world fantasy and, finally, secondary, alternate world fantasy. Though some of

these sub-genres are not always that exclusive (the last two, for example), they serve Johansen well, allowing comment not only on individual texts but on those approaches to fantasy that seem to have been the most successful.

Johansen follows her introduction with an individual chapter on each of her sub-genres, focusing primarily on what Canadian fantasists have provided in these areas, an encyclopaedic overview largely accomplished by providing mini book reviews of major contributions.

Though I, not surprisingly, have quibbles with some of her assessments of the worth of individual texts, I applaud the honesty and forthrightness of her analyses. Far too often, reviews of children's books provide little more than vague plot summaries with very little, if any, questioning of the aesthetic or literary value of a text. Not so with Johansen's analyses. She has her opinions and she quite adroitly defends them. She establishes clear criteria for what she considers a valid and valuable fantasy, and judges each text accordingly. And, I must admit, I found her criticism of even some of Canada's literary icons both refreshing and, more significantly, quite convincing.

Johansen's final chapter, echoing the title of the text, examines her chief concern about the present state of children's fantasy in Canada. Far too often, she argues, the fanciful elements in texts, their fantasy ingredient, if you will, are but window-dressing, with only a marginal attempt to create a world that is truly worth visiting. She also bemoans the absence of male heroes in the Canadian tradition, and, perhaps concurrently, of male fantasists. She also worries about the alarming passivity of Canadian fantasy protagonists and the rather passive plots they are asked to be a part of. There must be more emphasis on personal responsibility, she argues, on heroes and heroines facing crises that demand true risk.

As for the state of twenty-first-century Canadian children's fantasy, Johansen finds fantasies, particularly those directed at children rather than young adults, to be unnecessarily simplistic, with far too much reliance on stock plots and characters. She also quite forcefully decries the emphasis on "useful books" that do not overly challenge the readers, particularly linguistically. And, finally, Johansen admits that, though Canadian children's fantasies have vastly improved in the last decade, there is still an unfortunate reluctance on the part of Canadian publishers to take on any manuscript that is in any way unique.

Sadly, perhaps, Johansen's final conclusion is that there are, in fact, wonderful Canadian fantasists out there, but that they will have to be picked up by an American or British publisher to receive the creative support and recognition that they deserve, to finally be deemed so much more than mere "window-dressing."

Ce que nous réserve le passé

Sergio Kokis
Le retour de Lorenzo Sánchez. XYZ 25,00 $

Pierre Manseau
Ragueneau le Sauvage. Triptyque 22,00 $

Compte rendu par Pascal Riendeau

Dans *Le retour de Lorenzo Sánchez*, Sergio Kokis revient sur des sujets qu'il connaît bien, l'art et l'exil, tout en restant fidèle à sa *manière* : les longs échanges philosophiques et polémiques. Après avoir fui son Chili natal, le peintre Lorenzo Sánchez se retrouve en Europe, puis à Montréal où il vit seul de son art et de son enseignement. Forcé de prendre une retraite hâtive de l'université, l'artiste vieillissant, désabusé et cynique se présente d'emblée comme un grand donneur de leçons. Il abhorre le monde d'aujourd'hui, sa technologie, sa pensée, mais avant tout son art de pacotille

qualifié vaguement de postmoderne. Pour bien faire entendre la voix de Lorenzo Sánchez, Kokis recourt à une série de monologues intérieurs cohérents et lucides, clairement distincts grâce à l'italique, qui ponctuent une narration impersonnelle. En accord avec celle du narrateur au cours des premiers chapitres, cette voix crée un effet de redondance. Dans ces discours récurrents, ironiques, et misogynes, les lecteurs familiers de Kokis n'hésiteront pas à reconnaître la voix de l'auteur.

La vie du peintre est bouleversée quand il apprend que son frère cadet cherche à le contacter après plus de trente ans; cette nouvelle devient « un vrai cataclysme ». Toute une « sarabande » de souvenirs surgit alors, comme si la mémoire de Lorenzo libérait, dans le désordre chronologique mais avec clarté, des événements importants, voire cruciaux de son enfance et de son adolescence. Jeune Amérindien aymara adopté par la riche famille Sánchez, Lorenzo étudie aux Beaux-Arts, s'engage au parti communiste, mais surtout entame une liaison érotique avec sa soeur adoptive, relation découverte par les parents, ce qui le contraint à l'exil. S'il se promet alors de disparaître et de « s'inventer une existence originale à sa propre mesure », son passé le rattrape néanmoins, quelques décennies plus tard, et il doit affronter ce mouvement de nostalgie qui l'assaille. La rencontre avec son frère, qui lui annonce que leur mère (une véritable marâtre), contre toute attente, lui a laissé en héritage la maison de campagne familiale lui donne la raison ultime pour entamer ce retour vers son passé. Le voyage au Chili de Lorenzo Sánchez lui sera fatal, mais avant sa fin tragique, il a l'occasion de redécouvrir son pays d'origine et d'apprendre tout ce que sa famille lui avait caché, y compris le sort réservé à sa soeur, qui a pu écrire dans un cahier d'écolier le récit fragmenté de son propre destin tragique. C'est ce témoignage posthume qui sert d'épilogue, jouant un rôle analogue au « Cahier de Tiago » dans *Le maître de jeu*, roman le plus achevé de Kokis.

Malgré ses longueurs et un certain discours ressassé, *Le retour de Lorenzo Sánchez* offre de très belles pages sur la nostalgie et l'exil, sur le piège que peut représenter le pays d'origine pour l'exilé ou l'émigré. Durant son séjour au Chili, les monologues intérieurs sont plus discrets mais plus pertinents, car ils deviennent la véritable voix critique de Lorenzo Sánchez et incarnent admirablement la dualité de ce personnage d'exilé.

Dans *Ragueneau le Sauvage* de Pierre Manseau, le protagoniste est aussi un artiste, un écrivain dans la quarantaine, Nicolas Bourgault, dont on suit les tribulations en compagnie des deux seuls hommes de sa vie : Victor Anonymat, un des plus jeunes « enfants de Duplessis », qui ne sait ni lire ni écrire et qui a survécu grâce à la prostitution, puis Ragueneau, pêcheur nord-côtier au chômage, un peu montagnais, malchanceux, mais surtout alcoolique, échoué à Montréal et rescapé par Nicolas. Son amour éperdu pour Ragueneau n'est pas réciproque, et pour le lecteur, assez peu crédible. Ce qui l'est encore moins, c'est l'activité d'écrivain de Bourgault, lui qui semble incapable d'une réflexion profonde. Bien qu'il soit toujours en train d'écrire durant les quatre années que dure la narration, on apprend peu de choses sur ses romans, à peine quelques commentaires sur leurs critiques. Seule la dernière partie du texte nous donne accès à l'écriture de Bourgault, mais ce sont des extraits d'une lettre (d'adieu) qu'il écrit à Ragueneau alors qu'il se meurt du sida. Plutôt qu'un testament poignant, déchirant, ce que livre l'auteur relève d'un discours convenu accompagné de quelques aphorismes empreints de mièvrerie. Ce énième personnage d'écrivain dans le roman québécois contemporain pourrait être oublié assez rapidement.

Fulgurance du « logos »

Michaël La Chance
L'Inquisitoriale : fugue solaire dans les îles et plateaux du langage. Triptyque 22,00 $

Denise Brassard
Le Souffle du passage : poésie et essai chez Fernand Ouellette. VLB 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Noële Racine

L'Inquisitoriale : fugue solaire dans les îles et plateaux du langage—« livre de la soif », pour reprendre l'expression de l'auteur—propose une méditation libre et informelle sur le langage, puis un hommage complice et amical à la poète gaspésienne Françoise Bujold, décrite comme un « [o]iseau furtif », « une mouette en deuil d'immensité ». Sur un ton à la fois philosophique et poétique que lui inspirent ses voyages, ses lectures, ses rencontres et la nature, Michaël La Chance discute de l'irréductible corporéité du langage, de ce que ce dernier révèle de notre univers intérieur, de la liberté à laquelle on l'associe habituellement ainsi que du fondement de la langue du poème. Sont abordés, également, plusieurs autres sujets tels le désir, la perte, le vide, la réalité du rêve, et l'éternité de l'instant. Apparaissant sous la forme de vers libres et de fragments en prose, ces réflexions décousues et peu novatrices sont divisées en huit sections en plus d'être accompagnées de vingt-quatre photographies en noir et blanc (de Michaël La Chance et de David John Bradfield) qui illustrent la vie sous toutes ses formes.

Plus structuré se révèle *Le Souffle du passage: Poésie et essai chez Fernand Ouellette*, ouvrage dans lequel Denise Brassard observe le langage propre à ce poète. Plus particulièrement—et comme l'indique le sous-titre—Denise Brassard examine, sur les plans thématique et stylistique, les rôles divers (« transpos[ition] », « historici[sation] », « apaise[ment] », « frein[age] », et « relance ») que joue la pratique essayistique par rapport à la création poétique chez cet auteur. Selon elle, la dynamique interne et binaire de la production ouellettienne (« tremblement »/« errance », « fermeture »/« ouverture », « intériorisation »/« extériorisation », « verticalité »/« horizontalité ») s'avère l'instigatrice d'un mouvement plus large et plus global, soit le *passage* d'une poétique de la « révélation »—où le langage est perçu comme « objet »—à une poétique de la « relation »—voyant le langage comme « sujet ». Distribuées en trois parties qui se subdivisent elles-mêmes en six chapitres, les remarques retracent l'évolution de l'écriture ouellettienne à travers la variation et l'hybridité génériques qui la caractérisent (poésie « prosifiée », essai poétisé, biographie tirant sur l'autobiographie, autobiographie relevant de l'« autoportrait », critique d'art débouchant sur une rêverie mysticisante) ainsi que les thèmes de prédilection (ex. : engagement, érotisme, lumière, mort, spiritualité, temps), les motifs (ex. : cercle, masque) et autres lieux qui la ponctuent. L'étude de Denise Brassard rappelle également—et avec pertinence—qui sont les écrivains, les penseurs et les artistes (Bloy, Hölderlin, Ingres, Kierkegaard, Thérèse de Lisieux, Matisse, Novalis, Varèse, Vermeer, etc.) ayant influencé et inspiré Fernand Ouellette. Enfin, elle explique clairement quelques notions-clés (le « temps-espace », l'« angoisse-culpabilité espérante », et l'« entropie ») permettant de saisir l'essence tout comme la portée de son oeuvre.

Traduction et dialogue interculturel

Louise Ladouceur
Making the Scene : La traduction du théâtre d'une langue officielle à l'autre au Canada.
Nota Bene 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Catherine Leclerc

Dans *Making the Scene : La traduction du théâtre d'une langue officielle à l'autre au Canada*, Louise Ladouceur adopte un cadre à la fois diachronique et comparatiste. Cette approche lui permet de situer les stratégies de traduction des deux principales institutions théâtrales du Canada dans un contexte qui tienne compte à la fois de leurs traditions respectives, de leur évolution et du rapport qu'elles entretiennent entre elles. Sur une période qui va des années 1950 à la fin des années 1990, elle sélectionne cinq segments synchroniques et étudie dans chacun la traduction d'une pièce vers l'anglais et d'une vers le français.

Au Québec, Annie Brisset l'avait déjà démontré, la traduction servait surtout, dans les années 1970 et 1980, à affirmer une identité nationale en émergence : les pièces étaient traduites sur un mode appropriatif, avec l'adaptation comme principale stratégie de gestion de l'altérité. Par contre, à compter des années 1990, les traducteurs passent à un français moins chargé de connotations locales et populaires. Durant la même période, le répertoire anglo-canadien connaît, notamment avec Brad Fraser, une popularité grandissante sur les scènes francophones. Les traductions vers l'anglais, quant à elles, font voir un autre visage du rapport domesticateur à l'étranger. On n'y trouve aucune adaptation ni aucun gommage de l'altérité; plutôt, l'altérité québécoise est accentuée dans une visée ethnographique qui empêche le public de s'y identifier. C'est le cas dans les traductions du théâtre de Michel Tremblay où, pour rendre le joual, on emploie une langue parsemée « de sacres parfois abusifs et d'abondants gallicismes dans lesquels est projetée toute la "québécitude" du texte de Tremblay ». L'altérité ainsi créée est celle d'un Québec traditionnel, non menaçant, conforme à la représentation que s'en fait le public anglophone. Même après que l'usage du joual eut décliné dans la dramaturgie québécoise, une différence dans la façon de concevoir la langue continue de se faire sentir : « . . . le travail sur la langue et les représentations symboliques dont elle fait l'objet au Québec constituent un écueil insurmontable dans le passage transculturel en traduction anglaise. La fonction primordiale de la langue comme moteur culturel et discursif dans le contexte franco-québécois est tout simplement étrangère au système récepteur ».

Dans les traductions vers l'anglais comme dans celles vers le français, Ladouceur note une évolution qui va de l'obligation de plaire au public cible (que ce soit en lui permettant de se reconnaître lui-même ou en lui présentant une image stéréotypée de l'Autre) vers un souci grandissant mais limité d'adéquation. Toutefois, cette évolution continue de répondre à des besoins intrinsèques aux cultures cibles. Au Québec, l'ouverture au théâtre anglo-canadien survient au moment où la dramaturgie québécoise est suffisamment établie pour qu'à la quête de légitimation succède un désir d'expérimentation esthétique. En outre, on ne reconnaît de valeur à ce théâtre que lorsqu'il propose des innovations non sans affinité avec l'esthétique pratiquée au Québec au même moment. Les traductions vers l'anglais, quant à elles, ne délaisseront l'exotisme qu'une fois que la dramaturgie anglo-canadienne aura acquis un répertoire suffisant pour que son besoin d'emprunter diminue, c'est-à-dire lorsque le rôle de la traduction dans cette dramaturgie perdra de son importance. Sans compter que les nouvelles traductions ne sont pas toujours appréciées par le public et la critique journalistique.

À partir de considérations souvent micro-textuelles, l'étude de Ladouceur ouvre sur des questions plus larges d'acceptabilité culturelle. Elle montre que toute traduction est ethnocentrique, mais que « la dynamique historique et politique propre aux communautés linguistiques et culturelles en cause agit sur le choix des modalités retenues pour satisfaire ce principe ». En même temps, si l'ethnocentrisme est une constante en traduction littéraire, son fonctionnement n'est pas déterministe. Les analyses détaillées de Ladouceur, sur un corpus sélectionné par souci de représentativité, montrent que les traducteurs, s'ils subissent et assimilent les contraintes du système dans lequel ils opèrent, peuvent aussi agir sur lui. Sur ce point *Making the Scene* ajoute à l'étude descriptive un ardent plaidoyer pour la reconnaissance du « travail de médiation effectué par la traduction ». Cet ouvrage a été couronné du prix Gabrielle-Roy de l'Association des littératures canadiennes et québécoise en 2005 et du prix Ann Saddlemyer de l'Association canadienne de la recherche théâtrale en 2007.

The Narrow Road to Montreal (North)

Dany Laferrière
Je suis un écrivain japonais. Boréal $24.95

Reviewed by Mark Harris

There's a reason why Montreal is not only the most cosmopolitan, but also the most culturally organic city in Canada. In his prison diaries, Antonio Gramsci, Italy's foremost Marxist philosopher, famously worried about his homeland's inability to give birth to a popular author of *polars*. Why was it, he wondered, that, in a country crowded with the world's admired marbles and astonishing frescoes, the inhabitants were forced to rely on French, American, English and even Antipodean crime writers in order to satisfy one of their most basic cultural desires? It was lacks like these, as much as the need to replace Italy's then-reigning fascist ideology with something more humane and progressively-oriented, that led Gramsci to come up with the concept of the "organic intellectual", the new artist/thinker/professional who would do for the masses what Mussolini's black shirts and bourgeoisie couldn't even do for the elite.

Montreal doesn't have that Old World problem. Over breakfast, it is quite common to switch from the literary columns of *Le Devoir* to the sports pages of *Le Journal de Montréal* between coffee and croissant. Similarly, those intimate with the sublimities of Marie-Claire Blais are not necessarily ignorant of the indecencies of *Allo Police*, just as it seems perfectly natural to enjoy a low-brow, locally produced farce broadcast in *joual* over Radio Canada just prior to checking out the latest, post-*classe ouvrière* drama by Michel Tremblay about the clearly enunciated angst experienced by the overprivileged denizens of Outremont.

This level of cultural self-sufficiency was not, interestingly enough, attained via the blood-and-soil path recommended by Johann Herder. It was, rather, reached through an openness to outside forms of cultural expression that did not follow international norms. Thus, Violette Leduc was preferred to Colette, Joe Tex to James Brown, and Chester Himes to Georges Simenon. "Middleweights" in the rest of the world were Mike Tysons in *la belle province*, and this idiosyncrasy was expressed with complete naturalness, eschewing the extremes of apology and pride. It also resulted in the most self-sufficient cultural economy north of the 49th parallel.

Nowhere was this tendency more true than on the wide screen. In the 1960s, the most popular film in Montreal was not *The Sound of Music* or *The Dirty Dozen*, but *Onibaba*, an erotic horror movie by Kaneto Shindo who, like his countryman Masaki

Kobayashi, was more beloved in Quebec than he was in Japan (eat your heart out, Akira Kurosawa; you might have been known as "The Emperor" everywhere else, but not here).

Since he didn't arrive in Quebec until the mid-1970s, Dany Laferrière obviously missed the original *Onibaba* craze. Nevertheless, as so often in the past, in his latest novel he has correctly intuited his adopted city's unique spin on the nineteenth-century cult of *Japonaiserie*, as well as its seemingly insatiable lust for cultural hybridity.

To be sure, *Je suis un écrivain japonais* is not the sort of title one would expect from a novelist born in Port-au-Prince. First, it is delivered as an off-the cuff-response to a pressing editor and then to the *poissonnier Grec* who will sell him the salmon (a sly allusion to Proust's Madeleine) that will eventually cause him to throw up. Shocked, the fish monger asks:

- Et avez-vous le droit?
- D'écrire ce livre?
- Non, de dire que vous êtes japonais.
- Je ne sais pas.
- Avez-vous quand même l'intention de changer de nationalité?
- Ah non . . . Je l'ai déjà fait une fois, ça suffit . . .

In order to complete the task he has assigned himself, the narrator does two things. The first is to read Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* in lieu of travelling to the Land of the Rising Sun; the second is to actually *meet* a Japanese person.

To fill this latter lacuna, he buttonholes the first Asian that he meets (who turns out to be South Korean, a distinction Laferrière pretends not to appreciate). In exchange for twenty bucks, this mildly offended passer-by eventually advises his interlocutor to visit the Café Sarajevo (a place which, for what it's worth, I tried to track down on my last trip to Montreal; it was listed in the phone book, but had no address and no one answered the phone). That apparently is the home base of Midori, an all-female Japanese super-group whose star proves to be as elusive as William Gibson's virtual singer in *Idoru*.

Very soon one thing leads to another. Laferrière is seduced in his bathtub, eyes shut, by a lesbian back-up singer whose exit is dramatic enough to attract the attentions of the police. Then he's contacted by members of the Japanese Consulate, all of whom bear the names of famous authors (Mishima, Tanizaki, Murasaki, Shonagon). Translating *Je suis un écrivain japonais* into the native tongue has seemingly become a manner of national honour.

Other events seem more tangential, but they're no less entertaining. They include a long-ago crush on a Greek waitress, a sad reflection on what happens to small town girls in the big city, a close to libellous (*close* because the name is *slightly* different)—and entirely made-up—riff on one of the most popular contemporary Japanese authors, and a malicious reflection on Bjork's alleged passion for voodoo dolls.

While this might *sound* like a picaresque novel veering off the narrative rails at suicidal speed, Laferrière ultimately proves to be as good at roping in digressions as were his great predecessors, Denis Diderot and Lawrence Sterne. Yes indeed, this is a shaggy dog story, where past and present, near and far, cross paths effortlessly without causing readerly distress. It is a near-masterpiece, despite its disguise as a "make work" project.

Snapshot of a Discipline

Ron F. Laliberte, et. al., eds.
Expressions in Canadian Native Studies.
University Extension P $34.95

Reviewed by Judith Leggatt

Expressions in Canadian Native Studies is designed to provide an overview of Native Studies in contemporary Canada. The papers discuss many different Nations and range from the local, such as F. Laurie Barron and Joseph Garcea's "Reflections on Urban Reserves in Saskatchewan"; to the national, such as Bonita Lawrence's "Mixed-Race Urban Native People"; to the international, such as Priscilla Settee's "The Issue of Biodiversity, Intellectual Property Rights, and Indigenous Rights." The essays also provide diverse perspectives on important issues in Native Studies, such as Ron Bourgeault and Tom Flanagan's antithetical takes on the Louis Riel debate, or Joyce Green and Margaret A. Jackson's differing studies of the relationships between Aboriginal women's organizations and the self-government movement. The text also includes maps, excerpts of relevant government documents, and a glossary of terms. While the book is intended as a textbook for Native Studies courses—the critical reading and writing guides will be of primary value to students—it will also be of interest to scholars and more general audiences.

In their effort to "reflect the 'state of the field,'" the editors balance essays that follow the tenets of western academic scholarship with those that use an Indigenous learning approach, using storytelling and Elder's teachings as sources. Two early essays explicitly address the tricky interrelation of indigenous and academic authority: Peter Kulchyski emphasizes the importance of giving proper credit to elders "so that the names of these knowledgeable people can take their place beside the names of the non-Native authorities so carefully cited in scholarly practice" and Neal McLeod examines the difficulty of negotiating "the ground between Indigenous knowing and the requirements of the academy." Peter R. Grant and Neil J. Sterritt's study of the legal legitimacy awarded to oral history in the *Delgamuukw* decision shows similar transformations in another western institution. Several papers combine the two forms of knowing. Karla Jessen Williamson combines detailed scholarly research with personal and community experience, and a telling of the story of the creation of the sun and the moon from an incestuous brother and sister, in order to explain Inuit world views and gender and family relations. Bruce White frames his discussion of the role of Ojibwa women in the fur trade with the story of "The Woman Who Married a Beaver." Kim Anderson grounds her explanation of "Berry Fasting in the Twenty-First Century" in the teachings of the Mohawk creation myth told to her by Sylvia Maracle. Such papers show the possibility of combining approaches to understanding, balancing and integrating scholarly and Indigenous sources.

The contributors to the volume work in many overlapping areas: Native studies, education, creative writing, women's studies, sociology, history, anthropology, political science, politics, law, criminology, and forestry. Despite this extensive list, the majority of contributions come from History and the social sciences. Deborah McGregor's "The State of Traditional Ecological Knowledge Research in Canada" is the only paper from a scientific perspective; I particularly appreciated her challenge to the presumed cultural neutrality of scientific authority, and would have liked to have seen more work on Indigenous approaches to science included in the volume. Similarly, I would have liked to see more analysis of the creative work being done by Native people. The collection does include short

works of creative non-fiction by Drew Hayden Taylor on the problems of Native identity, and a story by Maria Campbell about the effects of residential school. Likewise, David Newhouse mentions the importance of painters such as Norval Morriseau, Carl Beam, and Jane Ash Poitras; musicians such as Kashtin, Red Power, and Robbie Robertson; and "writers galore" who "are telling the story of the Aboriginal community"; he suggests such artists play an essential role in "The Development of Modern Aboriginal Societies," and are a sign of hope for the continuing strength of First Nations cultures. Some in-depth analysis of these or other artists would have made the volume even stronger. I am betraying my own disciplinary bias here, but if the editors are attempting to provide a comprehensive approach to the inter-disciplinary discipline of Native Studies, a balance of the social sciences with the scientific and the creative would have formed a timely counterpart to their excellent balancing of Indigenous and academic ways of presenting ideas.

Deux promesses de calme

Tania Langlais
Douze bêtes aux chemises de l'homme. Les herbes rouges 10,95$

Tania Langlais
La clarté s'installe comme un chat. Les herbes rouges 14,95$

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

Douze bêtes aux chemises de l'homme, pour lequel l'auteur a remporté le prix Émile Nelligan, est une histoire de couple et de rupture où l'on distingue les voix de l'homme, de la femme, et de la narratrice.

Madrid l'été, elle décide de partir « pour du soleil / ou pour l'envers, un peu, / des déguisements ». Et pourtant, c'est elle-même souvent qui inaugure le manège, qui sciemment ou non empêche la transparence.

Dans cette atmosphère de corrida, elle est le matador. Celle qui joue avec le lin comme avec les robes, celle qui le garde, lui, dans son toril, mais suite à un coup du sort dirait-on. Car alors qu'elle le fascine, qu'elle lui semble être « la seule clarté / jamais blême », pour elle il n'est guère plus qu'un animal amoureux et transi, qu'une dernière bête à abattre avant d'atteindre le Brésil.

Nous nous retrouvons donc dans ces textes en plein centre d'une arène ou, si l'on préfère, au beau milieu de ces villes truquées, où celui qui fût l'amant reste pour recoudre les lambeaux de ses souvenirs avec ce fol besoin qu'il a de défendre sa fiction, et ce malgré sa certitude des mensonges répétés et malgré les commères aussi qui voudraient bien revenir lui planter encore quelques banderilles.

Veuillez noter qu'à l'adresse <http://blogue.bandeapart.fm>, il vous est possible d'entendre cinq relectures de cette oeuvre qui, dans le cadre du Festival Voix d'Amérique 2006 et en collaboration avec « Bande à part », a été remixée par les artistes de musique électronique suivants : Mossa, Pheek, Motus 3F, The Mole et Galerie Stratique.

La clarté s'installe comme un chat est, quant à lui, inspiré des notes inachevées du poète Stéphane Mallarmé suite au décès de son fils de huit ans, lesquelles ont été publiées sous le titre *Pour un tombeau d'Anatole*.

Comme dans son premier recueil, Tania Langlais reste aux côtés de son personnage qui glisse vers la mort, elle l'accompagne comme si l'espace d'un instant elle croyait que le poème y changerait quelque chose, qu'il viendrait corriger ce bleu qui tombe sans crier gare.

Or il n'en est rien. Bleue la lumière sur les dessins d'Anatole, alors qu'elle dit : « je t'avais préparé dans ma tête / un petit bateau à voiles / je te hissais à bord c'était facile l'eau ». Bleue également la robe de la femme : « qu'on porte à l'épaule / à la sortie de l'eau ».

Dès lors, même si le livre parvient quelquefois à feutrer les cris, il apparaît que les chants qui berceront l'espoir auront le langage des deuils à la vie conciliés.

Une plongée dans l'ombre

Laurette Lévy
Debout en clair-obscur. Prise de parole 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Ariane Tremblay

Dans *Debout en clair-obscur*, son premier roman, Laurette Lévy explore plus en profondeur la réalité de la perte des illusions qu'elle avait déjà bien campée dans son recueil de nouvelles *Zig-Zag.* Cependant, plutôt que d'assister à la blessure irréversible de la perte de l'enfance que donnait à voir ce recueil, le lecteur est témoin, dans ce roman, de la dégringolade d'une femme confrontée à un état autrement plus lourd de conséquences, soit la découverte de sa séropositivité.

Debout en clair-obscur présente le récit de Béatrice, une Québécoise ayant migré vers Toronto pour y refaire sa vie. Les épisodes clés de l'existence de Béa depuis sa séroconversion se succèdent ainsi dans le corps du texte, donnant à voir les accrocs inévitables qui apparaissent dans sa nouvelle vie : échecs amoureux, santé alarmante, deuils multiples et sensualité encombrante, voire inassouvie. À la manière de *Zig-Zag,* qui confrontait les espoirs déçus et les grands chagrins de l'existence adulte à de rares états de grâce, *Debout en clair-obscur* offre la même lucidité dans le regard posé sur la vie. Cette fois-ci, l'oeuvre s'attaque à la condition de séropositif, qui entremêle à de rares bonheurs une existence difficile, traversée par d'inéluctables questionnements. Le titre même du roman rappelle l'oscillation constante de la vie des séropositifs entre des moments de clarté et de longs espaces d'obscurité. Par ailleurs, le récit s'inscrit dans la période qui correspond à l'arrivée des premiers traitements réellement efficaces contre cette maladie. On voit donc se profiler, en arrière-plan, toute la dimension informative de l'oeuvre.

La richesse du roman, de son regard, tient cependant à sa dimension narrative. Dans un récit fragmenté en épisodes hétéroclites et non chronologiques—toujours axés sur une rencontre faite par Béa depuis son infection—, Lévy dresse un portrait consternant de cette maladie dont peu guérissent. Cette construction diégétique a, de plus, l'avantage de mener à l'élaboration du récit de Béa par l'entremise d'une multitude de micro-récits : ceux des gens que la protagoniste croise depuis la découverte de son statut. Cette narration polyphonique donne ainsi un portrait pluridimensionnel de cette réalité encore méconnue; l'efficacité des traitements n'est qu'à l'état embryonnaire pour cette maladie.

Avec *Debout en clair-obscur,* le lecteur est confronté aux problèmes d'intolérance et d'exclusion qu'engendre le Sida. Il faut applaudir cette représentation de la vie des séropositifs dans toute sa complexité, dans ce parfait amalgame d'ombre et de lumière que nous offre Lévy.

Looking for the Roots

Robert K. Logan
The Extended Mind: The Emergence of Language, the Human Mind, and Culture. U of Toronto P $39.95

Reviewed by Barbara Dancygier

If one needed a single word to describe Logan's book, it would be the word "interdisciplinary."

Logan offers a new look at the question of the origin of human language, an important topic for many groups of scientists. Assumptions about the emergence of language define major questions studied by linguists, but also constitute a challenge to evolutionary theory, cognitive science, and many other disciplines. Roughly

speaking, the approaches rely on some version of two distinct beliefs: either language is an independent faculty of the human brain, hard-wired and species-specific, or it evolved rooted in human culture, alongside other cognitive abilities. Neither approach seems to answer all of the relevant questions, which makes Logan's book particularly useful and timely.

In response to the ongoing dispute, Logan builds a model which explains not only the emergence of language, but also its role in the development of the mind. In Part 1 of the book, he briefly reviews the history of the research, then briskly moves to Part 2, on the evolution of language, and Part 3, in which he gives a detailed overview of the existing approaches to the study of language origins. The final parts, 4 and 5, present Logan's own view, which relies primarily on the synthesis of most of the approaches discussed earlier, with a specific emphasis on the interaction between language and culture.

Logan relies extensively on his earlier work where he proposed an understanding of language as operating in distinct modes, largely independent of its function as a spoken means of communication (the modes include writing, mathematics, science, computing, and the Internet). While the model is largely unrelated to the definition of language used by linguists, Logan uses it to substantiate his claim that language and thought are inseparably connected. The view of the development of language he espouses in the book relies crucially on the claim that "the first word" was tantamount to "the first concept", and took humans from the stage of reliance on observable individual instances of phenomena to the ability to connect such independent acts of perception to general concepts applicable to numerous, and possibly divergent, occurrences. Since, claims Logan, subsequently evolving modes of language do much more than just expand our vocabulary, one can see them as evolutionary stages. Furthermore, language can thus be seen not only as the faculty shared by humans and the core of the functioning of the human mind, but also as an organism which evolves. Also, it co-evolves with another "organism" which underlies human development, human culture. The final picture is summed up in the following equation: "mind = brain + language + culture."

The argument is aimed at reconciling most of the claims made so far regarding the origin of language and the relationship between language and the human mind. For Logan, language and thought are the same thing, and, in order to produce the effect we call "the mind", the brain had to change its way of functioning from merely processing perceptions to also being able to produce concepts and to connect concepts with words. This ability includes most of the mechanisms considered in earlier work—mimesis, symbolic representation, abstract grammar with universal features, ease of acquisition, etc.—but none of them is given priority as the key to language evolution. The added bonus, connected to the modes of language in the context of evolving culture, is the natural explanation for the emergence of science, art, mathematics, the Internet, or any other future innovation affecting our language and thought.

Logan's argument is presented through an extensive review of existing literature, with longish quotations and recurring comparative summaries. The review is extremely careful and will be useful to anyone interested in the questions raised, especially since the findings are presented in a jargon-free, accessible way. The conclusion, however, is somewhat daunting in its overwhelming generality and all-inclusiveness. While we will have to wait for the response from all of the scientists referred to, they are not likely to appreciate that their claims are taken out of their respective contexts and made to work together with other

claims, those which they had discounted. While it makes sense to believe that previous research contained a mixture of valid and unwarranted findings, it does not follow that they are right or wrong just where Logan needs them to be. Watering down all of the arguments does not make them easily pliable.

Furthermore, Logan's account does not seem to translate into a research program of the kind expected. While the field itself easily falls prey to speculation, most of the arguments rely on evidence of some kind (linguistic, anthropological, neurological, etc.). It is not clear, however, how Logan's model can be substantiated through experimental work. Many of the ideas proposed (such as language being an "organism") are intuitively appealing, but on closer inspection appear to function as metaphors rather than as technically viable constructs.

In spite of these problems, Logan's account is thought-provoking and should be useful to all interested in the subject.

A Very Mixed Bag

Moberley Luger
Ragtime for Beginners. Killick $14.95

Tim Lilburn
Orphic Politics. McClelland & Stewart $17.99

Daphne Marlatt
The Given. McClelland & Stewart $17.99

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

While two of these books add to their writers' lengthy oeuvre, Moberley Luger's *Ragtime for Beginners* is her first collection, and her approach stands in some opposition to the more complex poetics of the other two. Although it contains a number of prose poems, the general approach is lyric narrative, with a persona many readers might take to be the poet (although this speaker is slippery enough to be a carefully constructed fiction). Most of the poems appear to be meditations on memory, about growing up in a family falling apart, of moments of delight and apprehension in the young girl's life. A piano left to her serves as a dominating image, sometimes nostalgic, sometimes ironic, as in "The Green Baseball Hat": "My piano wears it well."

There's a long poem based on the case of Anna H who suffered forms of alexia and anomia, as documented by Oliver Sacks, and a number of poems about art; but the book keeps coming back to that young woman and her parents. The writing is sure, each piece reaches a satisfying closure, if that's what a reader wants. *Ragtime for Beginners* presents a new talent demonstrating real potential.

In *Orphic Politics*, Tim Lilburn returns to the ecstatic overreaching of such books as *From the Great Above She Opened Her Ear to the Great Below*; it's a great gawping gulp of metaphor and spiritual yearning expressed through extreme pressure on syntax. The first poem, "Getting Sick," suggests a spiritual crisis inside a medical one, but the poems soon turn toward a strained and strange theology, a reaching beyond the material world through a language all too material and forced toward transcendence. *Orphic Politics* does explore a kind of politics, but it's a politics of the spirit, of seeing through the world to something more.

Lilburn forces language against itself, as parts of speech morph into others. Specifically, almost any word, noun, adjective, for example, can take on life as a verb, pushing against the walls of worldly restraint. At the same time, Lilburn wields both highly philosophical probes and slang with equal verve. This, in a poem titled "Theurgy," for example: "Alcibiades ploughed, the fucker, in forepawed grass, teeth, elk and bear / slapping on him, a singing on his skin like an oil, a running flame / that didn't go in, the man, snot surfing from his smashed face, talking, / talking, turning to the wall, talking, turning back, talking, a buried / erection in a paleolithic

hand, talking, near the dolphin (talking), / chinless, grin-flanked, under-ocean saint-speaker, / the stream-naked Socrates." It goes on, evoking in passing "Nikolai Berdyaev. Lori Niedecker." The man is nothing if not omnivorous.

It is perhaps possible to trace a spiritual journey through *Orphic Politics*, but it's not an easy trip for the reader. Challenging sense with their overwhelming rhetoric of excess, these poems chant, pummel, cry out against so much that doesn't quite come clear, perhaps because it's all beyond. In their bold attempt to touch that beyond, these poems demand admiration, but they often remain too opaque to gain delight or love.

Long poem/novel/memoir, *The Given* adds another dimension to Daphne Marlatt's exploration of the mother-daughter relationship over time. Its five sections range from the narrator's present back to her childhood, teen years, and the terrible moment of her mother's death, slowly constructing the brilliant moments of insight, perception, understanding, and identification in a series of fragments, the accumulation of which makes for what can best be called a poetic psychological novel.

The publisher calls *The Given* a long poem, and that will also do; in many ways, that form is perhaps the most malleable one around these days. Except for a very few lineated fragments, Marlatt has written this meditation on time and memory in prose fragments that range through conversation, letters, newspaper clippings, and description to sharply delineated perceptions of nature, human constructions, and persons both close to and distant from the narrator. And she is represented as a psyche capable of finding and writing all these different genres, and of suddenly pushing an image, or a comment, to a poetic concision and complexity not usually found in straight memoir or fiction.

As her narrator explores her past in what was to her home, and to her mother the final insecure posting around the world, she also attempts to understand what "home" and "self" mean, especially in terms of whom one shares such a space with. Her relationship with her lover, and the sense of security it engenders, stands in contradistinction to her mother's sense of alienation in a Canada so at odds with her British upbringing and the life she led in Penang. The sections on "1953" and "1958" reveal both the normal tensions of family life and the more complex tensions between a woman locked in memory of the old country and the daughters so full of desire to live in the present new one; that the narrator is trapped in the all too narrow and banal rigidities of 1950s heterosexual advertising only adds to the tensions reflected in these sections.

The Given offers another version of Marlatt's continuing poetic autobiography, a story that is always open to further shaping, a powerful spiritual inquiry into how the personal past reverberates throughout our lives. It's a fine addition to a unique oeuvre.

Circle of Abuse

Rozena Maart
The Writing Circle. TSAR $20.95

Reviewed by Myrl Coulter

Although its title suggests that the book's subject is writing (and in many ways it is), Rozena Maart's second novel is about a specific kind of writing: it's about writing violence—historical violence, social violence, misogynist violence. Its subject is a cycle of violence determined not only by stereotyping, but also by past and present cultural conditioning.

Five women, all with professional careers and complicated private lives that are diversely separate yet strangely intersected, meet every Friday night in a Cixousian exercise of *écriture feminine*. As Maart writes at the outset, they gather together

on a weekly basis "to share their experience of writing memory, writing the body." For these, as for many women, their stories are indeed written in, on, and by their bodies.

Overwritten in some places and underwritten in others, *The Writing Circle* is a compelling, challenging read. As in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (also a novel about writing violence), South Africa's complex brutal history is a powerful presence. However, unlike *Disgrace*'s dominant white male narrator, five female voices tell *The Writing Circle*'s story. Titled "Isabel," the first chapter opens with an almost calm lead-in sentence that cautions the book's audience about the world they are poised to enter: "It was the cold mouth of the gun against my temple as I sat behind the wheel of my car that alerted me to the fact that this was indeed a hijack." Isabel's initially cool analysis of her situation suggests that violence in Capetown is a regular part of daily existence. Alas, Isabel is the target of more than a random hijacking, and her composed opening line is just the prelude to a brutal sexual attack that ends in the perpetrator's death.

Opting for a highly balanced structure, Maart divides her novel into two parts, both consisting of five chapters. Named simply for its narrator, each chapter features one of the five main characters telling successive parts of the evolving story. Curiously, their chapters follow each other in the same order in part two as in part one, as if each narrator is adhering to the group's regular writing workshop pattern. This democratic sharing of narrative duties allows Maart to reveal how the consequences of one act of violence echo through many different lives.

The participants in this writing group are five very different women who have five very different stories: Jazz is a take-charge Sikh neurosurgeon; Beauty, a Xhosa artist who creates sculptures of the female body; Carmen, a sensitive, insecure English psychotherapist; Amina, a Muslim mother who designs textile patterns; and Isabel, a social worker who works with victims of sexual abuse. Although Isabel is the one who is attacked, all the women in the story are subject to, and survivors of, various kinds of social and sexual abuse. Unlike Isabel's attacker—a menacing unknown figure who emerges from the shadows—most of their abusers are men (and women) close to them, people who should be trusted figures in their lives.

Trust, then, becomes a prominent theme in this unsettling tale. These women have formed unlikely, uneasy friendships that are severely tested during this ordeal. As they relate the events that follow Isabel's brutal experience, all five women reveal themselves, their follies, their wisdoms, their family relationships and conflicts, their unusual romantic liaisons, and their circle's reaction to the surprising revelation of the attacker's identity. In the end, their trust in each other is both transgressed and upheld.

The Writing Circle is not an easy read: the shifting narrative voices are effective but at times disruptive. However, these voices are also what allow *The Writing Circle*'s expansive cultural commentary to flourish. The relationships among the women are occasionally difficult to follow: at times they don't sound like friends, but adversaries instead. Ordinary details, such as a lengthy description of Amina's trip to the hairdresser, seem at first like unnecessary trivia or awkward red herrings. Yet Maart includes repeated 'hair' moments that link the ordinary to the extraordinary, such as the chunks of Isabel's hair that remain in her dead attacker's hands, or the moment when Isabel takes scissors to her own hair in the days after her assault.

As in South Africa's ongoing difficult recovery from past and current brutalities, *The Writing Circle* stops before the story ends. The characters are on their way to a traumatic meeting, one that will certainly

find its way into their shared writing circle, just as *The Writing Circle* should find its deserved place in the literary records of South Africa and Canada.

A Human Wilderness

I.S. MacLaren, ed.
Culturing Wilderness in Jasper National Park: Studies in Two Centuries of Human History in the Upper Athabasca River Watershed. U of Alberta P $45.00

Reviewed by Jocelyn Thorpe

In spite of Jasper's long history as a national park and forest reserve and its contemporary popularity with tourists (over two million people visit the park each year), few published materials have, until now, examined the human history of the upper Athabasca River watershed commonly known as Jasper National Park. The nine essays that comprise *Culturing Wilderness* focus on different aspects of the human culture and history embedded in Jasper nature, demonstrating that humans have profoundly shaped the ecological and cultural character of the region. The contributions of Eric Higgs and editor I.S. MacLaren, for instance, suggest that the dense forest that now covers much of Jasper National Park is not a natural phenomenon, but rather the result of fire-suppression initiatives launched in the early twentieth century by a federal government intent upon securing future timber supplies for prairie settlers. Peter J. Murphy in his interview with Edward Wilson Moberly also questions the self-evidence of Jasper wilderness, showing how the creation of a wilderness park was premised upon the eviction of Métis families from their homesteads. Collectively, the essays that make up *Culturing Wilderness* challenge the commonsense understanding of Jasper as a natural area devoid of, or at least not dramatically shaped by, human activity. In so doing, the collection's contributors offer concrete examples in support of William Cronon's seminal argument that wilderness, rather than existing outside of humanity, is the creation of particular humans at specific points in time.

In his introduction, MacLaren observes that no single book could do justice to the immense subject of human history in Jasper. *Culturing Wilderness*, however, provides an excellent start. The essays, which range in topic from park-boundary changes to tourism and from the politics of naming mountains to the ethics of climbing them, are thoroughly researched and thought provoking. In their piece about Mary Schäffer's 1911 survey of Maligne Lake, PearlAnn Reichwein and Lisa McDermott do a particularly good job of situating Schäffer in her historical context while also pointing out how she broke with tradition when she publicly acknowledged the labour conducted for her survey by working-class guides and local Aboriginal people, labour that made possible her "discovery" and subsequent survey of Maligne Lake. Reichwein and McDermott are careful neither to condemn nor to celebrate unabashedly the creation of Jasper National Park, and instead consider the complex race, class, and gender politics surrounding Schäffer's surveying expedition and her related effort to have Maligne Lake included within the park's boundaries. The essays of the collection do, however, make it clear that tourism in the national park erased other relationships with the region, for example working relationships associated with the fur trade and homesteading. Yet, as Zac Robinson's piece on mountaineering reveals, not all tourists were equally welcomed at Jasper. While periodicals such as the *Canadian Alpine Journal* celebrated the mountain-climbing accomplishments of upper-class white men and women who belonged to the Alpine Club of Canada, such publications barely acknowledged the efforts of a group of Japanese alpinists

who, in 1925, made the first ascent of Jasper's Mount Alberta.

The main point of *Culturing Wilderness*—that humans have played a large role in the making of Jasper wilderness—comes across clearly and convincingly in a book that is also beautifully designed, containing as it does many illustrative photographs and paintings as well as helpful maps. One element of the human history of Jasper that is not fully addressed in the collection is Aboriginal history. Although Michael Payne describes the fur trade in the region from 1810 to 1910, there is little discussion of what happened to Stoney, Cree, and other Aboriginal peoples after the creation of the park. Attention to this dimension of Jasper's history would not only add to readers' understanding of the region, but would also likely strengthen the book's argument that some human relationships with the region came to dominate over others. The occasion of the book's creation is the centennial of Jasper National Park. Given that centennials often emphasize celebration over critical reflection, *Culturing Wilderness* is refreshing in its reflective tone. The exception to this is the foreword by Jean Chrétien, which, in its overly celebratory salute to national parks and his own role in their creation, detracts from the aims and accomplishments of the book as a whole. A romp through *Culturing Wilderness* will certainly change, and also make more interesting, a reader's next journey in the thoroughly cultured Jasper National Park.

To Be Surprised Every Day

David W. McFadden; Stuart Ross, ed.
Why Are You So Sad? Selected Poems of David W. McFadden. Insomniac $21.95

George McWhirter
The Incorrection. Oolichan $17.95

Reviewed by Daniel Burgoyne

Nominated for the 2008 Griffin poetry prize, *Why Are You So Sad*? is the most compelling book of poetry I have read this past year. These are poems that invite perpetual rereading, alive in each instant and open upon return. "To be surprised every day" might have been a better title for the selected poems of a writer whose daily produce seems so effortless and unpretentious, whose constant innovation with the line, with voicing, with the very idea of a poem yields astonishment with the turn of almost every page.

I don't quite believe editor Stuart Ross' claim—perhaps it is McFadden's—that the order of the selection is randomly generated. I read through the book from beginning to end, and while the impression is sometimes bewildering in a chronological sense, requiring a quick thumb to the back of the book where most of the poems are commented on by McFadden, the progression and thematic patterning strikes me as too substantive to be random. Ross selects poems from a broad range of books like *Intense Pleasure* (1972) and *The Art of Darkness* (1984), rather than concentrating on the more well known books like *Gypsy Guitar* (1987). Perhaps it doesn't matter how the selection is organized because obliqueness is an art McFadden cultivates, like the random and almost anonymous encounter with Frank O'Hara during an Easter field trip to New York. O'Hara tells the young poet "never to let yourself / get bored by poetry."

One emphasis produced by this arrangement is McFadden's affinity with surrealism,

as in the images littering "Desire Blossoms":

> You know how you're walking at night
> and the ground's covered with severed
> human hands
> sticking up from the stinking ground like
> two lips
> and the forefinger of each is pointing at you,
> swiveling in synch as you slither by . . .

I'm not sure surrealism is the right word for it though. There is rarely anything like a *non sequitur* in McFadden. The juxtapositions seem purposeful, notices required of the poet like the "Lion in the Road." The "lion larger than six elephants" is "lying in the intersection of Bloor and Avenue Road": "what is it about me, why do things that most people scarcely notice affect me so, why can't I be like everyone else and simply turn and go back the way I came without honking? Why do I always have to give a damn?" The subconscious—if that's what it is—seems necessary.

Ross observes that McFadden's poetry is insistently social. Perhaps it is the shifting second person pronoun—poems are conversations, often punctuated with dream poems like "Greaseball" and "My Body Was Eaten by Dogs" as if the membrane separating individuals from each other was dissolved at the turn of a line. "Secrets of the Universe":

> You tell her you don't want to dance
> for there is too much snow
> and not enough music
> and she says you didn't mind
> dancing with me last night.
>
> And when you tell her she's mistaken
> you didn't dance with her or anyone last
> night
> she says oh yes you did . . .
>
> leaving you to wonder about the part of
> your life
> that is secret even from you.

A finalist for the 2008 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize, *The Incorrection*, by George McWhirter, Vancouver's first poet laureate, reads like a shambling fusion of observations in retirement and incisive flourishes of a master wit. I can't overemphasize how disorienting this combination can be. The first suite of poems, "Fluid Places," self-described as fey commentary and slender sonnets, eludes me completely with its transparent scenes of writing and enumerative miscellany. The second suite is a different matter altogether: "Epicuriosities and Po-Essays from the Dailies" begins with the bray and snort of daily news, poems that open around incidents of reported contemporary life taken from publications like *The New York Times*. These self-reflexive poems are perhaps the most innovative of the volume, dancing around topical or merely eclectic issues like how much water it takes to make a Californian t-shirt, an "absorption in juicy articles, a discussion." "Conviction," the third suite, is preoccupied with love, and it is here that the governing theme of incorrection comes to the fore. The volume's epigraph told us, "In trying to correct an old wrong / I seem to create a new one"; and in "Yellow Isle," at "the Court of Incorrections / the indictments add up on an abacus." This promise of insight fades, perhaps appropriately, through the final suite of the volume, which is preoccupied with nostalgia and marked by cliché at points, as in the poem "What is the First Thing You Do in the Morning?"

Here, There, and Nowhere

Roy Miki
There. New Star $21.00

Robert Moore
Museum Absconditum. Wolsak and Wynn $17.00

Carl Leggo
Come-by-Chance. Breakwater $14.95

Review by Andre Furlani

Roy Miki, Robert Moore, and Carl Leggo are not after the same things in poetry or with poetry. Moore, who teaches Humanities at the University of New Brunswick and whose first book *So Rarely in Our Skins* was nominated for the Atlantic Poetry Prize, wants the traditional moral and aesthetic dividend of sombre lyric introspection. Miki, who taught English at Simon Fraser University and whose *Surrender* won the 2006 Governor General's Award for poetry, wants tentatively embodied contradiction and projectivist propulsion without rest or reification. Leggo, who teaches teaching at the University of British Columbia, just wants to say what's on his mind, organizing as poems what might as well be memoirs, personal essays, or memoranda.

Moore's terrain is domestic and metaphysical (the *Museum Absconditum* alludes to an imaginary library catalogued by Thomas Browne), while Leggo is a transplanted Newfoundlander sometimes reporting from sabbatical near Corner Brook (*Come-by-Chance* is on Placentia Bay, but has a metaphysical connotation the poet can use). Miki's last book was *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. He is a hyphenated Canadian citizen of the world, writing from here and every "there": Taiwan, Japan, Germany, the Canadian West, and the digital nowhere.

The editor of Roy Kiyooka's *Collected Poems* and of a collection of essays on bpNichol, Miki views language as value-saturated and defining. Rather than orchestrating effects out of its docile materials, the lyric ego in *There* is embedded in language and shaped by it. His is exclusively "a contractual // 'i' never more than speech" ("The Fronds on Galiano"). The poet cannot hope to arrive at some originary, authentic self, for that self is not prior to language and history. And so in *There* words are less a medium than a matter, *the* matter. "Virtual Cells" is, for example, an alphabetical catalogue poem derived from abstracts to a Banff biotechnology conference. The cellular propagation of words suggests the equivalent of "complex emergent behaviours" in swarms (one of the conference subjects).

The poems vary from colloquial prolixity, as when in "There Are Some Days" he frets over his literary vocation, to the zen density of the oblique "Alibis." Plenty of *There* is baffling, exacerbated by a flight from the temptations of cadence and rhythm. Like a Sebald narrative, the book contains uncaptioned photos, including a Berlin office building, a Calgary clapboard, a Taipei tarmac, as well as abstractionist close-ups of natural forms. Their clarity makes a contrast with the verse. In "This Side" a photo of red garages up for lease in Calgary's industrial Victoria Park precedes a typical stanza:

> *Premonition*
> The patron saint of lease
> the tanginess of elsewhere
> routes the dog days of slumber
> ("This Side")

The poems are urbane, clipped, and sceptical. "Slippages" is a recurring word. The only refuge may be in the serene nature photos that make up part of several poems, but for all the references to Hokusai and Basho in "Glance" the poems do not resort to pastoral. They are political without being ideological. Alarms about the environment, biotechnology, and identity politics are conjured rather than proclaimed. The fractive, collage structures may leave much of the book unintelligible, but insulate it from sloganeering.

In "There Are Some Days" Miki groans at "mediated relationships with the news," including reports of the latest Microsoft gimcrack intended only to multiply ephemera. Quotation from Judith Butler, a photo of Kitsilano sunbathers, and a parallel column of rhymed couplets refract Miki's fear that verse is no longer audible "across the vast network of exchanges." The remedy for him is to render the poem a rival network of just such exchanges. (For Leggo in "Squid" the remedy is to tune out and write a poem about the act.)

Difficult poetry, yes. And yet, where it strives to be accessible Miki's poems can be almost as hokey as Moore's and Leggo's at their weakest. "Sagacity doubles / As city saga," Miki writes. "Cemetery-like seminary / So I left, sure a pastor shouldn't be pasteurized," writes Leggo. Meanwhile Moore's father is "at sea" in a photo in his son's boat and "at sea" with dementia. On turning fifty Leggo sees "weekend / as weakened" while Miki's oracular German travelogue is entitled "Weekling in Berlin." Is this all Canadian poetry gets for championing the free play of the signifier?

Moore is morbidly preoccupied with death, his own rehearsed through meditation on the deaths of family and familiars. "Goodnight moon" is not about faith in the morrow but a death vigil. The sardonic title is supposed to reveal the unillusioned clarity of the poet's mourning. He learned "irony" in palliative care, he explains, but often it sounds like the false bravado, cynicism, and insecurity of a teen. That's the age you learn irony.

Even an innocent game of marbles with his young daughter announces the *Dies Irae*. They were retrieved from his parents' basement after his mother's death, and he imagines those marbles at the end of the world, "the hour she stands up / on the grass, taking a moment to smooth her dress / before waving me over." At the Apocalypse those forgotten rules for marbles "are gone through and everything's explained," or so the poet would like to fancy. He really should not have to wait this long to get the rules for marbles.

Moore writes in a rambling free verse punctuated by the occasional unobtrusive rhyme. As the book's recondite title warns, Moore's diction can be obtrusive; hair is "atramentous," hopes are "hebetudinous," rock is "comminuted," woods are "caliginous," man is "dimidiated," fields are "flensed." The notes direct us to literary sources. Maybe, like Thomas Browne's imaginary library, this is all a pedantic joke.

Moore's levity is clever and involved, but undermined by stagy sepulchral brooding. In the characteristically titled "Among many false starts and other dead ends," Moore imagines his heart conversing with a former lover, the organ soon reporting that she is dying. When the poet says "it's late," the heart of course replies, "*Isn't it always*." Recollection of taking a call from a colleague during oral sex, in "Benedetti was a classicist," culminates in news that the man is dying. Eros and Thanatos? "*I want to tell you*, I nearly told the poor man, / you've meant more to me than you'll ever know." Classics, indeed: this is just the kind of joke that Martial or Catullus would have condensed into a slickly obscene epigram, but Moore makes a chatty page of it.

Leggo is wry, wistful, and sentimental but the similes and analogies are laboured. The return to the island inspires engaging prosaic memories but he abuses catachresis too much, as in "Mist," where he hopes to learn to "hear the light of the heart" and "taste the heart's rhythm." While driving the Trans-Canada across Newfoundland in the title poem, "I chant with the sun's ancient blood rhythms," but it is Whitman he is trying to chant. The figurative language trips up the poems rather than propelling them: "I want to stand naked / in the spring rain / and / grow like daffodils / open to language," he declaims in "Beachstones," but flowers are

not open to language, and nor are Leggo's poems. The better poems read like versified acknowledgments.

That originary and authentic self surrendered by Miki as a pronominal fancy is sought, studied, and palliated in Moore's and Leggo's poems. The two poets are aging, retrospective, good-humoured but finally sombre and self-absorbed. For all the pleasures this kind of lyric can provide, it is easy to see why Miki would wish to eschew the form, even as he cannot help but hear "the sparrows mock the maker / of poems going nowhere fast."

The Poet's Quandaries

A.F. Moritz
The Sentinel. Anansi $18.95

Raymond Souster
Sparrow Talk. Battered Silicon Dispatch Box $24.00

Reviewed by Amanda Lim

A.F. Moritz's *The Sentinel*, a 2008 Governor General's Literary Awards finalist, and Raymond Souster's *Sparrow Talk*, the second book of Souster's "Up to Date" series, are both collections of poetry dealing with questions of progress, nature, war, art, time, mortality, justice, and other seemingly timeless subjects. Although each collection is a worthy addition to the existing oeuvre of these accomplished poets, they confront similar subjects rather differently and with varying degrees of success.

The Sentinel opens with the evocative "The Butterfly," before presenting the rest of the poems in three sections named "Better Days," "In a Prosperous Country," and, again, "Better Days." "The Butterfly" presents a futuristic vision of the world, but very much grounded in the realities of the present—war, violence, competing utopian and dystopian visions, and a desire for political and social transformation. The poem introduces one of the book's dominant themes, the intersection of the personal and the political in imagining a collective future that is more just and responsible, for us and for future generations. Moritz writes on a range of topics: the construction and narration of history, the disenfranchised and war, the politics of memorialization, our vexed relationship with urban spaces, the trials of youth, the human body's mortality, the process of poetic creation, and the relationship between personal time, nature, and collective history. His butterfly poignantly reminds us of the "butterfly effect" and is like his canary in the coal mine—the harbinger, the prophet, and the poet. *The Sentinel*'s title poem, appropriately situated in the middle of the book, addresses similar connections between past legacies, present conundrums, and future visions. The sentinel, like the butterfly, represents the prophet-poet, caught between protecting the "old guard" of tradition and civilization and trying to anticipate and shape the future. His dilemma crystallizes our own tremulous position between hope and fear. Moritz is at his best when he combines his poetic sensibility—his ear for rhythm, precise phrasing, nuanced shifts in tone and register, and lyrical imagery—with his knowledge of mythic and literary conventions and his cogent political and philosophical observations.

Souster's collection, *Sparrow Talk*, explores many of the same issues as *The Sentinel*, such as mortality, technological progress, war and violence, and nature, but in a radically different style. Most of the poems are short, no longer than one or two stanzas, and many are only one to five lines long. Souster eschews the metaphors, allusions, and lengthier reflections that characterize *The Sentinel*, and opts instead for the speech of ordinary conversation, direct and declarative. Whereas *The Sentinel* is organized into sections, *Sparrow Talk* reads more like a stream-of-consciousness whose poems are organized chronologically and

continuously follow one after another on the same page, like the entries in a journal. Souster's strength resides in his seemingly inexhaustible capacity for witty aphorisms and humorous revisions to conventional ways of thinking. Like *The Sentinel*, *Sparrow Talk* hinges on the interplay of hope and fear, but contains more humour than the former, which is more melancholy though it contains flashes of modern comedy in poems like "Busman's Honeymoon" and "The Titanic." Yet, resignation, cynicism, and nostalgia seem more prominent in *Sparrow Talk* even though Souster writes that he sings of hope; his final poem "Old Fools Like Us" illustrates this. Moritz at times sounds post-apocalyptic, yet he usually avoids the nostalgia that in *Sparrow Talk* risks spilling over into conservatism and tends to create a sense of debilitation and paralysis. *Sparrow Talk* has the quality of avian conversation, consisting of brief, sharp insights into human behaviour, but its best moments of unique wit, irony, and understatement are punctuated by slightly tired and banal lines, making the collection somewhat uneven and disjointed in tone and affect. Souster does very well in capturing our gut reactions to and feelings about current political and social crises, but in comparison to Moritz's nuanced observations and balance between complex ethical quandaries and emotion, they can come across as simply righteous, indignant, and regrettably simplistic.

Thus, while each book has its own merits, *The Sentinel* accomplishes with greater dexterity what *Sparrow Talk* aims for but does not quite reach, which is the combination of formal attention and studied reflection in appealing to both reason and emotion.

Time Changes

W.H. New
Along a Snake Fence Riding. Oolichan $16.95

Rob Budde
Finding Ft. George. Caitlin $15.95

Colin Browne
The Shovel. Talonbooks $19.95

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

Although the terms of their engagement differ, all three of these books take up the burdens of history, local or world, and attempt to come to some sort of human comprehension of what they mean and how they continue to affect us in our individual and social lives.

William New's eighth book of poetry, *Along a Snake Fence Riding*, is, intriguingly, a poem for eight voices. A Narrator introduces and concludes the whole, while also introducing each section; within the sections six separate voices engage a wide range of topics, mostly associated with our awareness, sense, and knowledge of time; while throughout the eighth voice, "the Newtonian Clock," provides a running commentary, variations on a theme of time.

As his acknowledgements note, New has filled his poem with a vast array of allusions, to myth, legend, literature and science, while opening up a kind of multi-dialogue among his many voices and their particular concerns. The Narrator holds all together through his attention to the concept of travel through time and space, starting with a restless wanderer's approach to a small settlement and ending with our wandering state as we approach a venture to the stars. All the other voices provide a chorus of human visions of how we place ourselves in time, or in times of peace and war.

Along a Snake Fence Riding is an interesting read; it would, I suspect, make for a truly exciting performance, where the different actors' voices, overlapping one another, would add to the sense of

humanity speaking out of its various cultural awareness, asserting our common situation in a world of time passing.

In *Finding Ft. George*, Rob Budde approaches his new home in northern British Columbia with eyes wide open and poetic radar on full alert. The book is highly autobiographical yet "it's about leaving the lyric, and the city's full / use of us" behind. The i/eye is clearly the poet's, but it refuses the confessional, rather putting perception and textual awareness in the forefront. Poems dedicated to Prince George, in history and the present; poems dedicated to fellow writers; and poems dedicated to uncovering the commercial damage continually being done to the land around this boomtown interweave throughout, offering a clear-eyed vision of the place, as it is.

The poems in *Finding Ft. George* can shift from the savvy, almost satiric, take on commerce in "tankful" to a near-haiku of pure animal perception like "ends of the earth": "toad licks her lips / slouches in the mooseprint / hoping the earth holds on." Throughout, Budde insists that poetics inheres in geography, economics, history, and everything else he encounters. The idea of the poem emerges everywhere, often expressly, as in "the soup" ("tell a friend what's in it and / how poetry is hearty, how / it cleans the blood"), or by implication, as in "prince rupert (chatham sounds)." Always, the poet writing to us insists that he is also the reader, new to this particular text of a place, but a good interpreter already.

The final section is a poetic sequence, "the untrained eye," a lovely series of quick takes from the train, seeing much more and much more clearly than the title suggests. It makes for a fine conclusion to a volume more visionary than at first it seems. *Finding Ft. George* will enhance Budde's already growing reputation.

Colin Browne seems willing to try just about anything in his writing; certainly his accomplishments soar in *The Shovel*, a searing collection of meditations on history, war, destruction, and the savage inheritances of memory. Although there are moments of great good humour in *The Shovel*—for it reaches out to the full range of human experience—the overall impression is one of a great sadness at how far into atrocity people can be made to go.

The pieces in *The Shovel* range from prose memoirs to verse games in which the most apparently journalistic prose enshrines the most fictional moments while various poetic forms contain found materials Browne has dug up in research materials, stories from others, and various source texts. To quote the cover commentary, he "has inverted the way we have been defining and privileging forms of language in English for the last century." Whether or not the reader wholly agrees, she will be excited by the range of tones, the wild associations, and the profound uneasiness engendered by the accumulation of effects in *The Shovel*.

Browne collates the recent history of British Columbia with the wars of the long twentieth century, focusing most on the "adventure" in the mid-East during World War I, with all its implicit connections to the war in Iraq today. Over the course of the book, these connections become a kind of noose, pulled tight in the long final piece, a work of carefully entwined narrative threads, "Over Olean, or the Misuse of Reticence." A brilliant, and overwhelming, exploration of the personal memories of aged relatives and the actual war records, it brings the whole volume to a darkly glowing climax.

But among the visions of human atrocity in *The Shovel*, there are moments of intellectual brightness, even a kind of severe joy. I'd argue that the two pieces in which Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida appear, seemingly far outside their usual haunts, are alone worth the price of admission. Certainly Browne's riff on taking Barthes around the Kootenays, originally presented

as "a casual talk" at the "Alley Alley Home Free" conference in honour of Pauline Butling and Fred Wah, is sublimely comic in the philosophical sense. That it also presents a profound argument about the Barthean approach to life and art reveals the continual subtleties of Browne's art.

The Shovel is a major work, confirmation of Colin Browne's exacting artistry, his ability to bring such a wide range of materials into a single, epic (in the sense that Pound gave to that term), and devastatingly concentrated unity of purpose. One of those necessary books, it earns and deserves our closest attention.

Controversial Donne

Mary Novik
Conceit. Doubleday $29.95
Reviewed by Elizabeth Hodgson

As a John Donne scholar, I thought I would enjoy this fictional treatment of his life. As a critic interested in gender and cultural history, I imagined the focus on Donne's wife Ann More and on his daughter a productive antidote to his often misogynist verse. The opening scene, with the 1666 Great Fire of London eating up St. Paul's Cathedral, is strikingly dramatic. Unfortunately, my expectations of pleasure in *Conceit* were shortly undone.

I have three different difficulties with this novel. The first is with *Conceit's* structure. The first one hundred pages make Pegge, Donne's daughter, its focal point and narrator. The next 150-page section juxtaposes Ann More recounting from the grave her love affair with the young John Donne with Donne's own slow death. The last section(s) of the book gallop through the thirty plus years between Donne's death and the Great Fire. The sections have distractingly various density, focus, and perspective. The novel claims that Pegge is obsessed with her absent mother, but Pegge's smallpox, Donne's necrotizing feet, Izaak Walton's fly-fishing, and Pegge's odd behaviours in later life all obscure Ann More again. Pegge's mental disintegration, because it takes place in the accelerated second half of the book, is never fully explained. Digressions on Samuel Pepys' drinking, on Izaak Walton's lusts, do little to clarify the book's apparent central interest.

Second, the novel seems not to trust itself on subjects beyond a rather relentless emphasis on stink and pus and blood and maggots, on enemas and skulls and sweat. I enjoy gore and sex in my fiction as much as the next person, but not when writers appear uncertain as to whether they can make their writing interesting without them. *Conceit,* like Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl,* seems to feel that prurient titillation is the sole means to tempt readers to put up with a historical context. I'm all for marketing history, but some ways are better than others.

As a corollary to this, under the guise of gyno-lit ("the central character is a woman from the past who is treated badly by men. She has a fascinating physical life which will be revealed to illustrate the souls of women in bygone eras"), *Conceit* treats women as material bodies driven almost entirely by sexual desire, sexual competition, or slightly insane obsessions with their parents' love. We know far more about Pegge's hair than we do about her brains. If this is what the book is about, I would rather read a frank bodice-ripper than one aping a proto-feminist novel, especially since bodice-rippers often have a much more comprehensible view of women's complicated negotiations with power than this distracted work.

This leads me to my final unease with this novel. I know it is a very popular trend to use historical or famous people as central characters in "fictional" works. While I know that this practice is technically within the writer's rights by law, and can make for powerful imaginative works, I wonder

whether this is in every sense an inherently responsible practice. My further difficulty with Novik's fictionalized biography is that it is not only randomly evidentiary but also so frequently absurd. Snippets from Donne's prose and poetic work get used frequently in the novel: Novik certainly knows her source. This is most interesting when Novik tries to imagine what it would be like to live with a famous preacher with an infamous past. Too often, though, Donne's literary words become what he shouts to his children, his drunken dinnertime conversation, or even (via the bawdy "Epithalamium at Lincolns Inne") information on how Ann and John Donne were actually married.

Aside from how implausible this is, I find it also quite willfully disingenuous. Novik says in her "Valediction" that "this is *my* seventeenth century and I have invented joyfully and freely. The characters entered fully into the spirit of it, contributing in surprising ways to their own fictionalization, John Donne most liberally of all." It's hard to dispute that fiction is fiction. It does seem just as obvious, though, that such fictional derivatives will not be loved by all discerning readers.

Un moi à la dérive

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska
Autofiction et dévoilement de soi. XYZ 23,00 $

Compte rendu par Patricia Smart

Dans *Autofiction et dévoilement de soi*, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska nous livre une réflexion originale et stimulante sur ce genre extrêmement difficile à cerner qu'est l'autofiction. Romancière, poète, et essayiste remarquable, auteure d'ouvrages pionniers dans les domaines de l'écriture postmoderne et du féminisme, Ouellette-Michalska déploie ici la même intelligence et la même vastitude de références culturelles et théoriques que dans *L'Échappée des discours de l'oeil*, l'essai féministe couronné par le Prix du Gouverneur général en 1981, mais le ton est maintenant plus personnel et plus interrogatif, tout comme le genre traversé d'incertitudes qu'elle soumet à l'analyse.

Produit et symptôme d'une époque où les anciennes hiérarchies se sont écroulées, l'autofiction affiche la vulnérabilité et le scandale d'un moi à la dérive, libéré par (ou condamné à) la singularité de son trajet narratif. C'est le moi des émissions à lignes ouvertes, de la télé-réalité et d'émissions comme *Tout le monde en parle* : Narcisse postmoderne qui se met en spectacle, exhibant ses luttes et ses excès devant des milliers d'auditeurs, de spectateurs ou de lecteurs. Tentative de se faire aimer? Ou jeu cynique d'une société hyper-médiatisée? Ouellette-Michalska met le doigt sur le malaise suscité par cette abdication de la pudeur, où le narcissisme et le voyeurisme semblent avoir remplacé le respect des limites, signalant un effondrement de l'ordre établi. Elle scrute les manifestations littéraires de ce phénomène où les frontières entre le privé et le public s'estompent, se demandant pourquoi ces oeuvres ont acquis tant d'importance dans la culture de nos jours, quels sont leurs liens avec les autres genres autobiographiques, et pourquoi les femmes excellent à ce genre d'écriture.

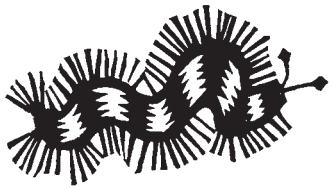
Est-il possible de démarquer la frontière entre autobiographie traditionnelle, roman autobiographique et autofiction? Après la référence obligatoire au pacte autobiographique de Lejeune (« Ce que je vous dis est vrai; je l'ai vécu ») et la constatation du fait que « l'écriture autobiographique n'exclut pas l'universalité », Ouellette-Michalska trace le graduel estompement du pacte et l'évolution vers le très (trop) intime de Sartre à Annie Ernaux et ensuite à Nelly Arcan. Tandis que *Les Mots* de Sartre, avec son identification entre écriture et identité, reste encore dans les limites de l'autobiographie traditionnelle, chez Ernaux on assiste à un dévoilement de « l'extrême privé » accompagné d'une insistance sur

l'universalité de la démarche: « Je ne me raconte pas; je révèle les choses essentielles de l'existence humaine. » Chez Arcan, avec son obsession du regard et son dévoilement des détails les plus scandaleux du corps et du sexe, il n'est plus possible de faire la distinction entre le vécu et le fictif : c'est la femme-objet qui parle, ouvrant un espace ambigu entre le féminisme et la pornographie. Ici, nous sommes carrément dans le domaine de l'autofiction.

Si le mot « autofiction » ne remonte qu'à son utilisation par Serge Dubrovsky dans les années 1970, Ouellette-Michalska nous rappelle que le phénomène existe depuis beaucoup plus longtemps (*Le Portrait de l'artiste* de Joyce, *La Naissance du jour* de Colette et *Prochain épisode* d'Aquin en seraient des exemples). De plus, le « roman intime », qui contient une large part d'autobiographie (*La Nouvelle Héloïse* de Rousseau, les oeuvres de Chateaubriand, de Byron, de Goethe), brouille les frontières entre autobiographie et fiction et privilégie une « confession romantique » qui anticipe les dévoilements moins pudiques de l'ère postmoderne. Malgré les tentatives de définition d'un grand nombre de théoriciens qu'elle passe en revue (Genette, Barthes, Robbe-Grillet, Dubrovsky, Lejeune), force est de constater qu' « il est difficile d'établir une ligne de partage précise entre l'autobiographie et l'autofiction ».

L'apport le plus original et intéressant de l'essai de Ouellette-Michalska est sa réflexion sur la place prépondérante des femmes dans la production de l'autofiction —dominance qui n'est pas surprenante vu l'importance des thèmes du corps, du désir et de la transgression dans le genre, mais que l'auteure voit comme un phénomène à double tranchant. Car, tout en représentant un renforcement identitaire pour les femmes, l'autofiction féminine exprime souvent un désarroi proche de l'affolement (on pense à Catherine Millet, Annie Ernaux, Nelly Arcan) : « Ne sachant plus ce qu'elle est, la femme capitule facilement devant le désir de l'autre, ses fantasmes, ses besoins ». L'auteure s'interroge longuement sur les origines de cette crise identitaire, nous présentant en cours de route de brèves histoires de l'écriture féminine et de l'écriture érotique ainsi qu'une analyse percutante de la situation confuse de la femme d'aujourd'hui face à la disparition de l'idéal de la féminité et des rôles qui la définissaient autrefois. Si la séparation de la sexualité et de la reproduction lui offre de nouvelles possibilités d'épanouissement érotique, elle la condamne en même temps à la perpétuation de son statut d'objet sexuel : « Le maquillage, la diététique, la salle de gym, l'hormonothérapie, la chirurgie esthétique transforment sa chair en objet culturel. »

L'immense terrain littéraire et culturel que Ouellette-Michalska choisit de survoler dans son court essai est à la fois la force et la faiblesse de son livre. (En plus des aspects déjà mentionnés, elle consacre un chapitre fascinant à la lettre amoureuse, de la correspondance d'Abélard et Héloïse jusqu'aux *Obscènes tendresses* de Marie-Josée Thériault [2006], en passant par les *Lettres de la religieuse portugaise* et les *Nouvelles lettres portugaises*.) Son sujet était flou—elle nous l'a dit dès le début—et elle en a exploré tous les recoins, avec une curiosité intelligente qui livre d'immenses richesses. Si parfois on se perd, et on a le sentiment que l'auteure elle-même s'égare de temps en temps dans le voyage qu'elle a entrepris, les découvertes qu'elle nous offre en cours de route valent bien le voyage.



Recherche poétique dans *le miracle rose de la ruine*

Laurent Poliquin
Le Vertigo du tremble. des Plaines 12,95 $

Patrick Lafontaine
Au lieu de l'abandon et *Mes êtres.* Noroît 19,95 $

Gilles Cyr
Fruits et frontières. Hexagone 12,95 $

Compte rendu par Sylvain Marois

La poésie est, peut-être, le plus artisanal des arts littéraires. Sa matière première est la langue, qu'elle aime faire et défaire, et le poète est son inséparable adjuvant. Sont-ce, toutefois, les mots ou les poètes qui font la poésie? Serait-ce la poésie qui fait le poète . . . ?

Le Vertigo du tremble est le troisième recueil de Laurent Poliquin. Précédé par *Velute velours* et *L'Ondoiement du désir*, cette dernière suite poétique poursuit une exploration sensuelle et sonore. C'est ce qui, en effet, semble marquer la quête du jeune poète (Poliquin est né en 1975). Le recueil est une recherche de l'autre, non pas l'Autre universel, virtuel—généralité abstraite utilisée à toutes les sauces—mais bien l'autre véridique, réel, celui, celle qui brise, rompt la solitude inhérente à la vie : « j'évacuerai la vacuité de ton souvenir / chaud d'un sourire jaune / qui te forçait jadis les lèvres / à me dire / l'éternité d'un mensonge / agglutiné au sublime abandon »; « je me sens bien / je me sens boire en toi / l'inavouable soif / d'un baiser désarticulé / en quête d'engrenage pulpeux »; « redis-moi encore le chemin de l'impunité / ai-je vraiment le mérite de voir au-delà de toi ». Enlisé dans mille désirs inassouvis, le poète force les mots à l'éclatement, à une renaissance au-delà du « Robert Littré Larousse / [qui] n'en disent pas plus de toi en moi . . . ». C'est dans le plaisir sonore, concrétisé par l'originale juxtaposition des mots, particulièrement lorsque Poliquin est émotif plutôt qu'intellectuel, que s'incarne l'intérêt de cette poésie manitobaine.

Patrick Lafontaine, qui s'est mérité le Prix Émile-Nelligan en 1996 grâce à *L'Ambition du vide*, publiait *Au lieu de l'abandon* et *Mes êtres* en 2006. C'est une plaquette double, un diptyque qui s'ouvre avec une rare puissance : « à l'ombre tombée / ta main la douleur /se creuse / un lit bleu ». La mort, l'enfance, la mère et une certaine errance cohabitent et s'entrecroisent ici : « tu es enfoui. près d'une église. ton genou sous les feuilles la terre. sais que tu n'es pas mort. sais que tu respires. sais que tu vas bientôt naître »; « maman, je t'appelle / pour te dire que de la boue / coule de ta bouche / quand tu manges / de mon enfance ». Si la prose est plus réflexive, enchaînée, voire rationnelle dans *Mes êtres*, il en est tout autrement dans *Au lieu de l'abandon*. Une pagination simple, des textes brefs, une ponctuation quasi absente, des phrases hachurées, tronquées, comme abandonnées à elles-mêmes . . . tout cela crée un minimalisme ambiant, un zen . . . bruineux : « dans le lit du soleil / la maison / brûle embaume / le cadavre / chaque soir / borde l'enfant / de décombres »; « sous la pluie / je me sens / sous la terre / je me sens / sous-estimé / je me sens / chez moi ».

Malgré quelques textes marqués par la superficialité et les clichés : « plus besoin / d'amour / plus besoin / d'enfance / plus besoin / de silence / plus besoin / que d'un revolver »), les poèmes de Lafontaine sont évocateurs et d'une originalité certaine. On retiendra, par exemple : « retire les voiles / retire les caresses / et laisse le frisson paraître / au creux de la blessure / le miracle rose de la ruine ».

Un peu à la manière des saisons, Gilles Cyr revient à la charge, sans cesse, imperturbable, depuis les années 1970. Traducteur, directeur de collection à L'Hexagone, récipiendaire du Prix de poésie du Gouverneur général du Canada en 1992, c'est grâce à la bourse d'écriture Gabrielle-Roy qu'il a rédigé, en 1999, *Fruits et frontières*. Rédigés à Petite-Rivière-Saint-

François, les poèmes sont imprégnés de la luminosité charlevoisienne et le fleuve, omniprésent, y règne en maître : « Toute cette eau / c'est une tranche de vie / buvons / . . . convenons que le fleuve / facilite les choses / assurément mais à propos / quel est ton nom / je le déchiffre à moitié / quel port et où vas-tu / allons cesse tes mensonges / petit vraquier ». Malgré une chronologie parfois lourde, voire une certaine rigidité narrative, le recueil rend bien la maturité du poète.

There's No Place Like Home

Mavis Reimer, ed.
Home Words: Discourses of Children's Literature in Canada. Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Benjamin Lefebvre

This outstanding collection of essays, part of the Studies in Childhood and Family in Canada series published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press since 1999, ably demonstrates the ways in which the field of Canadian children's literature has evolved in leaps and bounds since the publication of earlier foundational studies such as Sheila Egoff's *The Republic of Childhood* in 1967, Judith Saltman's *Modern Canadian Children's Books* in 1987, and Elizabeth Waterston's *Children's Literature in Canada* in 1992. Spearheaded by Mavis Reimer (Canada Research Chair in the Culture of Childhood) and bookended by her comprehensive introduction and a thoughtful afterword by Neil Besner, the volume consists of ten original essays contributed by twelve active participants in the field and its adjacent disciplines, most of whom teach or have taught at the University of Winnipeg and are affiliated with the Centre for Research in Young People's Texts and Cultures, which Reimer directs. The contributors met for annual working meetings over three years and continued to discuss each contribution through an online listserve, making for a unique collaborative structure for humanities research.

The volume is principally concerned with the concept of "home" as a cultural signifier in a wide range of texts for young people published in Canada in both official languages. While the individual chapters all consider "home," along with its counterpart "away," to be material, physical, psychological, and ideological concepts, the wide range of theoretical models, research methods, and outcomes makes for a thematically coherent volume that opens up further questions or pursuits instead of purporting to finalize the discussion. The chapters themselves highlight the impossibility of a unifying structure, particularly in Reimer's discussion of the depiction of homeless youth in YA fiction and in Louise Saldanha's chapter on books by Canadian writers of colour, who adopt a range of strategies to negotiate Eurocentric imaginings of "home" and "away." Dans deux chapitres en français, on découvre jusqu'à quel point le roman québécois pour jeunes aborde l'antithèse « ici/ailleurs » différemment de leurs équivalents anglophones, qui semblent s'éloigner du *home* à la recherche d'aventure ailleurs. Danielle Thaler et Alain Jean-Bart tracent l'effet de cet enjeux dans le roman historique situé en Nouvelle-France, où l'on retrouve « les représentations de la triade coloniale fondamentale : le colon, le coureur de bois et le Sauvage. » Quant au roman contemporain pour adolescents, selon Anne Rusnak, c'est plutôt le *away* qui envahit le *home*, et non l'inverse.

Further counterpoints can be found in Doris Wolf and Paul DePasquale's chapter on Aboriginal picture books by Aboriginal authors and in Perry Nodelman's discussion of young adult novels by non-Aboriginal authors that include Aboriginal presence. Whereas texts by non-Aboriginal authors tend to co-opt their Aboriginal characters under the banner of a form of multiculturalism that flattens difference in order

to prop up a liberal fantasy of a harmonious nation, picture books by Aboriginal authors tend to do the reverse, privileging Aboriginal viewpoints and communities while challenging the ethnocentrism of mainstream publishing in Canada, using a genre whose nineteenth-century origins coincide with a surge of empire-building efforts from Britain.

While the contributors cover a tremendous amount of narrative ground, the volume leaves a number of crucial gaps for subsequent critics to address. The selection of primary texts strikes a welcome balance between mainstream and non-mainstream, canonical and undervalued, and work in English and work in French. Further investigation in the area would now need to consider "home" and "away" in relation to such topics and areas as sexuality (including the coming-out narrative), religion/spirituality, and ability, as well as in a growing amount of work published in Canada for Canadian readers but set elsewhere, such as Deborah Ellis' *Breadwinner* trilogy, and in the plethora of texts that feature child protagonists but target an audience of adults. On aimerait également voir davantage une étude soignée des romans pour jeunes par des écrivains francophones hors-Québec, soit en Acadie, en Ontario et au Manitoba. In both what it accomplishes and what it leaves open for future researchers, *Home Words* has become the latest foundational study in a dynamic and interdisciplinary field—both book and field are highly recommended.

Échappatoires

Dany Rossignol
Impostures : le journal de Boris. David 18,00 $

Michèle Vinet
Parce que chanter c'est trop dur. Prise de parole 18,00 $

Claude Boisvert
Moi, vous savez, les génuflexions et les salamalecs . . . CRAM 19,95 $

Maggie Blot
Plagiste : dormir ou esquisser. Triptyque 16,00 $

Compte rendu par Caroline Dupont

Quoique se déployant dans des registres fort distincts, les quatre oeuvres abordées ici—deux récits, un roman et un recueil de nouvelles—présentent différentes formes d'échappatoires à un univers ou à des situations que les personnages récusent.

Trois ans après la parution de *L'Angélus*, son premier récit racontant une année dans la vie de Laure en pleine métamorphose, Dany Rossignol propose une autre quête initiatique rafraîchissante, celle de Boris, un solitaire de vingt-cinq ans qui nous livre son journal dans *Impostures*. Racontant avec verve son enfance, son quotidien, ses émois et ses aspirations, créant des haïkus susceptibles de traduire une émotion fugace, Boris se nourrit de sa propre écriture comme de la musique et de la littérature, seules véritables sources extérieures de stimulation pour ce marginal cultivé aussi rêveur que lucide. L'imposture consistant d'abord pour lui à se faire diariste alors qu'on le croit analphabète, elle gagne bientôt plusieurs autres terrains. Vivant lui-même dans un monde d'imposteurs—à commencer par ses propres parents—Boris n'hésite pas à traquer les secrets des autres et à dénoncer, souvent avec virulence, divers aspects d'un monde factice—le nôtre—centré sur la performance et le conformisme, monde avec lequel il ne peut ni ne veut s'accorder.

Dans un style un peu diffus, le roman *Parce que chanter c'est trop dur* de Michèle

Vinet traite lui aussi d'écriture, de musique et de différence, mais adopte une tonalité beaucoup plus onirique que celle des impostures débusquées par le diariste critique de Rossignol. Il n'en demeure pas moins que comme celui-ci, Mirabeau-Mirabelle, personnage central du roman de Vinet, figure une enfant marginale connaissant un retard linguistique, qui finira par tirer fort habilement son épingle du jeu, une fois encore grâce à la puissance des mots. L'enfant qui se moque de ce qui est pour inventer un monde à sa mesure, notamment en parlant avec des traits d'union dans la voix et en s'inventant un univers féerique dans la cabane-atelier de la vieille Mélie, deviendra une grande dramaturge aux côtés de sa complice de toujours, Chant-ale, ainsi que de Pierre et Luc, deux garçons de théâtre à qui les deux jeunes femmes uniront leur destinée professionnelle aussi bien que sentimentale. Celle qui refuse de chanter parce que c'est trop dur et qu'on dérape, ne parvenant pas à trouver le ton juste, n'affirme pas moins sa croyance dans les mots et « demand[e] à la page de parler pour ceux qui n'ont pas de voix, qui ne connaissent ni le baume de la page ni l'aventure de l'encre ». Ponctuée par la musique, qui coiffe d'ailleurs chacun des chapitres par l'entremise d'une indication de mouvement appropriée, mais aussi par une allégorie du temps, l'histoire des quatre fous de théâtre, qui en enchâsse plusieurs autres, prouve donc toute la force des mots, « ces traits d'union entre le connu et l'inconnu, entre l'être et le devenir », avec lesquels— du moins est-ce le postulat de cette oeuvre—on peut tout accomplir.

Cette confiance d'ingénue est bien loin d'habiter les différents narrateurs et personnages de *Moi, vous savez, les génuflexions et les salamalecs . . .* de Claude Boisvert, recueil de huit textes teintés de fantastique et sous-titré « nouvelles et récits humoristiques ». L'humour—au demeurant sombre et grinçant—de ce recueil n'est cependant pas ce qui retient d'abord l'attention du lecteur, qui tente plutôt de comprendre le profond mal de vivre de personnages évoluant entre rêve et réalité, constamment pris au piège de situations plus qu'inconfortables auxquelles ils tentent d'échapper, le plus souvent au péril de leur vie, ce qui ne semble pourtant pas les troubler outre mesure, vu le peu de prix accordé à cette vie. L'ensemble du recueil se lit d'ailleurs comme un réquisitoire tant contre la religion et le divin que contre une soi-disant grandeur humaine se déployant dans les faits au sein d'une société désincarnée, artificielle. Cette contestation généralisée prend parfois une forme extrêmement directe, comme en témoigne ce passage de la dernière nouvelle : « Je m'insurge contre la tromperie, contre les faussetés, contre ce qu'ils ont fait de la vie . . . je ne veux en aucune façon adhérer à leurs mensonges, je conteste le droit qu'ils s'arrogent de tout régir à partir de faux principes, de tout réglementer, de tout contrôler, de tout . . . ».

Sur un ton nettement plus détaché—sinon apathique par moments—le premier récit de Maggie Blot, *Plagiste : dormir ou esquisser*, raconte les petites tribulations d'une bande d'artistes paumés que leur « entraîneure » —dont la quatrième de couverture précise qu'elle « n'est pas sans évoquer une personnalité bien connue du milieu théâtral québécois », le texte étant par ailleurs dédié à Pol Pelletier—a abandonnés. La façon de réagir à cet abandon consistant pour eux à essayer de déjouer le désoeuvrement, tantôt en tâchant de comprendre les lettres vaseuses qui leur sont adressées et qui les mettent sur des pistes, tantôt en poursuivant leur « immense installation : monumentale affaire de buffet-banquet-festin », tantôt encore en s'intéressant à Plagiste, « une idole de chien qui nourri[t] [leurs] désirs puérils », il en résulte un récit difficile à caractériser, aux forts accents d'exercices stylistiques en même temps que d'intertextualité. Comme quoi les échappatoires

littéraires peuvent parfois prendre la forme d'une narration somme toute assez nombriliste.

Gabrielle Roy's Journalism

Gabrielle Roy; Antoine Boisclair and François Ricard, eds.
Heureux les nomades et autres reportages, 1940-1945. Boréal $27.50

Reviewed by Paul G. Socken

In 1974 I published an article in the *Canadian Modern Language Review* about Gabrielle Roy's journalistic writing in which I drew parallels between her journalism and her later fiction. Themes such as the dehumanization of modern life and Canada as a tapestry of cultures emerged from these journalistic efforts and became the pillars of her novelistic universe.

The "Groupe de recherche sur Gabrielle Roy" at McGill have done Canadian Studies a service by publishing this volume of Roy's journalism. The introduction, by Antoine Boisclair and François Ricard, places the writings in their historical and cultural context and justifies the inclusion (and exclusion) of articles. The criteria for selection includes their literary quality, historical interest, and the insight they provide into her life as she was preparing to write her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion*.

There are basically four distinct parts. One set of four texts is centred on Montreal. This writing, in the words of the editors, is the most successful artistically and constitutes a hugely important document of Roy's evolution and writing on Montreal. The articles on the Gaspésie and Côte-Nord look at these regions with a fresh perspective for the times, one informed by Gabrielle Roy's sense of social justice and which will be found in her novelistic writing.

The articles on Abitibi run counter to the missionary zeal that characterizes the period. By highlighting humble, hard-working immigrants like the Ukrainian Sep family, Gabrielle Roy sensitizes the reader to the diversity and rich cultures of the area. In her writing on western Canada, one finds prototypes of her fictional writing as well as themes that become the hallmark of her writing—the blending of cultures in this young country and the promise of the future. (The six articles that later appeared in *Fragiles Lumières de la Terre* are not included in this volume.) Finally, Horizons du Québec is a series of articles which mostly profile industries in Quebec.

Soon after Gabrielle Roy stopped writing for journals like *Bulletin des Agriculteurs*, where most of these articles appeared, times changed and those journals, for a variety of political and economic reasons, ceased publication. It was Gabrielle Roy's good fortune that they existed when they did and gave her the opportunity to hone her writing skills and her ideas.

Gabrielle Roy did not want her early writing published during her lifetime but now, twenty-five years after her passing, the editors correctly felt it was appropriate for her readers to have access to her journalism. Ricard calls these writings "*quasi-inédits*," that is, work that has been published in journals no longer readily available to anyone but researchers willing to search archives. Their publication now changes this situation. Readers of Gabrielle Roy and Canadian literature will welcome this impressive volume.

A Triumph of Scholarship

Patricia E. Roy

The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941–67. U of British Columbia P $32.95

Reviewed by Christopher G. Anderson

This is the last volume in an important trilogy that explores the political history of the Chinese and Japanese in Canada from the establishment of the colony of British Columbia in 1858 to the country's first centenary in 1967. As with *A White Man's Province* (1989) and *The Oriental Question* (2003), Roy continues to provide an artfully woven and richly embellished analysis that reflects research of an impressive breadth and depth. In the process, she has created the most extensive account of the evolution of relations between these two communities and both Canadian state and non-state actors. This is not, then, a general history of the Chinese and Japanese in Canada, but rather a history of the politics and public opinion that defined their treatment by the majority population. In carrying these themes forward to 1967, *The Triumph of Citizenship* develops an additional narrative as it traces how discrimination against these two groups, as well as efforts to undo it, influenced a post-war commitment to human rights in Canada, one that contributed to the institutionalization of a much more inclusive understanding of Canadian citizenship. For these and many other reasons, Roy's work will be of interest not simply to historians and political scientists but to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the evolution of the meaning of being Canadian.

Most of the book—about two-thirds—focuses on the Japanese experience, from the government's war-time policies of evacuation from coastal British Columbia and "repatriation" to Japan, which Roy had previously examined in her co-authored *Mutual Hostages* (1990), to subsequent efforts to remove various discriminatory barriers and receive compensation for property confiscated during the war. The rest addresses the situation of the Chinese, primarily in terms of their struggles to undo discriminatory policies that rendered them, like the Japanese, second-class citizens. Although the experiences of these two communities differed in important respects, with the evacuation and "repatriation" of Canadian-born Japanese constituting one of the most extreme forms of discrimination ever practiced in Canada, Roy identifies important parallels as she traces how members of each group increasingly organized to contest their treatment. In doing so, she shows how they forged alliances with a wide range of like-minded political actors (from churches, unions, civil liberties groups, the media, and political parties) and sought to mobilize public opinion in support of their bid for full political inclusion. Thus, as she has done throughout the trilogy, Roy details how Chinese and Japanese immigrants and their descendants were active political agents and not simply victims in their relations with Canadians. This, in turn, recognizes the influence that these communities had in shaping a Canadian citizenship and democracy anchored more firmly in human rights.

There is a growing literature that explores the appearance and consolidation of a human rights movement in Canada around the time of the Second World War. In part, it grew from the struggle against totalitarianism and in reaction to the Holocaust. It also developed in response to such domestic wartime issues as the status of Canadian civil liberties and the treatment of the Japanese in Canada. *The Triumph of Citizenship* contributes to this scholarship by showing how the Japanese and Chinese communities helped to define this movement through their demands for equality. Moreover, it explores the varied and

complex ways in which Canada's majority population reacted to such demands. The path towards the acceptance of political inclusion was by no means direct, and Roy draws detailed and nuanced portraits of those who, even though they supported human rights, nonetheless had difficulty in recognizing and accepting the full implications of non-discrimination. The clarification of how the numerous sides in this political relationship both affected and were affected by the others—how they have evolved over time—has been a signature strength of her analysis.

While there will doubtless be debates over some of the claims made in her book (for example, the weight given in her analysis of the evacuation of the Japanese to the idea that it was undertaken to protect the Japanese themselves and by extension Canadian prisoners of war has generated discussion since its first appearance in the 1990 volume noted above) and refinement of others (for example, considerably more research remains to be undertaken on the Chinese case), Roy's trilogy has established an extremely high standard for such scholarship and will long remain essential historical reading.

Indigenous Defamiliarizations

Deena Rymhs
From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing. Wilfrid Laurier UP $65.00

Pauline Wakeham
Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality. U of Minnesota P US$22.50

Julia V. Emberley
Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural Practices and Decolonization in Canada. U of Toronto P $65.00

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

These three new books by Canadian scholars attest to the ongoing and sustained interest in analyzing the conditions of Indigenous culture and life. All strong in their conceptualization and execution, each offers an important intervention into reading practices pertaining to both colonial and Aboriginal cultures. The very different terrain that each navigates, moreover, shows how varied the field of Aboriginal cultural studies has become in recent years.

Deena Rymhs' *From the Iron House* offers a reading of literatures created in relation to the prison system and residential schools. Rymhs terms this "carceral writing," discourses that arise both from inside formal penal institutions and educational ones like the residential school. Collating a unique archive of works, Rymhs reads the recent history of this writing in order to foreground rhetorical strategies for escaping confinement. Rymhs notes that "the personal histories of indigenous people in Canada are so heavily entangled in carceral institutions that it is difficult to assess the former without the latter." Even so, Rymhs notes, there has been little work done in addressing the themes that she addresses here. Her book attempts to bring a necessary focus upon this writing as a means not merely of addressing how inescapable disciplinary institutions are for Indigenous

people, but also as a means of working beyond the stereotype of the Aboriginal criminal.

Some of Rymhs' focal texts are familiar ones; others much less so. The book's two-part structure focuses initially on prison writing before moving to writing that focuses on residential schools. Better-known works studied include Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings*, Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe's collaborative *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*, Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days*, and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Also investigated are prison periodicals, shorter poems, and texts that have entered relative obscurity like Jane Willis' *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*. In each case, the text is addressed in critical terms that explore how Indigenous expression is limited by the carceral, but Rymhs also looks for sites of slippage that record resistance to such foreclosure. Ultimately, Rymhs uncovers how her focal writers are "seizing within writing the potential to liberate oneself and one's history through the act of self-representation." Although Rymhs could have helpfully written at greater length about many of her texts, her prose successfully conducts this analysis with great economy and clarity within this accomplished book.

Pauline Wakeham's *Taxidermic Signs* displays impressive depth, intelligence, and critical panache. Providing a genuinely original and important perspective on how the colonial imaginary has framed Indigenous peoples, this book charts an unexpected and very persuasive course through what Wakeham terms the semiotics of taxidemy. This term refers to the ways in which Aboriginal people have been associated with the preserved corpses of animals, both literally and metaphorically. There is, Wakeham suggests, "an equanimity and proximity" between taxidermied animals and Native bodies in museological displays, and this proximity renders both types of bodies "as substitutable focal points in a frozen and simulated spectacle of nature." This is the spectacle of a disappearing natural space before the onslaught of colonial "progress," one that encodes the familiar trope of the "vanishing Indian," Rousseau's Noble Savage retreating in a Romantic spectacle of death. Wakeham's analysis invigorates discussions of this notion by showing ways in which the semiotic proximity of taxidermy and the Native body in the colonial imaginary "preserve" and thus forestall the disappearance of pre-contact ways of life merely in order to invoke their continual disappearance and, thereby, to insist upon the ongoing death of Indigenous bodies, their ongoing disappearance in the world of late capital.

The texts studied display Wakeham's range as a scholar. Beginning with a discussion of literal taxidermy and the ways in which its practice in North America was used to "spectacularize" and "materially hasten the death of the conflated figures of nature and natives," Wakeham reads the Banff Park Museum in order to better understand how this semiosis functions in the popular imaginary from the early twentieth century onwards. She moves from this thoroughly convincing reading of taxidermy to the work of Edward S. Curtis whose photographs of a supposedly "disappearing" way of life on the American frontier constitute the best-known materials in the book. Examining how film encodes the simultaneous presence and absence of Curtis' subjects, Wakeham extends her analysis of taxidermy to other cultural works, particularly C. Marius Barbeau's 1927 documentary *Nass River Indians* and its recording—within silent film—of Native voices on early phonographic wax cylinders. Here, again, the rhetoric of preservation is one that functions to signal the disappearance of Indigenous cultural practices and, in turn, Native people themselves. Uncoding the ways in which the rhetoric

of these technologies allows for the easy continuation of taxidermic semiosis allows Wakeham to turn, finally, towards present-day genomic projects in her final chapter where she makes the crucial argument that today's genetic technologies represent the latest iteration of racist notions of miscegenation and purity. She does so through examinations of two important cases of repatriation of Native remains uncovered in Canada and the United States that illustrate—through the courts' promotion of genetic testing—how the projects like the Human Genome Project belie "a deep commitment to racial purity that is immensely productive for contemporary white interests." Convincingly linking the colonial imaginary from the early twentieth-century with contemporary discourses, *Taxidermic Signs* arrives in the present as a devastating critique of ongoing racism across North America and is vital reading for researchers in the field.

Wakeham ends by noting how her project might contribute to anticolonial projects, a perspective that she shares with Julia V. Emberley, who suggests in *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal* that she wants to perform an "analytics of dis/memberment" that might work to resituate constructs of the family. Emberley does so in order to witness "the cultural representation of 'the family' as an institution of colonial power in early twentieth-century Canada." For Emberley, the bourgeois European model of the family is one that has been systematically forced upon Aboriginal peoples as a means of social control, creating patrilineal descent and disenfranchising women. Emberley analyzes the two key figures of the "bourgeois woman" and "aboriginal man," examining the construction of each within the colonial imaginary. Uncovering how Aboriginal bodies were rendered into docile and disciplined subjects for agricultural and domestic labour, Emberley explores writing by Freud, Engels, and Foucault, among others, before turning to an examination of cultural and artistic materials. These, in turn, range from the film *Nanook of the North,* Tarzan and Jane, ads for Pears soap, family portraits, to an RCMP archive's investigation into the suspected murder of an Inuit woman and her family. The breadth of this book is extraordinary in this respect. She also devotes chapters to kinship structures in Wiebe and Johnson's *Stolen Life* and Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, commenting on the sexual and gendered violence and its ties to colonial notions of the family in each text. Emberley argues that "late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century visual and textual materials were constitutive of the web of colonial power that contributed to making and unmaking the very category of *the Aboriginal*" and examines the consequences of this construct up to the present day.

Plus qu'un outil pédagogique

Noëlle Sorin
Robert Soulières. David 15,95 $

Compte rendu par Daniela Di Cecco

Ce sixième titre de la collection « Voix didactiques – Auteurs » est consacré à l'un des auteurs québécois pour la jeunesse les plus populaires : Robert Soulières. Comme dans les titres précédents de la collection, il s'agit dans ce livre d'une étude détaillée des oeuvres qui se prêtent à l'enseignement. Parmi une cinquantaine de livres écrits par Soulières, Sorin retient deux romans pour adolescents : *Le Visiteur du soir* (1980) et *Un cadavre de classe* (1997), établissant des liens entre les deux ouvrages (leur succès commercial et critique et le genre littéraire auquel ils appartiennent [policier]), tout en démontrant leurs différences au niveau du style d'écriture. L'analyse des romans illustre l'évolution chez Soulières d'une écriture plus classique vers une autre plus éclatée.

L'ouvrage est divisé en deux parties. Dans la première, Sorin étudie les deux romans, en commençant par *Le Visiteur du soir*, considéré par la critique comme un des premiers romans urbains en littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse. L'analyse est claire et détaillée et celle du paratexte des différentes éditions est particulièrement intéressante. L'étude du deuxième roman, *Un Cadavre de classe*, suit le même schéma, avec une analyse textuelle très riche, et une étude approfondie des fonctions narratives et de l'intertextualité. La présentation des thèmes, surtout celui de la lecture (celle des jeunes en particulier, qui sont censés ne pas aimer lire), est pertinente et stimulante. Sorin explore également les différents procédés humoristiques exploités par Soulières (sa « marque de commerce »), un des aspects qu'elle propose comme sujet de discussion dans la section « pistes à réflexion » qui clôt l'étude de chaque roman.

Le dossier documentaire qui compose la deuxième partie du livre s'avérera très utile pour les enseignants, et l'entretien avec Robert Soulières, ainsi que la bibliographie exhaustive, qui soulignent l'apport considérable de Soulières en tant qu'auteur-éditeur, intéresseront non seulement les enseignants et leurs élèves, mais aussi les chercheurs en littérature de jeunesse.

"I Had a Taste of My Own"

Jennifer Surridge, ed.
Robertson Davies: Selected Works on the Pleasures of Reading. Penguin Canada $20.00

Jennifer Surridge, ed.
Robertson Davies: Selected Works on the Art of Writing. Penguin Canada $20.00

Reviewed by Michael Peterman

Penguin Canada has issued two new collections of essays by Robertson Davies in its "Modern Classics" series. Produced as family efforts by Pendragon Ink and edited by Davies' daughter, Jennifer Surridge, they are meant to (re)awaken readers to Davies' skills as an essayist, his engaging presence as speaker, and his idiosyncratic storehouse of knowledge and opinion, born of his reading, his experience as a writer, and his preoccupation with healthful introspection. The collections offer many examples of his genial, gentlemanly manner and what Surridge calls "his natural bent for humour." As a speaker he aimed to amuse and entertain—of one audience he wrote, "They had not expected to laugh, and I had determined that they should." But as almost everyone who has heard or read him knows, he also aimed to teach, to display his numerous (and interrelated) enthusiasms—the experience of theatre, the byways of nineteenth-century drama, the "depth psychology" of Carl Jung, the life-enhancing joys of reading and writing, and the themes of being healthy and being Canadian. These "essays" provide insights into the novelist as reader and practitioner. They also offer the opportunity to linger over his passions and ideas, to measure his traditionalist but at times maverick views, and to weigh his blind spots. At the same time, in prefacing many of the essays with a paragraph from Davies' daybooks, Surridge whets the appetite of those eager to access these "voluminous diaries." She is editing them for eventual publication.

While Davies' once-prominent star is somewhat obscured at the moment, especially in the trendier corridors of academe, these collections, along with Val Ross' recent *Robertson Davies: A Portrait in Mosaic* (2008), provide solid ground for an ongoing fascination with the inner man, his outward personality, and his art. They offer readers texts of many of his public performances, usually commissioned for special occasions in Europe, New York, and Canada. A perusal of the prefaces accompanying each piece makes one aware of the extent to which well-informed readers in the United States valued his novels.

Canadians often forget that Davies' fame was solidly international. His popularity among serious book-lovers increased book by book, culminating in sales of 90,000 hardcover copies of *The Cunning Man* in the US alone. To such readers he was one of the most interesting and stimulating novelists available. He was not a Canadian author to them: though he never stinted in making the Kingston-Renfrew-Peterborough-Toronto area the imaginative centre of his serious work, he was simply a novelist of quality.

Selected Works on the Pleasures of Reading contains material covering much of Davies' career from *A Voice from the Attic* (1960) through the talks comprising *Masks of Satan* (1976) to two lectures delivered at Johns Hopkins University to participants in a symposium entitled "An Allegory of the Physician" (1984). Surridge also includes sections on Collecting, Ghost Stories, and Dickens. There are a few occasional pieces ("Dickens and Music," "The Fourth Wiseman") that Davies enthusiasts may not have seen and there are plenty of old staples, the merits of which are autobiographical ("A Rake at Reading") or which provide context and background for certain novels—"Painting, Fiction, and Faking" (*What's Bred in the Bone*) and "Can a Doctor Be a Humanist" (*The Cunning Man*). "A Rake at Reading" provides a double pleasure in its description of Davies' formative reading experiences, as well as frank admissions about some well-known authors (Fitzgerald and Hemingway, for instance) whose work he didn't "get." In such essays he puts his personal taste on display—a peculiar melange of romance, melodrama, myth, theatre, music, social satire, marvels, and humour that appealed to his imagination.

It is of interest that a young Davies admitted that he was not "a serious student of literature. Never was, and doubtless never will be" even as he trumpeted forth a rebuttal with a sting—"I had a taste of my own, which is not a luxury every serious student of literature permits himself." Over his career he developed and modulated that "taste" both to entertain audiences and to raise his narratives to the imaginative level achieved by the great humanist writers of the western world—among them Rabelais, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Dickens, Trollope, Chekhov, Shaw, Joyce, Waugh, Mann, Borges, Jung, and Nabokov. Numerous essays are keyed in deftly understated ways to making the case for his personal place among such writers—those who address the inescapable human verities, who create "a Golden Tale" and re-imagine the Hero's "inner struggle" and who bring "great and important things for the consideration of his tribe." It was as a serious contributor to the humanist tradition that Davies aspired to be known.

Selected Works on the Art of Writing contains seven sections, among them Writing, Theatre, Canada, The Stratford Festival, Youth, and Age. Of the two collections this seems more about speeches and carries with it the incipient danger of alienating the reader by overdosing on the ways in which Davies courteously but rhetorically endears himself to his audience. Conscious of this, Surridge advises readers to remember that writing was always her father's "principal work": "He never regarded any other work he did as important, and with every novel hoped that someday he would write a really good book." To my mind he achieved that goal with *Leaven of Malice* and *Fifth Business*.

These are NOT volumes to be read together for pleasure, though they provide much humour and insight along the way. Collectively, they constitute a surfeit, the sort of highly flavoured, many-coursed meal that may send a curious reader staggering from the table in need of fresh air, digestive pills, and mental realignment. It is difficult not to see Davies as the autocrat at his own banquet table; in his highly tuned

individuality (or individuation), he is as far as possible from the cheerful group-leader facilitating a workshop over croissants and coffee. His strong views and prickly self-positioning can seem enlightening or alienating, depending on the reader's perspective. Relentlessly undemocratic in his beliefs, he is death on do-gooders, educational psychologists ("OISE and its fashionable follies"), unions, activists and writers who, posturing as modern thinkers, practise at best "a kind of superior journalism." Rather he glories in his anti-modern views, confident that he draws on firm life-knowledge and enduring truths rather than superficialities and trends. He deplores critics, scholars, and students who, in his experience, lack the capacity to measure his wisdom or understand his passions; rather too often, he courts cheap laughs by slagging dim-witted students who, by telephone, intrude into his private space with questions about his novels (he also blames their teachers for posing "stupid" assignments) and he takes an almost perverse joy in emphasizing how some scholars struggle to understand the place of Jungian thought in his fiction.

But Robertson Davies knew melancholy and failure. He was a determined man, and kept up the good fight according to his own lights, insisting above all that he be seen as a man of taste and a serious novelist struggling to connect with "the unseen current" of life and to transform that contact/vision into a first-rate book for posterity.

Searching for Truth

Judith Thompson
Palace of the End. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Kim Selody
Silverwing: The Play. Playwrights Canada $15.95

Wajdi Mouawad; Linda Gaboriau, trans.
Dreams. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Reviewed by Roberta Birks

Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* consists of a trilogy of monologues ("My Pyramids," "Harrowdown Hill," and "Instruments of Yearning") that make a powerful comment on the nature of inhumanity. The characters include American Army reservist Lyndie England, convicted of prisoner abuse in the Abu Ghraib scandal; British biologist and weapons inspector David Kelly, suspiciously dead shortly after confessing publicly that he had lied in confirming that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction; and Iraqi Communist and mother Nehrjas Al Saffarh, tortured, along with two of her young sons, following Hussein's CIA-backed 1963 coup. Each of these characters exists isolated in a liminal space "through the looking glass" where values have shifted and where they struggle to understand the nature of inhumanity and their own complicity in it.

"My Pyramids" refers to the Abu Ghraib human pyramids: England's own idea. She has been bullied and outcast—and has been a bully—since childhood; she found her niche at Abu Ghraib where her misguided patriotism and willingness to abuse "terrorists" attracted camaraderie. But it ended in court martial. England changes from misfit to hero to convict as a victim of a system that recruits and scapegoats the underprivileged and a media that labels her "inbred pure white trash."

David Kelly committed "the greatest sin of our time" in not denouncing earlier the British government's manipulative claims about Hussein having WMDs. It is a sin that has caused the death and mutilation

of untold numbers of Iraqis. Kelly's body was found at Harrowdown Hill (the monologue's title) a few weeks after he confessed his lie to a journalist. On stage, Thompson's Kelly has inflicted his mortal wounds and is in the process of dying, apologizing to the audience but needing them to witness his agony over the lies he told himself to rationalize his behaviour.

"The Instruments of Yearning" are the *Jihaz Haneen*, the bullies, the secret police of the Baath, who detained pregnant Nehrjas Al Saffarh and her sons in 1963. She and her sons endure torture (the children watching the repeated rape of their mother) because to betray her husband's whereabouts would be to risk the lives of thousands. But Al Saffarh commits "the worst sin of all" in not breaking her silence even when her beloved son Fahdil is beaten and thrown on the roof; she rationalizes that they would not dare to kill a pregnant woman and her children, and clings for days to the sound of Fahdil's weakening cough, until all is silence.

Kim Selody's bat Shade, the protagonist in the fantasy *Silverwing: The Play* (based on the novel *Silverwing*, by Kenneth Oppel), also deals with bullies in his quest for truth. The play begins long after the war between the beasts and the birds; the bats refused to take sides and were sentenced to eternal darkness. They have long since forgotten how to fight for their beliefs, accepting their lot—with occasional exceptions, including Shade's father, thought to be dead. The different species' creation myths—and values—clash. The banded and unbanded clash too: some believe that the banded are destined to become human or will be helped by humans, others fear that the banded bring bad luck and expel them from their colonies as outcasts. Some of these outcasts meet, but shun the unbanded, who they fear will bring bad luck.

Shade, the runt of the bat colony and object of the scorn of other young bats, is blown off course during migration and begins his quest. He braves bullies and storms, betrayal and dangers, as well as his own need for respect—and even applause—to save the colony and to seek the truth about both his father's fate and Nocturna's "Promise" for their future.

The characters in Quebec playwright Wajdi Mouawad's surrealistic play *Dreams* (translated from the French by Linda Gaboriau) seek to find the truth: about themselves, who they are, and why. Mouawad says that his creative process has included an "attempt to name the innermost identity of my life [which] led . . . to an attempt to eradicate, in all my characters, every word born not of their humanity but of convention and compromise." This, he says, led him to *Dreams*, in which he investigates the creative process. Willem, an author on a journey of self-discovery, rents a room from a garrulous Hotelkeeper and sits down to write; his imagination (the autocratic Isidore) and other personified elements of the story he is creating soon join him in the room. Isidore, the protagonist, and the melody become impatient when Willem's attention wanders from them, and he eventually begins the story. It is about a man, Soulaymâân (who has several personae), who gets out of bed and walks to the sea. Each of Willem's new ideas spawns a new identity for Soulaymâân and each manifestation explores an aspect of Willem's being. Together Willem and Soulaymâân investigate the relationship between author and character, the nature of existence and love, and the significance of memory to being. The protagonist and his characters yearn to know they exist and can transcend darkness, find the light ("it's always easier when there's light," though the bathroom, hallway, and room lamp are unreliable), feel, be. The protagonist's story emerges in free verse; often dark and violent, it suggests that fear blunts emotion, that feeling and love can be born only from the willingness to witness extreme cruelty and suffering.

Out of Control

Miriam Toews
The Flying Troutmans. Knopf Canada $32.00

Andrew Pyper
The Killing Circle. Doubleday $29.95.

Reviewed by Paul Denham

"Yeah, so things have fallen apart. . . . things were out of control," begins Hattie, the narrator of Miriam Toews' latest novel, thereby indicating one of its central motifs. Things have indeed fallen apart; Hattie has just been dumped by her lover in Paris, and has flown back to what looks like Winnipeg at the behest of her older sister Min's children, Logan, fifteen, and Thebes, female, eleven. Min has had another in a series of breakdowns, and before the end of chapter one she has been checked into the psychiatric ward of a local hospital, where she spends most of the story. Cherkis, the children's father, has long since decamped, driven away by Min, and is now rumoured to be somewhere in the US. Hattie feels somehow responsible for Min's illness, since family photographs seem to imply that Min was a happy child until Hattie was born. Not surprisingly, Logan and Thebes are troubled children, and Hattie is the only person who is willing to look after them. The three of them set off to seek out Cherkis in a kind of reverse Odyssey—instead of the hero looking for his home and family, aunt and children go looking for missing father. They drive an old van south almost to the US–Mexico border, and the novel is the story of their ultimately successful quest. This is a wretchedly dysfunctional family, riven with guilt, mental illness, and marital discord—the best kind of family for fiction.

Most of us, I suspect, would be driven to complete distraction by the circumstances of this road trip, but Hattie takes all the neurotic behaviour of Logan and Thebes (which is more than the standard adolescent craziness, though how much more may be open to debate) more or less in stride, never lets them down, and never lets them get her down either. The result is a strange tension between the tragic circumstances of the journey and the comic tone of Hattie's narrative, a tension which defines the distinctive flavour of Toews' book. She thinks of herself as inept, but she accepts her niece and nephew as they are, doesn't ask too much of them, and as a result is able to establish a bond with them. We may not quite believe that such a thing could be so easily and quickly accomplished, but at the end, when a lot of things are resolved and the lost father found, the final image is still one of a "tiny plastic universe out of control." The point seems to be to accept those things which we cannot control.

Things are out of control in Andrew Pyper's *The Killing Circle* too, but to much more sinister effect. Patrick Rush is Pyper's narrator, a failed journalist and would-be novelist in Toronto who joins a Writing Circle in an attempt to get his career as a serious writer started. His failure to produce anything even for the weekly meetings of the Circle indicates his lack of potential. He recognizes Angela, one of the circle's members, as having a compelling story to tell, and when he believes her to have died accidentally, he plagiarizes her story and publishes it as his own, thereby gaining a fleeting moment of fame, an understandable fear that he may be exposed, and a growing sense of terror that he and other members of his writing group are being stalked by a serial killer.

The plot leads through various surprises which should not be revealed here. But a couple of features are worthy of note. One is Pyper's negative view of the Toronto writing scene—we can hardly call it "the writing community," though the phrase does get used once—which is characterized by jealousy, resentment of others' successes, pretentious awards events, and a clutch of clearly talentless hangers-on. It seems quite

natural to add real murderousness to this grim list. And murderousness there is, in spades; the bodies pile up, and Patrick realizes that he and his son are on the list of targets. This is a gothic novel, where danger, death, and dismemberment lurk everywhere, just out of sight: a subway entrance is one of the "doors to the underworld"; "every shadow on the city's pavement [is] a hole in the earth waiting to swallow me down." Patrick, the plagiarist, manages to keep, just barely, our sympathy by his love for his young son and his desperation to keep him safe. But all around them are stories of abused and damaged children who grow up to be profoundly damaged adults. This assertion of the need for loving families, an assertion which links the book with Toews', is the core of decency amid the murder and mayhem.

The Tosses and Turns of History

Padma Viswanathan
The Toss of a Lemon. Random House $34.95

Reviewed by Nadine Sivak

At the beginning of *The Toss of a Lemon*, Sivakami, a Tamil Brahmin girl from rural, caste-organized Samanthibakkam, is ten years old and soon to be married. The year is 1896 and she and her parents are on a pilgrimage to her mother's home village of Cholapatti to meet the potential groom. The man they have chosen, Hanumarathnam, is a healer and astrologer who confirms the compatibility of his and Sivakami's horoscopes and also notes that there is a faint suggestion "in the weakest quadrant" that he will die in his tenth year of marriage, although the horoscope of his first-born son can override this prediction. Eight years later, Sivakami is widowed, two and half years after the birth of her second child, a son, whose unfortunate horoscope accelerated his father's death.

So opens Padma Viswanathan's beautiful, sprawling, family epic, which spans sixty-two years and four generations and bears witness to the dramatic transformation of Indian society. Propelled forward by Viswanathan's lyrical, richly descriptive prose, the novel immerses the reader in the intricacies of daily village life in Cholapatti's Brahmin quarter: the festivals, religious ceremonies, meals, codes, rules, and prescriptions that define South Indian rural society. Horoscopes, omens, and rituals govern every aspect of the growing family's activities, even as science and social and political upheaval transform the nation and cause rifts within the household. By the novel's end, in 1958, the strictures of caste have broken apart amidst the new economic and political regime of postcolonial India, and the family, according to Sivakami's granddaughter Janaki, is "shattered."

The highly superstitious Sivakami raises her two children—her perfect, beautiful, largely silent daughter, Thangam, and her difficult, socially ostracized, blotchy-skinned, math-prodigy son, Vairum—while faithfully observing the rules of *madi*, her untouchable status. Her husband prepared her well for his death: he hired a servant of astonishing loyalty and devotion, Muchami, to look after his lands, and gave his wife sufficient knowledge to supervise and keep track of his work.

In time, Thangam and Vairum are married: she to a handsome, irresponsible, good-for-nothing with talents for impregnation, disappearance, and gambling away his salary; he to a beautiful musical genius whom he adores but with whom he is unable to have children. Like his father, Vairum is beholden to a horoscope that predicted his fate.

Equally rich are Viswanathan's complex characterizations. Vairum, the most rebellious of the family members, rejects the injustice of the caste system and causes his mother and nieces no end of grief with his flagrant violation of their "provincial" ways.

He is also, however, deeply religious and so devoted to his sister that he provides excellently for all her nine children, raising them in his own home to relieve her of the burden resulting from an ineffectual spendthrift husband. Perhaps as revenge against his painful childhood, he becomes a successful businessman and one of the most respected members of his society. Other characters too embody contradictions. The ultra-conservative Muchami lives in a celibate marriage and makes regular night-time excursions into the forest to seek out the company of other men. Even Sivakami rebels against tradition and her brothers by choosing to raise her children in her husband's ancestral home and sending her son to an English school rather than having him educated as a priest.

The intrusion of politics into the life of the family is one of the novel's recurring motifs. The debate over Indian independence divides the nation, the Brahmin quarter, and the family. Although oppressed by the caste system's rules, both Sivakami and Muchami are some of its fiercest defenders, dependent as they are upon it to give their lives meaning and order to their world. As political and social structures break apart, however, strict observers of the Brahmin code come into contact, knowingly and unknowingly, with a gay man, *devadasis* (the courtesan caste), a revolutionary revision of the Ramayana by the "Self-Respect" movement, and other destabilizing forces. Through these contrasts, Viswanathan offers us a rare window onto how politics and social movements impact families and communities at the everyday level. Yet despite the inevitable march of science and democracy, the novel also has a layer of what might be called magic realism, and does not dismiss the power of forces beyond our control, including stars, magic, omens, and secrets, to shape destinies.

Old New Dimensions

Robert Charles Wilson and Edo van Belkom, eds.
Tesseracts Ten. EDGE $20.95

Cory Doctorow and Holly Phillips, eds.
Tesseracts Eleven. EDGE $19.95

Reviewed by Tim Blackmore

We seem to gnaw at what is or isn't Canadian as if the whole matter were a leg-hold trap (I know, it's a quintessential colonial reference). It'd certainly be nice to be free of the jaws—and jawing—of cultural nationalism. No art form seems immune, not even science fiction packaged in the hypercube represented by a tesseract. All of it evokes that twentieth-century running-shoe maker's aphorism (I'll rephrase it as a Canadian can): Could we please get on with the work and stop fussing about the rest?

In the case of two of the most recent entries in the Canadian science fiction establishment's anthology *Tesseracts*, the answer is: No. First, we must rehash the agony of being north of the elephant, west of the motherland, a colony. This made me grumbly: Get cracking, stop whining, keep your head in the word processor. Co-editor of *Tesseracts Eleven*, Cory Doctorow points out that he'd "never read a collection of works whose unifying theme was that they were written by Canadians." It's true that there are many points in our lives when the right work or idea can cause galvanic reactions, make us surge forward. In the backwash of the 2008 imperial (I don't care whose empire) Olympics, all this "here's what (Canadian) humans do so well" makes my tongue itch and nose crawl. It's hard to set the nationalism aside when the editors consistently push it forward.

But editors do leave a mark on anthologies, so potential readers will find one collection more to their liking than another. If you prefer a more traditional story form

where a large problem is solved by the canny operations of an underpaid and certainly underappreciated person smart enough to assemble the puzzle pieces, then choose *Tesseracts Ten*. The stories reveal comfortably idiosyncratic features that guarantee no genre machines were used in their production. There's the story of the programmers against both state and rogue computer virus (Stephanie Bedwell-Grime's cheerful "Puss Reboots"); an account of a resourceful fat (this is a plot point) female protagonist stuck on Mars (Michele Laframboise's "Women are from Mars, Men are from Venus"—curiously, the self-reliant protagonist is saved from a life of state-run prostitution by gallant and adoring men from Venus); the story of a morose but resourceful Asian restauranteur who must find a way to simultaneously get rid of his father's ghost and impress the emperor, and so on. There are some unusual story forms and narratives that make this collection intriguing, particularly Greg Bechtel's "Blackbird Shuffle," an inventive combination of First Nations and Tarot mythology told in a way that commands the reader's attention, and Mark Dachuk's affecting "Permission," about a desperate farmer on a one-crop near-prison planet hoping for the single bloom that will take her out of hell. It's a solid collection.

Tesseracts Eleven is the stronger of the two. As always with annual anthologies, the strength may have as much to do with what was available (some years are just better than others) as it does with who's choosing the texts. Doctorow and co-editor Holly Phillips have assembled a more unpredictable, unsettling series of fictions. They include David Nickle's charming "Swamp Witch and Tea-Drinking Man," about the costs of preserving that which one loves; Candas Jane Dorsey's "Seven in a Boat, No Dog," which for all its apocalyptic theme is really a whimsical character study; Kate Riedel's smart, acerbic and sadly funny "Phoebus 'Gins Arise," about a career woman's contractual arrangements with various forces; Jerome Stueart's "Bear With Me," which pays a friendly debt to Marian Engel; Stephen Kotowych's "Citius, Altius, Fortius," which literally anatomizes a sickening obsession with winning; and Andrew Gray's understated "Tofino," a familiar but unusual account of getting what one (thought) one wished for.

In each case there are happy surprises, a truth that covers both volumes. Whatever kind of story, they are all heartfelt and honest. A number suffer from the kind of heaviness that bears down new writers who have so much weight to unload, it can get concentrated in one immovably heavy piece of luggage.

There's an intriguing sameness to many of the themes: big problems solved with a clever (if somewhat unbelievable) one-shot fix; apocalypses narrowly averted; books and reading (stories that betray panicky bibliophile authors); the loss of memory; witches. This last needs to stop: it's too facile a way to explain the world's eldritch nature. Madam or Doctor Whacko-With-Connections appear too regularly to be interesting. I hope authors can allow themselves to let go of the story template designed in great part by *Astounding* (later *Analog*) editor John W. Campbell, Jr. I don't think Canadians write particularly different or more spectacular SF than the rest of the world. I hope that Canadian writers are writers first, nationalists second, or even third. All writers must be themselves, even before any of the rest of it. If someone wants to collect their good work into one place, that's all right with me. But if this writing is intended, as Judith Merril's original collection title suggests, to be part of a cube projected into the entirely new volume of four-dimensional space, let's leave behind the cultural claims that have muddied the old dimensions over the years. Please? (I'll end on that Canadian note.)

Crossing Borders

Steve Zipp
Yellowknife. Res Telluris $25.00

Reviewed by Jonquil Covello

Yellowknife is Steve Zipp's first novel and he uses his experience as a former northerner to create an array of eccentric characters and track their activities through a year in Yellowknife. Government biologists called Pfang, Smolt, and Ungle work on inane wildlife projects, while bushwise northerners such as Suzi and Iggi make their living fishing on the lake and terrorizing sport fishermen. The novel, which concerns crossing borders and survival, begins with Danny, a drifter, arriving at the NWT border and finding himself in an unfamiliar world. The reader shares Danny's confusion as he struggles to cope with a car-wrecking bison, a restaurant serving scrambled caribou brains on toast, and a map with nothing on it except blank spaces and mosquito routes. Danny teams up with old-timer Freddy and learns to survive by outsmarting ravens to steal dog food and bedding down at the local dump. In this north, survival is a full-time job involving wits and luck. Zipp reminds us of famous figures such as John Hornby and John Franklin who also challenged the north and failed to survive because of arrogance, pride, or stupidity.

Yellowknife is not exactly a history book or a guide book but it circles around these genres as it includes a startling number of obscure facts and events, and outlines solutions to problems that might confront newcomers. Who knew, for example, that the blade of a snowplow makes an excellent anchor for a houseboat, or that the best way to avoid getting wet while hunting in the rain is to take your clothes off? If there is a problem with *Yellowknife*, it is that there are too many confusing details and references to forgotten events such as the crash of the Russian satellite, Kosmos-954, the supposed disappearance of a caribou herd, or the unlikely discovery of diamonds, but then again it may be that the north is always a confusing and difficult place and that the authenticity of the novel resides in its very obscurity.

The novel contains tragic events, such as deaths by drowning, but somehow they are not unexpected because as Hugo, the mosquito biologist, realizes as he sinks into the cold water of Great Slave Lake, the north, and the world beyond it, is not an orderly place and cannot be relied upon. Zipp's novel is a witty and, at times, absurd satire on Yellowknife and the north, but underneath its quirkiness is a serious reminder that the wilderness is not a "summer camp" as some would believe, and those who disregard its mysteries do so at their own peril.

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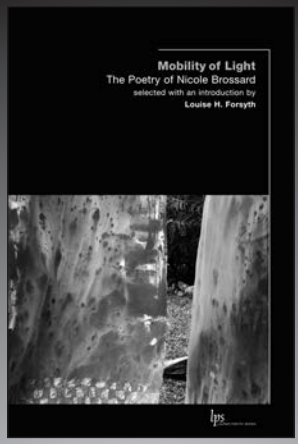

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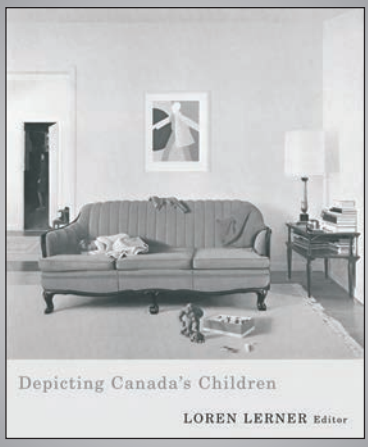

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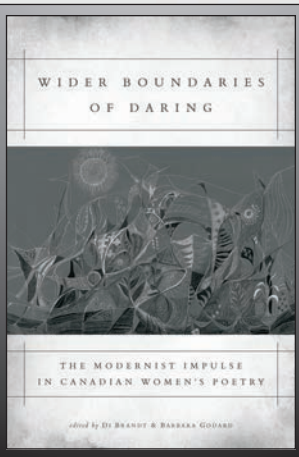

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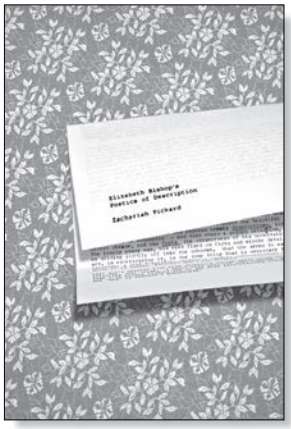

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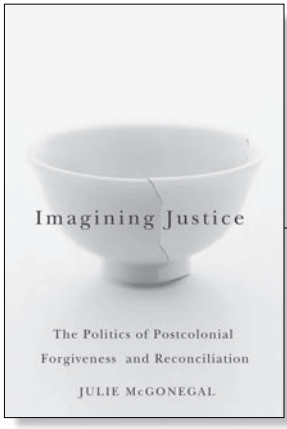

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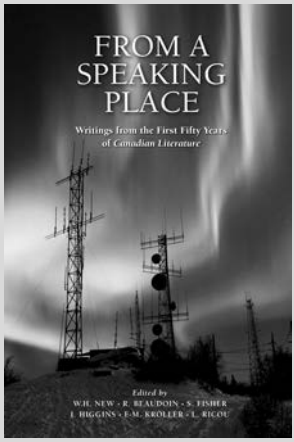

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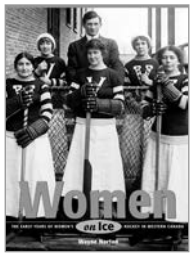

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