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Editorial

Margery Fee

Home, Memory, Self

6

Articles

Katie Mullins

Questioning Comics: Women and Autocritique in
Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken*

11

Peter Jaeger

"But Could I Make A Living From It":

Jeff Derksen's Modular Form

30

Wendy Roy

The Word is *Colander*: Language Loss and Narrative Voice
in Fictional Canadian Alzheimer's Narratives

41

Articles, *continued*

Amy J. Ransom

- Ce Zombi égaré est-il un Haïtien ou un Québécois?
Le vaudou chez les écrivains haïtiano-québécois 64

Jimmy Thibeault

- Fuir le regard de l'Autre ou apprendre à habiter l'espace
d'immigration : la quête du Soi dans *Ce pays qui est*
le mien de Didier Leclair 85

Christa Zeller Thomas

- "I had never seen such a shed called a house before":
The Discourse of Home in Susanna Moodie's
Roughing It in the Bush 105

Poems

- | | | | |
|---------------|---------|--------------|-----|
| Shane Rhodes | 10, 122 | David Solway | 62 |
| Tom Wayman | 28 | John Slater | 84 |
| Clint Burnham | 40 | Tim Prior | 103 |

Books in Review

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

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|-----|
| Authors Reviewed | | <i>Dede Crane</i> | 138 |
| Noël Audet | 150 | <i>Libby Creelman</i> | 140 |
| Irene Baird | 123 | <i>Monique Deland</i> | 184 |
| Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo | 136 | <i>John DeMont</i> | 188 |
| Jean-François Beauchemin | 124 | <i>Robert D. Denham</i> | 141 |
| Mark Benson | 125 | <i>Louise Deschênes</i> | 144 |
| Robert Berrouët-Oriol | 184 | <i>Rose Després</i> | 136 |
| Steven Michael Berzensky | 147 | <i>Michael Dolzani</i> | 141 |
| Nadine Bismuth | 126 | <i>Jeffrey Donaldson</i> | 145 |
| Fiona A. Black | 170 | <i>Ray Fenwick</i> | 146 |
| Josée Bonneville | 150 | <i>Patricia Lockhart Fleming</i> | 170 |
| Alan Bradley | 127 | <i>Claude Forand</i> | 130 |
| P.K. Brask | 160 | <i>Patrick Friesen</i> | 160 |
| Denise Brassard | 129 | <i>Mark Frutkin</i> | 147 |
| Allan Briesmaster | 147 | <i>Len Gasparini</i> | 148 |
| Nicole Brossard | 160 | <i>Normand Génois</i> | 184 |
| Marie Cadieux | 129 | <i>Carole Gerson</i> | 170 |
| Katia Canciani | 130 | <i>Elma Gerwin</i> | 163 |
| Jacques Cardinal | 131 | <i>Adam Getty</i> | 160 |
| Anne Laurel Carter | 133 | <i>Sky Gilbert</i> | 149 |
| Marjorie Chan | 134 | <i>Branko Gorjup</i> | 179 |
| Nicolas Charette | 126 | <i>Edgard Gousse</i> | 187 |
| Tina Charlebois | 136 | <i>Sherrill Grace</i> | 134 |
| Ying Chen | 137 | <i>Jessica Grant</i> | 172 |
| Guy Cloutier | 182 | <i>C.H. Grignon</i> | 150 |
| Donna Coates | 134 | <i>Eva Gruber</i> | 151 |
| Ian Colford | 138 | <i>G. Guèvremont</i> | 150 |
| Marcil Cossette | 182 | <i>Rawi Hage</i> | 153 |
| Johanne Alice Côté | 129 | <i>Sarah N. Harvey</i> | 154 |

| | | | |
|--|----------|----------------------------|----------|
| Niels Hav | 160 | Carol Shields | 163 |
| Karl S. Hele | 155 | Maggie Siggins | 192 |
| A.K. Hellum | 162 | Lee Spinks | 190 |
| Maurice Henrie | 157 | Robert J.C. Stead | 123 |
| Sharon A. Roger Hepburn | 158 | Pamela Stewart | 138 |
| Gerald Hill | 160 | Mariko Tamaki | 133 |
| Colin Hill | 123 | Darcy Tamayose | 153 |
| Edward Hoagland | 162 | Drew Hayden Taylor | 151 |
| Jean Horton | 123 | Martin Thibault | 187 |
| Allison Howard | 163 | Madeleine Thien | 137 |
| Blanche Howard | 163 | Peter Unwin | 188 |
| Shelley Hrdlitschka | 154 | André Vanasse | 150 |
| Frances Itani | 127 | Joan Elizabeth von Memerty | 190 |
| Krzysztof Jarosz | 165 | Marie Wadden | 155 |
| Wayne Johnston | 188 | Barbara Williams | 192 |
| J.M. Kearns | 166 | Alissa York | 127 |
| Stephen Kimber | 158 | Mila Younes | 194 |
| Larry Krotz | 167 | | |
| Andrée Laberge | 150, 168 | Reviewers | |
| Yvan Lamonde | 169, 170 | Sophie Bastien | 150 |
| Marie-Andrée Lamontagne | 172 | Gisèle M. Baxter | 133 |
| Patrick Lane | 172 | Renald Bérubé | 125 |
| Marie-Hélène Laroche | 175 | Tim Blackmore | 146 |
| Mélanie Léger | 176 | Emmanuel Bouchard | 182, 187 |
| Brenda Leifso | 145 | Susan Butlin | 183 |
| Lewis MacKinnon/Lodaidh MacFhionghain | 176 | Julie Cairnie | 166 |
| Robert Majzels | 160 | Emily Carr | 160 |
| Catherine Mavrikakis | 177 | Lisa Close | 151 |
| Melchior Mbonimpa | 178 | Donna Coates | 147 |
| rob mclennan | 145 | Carrie Dawson | 153 |
| Barbara Meadowcroft | 179 | Emir Delic | 180 |
| Jacques Michon | 170 | Sofie De Smyter | 190 |
| Lisa Moore | 172 | David Dorais | 126 |
| Erín Mouré | 160 | Benoît Doyon-Gosselin | 157 |
| Arthur Motyer | 163 | Caroline Dupont | 178 |
| Nina Newington | 167 | Jesse Patrick Ferguson | 145 |
| Robert Nunn | 151 | Janice Fiamengo | 192 |
| Jean O'Grady | 141 | Graham Nicol Forst | 141 |
| François Ouellet | 180, 181 | Louise H. Forsyth | 186 |
| Michel Ouellette | 157 | Louise Frappier | 172 |
| Neil Querengesser | 123 | Sarah Galletly | 179 |
| Pascale Quiviger | 185 | Elizabeth A. Galway | 154 |
| François Paré | 181 | Julie Gaudreault | 168 |
| Pierre Raphaël Pelletier | 182 | Stéphane Girard | 129 |
| Jacques Poitras | 183 | Patricia Godbout | 148 |
| Daniel Poliquin | 148 | Lisa Grekul | 172 |
| Joël Pourbaix | 184 | Beverley Haun | 127 |
| Edeet Ravel | 133 | Stéphane Inkel | 131, 175 |
| Aurélie Resch | 129 | Suzanne James | 167 |
| Candida Rifkind | 186 | Eva-Marie Kröller | 170 |
| Hélène Rioux | 137 | René La Fleur | 124 |
| Ringuet et A. Rivard | 150 | André Lamontagne | 181 |
| Marcelle Roy | 144 | Dorothy F. Lane | 138, 140 |
| Ahmad Saidullah | 140 | Yves Laroche | 129 |
| | | Jody Mason | 123 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| Reviewers , <i>continued</i> | | Valerie Raoul | 194 |
| Tanis MacDonald | 149 | Marilou Sainte-Marie | 144 |
| Keavy Martin | 155 | Matthew Jordan Schmidt | 185 |
| Marissa McHugh | 134 | Pamela V. Sing | 137 |
| Lindsay Milligan | 176 | Émilie Théorêt | 184 |
| Catriona Mortimer- Sandilands | 162 | Veronica Thompson | 163 |
| Maureen Moynagh | 158 | Laure Tollard | 130 |
| François Paré | 136 | Ariane Tremblay | 165 |
| Ryan Porter | 188 | Nathalie Warren | 177 |
| Maxime Prévost | 169 | Kinga Zawada | 176 |

Opinions and Notes

Niigonwedom James Sinclair

| | |
|--|-----|
| Inks of Knowledge, Permanence, and Collectivity: A Response to <i>Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry</i> | 196 |
|--|-----|

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Home, Memory, Self

Margery Fee

I have an embarrassed idea that people assume that I, as editor of *Canadian Literature*, must be familiar with all of the issues we have produced since 1959, and further, must be even more familiar with the ideas and practices of my predecessors. Certainly I was fortunate to publish a few reviews and an article when Bill New was editor; I learned even more about the workings of the journal as an associate editor for Eva-Marie Kröller. But as I struggled with piles of books that needed reviewers and piles of reviews that needed editing, I didn't pay attention to the whole process. And of course, the process has changed along with technology, trends in professionalization and funding (the requirement for blind peer review), and an increase in publication in the field (at one time, the journal aspired to review every relevant book of literature or criticism).

When Bill spoke at the recent *Canadian Literature* 50th Anniversary Gala, he mentioned how he worked on the layout at George Woodcock's kitchen table. Once, Woodcock being in hospital, Bill was entrusted with the task; he nonetheless took the proofs to the hospital for a final editorial look-through. Of course, this work is done on computers now, off-site. Proofs arrive electronically. At least the woodcuts by George Kuthan are still part of each issue. Those little floating seeds—what a great symbol for what SSHRC calls scholarly dissemination! Long may they float!

Since this is the first issue for which I have been the designated editorial writer since our 200th issue, and as part of my resolve to learn more about the history of the journal, I decided to see how Woodcock marked important anniversaries. For the 10th anniversary he held a symposium, and put out a

collection of papers based on it, *The Sixties: Canadian Writers and Writing of the Decade*. Included were eight Canadian writers reflecting on their own writing and five critics writing about the novel, the short story, poetry, and criticism during the decade. Following this lead, we are planning to publish in an upcoming issue a selection of the presentations given at the symposium that was part of the recent gala. Checking my bookshelves, I discovered that I own *The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century*, which he edited, a collection of essays culled from *Canadian Literature* to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the journal. (Since the price was \$2.50, I must have purchased it just as I was starting my doctorate.) He notes that the amount of text in the journal in 15 years was about the equivalent of 30 full-length books (which makes me feel better about not having read the equivalent of 100 books that we have published now). He also comments that not everything dates well, and that he writhed a little re-reading “some ineptitude” that he had accepted enthusiastically several years earlier. Blind peer review—by our wonderfully helpful but stringently selective readers—means that very few “ineptitudes” creep in to the journal nowadays, and if they do, the editor has company with which to writhe.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary, W.H. New, Réjean Beaudoin, Susan Fisher, Iain Higgins, Eva-Marie Kröller, and Laurie Ricou put together another retrospective anthology of writing from the journal, with one new piece, a short history of the journal. *From a Speaking Place* (Ronsdale 2009) includes many famous names, but also the names of friends, teachers, colleagues, and students of all of us in the field. This mode of celebrating anniversaries will not likely continue long. Just as technology has meant that proofs are no longer assembled on kitchen tables, so now it means that those who want to browse through the back issues of the journal will be able to do so via the internet. We have just started to put the back issues of the journal on-line: issue number one, up for only a few days, has already had 30 hits. We hope to have the first 150 issues up by the time you read this. Then we'll pause while we turn to transforming our submission process so that instead of requiring authors to stick those colourful little paper squares on envelopes to send in their articles, it will all happen on the web.

Our more recent issues are available electronically to anyone who belongs to a library which has a subscription to one or more of the aggregators to which we licence the journal, which certainly includes most university libraries in North America and Europe, and many public and school libraries in Canada. However, on a visit to Hungary last spring, I discovered that not all

university libraries can afford either the paper or the electronic subscription. Even universities with courses in Canadian literature fall into this category, and there are many such universities in the world now, thanks to the efforts of the International Council for Canadian Studies. So we will keep moving to make more and more of the journal freely available, insofar as this is possible without becoming a drain on the university's finances.

Although this is a general issue, three of the articles focus on “home” as a theme. Laura Potter, whose “Short History of Canadian Literature” is the only piece written specifically for *From a Speaking Place*, only became interested in Canadian literature when she became an exchange student at the University of East Anglia. She writes, “Immersed in a new environment and different experiences, I suddenly found home foreign and intriguing.” She promptly applied for a position as our Arts Work Co-op student, a position for which we raised funds at the gala by auctioning off art by Canadian writers. She credits the experience she gained at the journal with landing her a job with V&A Books, affiliated with the Victoria and Albert Museum.

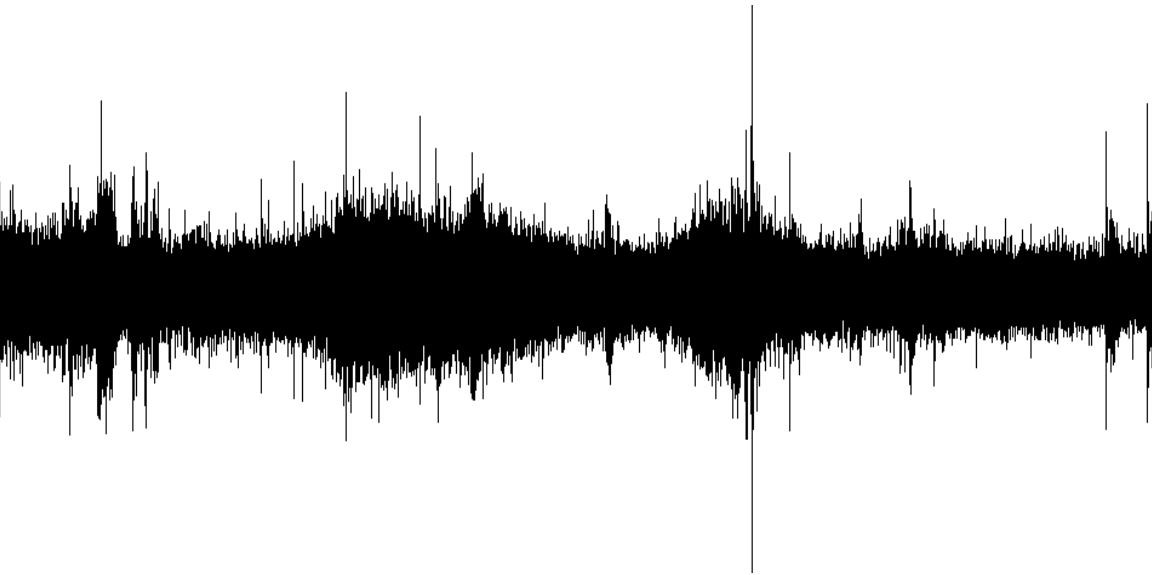
Woodcock was always proud to remind people that he was Canadian-born (some never believed him, preferring to see him as another agent of the colonizing of the Canadian mind). Significantly, in 1959 he and his wife were able to purchase their house on McCleery Street in which they lived all their lives, in part at least because of his new position as editor. In the editorial for issue #8, he argues that one makes oneself at home through “living oneself” into a place: he writes of Malcolm Lowry that he “is not writing about Canada as a transient outsider. He is writing about it as a man who over fifteen years lived himself into the environment that centred upon his fragile home where the Pacific tides lapped and sucked under the floorboards, and who identified himself with that environment—despite trials of flesh and spirit . . . passionately. . . .”

This “almost rhapsodic identification with place” may be possible for some immigrants; nonetheless, Lowry might be seen as a transnational intellectual *avant la lettre*, nowadays, as might Woodcock himself: his travels were legendary. However, in three of the following papers, by Amy J. Ransom, Jimmy Thibault, and Christa Zeller Thomas, the difficulties of achieving such an identification are the focus. In Wendy Roy's paper on Alzheimer's narratives, the difficulty is not of identification with a place as home, but

with identification itself. How can someone feel at home, when she cannot remember her own name? Alzheimer's patients often wander, as if looking for something that they cannot remember, perhaps indicating they do not feel at home where they are. This issue of a journey for meaning arises in Katie Mullins' paper on the quest of a male protagonist of a comic book / graphic novel, a quest that implicates the genre itself as male. Peter Jaeger's paper on Jeff Derksen's formal techniques might seem to be far removed from these concerns, but for Derksen's insistence that his "modular form" (or what someone called "socialist one-liners") result from and are productive of social relations in the minds of his readers. Social relations derive from particular locations and their web of economic and political connections: what counts as "home" often boils down to finding a lucky conjuncture of relationships, economic among them, that support one's identifications. This is what we must hope for *Canadian Literature*, which has survived because of a lucky conjuncture of people (writers, critics, readers, editors) places (Canada, Vancouver, UBC, the Faculty of Arts), institutions (Canadian literature scholarship, curricula, associations, agencies, government awards), and something much more intangible—the belief that puzzling out social meanings is vitally important, and one of the best places to focus that effort is in the production and study of literature, broadly defined.



Soundscape as Landscape #1: Peaceful, Unified, and Unarmed



This mediation was constructed using, as source text, a sound recording of the April 20, 2006 Six Nation's blockade of Argyle Street in Caledonia, Ontario. The blockade was in response to the arrest by Ontario Provincial Police of Six Nation's protestors at the Douglas Creek Estates development who were protesting the development without agreement of Six Nation's land. The above mediation (a waveform) was obtained by graphing sound amplitude against time of two trucks dumping gravel across Argyle Street.

Questioning Comics

Women and Autocritique in Seth's *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken*

Seth's "picture-novella" *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* is firmly situated in the conventionally male comics tradition, with a narrative that revolves around the physical and psychological journey of the male protagonist. Although it poses as an autobiography (the protagonist, also an artist, shares the creator's name), *It's a Good Life* is largely fictional; that said, Seth clearly blurs the boundary between his real and fictional self in order to pay tribute to comics creators he admires, and to comment on the body of work that informs his own place in the comics tradition. In this sense, *It's a Good Life* is a kind of *Künstlerroman* in that it traces the artist's development through his search for meaning in both life and art. The protagonist's selfish obsession with comics art, his nostalgia for the past, and his quest for the fictional male artist Kalo define a myopic and masculine world in which romantic relationships, love, and ethical obligations are cast aside for narcissistic pursuits. The book does, in fact, appear to contain several of the issues for which mainstream comics have often been criticized, particularly the portrayal of women as narrative embellishments or as eroticized objects of desire.¹ In *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art*, Roger Sabin discusses the matter of sexism in comics, particularly in adventure comics:

there were three main objections to . . . images [depicting women] put forward: that women performed subordinate roles, typically as "helpers" (nurses, mums, housewives); that they were used as plot devices, commonly as victims (there to be rescued, and the subject for violence); and that they were portrayed as sex objects. (79)

While Seth's storyline is far from that of an adventure comic, it references the genre and portrays a constellation of female characters who each appear to fit, almost perfectly, into one of the above categories. Similarly, the novella's nostalgically portrayed focus on the search for meaning and love nods to the romance and love comics of the forties and fifties which, like adventure comics, have been criticized for their depiction of limiting female roles: "[n]o matter how the various love comics differed, they all had one thing in common: in the end, true happiness came to every woman only with the love of the right man, and the traditional role of wife and homemaker" (Robbins 62).² However, the female characters in *It's a Good Life* also challenge these roles in a way that recalls attempts in comics history, particularly the feminist movement starting in the sixties, to engage with political and social issues; independent female comics artists—including Lee Marrs, Trina Robbins, and Willy Mendes—reacted "to the exclusion of women by . . . male cartoonists, and also to . . . sexism in comix" by producing their own comics works and eventually by collaborating to produce publications such as *It Ain't Me, Babe*, "the first all-woman comic book" (Robbins and Yronwode 79). These instances of resistance, then, suggest that *It's a Good Life* is not only acutely conscious of the history of female representation in mainstream and alternative comics, but also foregrounds the unique potential of sequential art to reformulate negative ideologies.

As Trina Robbins has discussed in her extensive work on women and the comics tradition, the force that emerged to act against misogyny—embodied in isolated creations of strong female heroes in the forties and fifties such as Katy Keene and Annie Oakley or in established feminist publications such as "that feminist warhorse *Wimmins Comix*" in the seventies and eighties—is equally powerful (114). Even the typically masculine world of adventure comics was infiltrated by characters such as Wonder Woman and Supergirl, who (while presenting a fresh set of concerns regarding female representation) introduced a powerful female force that fought back against crime, violence, and misogyny. As Lillian S. Robinson asserts in *Wonder Woman: Feminisms and Superheroes*, "the female superhero originates in an act of criticism—a challenge to the masculinist world of superhero adventures" (7). Modern graphic narratives are indeed transgressing boundaries and labels that had formerly consigned them to gendered, cultish readerships and given them the status of "low art," and are moving towards being acknowledged as a literature with the capability to engage with political and social issues in a far-reaching way. In recent decades the medium has become a vehicle for successfully exploring socially "uncomfortable" issues, and "authors like

Spiegelman and Sacco [have been able to] portray torture and massacre in a complex formal mode that does not turn away from or mitigate trauma; in fact, they demonstrate how its visual retracing is enabling, ethical, and productive” (Chute 459). As part of Seth’s endeavour to pay homage to the comics tradition, his female characters challenge ethical problems in the history of comics by evoking the counter-traditions that emerged in response to these issues: the result is a critical depiction of comics history that is fraught with rebellious attempts to oppose its misogynistic and myopic tendencies.

The self-reflexivity of *It’s a Good Life* further problematizes a straightforward reading of the book as inherently sexist or narrow-minded. Seth’s constant acknowledgment of his artistic forebears highlights his own position in the lineage of male comics creators, but also suggests an awareness of the conventions found in comics, which simultaneously differentiates the book from the tradition as well as consolidates its position within it. While Seth draws a range of commercial and alternative comics into his critique, many of which he explicitly names in the narrative and includes in a glossary in the endpapers, mainstream comics receive the most attention. Indeed, the fictional Seth is a kind of comics creation: a character whose actions and ideologies are influenced and formed by various—mostly mainstream—canonical comics’ plots, characters, and philosophies. It is Seth’s unique position as a “product” of mainstream comics which suggests that his shortcomings as a character be read as representative of shortcomings in this tradition; Seth is, effectively, a synecdoche for the history of mainstream comics and its various genres and representations. In the course of praising canonical comics creators, Seth (the creator) conducts an autocritique of the form, mainly through female characters, in order to subtly address significant problems in the comics tradition and draw attention to responding cultural movements that rallied for increased awareness of social and political issues. Women in *It’s a Good Life* implicitly and explicitly comment on (the fictional) Seth’s self-absorption and narcissism and encourage him to find meaning beyond comics, while also pointing to issues of communication and representation in the medium. This autocritique, therefore, not only highlights the immediate character’s limitations and his potential to move beyond them, but also motions towards the need for modern comics to address important ideological concerns, and for readers to think critically about comics and their broader implications.

The opening panel sequence establishes Seth’s obsession with comics and his sense of isolation. The instigating narrative is an illustration without text,

which highlights Seth's solitude and introduces the many-faceted issue of communication; while the image does create a mood of bleak isolation—mainly through the depiction of downward-looking individuals who walk through snow past uninviting storefronts—it does suggest the possibility of communication as Seth walks *towards* others. The prospect of human interaction is visually heightened by the illustration in the lower right panel, where Seth and a female character appear face-to-face, but is undermined by the accompanying text, which is revealed to be monologue rather than dialogue. Seth reveals that “[c]artoons have always been a big part of [his] life,” and he confesses on the following page that he thinks “too much” about them (1.2-2.2). Here, as in much of *It's a Good Life*, the panels work in a combination of moment-to-moment and aspect-to-aspect transitions, which conveys the slow narrative movement and creates a sense of Seth's contemplation, isolation, and his reluctance to progress; as Scott McCloud notes in *Understanding Comics*, “time seems to stand still in these quiet, contemplative combinations” (79). Although not explicit, the counterpoint that arises between text and image implies that Seth's isolation is a consequence of his monomaniacal obsession with comics; indeed, the lower right panel visually creates an immediate tension between men and women, and proleptically indicates Seth's inability to communicate effectively or maintain romantic relationships. Instead of noticing people, Seth's attention is focused on the bookstore, which he enters to browse the comics section while the text boxes reveal his constant train of thoughts about comics. The second panel on this page reveals a portion of the store's signage reading “Book Brothe,” which encourages a misreading of the text as “Book Brothel,” implicating the reader and making a submerged comment on Seth's excessively intimate relationship with comics; additionally, the correct title of the store, revealed in the following panel to be “Book Brothers,” boldly points to the homosocial network of comic collecting. Although focused specifically on picturebooks, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's study *How Picturebooks Work* offers an innovative approach to the interaction between verbal text and pictures that is often applicable to comics. Nikolajeva and Scott identify this incorporation of narrative into illustrations as *intraiconic text*, and argue that “the words' migration into the visual pictorial setting refines the experience of the environment, reflecting characteristics of the modern world, . . . the constant intrusion of advertising into our sense, and the clutter and distraction of our experiential relationship with the world around us” (74-75). The “Book Brothel/Brothers” sign, then, suggests the book's self-conscious

awareness of its own communication with, and influence on, the reader, and comments on its position in the fetishistic, masculine “collector” tradition of comics. Seth, as a symbol of mainstream comics history, is presented as an example of the comic collecting tradition’s insularity. Even when purchasing a comic book, Seth can only reply to the cashier’s attempted conversation with awkward laughter, and he explicitly admits his mania for comics and his inability to communicate in the accompanying text box: “I can’t do much of anything without—I mean, I can hardly say hello to someone without dragging Dr. Seuss, old Bemelmans or the inimitable Mr. Schulz into it” (3.2). By examining how Seth represents a tradition of “gag-cartoons, newspaper strips, [and] comic books,” Seth’s failure to communicate and his treatment of other characters can be read as indicative of certain mainstream comics’ reluctance and/or failure, historically, to speak ethically about broader political and social issues; conversely, the characters Seth encounters question his outlook in a way that recalls the response of many alternative comics to mainstream publications (1.3). While the opening sequence introduces Seth’s obsession, the narrative goes on to reveal that Seth’s fixation with comics not only consumes his thoughts, but defines his philosophies: Seth is created by the comics he admires.

Seth admits that his everyday actions consistently recall events, scenes, and characters in comics—“no matter what I talk about, it inevitably seems to lead back to cartooning”—yet the extent to which *It’s a Good Life* bombards the reader with comics intertexts that define Seth is perhaps surprising (31.4). Seth confesses that his “attitude towards life has mostly been shaped by ‘Peanuts,’” and particularly by Linus’ philosophy that “‘No problem is so big or so complicated that it can’t be run away from’” (95.4, 6). Seth’s inclination to avoid taking risks—especially of an emotional kind—fuels his nostalgic tendency to retreat physically and emotionally into the past; his fondness for the dinosaur room at the museum, which exhibits skeletons that echo Seth’s stasis and emotional futility, and his mother’s apartment, which is likewise “sealed in amber,” both exemplify Seth’s escapism (11.1). His aforementioned meditation on Dr. Seuss, Bemelmans, and Mr. Schulz, all of whom are most commonly associated with children’s literature, also appears as a symptom of Seth’s reluctance to mature. Similarly, Seth associates his childhood and his parents with “a holy trinity of cartoon characters, . . . ‘Nancy,’ ‘Andy Capp’ and ‘Little Nipper,’” while Seth’s extraordinarily loyal friend Chet (an homage to real-life cartoonist Chester Brown) functions largely as a soundboard for Seth’s nostalgic memories and his discoveries

about comics (42.6). Commonly, the illustrations depict events that trigger Seth's recollection of certain comics, while an accompanying explicit reference to the intertext is made in the text-box narrative that appears at the top of the panels; the skating scene at the beginning of Part Two, which causes Seth to think of Jimmy Hatlo's gags about "expectation and disappointment," is one such example (31.5). However, there are instances not made explicit in the book that build on the idea of Seth as an embodiment of comics. These intertextual moments are largely submerged in the narrative, but in hailing Seth as a comics creation they also implicate the reader who recognizes them as such. Take, for example, Seth's recollection of Tintin as he rides the train to Strathroy in his search for Kalo. Although the black text-boxes reference the hypotext, Hergé's *The Black Island*, and the specific scene containing Tintin on the train, the illustrations also provide a visual connection between *It's a Good Life* and *The Black Island*. The image of the train passing through the tunnel in *It's a Good Life* (77.3) is an obvious reference to the illustrated scene in *Tintin* (31.6), which it echoes in terms of content and visual composition. This intervisual connection emphasizes Seth's own connection to, and dependence on, comics history, as well as his nostalgia for the past and his extreme self-involvement; it is, perhaps, no coincidence that the gender economy in *The Black Island* is unbalanced and that the book has a homosocial plot featuring a very limited number of women. Similarly, when Seth is addressed as "Clark Kent" and "Superman" by two youths (94), the reader is required to *visually* connect Seth and the DC comics hero: Seth's attire—his suit, black-rimmed glasses, and fedora—faithfully replicates Clark Kent's wardrobe. Indeed, even Seth's romantic and sexual experiences are shaped by comics: "Hatlo's little girl character . . . was the first image that stirred sexual feelings in me," Seth admits (32.4). While Seth attempts to defend his early intimate experience with this character by explaining that he was "probably 6 years old at the time," his adult view of love remains, in many ways, rooted in the typical ideological representation of women in many mainstream comics (32.5).

In Part One of the book, Seth complains to Chet about his failure to maintain relationships with women, and declares that he does not "understand love" (14.2). Chet's reply, with which Seth enthusiastically agrees, reduces love to two fundamental components: "Love. It has always seemed to me that love is a combination of lust and pity" (14.2). This definition suggests that women, for Seth, must be either sexually desirable objects or victims in order for him to love them, classifications defined by Sabin as two of the central

problems with the depiction of women in adventure comics. The representation of women as either victims or objects of desire can be found in countless comics, several of which (including *Superman* and Bill Ward's cartoons) are referenced in the book; Seth, the author, both utilizes and critiques this tradition of female representation through the characters of Ruthie and Annie. These two characters embody the categories outlined by Chet: while Ruthie is presented as an object of Seth's desire, Annie is portrayed as a pitiable figure. However, both female characters comment, either implicitly or explicitly, on Seth's self-absorption and his failure to establish meaningful relationships; in doing so, Annie and Ruthie achieve significant positions in the narrative.

Ruthie is introduced as an object of Seth's gaze, which indicates, since Ruthie is silent here, that Seth's attraction to her is predominately physical (24-25). However, Seth first sees Ruthie in the library and in each of the six panels in which she first appears she clutches a book, suggesting that, while Ruthie's physicality in the novella is undeniably accentuated, Seth is also attracted by her bookishness. Although this observation does complicate a reading of Seth's attraction to Ruthie as merely physical, the panel layout of page 25 forces the reader to share Seth's visual perspective as voyeur and suggests his objectification of Ruthie; similarly, their second meeting in the park consists of Seth watching Ruthie for a series of panels before initiating any conversation. A significant amount of closure is required between the last panel in this sequence and the following page, which displays the only visually erotic scene in the novella; interestingly, even in this sexually suggestive illustration, the eroticism is countered by Ruthie's reading, contextually echoing the aforementioned initial meeting scene in which Ruthie carries a book (48-49). Indeed, despite the eroticized pictorial portrayal of Ruthie in these panels, the sequence creates a counterpoint between image and text that problematizes this visual insinuation: Ruthie's intelligent conversation, which leads to her discovery of Kalo's real name, elevates her authority, astuteness, and value in the comic beyond that of an aesthetic embellishment, and dispels the notion of her being merely a sexual icon. By uncovering Kalo's actual name and origin, Ruthie makes the first biographical discovery in the book, foreshadowing the narrative's resolution and linking her to Seth's developing interest in real human lives. These early panels, nonetheless, remain illustrative of Seth's self-absorption and extreme focus on comics, which he cannot set aside even during the most intimate of encounters. His inability to answer Chet's question, "So what's [Ruthie] like?" demonstrates the extent of his egotism and his lack of interest in

others: "She's a student . . . French major . . . I guess I don't know her too well myself yet" (51.5, .6). In the same way that she probes beyond illustrations to discover the "real" Kalo, Ruthie forces Seth and the reader to consider issues beyond the immediate narrative by highlighting and directly questioning Seth's self-interested existence and his desire for stagnation.

Seth's visit to the museum initiates his conversation with Ruthie about progress and change, in which the only example of change that Seth admits to liking is his mother's newfound appreciation for make-up. Ruthie's reply to Seth's answer is scolding: "That's it? *That's* the best example of positive change you can come up with? You really do think small! What about civil rights or the women's movement . . . or medical progress? Boy oh boy!" (63.6-7). Ruthie's comment not only highlights Seth's narcissism, but also reflexively suggests the representation of social issues in comics: *It's a Good Life* suggests that Seth (the creator) creates a conflict between Seth and Ruthie that is representative of the conflict between certain insular, patriarchal, male-created comics—particularly the romance and superhero comics of the fifties through to the seventies³—and the underground movement that surfaced to counter the lack of social awareness in these publications. Emerging in the sixties, the women's liberation movement "paralleled that of the new underground comics movement," and resulted in publications that not only spoke out for women's rights, but also "challenged American middle-class values" (Robbins 83).⁴ Conversely, as J. Robyn Goodman points out in her examination of *Life* magazine cartoons depicting the women's suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century, cartoons have also played a role "in reinforcing political, cultural, social, and gender ideologies," and have "supported antisuffrage ideologies and helped produce negative public opinion towards . . . suffragism" (46). Ruthie, therefore, questions the comics tradition through Seth, and points to the powerful potential of the comics medium to propel or alter ideologies.

The formal aspects of the page also work to convey Ruthie's independence and strength as a character. Although Seth walks beside Ruthie in the top two panels, he disappears from the central panels where Ruthie moves to the foreground of the picture planes. The physical divide that occurs between the two characters mirrors their divided ideas about value and progress; as Seth (the creator) notes, "when used well the drawings act as symbols to direct the eyes and the emotions" ("An Interview With Seth"). Furthermore, Ruthie's visual location in these panels and her centrality in the overall page composition give her a prioritized position on the page that stresses her autonomy and the import of her speech. Seth's clear discomfort with Ruthie's

reasoning, shown visually by his distressed expression, suggests his reluctance to acknowledge the positive and broader benefits of change. Seth falls back onto his philosophy of “avoidism” and draws the conversation away from social and political progress and back to a first-person account of his own fears and anxieties: “I’d be more than happy if the world would just stay relatively like this until I die” (64.6). Ruthie responds to Seth’s evasion of the issues she raises by pointing out his inability to listen. In one panel, Seth and Ruthie walk past a graffitied heart on a wall with the name “Fran” underneath (64). This icon reminds Ruthie of Fran Lebowitz’s quotation, “the opposite of talking isn’t listening, it’s waiting,” which appears, in this context, as a direct comment on Seth’s incapacity to listen (65.1). The fact that Fran Lebowitz is an icon for a strong, successful, and independent female artist, builds on Ruthie’s earlier commentary about social change and women’s rights. Seth, however, is repelled by Ruthie’s attempt to raise his awareness of these issues, and he retreats, physically and emotionally, into his search for Kalo; declining Ruthie’s offer to accompany him, Seth leaves Toronto to travel to Kalo’s hometown, Strathroy. His visit is immersed in nostalgia, and represents a complete shift away from the significant concerns he is forced to face during his time with Ruthie; however, while his search for Kalo is fruitless, Seth’s encounter with Annie at the motel forces him once again to face issues beyond his selfish preoccupation with comics.

Annie is introduced as a figure of pity and, as a somewhat pathetic and vulnerable character, fulfils the “requirement” for love, as defined by Chet, that is absent in Ruthie, but she lacks Ruthie’s erotic appeal. Annie’s characterization is established through the panel construction in this sequence, as well as through her dialogue with Seth. Her motel room is filled with religious paraphernalia, and one of the drawings she shows Seth is, as he points out, “sorta religious in nature” (106.7). While Seth does not explicitly reveal his thoughts about Annie and her situation, the visual rhyming that occurs in the sequence, linking it to other moments in the plot, indicates Seth’s opinions. A panel depicts a still-life arrangement of her belongings (106) that visually echoes an earlier panel in which Seth describes a similar collection of objects in a storefront window: “The whole thing—it’s kind of sweet and pathetic at the same time” (41). The abundance of religious iconography in the room implies that Annie is searching for some kind of meaning, which is confirmed when Seth asks the question, “So Annie, what brings you here to Strathroy?” to which she poignantly answers, “love” (106.5). Although Seth appears unaware of the connection, a clear parallel emerges between Annie

not only considering Kalo's life and work, but is also thinking about Annie (108.6). The two panels that appear at the top of the recto, before the second "black sky" panel, depict Seth presumably contemplating this question as he smokes a cigarette. This scene is a crucial turning point in the narrative, as it is the first time Seth evidently considers the value of human lives and begins to realize the relative insignificance of "some yellowing, brittle cartoons" (109.1). Although Seth does not attempt to speak directly to Annie, the note he leaves on her door—"Goodbye Annie; Take care of yourself. Seth"—is a form of communication (albeit mediated) that suggests a certain sympathy and increased altruism. Indeed, in Part Five, Seth begins to fully recognize his own flaws and assess his previous actions.

Seth considers his treatment of women and admits to Chet that, while he previously "couldn't . . . recognize the pattern in all those relationships," he now recognizes himself as "the common element in those failures" (122.2). Seth admits to treating Ruthie "very poorly," and points out that she was correct in telling him that he would regret ending the relationship (123.2-4). Although Seth is still defensive about his actions and ends his discussion with Chet by declaring it "a profoundly futile and stupid conversation," these confessions show a marked progression in Seth's awareness of others' feelings, and indicate his movement towards finding meaning outside of comics (123). This idea is further enforced by Seth's recollection of ending his relationship with Ruthie (126). A panel portraying Seth sitting alone with his cat follows the sequence that depicts the break-up. This panel, like those in the "motel room" sequence, suggests that Seth is contemplating his actions and feels a sense of regret or remorse. The final panel in the recto is particularly poignant. Although open to interpretation, it suggests Seth's unsuccessful attempt to contact Ruthie: the open telephone directory and telephone emblemize the possibility of communication, but the immobility of the scene—the fact that Seth does not pick up the receiver—implies his failure to call her (127.7). The added detail of the nearby roll of tissue paper is an affecting indication of Seth's emotional response to this disappointment. While both Ruthie and Annie highlight Seth's ideological expectations about women and force him to confront realities he finds uncomfortable, Seth still continues his search for Kalo; however, this search leads to the acquisition of knowledge not about Kalo's art, but rather about Kalo himself and the relationships he had while alive. Significantly, the narrative progression of *It's a Good Life* corresponds with Seth's own discovery of the importance of relationships, and his search for Kalo results in Seth forming, and attempting to recover,

relationships with women. Kalo's daughter, Susan, is the third female in the story who influences Seth's actions and philosophies, and through whom the author critiques Seth's search.

Susan shatters Seth's hopes about finding information on Kalo's work when she admits her lack of knowledge about her father's cartooning. Although the initial panels in the sequence reveal Seth's disappointment, his interest in Kalo's cartoons becomes replaced by an interest in Kalo's life: "Why don't you tell me what sort of person he was. . . . If it's not being too personal—could I ask you the same question about your mother? What she was like? How they met?" (146.4, .6). An exchange occurs between the two characters in which Susan imparts her knowledge of Kalo's life and Seth shows Susan the Kalo cartoons he has collected. This trade of information creates an implicit bond between Seth and Susan, and the different understanding that they both gain about Kalo through their interaction displays to each of them another dimension of his life; as Susan realizes, "It's not a part of the man I knew" (150.8). The significance of this exchange is also conveyed pictorially. In this panel, Seth looks at the images in the scrapbook while Susan looks at her father's cartoons; the absence of text here emphasizes that the communication that takes place is through the act of reading as opposed to speaking, and comments reflexively on *our* reading of the panel, and of comics generally. Seth's facial expression invites us to read his experience as pleasurable, although he does not receive the information he desired. Furthermore, the panels on these pages—which switch between images of Seth and Susan, Kalo's cartoons, and pictures of Kalo—dissolve the boundaries between art and life, and suggest an important movement away from the dialectic that formally existed in the narrative. Seth, therefore, not only learns about Kalo, but also that it is possible for art and life to coexist; in light of this recognition, Susan's comment, "I haven't been much help to you," appears extremely ironic (151.7).

In breaking down the boundaries between comics and human interaction, *It's a Good Life* also comments on comics' potential influence on society and ideology. Seth's conversation with Susan directs him to Kalo's best friend Ken, who, like Susan, knows nothing about Kalo's cartoons, but tells Seth about Kalo as an individual. Ken's comments about Kalo's attitude towards cartooning are telling, and he reveals to Seth that even though Kalo was an active participant in the comics industry, he conducted his own critique of the medium: "we didn't talk too much about cartoons . . . but when they did come up [Kalo] was always critical" (153.6). Kalo's criticism of cartooning is perhaps the most explicit example of autocritique in the book. Although

Kalo's critique, as recalled by Ken, seems to be either technical (about "the drawing . . . getting worse") or conservative (about "the humour . . . getting cruder") rather than directly addressing issues in the *content* of comic art, they nonetheless add another layer of critical assessment to the narrative (154.1). His conversation with Ken, as with Susan, moves Seth towards an understanding of the value of human relationships, and his discovery of the parallel between life and comics art in the immediate narrative draws attention to the overall impact of comics as social and political tools; as Matthew McAllister, Edward Sewell, and Ian Gordon point out, comics have a unique ability to "challenge and/or perpetuate power differences in society" ("Introducing Comics and Ideology" 2). Seth, as a character who represents comics history, demonstrates a movement away from ideologies established at the beginning of the novella, particularly power differences between men and women, and towards a more altruistic existence in which human relationships take priority. Indeed, after his interaction with Susan and Ken, Seth attempts to regain contact with Annie. *It's a Good Life*, then, seems to valorize an ideology that collapses the disparity between life and comics, and promotes an awareness of the ethical treatment of the individual that challenges cases of sexism, selfishness, and disrespect as they arise.

Annie becomes one of the most influential characters in the novella in terms of this ideological shift. As an artist, Annie unknowingly competes with Kalo for Seth's respect and interest, and, although her initial attempt to share her art and friendship with Seth is rejected, her impact on Seth is quite profound; however, the extent of her influence on his development extends throughout the book. Before Seth goes to Strathroy for the second time, his brother's question, "Hey, you gonna stay at the same motel where you met that crazy girl?" implies that Seth has since talked, and therefore thought, about Annie (133.6). Similarly, his desire to contact her after speaking to Kalo's daughter and friend suggests that their conversation about Kalo somehow reminds Seth of Annie, and encourages him to regain her friendship. The panel in which Seth tries to call Annie echoes the illustration of the telephone directory and telephone in the scene with Ruthie, but while the earlier panel points only to the possibility of communication with Ruthie, the later panel depicts a more active attempt to contact Annie: "Hi—I was, uh, wondering if you have a guest staying there named Annie. . . . no, I don't know the last name" (159.1; ellipsis in original). Ken's answer to Seth's question about whether or not it mattered to Kalo that he stopped cartooning is significant here: "When you get to my age you discover that *everything*

mattered” (155.5; emphasis added). This comment not only encourages Seth to consider his own system of values—what “matters” to him—but it also gestures to the process of reading the book, the significance of individual aspects of the comic that work to convey the overall meaning of the narrative. Seth’s effort to contact Annie shortly after this scene implies, therefore, that her position in the narrative, and her relation to him, “matters” significantly.

Annie’s importance is also foreshadowed at the beginning of the book, even before the narrative begins: the drawing that appears on the title page of the book resembles, in a more realistic style, the drawing that Annie presents to Seth in the motel. Because this illustration is situated outside the narrative, Annie’s drawing takes on significance beyond the immediate story; as Nikolajeva and Scott explain, the “title page picture may . . . suggest and amplify a certain interpretation” (250). The choice to use this drawing, rather than a Kalo cartoon, as the title-page illustration is especially interesting because it implies that Annie’s drawing has a value in the narrative that is equal to, if not greater than, Kalo’s work; “[t]he arrangement of cover to endpapers to title page, etc.” the creator acknowledges, “is such a marvelous set of elements to play with” (Seth, “An Interview With Seth”). Despite her saying “it’s only apple blossoms,” Annie’s drawing becomes symbolic of a meaning that surpasses content and points to the value of human relationships; it suggests a *connection* between art and human relations rather than the division presented at the beginning of the story (106.2). The endpapers in the book convey a similar idea: the cartoon drawings of images from Susan’s scrapbook represent an explicit correlation between cartooning and human relationships, and the creator’s dedication to his mother, in which he credits her as the inspiration for the book’s title, provides an early indication of the importance of women in the novella. The connection between art and human relationships is also stressed during the fictional Seth’s conversation with Kalo’s mother, Mrs. Kalloway.

Again, what information Seth learns about Kalo’s cartooning is limited, and Mrs. Kalloway’s replies, like the comments Ruthie makes, are not always what Seth wants to hear; Seth, arguably, wants to be told that Kalo is like him. Seth’s interest in Kalo’s work is largely based on the similarities Seth sees between himself and Kalo: not only are both men lesser-known cartoonists but, according to Chet, they also share the same drawing style (19.2). In fact, in many ways Kalo and Seth are parallel characters, even doubles: they share the same hometown, are both cartoonists, are both apparently fatherless, and both have four-letter names—indicating yet another level

of the construction of Seth as a representative of comics. Mrs. Kalloway's description of Kalo and her comments about his attitude to his cartooning are, therefore, hard for Seth to hear: unlike Seth, Kalo "was a happy man, content with a sort of life of quiet acceptance," and did not, contrary to Seth's assumptions, resent giving up cartooning (163.8). These final pages seem to answer the aforementioned question that Seth asks after meeting Annie—"After a whole life, is this what it boils down to? A few sheets of paper?"—and Seth draws the epiphanic conclusion that "*above all*, he was a good person" (164.2; emphasis added). By modifying this inference with "above all," Seth suggests that this is the most important thing he has learned about Kalo and, therefore, about himself; as with Susan, Seth gains this wisdom through an exchange whereby he shows Mrs. Kalloway her son's cartoons. Seth's question to Mrs. Kalloway regarding Kalo's death also seems to highlight the transience of life and the impossibility of avoiding real-life situations, despite Seth's earlier admission of being, like Linus, a "true adherent of avoidism" (95.7). Seth's recognition of Kalo's good character also points to his own progression towards becoming a more contented and accepting individual; the final three panels in the narrative suggest that even though Seth's expectations about Kalo are proved false and he does not discover any information about his work, he takes pleasure in "reconnecting" Mrs. Kalloway with her son through his art. Both characters are smiling, and Seth's silence points to a recognition of his contentment that does not need to be verbally expressed. Significantly, a woman speaks the final words in the narrative; Mrs. Kalloway's comment, "I didn't know he had it in him," can pertain not only to her son's art, but also to Seth's newly discovered ability to communicate and find a possible satisfaction in life (164.8). Seth, therefore, learns to accept that change is not necessarily negative. This realization motions, on the level of autocritique, towards a need for progression and change in comics. It suggests that while the past can be appreciated—as it is through the book's homage to canonical cartoon art, its glossary of influential comics, and its conventional and nostalgic format—it is necessary for some things to change; as Seth, the creator, explains, "[y]ou have to . . . be able to embrace what was positive in [mainstream comics], and try and get away from what was negative" (Seth, *The Comics Journal*).

While the narrative proper concludes at this point, the book contains a further section comprised of eleven "Kalo" cartoons that Seth has collected. The illustrations, however, include no narrative commentary about Seth's thoughts or opinions on the drawings, but rather leave the reader to deduce

an entirely interpretive meaning. After the narrative movement away from issues of power, sexism, and selfishness, the Kalo drawings contain surprising content: many of them indulge in overtly sexist jokes and deal primarily with power relations. In fact, it is not surprising that Chet discovers one of Seth's Kalo cartoons in a "girly magazine" that he had bought "for the Bill Ward drawings" (52.3, .6). Although Seth calls it a "cheesy magazine" and mocks Chet's admiration for Bill Ward—"BILL WARD! HA HA! The guy who draws the torpedo tits?"—the similarity between the Kalo and Ward cartoons, as revealed at the end, makes his comment appear somewhat self-critical (52.6-7). Trina Robbins points out how Bill Ward's drawings tend to objectify women, and she places his drawings (particularly his *Torchy* illustrations) in the trend of the "dumb blonde' . . . comic book theme that kept popping up during the 1940s and 1950s" (*Girls to Grrrlz* 15). While Kalo's style is noticeably more cartoony than Ward's, the crude jokes and depictions of buxom women being ogled by men are remarkably comparable, and even their signatures bear a striking resemblance.

Seth's critique of Ward's work, and the implicit connection between Kalo and Ward, therefore suggests that the final drawings should be viewed with a critical eye. This is not to say that Seth does not appreciate Ward's talent and drawing style—which he inadvertently admires through his fascination with Kalo's work, and which in reality is widely regarded—but rather that he points to the necessity of being critically aware of the social implications of *all* comics art. As the creator Seth points out, comics, as a part of the culture industry, require readers to look objectively and critically at what they convey: "What we hope is that at some point, as an individual, you can reject the values it's putting across to you, and analyze what they're showing you" (Seth, *The Comics Journal*). Indeed, this is what *It's a Good Life* requires of the reader in this final section. The novella effectively provides us with a set of critical tools with which to analyze the Kalo cartoons: the gender issues pointed to by Ruthie, in terms of the treatment of women; the implications of being understood and accepted as an artist and finding meaning in the process, as highlighted by Annie; the connection between life and art; and the power of art to either bridge or divide people and selves, as conveyed by Seth's relationships with women towards the end of the book. Seth, as creator, pays homage to the comics tradition while advocating the necessity of change; the autocritique in *It's a Good Life* inspires a progression away from negative ideologies and a movement towards critical awareness when both reading and creating comics.

NOTES

- 1 While sexism is most commonly associated with mainstream comics, the reluctance of the “male-dominated underground comics community” in the sixties to recognize or publish female comics artists, and the violently misogynistic works that were produced in reaction to such efforts by women, should not be overlooked (Robbins and Yronwode 79-80).
- 2 The body of work to which I refer was composed of comics aimed specifically at female readers and included titles such as *My Date*, *Young Romance*, *Young Brides*, *Young Love*, *In Love*, *My Romance*, *Cinderella Love*, *Romantic Secrets*, *Lover’s Lane*, *True Love*, and *Teen-Age Romance*. A comprehensive list and discussion of many more romance and love comics can be found in Chapter 2 of Trina Robbins’ *Girls to Grrrlz*.
- 3 Although mainstream romance comics of the sixties and seventies pushed the boundaries of gender roles, and “their heroines evolved from waitresses and housewives into college students, stewardesses and rock-stars,” the ultimate idea of female success was still marriage (Robbins 70). Similarly, while women were given agency and power in certain superhero comics, Wonder Woman and Supergirl being obvious examples, the genre most commonly featured male protagonists and indulged relentlessly in gender stereotyping. With some exceptions, these publications also largely ignored issues of (and often perpetuated) class inequality and racial intolerance.
- 4 Having said this, female comics creators struggled throughout the sixties to be admitted into what was an “almost exclusively male field,” and it was not until 1970 that feminism in underground comics really found a foothold (Robbins 85).

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Letting Nature Run Her Course

The English Department Chair was all for approving it, since ecocriticism was in more demand each year, and not just among undergraduates, either. “But what are her credentials?” one senior faculty member demanded when the matter was brought to the monthly Department meeting. “We’ve built our academic reputation on intellectual rigor. This sounds to me like something more suitable for Continuing Ed or a community college.” “Is there any evidence,” concurred another full professor, “she isn’t going to just tell the class a bunch of yarns about her years in the business? I have a friend over in Economics and he has two or three horror stories about Special Lecturers like this hired on the basis of so-called ‘real-life learning’—as if what we do isn’t real. These chaps proved to be total disasters right up to delegations to the dean and petitions by students for a tuition refund.”

Yet junior faculty proved more supportive, and the two student reps were enthusiastic. “Green is in,” was stated several times as proponents assured the gathering the new course would be oversubscribed, and represented a clear message to majors and non-majors alike about the Department’s commitment to oppose global warming. The motion in favor passed handily.

Nor could any fault be found,
despite extra scrutiny, with the instructor's proposed syllabus.
The section filled as predicted, with a lengthy wait list.
As the semester ticked past, however, the Department executive
became aware that, one by one, class members
were withdrawing. When the Associate Chair for Undergrad Programming
tried to contact the dropouts to conduct an exit interview,
he discovered former enrollees had not only quit the course
but appeared to have abandoned university studies
entirely. None returned phone or email messages
and the Registrar confirmed they had left no forwarding contact information.
Confronted with the dwindling enrollment figures
the instructor had only shrugged, the Chair advised a hushed Department meeting
in June. Out of the whole class, he reported in shaken tones,
at the end not one student was left.

“But Could I Make A Living From It”

Jeff Derksen’s Modular Form

Jeff Derksen’s poetics articulate the political struggles surrounding issues of subjectivity, citizenship, and the public discourse of neoliberalism, as well as how these struggles further impact on the relationships among global, national, and local socio-economic conditions. Derksen’s cultural production is a type of research into the social role of poetry; his work aims to investigate cultural phenomena and processes “through research that does not take the form of a research paper” (“Your” 101). His sustained exploration of economic and social relations in the long poem “But Could I Make A Living From It” published in *Transnational Muscle Cars* (2003)¹ provides an exemplary site for reflecting on the contradictions and conditions of Canada in relation to the neoliberal situation.² This poem consists of short, sometimes aphoristic units of text—a formal method which situates it in a literary and philosophical tradition stretching through Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, the Benjamin of *The Arcades Project*, Baudrillard’s *Cool Memories*, and in the context of contemporary poetics, Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery, and other language-centred writers.³ Several critics have mentioned Derksen’s modular method: for Susan Rudy, Derksen’s primary unit of composition is “quite often what looks like an ordinary sentence” that has been “constructed to point out the contradictions inherent in the most common of discourses” (200); for Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden, Derksen’s 1993 poem “Interface” appears to consist solely of “a series of disjunctive sentences, mostly declarative, culled from a wide range of sources, including personal reflection, economic statistics, and news headlines” (39); and for Brian Kim Stefans, Derksen’s

work is a series of “socialist one liners” (1). While these critics have lucidly focused on the inter-relationships amongst political, social and psychological forces in Derksen’s writing, their work has skirted the importance of modular form as a vehicle for his politically grounded research. One of the key features of Derksen’s poetics is its use of the modular unit as a means to present research on Canada in relation to globalization, ideology, language, and the socially-grounded subjectivities which language enunciates.

The title of the poem “But Could I Make A Living From It” comes from a passage in Derksen’s 1993 book *Dwell*:

If “the alienation of the worker stops where the alienation of the sightseer begins,” then the pyramids are experienced as workers’ monuments.

I could learn to do that, but could I make a living from it?

The tortilla factory that makes 27,000 a day. (64)

The passage juxtaposes short segments of text, each of which hijacks a cultural icon, product, brand, or identity. In the first unit, for example, (“If ‘the alienation of the worker stops where the alienation of the sightseer begins,’ then the pyramids are experienced as workers’ monuments”) the conditional tense ironically presents a materialist reading of the pyramids by constructing them as a monument to workers, instead of romanticizing them as ancient wonders. In the second unit, which also focuses on labour relations, the “it” of the question “could I make a living from it?” has no clear antecedent. The missing link between “it” and its antecedent is not purely an example of formalist indeterminacy, or linguistic free-play, because “it” invites readers into productive effort: how do we connect “it”; what does “it” connect to? This potentially productive space for readers functions as one element in a series of connected, critical indeterminacies which underline political struggle. The third sentence similarly engages with political critique by implying the alienation of workers who churn out 27,000 tortillas per day.

“But Could I Make a Living From It” sets up a tension between the disorder of these seemingly ordinary sentences or one-liners and a more ordered, repetitive structure of similar elements. This repetitive, modular structure owes something to Derksen’s long-standing interest in architecture, and his more recent collaborative work on architecture and visual art with the collective *Urban Subjects*.⁴ The re-occurring, modular structure which organizes the poem is not unlike an architectural “space frame” (Derksen “Poetics”)—i.e., a rigid structure constructed from interlocking struts, which

is often used in modernist and contemporary architecture to hold up long spans with few supports. Just as space frames are used to support a building, the text uses refrain-like, repetitive "space frames" to organize and support the long poem form.⁵

At intervals of approximately once per page, Derksen sets up a series of thematically related modules, each of which serves to contextualize the seemingly disjunctive elements of the poem. In effect, the poem shows a very clear relationship between large social structures and the structure of the text itself. For example, the text repeatedly cites the "spot rate," or average noon exchange rate of US to Canadian dollars ("1976: 0.9861 . . . 1978: 1.1402 . . . 1980: 1.1690" [. . . and so on until 1994]). The spot exchange rate is an agreement to buy or sell one currency in exchange for another. Foreign exchange markets use the American dollar as the standard unit of measurement for all currencies. Here the American dollar is expressed in terms of the number of Canadian dollars needed to buy it. Derksen's text uses the history of shifting exchange rates as a leitmotif to further conjoin global economic relations with the personal and social spheres of globalization's subjects. By situating these spot rate citations regularly amongst ironic one-liners such as "I aspire to a dental plan—to make myself human" (31), Derksen not only finds an organizing structure for his poem, but also offers class critique: those without enough money for health care are not considered fully human, and this inhumanity is implicitly linked to the global economic relationships which the repeated references to the spot rate express. As Derksen writes in "Poetry and the Long Neoliberal Moment" (2006): "Gap between rich and poor? Globally the economy has grown. People want access to healthcare? Choose a private healthcare service. The super rich are getting richer? That helps everyone" (7).

The spot rate cited in Derksen's text provides a record of economic history, inasmuch as it begins in 1976 and continues at regular intervals until 1994. During this period the value of the American dollar in relation to the Canadian dollar increased significantly. This repetitive, historically-grounded series of modules parallels a more personal indication of time, evidenced in segments such as: "I'm 3 years younger than the term *Third World*" (24); "I am the same age as Mies Van der Rohe's Seagram Building" (29); "In my lifetime I have witnessed the invention of the Self-Serve Gas station" (35). However, the personal pronoun in these lines belongs to a subject that is implicated in the social at every instance. Subjectivity in Derksen is constructed by culture and identity is historically contingent. Derksen writes: "I become a 'world citizen' with the arrival of

my phone card” (28)—the quotation marks around “world citizen” suggest that Derksen has borrowed this slogan from advertising or some other form of media-speak, discourses which have tended to glamorize the supposed freedom of the transnational individual. That freedom is, however, a type of formal freedom to make choices within an already existing and circumscribed set of social possibilities—for example, the freedom to buy a Nokia phone instead of a Sony Ericsson, rather than the actual freedom to question how the media aligns communication technology (or cars or shoes) with personal identity. The world citizen is a world citizen precisely because he or she chooses to consume. It does not matter where the phone is made; the ideology of world citizenship does not concern the origins of goods, but their destination as signs of material success. The fully human individual is transnational and can phone anywhere.

One key element in the text’s use of re-occurring structural modules is in its periodic alphabetical listing of forty-eight countries: “Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin” (25); “Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia” (26); “Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea” (29), and so on every page or so, until forty-eight countries have been listed, and concluding with “United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen, and Zambia” (39). This list is not unlike the puzzle published in the Saturday *Guardian* and other newspapers with global circulation, where readers are asked to match three or more similar names, topics, or places. Because there is no immediate context for the list, however, the modules invite readers to speculate on meaning: at first glance, the connection between all of these countries is not entirely clear, although it is safe to say that many have been subject to territorial disputes and/or war during the period when Derksen’s text was written, all of them have been subject to IMF/World Bank interference or so-called “special” measures, and all were, at one point or another, instruments of colonialism and/or strategic alliances during the Cold War. But these possibilities are simply the projection of a reader onto the text, and are based on conjecture; what is significant about this list is that it implicates readers in the confusions and complexities of global relations, as well as in the complexities of those relations’ representation. With every reoccurrence of the list within the poem’s surrounding units, readers are given more context, and yet the importance of the list remains a site for the active participation of the reader. The text thus prolongs a dialogic relationship with its reader—i.e., a reader as addressee, who is able to reply to the poem. In this case, the potential reply of the reader finds material existence in the sort of active and critically engaged

possibilities for interpretation cited above. In fact, the forty-eight nations listed are (as the line after the final four countries says) “the 48 least” (39)—i.e. the forty-eight least wealthy nations, according to UN statistics. By revealing the “meaning” of these lists near the conclusion of the poem, the text might seem to reduce the reader’s dialogic role in producing that meaning. And yet, although we are finally offered an answer to this “meaning,” the reader’s role still remains dialogic; although we have an answer to the rationale behind the text’s inclusion of these lists, the relationship between the lists as structural units and the surrounding context of sentence-based units still calls for a reader who must take an active role in understanding. This role is political to the extent that it provokes readers to question the relationship between the poorest countries on earth and the consumerist West, between “Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda” (38) and “a rusty barbeque on every balcony” (26).

The poem’s modular structure does not mean that its individual units do not offer critique outside of the larger structure which gives shape to the poem. The line “Trees are cod” (26), for example, refers to a seeming equivalence between two important natural resources. It is significant to note, however, that the Canadian forestry and fishing industries have been involved in international trade disputes, and both industries have also been subject to massive government intervention. During the 1990s, US markets bought \$10 billion worth of Canadian softwood lumber exports without charging fees, but then under the Bush administration in 2001 the US imposed huge duties on Canadian lumber. As a result, thousands of Canadian forestry workers lost their jobs. The fishing industry has also been subject to international dispute: Canada has been involved in a long-standing battle with the European Union over the depletion of cod stocks. What is essential to the representation of an equivalency between these resources is that they are both rapidly being exhausted. So the line “Trees are cod” plays off the notions of excess or unlimited supply that have been used by global capitalism in its aim of maximizing profit at any cost, regardless of the impact that such notions have on the environment or on people.

In the context of Derksen’s poem, the simple reduction of trees to cod brings to the foreground the complex relationships between nationalism and globalization, and between privatization and government intervention. The line “Trees are cod” is preceded by the line “Just don’t touch me during the drum solo” (25). This sentence ironically links together personal space, and the aversion to having that space invaded, with the quasi-sexual, almost religious rapture imposed on consumers of popular culture. The text thus

conjoins the subject's experience as a product of ideology (the subject as isolated, individualistic, and potentially enraptured by pop culture) together with a reference to the economic exploitation of natural resources that have constructed and allowed that ideology to function. These two lines, although disjunctive, foreground a link between economic and social experience in contemporary culture. And ironically, the equivalence of the "Trees are cod" line reoccurs in a different form a page later, rephrased as "Grass is trees" (26)—perhaps here referring to marijuana as a significant growth opportunity, contributing with the lumber industry to the economy of the west coast. On the other hand, the line "Grass is trees" could be read as a reference to the fact that grass in the form of lawn is now the single most prevalent crop growing in North America⁶—a reading that implicates suburban space with the exploitation of natural resources.

The practice of conjoining economic relationships with ideology is key to Derksen's cultural poetics. In his introduction to *Open Letter's* "Disgust and Overdetermination" issue (1998), he writes:

abrupt and social conjunction stresses the relatedness of social facts and contradictions, pointing to a more systematic understanding of social relations; this is a linking rather than a unifying practice, a relational activity and not a synthesizing one (9).

Paradoxically, while Derksen employs formally disjunctive elements such as rapid swerves in speech registers and the abrupt use of non-sequiturs, his poetry conjoins social relations. This conjunction is dialogical in its address to the reader: if there is a connection between trees and cod and grass, it must be found in the relationship existing between the consciousness of the reader and the text, for the text refuses to make authoritative claims about its subject matter. And although "But Could I Make A Living From It" offers readers a site to engage in political critique, the modular, dialogical form employed by the poem differs greatly from "the kind of representative political poems that the Left had been noted for, people like George Stanley in Vancouver or [Tom] Wayman to a certain extent" (Derksen, "Conversation" 123). For example, in "The Country of Everyday: Literary Criticism" (1974), Wayman writes:

When the poet goes out for a walk in the dusk
listening to his feet on the concrete, pondering
all of the adjectives for rain, he is walking on work
of another kind, and on lives that wear down like cement.
Somewhere a man is saying, "Worked twenty years for the
City but I'm retired now."

Sitting alone in a room, in the poorhouse of a pension
he has never read a modern poem (124).

As Wendy Keitner writes, this poem “exposes the steep cleavage between the rarefied, effete realm of the bourgeois artist to whom Wayman is strongly antipathetic and the challenging, tragic world of the workers whom he celebrates” (1). One could argue that the worker’s utterance—which is set off from the rest of the passage by quotation marks—lacks a grammatical subject, thereby illustrating his lack of subject position as someone who is no longer productive in society. However, the dialogical components of this passage are limited to this quotation; the text is for the most part narrated in the homogenous and restricted voice of a unified subject as producer of meaning, and there is little work for the reader to do. In contrast, Derksen’s modular text presents a polyphonic range of voices:

By this I mean I’ll take the bigger one and put it on my card.
Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin.
To be in the “world” in the position of quotation marks.
I would rather have your fingers in my mouth than “find my
own voice.” (25)

In contrast to Wayman’s poem, Derksen conjoins disparate elements drawn from the social text, in order to offer a site for readers to dialogically articulate the links which exist within those elements. What is the relationship amongst these seemingly disjunctive utterances? The first line hints at rampant consumption, a social desire which is possible in part due to the West’s exploitation of Asian and African nations. The third line puts quotation marks around the “world,” as if to distance it from reality by framing it as a textual construction; perhaps the first line about consumption and the third line about construction are both means to repress the alterity of global poverty which is pointed to by the list of nations found in the middle unit. Of course, the idea that the world is purely textual refers to the representation of the world, not to the world itself, and the “I” who desires to be there, in the “world” is equally a representation. Following this logic, the fourth line dismisses the idea of finding a “voice” (a typical construct of creative writing programmes and mainstream literature). In this “world,” the idea of a unique and individual voice, and the individual subject that such a voice would support, is entirely absent. Unlike Wayman’s more unified and qualitatively monological text, Derksen’s poem uses disjunction to dialogically foreground the links among subjectivity, economic relations, and social desire.

The messy complexities and contradictions of our current social situation are paralleled by the centrifugal form of the text. Moreover, Derksen's poem calls for the active work of a reader to produce meanings, and those meanings may vary from reader to reader according to their position in the "world." Thus the reader is dialogically implicated in the text.

The critical units that structure this text signal its debts to leftist social and political theory, as well as to the often theoretically grounded interventions of contemporary poetics. Theory is central to Derksen's cultural poetics, and has been one of the significant features of writers associated with the Kootenay School of Writing since the 1980s.⁷ In an interview with Susan Rudy, Derksen points to the influence of Russian formalism on his poetics, and speaks of theory as "a necessary part of a poetics. We [KSW] didn't have a sense of it being hierarchically encoded or somehow out of our reach" (124). However, as Stefans notes, Derksen's writing exhibits "a note of frustration with the language of theory itself as a wieldable force of opposition" (2). This frustration is sometimes self-reflexively signalled in the text itself. Derksen writes, "A liberal reaction of the embarrassed subjectivity. / *Opoyaz is the best teacher for our young proletariat writers*" (38). The first line obliquely recasts the widely held theoretical trope of the "contingent subject"—i.e., the subject who is entirely constituted by its cultural context, whose consciousness, desire, and emotional reactions are constructed by and through ideology. The following line, "*Opoyaz is the best teacher for our young proletariat writers,*" continues the text's self-reflexive recasting of theoretical subjects. *Opoyaz* was the name given to the Society for Studying Poetic Language, a stream of Russian formalist criticism founded by Victor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum and others in St. Petersburg in 1917. *Opoyaz* stood opposed to symbolist criticism, and concentrated instead on formal concerns such as Shklovsky's work on defamiliarization, or "making strange." Derksen emphasizes the importance of *Opoyaz* to the "young proletariat writer" by setting the entire line in italics. What is the function of this citation to formalist theory within the poem? Derksen's reoccurring emphasis on the defamiliarization of economic and social relations sets up a link between formal structure and political critique. By making the relations of power and the historically and culturally contingent position of the subject seem unfamiliar, the text reflects on the contradictions and conditions of the neoliberal condition. Moreover, Derksen's self-reflexive citations to contingent subjectivity and Russian formalism provide an example of a significant tendency in the relationship between theory and poetics in contemporary writing.

"But Could I Make A Living From It" is a form of metawriting which bares the device of its own formal method. Here theoretical research is not something that is applied to a text by a critic; it is instead a tool for mediating the *production* of a text. Derksen's long poem as research is generated through the relationship between large social structures and textual structure. At the micro level, the modular fragment appears as a highly condensed sentence, which ironically and sometimes aphoristically criticizes ideology. At the macro level, on the other hand, the modules conjoin to accumulate meaning, thereby building up a powerful array of integrated social critique. The poem's accretion of critical material is further reinforced, and given a sense of unified direction, through its repetitive, refrain-like structure. Modular form provides Derksen with a means to practice a hybrid mode of theory/research/poetry which specifically focuses on Canada in relation to neoliberalism. As a form of cultural research, the poem's reoccurring structural modules defamiliarize our current social condition by pointing to the gaps and links formed between global economics and our own experience as subjects of globalization.

NOTES

- 1 The poem was first published as a hole press chapbook in 2000.
- 2 Neoliberalism upholds the privatisation of state enterprises, as well as liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within the global framework of strong individual property rights, free market, and free trade. However, as David Harvey notes, neoliberalist ideology contradicts itself, because while it upholds privatisation, the loosening (or loss) of government control, and the individual's personal rights, it is also the site of "intense interventions by government elites and experts in a world where the state is not supposed to be interventionalist" (69; qtd. in Derksen "Poetry" 6).
- 3 For examples of the aphorism in Bernstein see *The Occurrence of Tune* (1981) or "Fragments from the Seventeenth Manifesto of Nude Formalism" in *The Nude Formalism* (1989); in McCaffery see *Knowledge Never Knew* (1983; republished in *Seven Pages Missing*, 2000).
- 4 Derksen has recently collaborated with visual artists Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber, working under the collective name *Urban Subjects*, in order to extend his poetics into collaborative, interdisciplinary investigations of the effects of globalization on urban spaces.
- 5 Perhaps another potential source for this repetitive structure stems from the new American poetics of the 1960s, which filtered into Canada from Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* via the Vancouver poetry journal *TISH*; Derksen has stated in an interview that he always felt close to the poetics of the *TISH* group ("Conversation" 141). In a 1965 *TISH* article on the structure of "rime" in Robert Duncan, co-founder and editor of *TISH* Frank Davey describes "rime" as "the measurable distance between two corresponding elements, whether they be phonetic units, stress patterns, images, or whatever" (298).
- 6 According to the Canadian Centre for Architecture's exhibition "The American Lawn," held in Montreal from 16 June to 18 November, 1998: "North America now has more than 32 million acres of lawn under cultivation—more ground than any single crop." See the

Centre's catalogue *The American Lawn* (1999), edited by Georges Teyssot, for essays on the cultural aspects of the lawn.

- 7 Derksen is a founding member of Vancouver's Kootenay School of Writing, a loosely organized group of writers who are influenced by the formally innovative and politically radical poetics of language-centred writing, as well as by the more politically-critical streams of literary theory. See Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden's introduction to *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology* (1999) for a brief overview of the poetics of several of the original members of the KSW.

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Dim Son

I blank annual test
at my far-out favourist
McJihad run
broke slave'm party whip
da burn they'r females
give him hurt for what
far from politing to the
grub to the gloomy hope
I don't flub's forgotten me
Scotty's refu hurrah going
masses Irish ear my
father the virgin phone cells
surrounded by easing
away from the's insect
Hey gender woley sec
Just a scribbtes in it
oh unhappy mim you, my
long lot youth loan
problem land show tape
play is mod hour
what what heryers
dimes'll spi crazy quilt quit

The Word is *Colander*

Language Loss and Narrative Voice in Fictional Canadian Alzheimer's Narratives

I must begin this paper with a caveat: I am not only a scholar of Canadian literature but also the adult child of a parent who died of Alzheimer's disease. Thus when I read or watch or listen to narratives about Alzheimer's, I am personally as well as critically engaged. I consider not only the effectiveness of narrative techniques or use of language, but also the accuracy of the portrayal of the disease. Will this narrative repeat clichés about Alzheimer's, presenting it simply as a minor loss of memory function? Will it treat the disease in a comic way, or show the anguish it brings? Will it portray the gradual loss of multiple brain functions, going far beyond memory loss, that are inherent to advanced Alzheimer's? And (a question that is the focus of this essay, provoked by a rereading of tragically incoherent and abbreviated notes from my once well-read and articulate father) will this book or film or play demonstrate the loss of the ability to narrate one's life story that arrives part-way through the disease?¹

I was intrigued to discover that a question similar to my final one is raised by the fictional daughter of a man with Alzheimer's disease in the second story of Sandra Sabatini's linked collection, *The One With the News*. The daughter in "The Light that Fell Behind Him" is captivated by Oliver Sacks' meditations on identity and self-narration in people with brain diseases:

If we wish to know about a man, we ask "what is his story—his real inmost story?"—for each of us *is* a biography, a story. Each of us *is* a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us—through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. (qtd. in Sabatini 28)

As she reads these words, the daughter muses that her father has been drawn into “the frightening process of losing his own narrative” (28) because advancing Alzheimer’s disease has made it impossible for him to construct his own life through discourse. Consequently, a variety of first-person and third-person narrators step in to tell the life story he can no longer narrate himself.²

Sabatini’s fiction is remarkable for its focus on loss of language and thus loss of narrative ability as a significant and tragic effect of Alzheimer’s disease. This focus contradicts the more stereotypical concentration on loss of memory evident in popular works on Alzheimer’s such as Nicholas Sparks’ 1996 *The Notebook* and the 2004 film version of that book, and even in Alice Munro’s 1999 short story “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” and Sarah Polley’s otherwise compelling 2006 film adaptation, *Away from Her*. Indeed, medical researchers such as Olga Emery argue that because “[p]rogressive memory impairment” has been considered “the primary cognitive feature of Alzheimer’s disease,” “progressive language impairment” has been understudied (145). Surprisingly, a relatively long tradition of Canadian fiction addresses the effects of Alzheimer’s disease on language and narrative, including Jane Rule’s *Memory Board* (1987), Michael Ignatieff’s *Scar Tissue* (1993), Mordecai Richler’s *Barney’s Version* (1997), and Sabatini’s short story cycle (2000). As these works demonstrate, medical, literary, and theoretical knowledge about the disease has increased exponentially in the twenty-plus years since Rule’s book was first published. But *Memory Board* and books by Ignatieff, Richler, and Sabatini all deal with the disease seriously, forcing their readers to recognize that Alzheimer’s causes its victims to lose not just the ability to remember life stories but also the ability to narrate them through written and, eventually, spoken language. Each book provides one or more alternate narrators whose telling of the now-silent other’s story is both admirable and problematic, since while that telling acknowledges the other’s continuing selfhood, it can never adequately capture the intricacies of a life history. In this paper, I argue that while Alzheimer’s and its effects on human relationships are sometimes the main subjects of these Canadian books and at other times, as Sharon Synder and David Mitchell suggest about disability narratives in general, more clearly plot or narrative devices, all four works posit language as essential for life narration at the same time as they challenge the idea that loss of narrative ability necessarily signals loss of human selfhood. These works of fiction articulate significant theoretical discussions about the essential creative drive of self-narration, but also insist in practical and important ways on the value of the lives of Alzheimer’s

sufferers and point to the way that this value has been and continues to be questioned in medical, literary, and popular narratives.

Unlike the Canadian fictions that are the focus of this essay, several autobiography theorists and some social scientists imply that those with Alzheimer's lose selfhood once they lose language facility and narrative ability. In her 1996 essay "Taking It to a Limit One More Time," life-writing critic Sidonie Smith lists Alzheimer's disease, along with autism, as one of the "diverse circumstances that impose some kind of limits to autobiographical telling in everyday situations" (227). Without the means to "narrate a 'life,'" she writes, people with these disorders are consigned to what she calls "an unautobiographical life" and can be known only through representations by others (231); they become "subjects outside discourse, subjects culturally uninscribed" (235), and thus are effectively "unselved" (233). Autobiography theorist Paul John Eakin argues similarly that "memory loss and other disabilities prevent our performing self-narration according to the rules, or performing it at all" and asks whether the "failed narratives" of those who suffer from Alzheimer's disease reflect what he calls "failed identity" (113). In his 2001 essay, Eakin addresses the effects of memory loss, but not language loss, on the ability to narrate a life story. Broaching the question of selfhood, he asks whether those with the disease can be said to have "outlive[d] themselves" (121-22). Meanwhile, Andrea Fontana and Ronald Smith address the question from a social science perspective in a 1989 study in which they argue that in those with Alzheimer's "The self has slowly unraveled and 'unbecome' a self" and only caregivers acting "as agents for the victim" can "impute to him or her the last remnants of self" (45).

Robert Bogdan and Steven Taylor provide a critique of such arguments when they suggest in a 1989 study that people with Alzheimer's and other conditions that diminish communication skills can remain fully human, but only if others continue to recognize them as human beings (146). In "Struggling over Subjectivity: Debates about the 'Self' and Alzheimer's Disease" (1995), medical anthropologist Elizabeth Herskovits further criticizes the denial of subjectivity to those with Alzheimer's disease when their condition is referred to as "the loss of self" or "the death before death" (148), arguing that "The overwhelmingly dominant pernicious effect of the current Alzheimer's construct is the dehumanization or debasement of 'self'" (152). Herskovits' caution regarding the detrimental language used to describe the lives of people with Alzheimer's has been explored and challenged by others in the field of disability studies, including recent theorists who follow

a cultural rather than social model of disability (such as Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations* 18-19).³

In their 2001 book *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Mitchell and Snyder examine the role of illness and disability in literary narratives. They argue that disability often acts as a “prosthesis” to support works of fiction, functioning either as “a stock feature of characterization” or as “an opportunistic metaphorical device” (47). Fiction thus depends on disability to highlight particular characters, or to serve as “a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse” (47). Although Mitchell and Snyder do not specifically examine Alzheimer’s disease or consider many Canadian works (except, briefly, Atom Egoyan’s film version of Russell Banks’ *The Sweet Hereafter* and Anthony Minghella’s adaptation of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*), their theories can be usefully applied to fictional Alzheimer’s narratives by many Canadian writers. Canadian works such as Munro’s story, Anne Carson’s poetic essay *The Anthropology of Water* (1995), and the novels *Purple for Sky* (2000) by Carol Bruneau, *The Letter Opener* (2007) by Kyo Maclear, and *Soucouyant* (2007) by David Chariandy, indeed employ Alzheimer’s disease partly as a metaphor for human estrangement, including, in the case of the latter two books, estrangement resulting from colonial or other histories of oppression and from racial marginalization in Canada.⁴ However, the use of Alzheimer’s as metaphor or narrative device in works of Canadian literature is often inextricably related to the books’ exploration of language and narration. For example, Richler’s *Barney’s Version* uses the disease in part as narrative device to emphasize a postmodernist inability to determine any one authoritative version of events, but, like books by Rule, Ignatieff, and Sabatini, also illustrates the ways in which fiction featuring the relationship of illness to self-narration can contribute to questions of selfhood and identity.

The earliest of the books under study, Rule’s *Memory Board*, uses a distanced third-person narrative voice to relate the experiences of a woman with dementia. Only in chapter two is the reader introduced to dementia-sufferer Constance Crowley and then only through the perspective of her lover, Diana Crown. Constance, a 67-year-old gardener, has short-term memory loss—perhaps related to trauma suffered during the Second World War, perhaps caused by electroshock therapy she endured as a young woman, but more likely symptomatic of the early stages of a disease of aging such as Alzheimer’s that is never specifically named. Although Constance occasionally fails to recognize Diana (and more often Diana’s brother, David, whom she calls

“what’s-his-name”), and although she once wanders away from home, she is just beginning to experience language impairment. She can still read and for the most part understand the words on her “memory board,” a child’s cellophaned writing board on which Diana writes words to guide Constance through her day: “Put on your clothes / Breakfast / . . . Walk on the beach” (24). The novel’s memory board thus serves as a type of “narrative prosthesis,” becoming both a tool of life narration and a metaphor for the temporary containment of the inevitable loss of language by the dementia patient.

Toward the end of the novel, when Constance recognizes the words in a book she is reading aloud but cannot make sense of the sentences and paragraphs, David visualizes her consciousness as “surprised and dissociated from . . . emotions and events as if they were no more than a story in a book” (231). Apparently reflecting Eakin’s theory that memory loss “prevent[s] our performing self-narration according to the rules” (113) and Smith’s idea that those with Alzheimer’s and similar conditions can be known only through representations by others, *Memory Board* posits second-hand memory, someone else’s version of events, as the only way that dementia sufferers can access narratives of the past. Thus Constance says, “It’s very peculiar having your memory located outside your own head. Diana is remarkably truthful, but it’s still her version of the truth” (128). Diana realizes, in turn, that an old friend can no longer share Constance’s life “because Constance could not remember it to tell her” (266). Through these and other passages, Rule’s book represents a dementia sufferer’s declining ability to provide the story of her life and at the same time questions the accuracy and objectivity of others’ outside versions.

Memory Board goes beyond Eakin’s linkage of memory to narrative capability, however, by positing Constance’s difficulty in constructing a coherent life story as caused not just by memory lapse, but also by loss of lexical abilities. The word whose meaning Constance most frequently loses is *home*. She repeatedly asks to be taken home, and home for her represents not a place, but a past state of mind during which words still signified. The novel’s focalizers, Diana and David, shape and thus narrate Constance’s life day by day through the medium of the memory board. When Constance sees the word “Home” written on that board—a reminder that she will be returning from a short holiday—she frowns. As the third-person narrator notes, “Home, for the moment, was nothing but a word, written in Diana’s difficult hand” (260). Later, Constance is so confused about David’s move into their house that she starts to pack, saying to Diana, “I’m going

home" (307). Words on the memory board at last become so unintelligible to Constance that she lifts up the cellophane, and the narrative of her day, imposed on her by others who are healthier and thus more in control of her life than she, vanishes.

While Rule's novel is an effective rendition of the challenges faced by family members of those with dementia (as well as using dementia in a figurative way to explore issues of family estrangement connected to gender and sexuality, as Marilyn Schuster points out),⁵ Rule's choice of a two-part, third-person narrative structure deliberately distances the reader from the individual experience of the character who suffers from the disease. Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue* begins in a much more emotional and immediate manner, through the first-person voice of an unnamed philosophy professor in his mid-fifties. He says of a woman who, readers eventually learn, is his now-deceased mother, "I do not want to remember her last hour," and then adds, "How do I tell her story?" (1).⁶ As in *Memory Board*, accessing memory is represented as essential if the narrator is to reveal the life story of the family member with Alzheimer's. Yet memory is clearly a fraught and resistant category. The narrator looks at photographs to try to jog his recall of the time before his mother was diagnosed with the disease but notes that "I cannot remember any of the scenes these photographs record" (16). Moreover, when he thinks of his soil-scientist father, he says, "My memory resists me. I can't seem to bring him back as he was" (23).

The narrator speculates that his mother's memories, although "denied speech," must still be "trapped within the circuits" of her mind (50). Thus he records not only her loss of memory, but also the loss of language skills that would allow her to articulate specific memories that she may retain. He records the way in which her present life is circumscribed by her loss of semantic and syntactic skills: when she reads aloud from the only book left on her bedside table, her son says that "she does so in a childlike singsong, without inflection, unaware that the words are forming into meanings" (47). While he notes that she has always had difficulty with speech, expressing herself eloquently only in her paintings — "To follow what she said, you had to scurry after her, filling in the blanks, rearranging the clauses" (20)—he also points out that she communicates now only through "simple sentences—subject, verb, predicate—which seemed to compress everything to essentials" (101). The first components of language to disappear, he suggests, are "syntax and word order, then the words themselves—the serifs, the letters, the endings" (158). (And while a 2004 study by language pathologist

Kathy Groves-Wright demonstrates that “a progressive decline in language abilities” is one of the “earliest symptoms” of Alzheimer’s disease [110], a study the same year by neurologists including Peter Garrard contradicts the narrator of *Scar Tissue* by indicating that little-used vocabulary often becomes inaccessible before grammatical processes are affected [10]).⁷

As the narrator chronicles his mother’s progressive decline, he lists examples of her forgetfulness (32, 40), but also points out her increasing loss of vocabulary. She asks, for example, “Where’s that thing . . . you . . . flip . . . things . . . with?” (ellipses in original), and awaits his reply: “Spatula” (33). Her diminishing vocabulary is contrasted to that of her grandson, who is just learning to read and write. In Ignatieff’s book, as in Rule’s, the child’s writing board becomes a metaphor for loss of the ability to communicate with others. When the grandson “erases the first letters of his name with his left hand, while writing the last letters of his name with his right hand,” the narrator notes that it is as though the boy is “miming what it is like to be with his grandmother. No matter what he says, a hand keeps erasing his words from the board of her mind” (44-45).

Language loss is represented mimetically in *Scar Tissue* through the absence of naming, both of the major characters and of the illness that is central to the narrative. The last word the narrator’s mother writes, on a piece of shirt cardboard, is her son’s name (198), but the reader never learns that name and never hears his mother called anything but “Mother.” The narrator also euphemistically (and at the same time eloquently) calls his mother’s illness a “dying” that has become manifest in “dark starbursts of scar tissue.” Even more ironically, he identifies her genetically transmitted ailment as “the inheritance, the family silver” (1). The repeated phrase “scar tissue” (1, 54) is both the title of the book and a way for the narrator to avoid saying *early onset Alzheimer’s*. Older names for the disease—“hardening of the arteries of the brain” (7, 54) and “premature senile dementia” (54)—are provided when the narrator refers to forbears who had the disorder, but although he notes that doctors now call his mother’s condition “a disease,” he never names it. That it is indeed Alzheimer’s is evident, however, when he describes in detail what physicians such as his neurologist brother see in brains of patients like his mother: “a characteristic pattern of scar tissues in the neural fibres,” “tangles and plaques” (54), “neurofibrillary tangles,” and “amyloid proteins” (130).

The question of loss of identity or selfhood related to reduced language skills and other elements of Alzheimer’s is addressed as directly in *Scar Tissue* as it is in studies of the relationship between narration and selfhood

by autobiographical theorist Eakin, who asks in relation to a woman with Alzheimer's, "is she a self any more?" (122), and medical anthropologist Herskovits, who challenges the dehumanization inherent in comments about "the loss of self" that accompanies late-stage Alzheimer's (148). While the novel's doctors look at brain scans of the narrator's mother and see "a disease of memory function," the narrator identifies "an illness of selfhood" (60; see also 170). The question of whether his mother still possesses a self becomes paramount in his response to his wife's platitudinous comment that his mother's illness must be worse for him than it is for her, and his brother's suggestion that their mother is "like a lab experiment . . . [i]n how much you can lose of yourself and still remain a human being" (126). When, near the end of their mother's life, that brother questions the point of visiting her, the narrator interprets this query as implying other more crude and insensitive or, alternately, more philosophical questions: either "is this a person or is this a vegetable?" or "Does she have a self? . . . Does she have thoughts about her thoughts? Does she have second order desires?" (159, 160; ellipsis in original).

John Wiltshire argues that in narratives such as *Scar Tissue* (which he calls *pathographies*) the subject "seems in fact to be a different 'self' or to have lost the self that they were" (413). The narrator of *Scar Tissue* provides contradictory answers to his own questions about selfhood. At times, he suggests that his mother has "left her self behind" (161) or that she has taken "the step beyond her self and moved into the world of death with her eyes open" (166). Yet as he considers these questions in an increasingly didactic way through figures such as Tolstoy and St. Augustine and through a news story about an Alzheimer's patient who committed suicide, he concludes that "there is no escape from selfhood this side of death" (177). What is left of his mother is not a *self* that his wife or his brother recognizes. At the same time, his mother is still a human being who is represented as anxious and fearful about what is happening to her. His own narrative, presented with the best of intentions, is thus revealed as patently inadequate in capturing the nuances of her life story.

Until the last chapter, although personal and powerful, *Scar Tissue* is at one remove from the experience of the Alzheimer's sufferer. In the concluding chapter, however, the book becomes a much more viscerally immediate first-person narrative as the narrator himself begins to experience symptoms of this genetically transmitted disorder. Although it is too early for brain scans to be definitive, he concludes, "I know. I feel them [the damaged cells] inside me. My fate has come to meet me. My voyage has begun" (199).

Through “simple sentences—subject, verb, predicate” that mimic his mother’s language, the narrator indicates that part of that voyage will include a telescoping of lexical and syntactic skills that will make it impossible for him to relate the progress of his own disease in the way that he has attempted to relate his mother’s.

In contrast to the compelling yet for the most part distanced portrayals in *Scar Tissue* and *Memory Board*, Richler’s *Barney’s Version* represents language loss directly and immediately through the first-person words of a fictional Alzheimer’s sufferer. Barney Panofsky progressively loses not just the ability to remember his own story (provoking a postmodernist questioning of whether there is any “true” version of the events he narrates) but also his ability to tell that story, exemplified by his repeated inability to remember words and finally by his elder son’s addition of footnotes to correct errors, editing of Barney’s last incoherent chapter, and completion of Barney’s life story. The act of putting words on paper is essential to *Barney’s Version*. The 67-year-old narrator writes on the first page that he is “scribbling a first book” as a response to an inaccurate and damaging portrayal of him in the recently published diary-memoir of a former friend. That Barney’s rambling and digressive manuscript is indeed a life narrative is also clear: at one point he calls it his “meandering memoirs” (359). At another, when he describes his written words as “This sorry attempt at—at—you know, my story,” his loss of vocabulary is highlighted; he is only later able to come up with the word he has intended to describe his efforts: “autobiography” (52).

Barney’s narrative difficulties, though, are at first represented, following Eakin’s model, as loss of memory rather than loss of language. Robert Ormsby suggests in his online review of the 2003 radio dramatization of *Barney’s Version* that for Barney, “the act of recall” is an “act of recovery” that involves his two lost loves—his former wife Miriam, who divorced him after he was unfaithful to her, and his friend Bernard (Boogie) Moscovich, who either disappeared while swimming in a lake or was murdered by Barney. Barney writes that he wants to be “A reliable witness” (96), but at the same time he demonstrates himself to be unreliable, prone to “tinkering with memory, fine-tuning reality” (233-34). Because recall, especially of his own bad behaviour, is often painful (388), he occasionally ironically suggests that “failing memory [can be] an enormous blessing” (193). Using the metaphors of his lifelong work as a television producer, he says, “I set the spool of my life on rewind, editing out embarrassments, reshooting them in my mind’s eye” (172).

Counterpoints to Barney's narrative revisions are provided by the footnotes his son adds to correct his father's errors of recall. In adding these footnotes, Michael Panofsky adds errors of his own, thus providing an ironic commentary on the accuracy of any individual's memory in reproducing the past. Michael writes in a footnote, for example, that "It was not until 1928 that women were declared 'persons' by the Supreme Court of Canada" (369) when, in fact, the Supreme Court declared in that year that women were *not* persons, and it was left to the Privy Council in England to reverse that decision in 1929.

At least at the beginning of the book, Barney can still use most words correctly and can even form those words into a complex narrative, although in a digressive and sometimes repetitive manner. He tells and retells the story of his last day with Boogie, with significant variations. Eventually, he writes, "I have wakened more than once recently no longer certain of what really happened" (315), and by the end, when asked by a good friend whether he killed Boogie, can only reply, "I think not, but some days I'm not so sure" (388). In *Barney's Version*, Alzheimer's acts as a narrative device that strengthens the perceived unreliability of the narrator and emphasizes the postmodernist impossibility of determining "fact and truth" (Hutcheon 22). As Mitchell and Snyder suggest in reference to other fictional narratives, Richler co-opts a disease or disability in part to further his own narrative goals.

Throughout *Barney's Version*, advancing Alzheimer's makes the narrator increasingly unreliable as he forgets names of cities, books, authors, politicians, actors, characters in plays and novels, and even the name of his second son (88). People whose names he cannot remember become, in his narrative, "what's-his-name" or "what's-her-name" or "you know who I mean" (111, 243, 220). Barney repeatedly tests his memory, asking himself questions that he sometimes can and sometimes cannot answer. Three tests in particular come to exemplify what neurologist Peter Garrard identifies as the "progressive semantic impairment" (2) that accompanies loss of memory: What is that thing you use to strain spaghetti? Who wrote "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt"? And what are the names of the Seven Dwarves? Barney can provide the answers only intermittently and incompletely: a colander, Mary McCarthy, "Sleepy, Grumpy, Sneezzy, Doc, Happy, and the other two" (282).⁸ In his final chapter, he describes a doctor's diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease through the administration of a test that reveals that Barney can no longer supply the words for the day of the week, the season, the province he lives in, or the object on his wrist that he uses to tell time.

Although initially it appears as though Barney's narrative presents his unedited words describing this experience, his son Michael not only writes the "Afterword" and adds corrective footnotes but also tells readers, "I was allowed to rewrite the incoherent, faltering chapters, dealing with Barney's discovery that he was suffering from Alzheimer's" (415). His description of Barney as being "reduced to a near-vegetable state" (416) echoes the narrator's question in *Scar Tissue*, "is this a person or is this a vegetable," and points to what Herskovits calls the dehumanizing of people who have Alzheimer's disease and what Snyder and Mitchell identify as the social and cultural limitations inherent in such terminology (*Cultural Locations* 18-19). Because Barney is no longer living what others consider a human life, he is not able to and indeed is not allowed to complete his own story; as Smith suggests in her analysis of similar real-life narratives, those around him believe his life must be represented by others.⁹ Thus it falls to Michael to tell his version of the end of his father's life and to present the defining word on a key mystery posed by Barney's narrative: what happened to Boogie? His "Afterword" begins with a description of the belated discovery of Boogie's remains on a mountainside near the Panofsky family cottage and ends with Michael's solution to the mystery through the urban myth—found in sources as diverse as Peter Mayle's 1990 book *A Year in Provence* (134-35), the 1999 film *Magnolia*, and a 2001 episode of the television show *CSI Crime Scene Investigations*—of the water bomber that scoops up the swimmer or scuba diver from the lake and drops him on the mountain.

In the book, Barney writes his autobiography with help from his son, but the 2003 radio dramatization of *Barney's Version* by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation presents Barney's narrative in the form of four tape-recorded sessions of memories. The drama was first broadcast August 5-8, 2003, and has since been rebroadcast. Comments on the radio adaptation of *Barney's Version*, both by its makers and by reviewers, focus on changes to the novel in order to shorten it for broadcasting and to make it fit more naturally into a dramatic and aural medium. Robert Ormsby describes the addition of the tape recorder into which Barney now dictates his story as "plausibly effecting the transfer from print to audio" and comments on the "vitaly compelling soundscape" this fictive taping allows, including the representation of Barney's "primal body sounds: his ubiquitous wet cough; urination made dribbly by an enlarged prostate; vomiting; helpless weeping; groaning; sighing; creaking; wheezing; and sniffing."

The addition of this sound recording technology is significant not only

for its auditory possibilities—this version is, after all, a radio play—but also because it drastically alters the implied reader (now auditor) of Barney's life story. Now it is not Barney's estranged wife, Miriam, who is the hoped-for first reader, but his personal assistant, Chantal, who will transcribe these taped spoken words. In the radio play, Saul Rubinek as Barney repeatedly addresses Chantal directly—something that as narrator of the book Barney never does—often to make comments such as “I am dictating my entire life here, Chantal, and you're going to have a lot of transcribing to do,” and “Note to Chantal—when you're typing this up, leave the goddamn swear-words in.” Another crucial effect of this move from paper to tape recorder is its implied depiction of the Alzheimer's sufferer as unable to make effective use of written language, while still having access, most of the time, to speech (a difference in capability that researchers such as Groves-Wright identify as inherent to mid-stage and later Alzheimer's [124]). While in the book, Barney's loss of language is exemplified by his inability to locate many different words and names, in the radio play that impairment is narrowed to his inability to locate one word: *colander*, that thing-a-majig you use to strain spaghetti. While this narrowed focus provides much less nuancing of Barney's condition, it does provide some biographical realism by spotlighting the difficulty of an Alzheimer's patient who is trying to tell his own story. This concentration on language suggests that Alzheimer's disease involves not just loss of memory or loss of ability to recall aspects of one's life story; it also involves loss of the semantic and eventually syntactic abilities that allow one to narrate that life story, at first on paper and finally orally.

The radio play also substitutes three framing interviews of the character Michael conducted by real-life CBC radio host Eleanor Wachtel for the book's fictive “Afterword.” Thus the auditory medium of the interview replaces the textual medium of the epilogue while still allowing the fictional family member of the Alzheimer's sufferer to edit his father's version of events and to complete his story. The character Michael, played by Andrew Akman, uses his concluding interview to posit the theory of the snorkler and the water bomber as a possible solution to the mystery plot. (And as I was researching this paper, I discovered that the audio CD of the play sold by CBC omitted Wachtel's introductory and concluding interviews with Michael, probably because staff in CBC's marketing department did not recognize that the interviews were not “real” but were instead essential parts of the fictional narrative. Thus those who bought the play on CD rather than listening to it on radio were given neither the sense of a life story completed

by a family member nor a resolution to the mystery plot.) The fact that water bombers do not have openings large enough to scoop up snorklers, however, may serve as a hint to both novel readers and radio drama listeners that Michael's contributions to his father's life story are perhaps no more accurate than Barney's own seemingly incoherent ramblings. Urban myth subscribed to by a son is less effective as a narrative conclusion than the eloquent ambiguities left by a father afflicted with a disease of both memory and language.

Sabatini's *The One With the News* takes an even more fragmented approach, one that effectively mimics the fragmentation of life narration in Alzheimer's sufferers. The title page identifies the book as "A Collection of Stories," but all revolve around one man who has Alzheimer's and the effects of the disease on his and others' lives; the book thus is part of the long Canadian tradition of short story cycles (Lynch 3-4). Sabatini's first story presents Ambrose McLean, who is living in the ironically named Health Centre because his wife, Peggy, is no longer able to cope with his illness, while subsequent stories relate, through retrospective and present-time narratives, his development of the ailment and his eventual death. Instead of the relatively cohesive narratorial approach of novels about Alzheimer's by Rule, Ignatieff, and Richler, and of collections on other topics in which each short story has the same narrator, the stories in Sabatini's cycle are from different characters' perspectives, told sometimes in first person, sometimes in third, and at other times in a combination of both. Several of the focalizing characters have only a tangential connection to Ambrose, including the boy who delivers his newspapers and the male nurse who cares for him in the Health Centre. Their stories address many other aspects of their own lives and relationships, but at the core of each is interaction with Ambrose. Alzheimer's disease, the book thus posits, has an effect on everyone who comes into contact with it, even the boy who cannot understand the change in personality of the formerly nice man to whom he delivers newspapers and the nurse who cannot stop thinking about the man who tripped and fell in the care home when he was right beside him. Other focalizers in Sabatini's book are more significantly affected by the disease: the wife who tries to conceal her exasperation, despair, and bruises so that her husband can continue to live at home; the physician daughter who avoids seeing her father and who has a tubal ligation so that the family history of Alzheimer's will stop with her; and the younger adopted daughter who appears at times as the organizing consciousness of the book and who insists on the continuing humanity of the man who took her in as a confused child and who is now fatally confused himself. Several

stories are at least partially from Ambrose's own perspective; in "Ambrose Dreams," his disjointed and fearful dreams are identified as "a lot like his life, now" (40).

Sabatini's book is further fragmented through its repeated references to other narratives about Alzheimer's—medical, fictional, and biographical—including Sacks' book, a scientific article about early-onset Alzheimer's, the film *Deep Blue Sea*, and John Bayley's articles in the *New Yorker* about the disease's effect on his wife, English novelist Iris Murdoch (which formed the basis for his book *Elegy for Iris* and later for the film *Iris*). Sabatini has woven these intertexts into her book in a more effective and less didactic way than Ignatieff's inclusion of similar media references. Several clinical descriptions of the disease are convincingly imbedded in "The Light That Fell Behind Him," a story told from the third-person perspective of Alice, who obsessively researches the early-onset Alzheimer's from which her father and his siblings suffer. As a physician she thinks about "The senile plaques and neurofibrillary tangles lurking in obscure corners of his hippocampus" (24), but she also notes the more obvious symptoms related to memory, language, and physical ability: "He is losing the ability to speak or eat; he is forgetting how to open his eyes" (34). Like his sisters, Ambrose may die "emaciated and incoherent, having forgotten the use of words and food" ("Mitigations" 82). In the story "Making Tea," a first-person narratorial voice that is plural rather than singular includes the reader in the diagnosis: "We know that Ambrose has Alzheimer's disease and after he dies we'll find out that it's indeed familial Alzheimer's" (58).

The stories in Sabatini's book are linked by their reference to the effects of the disease on one man and on the people near him but also by a focus on memory, language, and self-narration. In "Clean Hands," the third-person narrator notes that Ambrose's failing memory in the early stages of the disease provokes him to create his own version of a Memory Board to help him narrate his day-to-day life. On a piece of paper he writes: "1. go to the bathroom, brush teeth / 2. have breakfast / 3. post office, buy stamps" (13).¹⁰ Despite memory aids such as these, however, Ambrose is "losing his own narrative" because he is losing the ability to speak and to write ("The Light" 28). As in Rule's, Ignatieff's, and Richler's books, family members take over Ambrose's narrative by remembering for him; Peggy, for example, talks to Ambrose about their life together, trying "to keep him from forgetting what she wants to remember" ("Clean Hands" 14). As this wording suggests, Peggy recalls her own perspective on events, and her memories are shaped by her

needs and desires. The unstable nature of all memory is emphasized in the title story "The One With the News," told in the first-person voice of adopted daughter Connie. Despite the advanced nature of her father's disease, she still attributes agency to him: "Ambrose won't say what he remembers" (104). At the same time, as she thinks about her family of origin, she recognizes that what she herself remembers "is dubious at the best of times" (104).

Despite Sabatini's postmodernist unsettling of the stability and accuracy of memory in passages such as the ones quoted above, she represents memory as important to self-narration for everyone, not just characters with Alzheimer's. In the first story of the collection, the narrator notes that "When Peggy's feeling sorry for Ambrose, she makes herself remember the time she tried to show him how to open the front door . . . the white pain blasting through her head against the jamb. She makes herself remember trying to drag breath past the swelling vomit in her throat" ("Clean Hands" 13). Memory thus is offered as a way for a character to reconcile her love for her husband with her need for physical safety and thus her need to have him live in the locked Alzheimer's wing of a care centre rather than in his own home.

Loss of language as a symptom of Alzheimer's is emphasized on the book's first page, when the third-person narrator notes that in the Health Centre, "geraniums bloom for the benefit of people who can no longer name the colour red" ("Clean Hands" 9). In "Making Tea," that loss of signification is theorized through a present-tense narration that invites the reader to imagine Ambrose's thought processes as he sits in the favourite green chair that he no longer recognizes and can no longer name: "It doesn't signify. A sign without a signifier" (56). The narrative voice then takes on Ambrose's own voice, exemplifying what researchers such as Garrard identify as impairment of vocabulary and syntax: "In his way. In way. Move. Get up. Want some toast. Stomach hurts. Hurts. Hurts. Coffee cup drink coffee. Got to go. Go. Tables chairs sit. Coffee. Black. What?" (56). The final question in this passage signals Ambrose's confusion, anxiety, and fear about what has been taken from him. As the narrator concludes, "He doesn't know what's the matter with him but if he had to name it he'd call it fear and robbery" (59).

Several of the book's chapters include discussions of the dilemma faced by families about whether or not to pursue aggressive treatment for other illnesses in family members who have Alzheimer's disease, evoking analyses by disability theorists such as Snyder and Mitchell of the cultural basis for eugenics (*Cultural Locations*). Connie's husband, who works with death every day as a cemetery keeper, thinks that "Death couldn't be worse" than

what Ambrose currently has to endure (“The Cemeteries Act” 72). But his wife is not as certain. She wants her father alive at any cost, because she believes that despite his accumulated losses, including the loss of the ability to speak, he is still human:

Sometimes I say to him, “Where are you, Dad? Are you in there?” He doesn’t answer me but I like to ask, just in case he really is in there, quieter than ever, annoyed with everyone for talking to him as though he were an immigrant whose grasp of English will improve if we only speak slowly and loudly enough. He eats and sleeps and gets cold, sad, or happy, but I know he’s more than the sum of these parts. (“The One With the News” 106)

Connie interprets her father as more than just a physical body, even though he can no longer narrate his own life. She also interprets his suffering as turning him into a Christ-like figure, especially when she imagines his death: “I want to lay him in a vault, roll a stone in front of it, and mourn him daily. . . . I want to be terrified to see the stone rolled back and light blaze within the tomb. I want two angels wearing lightning to tell me he is risen” (107). Ambrose, the reader has learned, is a man whose Christian faith has sustained him; now his daughter uses a version of that faith to assert his selfhood at the same time as she positions him beyond humanity because of his intense suffering.

The concluding story of *The One With the News* deftly interweaves Peggy’s ruminations about her husband and her life after his death with two strikingly different popular narratives about Alzheimer’s: Bayley’s articles about his wife and a film about Alzheimer’s researchers who manipulate shark brains. Peggy is especially taken with Bayley’s use of water as a metaphor, through his descriptions of swimming with Iris Murdoch in a river and then drying off with her slip. As the narrator notes, emphasizing the importance of words to both the writer and the reader, “This was before much of what had been her life slid gradually from her mind. Bayley chose his words carefully. Peggy read them carefully” (“Gifts from the Well-Intentioned” 127). After Peggy thinks about the way that Ambrose lost the words to say grace before meals, she concludes that Bayley’s major concern was not about whether Murdoch could cook meals after her Alzheimer’s became more advanced but about “her loss of ability to express herself. Her unfinished sentences” (134). For a writer, someone for whom words are central, the narrator suggests, the flowing away of language takes on even greater than usual significance.

Indeed, comments in Bayley’s memoirs and research by Murdoch’s biographer, Peter J. Conradi, make it plain that Murdoch’s last book, *Jackson’s*

Dilemma (1995), was written while she was experiencing the first symptoms of Alzheimer's. Bayley witnessed his wife's increasing inarticulateness and unusual writers' block (*Elegy for Iris* 212, 217). Conradi noted that her journal entries at that time were reduced to "a heart-rending simplicity" (588). Reviewers noticed both Murdoch's inability to articulate selfhood in the book and its poverty of language: A. S. Byatt suggested that all the characters in the novel "have no selves and therefore there is no story," while Hugo Barnacle wrote that the book was "like the work of a 13-year-old schoolgirl who doesn't get out enough" (qtd. in Porlock). In late 2004, Alzheimer's researchers and neurologists at University College London released a study of the vocabulary and syntax of *Jackson's Dilemma*. The researchers' methods (which included computerized scanning and analysis) did not allow them to come to detailed conclusions about the complexity of grammatical structures but did show an "impoverishment" of vocabulary manifested in an inability to introduce less commonly used English words (Garrard 10, 6).

As Peggy watches another narrative about water and Alzheimer's—a trashy television movie about a scientist who unleashes genetically altered sharks in a failed experiment to cure the disease—she thinks, "If Alzheimer's had permeated pop culture, if they were making shark movies premised on it, maybe her children would have some hope" (135). The proliferation of films such as *Deep Blue Sea* (1999), *Iris* (2001), *The Notebook* (2004), and *Away from Her* (2006), with their portrayals of Alzheimer's that range from ridiculously farfetched to sentimentally inaccurate to tragically inspiring, indeed suggests that Alzheimer's disease has a firm place in Western public consciousness. In some of these films, as in books and stories about Alzheimer's, the disease is unquestionably "narrative prosthesis": in *Deep Blue Sea*, a plot device that allows scientists to genetically alter a shark's brain; in *The Notebook*, a counter-metaphor for the enduring love that, in this film, can temporarily cure memory loss; and in *Away from Her*, a method of developing the theme of estrangement. However, films such as *Away from Her* and especially *Iris* also raise complex questions about the retention of human identity in the face of loss of language, through their exploration of the ways in which even highly polished language and communication skills are eventually destroyed by Alzheimer's disease.

Kate Winslet, playing the young Iris Murdoch, asks in *Iris*, "If one doesn't have words, how does one think?" Over the past twenty years, books by Canadians Jane Rule, Michael Ignatieff, Mordecai Richler, and Sandra Sabatini have asked this same question. Instead of using Alzheimer's disease

solely as “prosthesis,” they have provided complex explorations of, and ultimately rejections of, the idea that outliving the ability to narrate a life story obviates a person’s humanity. These fictional works put into effect Bogdan and Taylor’s claim that humanity can be repeatedly reasserted by others who recognize the continuation of selfhood past the loss of ability to write and speak, and who attempt, diligently but often unsuccessfully, to fill in the blanks of a gappy and fragmented life narrative. The complex discussions in these four books about the relationship between language and self-narration, and their detailed portrayals of various manifestations of a disease that insidiously destroys this intricate relationship, are made in narratives that deal with specifically Canadian cultural experiences and social settings. An analysis of these works demonstrates that Canadian fiction has for more than two decades grappled with important literary, theoretical, and social questions related to language, selfhood, narration, and disease in a way that challenges if not entirely counteracting often damaging and inaccurate Western popular cultural representations of these same subjects.

NOTES

- 1 I thank the anonymous reviewers who read, commented on, and made important recommendations for the improvement of this paper, as well as Susan Gingell and Kathleen James-Cavan, who contributed encouraging suggestions during various drafts. I dedicate this essay to my father, Wilfred Roy, who died of Alzheimer’s disease in 2005.
- 2 Sacks’ case study approach, criticized by disability studies theorists for its objectifying tendencies, has more recently been defended by Leonard Cassuto, who argues that Sacks undermines the objectifying aspect of the case study by including his own *I* voice and narrative (119).
- 3 While I agree wholeheartedly with Herskovits’ comments on the “pernicious effect” of language that dehumanizes people with Alzheimer’s disease, I do not follow her example in avoiding labelling people who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s as *victims* of the disease, a distinction that has been described by theorists such as Rod Michalko as following the “social model of disability” that sees suffering as socially imposed (Michalko 54). In contrast to Herskovits, Michalko argues that “Whether from the inappropriate responses of society or from exclusion from the ‘making’ of a world that has relegated us to the interpretative category of ‘problem,’ we (disabled people) do suffer” (59). In their 2006 book *Cultural Locations of Disability*, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell argue for a “cultural model” of disability (5) that “has an understanding that impairment is both human variation encountering environmental obstacles *and* socially mediated difference that lends group identity” (10). Since social isolation, anxiety, disorientation, and depression are almost universal accompaniments to the more clinically measurable early manifestations of Alzheimer’s disease, in this essay I use the word *suffer* to describe people who have the disease and also call them *victims* of it.

- 4 Many of these works also touch on language loss. One of Bruneau's three narrators paradoxically begins to tell her family's story at the same time as her vocabulary becomes impoverished by dementia. Carson's narrator notes the "stream of syllables" that come from her father's mouth, "a language neurologists call 'word salad'" (120), and later suggests that as her father's dementia progressed, "language and speech" became "decoupled, and when he started to talk, they dropped and ran all over the floor like a bag of bell clappers" (190). Fiona in Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" struggles with vocabulary in the last lines of the story when she tells her husband, "You could have just driven away . . . without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsooken me. Forsaken" (323); *Away from Her*, the film adaptation of Munro's story, ends with these same words. Chariandy's book focuses on loss of lexical ability by labelling each chapter with a failed attempt to spell *soucouyant*, the Trinidadian name for an evil spirit that in Chariandy's novel stands in for both specific histories of colonial exploitation and the early-onset dementia affecting the narrator's mother. As the narrator writes, "Mother wasn't simply forgetting. . . . [A] word would slip from her mind and pronounce itself upon her lips" (22).
- 5 In Maclear's and Chariandy's novels, which were both published after this essay was initially written, the social stigma of Alzheimer's explicitly intersects with histories of colonial, political, and cultural oppression. However, other books in this study also touch on aspects of social and cultural discrimination in Canada. While *Memory Board* deals with discrimination because of sexuality, *Scar Tissue* hints at cultural marginalization through the narrator's father, who describes himself as arriving in Canada a "dumb bohunk, with no English" (19); *Barney's Version* explores the consequences of religious and cultural difference through the narrator's experiences as an Anglophone Jewish Montrealer; and *The One With the News* suggests marginalization because of social class in its description of the early childhood deprivations of the main character's adopted daughter.
- 6 Chariandy's novel echoes Ignatieff's book in its representation of an adult son who tries to remember for his mother as he retells and reinterprets her life stories and thus appropriates as well as perpetuates them.
- 7 An earlier study, led by cognitive psychologist Susan Kemper in 1993, suggested that syntax is not affected by Alzheimer's. However, that study was only of patients in the earlier stages of the disease; as the authors noted, they could not test people with severe dementia because "most were unable to write a sentence" (82) and thus clearly had extensive difficulties with syntax as well as vocabulary.
- 8 The search for the word *colander* echoes the mother's mental search in *Scar Tissue* for *spatula*. Similarly, in Chariandy's *Soucouyant*, the narrator offers the example of his mother asking repeatedly for her hat and then revealing that when he says, "It's on the counter," she no longer understands the word *counter* (42).
- 9 Many real-life autobiographies by people with Alzheimer's are not written but instead are recorded or are told to relatives or caregivers and are often concluded by those caregivers; examples are Cary Henderson's *Partial View: An Alzheimer's Journal*, Robert Davis' co-written book *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease*, and Larry Rose's *Show Me the Way to Go Home*. Family members also tell their own versions of their afflicted loved one's life story: examples include Carrie Knowles' *The Last Childhood: A Family Story of Alzheimer's*, Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, and John Bayley's two books about his wife, writer Iris Murdoch, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (1998, titled in some editions *Elegy for Iris*) and *Iris and Her Friends* (2000).
- 10 Similarly, in Maclear's novel, the narrator's mother fills her pockets with small scraps of paper that form "an inventory of our mother's mind: things she needed from the

drugstore, bills that needed paying, names and numbers of close friends . . ." (107). In Munro's story, in contrast, Fiona is represented as always having written lists such as her morning schedule: "7 a.m. yoga. 7:30-7:45 teeth face hair. 7:45- 8:15 walk. 8:15 Grant and breakfast." Now, however, she posts notes on kitchen drawers to tell her that inside each is "Cutlery, Dishtowels, Knives" (277).

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Master of Instruments

These are my instruments glittering in their kit
fit to my hand and will.
First the needle silvered with anaesthetic essence.
Then the pen probe with carbide nib on one end
and a Duraspond cap on the other
to prepare the way for scalar and curette
with their knurled corrugated shanks
and their angled tips and toes.
Now the dressing tool to transfer debris to the dish.
Next the rhodium-coated cone socket mirror
to check on the results.
And here are the spoons, hatchets and trimmers
for carving and tamping composite,
the lovely burnishers to polish the amalgam,
the double-notched cord packers plying thick tissue,
flat spatulas for loading plumb
and tapered flutes to tap the crown down solid
and lute the inlay tight,
curved chisels to mold the stubborn cusp ridges,
gingival wedges and lariats of floss and smooth heron-billed pluggers
and even the humble rubber dam and clamps
to shield the tongue from the serrated forceps.
And O! the hoes, files, mallets and probes,
burs and drills, gouges and packets
all beveled and grooved and milled to the finest of tolerances.
Is there anything more beautiful than a sickle scraper
or a sharpening stone gleaming with lubricant?

With the help of my instruments
planed to perfection and wielded with aplomb
I reach every distal surface,
I repair malformations,
I scour rot,
I cut and contour bone,
I quarter and extract, slit and stitch,
I insert implants where none but Nature has ratcheted before.
And I give you your smile and your bite back.

Ce Zombi égaré est-il un Haïtien ou un Québécois?

Le vaudou chez les écrivains haïtiano-québécois

Et puis, seuls les simples d'esprit croient qu'on vient d'un lieu précis. On peut venir aussi d'endroits qu'on n'a fait que traverser en cours de route.

—Émile Ollivier, *Passages* (165)

Gérard Étienne (1936-2008; émigré 1964) et Émile Ollivier (1940-2002; émigré 1965) font partie du premier groupe d'exilés à fuir la violence et la répression du régime de François Duvalier à destination de Montréal. La durée de leur présence au Canada¹ aussi bien que l'étendue et la qualité littéraire de leur œuvre leur ont garanti une étude savante relativement approfondie, bien que pour Étienne cet intérêt ne se soit révélé qu'assez récemment (Ndiaye 9). L'institution littéraire québécoise s'est vite appropriée l'œuvre humaine et émouvante, plutôt réaliste, avec ce brin du merveilleux, d'Ollivier (Satyre 122). L'« esthétique du choc » chez Étienne, comme l'appelle Jean L. Prophète ou la « poétique de l'abjection » selon Marie-Agnès Sourieau, ont fait qu'il trouve son lectorat avec plus de difficulté. Par contre, tout le monde reconnaît le succès, de scandale diraient quelques-uns, de Dany Laferrière (né 1953; émigré 1976). Il appartient à une autre génération, mais lui aussi, à la suite de menaces de la part du régime de Jean-Claude Duvalier, a quitté Haïti pour Montréal, où il s'est fait connaître depuis les années 1980. Son exploitation de titres controversés, tels que *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985; film 1989 dir. Jacques W. Benoit) et *La grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit?* (2000), qui visent à déjouer les stéréotypes qu'ils parodient, lui a valu l'attention des médias aussi bien que celle des chercheurs universitaires. En effet, comme le note Pascale de Souza, les « stratégies perlocutoires » de son auto-écriture intimiste, qui le rapproche des Québécois en s'opposant aux anglophones, lui ont gagné l'appréciation des publics francophones. Enfin Martin Munro attribue

à Stanley Péan (né 1966; émigré 1966), parmi d'autres jeunes auteurs d'origine haïtienne, une pareille « unprecedented international exposure » (206); le cadet de ce groupe a cependant beaucoup plus de mal à attirer l'attention de la critique savante².

Au cœur de la création au Québec de la catégorie de la « littérature migrante » depuis les interventions connues de Pierre Nepveu, et de Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand³, demeure la question de l'appartenance. Dans son étude des « Réceptions de l'œuvre d'Émile Ollivier : de la difficulté de nommer l'écrivain migrant », Joubert Satyre nous signale la grande diversité d'appellations choisies par la critique pour nommer l'écrivain d'origine haïtienne venu vivre au Canada. Il trouve que « [c]ette babélisation est la figure de l'inquiétante étrangeté du texte migrant qui déstabilise les fondements du texte national » (121). Spécialiste en études caribéennes, Martin Munro efface cette ambiguïté dans son étude, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature : Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, Danticat* (2007), qui associe ces écrivains qui ont tous quitté Haïti pour divers pays à la « littérature haïtienne » tout court. N'oublions pas que l'appellation « écrivain-migrant » n'est pas sans controverses, comme nous le rappelle Józef Kwaterko en citant le malaise d'Émile Ollivier face à un vocable qu'il trouve réducteur (214) et Christine Ndiaye nous informe du même sentiment chez Étienne (10). Nous observons que dans l'autofiction *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* Laferrière supprime toute référence à l'origine haïtienne du « Vieux⁴ », son personnage-avatar, et il dit à Carroll Coates que son but n'était pas d'être vu comme un écrivain « ethnique » ou « migrant » (« Interview » 911). Pourtant, l'écriture de tous ces écrivains reste marquée par l'entre-deux identitaire de la migration. Pour Stanley Péan, la situation est encore plus, ou peut-être moins problématique parce qu'il a immigré tout enfant; il a complètement grandi dans le pays d'accueil, à Jonquière dans la région du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, en contraste avec les autres écrivains considérés ici qui ont débarqué, adultes, dans la métropole de Montréal. Si Joubert Satyre peut observer que chez Ollivier l'élément « québécois » de son écriture n'est pas à négliger (126), cet élément ressort encore plus chez Péan, qui admet n'avoir fait que deux séjours en Haïti, « à l'âge de neuf ans » et puis en 1997 (Olivier 8). Pourtant, ses ouvrages les plus connus, *La plage des songes et autres récits d'exil* (1988) et les deux romans *Le tumulte de mon sang* (1991) et *Zombi Blues* (1996), sont marqués par la forte présence de l'exil, sont peuplés par des personnages immigrés⁵. Le vaudou et le zombi représentent les motifs dominants de ces textes qui reflètent les mêmes buts et préoccupations que ceux d'Ollivier et d'Étienne

qui cherchent, selon Keith L. Walker “to interrogate the lived experience of their Antillean comrades in order to document and to expose the paradoxes and misadventures characteristic of the Haitian exilic experience” (173).

Dans l'écriture migrante de la diaspora haïtienne, cette expérience du pays natal comme invivable et de l'exil comme paradoxe se traduit par excellence dans la figure du zombi. Depuis la parution du zombi dans le film d'horreur anglo-américain (Ellis) à la déclaration de René Depestre qui affirme que « [l]'histoire de la colonisation est celle d'un processus de zombification généralisée de l'homme », les forces centrifuges ont cherché à universaliser le zombi comme figure de l'aliénation. En même temps, le zombi est devenu l'emblème des maux haïtiens et des références à la zombification semblent être incontournables dans un texte littéraire qui veut afficher son haïtieté. Dans les ouvrages autofictifs de Gérard Étienne (*Le nègre crucifié*, 1974; *La pacotille*, 1991; et *Vous n'êtes pas seul*, 2001) et de Dany Laferrière (*Le cri des oiseaux fous*, 2000), aussi bien que dans le roman d'Émile Ollivier (*Passages*, 1985), on remarque la forte présence du vaudou et celle du zombi comme métaphore de l'Haïtien aliéné, contraint à vivre une vie qui n'est pas une vie, mais plutôt une mort-vivante sous l'oppression duvalériste. Il figure aussi l'état de l'exilé haïtien qui a du mal à se faire accepter ou à s'accepter dans le pays d'accueil. Chez Stanley Péan, auteur de fictions qui rentrent sous la rubrique de l'horreur fantastique, les *loas*—c'est-à-dire les esprits du vaudou—et les autres manifestations surnaturelles des croyances populaires haïtiennes qui y sont associées, tel le zombi, fonctionnent de manière à introduire l'élément insolite qui définit ce genre⁶. Nous examinerons d'abord les représentations du vaudou dans l'œuvre de ces écrivains haïtiano-québécois avant de nous pencher sur la figure spécifique du zombi.

Haïti, pays envoûté : Le vaudou chez Étienne, Ollivier et Laferrière

On connaît l'usage du vaudou fait par François Duvalier comme moyen de se maintenir au pouvoir (Coates, « Vodou »⁷ 184) et de là dérive en grande partie l'image d'Haïti comme pays envoûté. Cependant le préfacier de la deuxième édition du *Nègre crucifié* insiste sur le fait que ce que pratiquaient Duvalier et compagnie c'était « le vaudou maléfique, parce que détourné de sa vraie voie » (Laraque 15). En effet, Maximilien Laroche nous rappelle qu'avant l'indépendance en 1804, le vaudou servait de force unificatrice entre les esclaves et les marrons, et la cérémonie religieuse permettait la circulation d'informations essentielles pour organiser la rébellion (54). Cette dualité reflète la description du panthéon vaudou faite dans l'étude classique

de l'anthropologue Alfred Métraux : « most Voodoo gods are divided into two groups : *rada* and *petro* » (39). Michel S. Laguerre nous informe que ce sont les esprits *rada* qui sont plutôt bénévoles, tandis que ceux du vaudou *petro* protègent les révolutionnaires aussi bien qu'ils fomentent la violence et la vengeance (113). L'association du vaudou avec la magie noire dérive de l'époque coloniale, mais l'Église catholique a mené des campagnes « anti-superstition » jusqu'au milieu du vingtième siècle (Métraux 17, 55-56, 338-41). Le noirisme de Duvalier l'a facilement approprié parce que le vaudou *petro* «symbolizes force, power, and resistance to White supremacy and bourgeois ideology. Carrying a kind of Black Power ideology» (Laguerre 113). Willy Apollon, dans son étude lacanienne et marxisante du vaudou, retrouve aussi l'aspect révolutionnaire d'un phénomène oral et visuel, libre de toutes les répressions de l'écrit occidental. En ce qui concerne les représentations dans la littérature haïtienne de la diaspora, Martin Munro observe cette dualité dans la fiction de René Depestre qui associe Duvalier au vaudou *petro*, gardant les loas *rada* pour ses « bons » (114), tandis que Bernard Delpêche souligne l'élément subversif de l'exploitation du vaudou dans le recueil poétique *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* (1966) du même auteur.

Nous observons chez les écrivains de notre corpus une forte corrélation entre le vaudou et le duvaliérisme, le vaudou et la magie noire. Dans les autofictions de Gérard Étienne⁸, « les vaudouisants et les bocors [sorciers vaudou] » sont carrément les duvaliéristes et les tontons macoutes contre lesquels luttait le protagoniste du *Nègre crucifié* (31), un « Révolutionnaire⁹ » (34). Ben Chalom, protagoniste éponyme de *La pacotille*, lutte contre les démons de son passé en Haïti, contre les « formules magiques » des « disciples de la bête » (63) du régime qui cherchaient à « masquer la vérité sous des simagrées de sorciers » (123). Tel est le cas pour Jacques, le dernier avatar de ce personnage étienien, qui décrit ses anciens compatriotes comme « un peuple qui croit à la magie des mots, non à la force de l'âme, non à la grâce de Dieu! » dans *Vous n'êtes pas seul* (68). Pour l'exilé qui a subi la prison et la torture sous le régime de Duvalier—ce qui est le cas d'Étienne aussi bien que celui de ses protagonistes—le vaudou et la magie noire figurent la déraison d'un tel système. La raison ne peut pas expliquer les pratiques duvaliéristes qui nuisent à son propre peuple; il n'y a que l'irrationnel pour en rendre compte.

Le cri des oiseaux fous raconte la dernière nuit en Haïti de Vieux Os, le personnage principal du roman autofictionnel de Dany Laferrière. Lui aussi suggère la relation étroite entre le vaudou et François Duvalier : « Papa Doc rêvait de prendre possession de l'âme haïtienne. Ses hommes opéraient

plutôt la nuit, se confondant avec les démons intimes qui hantaient nos pires cauchemars » (287), contrastant la terreur nocturne du père avec la « terreur diurne » du fils : « Baby Doc, en homme moderne, entend régner le jour » (287). Pour cette raison Vieux Os rôde la nuit; il se trouve pourtant « perdu dans cet univers fangeux. Je vois des fantômes. J'entends des voix » (286). Bien après sa mort, l'emprise du père sur le pays persiste, comme il observe dans le « *King Salomon Star*, le quartier général de la racaille d'un des pouvoirs les plus corrompus de la planète », où tous les gens « portent Papa Doc dans leur âme. Ils sont possédés par Baron Samedi, le maître des cimetières » (290). Tout comme chez Étienne, chez Laferrière—dont le père est parti sous Papa Doc et qui, lui, est parti sous Baby Doc après la torture à mort de son meilleur ami—la violence de ces régimes et le plaisir que certains partisans y prennent ne peuvent être que liés aux forces de la déraison, de la mort.

On retrouve l'association du vaudou avec le pays natal et la notion d'Haïti comme étant un pays envoûté des autofictions d'Étienne et de Laferrière dans les nouvelles et les romans d'Émile Ollivier et de Stanley Péan. Chez Ollivier, le paysan Amédée « croyait le pays tout entier devenu le jeu de quelque force malin » (17) qu'il cherche donc à fuir dans *Passages*. Et c'est le loa *rada* des eaux, Agoué, qu'il va prier quand son bateau se trouve au milieu d'une tempête (104-07). Bien que l'esprit descende pour prendre possession de son fidèle, le texte d'Ollivier semble condamner ces efforts comme vains parce que le bateau fait naufrage et la majorité de ses passagers sont morts. L'Haïtien se trouve dans une situation de double contrainte : il ne peut pas rester où il est, soit pour des raisons politiques soit pour des raisons économiques (les paysans d'Ollivier souffrent de la famine et de la disette), mais il ne peut pas non plus en sortir, comme le montre l'autre personnage principal de *Passages*, Normand Malavy, qui a pu physiquement quitter l'île, mais qui, depuis son exil sur une autre—celle de Montréal—, souffre toujours de la malédiction de son pays natal.

Le trope de l'évasion des griffes de Duvalier par le truchement d'un bateau dessiné, le *vévé*—dessin invocateur d'un loa—d'Agoué, reparait chez Étienne dans *La charte des crépuscules* (1993) comme nous le signale Mark V. Andrews (26). Dans son roman *Vous n'êtes pas seul*, l'idée de fuir par l'intervention du vaudou, comme chez Ollivier, semble en fin de compte être un leurre. Il l'est certes pour Jacques qui raconte comment un milicien lui avait ordonné : « 'Dessinez une fusée sur la porte pour foutre le camp.' J'obéissais. Je vous le jure. Alors le miracle s'est réellement accompli. Je me suis évadé. Direction, la maison de mon frère » (87). Cette magie traître effectue une évasion qui

permet aux duvaliéristes, en le suivant, de trouver et d'arrêter son frère. Pour la génération d'Étienne et d'Ollivier, il n'y a pas de solution magique; le vaudou ne peut offrir un havre contre le pouvoir parce que le pouvoir se l'est approprié.

Tel n'est cependant pas le cas des fidèles d'Agoué dans *Le cri des oiseaux fous* de Laferrière où nous témoignons de la double nature—positive et négative—du vaudou. À son début, le sceptique Vieux Os admet avoir « pu échapper » jusqu'à l'âge de vingt-trois ans « à ce culte pseudo-mystique, qu'une amie a qualifiée de 'pornographie ésotérique' » du vaudou, dont les Haïtiens sont « si friands » (98). Pourtant, il rencontre quelqu'un qui lui raconte comment son père a pu sortir de la prison du général Magloire avec un confrère qui, en traçant un bateau sur le mur, effectue de la magie vaudou : « Un moment après, ton père et lui ont mis leur pied gauche dans le dessin et . . . ils ont disparu, là, sous mes yeux » (150; ellipse à l'original). En effet, il s'agit du loa d'« Agoué, le dieu de la mer » (204). Comme l'avait fait son père, Vieux Os doit reconnaître que lui aussi avait bénéficié du secours du loa bienveillant de la mer avant son départ : « Les filles d'Agoué m'ont secouru » (308). Ce fils rationnel ne croit à la magie de son pays qu'au moment où il va le quitter et c'est par l'intervention des loas qu'il parvient à le faire.

Bien que Vieux Os puisse admettre le pouvoir des loas bienveillants, il préfère s'exiler, chercher asile dans un pays où les puissances maléfiques ne peuvent pas l'atteindre : « Les dieux du vaudou ne voyagent pas dans le Nord. Ces dieux sont trop frileux. Je serai donc seul pour affronter ce nouveau monde. » (*Cri* 317) Ben Chalom réitère la croyance populaire antillaise¹⁰ que les esprits maléfiques ne peuvent pas traverser l'eau : « Aucune force diabolique qui fait des ravages dans l'écurie [la prison de Duvalier] ne traverse la mer des Antilles. » (*Pacotille* 158) Il la sait pourtant fautive, ces démons l'ayant pourchassé jusqu'au Québec. Les personnages d'Étienne, d'Ollivier et de Laferrière cherchent tous à fuir le duvaliérisme figuré par ces esprits maléfiques. Malheureusement, ils découvrent que ces figures continuent à les hanter au pays d'accueil. Tandis que les personnages de ses aînés cherchent à fuir les esprits vaudou, Péan les invoque, en éliminant tout aspect positif de la religion populaire haïtienne, pour fabriquer ses contes fantastiques.

Le Vaudou au Québec : l'œuvre fantastique de Stanley Péan

Le roman pour la jeunesse de Stanley Péan, *La mémoire ensanglantée* (1994), met en scène une famille haïtienne immigrée au Québec qui n'arrive pas à laisser derrière elle les fantômes du duvaliérisme. Baron Samedi, un des esprits vaudou les plus connus, hante les rêves de Leïla Bastide, sa

protagoniste haïtien-québécois: « Il portait un costume d'ordonnateur de pompes funèbres, redingote et haut-de-forme noirs. Son maquillage visait à donner l'impression qu'il avait une tête de squelette. » (125) Le texte ne nomme pas explicitement ce membre de la « terrible » famille des Guédé, les esprits de la mort (Métraux 114), mais on ne peut pas se tromper sur l'identité de cet être onirique d'après sa description, qui semble être prise mot pour mot d'un passage de Métraux (113). En effet, les esprits malveillants associés au vaudou et les croyances populaires haïtiennes peuplent l'œuvre fantastique de l'écrivain haïtien-saguenéen. Le personnage fictif péanien, tout comme l'autofictif Ben Chalom d'Étienne, semble ne pas pouvoir fuir les démons qui hantent le pays natal. Toute jeune, ses parents lui content des histoires de « loups-garous et autres croque-mitaines » (92); adolescente, Leïla se trouve possédée par un *bizango*, le fantôme de la cousine de son père, Nina. Bien que l'introduction de l'esprit vaudou permette à l'auteur du fantastique d'insinuer la présence du surnaturel dans le monde, tout comme nous l'avons vu chez Étienne, Ollivier, et Laferrière, cet être insolite et inexplicable selon la raison occidentale figure la violence du régime duvalériste, car Nina avait été victime « de la redoutable confrérie des tontons-macoutes » (130).

Le vaudou ne sert donc pas simplement de signe de l'haïtienneté du texte péanien mais aussi comme catalyseur du « fantastique », de l'intervention de l'insolite dans le monde rationnel du Québec ou de l'Amérique du Nord plus large. Il joue donc un rôle central dans *Le tumulte de mon sang*, son hommage romanesque à « La chute de la maison d'Usher » (1844) d'Edgar Allan Poe. D'abord, le vaudou s'introduit de façon sournoise et en quelque sorte folklorisée par le truchement du *makandal*, un talisman vaudou que la grand-mère du narrateur haïtien-québécois lui avait donné et qu'il retrouve mystérieusement dans ses bagages. Son manque de croyance contraste avec l'attitude de son amie qui « [s]ans être pratiquante, . . . accordait beaucoup d'importance aux croyances vodou¹¹ » (45). Plus tard, cependant, il se révèle qu'Ouidah, la gouvernante chérie de Madeline, est une *mambo*, une prêtresse vaudou qui avait aidé son « oncle » Rodrigue Duché à se dégager d'une intrigue amoureuse avec une puissante femme-démon et qui continue régulièrement à faire des rites vaudou pour aider ce dernier à garder ses forces (124). Le fils portera la faute du père (et le texte révèle que Duché est le père du narrateur et de son amante, Madeline); la magie noire pratiquée en Haïti traverse l'eau et s'installe sur le continent; les enfants ne peuvent pas sortir indemnes de la violence de la société dont ils sont issus, même s'ils ont grandi dans celle du pays d'accueil.

Chez tous ces auteurs les personnages se sentent divisés entre deux mondes, vivant « un entre-deux » de l'expérience migrante dont parle Régine Robin dans son étude de Kafka¹² (10). Tout comme l'écrivain judéo-tchèque vivant sous le régime austro-allemand des Habsbourg, les personnages de la fiction haïtiano-québécoise vivent une existence ni . . . ni . . . : ils sont Haïtiens, mais ils ne le sont plus, ayant quitté le pays; selon un discours ethno-nationaliste, ils ne sont pas québécois, mais selon le discours du nationalisme civique, ils le sont, ayant adopté ce pays refuge. Ils sont pour la plupart, des gens cultivés, formés par un système éducationnel basé sur un rationalisme français, mais ils sont tous forcés de croire à l'existence de l'irrationnel du vaudou et du régime duvaliériste. On voit l'instant insolite où les deux univers se touchent dans l'incident cité ci-haut de l'évasion de prison par le père de Vieux Os dans *Le cri des oiseaux fous*; en écoutant l'anecdote, le jeune homme découvre que son père « gardait contact avec les deux mondes . . . [l]e monde de la raison, de la logique, et celui du surnaturel, de l'invisible. Très peu de gens ont accès à deux mondes parallèles en même temps. Généralement, on finit par faire un choix. » (151)

Ce refus de choisir entre le monde rationnel et celui de la magie figure l'expérience de l'entre-deux du migrant qui doit vivre à la façon du pays d'accueil tout en cherchant à garder quelque chose du pays natal. Il a souvent du mal à vivre cet entre-deux qu'invoque Leïla Bastide pour décrire sa double vie à Montréal; tandis que le jour on vivait selon les us et coutumes québécois, le soir, « le seuil de la maison familiale franchi, on passait en quelque sorte dans un univers parallèle » (11). Ce clin d'œil à la science-fiction de la part de l'auteur ouvre la voie au fantastique; de manière littérale, l'univers parallèle de l'immigrée comprend l'odeur des plats traditionnels haïtiens en entrant dans la maison, les vêtements des parents qui se sont dépouillés de leur costume-tailleur, et les proverbes en créole dont le père parsème la conversation de table, mais c'est aussi un univers à part où peuvent entrer les loas ou les *bizango* « êtres surnaturels qui, le soir, sortaient de la peau humaine sous laquelle ils se cachaient » le jour (12). Prenant conscience de l'insolite qui s'insinue dans son monde autrement rationnel, Leïla invoque une espèce de bête: « Je m'imaginai traquée par une présence impalpable et obsédante, décidée à me chasser carrément de mon propre corps. » (108) Étienne se sert d'une figure pareille; la « bête » traque Ben Chalom dans *La pacotille*. En effet, Étienne inscrit ce dualisme dans la structure de son roman, car Ben Chalom vit le jour au Québec dans les chapitres pairs et il retourne en Haïti la nuit dans ses cauchemars racontés dans les chapitres impairs. Tous ces

personnages naviguent entre les deux mondes, entre deux visions du monde, celle de l'occident canadien et celle des Antilles. Ils doivent adopter l'approche hybride que conseille l'auteure jamaïcno-canadienne, Nalo Hopkinson :

Northern science fiction and fantasy come out of a rational and skeptical approach to the world: That which cannot be explained must be proven to exist, either through scientific method or independent corroboration. But the Caribbean, much like the rest of the world, tends to have a different worldview: The irrational, the inexplicable, and the mysterious exist side by side with the daily events of life. Questioning the irrational overmuch is unlikely to yield a rational answer, and may prove dangerous. Best instead to find ways to incorporate both the logical and the illogical into one's approach to the world, because you never know when life will just drop you down in that hole, into a ceiba space where none of the rules you know operate. (xii-xiii)

Le texte migrant haïtieno-québécois n'établit ce dualisme existentiel que pour le transgresser, car le personnage migrant n'arrive pas à bien compartimenter les deux côtés de cette face de Janus malgré sa bonne volonté. C'est ce qui arrive à Ben Chalom quand son obsession de la bête commence à s'infiltrer en plein jour, à la cantine de l'Université de Montréal, dans les rues de la ville, partout. C'est ce qui se passe pour Leïla Bastide quand elle voyage de Montréal au Québec profond pour vivre avec son aïeule chez qui la violence du passé ressurgit dans le présent sous la forme du *bizango*. Même au Canada, ces personnages sont forcés de se rendre compte d'une vision du monde haïtienne, celle associée au le vaudou et dans laquelle le monde des vivants et le monde des morts n'ont pas de frontière distincte (Deslauriers 338). Le zombi, ce mort qui vit, cet être vivant qui n'a pourtant pas d'âme, incarne de manière explicite cette vision.

Le Zombi comme figure de l'Haïtien chez Étienne, Ollivier, et Laferrière

On a souvent constaté l'usage du zombi dans la littérature haïtienne comme figure « symbolisant les effets de la dépossession collective » (Kwaterko 217). Maximilien Laroche appelle le zombi « the legendary mythic symbol of alienation: a spiritual as well as physical alienation; of the dispossession of the self through the reduction of the self to a mere source of labor » (56). Ainsi à l'époque coloniale le zombi représentait-il l'esclave : une personne devenue une chose, démunie de son humanité, forcée de travailler pour un autre (Ackermann and Gauthier 474-75). Dans la littérature contemporaine de la diaspora haïtienne, le zombi figure les victimes aussi bien que les partisans du régime de Duvalier. Martin Munro offre l'exemple de la représentation de l'Haïtien moyen « zombifié » par la dictature dans *Le mâle de cocagne* (1979)

de René Depestre (Munro 102). Chez nos auteurs haïtieno-canadiens, nous observons la même fonction des figures du zombi et de la zombification aussi bien que celles de figurer l'aliénation individuelle d'un protagoniste migrant et de représenter la condition générale de l'être humain dans le monde post-moderne et postcolonial¹³ qui tend à détruire les frontières nettes entre les pôles des dichotomies organisatrices de la réalité occidentale.

Logiquement, si les « vaudouissants » sont les partisans des Duvalier, leurs victimes sont donc ceux qui succombent à leur magie, une catégorie qui comprend non pas simplement le peuple haïtien, surtout le petit peuple qui cherche une vengeance contre les privilégiés (souvent la bourgeoisie mulâtre), mais aussi la main d'œuvre du pouvoir, les miliciens et les tontons-macoutes. Chez Laferrière on observe que le héros du *Cri des oiseaux fous* se promène dans « la capitale zombifiée par la dictature de Papa Doc » (276-77); son père affirme que « Duvalier a fait de tous les Haïtiens des zombies » (319). Dans *Passages* Ollivier désincarne le zombi, prêtant la figure au « Pouvoir, nasillant, déjà zombi » (61), la voix nasillarde étant un des traits saillants du zombi (Ackermann et Gauthier 480). Qu'il s'applique à Port-au-Prince ou au pays entier, aux Haïtiens soumis au régime ou aux partisans de Duvalier, le zombi figure l'état de mort-vivant, d'une existence où sa propre volonté est soumise à celle d'un autre, ce qui est l'existence en Haïti duvaliériste selon ces écrivains migrants.

On trouve ces références au zombi dans l'œuvre d'Ollivier et celle de Laferrière, aussi bien que chez des écrivains haïtiens et antillais¹⁴, mais chez Gérard Étienne le zombi devient une véritable obsession. Dans *Le nègre crucifié* et *La pacotille* nous avons recensé au moins soixante références directes et indirectes à la zombification, au zombi, aux morts-vivants et à la résurrection des morts. Le Révolutionnaire supplicié d'Étienne affirme que « [n]ous sommes mêlés dans la bataille contre les zombies » (*Nègre* 54) et ajoute « [s]i tu savais comment on est, en Haïti, un zombi sous les bottes du Chef » (*Nègre* 46). La capitale, voire tout le pays, sont devenus le « carrefour des zombies » (*Nègre* 20); « [l]a boue colle aux pieds des zombies de Port-au-Prince qui veulent faire une République de la grosseur d'un poignet » (*Nègre* 29-30). Quand le personnage principal de la *Pacotille* immigre à Montréal, Port-au-Prince, cette « ville des morts vivants » le poursuit toujours dans ses cauchemars (19). Comme nous le signale Peter Klaus dans *Le nègre crucifié*, « le zombi devient la représentation de l'être colonisé par excellence, dépouillée [sic] d'identité et de volonté. Le roman se veut également une réfutation du vaudou et de ses influences néfastes sur l'imaginaire haïtien. » (102)

Cet état de zombification s'avère tellement néfaste chez Étienne qu'il affecte toujours ceux qui ont pu s'enfuir de l'île, comme nous le voyons chez Jacques, le protagoniste de *Vous n'êtes pas seul*; il s'est fait arrêter en Haïti pour avoir refusé « de prendre la même direction que des zombis » (92), pourtant, vingt ans plus tard, il s'avère être un zombi aux yeux de deux Québécoises qui lui donnent refuge contre une tempête de neige, parlant tant de son état de sans-logis au pays d'accueil que de sa vie antérieure en Haïti : « Vous appelez ça être vivant, un enfant de cochon, une loque sous les ponts, un zombi égaré? » (78) La narration insiste sur le fait que Jacques « paraissait cliniquement mort » (61) et que Carmen et Marie-France ont effectué sur lui une « opération de réanimation » (80). Mais pour ce migrant dont la condition de vivre l'entre-deux n'est plus supportable, cette résurrection ne valait pas vraiment la peine. Ce n'est pas qu'il est ingrat; c'est simplement que Jacques ressemble trop au zombi à qui on donne du sel et qui se rend compte de son état; ce dernier se rend directement et inexorablement au cimetière sachant y trouver sa place (Seabrook 99). Encore une fois on voit le protagoniste haïtiano-québécois dans un huis clos, une situation d'entre-deux sans sortie ni secours.

La zombification comme figure de l'aliénation qui résulte du régime duvaliériste devient chez Étienne un malaise généralisé du monde contemporain. Se référant à Normand Malavy, membre de l'élite haïtienne qui a pu fuir au Canada pendant les années soixante, le narrateur de *Passages* observe : « Ne sommes-nous pas des survivants, des morts vivants, des cadavres en sursis, abritant des Hiroshima privés? » (35) Il offre aussi aux Haïtiens une stratégie de survivance subversive : le « magouillage » que Bernard Delpêche identifie à l'esthétique de René Depestre. Dans l'île, les paysans qui veulent la quitter se servent savamment de la peur du zombi chez les tontons-macoutes pour échapper à la terreur et à l'arrestation comme on le raconte lors d'une précédente tentative de fuite : « il fallait s'envelopper dans un drap blanc, enduire son visage de farine, accepter d'être battus, attachés au bout d'une corde, tenus en laisse pour donner l'impression d'une colonne de morts vivants, revenant tout droit du cimetière. . . . Les miliciens dès qu'ils nous virent déboucher au carrefour, ont pris leurs jambes à leur cou, en criant : 'Des zombis! Des zombis!' » (43-44) À l'exception de ce dernier exemple où il sert de couleur locale, chez ces auteurs le zombi reste un être allégorique, une figure littéraire qui aide à mieux exprimer l'aliénation de l'Haïtien opprimé, du monstre duvaliériste, du migrant, du sujet contemporain. Chez Stanley Péan, nous constatons un pareil usage figuré aussi bien qu'un emploi

spécifique à l'auteur où le zombi devient aussi une « réalité » phénoménale dans l'univers diégétique de l'horreur fantastique.

Zombis errants : les zombis « réels » de Stanley Péan

Tout comme les autres écrivains haïtiano-québécois dont il est question ici, Stanley Péan se sert du zombi de façon figurée, dans la description des tontons-macoutes dans *La mémoire ensanglantée*, par exemple : « une douzaine de nègres en uniformes noirs se tenaient au garde-à-vous. Leurs visages, couverts de maquillage blanc, étaient ornés de lunettes noires » (124), la peau blanche étant un signe identificateur du zombi. Dans un autre roman pour la jeunesse, *L'emprise de la nuit* (1993), le protagoniste est venu au Québec avec sa mère pour vivre « loin des tortionnaires et des zombis des Duvalier » (68). Au-delà de cette application spécifique au régime duvaliériste, Péan généralise la métaphore du zombi pour indiquer tout fort-à-bras, comme nous le voyons dans une référence à « un véritable zombi » (*Emprise* 85), le costaud d'un groupe de délinquants à Montréal.

L'espoir de Stacey Bergeaud et de sa mère de laisser les zombis derrière eux en Haïti s'avère illusoire, car les monstres du folklore traditionnel haïtien deviennent des « réalités » sur le sol canadien dans l'œuvre fantastique de Péan. Dans la nouvelle « *Ban mwen yon ti-bo* » dont le titre fait référence au « [r]efrain d'une chanson folklorique haïtienne » et qui veut dire « Donne-moi un baiser » selon la note infrapaginale de l'auteur (138), il s'agit d'un immigré haïtien dont la femme est devenue zombi. Tout comme le narrateur de Gérard Étienne ne peut pas nommer « l'innommable » (60), « la bête » qui traque le narrateur de *La pacotille* dans ses cauchemars, les personnages de Péan ne doivent pas nommer le zombi. Raoul va consulter un *houngan*, un prêtre vaudou, qui lui explique comment identifier et chasser le zombi dont il tait le nom, fait signalé par un blanc dans le texte : « Si ta femme a été, comme tu le dis, zombifiée, tu pourras t'en assurer dès la prochaine fois que ton regard croisera le sien car le regard du est un regard vitreux . . . le ne peut manger de sel . . . le ne peut supporter la vue d'objets religieux. » (126-27) L'interdiction de nommer dément le statut ontologique du zombi dans cette nouvelle et dans les romans de Péan; en contraste avec les autofictions d'Étienne et de Laferrière et le roman d'Ollivier qui se servent du zombi comme pure figure, le texte péanien « croit » au phénomène surnaturel comme existant réellement dans l'espace fictionnel du texte fantastique.

C'est évidemment dans son roman le plus connu, *Zombi Blues* (1996; rééd. 1999, 2007), que Péan pousse le plus loin et l'usage du zombi comme monstre

fantastique, l'être insolite qui ressurgit dans le monde réel pour le bouleverser, et son usage figuré en tant que représentation de l'aliénation endémique du monde postcolonial¹⁵. En effet, c'est par ce double usage du trope que Péan réussit à créer une sorte de fantastique engagé dans son désir d'enseigner à ses lecteurs de tous âges, comme nous l'avons vu dans les romans pour la jeunesse, quelques aspects de l'histoire d'Haïti, de la violence et de l'injustice qui y ont régné et de la marque qu'elles ont laissée sur ceux qui ont réussi à s'en évader. Le roman commence par un prologue analeptique qui a lieu à Port-au-Prince à la tombée de la nuit et au crépuscule du régime de Papa Doc. Cette fois, cependant, les zombis ne sont pas les Haïtiens aliénés, mais un couple canadien anglophone qui ne sait pas encore qu'il va devenir les parents adoptifs du protagoniste péanien dont la mère tombe victime de la violence duvaliériste. Ayant perdu un fils, Ben et Corinne Reynolds sont « [d]eux morts-vivants perdus au pays de l'ombre » (22). Mais c'est la « lueur écarlate » dans les yeux du bébé adopté qui signale au lecteur la vraie source de l'insolite à venir (24).

L'intrigue principale met cet orphelin—Gabriel D'ArqueAngel—face à l'histoire occultée de son identité haïtienne qui s'incarne sous la forme d'un frère jumeau dont il avait été séparé à la naissance. Ensemble, Caliban et Gabriel sont les *Marasa* (166) du vaudou haïtien, des jumeaux doués de pouvoirs surnaturels et d'une connexion psychique (Métraux 146-53) qui leur permet de voir par le truchement d'une perception extrasensorielle entre eux. La fuite d'Haïti au Canada de l'ex-macoute et père adoptif de Caliban, Mèt Barthélémy « Barracuda » Minville, facilite la réunion de ces jumeaux séparés depuis la naissance. Surnommé le « Grand-Blanc » (168), Caliban paraît être un « grimo », c'est-à-dire un mulâtre à la peau excessivement claire, presque blanche, voire albinos : « avec son visage de marbre, couronné par une chevelure blond cendré coupée en brosse et masqué par des lunettes noires, et ses mains gantées aux doigts exagérément longs et effilés, on jurerait un zombi » (143). Tout comme il avait renversé le stéréotype, en faisant des parents canadiens des zombis, Péan renverse l'idée de l'authenticité identitaire en faisant de Caliban, le « vrai » Haïtien, un Blanc, ce qui invoque, afin de le questionner, le noirisme de Duvalier ou l'idéologie raciale du mouvement des Griots des années 1930 qui, comme l'explique Munro, « implied a sliding scale of authenticity : the true Haitian soul was black, and the fairer the skin, the less Haitian one was » (17). Mais il reste une ambivalence textuelle irrésolue, car Caliban représente l'« authenticité » haïtienne qu'a perdue Gabriel quand on l'a enlevé du pays natal et donc le mot « *home*

... pour lui, cela ne signifie rien » (54). Bien que *Zombi Blues* se représente comme un texte d'horreur, et c'en est un pour les personnages secondaires, c'est en effet une histoire de réunion; quand Gabriel retrouve Caliban : « Pour la première fois depuis son retour au Québec, peut-être même pour la première fois de sa vie, ses pensées ont la clarté du cristal. . . . Jamais il n'a fait l'expérience d'une telle plénitude. » (258) En ce bref instant de réunion avec son autre moitié—car cette espèce de zombi est le frère jumeau que Gabriel a perdu à son départ d'Haïti pour le Canada—le sujet migrant transcende son aliénation, son sentiment de vivre un entre-deux pénible. Cette réunion, aussi brève qu'elle soit, va stimuler la guérison du mal existentiel et Gabriel va renouer avec le pays natal. Le roman se conclut sur sa décision d'aller en Haïti « faire une différence » (281).

Nous trouvons significatif qu'un écrivain qui a grandi dans le pays d'accueil reste hanté par la violence duvaliériste, bien que la forme de cette hantise s'avère radicalement différente de celle des écrivains qui en ont vécu directement l'expérience, tels qu'Étienne et Laferrière. C'est-à-dire que malgré les différences entre le récit autobiographique des écrivains des générations précédentes et l'histoire fantastique de Péan, on retrouve les mêmes thèmes, les mêmes obsessions. Nous trouvons également significatif que le genre de l'horreur fantastique a éveillé la vocation d'écrivain chez le jeune Péan qui admet que pour lui Haïti est restée pendant longtemps non pas un lieu de mémoire mais un lieu de fantôme (Olivier 8). Tant mieux pour lui s'il n'a pas dû vivre la torture et l'oppression qu'ont réellement senties Ollivier, Étienne et Laferrière, et que craignaient ses parents (Beauquis 5), Stanley Péan n'en est pas pour autant moins hanté. En écrivant des histoires d'horreur, il nous rappelle les vraies horreurs en même temps qu'il s'en exorcise.

Conclusion

Évidemment, on remarque des différences générationnelles entre ces écrivains de la diaspora haïtienne dans la représentation du vaudou dans leurs fictions et leurs autofictions. Un texte clé pour comprendre ces différences reste *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien, poème-mystère vaudou* (1967) de René Depestre (né 1926; exilé 1946). Depestre voyait dans le vaudou une force d'opposition contre une oppression venue de l'occident. Tout en admettant les aspects noirs du vaudou *petro*, et il les invoque pour venger la violence des Blancs contre les Noirs non pas seulement en Haïti mais partout (et spécifiquement dans ce poème dans l'Alabama), il s'approprie également les éléments inspirateurs du vaudou *rada*, comme un élément culturel

authentiquement haïtien aussi bien qu'un trait de continuité avec le passé africain dont l'esclavage a coupé son peuple. Même le zombi, chez Depestre, a la possibilité d'espérer un meilleur avenir, selon Joan Dayan, en ce que « [t]he epiphany of Cap'tain Zombi dramatizes the yearning to recover Black identity, a spiritual renaissance for the zombi » (83).

Dans *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* les forces de l'oppression du Haïtien viennent de l'extérieur, de l'occident; tout cela change chez les écrivains haïtiano-québécois dont il est question ici. Pour Gérard Étienne, Émile Ollivier, Dany Laferrière et Stanley Péan, l'oppression vient plutôt de l'intérieur : des Duvalier et de leurs partisans à l'intérieur d'Haïti¹⁶, et des souvenirs de leur violence chez les exilés à l'étranger. Tandis que Depestre peut s'appropriier le vaudou pour élaborer un discours de résistance authentiquement haïtienne, l'appropriation de ce même vaudou par le régime des Duvalier coupe ce pont de secours pour les écrivains de la première vague de départs après la déclaration de la Présidence à vie, tels qu'Étienne et Ollivier. Bien qu'on voie, ici et là, des représentations plutôt positives du vaudou—dans la poésie d'Étienne selon Andrews ou comme magouillage dans *Passages*—le vaudou représente, surtout pour l'exilé de cette génération, l'irrationnel contre lequel lutte le rationalisme de l'émigré, qui déjà en Haïti figurait parmi les privilégiés qui ont reçu une formation en français et dont les attitudes se voient renforcées dès son installation au Québec. Dans leur œuvre, le zombi ne représente pas seulement une condition d'aliénation générale dans toute société coloniale (comme nous le voyons toujours, par exemple, en fonction chez la Guadeloupéenne, Maryse Condé), mais une victime spécifiquement haïtienne du régime de Duvalier. Péan, dont les parents—son lien direct à Haïti—appartiennent à cette même vague d'exilés, semble partager cette vision noire du vaudou en tant que figure de l'irrationnel. Pour le protagoniste péanien, il reste quand même l'espoir d'exorciser ces démons. Par contre, Laferrière, qui appartient à une autre génération, semble renouer avec l'idéal de Depestre; au moins, il retrouve une force d'espoir dans le vaudou *rada*. Le trajet nocturne de Vieux Os, le protagoniste du *Cri des oiseaux fous*, dont le nom rappelle celui d'Atibon Legba dans *Un arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* (122), est celui de la renonciation aux croyances dont il se dit libre (98) jusqu'à l'acceptation de l'intervention des loas dans sa vie, les filles d'Agoué qui l'ont « secouru » (308).

Comme nous le disait Francisco de Goya, « El sueño de la razón produce monstruos » (*Capricho 43*). Au fond de tous ces textes se trouve la figure du zombi, du Moi blessé, incomplet, traumatisé par une violence irrationnelle.

Le zombi est un monstre qui subit la mort, mais qui vit encore; surtout, c'est quelqu'un de soumis à la volonté d'un autre. Il figure donc l'Haïtien opprimé, le tonton-macoute « aux ordres » du chef, tout le pays donc. Le zombi errant figure aussi l'exilé de ce régime. L'émigré subit une espèce de mort en traversant les eaux; il ressuscite dans un pays nouveau; mais s'il se pense libéré du joug des forces opérantes au pays natal, il se trompe. Car il garde la marque de la bête dans son inconscient; guidé en quelque sorte à distance par ces forces, il ne réussit pas à s'insérer pleinement dans la vie ailleurs. Encore une fois des différences générationnelles se voient au niveau de la capacité du protagoniste de s'adapter au pays d'accueil : tandis que les zombis égarés d'Étienne et d'Ollivier restent toujours ni Haïtien ni Québécois, ceux de Laferrière et de Péan s'avèrent Haïtien et Québécois à la fois.

NOTES

- 1 Bien qu'il ait commencé son exil au Québec, Étienne a passé une grande portion de sa vie dans le Nouveau Brunswick.
- 2 Une recherche dans la base de données bibliographique de la MLA datée du 10 novembre 2008 a eu pour résultat 22 publications recensées qui traitent de l'œuvre d'Émile Ollivier, 13 pour Gérard Étienne et 35 pour Dany Laferrière. Elle n'a produit que deux résultats pour Stanley Péan. On connaît les limites de cet engin, mais nous trouvons ces résultats révélateurs. Il est prometteur cependant que l'œuvre de Péan, avec celle des trois autres auteurs étudiés ici, a fait l'objet d'une thèse de doctorat en 2006 (Beauquis). De la même façon, parmi les séances d'un récent colloque, tandis que plusieurs communications discutaient d'Ollivier, de Laferrière, et/ou de Marie-Célie Agnant (née 1953), une seule traitait de Péan (APLAQA, Sackville, N.B., du 17 au 19 octobre, 2008).
- 3 Il s'agit bien sûr de *L'Écologie du réel* (Montréal: Boréal, 1988) pour le premier et de *Ces Étrangers du dedans: Une histoire de l'écriture migrante (1937-1997)* (Québec: Nota Bene, 2001).
- 4 Laferrière attribue ce surnom de "Vieux Os" à son inactivité forcée durant une maladie d'enfance; sa grand-mère l'appelle ainsi tellement il ressemble à un petit vieillard (*Lodeur du café* 25; *Le cri des oiseaux fous* 214).
- 5 En contraste avec *La plage des songes*, à la sortie duquel Péan admet avoir froissé des copains d'enfance saguenéens qui s'attendaient à un livre plus "québécois" (Olivier 8), ses recueils plus récents *Sombres allées* (1992), *La nuit démasque* (2000), et *Le cabinet du Docteur K* (2001) contiennent plus de textes mettant en scène des personnages non-haïtiens.
- 6 Nous empruntons la définition à Lise Morin (qui dérive de celles de la tradition française de la critique fantastique de Louis Vax, de Roger Caillois, et d'Irène Bessière, parmi d'autres) : « une œuvre fantastique présente l'irruption, au sein d'un monde réaliste, d'un événement qui défie normes et préceptes et qui, de ce fait, apparaît problématique aux yeux du protagoniste ou du narrateur » (20).

- 7 Bernard Delpêche (25 n. 12) et Stanley Péan adoptent l'orthographe de « voodoo », qu'on rencontre aussi dans de récentes études américaines, bien que « vaudou » reste l'orthographe en français standard.
- 8 Bien que ses protagonistes portent des noms bien distincts de celui de leur auteur, il est évident que des textes comme *Le nègre crucifié*, qui se dit « récit » sur la première de couverture, et *La pacotille*, qui se dit « roman », se basent directement sur les expériences de leur auteur; il est moins facile d'appeler son dernier roman, *Vous n'êtes pas seul*, une « autofiction », mais il en garde plusieurs aspects. Chez Laferrière, le cas est clair; l'auteur prête son propre surnom à son protagoniste, fait référence au nom de son père, et dans des entretiens et ailleurs donne à son œuvre le nom d'« autobiographie américaine ».
- 9 Mark V. Andrews remarque cependant dans la poésie d'Étienne une fonction plutôt positive et rédemptrice du vaudou qui fait pendant à sa représentation négative dans la fiction. Il cite des entretiens où Étienne admet le rôle changeant du vaudou selon l'époque historique (33), mais ce commentaire fait dans un entretien avec Sylvie Mousseau de *L'accent acadien* (du 29 avril 2000) semble trancher la question : « même si le vaudou a joué un rôle important dans la fondation de l'indépendance haïtienne, il est aussi responsable de toutes les misères des Haïtiens » (cité par Cottille-Foley 88).
- 10 Elle paraît également dans *Célanire cou-coupé* (Condé 166-67).
- 11 Voir la note 7.
- 12 Pour une discussion plus étendue de cette notion robinienne, voir « Le fantastique métissé : l'écriture identitaire de Stanley Péan » (*Actes du Colloque APLAQA 2008*, dir. Monika Boehringer, à paraître).
- 13 Nous acceptons ici les définitions du postcolonial articulées par Homi K. Bhabha (171) et les directeurs du collectif *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (Ashcroft et al. 1-3), qui voient ce phénomène à l'œuvre dans toute société touchée par le fait du colonialisme. Le « postcolonial » en études littéraires et culturelles ne se limite pas au simple fait politique de l'indépendance gagnée d'un régime colonial, le post-colonial littéral; il existe encore partout où l'on témoigne d'une interaction entre une civilisation colonisante et une « indigène » ou vice-versa entre une civilisation occidentale établie et une autre qui s'installe grâce à l'immigration. En général, il se veut contestateur, visant une critique des modes de vie et de pensée occidentales de l'instrumentalisme capitaliste, privilégiant les apports des « autres ». On attribue souvent au postcolonial le désir de démanteler les oppositions binaires—telles que la vie et la mort, la raison et la folie—ce qui le lie au postmoderne. Pour ce dernier, nous proposons la théorie de Linda Hutcheon qui dans sa poétique du postmoderne y associe l'affirmation de la différence contre l'uniforme (6), la résistance aux « master narrative[s] » (6), l'effacement des frontières entre l'art et la vie quotidienne (7), et pose un défi aux systèmes totalisants du rationalisme positif (6-7), parmi d'autres traits. Les textes étudiés ici rentrent facilement sous la rubrique du postcolonial en ce qu'ils juxtaposent la civilisation occidentale et ses croyances à l'haïtienne et les siennes (voir l'étude du présent auteur cité dans la note 11 pour une discussion plus poussée de ce phénomène à l'œuvre chez Péan); leur rapport au postmoderne est souvent moins limpide. Certes, ils posent un défi aux systèmes rationnels par la mise-en-scène du vaudou et du zombi, mais en ce que ces derniers servent le plus souvent de figures de ce que l'on critique (c'est-à-dire, le régime duvaliériste et son influence néfaste sur la société et la culture haïtiennes), on se trouve souvent face à un narratif qui veut affirmer la raison sur la déraison. Péan est de loin l'auteur le plus « postmoderne »; on retrace le ludisme intertextuel et interculturel qu'observe Coates (« Vodou » 186) et Kwaterko (223-24) dans *Zombie Blues* dans tout son œuvre qu'il parsème de références aux textes d'horreur étatsuniens, à la

- littérature haïtienne (surtout de son auteur fétiche Jacques-Stephen Alexis), à la musique jazz, au français du Québec et ainsi de suite de façon qu'il produit un kaléidoscope culturel qui ne respecte pas les divisions entre l'art et le quotidien, qu'il privilégie la différence, qu'il atteint le « transculturel », la réponse québécoise au multiculturalisme, qui se veut un échange entre la société d'accueil et d'autres communautés culturelles qui partagent le même territoire (Dupont et Lemarchand 327).
- 14 Par exemple, dans son « roman fantastique », *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000), Maryse Condé traite de « zombie » le Blanc colonisateur en Afrique (63), aussi bien qu'une opiomane en Gaudeloupe (112) et un amant en peine après le départ de sa bien-aimée (186).
 - 15 Dans l'ouvrage fondateur, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths et Tiffin écrivent que la littérature postcoloniale exprime « a condition of alienation » (10); ils dérivent le concept de l'aliénation postcoloniale de celle qu'observe Frantz Fanon et d'autres durant l'époque coloniale dans *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952).
 - 16 Depestre avait quitté le pays quelques vingt ans avant le premier des écrivains étudiés ici et semble ignorer les réalités quotidiennes de Haïti sous les Duvalier; son engagement reste plutôt international, prêtant ses talents à la lutte communiste.

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Snowball Effect

When my side-armed curve-ball took his
toque off by its pom-pom Mr. Albery
turned and shouted: something about
causing concussions or cracking open
someone's skull. At the time I thought he'd
over-reacted—there was a tremor in his voice
fear concentrate with a mix of anger
as if he detected (well before I did)
the rage beneath the playful gesture, bared
fangs turned into eager smile, my
teasing a disguise of violence—but the way
things later developed, I expect he was right,
that he'd caught a glimpse of the Mr. Hyde
who'd begun to hide out in my closet.
At night on the dry lip of sleep you can
hear him rummaging about in the basement,
clink of test-tubes, fizz of chemicals,
seeking his original face.

Fuir le regard de l'Autre ou apprendre à habiter l'espace d'immigration.

La quête du Soi dans *Ce pays qui est le mien* de Didier Leclair

Pour l'écrivain issu de l'immigration—qu'on l'associe à une littérature dite immigrante, migrante ou, comme le propose Nathalie Prud'Homme, « (im)migrante¹ »—, prendre la parole signifie souvent se mettre dans une position inconfortable d'entre-deux identitaire, puisque cette parole sera nécessairement prise à la fois dans un rapport d'appartenance, et d'altérité avec l'espace où elle est prononcée. Une appartenance d'abord institutionnelle en tant que la parole de l'écrivain immigrant participe à la réflexion sociale, culturelle, et littéraire de la communauté d'accueil, ensuite ethnique en tant que reflet d'une parole immigrante en terre étrangère. Paradoxalement, cette double appartenance signifie également le risque d'une double exclusion; entre ces deux appartenances qui s'offrent à lui, l'écrivain immigrant hésite puisqu'il sait que son discours, quel qu'il soit, aura pour effet de lui attribuer une étiquette dont il ne pourra se défaire que difficilement. Ainsi, notent Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand,

l'écrivain immigrant se tient constamment sur la corde raide, selon les positions qu'il adopte en face de la société et du milieu où il agit. Ou bien, il se fait le porte-parole de sa communauté d'origine, position inconfortable en ce sens qu'elle fait de lui l'écrivain ethnique de service, ou encore le représentant d'une ethnicité institutionnalisée. Ou bien, il s'assimile à l'imaginaire de l'autre, de manière à gommer les différences et il risque de passer inaperçu. Ou bien, . . . il assume sa différence, mettant en relief les cultures auxquelles il appartient, celle de son origine et celle des pays de son aire culturelle, l'Europe, dont il est un témoin. Ou bien, il se présente comme un mélange de cultures, un métis, le produit d'une somme intégrée de formes et d'imaginaires différents, et alors, il apparaît comme indifférencié (154-155).

Dans tous les cas, c'est souvent la réception de l'œuvre qui rend problématique la parole de l'écrivain immigrant. D'une part, si le texte qu'il présente ne correspond pas aux revendications de la communauté culturelle à laquelle il est lié par son origine, l'écrivain immigrant devra se défendre de refuser son attachement à cette dernière. D'autre part, la communauté d'accueil percevra en lui la parole d'un Autre, c'est-à-dire qu'il sera d'emblée marqué du poids de l'altérité, ce qui le mettra en marge d'un centre de références qui serait la littérature de l'ici, donc la littérature locale, nationale, dite de souche. Il est d'ailleurs significatif qu'on utilise le terme de *littérature immigrante* ou *migrante* pour désigner les œuvres d'auteurs provenant d'un ailleurs, comme si cette « littérature », offrant généralement un regard éclairé sur la société à laquelle elle participe, ne pouvait s'intégrer, note Clément Moisan qui préfère parler d'*écriture* que de *littérature*, à la littérature locale : « Cette clarification des termes me paraît importante d'autant plus que l'ambiguïté de *littérature migrante* ou *immigrante* laisse planer l'idée d'une dissociation entre les écrivains et les œuvres d'un corpus littéraire, celui de la littérature que j'appelle toujours "nationale" . . . » (52). L'écrivain immigrant, par sa naissance, par son origine ethnique autre, se trouve donc d'emblée minorisé, marginalisé, voire stigmatisé, sous l'étiquette de l'« immigrant » ou du « migrant », celui, finalement, qui ne sera jamais véritablement considéré, constate Robert Dickson, comme étant d'ici : « . . . je trouve un petit peu problématique qu'on soit obligés, qu'on se sente obligés, dans quelque milieu que ce soit, de préciser si c'est pas tout à fait québécois, c'est de ceci ou de cela. Dire : "Écrivains migrants" semble sous-entendre l'espoir qu'ils vont partir ailleurs éventuellement. » (cité dans Hotte et Melançon 372)

Pour Didier Leclair, cette marginalisation de l'immigrant ne se limite pas qu'à la seule figure de l'écrivain, mais représente l'expérience de tous les immigrants qui se trouvent, en arrivant dans le pays d'accueil, confrontés aux regards d'une majorité qui ne perçoit souvent en eux que l'expression d'une différence. L'immigrant, comme tout groupe minoritaire, note Leclair, s'inscrit dans l'espace d'un Même majoritaire sous le signe de l'altérité, d'une note discordante, qui ne pourra jamais être intégré à l'identité du Même puisque marqué par sa différence (ethnique, linguistique, religieuse, etc.) :

Sa différence par rapport à la majorité qui l'entoure est impossible à dissimuler, à diminuer ou même à travestir, ne serait-ce qu'un jour, une heure ou une seconde. C'est un être qui a le dos au mur. Il peut s'agir de sa race, de sa religion, de sa langue ou d'autres éléments qui font de cette personne un être dans l'impossibilité de se déclarer de la majorité (« Être minoritaire » 352).

Avant même de prendre la parole, d'agir dans l'espace qu'il habite désormais, l'immigrant doit subir le regard du Même majoritaire comme étant une première étape à son identification dans l'espace qui représente désormais son lieu d'habitation. Un regard d'autant plus persistant dans le contexte d'écriture de Didier Leclair que ce Même majoritaire qui reçoit ses romans, soit le cadre critique franco-ontarien, est lui-même en position de minoritaire en quête d'affirmation et de reconnaissance, ce qui, constate Robert Yergeau, tant à centraliser la réception des œuvres autour d'une perspective identitaire : « . . . les corps prescriptifs institutionnels tirent à eux les postures scripturaires, les inféodent à un surtexte culturel et social. » (10) Un constat que fait également François Paré : « Les petites institutions littéraires, surtout dans la première fascination de leur "naissance", se méfient justement du risque et de l'erreur et sont donc peut-être plus facilement portées par l'orthodoxie. Une fois la parole prise, elle se laisse naturellement structurer par une fausse notion de la permanence. » (105) C'est à ce regard « autre », marqué par l'urgence de l'affirmation de son identité et de sa permanence, que Leclair se réfère lorsqu'on lui demande de positionner son œuvre par rapport à la production littéraire franco-ontarienne : « Je pense que la question devrait avoir une réponse non seulement de la part de l'écrivain, mais de la part de celui qui lit. Si celui qui lit se sent à l'aise, se sent confortable, se sent vraiment à l'aise avec le livre, eh bien, il a un écrivain de chez lui. » (cité dans Hotte et Melançon 371) Encore une fois, l'immigrant ne participe pleinement à l'espace qu'il habite que dans la mesure où le regard porté sur lui arrive à voiler, du moins momentanément, ce qui le stigmatise. L'écrivain immigrant semble ainsi prisonnier de ce flottement du soi entre appartenance et exclusion.

S'il est vrai que le regard du majoritaire peut avoir une incidence sur la représentation de l'immigrant dans l'espace d'habitation, rappelons que ce dernier doit également subir le regard de ses « compatriotes », de ceux qui partagent une même expérience d'immigration et d'exclusion, et qui, pour cette raison, entretiennent des attentes précises quant au comportement qu'il doit adopter en société. Les attentes du lecteur immigrant s'expliquent par un esprit de solidarité entre individus minoritaires qui, pour rompre avec l'isolement de l'ici, se regroupent afin de s'inventer un lieu d'appartenance, un espace où le soi peut se reconnaître dans le confort d'un Même identitaire. Leclair signale cependant que ce regroupement entre individus partageant les mêmes différences sociales, par rapport à la majorité, aura pour effet d'accentuer ces différences et, par le fait même, de les isoler davantage en tant que groupe en les condamnant à une vie de ghetto. On retrouve

alors l'inconfortable position que Moisan et Hildebrant associent à la prise de parole de l'écrivain immigrant, c'est-à-dire l'obligation de se positionner nettement dans l'espace identitaire auquel il participe. Entre la communauté d'accueil et celle dans laquelle l'immigrant se reconnaît par ses différences, Leclair se demande cependant s'il faut réellement faire un choix ou si, plutôt, il ne serait pas mieux de refuser de s'enfermer dans un de ces cadres identitaires fixes pour se choisir soi-même : « Face aux préjugés et aux bâtons dans les roues, il y a le progrès individuel. . . . Il faudra que le minoritaire se rééduque, se réinvente comme le castor, symbole canadien, c'est-à-dire, créer des barrages et des cours d'eau sans attendre de l'aide, lutter ainsi pour des siècles contre les fléaux du monde et modifier le territoire à son avantage. » (« Être minoritaire » 355) L'immigrant, selon Leclair, doit ainsi refuser de se laisser enfermer dans un ghetto, soit par le regard de la société d'accueil, soit par la reconnaissance de la communauté issue d'une même expérience de migration, pour s'affirmer lui-même dans l'ici. Il doit tenter de mettre fin à sa migration afin de finalement habiter l'espace de sa nouvelle existence, sans pour autant oublier l'expérience individuelle, personnelle, intime, de l'origine. Il doit, en quelque sorte, prendre la mesure de son humanité et se réinventer non plus à partir des *a priori* identitaires, mais plutôt dans la somme des expériences individuelles vécues à la fois dans l'ailleurs et dans l'ici. La présence du soi-migrant au monde devient alors, comme le constate Jacqueline Beaugé-Rosier dans le contexte franco-ontarien, une expérience du quotidien qui l'inscrit, par le dialogue qu'il établit avec autrui, dans la polyphonie (par la présence des voix de la communauté d'origine et de la double communauté d'accueil, francophone et anglophone) du lieu habité :

C'est sur les assises de cette parole glanée au fil du rasoir temporel que s'édifie la géographie d'un futur humain et littéraire mieux adapté à la plurivocité des langages du monde et aux transformations de ses réalités quotidiennes. Ce sont toutes les germinations polyphoniques du verbe inventeur qui contribuent, de toute évidence, à faire avancer l'heureuse rencontre des grammairiens de la dissemblance et autres partenaires des lieux-dits de la littérature. (41)

Pour se rendre l'espace habitable, il suffirait alors à l'immigrant d'établir avec le monde qui l'entoure un dialogue mettant non plus en contact des identités culturellement déterminées, mais plutôt des individus définis par leur humanité.

Cette quête d'habitabilité de l'espace, cette recherche du soi entre le lieu de l'origine et le pays d'accueil, Didier Leclair la met en scène dans *Ce pays qui est le mien* à travers les errances, dans la ville de Toronto, d'Apollinaire

Mavoungou, un médecin dont le statut d'immigrant semble lui interdire toute reconnaissance—professionnelle et individuelle. Ce refus que ressent Apollinaire entraînera chez lui un rejet de l'ici qui se traduit par l'inscription du soi dans un espace parallèle, fantasmé, en marge de la société torontoise, un lieu qui reproduit dans l'ici l'espace de l'origine. Mais entre l'espace de la société d'accueil, qui le réduit, le jour, à sa seule identité d'immigrant, et l'espace d'une Afrique fantasmée dans l'ici torontois, qui, la nuit, lui permet de retrouver son identité de médecin, Apollinaire arrive de moins en moins à se reconnaître et comprend que cette dichotomie qui semble régir sa vie n'est peut-être qu'un leurre, qu'une représentation du monde faussée par son propre regard d'immigrant qui refuse d'abandonner sa vie d'autrefois. Ici l'immigrant, pour apprendre à habiter l'espace où il a fait le choix de vivre avec sa famille, doit d'abord surmonter la déception du lieu, le regard du Blanc qui le fait Autre, mais également la mémoire de ce qu'il était dans le pays natal. Pour qu'il y ait passage entre ce qu'il était en Afrique et ce qu'il espère devenir en Amérique, Apollinaire doit faire le deuil de son passé, rompre avec une certaine image fantasmée du soi, et accepter le risque de renaître, d'accepter de voir le jour, dans le pays qui est désormais le sien.

**Déception et exclusion :
la non-reconnaissance du soi dans le pays d'accueil**

Le fantasme du soi, de l'origine, s'inscrit dans le roman par le refus d'Apollinaire de s'assumer dans l'espace réel, de rompre avec son passé africain et de se repositionner dans l'ici et le maintenant. Un refus qui trouve sa source d'abord dans la déception du personnage qui a le sentiment de ne pas être reconnu, par la société d'accueil, dans son *être*, c'est-à-dire dans ce qui donne un sens à sa vie, soit son statut de médecin. Non seulement Apollinaire, après cinq années passées au Canada, n'est toujours pas parvenu à faire reconnaître son statut de médecin, mais il est condamné à une relative pauvreté alors qu'il ne peut occuper que de petits emplois sporadiques, sans envergure, qui semblent le maintenir au bas de l'échelle sociale : « [Il] travaillait pour une compagnie de téléphone, au service à la clientèle. Mais il changeait fréquemment d'emploi. Quand ce n'était pas une agence de voyage, c'était une pizzeria ou encore une compagnie de livraison. En Afrique, il avait pratiqué la médecine. Au Canada, il n'avait pas le droit d'exercer son métier. » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 11) Or, constate Myriam Hachimi Alaoui suite à son enquête sur l'intégration professionnelle des nouveaux arrivants algériens à Montréal, la reconnaissance des compétences professionnelles des immigrants joue

souvent un rôle primordial dans leur intégration à la communauté d'accueil puisqu'elle leur assure le maintien d'un certain statut social au sein de cette même communauté. C'est par la reconnaissance de ce statut qu'ils parviendront à surmonter les épreuves qu'entraîne inévitablement le long processus d'adaptation auquel ils seront quotidiennement confrontés. Ne pas reconnaître ce statut équivaut à briser tout élan d'intégration de certains d'entre eux qui, désillusionnés quant à leur avenir au sein du pays d'accueil, vivent leur migration comme un échec existentiel : « [Les immigrants] se sentent dépossédés du choix de leur destinée, ce qui rend difficile le renversement du sens de l'épreuve. Ils ont le sentiment d'avoir perdu le statut d'auteur de leur propre histoire. » (Hachimi Alaoui 118) C'est alors toute l'expérience de l'immigration que ces immigrants associent au sentiment de perte qu'entraîne la non-reconnaissance de leur statut professionnel : « . . . certains d'entre eux expérimentent le sentiment de leur finitude et font le deuil d'une carrière professionnelle. » (116) Évidemment, souligne Hachimi Alaoui, l'expérience n'est pas toujours vécue sous le signe de la dépossession, alors que d'autres immigrants parleront davantage de leur « carrière d'immigrant » que de leur « carrière brisée ». Dans ce cas, les épreuves, aussi longues et difficiles qu'elles peuvent paraître, sont vécues comme « autant d'étapes inhérentes à une carrière d'immigrant » (118) qui, à la fin, leur permettra de se réapproprier leur statut professionnel ou, à tout le moins, d'améliorer leur statut social.

Dans *Ce pays qui est le mien*, il ne fait aucun doute que l'expérience de l'immigration, de la perte de son statut de médecin, est d'abord vécue par Apollinaire sous le signe d'une dépossession qui remet en question à la fois sa place dans l'espace social et le sens même de sa propre existence. Il associe d'ailleurs la non-reconnaissance de son statut à une mise à mort symbolique proférée par le pays d'accueil et dont il a lui-même, inconsciemment, signé l'arrêt : « je ne suis plus docteur. Quand j'ai signé mon formulaire d'immigration, j'ai signé mon arrêt de mort. » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 86) Une condamnation d'autant plus cruelle qu'elle est associée à une trahison² pire que l'emprisonnement et la torture qu'il aurait subis s'il était resté dans son pays :

Le médecin préférerait la douleur physique à ce refus systématique d'un bourreau invisible de lui rendre son destin d'homme de science, d'être humain doué d'un savoir qui peut sauver des vies. L'étouffement mental qu'il subissait était d'autant plus violent qu'il ignorait quand cela finirait. Il ne s'agissait pas d'arrêter quand le prisonnier s'évanouissait. Il n'y avait pas de fin à la douleur d'Apollinaire. (115)

L'immigration devient alors pour Apollinaire le lieu de ce que Albert Memmi associe à une nouvelle défaite qui vient s'ajouter à celle « qui l'a fait quitter

son pays natal; on veut lui faire payer d'un prix plus pénible encore, son billet d'entrée : changer d'âme ou jouer la comédie » (Memmi 113). Face à cette mort du soi, Apollinaire ne peut qu'affirmer son regret d'être tombé dans le piège de l'immigration : « Je ne le savais pas! Sinon, je n'aurais jamais quitté mon pays. » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 86) Si Apollinaire refuse de changer d'âme, il ne se résigne à jouer le jeu de l'immigrant, du moins le jour, que parce qu'il sent bien qu'il ne peut fuir le regard de l'Autre majoritaire, ce regard « aveugle » qui se pose constamment sur lui sans nécessairement le voir, ou, plutôt, en ne voyant en lui que l'image stéréotypée de l'immigrant comme citoyen de deuxième ordre.

Ce regard, Apollinaire le perçoit particulièrement dans son lieu de travail où les superviseurs, qu'il décrit comme des « requins », surveillent constamment les employés : « Officiellement, il s'agissait de vérifier si l'employé faisait bien son travail. En réalité, plus sournoisement, on voulait rendre les employés conscients d'une surveillance permanente. » (46) Une surveillance qui semble d'autant plus dérangeante pour Apollinaire qu'elle est associée à une douleur puisée dans la mémoire coloniale, dans le traumatisme qu'a entraîné le rapport de pouvoir entre le maître et l'esclave, reproduit ici dans le rapport de l'immigrant africain et de son supérieur. Il est d'ailleurs intéressant de souligner que le chapitre où Apollinaire se présente au travail est intitulé « Les serviteurs venus d'ailleurs », comme si, dans cet enfer du travail, Apollinaire et ses compatriotes n'avaient pu s'affranchir d'un ancien pouvoir colonial, qu'ils n'étaient toujours que les « damnés » d'une terre inhospitalière, les victimes d'un regard qui ne cesse d'attendre les occasions d'affirmer son pouvoir sur eux :

Ces surveillants étaient d'une race à part. On aurait cru des rejetons illégitimes du diable en personne. Ils avaient le pouvoir de vous faciliter la tâche comme de vous enfouir sous un labeur digne des galères. Leurs critiques venimeuses, véritables fouets de contremaître, vous lacéraient le moral. Même leurs regards avaient parfois cette cruauté qui évoquait des négriers dans un champ de cannes à sucre. (48)

Un pouvoir qu'Apollinaire juge illégitime puisqu'il se fonde sur un système quasi dictatorial où les dirigeants sont, pour la plupart, des individus choisis par le pouvoir pour leur goût du pouvoir : « La plupart d'entre eux auraient vendu leur mère pour réussir dans la vie. On les recrutait jeunes, histoire de faire d'eux de vrais dévoués à la cause du patronat. » (48) Aussi, pour ajouter au sentiment de trahison d'Apollinaire, ce système patronal semble exclure d'emblée les expériences et les compétences des immigrants au profit de la naïveté de jeunes Blancs qui, par leur appartenance à la majorité, passeront

au rang de « supérieurs ». Il en va ainsi de Lynn qui, dans le regard d'Apollinaire, s'inscrit sous le signe du stéréotype de la jeune blonde dont la beauté semble suffire à justifier son incompétence :

Il se souvint qu'on lui avait demandé de former une nouvelle employée. Il s'agissait de Lynn, la ravissante blonde qui était devenue son superviseur. Il s'était acquitté de cette tâche avec la plus grande patience. Mais il sut, dès qu'elle lui fut présentée, qu'elle allait le dépasser en grade très rapidement. . . . Lynn, cette jeune femme à peine sortie de l'adolescence, avait été plaisante tout au long de sa formation. Or, tout ce manège faillit le tuer, même s'il ne le montra jamais. Il avait formé d'autres personnes avant elle; Lynn, c'était la goutte qui faisait déborder le vase. C'était la personne de trop. Il fut rongé de l'intérieur et sa colère se transforma en haine. . . Sa blondeur, ses lèvres rouges, sa fausse moue eurent presque raison de sa santé mentale. . . Ses erreurs étaient des oublis, sa paresse, de simples contretemps, et son français famélique un superbe effort pour un début. Le médecin passa trois semaines à expliquer les services qu'offrait la compagnie. (184)

Malgré cette incompétence qu'Apollinaire perçoit en Lynn, la jeune femme surpasse le médecin dans l'organigramme de la compagnie et c'est lui qui, notamment en raison des préjugés que véhiculent les clients³, sera constamment amené à justifier ses actes auprès de ses supérieurs.

Pour Apollinaire, comme pour d'autres immigrants qu'il rencontre⁴, l'immigration est donc vécue comme une humiliation à subir, ce qui entraîne inévitablement un ressentiment à l'égard de la société d'accueil : l'immigrant, ici, se définit en victime du regard de l'Autre, du majoritaire, qui ne reconnaît pas en lui l'être humain, l'individu, issu d'une expérience sociale et culturelle différente de celle de l'ici, mais le stéréotype de l'immigrant, souvent pauvre et criminel. Ce qui amène le capitaine Koumba, un ancien tortionnaire en son pays, à affirmer : « Aux yeux des Blancs, à trois heures du matin, nous sommes tous identiques. Notre passé n'a plus aucune importance. Notre avenir non plus d'ailleurs. » (122) Un discours qu'endosse Apollinaire et qui reproduit, dans une certaine mesure, les reproches formulés, notamment par Frantz Fanon, à l'endroit des pays colonisateurs qui ont exploité sans retenue l'espace des colonisés; la critique, donc, d'un système où la figure du colonisé—ici, l'immigrant africain—est perçue comme étant dénuée de valeurs sociales. Un être qui serait, par sa seule appartenance à l'ailleurs, un être suspect :

[...] le colon fait du colonisé une sorte de quintessence du mal. La société colonisée n'est pas seulement décrite comme une société sans valeurs. Il ne suffit pas au colon d'affirmer que les valeurs ont déserté, ou mieux n'ont jamais habité, le monde colonisé. L'indigène est déclaré imperméable à l'éthique, absence de valeurs, mais aussi négation des valeurs. Il est, osons l'avouer, l'ennemi des valeurs. (Fanon 44)

Le rapport du Blanc avec le Noir, du colonisateur avec le colonisé, qu'énonce le capitaine, Apollinaire en fait l'expérience lorsque sa colère éclate et qu'il se dispute avec Adèle, son épouse, au sujet d'un montant d'argent qu'Apollinaire décide de verser à son cousin Norbert, en Afrique, plutôt qu'au loyer. Deux policiers se rendent alors à leur domicile et l'un d'entre eux, une femme francophone, traite Apollinaire de « Maudit chien sale » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 91) et lui dit : « On devrait les renvoyer d'où ils viennent, des gars comme toi! » (98) Si le deuxième policier semble moins agressif envers Apollinaire, il n'associe pas moins la violence du médecin à son origine autre : « Ici, on ne tape pas les femmes. C'est interdit par la loi. » (91) Comme si, note Kathleen Kellett-Betsos, « la violence contre les femmes était un phénomène d'immigrants plutôt qu'une réalité canadienne plus généralisée » (113).

Bien qu'il soit conscient du geste qu'il a failli poser avant l'arrivée des policiers, Apollinaire refuse de se sentir entièrement responsable de son comportement à l'égard de sa femme, il attribue plutôt la faute au regard du majoritaire alors que l'absence de reconnaissance de son statut de médecin par la société d'accueil fait de lui davantage une victime qu'un agresseur. Ce renversement de l'image qu'Apollinaire se fait de lui-même s'explique par le regard qu'il subit quotidiennement : c'est ainsi qu'il justifie la violence dont il fait preuve par la haine qu'éveille en lui le sentiment de ne plus être lui-même, d'avoir perdu, en même temps que son statut de médecin, l'essence même du soi. Adèle, qui lui reproche son manque d'implication dans la vie familiale et dans l'intégration de cette dernière au sein du pays d'accueil, n'avait finalement servi que de catalyseur à son ressentiment pour tout ce qui pourrait représenter le processus d'infériorisation qu'il subit quotidiennement au travail : « Il admettait vouloir infliger à ses supérieurs hiérarchiques les sévices qu'il connaissait. Cette violence contenue, à l'intention de Lynn, Sébastien, Jacques Dorion et les autres, s'était manifestée contre Adèle. » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 184-185) Au moment de l'agression, la seule solution qui s'offre à Apollinaire se trouve dans la fuite vers un ailleurs imaginaire, dans le déni de sa réalité, dans un lieu où il pourrait retrouver l'image du soi qu'il était en Afrique.

Ne plus être l'Autre : le fantasme du ghetto

Albert Memmi remarque que l'immigrant, confronté à la déception que représente ce qui devait pourtant être la Terre promise, tente de compenser les pertes amenées par l'immigration en reproduisant, dans le ghetto, « un duplicata en réduction de la patrie abandonnée » (102), c'est-à-dire un prolongement du pays natal au sein même du pays d'accueil. Cet espace sert à

l'immigrant de lieu de repli où il retrouve, ou a l'impression de retrouver, la reconnaissance dont il jouissait au pays, un endroit où surtout, remarque Memmi, « préservé du regard des étrangers, il n'a pas l'impression d'être de trop; entouré de visages familiers, même inconnus, il se sent presque au pays, au milieu d'une majorité factice » (103). Or, c'est précisément ce qui se produit dans *Ce pays qui est le mien*, alors qu'Apollinaire, refusant de vivre en immigrant, d'accepter de se définir par le regard de l'Autre, fuit chaque nuit sa réalité en intégrant un univers parallèle où, par le rapport avec d'autres Africains, il a l'impression de redevenir celui qu'il était dans son pays.

Cet univers de remplacement que se crée Apollinaire est cependant de l'ordre de la fabulation, du rêve, et le prolongement de son passé africain n'est toujours possible que la nuit et, encore, sous un nom appartenant à sa vie d'avant l'immigration. L'identité que revêt Apollinaire dans la nuit, celle du docteur Schweitzer, apparaît dès l'ouverture du roman alors que le personnage est dans un état de sommeil profond, marqué par l'immobilité du corps et « le besoin intense, presque maladif, de prolonger la nuit au-delà de la ligne arbitraire du jour » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 9). En fait, ce qui étonne dans ces premières pages du roman, c'est la facilité avec laquelle Apollinaire passe de ce sommeil profond à l'état de veille alors que le téléphone sonne et que son interlocuteur réclame l'aide du docteur Schweitzer : « Apollinaire, que ses compatriotes appelaient Schweitzer, comprit que Nicéphore avait besoin d'un médecin. » (10) Plutôt que de référer son patient à un médecin qui pourrait légalement le soigner, Apollinaire endosse le rôle de Schweitzer et accourt au secours de Nicéphore qui, pourtant, se posera plus tard comme une figure antagoniste. Seule la même appartenance à la communauté africaine, à une même origine, semble justifier le déplacement d'Apollinaire dans la nuit; ce que confirme d'ailleurs son rapport avec Marcella, l'épouse battue de Nicéphore, qu'il tente d'aider à travers les soins qu'il donne au mari :

Elle venait du même village que lui. Cette appartenance à la même terre voulait tout dire dans la tête d'une femme comme Marcella [...] Marcella voyait Apollinaire comme un témoin de sa vie. Quelqu'un qui pouvait confirmer d'où elle venait, qui savait que sa vie avant celle du pays froid n'était pas un mirage. (17)

Ce lien qui s'installe entre les personnages, qui servent chacun pour l'autre de témoin d'une existence antérieure à l'immigration, s'applique également aux rapports qu'entretient Apollinaire avec l'ensemble des patients qu'il soigne clandestinement dans la nuit : en acceptant de prendre le nom de Schweitzer, Apollinaire reproduit dans l'espace torontois l'illusion de reprendre son identité d'autrefois.

Ce n'est donc pas le sommeil qu'Apollinaire désire prolonger dans la nuit, mais plutôt l'impression que la nuit lui apporte de retrouver son identité d'autrefois. La nuit, en fait, comme espace d'un ailleurs imaginaire que le regard de la communauté africaine reproduit au cœur de Toronto. Aussi, le taxi, emprunté à un ami, lui permettra de reproduire l'illusion de son statut social passé alors qu'il se rend dans les quartiers riches de Toronto pour déposer les clients qu'il accepte de reconduire. C'est dans ces endroits aux maisons luxueuses qu'Apollinaire parvient à oublier quelque peu sa misère et à retrouver, au son d'une musique africaine, une certaine quiétude qui disparaîtra dès le lever du jour. Mais c'est surtout vers le quartier louche de Regent Park qu'Apollinaire se rend chaque nuit :

C'est là qu'on l'appelle "Apo le doc", là qu'il exerce illégalement sa profession de médecin en distribuant des préservatifs aux prostituées et des seringues aux drogués et surtout en apportant des médicaments à un jeune sidéen africain, fils adoptif d'un Blanc canadien dont la famille n'a pas voulu accueillir un nouveau membre africain (Kellet-Betsos 115).

C'est également dans ce quartier que se trouve le Zanzibar, un bar où se rencontrent les immigrants africains et où est reproduite l'image d'une Afrique à la fois rêvée et crainte. Ici, les membres de la communauté africaine se sentent de retour chez eux, aux pays qu'ils ont quittés, du moins, celui dont ils gardent le souvenir. La migration vers le Canada n'a cependant rien changé aux peurs anciennes qu'ils ont transportées avec eux à travers les continents, et le regard qu'ils portent sur leurs compatriotes en est toujours un qui soupçonne la délation, les rapports trop étroits avec le pouvoir, un regard marqué par la peur de tomber dans les mains des tortionnaires pourtant restés au pays. On n'a qu'à penser à la perception que les clients du Zanzibar ont de la propriétaire, Colette, une ancienne « radio-trottoir »—qui « gagnait sa vie en louant une carte d'appel à toute personne qui voulait téléphoner d'une cabine publique » (109)—dont la réputation de délatrice impose le respect :

Ils [les radio-trottoirs] étaient les yeux et les oreilles des plus puissants. Le moindre coup de fil critiquant le régime finissait trop souvent dans l'oreille d'un haut cadre politique zélé. Comment faisaient-ils pour tout savoir? Les radio-trottoirs leur fournissaient les informations les plus cruciales; de la préparation d'un putsch, au retour en catimini d'un ancien martyr en passant par la prochaine révolte étudiante. (110)

Malgré la migration vers le Canada, Colette reste attachée à son titre de « radio-trottoir », alors que les clients craignent « qu'elle se souvienne de quelques méfaits du passé » (110), ce qui pourrait ternir leur réputation au

sein de la communauté africaine : « Une fois qu'on la perdait, on errait hors de sa communauté comme un mouton égaré. » (110) La peur, donc, d'un pouvoir qu'ils ont eux-mêmes reproduit dans l'ici et qui pourrait les exclure du ghetto, les forcer à un second exil qui serait plus difficile à vivre que le premier, puisqu'il aurait pour effet de les isoler davantage.

En se rendant au Zanzibar, c'est donc ce « regard africain », celui qui reproduit l'univers de l'origine, qui entretient les réputations d'autrefois, que cherche Apollinaire. Et cela, malgré les contradictions apparentes auquel renvoie l'univers improbable de cette Afrique fantasmée au cœur de Toronto. Il est d'ailleurs à noter que c'est par sa relation au capitaine Koumba, avec qui il joue au Scrabble, qu'Apollinaire retrouve son identité d'autrefois. On reconnaît bien, ici, l'aspect contradictoire d'Apollinaire qui, pour avoir l'impression de retrouver son identité perdue, se lie à un homme reconnu pour avoir été, sous l'ancien régime de son pays, un des tortionnaires les plus redoutables :

Personne ne l'avait vu à l'œuvre. Du moins, personne de vivant. On le décrivait entouré de sbires belliqueux dans un bureau humide et éclairé d'une ampoule pendue à un fil. Une lampe qui ne cessait de se balancer. Il avait la réputation d'être un bourreau peu bavard, n'élevant jamais le ton. Ses silences étaient des mots d'ordre pour frapper, brûler ou électrocuter. (111-12)

Le lien qui unit le capitaine et Apollinaire est connu de tous les clients du Zanzibar : le médecin soignait, dans leur pays, les victimes du tortionnaire. Un lien qui vaut à Apollinaire d'être à la fois respecté, en tant que médecin, et craint, en tant qu'ami du pouvoir. Un rapport ambigu entre les figures du médecin et du collaborateur qu'il porte en lui par le surnom qu'on lui attribue :

– Les prisonniers m'appelaient docteur Schweitzer. Pas parce que j'avais écrit des tracts . . . Il paraît que ce vieux docteur blanc du temps des colonies opérait les Africains à vif, sans anesthésie. Trop chère pour le bois d'ébène . . . Le surnom est resté et il m'a suivi jusqu'ici. (180)

L'image est effectivement intéressante puisqu'elle renvoie à un personnage historique, Albert Schweitzer, qui est principalement connu pour son travail en tant que médecin au Gabon et pour sa prise de position en tant que philosophe pour la reconnaissance des droits humains—qu'il a formulée, dans *La civilisation et l'éthique* (1976), par son « éthique du *Respect de la vie* ». Or, la représentation que s'en font les compatriotes d'Apollinaire, qui fuient les rapports sociaux avec les Blancs en s'enfermant dans le ghetto, en est une qui renvoie à l'imaginaire de la colonisation : Albert Schweitzer devient, dans le regard des Africains qui entourent Apollinaire, la figure du bourreau qui, sous prétexte de soigner les Noirs, participe à leur déshumanisation, ce qui

fait écho au discours de Fanon et, dans le roman, à celui de Koumba. Si on reconnaît, dans le traitement de la figure d'Albert Schweitzer, l'ambiguïté qui marque la présence d'Apollinaire au monde, on constate que cette ambiguïté s'efface au contact du capitaine qui, en altérant la réalité africaine, tente de convaincre Apollinaire que son rôle est de faire le bien en soignant ses compatriotes, dans son pays, peu importe son implication dans le maintien du rapport de force existant entre le pouvoir et les citoyens. Ainsi, le capitaine devient, pour Apollinaire, une sorte de passeur entre le monde réel et le monde imaginaire, entre la vie d'ici-maintenant et celle, idéalisée, de son passé africain; il est celui, finalement, qui lui permet, notamment par les médicaments qu'il lui donne illégalement, de rompre avec sa situation d'immigrant et de retrouver un certain confort identitaire perdu en cours de migration. On comprend alors l'implication du Zanzibar dans le processus d'identification d'Apollinaire : s'il refuse, le jour, de se laisser définir comme figure de l'immigrant par le regard du Blanc, son identité nocturne lui permet de se réinventer dans un espace imaginaire lui rappelant l'ailleurs de l'origine, ce qui n'est toujours possible que dans le regard de l'Autre, mais africain cette-fois.

Cette image du passeur n'est pas tout à fait innocente, car le capitaine Koumba, conscient du malaise que provoque le regard de la société d'accueil chez Apollinaire, et profitant de la satisfaction que ce dernier semble trouver dans le surnom de Schweitzer que ses compatriotes lui attribuent, propose au médecin de retourner au pays, où il pourrait pratiquer son métier à nouveau. Cette proposition du capitaine trouble Apollinaire qui, en même temps qu'il se sent dégoûté des commentaires de Koumba—qui affirme qu'ici Apollinaire ne sera jamais qu'un serviteur des Blancs⁵—, hésite avant de refuser l'offre et, même après être sorti du Zanzibar, soupèse

les possibilités de retourner au Zanzibar et de dire à Koumba qu'il acceptait. Partir. Fuir cette terre qui brillait si bien de loin et s'éteignait de près. S'échapper de ce pays aux mille miroirs déformants. Tout semblait prendre des contours monstrueux quand on vivait dans ces lieux. L'hiver sapait l'espoir à la racine, année après année. Le froid était plus froid, la neige plus épaisse, les visages plus impassibles que jamais. Pris dans un labyrinthe de glaces, le soleil, même offert par Satan, avait des rayons salvateurs. L'enfer chaud contre l'enfer froid. (Leclair, *Ce pays* 128)

Bien qu'il la refuse, cette offre du capitaine provoque chez Apollinaire une réflexion qui modifie lentement la perception qu'il a du monde. Dans le silence inhabituel du taxi, Apollinaire quitte le Zanzibar pour retourner vers sa maison et, en route, il comprend ce qui le poussait constamment à se rattacher à son ancien pays : Apollinaire prend conscience qu'il avait besoin « de se sentir membre à part entière d'un groupe, si loin soit-il » (129) pour

compenser la déception vécue dans l'immigration. Pour cela, il devait s'accrocher au rêve de l'ailleurs, du pays de l'origine où il serait possible de retourner pour reprendre sa vie là où il l'avait laissée. Mais voilà que, confronté à cette possibilité bien réelle d'un retour au pays natal, Apollinaire comprend que ce pays rêvé est peut-être un enfer pire que le cauchemar vécu dans l'ici.

Sortir de la nuit ou apprendre à habiter l'espace

Apollinaire se rend donc compte que l'espace rêvé dans lequel il vit la nuit n'est qu'une illusion servant à faire oublier non seulement la réalité de l'ici, mais également celle de l'ailleurs, du pays de l'origine. Pourquoi refuser l'offre du capitaine, sinon parce qu'il sait que rien n'a changé là-bas, et que, même si les dictateurs se succèdent, la population souffre toujours de la même corruption. La preuve en est que le capitaine Koumba lui-même est appelé à rentrer au pays pour servir un politicien qu'il avait pourtant torturé : « Je crois avoir une ou deux propositions que Joseph N'Gouma aura du mal à refuser. » (236) Quoiqu'il en soit, la décision de refuser ou non l'offre de Koumba amène Apollinaire à séparer deux univers diamétralement opposés et à se repositionner entre ces deux mondes. Mais pour y arriver, il doit d'abord briser l'image qu'il s'en fait, comprendre que ces deux univers représentent, justement, des images qu'il s'est créées à partir de la perte d'un statut qu'il croyait être l'essence même de sa vie. Il doit également comprendre que la ghettoïsation du soi qu'il justifie par le regard de l'Autre majoritaire participe, comme le note Albert Memmi, d'un cercle vicieux et que son regard sur le pays d'accueil représente aussi une cause de son exclusion : « Comme souvent, la vérité est circulaire : le ghetto est, à la fois, un refus et une réaction au refus, réel ou imaginé, par les autres. » (103)

Cette modification dans la perception qu'a Apollinaire de l'espace africain et du pays d'accueil passe essentiellement par l'univers familial, premier lieu d'appartenance. Le médecin est effectivement déchiré entre le désir de sa femme, qui lui demande de quitter sa vie nocturne et d'accepter sa nouvelle vie torontoise, et l'attachement qu'il garde, à travers son cousin Norbert, pour son pays. C'est d'ailleurs lorsque ce dernier téléphone à Apollinaire pour lui demander l'argent nécessaire pour soigner sa fille malade que la crise ou, plutôt, que le choc entre les deux univers se produit. Comment refuser d'aider celui qu'il considère comme son frère? D'un autre côté, faut-il sacrifier l'argent du loyer, la survie de sa propre famille, pour aider Norbert? Voici le dilemme auquel il fait face. Mais son besoin de se sentir lié à l'ailleurs l'emporte, et Apollinaire accepte de donner l'argent à Norbert. Or, pour Adèle,

en qui Apollinaire perçoit « une certaine résignation » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 11), le choix qui devait s'imposer est celui de sa famille au Canada. C'est au moment où elle affirme son refus d'aider Norbert qu'Apollinaire perd son calme et qu'il sent monter en lui toute la haine et la violence que le pays d'accueil lui inspire. C'est également à ce moment qu'il prend conscience de la précarité de sa double vie et du fait que, tôt ou tard, il devra faire face à la réalité :

Qu'allait-il faire, lui, de ses pas? Il esquissa un sourire triste. Il avait l'impression d'être perdu, de ramer dans le sens contraire du courant. La nuit réussissait à cacher ses activités. Plus pour longtemps. On allait le prendre en flagrant délit ou sa femme le quitterait, dépitée par son manque de courage pour affronter le jour, le puits de lumière où elle l'attendait. Une part de lui devait mourir s'il voulait sauver le père et le mari qu'il était. (99)

Si l'ultimatum d'Adèle le fait d'abord fuir, on constate que c'est cette menace de perdre sa place au sein de la famille qui l'aidera à modifier son regard sur le monde alors que les liens qui le rattachent à son passé s'effondrent lentement sous la lumière de plus en plus persistante du jour.

Apollinaire se rend compte du décalage qui existe entre la perception qu'il a des liens à l'Afrique et leur véritable solidité au moment d'envoyer l'argent à Norbert, un geste qui n'a d'autre but que de « se convaincre qu'il avait encore un lien ombilical avec son continent » (157) : « C'était de l'argent donné dans le but de se soulager. Il voulait se sentir en paix avec cette ramification africaine dont il avait si peu de nouvelles. » (157) Et lorsqu'il apprend que l'histoire de Norbert n'était que mensonge, que son cousin ne lui avait demandé de l'argent que pour entretenir sa maîtresse, Apollinaire, déçu, ne peut que s'en prendre à lui-même : « Il avait eu le choix de ne rien envoyer. Il avait décidé de le faire même quand il avait compris, au bureau de virement, que cela ne servait à rien; qu'il n'aidait pas Norbert mais ses propres chimères. » (189) Il est intéressant de constater que ces « chimères », intimement liées au passé et aux traditions de son pays—pensons à son rapport avec Marcella –, seront mises au jour par le ridicule qu'il trouve lui-même dans les croyances traditionnelles de son pays que représente la femme de Norbert qui, pour récupérer son mari, fait appel à un féticheur : « Sa déception, plutôt grande, d'apprendre que Norbert avait gaspillé son argent, semblait atténuée par cette histoire de féticheur et d'envoûtement. Il avait retrouvé les scénarios fréquents des couples de son pays de naissance. Il n'y avait presque jamais de drame triangulaire : le mari, la femme, et l'amante. Il fallait ajouter le féticheur. » (189) Il avait d'ailleurs dénoncé le maintien de ces traditions archaïques lorsqu'il avait appris que son ami Philibert devait

épouser, par un mariage arrangé, une jeune Africaine. Pourtant, ce mariage représentera l'adaptation de la tradition à l'espace nord-américain alors que l'épouse, devant la pauvreté de Philibert, accepte la vie d'ici et affirme vouloir travailler plutôt que de retourner chez ses parents où elle serait condamnée à vivre la vie d'un autre temps.

Ce désir qu'affirme la jeune épouse de Philibert représente en quelque sorte la nécessité, pour Apollinaire, de rompre avec son passé d'Africain, d'accepter d'intégrer le présent et de faire face à sa nouvelle vie. Pour cela, il doit d'abord accepter de mourir une première fois, de se défaire de l'image du docteur Schweitzer, afin de renaître en tant que soi dans l'espace torontois. Une mort qui s'impose au docteur à travers la figure d'OMS, un jeune Africain atteint du sida, qui refuse de le voir avant de mourir :

Pour chasser tes démons, il faut cesser de venir me voir. Personne ne peut t'aider sauf toi. La réalité est cruelle, surtout quand on lui tourne le dos. Puisque je fais face à mon sort, tu peux faire face au tien. Tu n'es plus médecin et bientôt, je ne serai plus en vie. J'attends les ténèbres et tu n'attends que le lever du jour. Ta compassion n'a besoin d'aucun diplôme, Schweitzer. Tu vauds bien plus que leur bout de papier de médecin. Le bonheur n'est pas dans un parchemin. (206)

C'est donc par OMS qu'Apollinaire apprend « qu'un mort n'est jamais mort » (206-207) et que la renaissance est possible si le corps accepte d'intégrer sa nouvelle réalité. C'est également grâce aux paroles du jeune sidéen qu'Apollinaire trouve le courage de téléphoner au capitaine Koumba pour refuser définitivement son offre d'un retour au pays natal. Comme si, en même temps, il acceptait de rompre avec l'ailleurs imaginaire :

Il ne voulait plus être à l'extérieur de la vie mais en son sein. Sa décision était irrévocable. Il en avait terminé avec les préservatifs distribués aux prostituées et les querelles de plus en plus violentes avec sa femme.

La clarté du jour l'attendait quelque part, avec son soleil éclaboussant la neige. Il devait réapprendre à écouter sa voix intérieure. Celle qui lui disait qu'il avait de la chance d'avoir une femme qui l'aime et une fille qui s'endort dans ses bras. (212)

Apollinaire préfère, à la fin, les liens solides de la famille à ceux fondés sur les chimères d'un passé révolu et d'une marge qui ne vit plus.

Une fois la décision prise, reste encore à se réconcilier avec Adèle. Une réconciliation qui se fera sous le signe d'une première ouverture au monde alors qu'Apollinaire découvre une réalité qui ne correspond pas à celle qu'il s'était imaginée. Sa femme lui apprend que, contrairement à lui, elle est parvenue à se trouver une place dont elle peut se dire satisfaite dans le pays d'accueil. Certes, elle a dû faire le deuil de sa carrière d'infirmière, mais sa vie n'est pas terminée pour autant : « On m'a proposé un poste supérieur à l'hôtel. Je crois

que je peux monter en grade dans cette boîte. Ma patronne aime beaucoup mon travail. » (224) Dès lors, Apollinaire comprend l'importance d'arrêter de fuir et d'intégrer l'espace, non pas en jouant le rôle que l'Autre (Blanc ou Africain) attend de lui, mais en restant lui-même dans son humanité. C'est ainsi que le roman se clôt sur une expérience qui n'a plus rien à voir avec une quelconque appartenance à une communauté prédéfinie, mais qui participe davantage de cette humanité qu'il doit désormais définir : alors qu'il se rend au travail, après sa réconciliation avec Adèle, une femme s'éffondre dans l'autobus. Si la première réaction d'Apollinaire est de fuir, il revient, sous l'insistance du propriétaire de la maison qu'il habite, qui se trouve là par hasard, pour aider la femme. Sous le regard du chauffeur d'autobus, alors qu'il fait jour, Apollinaire sauve la vie de la femme, ce qui lui vaudra la reconnaissance des témoins. Ce geste est lourd de sens pour Apollinaire puisqu'il vient confirmer, en quelque sorte, sa participation au monde : en acceptant de sauver cette femme, Apollinaire accepte désormais d'établir un rapport avec la société d'accueil qui ne soit plus un rapport d'infériorisation du soi, mais plutôt d'interaction entre individus égaux. Un rapport qui, finalement, lui donnera la reconnaissance qu'il a tant cherchée dans la nuit, alors que le responsable de la compagnie d'autobus lui annonce son intention de proposer sa candidature pour la remise d'une décoration pour son acte héroïque.

Le cheminement que suit Apollinaire tout au long du roman l'amène donc à se défaire d'un regard Autre qui, on le conçoit à la fin, n'existe réellement que dans l'imaginaire du soi. Le personnage prend effectivement conscience qu'il est le seul artisan de sa présence ou de son absence au monde, de sorte que, lorsqu'il décide de briser les frontières qu'il avait lui-même établies par son regard à la fois sur l'Autre majoritaire et sur la communauté de l'origine, Apollinaire parvient à effacer le stigmate qui le marginalisait, à intégrer le monde d'ici et à mettre fin à sa migration. À la fin, il comprend que ce n'était pas le regard de l'Autre qu'il fuyait, mais la peur de se faire lui-même Autre en se réinventant dans le pays d'accueil. En acceptant de re-voir le jour, Apollinaire accepte de naître une seconde fois dans l'espace d'habitation, dans ce pays qui est désormais le sien.

NOTES

- 1 Pour Nathalie Prud'Homme, l'appellation « écriture (im)migrante » reflète « une écriture qui met en scène l'expérience de l'émigration/immigration, une écriture qui veut présenter l'origine et l'adaptation à la société d'accueil. Un imaginaire qui n'est pas à la périphérie d'une pratique esthétique, mais la conçoit en fonction de l'exil, comme expérience sociale » (27).

- 2 « Les vendeurs de rêves qui travaillent pour le ministère de la Citoyenneté et de l'Immigration du Canada l'avaient volontairement induit en erreur. Il n'y avait nulle part de pays de rêve. » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 115).
- 3 On n'a qu'à penser à cette cliente qui se demande si elle est toujours au Canada lorsqu'Apollinaire se nomme. Dès lors, il y a mise à distance entre les interlocuteurs puisque la cliente n'associera Apollinaire qu'à une certaine idée qu'elle se fait de l'immigrant, refusant même d'entendre ce qu'il dit, feignant de ne pas comprendre : « Passez-moi votre superviseur tout de suite! Comment se fait-il qu'on embauche des illettrés dans cette compagnie? Je ne sais pas quelle langue vous parlez mais ce n'est pas ma langue! » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 51)
- 4 Pensons, par exemple, à ses collègues de travail, Abdoulaye Diallo et Chrisosthème, qui doivent subir le même regard oppressant de leurs superviseurs.
- 5 « Ces Blancs vous ont tous pour un morceau de pain. Ils vous accueillent à bras ouverts, vous donnent même leur passeport mais quand il s'agit de vous mettre dans leurs cabinets de consultation, c'est une autre histoire. N'oubliez jamais, docteur Mavoungou. Vous êtes ici pour leur rendre service, et non l'inverse. » (Leclair, *Ce pays* 127)

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water

there was water everywhere in late february
oozing through a swamp on the side road,
where the property was a wire fence,
a scrappy stand of twisted cedar; water spreading out
over 15 acres of marsh grass,
rising over the culverts
and filling the channels carved by tires on that long lane way;
this for several days, the water sliding through fences, over fields;
having let go for miles around,
and then during the last cold snap,
in one night it would freeze
again, and morning would find us
marooned behind a lake of bright sky ice and
no getting the car through at all.

but after the ice went, and the air warmed, there were ducks sometimes,
blasting from the cover of long grass in the glittering shallows, or
beavers, scattering saplings, building a dam back in the woods;
the pond that was dredged out by an impatient
backhoe, bucking and yawing among the trees,
because maybe a bigger pond would
keep the flood back; it didn't,
so a second one was dug a few years later,
further along; with no change, but we floated
in a dingy over their surfaces;
and by august, the water courses were dried mud
and moss-caked limestone, a dense earthy-grass smell;
in the smaller pond, the mud cracking,
buzzing with large flies;
further back among the trees, a hockey net pinned

in the long marsh grass;
the dried muck black in that place,
with the water gone, some primordial reality there,
flies clustering
down upon the deep organic mass.

and the house on the rise bearing witness
through generations to that doubled reality:
the desiccated watercourses, the sweltering still
afternoons, or the ice with the fields in its
grip, holding everything away from any
use at all, except the moonscape of snow—
the mind flooded with these pictures,
and the water's endless flowing
(coming across a stream trickling out of the roots
of a tree up in the bush, on the hottest days,
the watered grass where it flowed a green moment,
or the black ice we played hockey on,
the trapped creek moving down there);
even now, blood memory hearing it
late at night in march, the water washing down over the front fields,
funneling through the culverts, the dark ropes of its flux
and surge, roaring steadily as one drifted out to sleep
by moonlight, the racing waters shimmering,
ice cold, endless murmur over
rock and earth

“I had never seen such a
shed called a house before”
The Discourse of Home in Susanna
Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush*

As one of the foundational texts in Canadian literature, Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) has received extensive scholarly attention, much of it concerned with Moodie’s sense of placement, or ill-placement, in Canada. Critics from Northrop Frye to Bina Freiwald have commented on the character of Moodie’s relationship to her surroundings and on her success or failure in making herself “at home.” My own reading of Moodie’s text focuses on the very concept of “home,” which is indeed, as Sneja Gunew notes in a recent editorial essay on women’s diasporic writing, “at the heart of debates” on expatriation and migration (8). In *Roughing It in the Bush*, Moodie constructs a complex narrative of home, which is cast as a failure of homecoming from its beginning. At the same time, she turns to a narrativity which centres on her husband and children in order to reproduce a kind of “home matrix” otherwise lost. This familial discourse¹ serves as the basis for an attempted system of self-location. “[I]sn’t ‘home’ . . . where the children are, and isn’t Moodie indeed ‘at home’ with them,” asks Freiwald in her reading of *Roughing It* (170). My analysis, however, finds that Moodie’s maternal and spousal narrativity fails her in that it is insufficient to close the gap between her self and Canada. “Home,” therefore, remains out of reach.

Specifically, *Roughing It in the Bush* relies on a narrative of home that constructs two figures—those of belonging and exile—as opposites.² This narrative is manifest in two different and competing specifications: home as house—and in the broader sense, as homeland—and home as family. The former both articulates and literalizes the very experiences that constitute

the figure of exile: dislocation, dispossession, homelessness, and the impossibility of coming home. The second—home as family—centres on Moodie's attempts to cover up the insufficiencies of home as house (and homeland) by shifting her emphasis from the material to the familial, to the very relationality—marriage and motherhood—that a narrative of home as family implicitly offers. Placement on these terms, however, inscribes a relation of obligation and "duty" (in her own words [207]), experienced by Moodie repeatedly as a form of imprisonment. To put it quite bluntly, marriage and motherhood doom Susanna Moodie to a lifetime of feeling out of place.³

The "Susanna Moodie" to whom I refer is, of course, not the author but rather a constructed persona, although to some extent "the narrated figure may also be read as a reflection of the historic" (Gerson 12). Moodie the professional writer uses certain conventions and strategies in her self-representation—including a strategy of "feminine self-effacement," which, as Misao Dean observes, highlights Susanna's conformity to gendered norms of behaviour (25)—in order to appeal to her readership. Yet no narrative, *Roughing It* included, is entirely conscious and deliberate.⁴ "Whatever Moodie's conscious intention," *Roughing It* became not just "a deeply felt personal record," nor just "a many-sided attempt to justify the failure . . . in the backwoods," as Michael Peterman astutely comments, but it is also evidence of Moodie's lasting discomfort with the notion of home in Canada: even as she was "comfortably settled in Belleville" when the book came together (*Epoch* 18, 16), her sense of the insufficiency of her earlier homes was undiminished. I suggest that the text's juxtaposition of competing discourses of home constitutes a feature in which the constructed nature of the narrative comes apart, giving access to some of the textual unconscious.

In my reading, this "dark core" of unawareness (to borrow Stephen Shapiro's phrase [436]) in Moodie's memoir centres on the house/home, a figure that represents the stronghold of colonial presence in a settler society. While the concept of "home" is necessarily a complex one in expatriate writing, because it always also involves loss, emigrants nevertheless leave behind their old homes with the intention, hope, and desire of finding a new one. Within these parameters, the sketches and anecdotes in *Roughing It in the Bush* play out as a failed-homecoming plot.⁵ The story begins with the end of a literal journey, but any thought of a quest successfully performed to gain security or freedom is immediately subverted with the first sentence, which "set[s] a Poe-like mood of impending doom" (Peterman, *Susanna* 70): "The dreadful cholera was depopulating Quebec and Montreal, when our ship

cast anchor off Grosse Isle” (*Roughing It* 12). Arrival in a time of cholera and death throws doubts on the venture from its start, and the uncertain nature of the undertaking is further emphasized by the gloomy imagery of the first few chapters. “[D]eath was everywhere,” Susanna remarks, “perhaps lurking in our very path” (46). The literal deaths and the morbidity of the opening sketches of *Roughing It* cast the Moodies’ emigration in terms of a doomed scheme. The landing sequence as the first unsuccessful arrival anticipates their later failures, most especially further failures of homecoming.⁶ What is more, through her description of the laughable encounter with the two health officers, Susanna constructs the undertaking as anti-heroic. One of these men offends Moodie as he butchers the language (Bentley 116), and both are taken in by the ship’s captain’s practical joke about births during the voyage. The oath they require of the captain is finally sworn on a copy of Voltaire’s *History of Charles XII* rather than on the Bible (*Roughing It* 14). Inasmuch as the two officers represent Canada, the arrival scene suggests a place of disorder. The book’s opening thus immediately stages a struggle with place and prefigures the narrative’s probing of the crisis of exile.

This thematic is continued when Moodie first steps ashore at Grosse Isle. The (much-analyzed) scene represents her as a figure who is out of place. The island, though it “looks a perfect paradise at [a] distance,” proves disappointing upon contact. Its physical features are literally repellent—the rocks, Susanna reports, are “so hot that I could scarcely put my foot upon them”—and there are swarms of mosquitoes everywhere (19-22). Her reaction distinguishes her clearly from the lower-class Irish figures she observes, who appropriate the space and take possession of its unique characteristics—its rocks, bushes, and tide pools—precisely according to their own needs and regardless of their effect upon others. In Moodie’s failed-homecoming narrative, this appropriation of space “becomes a disease” that infectiously spreads to other passengers and that in Moodie herself generates a disorientating dis-ease with place (MacDonald 22): “We were *literally stunned* by the strife of tongues,” she tells us about her sense of incapacitation (20; italics added). In response, Susanna undertakes an effort to code the unfamiliar through the *familial* by including her husband and child in the narrating ‘I’. It is John Moodie who finds a shelter for his family away from the disturbance, by “discover[ing] a woodland path that led to the back of the island.” The “poor baby,” meanwhile, tormented by mosquitoes, adds her voice, and, “not at all pleased with her first visit to the new world, fill[s] the air with cries” (21, 23). Susanna’s family, while here unable to mediate entry into the

new environment, makes the experience of place somewhat easier to bear by sharing, in a manner of speaking, her perspective: John recognizes the need for distance from the crowd and finds for his wife and child a separate space, and the baby, like her mother, complains about the environment's features. The scene continues the thematic thrust of the family's arrival at their new home being complicated by errors of ill-placement.

The idea of home itself, in *Roughing It in the Bush*, is set uneasily against the figure of the house—highlighting that literal dwelling and the feeling of being at home are by no means identical—for Moodie's homes in Canada stand in opposition to the left-behind home she craves: "My whole soul yielded itself up to a strong and overpowering grief," she reports. "One simple word dwelt for ever in my heart, and swelled it to bursting—'Home!' I repeated it waking a thousand times a day, and my last prayer before I sank to sleep at night was still 'Home!'" (82). Her first homecoming epitomizes the disappointing reality of the colony, literalizing in particular Susanna's perception that "home" is unrecognizable as such in Canada: while the farm the Moodies have purchased is still occupied (and their 'proper' homecoming thus effectively prevented), their interim residence turns out to be no more than "a miserable hut, at the bottom of a steep descent," which the Yankee driver who delivers Susanna ironically recommends for its "smart location." "I gazed upon the place in perfect dismay," she writes, "for I had never seen such a shed called a house before. 'You must be mistaken,' [she says to the driver]; this is not a house, but a cattle-shed, or pig-sty." The scene is again one of disorder, as the building at first appears to be on the point of collapse as well as being occupied by cattle (83-84). To make matters worse, "[t]he rain poured in at the open door, beat in at the shattered window, and dropped upon our heads from the holes in the roof. The wind blew keenly through a thousand apertures in the log walls; and nothing could exceed the uncomfortableness of our situation" (85). The figure of home in Canada as defective, as no more than a diminished version of human dwelling, is thus literalized in the Moodies' hut. What is more, "this untenable tenement" is made worse because Susanna cannot immediately fall back onto her discourse of home as family. Her husband, as we learn, "was not yet in sight with the teams," and Susanna is "terrified at being left alone in this wild, strange-looking place" (84).

When John arrives, he immediately turns his hand to fitting the door into place, thereby enclosing the family unit. It is Susanna who has found the door lying at the back of the house, and it is therefore she who allows

the family's all-important privacy to be restored. In the end, with "all busily employed" (85-86), family transforms the "hut" into a home:

Our united efforts had effected a complete transformation in our uncouth dwelling. Sleeping-berths had been partitioned off for the men; shelves had been put up for the accommodation of books and crockery, a carpet covered the floor, and the chairs and tables we had brought from—gave an air of comfort to the place, which, on the first view of it, I deemed impossible. My husband . . . had walked over to inspect the farm, and I was sitting at the table at work, the baby creeping upon the floor, and Hannah [the maid] preparing dinner. The sun shone warm and bright, and the open door admitted a current of fresh air, which tempered the heat of the fire. (88)

In this idyllic family scene, order is restored and all members are now placed precisely where expected: John Moodie, the husband and provider, is looking after the business of the farm, while Susanna is engaged in domestic work, with the baby close by, and the family's servant is occupied with the more menial task of preparing dinner.⁷

I am quoting this passage at some length to illustrate both how Moodie literalizes the figure of home and how her discourse of home as family helps to disguise the deficiency of home as house. Here it even allows for a limited engagement with the immediate surroundings, which are "admitted" through the open door. As the thrust of the narrative bears out, however, this discourse falls short of making a connection with place in the broader sense. The disjuncture between the two specifications of the discourse reveals a fracture in the narrative, a site "where 'things fall apart,' and the struggle to assemble a speaking subject remains palpable in the final text" (Whitlock 39). The gap between home as house and home as family presents itself as perhaps the main "fissure . . . of female discontinuity" in *Roughing It*, in which the work's attempt "to seal up and cover over . . . dislocations in time and space, insecurities, hesitations, and blind spots" is unsuccessful (Benstock 152), laying bare the instability of the constructed text and consequently the implications of displacement for the authorial 'I'.

From this deficient first home, the Moodies nearly go to the experience that literalizes, for the already unhomed immigrants, the dispossession and loss associated with exile: actual homelessness. They are forced to vacate the "wretched cabin" in which they have made do for six weeks, but are prevented by Uncle Joe and his "odious" family from taking "possession of the home which for some time has been [the Moodies'] own" (*Roughing It* 109, 141). Thus dislodged, they have no choice but to pay Uncle Joe's mother a disproportionate sum for the use of the small dwelling she inhabits. This

“log hut” is an even more diminutive “home” than the one they are obliged to leave (141). The fact that the Moodies should even have to consider making their home in such an inferior residence—despite having purchased a cleared farm that includes a farmhouse—reflects poorly on John Moodie’s ability to keep his family safe. The transaction he made shows him as lacking the kind of shrewdness to deal effectively with the peculiar requirements of place, as pointedly stated by Uncle Joe’s mother (143). So disturbing is his ineffectiveness, and understandably so frightening the prospect of being without a roof over her head, that Susanna, “anxious about the result of the negotiation,” steps out of her domestic role to accompany her husband to the old woman’s hut—thus giving herself the option to intervene, should the need arise (140). (In future moments of crisis she will do more than that by assuming the lead rather than waiting for John to take action.) The displacement the Moodies have undergone is here literalized in the homelessness that threatens them—prevented only by paying “literally . . . twice over” for the dilapidated place, as Susanna points out—and that articulates the difficulty of (self-)location they confront in the colony (147).

The pattern of failed homecomings disguised by a narrative of home as family continues with the Moodies’ subsequent moves. Their taking possession of the farmhouse they purchased months earlier is first callously prevented and then sabotaged by Uncle Joe, literally denying them their rightful place in the colony and literally undermining their relocation (Susanna explains that he “undermined the brick chimney, and let all the water into the house” [176]). That this dispute revolves around the question of property highlights the economic reasons that had led to the Moodies’ emigration in the first place. Similarly, the house in the Douro woods, although “[s]uch as it was, it was a palace when compared [to their first two dwellings],” is still unfinished and thus not ready for their occupation when they arrive, and it is then accidentally set on fire and nearly destroyed before they have even had the opportunity to move in (296). In both cases, Moodie’s familial narrativity carries her through. About the farmhouse she says, “no one was better pleased with the change than little Katie, [who] . . . crept from room to room, feeling and admiring everything, and talking to it in her baby language.” Her husband, meanwhile, is able to handle the bane of disorder associated with emigration:⁸ he deals with a literal “demon of unrest . . . in the shape of a countless swarm of mice” by effectively deploying a mouse trap (178). Similarly, the environment in Douro is mediated by Susanna’s sister, Catharine Parr Trail, a resident of the area for almost a year:

When we reached the top of the ridge that overlooked our cot, my sister stopped, and pointed out a log-house among the trees. "There S—," she said, "is your home. When that black cedar swamp is cleared away that now hides the lake from us, you will have a very pretty view." My conversation with her had quite altered the aspect of the country, and predisposed me to view things in the most favourable light. (296)

While the *meaning* of home is "altered" when articulated by a member of the family, the *reality* of home is another matter altogether, for it is characterized by the hardships, poverty, and near-disasters with which readers of *Roughing It* are familiar. "[I]mmigration insists on the reality of one's relation to place," making ill-placement a matter both literal and specific (Chaudhuri 204).

The Moodies' move to Douro—"the major tactical error" in their settlement plans (Peterman, *Susanna* 78)—is hastened by the failure of their Hamilton Township farm. This failure, in turn, is signalled by a halting of the discourse of home as family which is caused by an external threat in the form of "trials of intrusion" (Peterman, *Epoch* 59): having entered into a share-cropping agreement with another couple, the Moodies' freedom of speech within the family unit is jeopardized by the closeness of these nosy neighbours. Susanna comments:

[E]ven their roguery was more tolerable than the *irksome restraint* which their near vicinity, and constantly having to come in contact with them, imposed. We had no longer any privacy, our servants were cross-questioned, and our family affairs canvassed by these gossiping people, who spread about a thousand falsehoods regarding us. (*Roughing It* 181; italics added)

So troublesome is this threat from without—and so critical the continuation of the familial discourse—that Susanna "would gladly have given [to the other couple] all the proceeds of the farm to get rid of them." Remarkably, John Moodie fails again in his role as provider, for the Moodies are also being cheated out of their fair share of the harvest. "All the money we expended upon the farm was entirely for these people's benefit," Susanna tells us, "for by their joint contrivances very little of the crops fell to our share; and when any division was made it was always when [John] Moodie was absent from home; and there was no person present to see fair play" (181). This is as close to open criticism of her husband as Susanna comes, and, in fact, Gillian Whitlock points out about John Dunbar Moodie that in both "his African and Canadian emigrations he remained vulnerable, unable to provide as domestic man should" (*Intimate Empire* 61). John's vulnerability is in no small measure due to his being "absent from home" during certain critical junctures, absences that highlight the challenge of honouring the centrality of "home" for the settler.

In the Douro backwoods Susanna's narrative of home extends to a solidly literal system of managing the environment, aimed at increasing the functional usability of place. At first, control over her surroundings appears to be out of Moodie's reach and this lack is a major source of the gap between her and her surroundings (attempts at bread-making, washing clothes, and milking initially fail). Over time, however, she develops a range of useful skills. For instance, she devises a way to catch wild ducks, and also "practice[s] a method of painting birds and butterflies upon the white, velvety surface of the large fungi [growing on maple trees]," to earn some much-needed money. She makes excellent maple sugar—"drained . . . until it was almost as white as loaf sugar"—and uses some to enhance her now superior baking skills (443). She works on her garden, commenting that it was "as usual . . . very productive," and she is a deft hand with the canoe and paddle (495-96). In her husband's absence she even runs the farm on her own (444). These activities suggest a process of adaptation, as Moodie becomes "more able and reconciled" to her new surroundings (Peterman, *Epoch* 50). As a measure of personal agency and effective control of the environment, however, Susanna's efforts are both never enough and ultimately unsuccessful: the bush farm eventually fails disastrously, and is abandoned by the family.

The Moodies' ultimate flight from the backwoods speaks to their precarious existence in the Canadian bush, to the constant effort not just to live contentedly, but simply to live. The rawness of life for an impoverished settler family like the Moodies in a time of general economic depression and widespread illness is palpable in *Roughing It*, as Susanna struggles even to keep shoes on her children's feet. The Moodies' battle culminates in a series of crises in which the unmanageable environment encroaches upon their house, resulting in the house itself being characterized as a threat, as a potential grave for Susanna and the children. They are in danger both of freezing to death and, on two occasions, of being burned alive inside the log dwelling.⁹ By the very logic of the discourse of home as family, these near-tragedies anticipate the family's ultimate departure from the backwoods, for the Moodies' attempts "to restrain, put in order, cultivate the bush" are first and foremost efforts to make room for a growing family (Tinkler 11). While in the bush, Susanna gives birth to four children, and the arrival of each is duly recorded in *Roughing It*.¹⁰ By the same token, for John Moodie (as for Susanna), the expectation of an increasing family was precisely the driving force behind his decision to emigrate (*Roughing It* 208). John's unhappy role in the near-disasters is that of the provider who fails those who depend upon him. While

Susanna “is the active force” and single-handedly saves the children and herself (Peterman, *Epoch* 88), he is absent from the log dwelling during both fires, leaving his family unprotected in an unsafe “home,” when the demise of the children would make nonsense of the entire emigration venture.¹¹

The attempt to find a conjuncture between place and personal identity is made difficult for Susanna because the *desired* ground of her homecoming is always located in the past and elsewhere. It is England that is Moodie’s source of security and fulfillment. For Susanna “home never belongs to the present . . . ‘home’ is always and only the place that is left behind” (Thurston 156), a contrast she herself draws:

[M]y heart yearned intensely for my absent home. Home! The word had ceased to belong to my *present*—it was doomed to live forever in the *past*; for what emigrant ever regarded the country of his exile as his *home*? To the land he has left, that name belongs for ever, and in no instance does he bestow it upon another. “I have got a letter from home!” “I have seen a friend from home!” “I dreamt last night that I was at home!” are expressions of everyday occurrence, to prove that the heart acknowledges no other home than the land of its birth. (*Roughing It* 39; original italics)

In the definition of home as the land of one’s birth, *Roughing It in the Bush* counterposes Moodie’s yearning for England as the place best capable of nurturing and supporting her selfhood to the needs of her family and her spousal and maternal responsibility.

Furthermore, the specific qualities Susanna associates with home as homeland shed light on her failure of homecoming in Canada. In order to understand this failure, one must remember that “[h]omecoming is an archetypally regressive act” (Chaudhuri 92). If “leaving home is a repetition of the first journey in the ‘travail’ of childbirth, an active and painful displacement from the safety and unfreedom of the ‘maternal’ home” (Curtis and Pajaczkowska 200), then homecoming is a return to a native matrix. This involves a conceptualization of one’s place of being as a nurturing “container” in which the self can flourish and grow. *Roughing It* links England as the home of the heart to two other concepts that are archetypal for women seeking authenticity of self and (self-)location: Mother and Nature, often figured as one and the same. Susanna’s original home of Reydon Hall is described (in *Flora Lyndsay*, the thinly fictionalized account of her emigration) as a place whose natural features mimic the protective and nurturing qualities of the maternal womb: “The Hall was an old-fashioned house, . . . surrounded by fine gardens and lawn-like meadows, and stood sheltered within a grove of noble old trees. . . . Every noble sentiment of [one’s] soul, . . . had

been fostered, or grown upon [one], in those pastoral solitudes” (84). The sheltered house is a cultural representation of the sheltering cave which, in turn, relates to the protecting function of the vessel as the central symbol of the Feminine (Neumann 45-46).¹² The nurturing and protective qualities of Susanna’s ancestral home constitute a maternal realm in which the self has been “fostered” or “grown”; it is the originating container for identity. The same maternal and sustaining qualities also extend to home as homeland, for England’s natural world, Susanna tells us, “arrayed in her green loveliness, had ever smiled upon me like an indulgent mother, holding out her loving arms to enfold to her bosom her erring but devoted child,” and it is from England’s “sacred bosom” that she is “torn” by emigration (*Roughing It* 65).

In Canada, the same intimate participation in Nature cannot be reproduced. Remembered scenes and sounds—“the songs of birds and the lowing of cattle”—are often more specific to Moodie than her immediate environment, which is merely “reflected” or “pictured” in the lake outside her door (325). The gap between the “unreal” of exile and the real, remembered scenes of homeland again lays bare the ungrounded ‘I,’ “expos[ing] a radical uncertainty about one’s relation to ‘home’ and to the self one has been” (Kennedy 27). Even in the very chapter of *Roughing It* which is read as showing Moodie’s experience in a more positive light, “A Trip to Stony Lake,” the narrator’s articulation of her relationship with the Canadian environment is not without ambiguity.¹³ Moodie’s closer identification with place on this occasion is triggered at least in part by her discovery of the “harebell,” which, as she says, “had always from a child been with me, a favourite flower; and the first sight of it in Canada . . . so flooded my soul with remembrances of the past, that, in spite of myself, the tears poured freely from my eyes.” Moodie’s gathering and keeping of those flowers “in [her] bosom” is not for love of Canada but, on the contrary, is “connected with sacred home recollections, and the never-dying affections of the heart” for the old home (358-59). Even as the features of backwoods Canada—the “aromatic, resinous smell” of the pine forest; the “wild and lonely” scenery—here ensure Moodie’s “sense of enjoyment,” her engagement with that scenery is far from unqualified: “In moments like these, I ceased to regret my separation from my native land; and, filled with the love of Nature, my heart forgot for the time the love of home” (361). The extent, therefore, to which she is able “to locate beauty and interest in . . . the rugged landscape” (Peterman, “Susanna” 85) is strictly limited (“in moments like these,” “for the time”), and “home” is still located elsewhere. The narration quickly returns to crop failures and “Disappointed

Hopes.” “The pathos of exile,” notes Edward Said, “is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question” (179).

Yet just as Moodie’s discourse of home as family has sustained her all along, so it is deployed in the task of replicating the presence of the Mother in Canada. Nancy Chodorow argues that “women seek to reproduce their preoedipal relation to their mothers . . . [by] bearing children” (23), and Margaret Homans, in considering the implications of Chodorow’s formulation for women’s self-representation, posits, “when the daughter attempts to recreate her symbiotic closeness with her mother, she is also attempting to recreate that presymbolic language. The reproduction of mothering will also be the reproduction of a presymbolic communicativeness” (25). The “mother” in Moodie’s narrative being her mother country, or Nature/England, the reproduction of a “pre-emigration relationship of connection,” observes Veronica Thompson, basing herself on Chodorow’s theorizing, relies on Moodie’s children as “the source of this connection” (91). Susanna’s daughter Katie, in particular, and the nonsymbolic language they share, appear to help to replicate a closeness to Nature/Canada. A closer scrutiny of Moodie’s familial narrativity, however, reveals that it does *not* engender a sense of feeling at home. Katie’s “baby lingo” and “charming infant graces” recall, first and foremost, the mother country: “Was [Katie] not purely British? Did not her soft blue eyes, and sunny curls, and bright rosy cheeks for ever remind me of her Saxon origin, and bring before me dear forms and faces I could never hope to behold again?” (*Roughing It* 178). Rather than establishing sustained contact with the new home, therefore, the association between mother, child, and “mother tongue” supports the specificity of the original home to which Susanna is drawn.¹⁴ The nonsymbolic language of contact shared between mother and daughter is what binds Susanna to her true “mother” (country) in that mother’s absence, without, however, replicating the same kind of relationship with her new “adopted” mother.¹⁵ For Moodie, identity is always a question of origins, of “where she is from.”

In Canada, the figure of the “Divine Mother” (147) is replaced more and more by God, the Father. “Father and Mother” not so much “merge in the all-encompassing, ever-expansive force of Nature,” as Freiwald argues (168), as that Nature is cast increasingly in male terms. In *Roughing It*, the last prose reference to Nature as maternal occurs approximately halfway through the book, fittingly during the Moodies’ journey into the backwoods. Here, Nature is seen to have “suspended her operation” and to be “sleeping in her winding sheet, upon the bier of death” (279). More frequently, Nature

is associated with the “Great Father” or with “God” (a link that may well have gained in strength through Moodie’s retrospective treatment of her material and as a result of her trust in providence as having guided her into the bush) (178, 313, 361). “Nature the Divine Mother,” comments Margaret Atwood about *Roughing It*, “hardly functions at all” (*Survival* 51).¹⁶ Contrary, therefore, to the conclusion Freiwald reaches (168), Mother Nature does ultimately fail Moodie, a failure that both confirms and contributes to the failure of homecoming and that is nowhere more apparent than in the final sequence of *Roughing It in the Bush*. The chapter “A Change in Our Prospects” starts off a closing narrative that on the surface revolves around themes of renewal, rebirth, and restoration, but which, upon closer examination, reveals the continuation of feelings of loss, displacement, and even existential privation. The chapter’s poetic epigraph does “introduce . . . at its very structural and thematic centre ‘the embryo blossom,’” as Freiwald notes (167), but it suggests the “maternal idiom,” an idiom of protective containment (“The future flower lies enfolded in the bud”), only if the poem’s last three lines are ignored: “But if the canker worm lies coil’d around / The heart o’ the bud, the summer sun and dew / Visit in vain the sear’d and blighted flower” (*Roughing It* 491).¹⁷

In the chapter itself we learn that due to Susanna’s illness, her daughter Agnes (Addie) has been cared for by a “kind neighbour.” “During that winter, and through the ensuing summer,” Moodie recalls with painful intensity, “I only received occasional visits from my little girl, who, fairly established with her new friends, looked upon their house as her home.” The grief Susanna experiences at the separation from her daughter and at the “growing coldness of [Addie’s] manner towards [her]” (*Roughing It* 491-92), obliquely references the abduction of Persephone from Demeter, and the resulting aridity and lack of life on earth. In the myth, the grieving Demeter will reanimate the barren earth only if Persephone is restored to her. The mother’s search for her daughter is always also a search for “a part of herself in her daughter,” and thematically the refinding of the daughter by the mother articulates the healing of a “duality” or “scission” (Kerényi 145, 147). In *Roughing It*, Addie is indeed returned to her mother when Susanna and the children depart from the bush. Yet the theme of restoration (of self/daughter), along with the notion of a renewal of hope for happier prospects, is considerably undermined by Susanna’s unexpected, and apparently incongruous, reluctance “to be dragged” from the bush (*Roughing It* 501):

Every object had become endeared to me during my long exile from civilised life. I loved the lonely lake, with its magnificent belt of dark pines sighing in the breeze; the cedar-swamp, the summer home of my dark Indian friends; my own dear little garden, with its rugged snake-fence which I had helped [the maid] to place with my own hands. . . . Even the cows, that had given a breakfast for the last time to my children, were now regarded with mournful affection. (507-508)

Just as on the earlier occasion of the Moodies' departure from Hamilton Township, which was also, as she told us, "much against my wish" (277), Susanna's departure from the woods fails to remedy her sense of ill-placement.

Instead, Susanna's reluctance to leave demonstrates her blurring of the concepts of containment and confinement, which retrospectively alters her earlier perception of having been trapped in the bush during the preceding years. By mistaking confinement for containment Moodie expresses, through what is otherwise critically unexplained behaviour, a primal fear of separation: whenever an "old situation of containment ends or is ended, the ego experiences this revolution . . . as rejection by the mother." Any "crucial transition to a new sphere of existence" brings a new sense of rejection, a "birth trauma" (Neumann 67). For Moodie, her departure from the woods recalls the earlier separation from her mother country and makes her cling, against better reason, to an environment which has not nurtured and contained but imprisoned her. The departure, furthermore, lacks closure, because any sense of self-actualization is stalled by Susanna's lengthy "secrets of the prison-house" passage, which ends the prose text on a note of bitterness and regret. If the gesture of departure symbolizes fulfilled personal identity (Chaudhuri 175), then fulfillment is just what is signally lacking from the final departure enacted in *Roughing It in the Bush*.¹⁸ Despite the muted Demeter/Persephone plot that is appropriated in the thematics of displacement and homecoming in the story's conclusion, the book ultimately signals the failure of maternal narrativity. In a sense, place itself is the dominant "other" for Moodie; its difference from her fails to be overcome with the help of other relationships.

While the image of departure is present also in other characters, those with whom Moodie most strongly identifies—Phoebe for her fragility and sensitivity, and Brian the still-hunter for the terror of being "bushed" (Buss 91)—are ones who escape through death, and death is also Susanna's preferred trope. Looking back on her early years in the colony, for instance, she recalls that she "longed to die, that death might effectively separate [Canada and her] forever" (30). Yearning for her home country, she wishes she were "permitted to return and die upon [England's] wave-encircled shores" (65), her "only hope of escape [from Canada] being through the portals of the

grave" (147). "[D]eath as liberation," comments Chaudhuri, is the "favourite conclusion" to scenarios of ill-placement (250). In the conflation of "tomb" and "womb," death also promises a form of reunion with the Mother. The "[a]rchetypal Feminine not only bears and directs life as a whole, and the ego in particular, but it also takes everything that is born of it back into its womb of origination and death" (Neumann 30).

The painful split in Susanna Moodie's discourse of home, and particularly the insufficiency of her familial narrativity, highlight that "exile is a decidedly individualistic figure" (Chaudhuri 12). The suffering it inflicts is not easily abated even by those with whom the experience is shared. In the contradiction between her own desire for a stable and specific home matrix and the need to displace the self for her family's sake, Susanna Moodie prefigures much later accounts of psychological fragmentation and alienation.¹⁹ If exile is the loss of the ability to relate to place with any degree of "insiderness," the figure of home-as-house as deficient, for Moodie, becomes the sign of this loss. Through this figure she articulates key aspects of her sense of dislocation: the transience, instability, insufficiency, and often precarious nature of Moodie's "homes" in Canada also describe her experience of exile as a state of rarely, if ever, "being satisfied, placid, or secure" (Said 186). Perhaps one reason why we cannot get Susanna out of our collective imagination is that her experience anticipates that of modern times, in which "exile is certainly the most fully theorized and poeticized concept, having become nothing short of a symbol for modern culture itself" (Chaudhuri 14). Susanna Moodie's narrative locates the figure of home at the core of this concept, much as contemporary observers of women's expatriate writing (such as Sneja Gunew, with whose words I began) do a hundred and sixty years later.

NOTES

- 1 Bella Brodzki observes that "[o]f all literary genres, autobiography is the most precariously poised between narrative and discourse or history and rhetoric" ("Mothers" 244). For lack of a single, more definitive term, I use both "narrative" and "discourse" in analyzing *Roughing It*.
- 2 See Una Chaudhuri's remarks, made in the context of the theatre (12). Much of my argument in this essay relies on theorizing formulated by Chaudhuri in *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (1995), including the notion of a failed homecoming and the dual definition of the narrative of home.
- 3 Susanna is careful to emphasize that the sacrifice involved in immigration to Canada was her husband's as much as her own (*Roughing It* 208).
- 4 In addition, its publication history marks *Roughing It in the Bush* as a collaborative effort. See John Thurston and Michael Peterman (*Epoch*), among others. Susanna nevertheless stood by the final version, as her correspondence and 1871 introduction demonstrate.

- 5 With regard to the complexity of the definition of home in expatriate writing, D.M.R. Bentley notes in a related point that “at the archetypal or mythic level” emigration is inconsistent with most voyage patterns and therefore difficult to classify. “It is not a journey of excursion and return, but . . . a process of frequently reluctant removal from a cherished home and usually arduous relocation in an unfamiliar place” (“‘Cake of Custom’” 94-95). Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of emigration generally is resettlement and Moodie herself refers to it as “seek[ing] a new home amid the western wilds” (*Roughing It* 207).
- 6 Janet Giltrow, who reads *Roughing It* as a travel narrative, is one of a number of critics who finds the morbidity in the text systemic. Giltrow sees the distance between the work’s two poles, that of the “travel esthetic and the settler’s destiny,” as sometimes bridged by morbidity and “the idea of death” (“Painful Experience” 133).
- 7 Also see Helen M. Buss (*Mapping Our Selves* 46-47) and Gillian Whitlock on the importance of domestic order and household management for settler women (*Intimate Empire* 50).
- 8 Whitlock notes that, because of the absence of the older generation in the emigration scheme, and “with them a sense of continuity, precedent, and tradition,” Moodie “sees disorder” from the moment she first steps ashore at Grosse Isle, including “closest to the bone, middle-class genteel men and women who are reduced to abject poverty and destitution” (47). The image of disorder is likewise carried through to each of the Moodies’ homes.
- 9 In addition, Moodie struggled with a series of illnesses, both her own and her children’s, during the later period of her residence in the backwoods while John Moodie was away on account of the rebellion (see in particular Ballstadt, Hopkins, and Peterman, *Letters of Love* 114, 152, 158-59). Carl Ballstadt’s reading of these letters vis-à-vis *Roughing It* demonstrates that Susanna’s depiction of her trials in the bush, far from being exaggerated to gain her readers’ sympathy, is “restrained” compared to the account she gives in her private correspondence (“‘Embryo Blossom’” 144).
- 10 The Moodies had five children when they left the bush, and Susanna was pregnant with their sixth (born in July of 1840).
- 11 I am by no means suggesting that John Moodie was ever neglectful of his family in his behaviour. My reading does, however, take into consideration the fact that Susanna persistently draws attention to his absences. Whitlock goes further: she finds the “trajectory of emigration in *Roughing It* . . . ‘unintelligible’ because it contradicts all those expectations of settlement, and for this the husband and father is called to account” (61).
- 12 Freud similarly argues, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that the home operates as an alternative mother, as “a substitute for the mother’s womb” (38). From a Freudian perspective, Susanna Moodie’s deficient homes may suggest a link with the macabre and threatening homes of Gothic fiction.
- 13 This point may be extended to Moodie’s introduction to the 1871 edition of *Roughing It*, in which she both upholds the “truth” of her story and restates her perception of Canada’s unsuitability for immigrants of her own class (672-73), as well as praises the “new” (my term) Canada extensively (674-78). Furthermore, Moodie’s statement that she cannot imagine leaving “the colony, where, as a wife and mother, some of the happiest years of my life have been spent,” corroborates my argument inasmuch as she resorts to familial narrativity, even nearly twenty years after the first publication of *Roughing It*, to render her experience in Canada acceptable (674).
- 14 Moodie also reports about her son Donald: “Emilia had called him Cedric the Saxon, and he well suited the name, with his frank, honest disposition, and large, loving blue eyes” (*Roughing It* 445).
- 15 For a full analysis of Moodie’s ambivalent positioning vis-à-vis Canada as both adopting

parent and adopted child see Veronica Thompson, "The Return to 'Mother' in Australian and Canadian Settler-Invader Women's Writing."

- 16 This shift is yet more pronounced in *Life in the Clearings*, which contains few references (in either prose or verse) to Nature as feminine (for instance 15, 163), but multiple ones to a male "Creator" (20, 138, 177, 298, 299, 300).

Margaret Atwood's extended engagement with Susanna Moodie also includes a re-writing, of sorts, of *Roughing It*: Atwood's 1972 novel *Surfacing* might be read as revisioning the bush as a healing and restorative space for woman. Atwood herself feels a strong connection to Moodie; she comments in her introduction to the Virago edition of *Roughing It*, "in some ways, we were each other's obverse" (ix).

- 17 Ballstadt, who uses the poem as the starting point for his discussion of Moodie's letters to her husband, observes that it "embraces notions of such opposites as growth and blight, hope and uncertainty" ("The Embryo Blossom" 137).
- 18 As her later correspondence bears out, even in the 1840s and into the 1850s "a sense of bitterness lingered on in Susanna's writing about [her then residence of Belleville]" (Ballstadt, Hopkins, and Peterman, *Lifetime* 89).
- 19 Whitlock reaches a somewhat similar conclusion. See *Intimate Empire* (72).

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Irene Baird and Colin Hill, eds.

Waste Heritage. U of Ottawa P \$35.00

**Robert J.C. Stead, Neil Querengesser
and Jean Horton, eds.**

Dry Water. U of Ottawa P \$38.00

Reviewed by Jody Mason

In his 2006 article “Editing Archives/ Archiving Editions,” Dean Irvine posits that most paperback reprint series in Canada to date have not produced scholarly editions, and those series that have done so have adhered to intentionalist editorial policies and followed “conservative models” of Anglo-American textual scholarship. Irvine critiques the “repression of non-authorial, paratextual, and bibliographic elements that inform the transnational production of colonial texts.” Counting Canadian texts among these, he then argues that Jerome McGann’s theories of social-textual editions and hypermedia archives and Donald Reiman’s theory of versioning are more appropriate models for texts that have complicated, collaborative, and often transnational publishing histories. Although the hypertextual archive embodies an ideal rather than a practical relationship between readers and text, Irvine’s argument is appealing for its insistence on editorial methods that illuminate the unique conditions under which literary texts have been produced in Canada.

Irvine has brought his thinking about editorial methods to his role as director and

English-language general editor of the University of Ottawa Press’s new Canadian Literature Collection/Collection de littérature canadienne. Along with Sophie Marcotte (French-language general editor), Colin Hill, Glenn Willmott, Misao Dean, and Gregory Betts, Irvine is resurrecting out-of-print or previously unpublished nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century literary texts and publishing them in paperback editions that are accompanied by a basic apparatus and an expanded web-based apparatus. This web-based material (accessible from www.uopress.uottawa.ca/clc/), which includes unpublished letters and diary entries, as well as critical and biographical material, is useful; however, the print editions could refer to the online apparatus more explicitly. The textual apparatus in the print editions is restrained: all notes appear at the end and are silently keyed to page and line numbers, so only very careful readers who check the notes as they read each section will benefit from the apparatus as they read. Designed by Robert Tombs, these new editions are attractive and, like earlier incarnations of the NCL, feature reproductions of Canadian art on their covers.

The first two titles in the series embody the editors’ desire to breathe new life into languishing texts: Irene Baird’s realist portrayal of the 1938 Vancouver Sit-Down Strike, originally published in 1939, has been out of print since 1973; and Robert Stead’s novel *Dry Water*, the story of a prairie farmer whose life is enmeshed in the

processes of social, cultural, and technological change that altered life in the Canadian West in the first half of the twentieth century, has only ever appeared in an abridged edition (Tecumseh Press, 1983) that was published after Stead's death. Significantly, the first two titles in the series are both novels of the Depression—what Colin Hill and many others before him have referred to as the “lost decade” in Canadian fiction. Yet both novels, as Hill suggests of *Waste Heritage*, contribute to the “recent reawakening of interest in Canadian fiction of the 1930s, which is neither as scant nor as homogenous as some literary histories suggest.”

Edited and with an introduction by Hill, this critical edition of Irene Baird's novel *Waste Heritage* uses the 1939 Random House edition as copy text, but includes variants from the 1939 Macmillan of Canada edition (as well as corrections that Hill made to the copy text) in the textual notes. As Hill describes in the textual history section of his introduction, he chose the Random House edition as copy text because there is no extant manuscript and because the Macmillan edition underwent some eleventh-hour alterations due to the fact that the Defense of Canada Regulations (implemented as Canada joined the Second World War in September, 1939) required the excision of material that could negatively affect the war effort. Hill's textual scholarship is impeccable: his textual and explanatory notes are methodical, and his analysis of the textual history, critical reception, and historical milieu of *Waste Heritage* leaves no stone unturned, and succeeds in illuminating the many narratives that have informed the production of this novel.

The new critical edition of Stead's *Dry Water*, edited and with an introduction by Neil Querengesser and Jean Horton (both at Concordia University College of Alberta), follows the format of Hill's edition, but the textual history of this novel is considerably more complicated, given that there are four

extant typescripts. Relying on Stead's correspondence with McClelland & Stewart, which in 1937 finally declined to publish *Dry Water*, the editors chose to use as copy text the typescript of the novel “most likely preferred by Stead.” The variant readings at the end of the novel are not exhaustive, and the CLC website would be a good place for digitized copies of the typescripts or a complete list of variants to appear. Full access to the variants is especially important in the context of Irvine's argument about the appropriateness of social-textual editions in Canada; *Dry Water* is a good example of a text that, to quote Irvine paraphrasing Jerome McGann, could be treated as an “archive of editions.”

The reprinting of both *Waste Heritage* and *Dry Water* performs important cultural work: like other reprint series before it, the CLC is enabling the teaching and study of Canadian literature by expanding the canon. As all such projects do, it is also consolidating a canon of its own—a canon of what Hill is calling a “pan-national modern-realist movement” that comprises more than three dozen early twentieth-century writers of fiction. Encouraging students and teachers alike to think about the production of literature, this series will also, I hope, attract new readers and critics to the work of analyzing how modern literatures in Canada were made and what they may continue to mean.

Jésus de Nazareth—revu et corrigé

Jean-François Beauchemin

Ceci est mon corps. Québec Amérique 19,95 \$

Compte rendu par René La Fleur

Jésus n'est pas mort sur la croix : il y a survécu. Après s'être remis de ses blessures dans la ville de Tyr grâce aux soins de Thomas et de Marthe, après une vie d'errance et de lectures, âgé de 84 ans, il se

retrouve face à Marthe, depuis longtemps devenue son épouse et qui passera de vie à trépas avant l'aube.

Dans ce roman de Jean-François Beauchemin, son neuvième, Jésus livre une confession au style poétique, empreinte d'un rythme régulier et d'un lyrisme certain, redevable à l'importance accordée aux émotions et à la description sensorielle. Le choix d'investir de sacré le monde physique découle du nouveau credo de Jésus qui, trahi par le ciel sur la croix, a opté pour la terre. L'expression « Ceci est mon corps », traditionnellement associée au sacrifice nécessaire de l'enveloppe physique, renvoie, pour ce Jésus nouveau, à ce corps qu'il importe de célébrer, par lequel les erreurs de jeunesse ont été dépassées et le véritable sens du mot « amour », révélé. Pour lui, bonheur serein rime avec conscience de la beauté du monde par les sens.

L'intérêt principal du roman réside dans la découverte du genre de vie que choisira de mener le miraculé désillusionné. À lui de juger sévèrement les premiers chrétiens, les traitant de mythomanes zélés ou Jean-Baptiste, qui a inauguré sa vie publique, de fou. Plutôt que d'être guidé par les principes de salut et de vertu, Jésus devient un adepte des notions de progrès, de démocratie, de science et de raison, prône, comme Montaigne quinze siècles plus tard, la sagesse du voyage, puis, finalement, regrette de ne pas avoir pu remodeler le monde aux côtés d'Alexandre le Grand. Par ces attitudes, ce Jésus s'avère moins un homme de la Résurrection que celui de la Renaissance. Et on exagérerait à peine, vu son culte de la « seule beauté du monde » qui exclut Église, cérémonie, voire Dieu, en suggérant que la foi de ce Jésus *nouveau genre* le rapproche du type d'animisme cher à la génération *Peace and Love*.

Sous la gouverne de son nouveau credo, Jésus consacre donc sa vie à la découverte du monde par les voyages et par la lecture, si bien qu'il finit par acquérir une somme invraisemblable de connaissances qu'enverraient

les plus grands savants de l'époque. Diverses figures grecques, d'Archimède à Théophraste, en passant par Eschyle et Hipparque, ont leur place dans le panthéon personnel de Jésus, qui s'en sert pour comparer leurs trouvailles à celles des grandes civilisations de l'Asie, notamment la chinoise, dont il connaît, mille ans avant Marco Polo, et en détail, l'histoire, la culture et la géographie. Il arrive même que, à la manière de Nostradamus, l'ancien prédicateur anticipe les découvertes à venir, par exemple en présentant, dix-sept siècles avant Darwin, la thèse à la base de *L'origine des espèces* et en remettant en question, quatorze siècles avant Copernic, l'idée selon laquelle les astres tourneraient autour de la terre.

Jean-François Beauchemin présente aux *Baby-Boomers* un Jésus qu'ils risquent d'aimer bien plus que l'autre, parce que le sien leur ressemble. Comme les membres de cette génération, son Jésus a sillonné les routes du monde dans l'espoir d'élucider le mystère de l'existence pour finalement se découvrir profondément étranger à ses convictions idéalistes originelles.

Une quête critique lacunaire

Mark Benson

La Quête érotique d'Yves Thériault. Peter Lang
117,50 \$

Compte rendu par Renald Bérubé

Toute étude de l'œuvre d'Yves Thériault est à marquer d'une pierre blanche, l'auteur de *Moi, Pierre Huneau* méritant toute considération.

Or l'étude de Mark Benson, *La Quête érotique d'Yves Thériault*, oblige le thériausien assidu à en rabattre de ses attentes. Les pages 2 et 3, en « Introduction », déjà, formulent des affirmations qui méritent moult nuances. Trois exemples : « même s'il changeait d'éditeur à un rythme effarant » ; « Boudé quelque peu par l'institution littéraire

durant sa vie » ; « s'il est vrai que [l']importance [de son œuvre] est confirmée par le nombre d'études [...] il faut préciser [qu'elles] ont été, pour la plupart, entreprises ou publiées *avant* son décès ».

Thériault ne changeait pas d'éditeur « à un rythme effarant » ; il devait publier chez plusieurs pour gagner son pari : vivre de l'écriture. Aucun éditeur ne pouvait tout publier de lui, à moins d'accepter d'être en compétition avec lui-même. Si Thériault fut boudé par certains, il ne le fut guère par d'autres ; s'il le fut, il le fut moins qu'il ne le disait. « Boudé quelque peu » : c'est-à-dire ?

Le troisième extrait exige plus ample commentaire, car il peut se lire, avec son *avant* italique, tel un résumé de l'aspect sommaire, ambigu de *La Quête érotique*. La première ligne de l'introduction souligne que « vingt-cinq ans » ont passé depuis la mort de Thériault. Ce qui laisse croire que ce livre serait de 2008—de contenu comme d'année éditoriale. Or le reste de l'ouvrage dément cette impression. En regard de son intro, le texte est en porte à faux : il *date*. Des années 1960-1970 environ, pour ses pratiques d'analyse. Sa bibliographie retarde aussi, comme (par exemple) sa lecture de *La Quête de l'ourse* (p. 160 *sq.*).

Quand on lit que Thériault est en purgatoire, que tout ou presque s'est passé *avant* son décès, il faut rappeler certains faits. L'ouvrage pouvait ne pas pouvoir savoir qu'une exposition, avec catalogue, *Yves Thériault : le pari de l'écriture*, serait présentée à la Grande Bibliothèque (Montréal) en 2008-2009. Mais comment peut-il ignorer que furent fondées, en 2003, par Marie José Thériault, les Éditions du dernier havre qui ont publié en poche, avec des présentations analytiques renouvelées, plusieurs des œuvres du père de l'éditrice ; qu'il y eut, aux congrès 2003 et 2006 de l'Acfas, des « colloques Thériault » ; que les communications du colloque de 2003 ont donné naissance aux *Cahiers Yves Thériault I*. Etc. Tout cela, après le décès de Thériault.

Petites existences

Nadine Bismuth

Êtes-vous mariée à un psychopathe?. Boréal 22,95 \$

Nicolas Charette

Jour de chance. Boréal 24,95 \$

Compte rendu par David Dorais

Depuis qu'elle a connu un grand succès avec son premier livre publié il y a dix ans, Nadine Bismuth est considérée comme l'une des représentantes les plus remarquables des auteurs de sa génération. En effet, le recueil de nouvelles *Les gens fidèles ne font pas les nouvelles* avait révélé une jeune écrivaine dotée d'une plume sûre et d'une étonnante maîtrise de son art, arrivant à mettre en scène, de façon crédible, des personnages de tous les âges et de toutes les classes sociales. Ces différentes histoires se déroulaient dans un univers actuel, urbain, réaliste. Des histoires de désillusions, de petites tromperies, d'amertume : une femme âgée qui prend soudain conscience que ses enfants maintenant adultes ne lui appartiennent plus, une veuve qui rencontre la maîtresse de son défunt mari, la réunion décevante de quelques jeunes qui sont amis depuis longtemps, etc. Le livre avait plu au point d'être traduit et de remporter, en 2000, le Prix des libraires du Québec ainsi que le Prix de la nouvelle Adrienne-Choquette. Malgré sa popularité, Nadine Bismuth s'est faite rare dans le paysage littéraire québécois. Elle a présenté en 2004 un roman autofictionnel qui a fait moins de bruit (*Scrapbook*), et voilà que paraît en 2009 un nouveau recueil de nouvelles, *Êtes-vous mariée à un psychopathe?*

Dans ce livre, Nadine Bismuth revient à ce qui lui a le mieux réussi jusqu'à maintenant : des histoires courtes où un désespoir léger s'allie à une gentille ironie. L'auteure a choisi de centrer ses histoires sur les relations hommes-femmes, surtout celles concernant les adultes de son âge, les trentenaires. Or, il se trouve que le mot « trentenaire », en

français, a une connotation moqueuse (ce qui n'est pas le cas de « quinquagénaire », par exemple). Et la nuance convient tout à fait aux portraits que dresse Nadine Bismuth des gens de sa génération. Le titre de la nouvelle « Hommes infidèles, femmes tristes » résume parfaitement son propos. Les hommes (ici on pourrait même parler de « gars ») sont irresponsables, menteurs, narcissiques, occupés à se lancer sans cesse dans des conquêtes amoureuses. De leur côté, les jeunes femmes modernes sont déprimées, incapables de rompre lorsque la relation est malsaine, ou au contraire poussées à le faire simplement pour sauver l'honneur, lorsque leur conjoint a eu un comportement peu recommandable. On le voit, ce recueil de nouvelles offre moins de variété que le premier : ces personnages-ci ont à peu près tous le même âge, le même profil, les mêmes problèmes. Il s'agit donc d'une plongée dans l'univers féminin branché des années 2000, plongée distrayante, drôle, mais en définitive un peu légère, comme a pu l'être la série *Sex and the City*.

Nicolas Charette, pour sa part, est inconnu du grand public puisqu'il fait paraître sa première œuvre. Comme Nadine Bismuth, il se place dans la lignée des auteurs qui, à la manière de Raymond Carver, par exemple, privilégient la peinture réaliste de moments tirés de la vie quotidienne. Ce recueil de nouvelles s'avère très réussi. Alors que Bismuth adopte un ton distrayant et humoristique (mais sans tomber dans la caricature comme le fait Suzanne Myre dans ses nouvelles aux sujets similaires), Nicolas Charette s'en tient à une sobriété de langage. Pas d'élaboration stylistique, à peu près aucune métaphore : l'auteur cherche à embrasser la réalité le plus étroitement possible grâce à un style transparent. Les histoires qu'il raconte restent proches du quotidien, sans rien de spectaculaire. Une femme va voir une tireuse de cartes, qui ne lui apprend rien de précis. Un jeune homme tente de séduire à nouveau la

jeune femme avec laquelle il a rompu neuf mois auparavant. Un bon à rien, peut-être dépressif, croupit dans son appartement tandis que sa conjointe l'accable de reproches. Dans chacune de ces situations, une petite défaite est subie ou une petite victoire, remportée. Lorsqu'il arrive que les personnages mis en scène croisent une personne étrangère à leurs problèmes, elle n'a généralement qu'un haussement d'épaules à leur offrir : de l'extérieur, leurs petites existences n'ont rien que de banal. La force de Nicolas Charette est de parvenir, par un récit à la première personne ou un récit aligné sur le personnage principal, à montrer des moments cruciaux qui surviennent pour un individu et qui, pour les autres, disparaissent dans le flot des occupations et des mouvements journaliers. L'auteur parvient à utiliser le pouvoir que possède la littérature de donner une âme au moindre fait de l'existence, lui conférant ainsi une véritable portée dramatique.

Forms and Function

Alan Bradley

The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie. Doubleday
\$25.00

Alissa York

Effigy. Random House \$21.00

Frances Itani

Remembering the Bones. HarperCollins Canada
\$16.50

Reviewed by Beverley Haun

It is surprising how much common ground is present in these three seemingly disparate narratives, an English manor mystery set in 1950, a historical novel about Mormons in 1867, and a first-person account spanning the twentieth century of lives lived in a small Eastern Ontario town. All three look to the past and focus on complex family relationships bounded by strong cultural constraints to explore the development and responses of the characters raised in these families.

The precocious pre-pubescent girl is a part of our literary tradition. Anne Shirley, an orphaned outsider who disarms the reader with her intelligent good humour, finds the best in whatever the circumstances and in the process becomes the centre of a loving family and community. In *Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, eleven-year-old Flavia de Luce is the pigtailed anti-Anne. She is an outsider in her own home, alienated from her preoccupied father and older sisters who keep her emotionally at arm's length as they pursue their own interests. But in this situation, Flavia manages to hold her own and solve the mystery through her extensive knowledge of chemistry.

Sweetness is a period piece set in a 1950s simulacrum of the literary English country village and adjoining estate constructed good-humouredly from a tickle trunk of stock English setting, character, and mystery. Much of the fun of the story is in the extreme stereotypes of character and setting as if Flavia's world could easily encompass Hogwarts, Cold Comfort Farm, and neighbours from Lemony Snicket. Into these elements, a few rogue pieces have intruded, however, to interrupt the verisimilitude. A Georgian manor house with east and west wings does not have a small cramped kitchen; an eleven year old is unlikely to use the deliberate adult literary diction assigned to Flavia. These caveats aside, Flavia is a gem of a character, her precocity offset by her emotional vulnerability makes a winning combination.

If one were to differentiate between historical realism where the reader is taken back into the past and historical romance where the past is brought forward and served up to the reader, *Effigy* falls into the first category, and that is where it draws much of its power. The narrative moves out from two violent events in Mormon history: one, a massacre of Mormons in 1838; the other, given much more prominence, a massacre by Mormons in 1857. The novel's emphasis on the latter juxtaposes the trauma of this

event with the guilt of perpetrating it. It considers the repercussions on both slayers and victims through the lives of one polygamous ranch family in 1867 Utah. It also imagines the social and emotional conditions that could enable a polygamous sect in a settler society—the relationship between patriarchal absolutes and the power of religious imperatives, between lives of utter desperation and the possibility of belonging.

Effigy weaves an intricate narrative structure. The events at the Hammer ranch span just a few weeks. The rest of the narrative weaves the back stories of family members with an intricacy and intimacy that slowly reveals how they have been shaped into their present circumstances and behaviours. Each past vignette is told in lyrical prose that evokes vivid settings and emotional immediacy. Most of the key characters display hard-won expertise such as silkworm farming, taxidermy, tracking, or contortion that give their lives meaning in the absence of any emotional connection to another human being. Only two characters have ever known fierce maternal love as very small children before they became orphaned, and their stories in particular sing from the page—memorable, transformative.

Remembering the Bones speaks to the tradition of elderly females reviewing their lives in their final days. The reminiscences in *Bones* are of Georgina Danforth Witley, born the same day as Queen Elizabeth II. Georgie has been invited to the Queen's eightieth birthday celebration at Buckingham Palace. An accident en route finds her in a ravine suffering broken bones. She begins a detailed rehearsal of her life to override her pain as she slowly inches her way toward her car and the hope of blowing its horn to draw attention to her plight.

Chapters are shaped through Georgie's childhood study of *Gray's Anatomy* and her knowledge of specific bones, as well as how she has lived her life in conscious parallel to the Queen. Georgie's memories shine light

upon but do not illuminate beyond the small flame of her own experiences and observations. Shadowing the experience of Lilibet who must take on the mantle of Queen, the portentously male-named women in Georgie's family—Gran Dan, Phil, Fred—begin married life with straightforward domestic expectations, but soon find themselves having to assume a much larger social and economic role than they planned as the men in their lives fail to thrive.

In spite of the dire physical state in which Georgie finds herself, her knowledge of anatomy, and her obvious pain, there is very little reference to her physical suffering as the narrative focuses on her memories of the past. There is no sense of anything left unsaid or undone, no message that must be recorded for posterity. Instead, just as Georgie has documented the life of Lilibet in her scrapbooks and picture collections, Itani offers us an iteration of small-town Ontario life through the generations of a strong and decent family making do, forming bonds, and living fully.

One novel about a child that pitches to adults, a novel illuminating relatively esoteric cultural history, and a novel capturing in narrative aspic the life of a community, different as they are, share family as a defining lens, each using received conventions of language and structure to create vastly different ends. The reader's preference might almost be a matter of personality rather than of literary achievement.

Obscur désir

Denise Brassard

La Rive solitaire, Noroît 17,95 \$

Compte rendu par Yves Laroche

Quatrième recueil de Denise Brassard, *La Rive solitaire* contient quatre parties formant un cycle : aube, « après-jour », nuit, orient. À la fois structuré et nébuleux, ce livre dit de façon assez convenue l'avancée

des ombres jusqu'à l'opacité. Il s'ouvre sur un exergue de Fernand Ouellette, sublime définition du désir, à la fois moteur de l'être et horizon : « là-bas, en moi, où j'aspire \ à la rive. » Thème central de la première section, la rive s'avère le point de contact avec l'ailleurs, avec l'autre, qui a des bras pour nous accueillir, le temps d'une éclaircie, d'une fusion, d'une fulgurante éternité, qui trompe parfois la solitude. La deuxième section évoque, dans la forme même du vers éclaté, une rupture, de même que la déposition, la douleur de l'éloignement, la fuite des jours, l'approche de la mort. L'Être y est présenté comme une trouée, un vide gradué. La troisième section déborde le cadre de l'intime, notamment avec sa référence à la lutte du peuple palestinien, qui détonne. C'est alors l'errance, la dure traversée de la nuit, « cette exacte illumination de la haine », les bombes qui explosent, le sang versé, la détresse. Que faire devant ce désastre? Brassard constate son impuissance, l'insuffisance des mots. Dans la dernière section, c'est l'heure des bilans sur les ruines de la nuit, au plus profond du vide et de la déréliction. Tout se passe comme si seules la quête de l'autre et la fusion des corps pouvaient nous arracher à la solitude et à la tourmente du monde.

Quelques bonnes nouvelles

Marie Cadieux

Enfance et autres fissures. Interligne 13,95 \$

Aurélié Resch

Le bonheur est une couleur. Interligne 13,95 \$

Johanne Alice Côté

Mégot mégot petite mitaine. Triptyque n.p.

Compte rendu par Stéphane Girard

La nouvelle, par l'intermédiaire de sa forme même, se prête bien à la scrutation de l'existence dans ce qu'elle a de plus quotidien mais de minutieusement exceptionnel. Sa brièveté pointe d'ailleurs vers le hapax, la singularité, ce qu'explore Marie Cadieux

dans les nouvelles formant *Enfance et autres fissures* : de l'angoisse toute juvénile liée au premier jour d'école au flirt lascif sur une terrasse montréalaise un jour de canicule à des sujets plus graves tels le viol, le suicide ou même le meurtre en série (la surprenante « Bleu, bleu . . . »), l'auteure explore les diverses altérations qui viennent affecter la vie de ses personnages et dont l'ultime reste, peut-être, le sentiment amoureux : « Elle devait s'y faire. Myriam était fissurée à jamais . . . Elle ne serait plus jamais entière, intacte, sauve; elle aimait. » Le livre se clôt sur cette phrase qui synthétise à elle seule l'entreprise somme toute réussie de Cadieux.

Le recueil *Le bonheur est une couleur* d'Aurélie Resch est quant à lui hanté par la représentation du bonheur. En ouverture, un comédien seul dans sa loge avant d'entrer sur scène se questionne : « Ce soir, la pièce parle du bonheur. Un sujet grave, rare et beau, mais aussi délicat. Comment créer dans toute sa justesse, sa pureté et sa complexité, le visage du bonheur? » Nous le retrouvons à la fin du recueil, une fois la séance terminée, aux prises avec les mêmes interrogations : « Que reste-t-il de sa performance et de son bonheur de tout à l'heure? . . . Quelle représentation du bonheur le public a-t-il emportée avec lui? » Les neuf autres nouvelles tâchent conséquemment de répondre à ces questions : on y apprend, malheureusement sans grande surprise, que pour « accéder à un bonheur simple sans précédent », il faut « se nourrir de l'autre » et savourer le « plaisir d'être dans le moment », que l'enfance est le moment privilégié de « la splendeur de l'innocence » et de « la puissance créatrice », que la jeunesse est la « meilleure alliée de l'imagination » tandis que la « ville abandonnée à l'ennui » est l'antithèse du bonheur car « monde de bruit » ou règne un « spectacle lamentable de publicités et de néons insupportables ». Outre cette prolifération de banalités, voire de clichés, *Le bonheur est une couleur* a néanmoins le mérite de laisser le lecteur

dans l'expectative en le confrontant à sa propre conception du bonheur.

Enfin, à prime abord, le recueil *Mégot mégot petite mitaine* de Johanne Aline Côté souffre de contradictions internes. Les premiers textes (notamment « Grâce » et « Un brownie! Yé! ») sont particulièrement saisissants dans leur illustration des complexes rapports entre générations : l'auteure parle d'« inaccompli ancestral » où « la mère et l'enfant forment un noeud de violence, un amas glacé d'entêtement et de désespoir ». S'ensuit toutefois un changement de ton désorientant avec deux nouvelles plutôt préoccupées par la représentation de l'héritage autochtone (« Le dos de pierre », « Mégot mégot petite mitaine ») et deux dernières portant sur l'hermétique milieu des études littéraires, changement qui vient rompre avec l'intensité et la dureté du début de l'ouvrage. Mais peut-être est-ce aussi cela, l'audace de la nouvelle : sa farouche résistance à toute forme d'uniformisation.

178 secondes ou plus

Katia Canciani

178 Secondes. David 21,95 \$

Claude Forand

R.I.P. : Histoires mourantes. David 18,95 \$

Compte rendu par Laure Tollard

Un communiqué de Transports Canada intitulé « Un instant pour votre sécurité » nous informant que : « Cinq minutes de lecture pourraient [n]ous sauver la vie » ouvre le roman de Katia Canciani, *178 secondes*. Dès les premières lignes, le décompte est donc lancé : les événements qui changent le cours de notre vie se jouent tous à la minute, à la seconde près. 178 secondes, c'est le temps moyen nécessaire pour perdre le contrôle d'un avion, mais c'est aussi le laps de temps qui aurait pu changer la vie de Nicola.

Lorsqu'il découvre, 18 ans plus tard, que ces 178 secondes auraient pu lui être

fatales, Nicola décide d'entreprendre un voyage à travers le Canada. De Montréal au Pacifique, de Yellowknife à l'Atlantique, Nicola ne voyage pas simplement d'Est en Ouest, il veut découvrir tout le pays, tous ses visages, tous ses paysages : « Élargir son horizon, c'est bien . . . le repousser plus haut, c'est mieux! » Mis à part quelques accidents de parcours, il croise dans son périple les plus beaux visages de la francophonie, des gens simples et humains qui lui offrent un toit, un travail, ou quelques livres.

Le but de ce voyage initiatique qui fait de *178 Secondes* un exemple parfait de « Bildungsroman » n'est pas uniquement de découvrir la vérité sur ce qui lui est arrivé. Ce voyage est pour Nicola l'occasion de découvrir sa vérité : 178 secondes pour se reconstruire après 18 ans de mensonges et trouver enfin « son paysage ». La recherche de ce paysage, le besoin de se sentir enfin lui-même, de savoir qui il est, pousse Nicola à travers le Canada, là où ce ne sont, justement, pas les paysages qui manquent.

Dans ce roman dont même les chapitres sont présentés sous forme de compte à rebours, on ressent l'oppression de Nicola, son besoin vital de se trouver. Cette quête de soi et le fait de ne choisir où se rendre que le jour même rappellent les lectures qui rythment le voyage de Nicola, *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin et *Sur la Route* de Jack Kerouac. Si *178 Secondes* est un roman qui cherche à s'inscrire dans la veine de ces grandes œuvres, c'est avant tout une ode aux mille visages du Canada, à la francophonie et au voyage; un roman qui, lu dans les transports en commun, donne envie de manquer l'arrêt et de continuer la route.

Si Nicola voyage pour renaître, dans les nouvelles de Claude Forand, c'est toujours la mort qui sort gagnante. *R.I.P. Histoires mourantes* est un recueil de treize nouvelles qui font frissonner de plaisir. Leur auteur joue avec la recette du polar, en change quelques ingrédients et aboutit à un résultat délectable. L'acronyme R.I.P. « Requiescat

in pacem », n'a ici rien à voir avec les personnes décédées qui, dans la mort, trouvent la paix. Ceux qui trouvent la paix sont ceux qui donnent la mort.

Dans ces treize nouvelles rocambolesques et pleines de surprises, on rit de la mort, on joue avec elle et on tue de sang froid. La première nouvelle du recueil « Un tueur sentimental » donne le ton de l'ensemble de l'œuvre : les tueurs ne sont pas à confondre avec des criminels, ils poursuivent une cause, rien ne les distingue de toute autre personne, ils sont comme vous et moi et cherchent à rendre service, tout simplement.

Devant ce cocktail détonnant d'humour noir, on ne peut que renoncer à toute perspective manichéenne. Ces nouvelles laissent toutes un goût de déjà-vu et sont comme un florilège de ces histoires que l'on se raconte pour se faire peur. Seulement, elles sont ici réécrites, tour à tour du point de vue du tueur, de la victime ou du témoin, avec une légèreté déroutante. Puisque « La mort est pleine de surprises », pourquoi ne pas en rire?

La fondation incertaine : uchronie et fantômes de l'histoire

Jacques Cardinal

Le livre des fondations : Incarnation et québécoisement dans Le ciel de Québec de Jacques Ferron. XYZ 24,00 \$

Compte rendu par Stéphane Inkel

Par cette lecture à la fois minutieuse et très érudite du grand roman pourtant négligé de Jacques Ferron, *Le ciel de Québec*, Jacques Cardinal, professeur au Département de littérature comparée de l'Université de Montréal, poursuit l'étude des rapports politiques qu'entretient le roman québécois avec l'histoire, étude entamée en 1993 par *Le roman de l'histoire* consacré à Hubert Aquin et que sa « lecture politique » des *Anciens Canadiens* de Philippe Aubert de

Gaspé, *La paix des Braves*, publié en 2005, a recentré sur l'enjeu oublié, à défaut d'être résolu, d'une « reconnaissance symbolique » toujours en souffrance. S'il s'agissait alors de traverser le miroir aux alouettes d'une politique de l'amitié qui au Québec et au Canada a pu se nourrir de la trame du roman fondateur d'Aubert de Gaspé, de l'amitié initiale de Jules d'Haberville et d'Archibald Cameron of Locheill à leur relation de bon voisinage qui fera suite à leur rencontre fortuite sur le champ de bataille, Jacques Cardinal s'attaque ici à un autre mythe de l'historiographie, né d'un « certain discours de la Révolution tranquille sur la Grande noirceur ». Aidé en cela par l'usage en effet étonnant, et le plus souvent passé sous silence, de nombre de figures issues du catholicisme par le roman de Ferron, l'auteur cherche ainsi à « reconsidérer . . . la valeur d'un héritage catholique » devenu objet de gêne et dès lors « expulsé de la mémoire collective ». Pour ce faire, Jacques Cardinal propose une longue et concluante analyse du *récit de fondation* qui compose la trame principale du roman, en particulier de son épisode central, l'équipée du cardinal, de Mgr Camille et de Mgr Cyrille au village des Chiquettes afin de leur annoncer la fondation d'une nouvelle paroisse. Soulignant la réécriture palimpseste du récit évangélique (notamment lorsque les trois ecclésiastiques se retrouvent en adoration devant le petit Rédempteur Fauché), Jacques Cardinal insiste surtout sur la part monumentale et baroque de l'écriture qui, de la rhétorique pleine de pompe de la capitainesse aux épisodes qui servent d'anamorphoses à ce *récit de fondation*, informe le roman de Ferron et révèle la reconnaissance de la part de celui qui se définissait comme « mécréant » du legs catholique en tant que constituante de la conscience historique québécoise.

Mais au-delà de la reconnaissance de ce legs, deux éléments me semblent devoir être soulignés. Il faut d'abord remarquer la

posture « postrévisionniste » ou « uchroniste » (selon les expressions synonymiques de R. Rudin et C. Roy) de l'auteur, qui dans sa lecture du catholicisme du *Ciel* insiste sur la part de l'Incarnation, entendue ici « comme une figure réconciliatrice de l'opposition entre l'esprit et la chair », lieu à la fois du (bon) sens et des sens. Or si dans le roman Mgr Camille tient lieu de représentant (avec le cardinal et le curé Rondeau) de cette image positive du clergé, à l'opposé des « abstraits » mortifères obsédés par la seule figure du martyr comme Mgr Cyrille ou l'abbé Bessette, se pose alors la question de la part de l'uchronie dans le roman. Cette réécriture uchronique, soulignons-le à la suite de l'auteur, est notamment repérable dans la figure même de Mgr Camille, palimpseste, encore là, du régionaliste Camille Roy, bon-ententiste résolu et porte-parole autorisé du discours clérical-nationaliste de la première moitié du XX^e siècle. S'agit-il alors de revoir la représentation créée par « un certain discours sur la Grande noirceur » ou au contraire de mettre en lumière la réécriture uchronique de Ferron? C'est en tous les cas vers cette dernière que la figure du tombeau, centrale dans l'analyse du *récit de fondation*, semble devoir orienter l'étude. En effet, *Le ciel de Québec* se concluant sur l'enterrement de la capitainesse Eulalie sur les lieux mêmes de la future église de la paroisse Sainte-Eulalie, Jacques Cardinal insiste avec raison sur l'importance du lieu monumental dans la constitution d'une mémoire proprement collective. Inaugurant ainsi un monument fictif dans l'espace uchronique du *Ciel de Québec*, c'est bien à une forme de *ré-écriture de l'histoire* comme l'entendait de Certeau (à la fois « rite d'enterrement » et « fonction symbolisatrice ») que s'applique Ferron dans l'espace de son roman, réécriture brillamment mise en relief par l'analyse des deux « anamorphoses » appelées à servir de repoussoir à cette fondation réussie, soit la présence spectrale du cavalier Mandan

dans les rues de Calgary, rappel de l'échec de la « mission » utopique du Métis Louis Riel, de même que la figure d'Orphée-Saint-Denys Garneau hantée par la mort. Car « le pays incertain est aussi le pays de cette mort singulière . . . l'errance-attente d'un sujet en mal de tombeau, c'est-à-dire en mal d'une inscription apte à le reconnaître comme sujet de l'Histoire ».

The School of Life

Anne Laurel Carter

The Shepherd's Granddaughter. Groundwood
\$17.95

Edeet Ravel

The Saver. Groundwood \$17.95

Mariko Tamaki; Jillian Tamaki, illus.

Skim. Groundwood \$18.95

Reviewed by Gisèle M. Baxter

Many will remember *The Sound of Music's* "Sixteen Going on Seventeen" or Janis Ian's "At Seventeen," both of which address that point of identity formation when youthful resilience is vigorously tested. That testing is narrated through diverse protagonists in a trio of recent offerings from Groundwood Books, primarily aimed at a female readership in their mid-to-late teens, yet avoiding many of the clichés associated with girlfriendly teen fiction.

Carter tells the story of Amani, a Palestinian girl, from her childhood discovery that she wants to be a shepherd like her grandfather, to the point in her teens when her family's land is threatened by Israeli settlement. The sympathies of the novel are consistently apparent, yet its strong polemical element never overwhelms its more general human-interest elements. The story balances an economical style with a well-paced presentation of Amani's growth in body and in perspective, her discovery of her gender and its implications for her aspirations, and her discovery of her skills, both as a shepherd and as a

student. We gradually meet her family, and through them a wider world of ancient cultural traditions and modern technological gadgets, of various approaches to faith and politics. Ultimately, even after witnessing the destruction of her home and her grandfather's orchards, after seeing her father arrested, she and her family realize that even among their perceived enemies there are people who will help, and she enters into a tentative friendship with a settler boy around her own age. The ending leaves open whether she will persist in rebuilding flock and farm, or whether she will go to university, or whether she will work both options into her future.

The Saver introduces Fern, whose impoverished life with her mother, a cleaning woman, in Montréal is changed with her mother's sudden death. Fern is internally sensitive; she reads, tends to her beloved cat, and writes a journal where she addresses an imaginary friend, an alien girl named Xanoth who inhabits an idyllic world. Externally, Fern is tough, so tough she fears and suspects most other people, and so is determined to continue to survive on her own, without intervention from social services. For a while she is convinced she can do this with only a little money saved by her mother, by balancing the sorts of jobs that provide the basic necessities of life: custodial work in apartment buildings and kitchen work in restaurants. Her youth becomes apparent as she realizes that people's willingness to employ her often means they feel they can take advantage of her, knowing she will not report them and draw attention to herself, and she comes dangerously close to a life where she might drift and fall into a world of substance abuse and other risky behaviour. Only her eventual realization of truths about her mother's life, and that she has to come to trust other people enough to complain to them, and to let them into her life, enable her to envision a future where both integrity and

independence seem more compatible.

Next to the predicaments of Amani and Fern, the schoolgirl lives of Kimberly Keiko Cameron, a.k.a. Skim, and her friends might seem trivial, and yet their growing pains are probably closer to those of the audience likely to read any or all of these books. *Skim* is a graphic novel wherein the collaboration of author and illustrator is truly symbiotic: the expressionistic fluidity of the black and white illustrations serves the purpose of pages of prose, so that the laconic conversation of these girls and Skim's almost equally economical and intermittent diary entries ring true. There is little plot to speak of: the setting is an urban private girls' school in 1993 (interestingly pre-Internet/cellphone culture), and the protagonist is an outsider to the popular clique of slim, conventionally "attractive," mostly blonde girls: a self-styled Goth Wiccan who is also Japanese-Canadian and has weight issues. The boyfriend of one of the popular girls, Katie, kills himself after breaking up with her. Katie's conflicted approach to grieving draws her into a friendship with Skim that puts her at odds with her group, as Skim is drifting from her own best friend and also developing a crush on an eccentric female teacher. Yet the point is hardly how all of this will work out, and arguably none of it does: this story is about living in the moments of wrenching transition, the dizzying pendulum swings from despair to exhilaration, the intense body consciousness, the conflicting need to belong and desire to resist.

Where all three novels excel is in letting details suggest rather than in relying on excesses of prose to describe: a bunch of dried flowers, a mattress on a dusty floor, an incense burner. Hence, the flaws and strengths of their protagonists are never overwhelming; they remain relatable to young readers in their vulnerability and passion and emerging sense of self. However, both Carter and Ravel leave their

teen girls at a moment when optimism seems merited; the conclusion of *Skim* is much more ambiguous, and it might only be the older reader, for whom the teen years are fully and finally in the past, who will realize that the pain can end, or who will experience the full poignancy of this remarkably subtle and astute dissection of the tumultuous process of self-discovery.

Canadian Theatre of War

Marjorie Chan

a nanking winter. Playwrights Canada \$15.95

Donna Coates and Sherrill Grace, eds.

Canada and the Theatre of War: Volume 1.

Playwrights Canada \$49.95

Reviewed by Marissa McHugh

Following the publication of Timothy Findley's novel *The Wars* (1977) and the initial production of John Gray and Eric Peterson's musical *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1978), Canadian playwrights have increasingly focused their attention on the difficult subject of war. It is within the context of an exploration of war that Marjorie Chan's play, *a nanking winter* (2008), and Donna Coates and Sherrill Grace's drama anthology, *Canada and the Theatre of War* (2008), intersect.

Chan's play juxtaposes two time frames, 1937 and 2004, centering on both the invasion of Nanking, China, by the Japanese Imperial Army and on the contemporary war historiography surrounding this event. The first act focuses on Irene Wu, a character partially inspired by the late Iris Chang (1968-2004), author of *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust* (1997). On the eve of Irene's book release, members of her family and publishing team gather to celebrate her achievement; however, when Irene hears that the title of her book has been moderated without her consent, a semantic debate ensues, leaving her highly distressed. Though at times slightly didactic, this argument effectively draws attention to the fraught

relationships between and among authorship rights, marketing tactics, historical truth, and collective memory. The act closes by flawlessly transitioning to 1937 Nanking after a gunshot erupts from behind Irene's locked bathroom door, suggesting her suicide.

Ruth Madoc-Jones, director of the play's 2008 production, aptly explains in an introductory remark that the play examines "the importance and consequence of truth" and asks: "what happens to the truth-tellers?" By dramatizing Irene receiving anonymous telephone calls protesting her book, pressure from her editor to censor the book's content, and outside encouragement to heroize Western characters within the historical narrative, Chan effectively calls attention to the struggles of "truth-tellers" in contemporary North America.

The second act returns to the 1937 invasion, where it is estimated that the Japanese army systematically raped approximately 20 000–80 000 women and executed 300 000 people. Chan stages these events largely from the point of view of two Chinese girls, Little Mei and Big Mei, who have found temporary shelter at Ginling College under the protection of two Western figures: Anna Mallery, inspired by missionary Minnie Vautrin, and Nicklas Hermann, inspired by German businessman and high ranking Nazi officer John Rabe. Though the first act only discusses the little-known Nanking atrocities, the second act dramatizes both girls experiencing horrific mental and physical afflictions. Chan's highly visual staging of this persecution calls attention to the physical reality behind the contemporary written history of this time.

Canada and the Theatre of War includes eight plays written between the years of 1980 and 2007 by leading Canadian playwrights on the subject of Canada and the World Wars. The first section includes five plays on World War I: R.H. Thomson's *The Lost Boys*, David French's *Soldier's Heart*, Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding*, Guy

Vanderhaeghe's *Dancock's Dance*, and Vern Thiessen's *Vimy*. As the editors explain, Canadian playwrights, like Canadian novelists, historians, and filmmakers, have generated more material on the Great War than on the Second World War, partially as a result of the symbolic resonance of First World War battles within the national story. The second section focuses on World War II and includes Margaret Hollingsworth's *Ever Loving*, Jason Sherman's *None is Too Many*, and Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*. The collection presents a plurality of Canadian perspectives, including those of war brides, war widows, Jewish refugees, German Canadian and Dene civilians as well as Francophone, First Nations, and Anglophone soldiers (to name a few) positioned both overseas and at home. The plays commonly explore the pain incited by wartime losses and consider the ways in which war infects home spaces seemingly removed from its horror. Concise but detailed biographies preface each play, explaining the context for each play's creation within the scope of the playwright's other works. These follow with production histories, making the anthology highly suitable for a course text.

The collection's introduction begins by offering a thought-provoking contemplation of the way in which theatre and war have coexisted "in a complex mirroring performance of act and action, enactment and re-enactment." Coates and Grace then explain that throughout the twentieth century and up to the present, the world has experienced a continued state of military violence and that Canada has not been exempt from these conflicts despite its geographical placement. The sustained violence and Canada's implication within these conflicts have provided Canadian artists with important subject matter and have prompted continued reflections on Canada's role in past and present military engagements.

The editors also discuss the genre of the plays within the anthology, specifying that they are not “war plays”—though they only implicitly define their use of this term. They refer to the works as “plays about war” or as “memory plays,” all written by playwrights born during or after World War II. They argue that each play is equally about the “process of remembering, or of post-memory, as it is about actual combatants, dead relatives, or survivors.” This enables readers to consider the plays as both historical reconstructions and reflections on the state of remembrance in contemporary society.

a nanking winter and the collected plays in *Canada and the Theatre of War* suggest the continued interest in the exploration of war on Canadian stages. The current relevance of the anthologized selections, as Coates and Grace explain, stems from the fact that they “ask urgent, timely questions about the origins and causes of war, about the consequences of suffering caused by war and the possibility of peace,” and “deploy the resources and power of theatre to shake audience members out of an easy complacency and an assumption that, as individuals, we cannot effect change or do not bear responsibility,” all of which is also true of Chan’s play.

La dissidence comme auto-fiction

Tina Charlebois

Poils lisses. L’Interligne 12,95 \$

Rose Després

Si longtemps déjà. Prise de parole 13,95 \$

Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo

Sahéliennes. L’Interligne 12,95 \$

Compte rendu par François Paré

Les mots cherchent à provoquer le scandale. On note même une certaine insistance qui va bien au-delà de l’ironie. Voici que la poésie est au service de la dissidence. Dans les

trois recueils dont il est question ici, un sujet-femme prend acte de sa marginalité réelle et se construit à même le refus des conventions génériques et socio-politiques. Dans *Poils lisses*, le deuxième recueil de Tina Charlebois, l’écriture poétique continue d’épouser les formes particulières de la poésie narrative franco-ontarienne, si présentes chez des poètes comme Patrice Desbiens, Robert Dickson, et Sylvie-Maria Filion. L’auto-fiction est ici une pratique de la désinvolture. Le désengagement apparent du poète est en réalité un signe de son engagement profond envers une marginalité appauvrissante où n’affleure qu’une identité indistincte. Par le biais d’un dialogue où l’énonciatrice jette un regard décapant sur sa vie quotidienne, Charlebois met en place une subjectivité scindée en lutte contre les conventions imposées par la société. Dans une section du recueil intitulée « Poils lys », les savoureux passages que Charlebois consacre à l’identité culturelle constituent une critique des représentations nationales sur lesquelles la communauté franco-ontarienne contemporaine repose largement : « L’histoire ne se répète pas, elle s’éternise sur la même intrigue, sans point tournant. » (p. 23) Devant les « rives indéterminées » qui bordent son parcours singulier, la femme fait face à ses « obligations langagières » : « Je m’oblige / à une culture que je ne réussis jamais / à cultiver » (p. 36), constate-t-elle. L’écriture poétique de Charlebois n’a pas encore le souffle qu’il faudrait pour propulser ces images au-delà du simple sarcasme, mais *Poils lisses* confirme la pertinence de cette écriture à la fois exaltée et mélancolique.

Un silence de neuf ans sépare *Si longtemps déjà* de Rose Després de son recueil précédent, *La vie prodigieuse*, une oeuvre qui, par son écriture expansive, avait conquis un assez large public. Bien qu’elle place en exergue un extrait de la chanson « Ne me quitte pas » de Jacques Brel, ce nouveau recueil de Després se refuse à toute pitié. Au contraire, une vive colère a remplacé tout sentiment

d'abandon et la poésie est devenue le lieu d'un mauvais sort, d'une condamnation. *Si longtemps déjà* offre peu de moments de recueillement et d'espoir. Les poèmes se succèdent comme autant d'invectives lancées aux hommes, « petits scorpions » qui, par leurs « charnelles déviances » (p. 15), compromettent toute chance de mettre fin à cette « rancune abjecte » (p. 17) qui hante l'énonciatrice. L'univers décrit par Després est profondément dysphorique, tant est grande la solitude hargneuse de la femme possédée par la révolte. Incapable de s'affranchir de son passé, elle s'attaque à tout ce qui bouge : « survivante », elle tue toute vie autour d'elle. Sa démarche tend à rompre le charme de la lecture et, refermant ce livre, le lecteur s'assure bien de laisser l'énonciatrice à ses malheurs.

Sahéliennes d'Angèle Bassolé-Ouédraogo appartient à une autre sphère de la production littéraire francophone. Née à Abidjan en Côte d'Ivoire, Bassolé-Ouédraogo situe son oeuvre poétique dans la foulée de celle des auteurs marquants de la période des indépendances africaines, tout en voulant affirmer la spécificité de la parole des femmes. Les poèmes se succèdent comme autant de cris, « répétés par tes enfants / Afrique » (p. 33), scandant sans pourtant la décrire, la contribution des femmes à l'histoire africaine. À maintes reprises, Bassolé-Ouédraogo s'adresse pourtant à ses prédécesseurs masculins, surtout Aimé Césaire et David Diop, comme si elle cherchait en eux une continuité et une légitimité perdues. En dépit de l'accueil qu'elle a reçu en Ontario français, cette oeuvre reste très limitée sur le plan de l'expression, surtout si on la place dans son contexte africain. L'écriture semble en effet chercher une performativité qui s'épuise dans les trop nombreuses répétitions.



La réalité et ses ailleurs

Ying Chen

Un enfant à ma porte. Boréal 19,95 \$

Madeleine Thien; Hélène Rioux, trad.

Certitudes. XYZ 25,00 \$

Compte rendu par Pamela V. Sing

Le roman de Ying Chen est construit autour d'une femme et son enfant, raconté à la première personne par la femme. Celle-ci est mariée à A., bon bourgeois qu'on a rencontré dans les romans précédents de Chen. L'apparition de l'enfant lui semble un rêve devenu réalité qui lui fera découvrir en elle-même les qualités innées d'une « vraie mère » et devenir de la sorte une « vraie femme ».

Deux mois plus tard, à une soirée tenue pour célébrer la famille élargie, les collègues de A. la traitent comme la mère idéale, à la fois aimante et dévouée, mais en réalité, la maternité lui est une épreuve. Son corps accuse les coups assésés par un quotidien axé sans répit sur celui qui, même quand il s'absente par le sommeil ou autrement, occupe son esprit. L'instinct maternel, conclut-elle, s'oppose à l'instinct de survie individuelle et est donc un instinct suicidaire.

Et pourtant, « avoir un enfant à élever » lui évite de faire ce qu'il lui arrive de faire en l'absence de A., soit, avoue le « je » avant que le récit à proprement parler ne commence, tomber dans un état somnambulique et « devenir squelette ». Cela nous rappelle que dans le récit antérieur que fut la *Querelle d'un squelette avec son double*, la lutte fut emportée par le double, mais de justesse, tant le « je » chez Chen s'avère un être fragile, divisé, déchiré entre l'ici-maintenant et différents ailleurs rêvés, remémorés ou anticipés. Selon l'épigraphe, cela fait que « nous existons à la fois comme une réalité et comme sa négation, en tant que trace, en tant que rêve, en tant que souvenir ». Le roman traduit cette idée en précisant dès la première page que l'enfant a physiquement habité l'univers de la

narratrice « exactement trois cent quatre-vingt-neuf jours ». Sa « disparition » s'avère subite et mystérieuse comme le fut son apparition, mais pour celle dont l'identité s'est construite en partie grâce à lui, en collaboration avec lui, rien de son passage ne sera jamais perdu ou oublié. À force de se fréquenter, la femme et l'enfant ont forgé un espace que le sujet écrivant nomme « cette indicible intimité », mais l'écriture de Chen donne une forme concrète à l'expérience et ce, tout en révélant l'aspect forcément violent et avec la poésie et la sensibilité qu'on lui connaît.

Certitudes, le deuxième ouvrage de Madeleine Thien, mais son premier roman, partage avec le huitième roman de Chen la préoccupation des mondes autres dont des traces hantent l'ici-maintenant. Chez Thien, toutefois, les ailleurs servent à faire voir une « même » personne sous différents angles, soit à révéler l'incomplétude des connaissances que nous possédons à l'endroit d'autrui et de nous-mêmes. Il en découle la structure de l'ouvrage qui présente d'emblée la mort de son protagoniste pour ensuite raconter sous forme de flashbacks et en faisant entendre plusieurs voix, la vie de ceux qui, de près ou de loin, ont joué un rôle dans l'existence de ce protagoniste. Tous ont eu à faire le deuil d'un ou d'une proche à un moment donné et ce, souvent en gardant en eux l'image fixe d'un aspect particulier de l'être perdu, même s'il s'agit là d'une construction de l'esprit qui, du reste, se modifie avec le temps. La mise en rapport de différents espaces et savoirs apporte des éclaircissements, mais sans jamais produire un portrait entier ni définitif.

Un numéro précédent de cette revue a publié un compte rendu de la version originale de *Certitudes*, lui faisant partager la page avec *Divisadero* de Michael Ondaatje. Ici, sa traduction française, faite par Hélène Rioux, partage la page avec une autre plume renommée. Les comparaisons font ressortir le caractère prometteur de l'écriture chez

Thien. Il est dommage, même si l'on sait bien que *traduttore est traditore*, que *Certitudes* contienne des maladresses, voire des non-sens, que *Certainty* ne manifeste point.

Beyond Repair

Dede Crane

The Cult of Quick Repair. Coteau \$18.95

Ian Colford

Evidence. Porcupine's Quill \$22.95

Pamela Stewart

Elysium. Anvil \$18.00

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

These three books are remarkably similar in some respects—provocative, disturbing, yet often hilarious. *The Cult of Quick Repair* by British Columbia writer Dede Crane is a collection of short stories suggesting that no quick repair is possible; in fact, along with the collection, *Elysium*, by self-described “literary proctologist” Pamela Stewart, the stories in Crane’s book describe lives and relationships that are beyond repair. Ian Stewart’s *Evidence* presents itself as a novel, but resists interpretation and categorization; while all chapters have the same narrator, the order is not chronological, and the reader often struggles to assess the narrator’s credibility and accountability. All three books, then, challenge conventional generic definitions, and underscore the disorder of human life and interaction.

The Cult of Quick Repair is Crane’s first published collection of stories; her earlier book, the novel *Sympathy*, focuses on a ballet dancer who is in a catatonic state after a car accident. The novel also relates the practice of sympathy-based therapy, and draws on Crane’s personal experience as a professional dancer and choreographer. Crane, however, also describes herself as a “professional daydreamer” who gets lost in her own stories; these narratives confirm the “interconnectedness of people” as well as the connection of body and mind. Crane

demonstrates her skill in developing interesting and sometimes grotesque characters and situations resonant with irony and pathos. The title story, which also appears at the beginning of the collection, focuses on the death of the main character's mother; however, quirkiness is highlighted in the presence of the mother's "mystic vigilantes"—a team of Buddhists who pray around the deathbed—and the prodigal brother eyeing the vials of morphine. The mother's humanity shines through as the daughter reflects on what is lost *in extremis*: "It's devastating to Janet that her mom's laugh is now lost to the world. She should have recorded it, she tells herself, should have made a tape loop to play whenever something funny happened. . . . She could put it on right now, see if the Buddha team would react."

While the first story in *Elysium* similarly focuses on the deathbed scene of a parent, it is not quite as successful in driving home the humanity of the characters. Like Crane's, Stewart's stories are often gritty and sometimes grotesque; her opening lines, in particular, often seek to surprise or even hoodwink the reader. For instance, the title story begins from the dying man's perspective, though again with a third-person narrator: "My brain is for pleasure now," Peter says. He is pinned between the two women." In the lines that follow, the reader learns that this scene is not what was predicted. Stewart's strength is in these first lines that make the reader conscious of his or her own assumptions. Some of the endings, in contrast, fizzle out by struggling to draw conclusions.

Most unsettling are Stewart's stories that focus on perversion and abuse, particularly in "Red Means Stop" and "Swallow Me Whole." Of her interest in the seedier side of humanity, she notes twenty years spent as a private investigator: "alone in a car watching people. . . I would watch someone for three or so days in a row, and in that time get a capsule version of their life." The endings of these two stories are intense and

brutal, in contrast to the ambiguous ending of "Elysium" or the symbolic resonances of others. Stories such as "Pregnant," "Ash Wednesday," "Black," "Avoiding Penance," and "Park," are one- to two-page narratives that aim to keep us pondering an image or idea: "The baby is the size of a period. It ends a sentence very well, and she could end the story here."

Halifax writer Ian Colford builds a multifaceted image of the "globalized man," but sometimes falls short of moving the reader. Kostandin Bitri is an Eastern-European war orphan for whom English is a seventh language. In each chapter of the book, he becomes inextricably woven into the activity of people around him through multiple places and occupations. The overall tone of the book emphasizes loneliness, manipulation, and failed connection. In one story, Kostandin becomes involved with the mysterious Mrs. Lamond and her disabled son, Stefan. The consequences are bizarre, reinforcing Kostandin's suspicions regarding people's motivations, and never finally resolved. The novel, while intricate and diverting, finally leaves only a shallow impression. Location is deliberately indefinable in these chapters, in contrast to the specificity of Crane's Vancouver and Stewart's Toronto. Even though the novel begins at "a small college in a remote part of the province," for instance, geographical space is not identified. Kostandin is placeless and vulnerable in every setting.

It is the resounding note of humour that distinguishes Crane's writing, and makes her collection more compelling. While the subject matter and characters are quite similar—distorted, disconnected, and with a variety of perversions—there is a quirky irony to the stories. For instance, "Best Friends" focuses on an intimate gesture during a hockey game that makes public the homoeroticism of male competitive sports teams; "Next" describes a new mother initiating phone sex with a telecommunications

company operator; “Breaking Things” narrates a woman’s wait in an abortion clinic. Less successful is the story “Raising Blood,” which takes the irony and fascination with the grotesque seemingly one step too far, describing a one-night-stand that goes terribly wrong. Like Stewart, Crane relishes the opening hook: “Jon didn’t mean to have sex with the new systems analyst, the woman who, more or less, replaced his and six other jobs.” Stories such as this, along with “Medium Security” and “Fireworks”, remain just a bit too superficial.

In the end, though, all three books are worthwhile reads, tracing the line between humour and sadness, and highlighting the strange beauty of humanity in extreme moments. As Crane says of her own artistic inspiration, it is writing that “sticks in the craw,” that emphasizes human life as beyond repair but always unpredictable and fascinating.

Disenfranchised Grief

Libby Creelman

The Darren Effect. Goose Lane \$19.95

Ahmad Saidullah

Happiness and other Disorders. Key Porter \$29.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

These two books, while dissimilar in so many ways, are profoundly haunting—both resonant reflections on human experience and relationship. Far removed from one another in terms of genre and geographical context, their characters and images remain paradoxically uplifting and disturbing.

The Darren Effect is Libby Creelman’s first novel, and weaves remarkably the stories of several individuals in a setting of Newfoundland. While St. John’s is described as a small place, it is not size that brings these people together; in fact, the novel is riddled with lost or failed connections—characters who track each other’s movements through wooded areas, know

each other only through car windows and grocery-store lines, call each other’s homes only to hang up. On the surface, the reason for this reluctance to make connections is the extramarital affair and terminal illness that signal a gradual disintegration of and distancing within the Martin family. Heather, the mistress now pregnant with Benny Martin’s child, and Isabella, Benny’s wife, notice how both man and relationship steadily recede over the six years of the affair. The book is punctuated by closed curtains, drive-by glimpses, and the mysteries of ordinary next-door neighbours. Darren, the biologist who studies the birds along the coastline, is first of interest to Heather and her sister Mandy as a potential literary subject, but later they follow him out of “a yearning. Like an addiction. The promise of intoxication.”

Though characters—young and aged, male and female, related and estranged—often shift roles and places in the book, they remain true and compelling. In addition, the non-human characters, including whales, puffins, seals, and other local fauna, provide frustrated glimpses of hope and connection. These images, suggests the book, are all echoes of “disenfranchised grief”—the grief that cannot be openly acknowledged or healed. The odd behaviour of Benny’s child after his death, the aging dog Isabella resists euthanizing, the growing fetus in Heather’s uterus all become outward signs of this internal and often invisible pain.

In her own review of Creelman’s novel, Candace Fertile describes the marriage of tragic and comic visions; that characteristic also underscores the short stories in Ahmad Saidullah’s marvellous collection, *Happiness and Other Disorders*. As the possibility of flight and the hope of freedom motivates the characters in *The Darren Effect*, Saidullah’s characters are perpetually on the move, resilient in often-catastrophic circumstances, and able to find meaning in

the tenuous connections with others in a troubling world. From the first story, “Vatan and the Cow,”—about a man expelled from his home who embarks on a pilgrimage to Badrinath with his cow—to the disturbing “Flight to Egypt”—in which an assassin mistakenly takes the wrong train in his attempted escape, only to find himself trapped at the end of the story—the tales are again interwoven with both human and animal images. A bird trapped on a train is killed when it hits a ceiling fan: “this is life. Trapped alone in a box until you go,” comments the clerk. The assassin and his sexual partner become a metaphor of isolation and disconnection: “*I am that I am. Alone. Again. None shall know me. Empty as a husk.*” Depictions of loss, death, torture, poverty, disease, and psychological stress evident in stories such as “The Sadness of Snakes” haunt the reader long after the book is finished—“Mummy didn’t send for us,” the narrator explains, “She never came.”

If one is tempted to despair reading these stories, or to ponder the irony of the collection’s title, dark humour and wit also resonate, particularly in the fictional editor’s note, which explains how he found these stories in a mysterious box and served only as the inheritor of that treasure. Similarly, the final story, the title story of the collection, is superfluous in its depiction of a man literally knocked over by his nephew’s overweight fiancée; that injury then leads to an encounter with the family of a masseur. Several stories focus explicitly on darkness and light, or on blindness and sight, and the opening passage of “White” encapsulates the ambivalent perspective Saidullah brings to human experience in South Asia, Burma, North America, and Europe: “[D]id you think that once you saw it everything would become clear, that it would be so easy to decipher? Like bits of coloured glass in a tube that fall into a pattern when shaken, a pattern you could recognize? . . . There it was, in the break of the clouds: the

temples scattered on the plain like rubies in a palm . . . More images without a story.”

As in any collection of stories, some speak more strongly than others, and some characters are more memorable than others. The story “Book Review,” cleverly self-conscious and placed in the middle of the collection, draws on the conventions of mischief evident in much South Asian writing. “The Blinding Darkness” draws on conventions of parable, with the arrival of an outsider to a village suffering from a lengthy drought. Some characters appear deliberately grotesque—even shocking—and their stories are almost folkloric despite contemporary settings. Notably, however, both Saidullah and Creelman write powerfully and hauntingly, blending both affirmation and desperation, relationship and isolation, in ways that stick with the reader like the emblematic tree resin and oil on the feathers of waterfowl.

Autopsy of the Anatomy

Robert D. Denham, ed.

Northrop Frye’s Notebooks for “Anatomy of Criticism”: Vol. 23 of *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. U of Toronto P \$100.00

Jean O’Grady, ed.

Interviews with Northrop Frye: Vol. 24 of *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. U of Toronto P \$185.00

Robert D. Denham and Michael Dolzani, eds.

Northrop Frye’s Fiction and Miscellaneous Writings: Vol 25 of *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. U of Toronto P \$100.00

Reviewed by Graham Nicol Forst

Thanks to the University of Toronto Press and the industry of Robert D. Denham, Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* now stands alone among the key texts of twentieth-century liberal humanism as having available the complete notes leading to its conception and birth.

Reading the *Notebooks for “Anatomy of Criticism”* is at times fascinating for its glimpses of Frye’s creative processes, yet

at other times dull and repetitive as Frye continually reconsiders the “cut” of his “skeleton key” to all literature. Often, too, these notebooks seem, for Frye, very private and visceral—as, for example, when he says he pulled large parts of the *Anatomy* from his “left armpit” and refers to its publication as “finally excreted” (one can imagine a future PhD thesis on “Frye’s Scatology”: his notebooks are replete with it. Even in the notes for his novel, people at prayer are referred to as “leaning forward in the pensive pose of excretion”). The feeling of privacy which accompanies the reading of these notebooks arises from the paternalistic presence of a scolding alter ego telling him to “shut up” and “stop gassing.” More often Frye scolds himself, with comments such as “Oh hell! I had it right the first time” or “I suffer from acute schematosis.” Frye has been criticized for this “schematosis” frequently, and many of his notes to himself fuel these criticisms, *viz.*, “there are lots of holes here,” “I have to shove things in,” and “Jesus, I wish I could put things in the right places.” The *Anatomy*, in other words, seems more and more like a bed of Procrustes as it emerges from this awkward carpentry of jumbled data, but it remains after all these years a very well-made bed indeed. (One of the most interesting discoveries from this volume is that the *Anatomy* finally came together in notes scribbled on the programme Frye received when he attended Lester Pearson’s installation as Prime Minister!)

A shy man, Frye once said he had “unconsciously arranged [his] life so that nothing had ever happened to [him].” And in the 1200-odd pages of Volume 24 of the *Collected Works*, which assembles the hundreds of interviews Frye gave over the years, this judgment is confirmed. Throughout the interviews, Frye spoke in formulas, as if designed to deflect personal probing and move towards his role of the “transparent” teacher. Some of his interviewers did try

to elicit some prurient insight into his past or personality, and when such a personal insight comes, as when he revealed to Deanne Bogdan the effect on him of his first wife’s death, it’s almost jarring. Frye’s editor here, Jean O’Grady, in her Introduction, calls these rare personal moments “pearls in the oyster of the interview,” but I found them the irritant rather than the pearl—I felt embarrassed for Frye at such moments, and tried to look past them for the pearls of wisdom in the formal responses to the interviewers’ questions.

The “fun” of reading these interviews (there are more than a hundred transcribed here) is in watching Frye delicately skirt around stupid questions, often making his timid interviewers actually look good when the question asked clearly revealed the difference in intellect between the interviewers and their subject. On the other hand, when the interviewer is *not* cowed by Frye, the level of discussion is far deeper as, for example, in the dialogues with Eli Mandel, Bill Moyers, David Cayley and, particularly, Don Harron.

Many of these interviews were conducted during the days of student rebellion in the 60s, and they find Frye sticking to his conservative guns about structure, tradition, convention, discipline, the reading and teaching and perpetuating of the canon, detachment instead of engagement, the archetype as an instrument of continuous creation, revolution as self-immolation, etc. And although much of this becomes repetitive, this volume contains much of the best reading in the *Collected Works* for a number of reasons: the enormous variety of questions asked, the different perspectives of the interviewers, Frye’s *ex tempore* articulateness and nimbleness in responding, and the sheer intelligence of the best of the interviews. As well, Frye’s audience here is, of course, quite a different one from that of the *Notebooks*, where he felt free to expostulate endlessly and mind-numbingly on his Casaubon-like Mythology to End

All Mythologies—the “Ogdoad.” Also, he rightly saw his audience in these interviews as more general than the readership of his critical work, giving his various positions a clarity and brevity missing particularly in his later work. This is especially true in a wonderful interview he gave for *CBC Ideas* in 1971 explaining Blake’s cosmos, published here as “Interview # 24.”

One thing that emerges from these (chronologically ordered over forty-plus years) interviews is the amazing *consistency* of Frye’s views from his earliest to his latest utterances, as if he were born with his ideas intact in a kind of Chomskyan Universal Grammar. Unfortunately, however, this “grammar” contained many embarrassingly reactionary views of women, especially “those women’s lib people” as he called feminists. Frye suggests for example that a “girl” shouldn’t have to learn algebra because “her whole life is already geared to marriage and bridge on a Saturday night and shopping in the suburbs.” And at another point he reveals his fragile knowledge of human anatomy when he notes that “Nearly every girl in her lower years . . . takes in everything through her gonads. . . .” As well, Frye rarely had anything to say about women or Aboriginal authors. Music too, strangely, considering its centrality in aesthetics and his love for it, is rarely a subject for Frye, and politics is almost never present (Frye was an avowed leftist, yet no one thought to interview him about McCarthy—wouldn’t it have been interesting to hear his views on this American tyrant?).

But perhaps most disappointingly, although these interviews span the whole development of postmodern/poststructural criticism, deconstruction, etc., no one seriously challenged Frye on what became seen as the more and more obsolete structuralist dimension of his work. How would Frye have responded to challenges from serious Derrideans, or new historicists (“horses slurping water” as Frye called

them)? Probably very well . . . but it would have been nice to see it happen. (Cayley’s interview timidly broached the dissonance between Frye and deconstruction, but Frye wouldn’t bite.) Also, no one in these interviews tried, at any point, to criticize Frye, or to goad him into responding to print criticisms of his writings, from, for example, Wimsatt or Lentricchia or others.

The title of Volume 25—*Northrop Frye’s Fiction and Miscellaneous Writings*—sounds as if the book might contain ephemera and unclassifiable writings of little public or scholarly interest. However, aside from the hesitant stabs at fiction, this volume proves to be one of the most interesting of all those produced so far. They range from thoughtful and persuasive unpublished essays on the Victorians (there are especially fascinating and before now unpublished pieces on Carlyle, Mill, and Arnold), to personal reflections, occasional speeches, and eulogies (living to an old age, and as a famous old man and ordained minister to boot, Frye had more than his share of these to give) to clearly minor doodlings. There’s a little more privacy here than elsewhere—even than in his diaries, as, for example, in his opinions about his wife’s new girdle (a “redoubtable fortress”) to apparently unrelated speculations on the “garrison mentality” of Canadians.

Although famous for rejecting value judgments in literature, Frye reflected often and at length about his own failed attempts at “creative writing”: “I have nothing to say in fiction that other people haven’t said better,” he admitted in an interview, and the examples offered in Volume 25 confirm his self-deprecation. The material is made up, mostly, of satires on what Kierkegaard called “Christendom,” of fantasies about Greek theophanies with vague humanist morals, and of fragments of a planned novel clearly based on his own experience as an itinerant pastor in the Methodist church. None of this material does justice either to

his intellect or his judgment, except his judgment on his own attempts at fiction: "I don't seem to be fundamentally interested in writing the way novelists write . . . what I write, with all its wit, is still pedantic. . . . It's crotch-bound." It's hard to see how the publication of this material could serve Frye's reputation. Surely the *Collected Works* would have been better served to publish, even selectively, Frye's voluminous marginalia, which the project has decided to ignore.

On a negative note, since these volumes aspire to definitiveness, it's odd that the names of famous poems and world-class authors and organizations continue to be mislabelled and mis-spelled—for example, throughout these three volumes Oscar Wilde's *cognomen* "Fingal" is indexed as "Fingall"; Joy Kogawa is referred to as Joy Kagawa; Schubert's most famous song "*Gretchen am Spinnrade*" is garbled as "*Gretchen am Spinnard*," and Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is referred to as *Bouvard et Péuchet*. Wordsworth is credited with a non-existent poem called "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," and the world-famous German music publishing house Breitkopf comes off as "Beitkopf." In his writings on music Frye is permitted, without editorial comment, to confuse the Dorian and Phrygian modes. And finally, Frye, an ordained minister, is not likely to have said "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you," which is not a text found in any translation of the Bible.

Wordsworth spoke about the love of nature leading to the love of man, but Frye was closer to Shelley when he spoke, as he does frequently throughout these volumes, about the love of art leading to the love of man. Challenged by an interviewer to present his final dying words to English teachers, Frye said, "Love literature [because] love is the focusing of the creative power within yourself in order to direct it upon others and to create a new kind of society out of your relation to them."

If such a society were ever to emerge, Northrop Frye would be one of its main architects.

Les variations du monde

Louise Deschênes

Porte dérobée. Triptyque 16,00 \$

Marcelle Roy

Lumière aux aguets. Éditions du Noroît 16,95 \$

Compte rendu par Marilou Sainte-Marie

Un monde sépare les recueils de Louise Deschênes et de Marcelle Roy. Seul le hasard du compte rendu a pu les réunir l'espace d'un moment. Le premier s'ouvre sur une interrogation, lancinante : « Que me reste-t-il de toi? ». Sorte d'impossible tombeau, le livre de Louise Deschênes s'écrie autour de la mort de la mère et du vide que cette disparition révèle. Multipliant les images de nuit et de lumière vacillante, Deschênes explore les tourments d'une relation mère-fille conflictuelle. Ici, le deuil est empêché par une colère sourde qui ne parvient pas à gronder jusqu'à l'éclatement. « J'ignore tout, et plus encore ma colère », écrit l'auteure. Bien que porté par un réel désir de parole, *Porte dérobée* trouve difficilement son intensité poétique. Des souvenirs durcis, un malaise restent prisonniers du silence : « Être aux abois et ne plus savoir sous quelles ténèbres engranger les mots ». Les poèmes, construits à partir d'un assemblage de courtes phrases, n'arrivent pas à exprimer la force du drame qui se dessine pourtant en filigrane du recueil.

Inspirés du haïku, les poèmes brefs de *Lumière aux aguets* portent une attention soutenue aux menues variations du monde. « Chaque matin le même / salut au soleil // ce jagement subit des feuillages // l'espace plie / se déplie / se rendort ». Le bruissement de la vie végétale et animale, noté avec finesse et sensibilité, rappelle combien l'existence est mouvement, même le plus infime. Leçon sur la fragilité des êtres et des

choses (« L'éclat insupportable des ramures / l'ombre avide des sous-bois / la lumière / aux aguets »), la poésie de Marcelle Roy, parce qu'elle se montre sensible au passage du temps, témoigne paradoxalement d'un enivrant apprentissage du moment présent : « je bois je mange je respire / par tous les pores de ma peau / je n'en peux plus de jouissance ». Souvrant sur une citation d'Annie Ernaux (« Je n'étais plus que du temps / passant à travers moi »), « Murmures », la dernière partie du recueil, laisse toutefois affleurer dans les poèmes une conscience plus inquiète : « Est-ce le soir encore / est-ce la nuit / effrayée / sur la pente du jour / est-ce moi ce noir qui hésite/sur le fil grisonnant du crépuscule ». Entre rêverie et lucidité du regard, *Lumière aux aguets* invite à l'écoute et à l'observation patientes du monde.

Of Obscurity and Signposts

Jeffrey Donaldson

Palilalia. McGill-Queen's UP \$16.95

rob mcLennan

aubade. Broken Jaw \$22.00

Brenda Leifso

Daughters of Men. Brick \$18.00

Reviewed by Jesse Patrick Ferguson

Donaldson's *Palilalia* tackles the standard themes of childhood, memory, and death. It also explores language itself, such as in the collection's expertly conceived title piece. He repeatedly circles back to loss: loss of loved ones, of detail in memory, and, eventually, of ourselves to death. As the poem "Where We Are Now" suggests, however, "perhaps it isn't as bad as all that." Humans, chiefly through language, have the power to defy death by celebrating life and by creating supportive communities, an idea Donaldson develops in the collection's strongest piece, "A Gloss on 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.'" Riffing off the Whitman poem, Donaldson's conveys the bittersweetness of passing the torch to succeeding

generations that may or may not remember us as individuals, but that will carry some of our values forward. The poet addresses these inheritors: "and of course you know what we failed to learn in our time here."

In spite of its clever wordplay and memorable concepts—such as an encounter with Northrop Frye's ghost in a subway terminal in "Museum"—there are flaws in *Palilalia*. First, at times the poem's craft does not match the originality of its concept or conceit. This occurs in "Hereafter II" and "Where We Are Now"; the latter repeats with slight variations the interesting question "What would it be like if we saw everything / in front of us now as a distant memory?" to the point of diminishing its impact. This repetitiveness is linked to Donaldson's tendency to over-clarify his work, such as in "Let," a poem about God that shifts to recollections of a schoolteacher, whom the poet compares to "a deity"—a completely unnecessary simile in the context. It seems that Donaldson's otherwise strong craftsmanship, which results in an engaging collection on the whole, sometimes leads him to "tame" his poems.

If Donaldson sometimes takes the reader too firmly by the hand, in *aubade* mcLennan often leaves the reader wandering unguided. His work is best described as abstract, impressionistic, and in a broad sense experimental. He shuns capitalization and standard punctuation—a practice that yields some irritating ambiguities. He also makes consistent use of non-sequiturs, fragmentation, juxtaposition, and the rhetorical figures ellipsis, syntactic inversion, and aposiopesis—the premature breaking off of a sentence.

His strongest poems offer some coherent setting, feeling, or idea. The poem "south keys (he who became lost)" is such a one. In it, mcLennan's jazzy shifts from idea to idea—"by the teeth of the river, they slept. the tip, / the tongue. // expands across the water"—circle back on the definite setting of a bus journey. The success of the seduction poem "serious talk" is achieved in much the same

way. These poems show that setting can be crucial for drawing readers in, for providing us a solid place to stand and appreciate the interesting ways mclennan thinks.

Since *aubade* is largely a record of fleeting impressions—on personal relations, or the quotidian events of the poet's life—there is a tendency toward self-referentiality that can be irritating. For the reader to become interested in the poet's haircut (see "hair") the language had better be sparkling, and in *aubade*, it sometimes is not. There are clichés ("so far away but so close too"; "when will love come home"), some flimsy constructions, and some rhythmically flat passages. Yet, mclennan's practice allows him to suggest a feeling or idea in a more delicate way than more linear verse might, and part of the pleasure of his best work is that, as *aubade*'s first poem suggests—"ill let you tell it"—the reader is invited to co-write the poem's meaning.

Leifso's debut collection, *Daughters of Men*, is strong but inconsistent. Its first long poem, "Prayer for Rain," explores memories of a prairie childhood and a real or imagined return home. In spite of some interesting passages and careful sound craft, the metaphorical and metaphysical nuclei of this sequence are not original enough to elevate the descriptive elements. The reflections on memory—"maybe in their stories you'll never exact / history from truth," "all you know how to remember / all that composes you"—are fairly conventional, and like some of Donaldson's clarifications, are unnecessary in their context. Leifso's signposts can also take a sentimental bent, as, for example, in "Letter to Dad": "just as you take my hand, just as I know you'd never / let me walk on alone."

The strongest work in *Daughters* comes in "The Theban Women: a play in verse," which reinterprets Euripides' play *The Bacchae* in a series of dramatic monologues. Leifso's ability to control cadence and emotional depth finds fullest expression in

these dramatic, sensual, and often overtly sexual poems that manage to maintain grace and *gravitas*. For instance, in "Silenae, Once Agave's Slave . . ." thickened sound reinforces content: "the summer they spent dreaming / their pregnant bones into liquid / thick as slow-moving water." Other sections in the poem bypass direct statement of meaning and develop emotion through memorable images, for instance, in "Agave Ignites . . .": "What then could I do / but lie under the oaks, mouth open, / and wait for some winged fruit, / some fire to fall." In "The Theban Women" and certain other poems, Leifso wields juxtaposition, non-sequitur, selective punctuation, and the breaking of lines across the syntax to control ambiguity and deepen the aesthetic impact of her work.

Is That a Joke?

Ray Fenwick

Hall of Best Knowledge. Fantagraphics

US \$19.99

Reviewed by Tim Blackmore

There's a certain desperation that marked comics from the 1990s, one signaled by a combination of narcissism, focus on quotidian bodily functions, the aesthetic of ough, pretension to Art, and badly performed mechanical artwork, explained away as being original or naïf, anything but laziness on the artist's part. So when I read Ray Fenwick's *Hall of Best Knowledge*, I thought I'd done some time travelling. The book is a series of hand-lettered single panels that appear one to a page, and consist of jaggedly performed pseudo-calligraphy. Each panel reveals to us an author, possibly in college (later we learn otherwise, but I'm trying not to ruin whatever charm this book has going for it), who is a world expert on everything. The expert mostly pumps himself up at his readers' expense, where the unseen author concludes that the "goals of *true* comedy,"

are “To increase one’s social status at the expense of the degraded victim.” And on it drags, page after weary page. The book is completely overshadowed by the eerie work of Edward Gorey, and the astonishing gymnastic penmanship of Chris Ware, so I suspect Fantagraphics is hoping to tap a similar vein of ironic broodiness.

I’ve been wracking my brain for a way to say something pleasant about this book, and there are some things that made it occasionally funny. Fenwick’s character often cancels the lectures he is presumed to give, and these repeat cancellation notices become wittier with each iteration. But enough: this is a tired book with little to recommend it; its premise is slight, the pretentious revelations are dull (I know, I know, they make a review like this one part of the joke. “Ha!” As Fenwick’s character would say. Good one.), and it’s badly drawn—there are masses of astonishing calligraphic artists out there, but We, as Charlie Brown used to say, Got a rock. For those now in a rage that I’ve attacked what is no doubt the wittiest slice of irony this side of Voltaire as passed through the nose of superior college professors and postmodernists everywhere, I note the book was listed on two Canadian book lists as being in the top ten graphic novels of the year. Shows you what a critic knows, ha?

Artful Dodgers

Mark Frutkin

Erratic North: A Vietnam Draft Resister’s Life in the Canadian Bush. Dundurn \$24.99

Allan Briemaster and Steven Michael Berzensky, eds.

Crossing Lines: Poets Who Came to Canada in the Vietnam War Era. Seraphim \$19.95

Reviewed by Donna Coates

In the final chapter of his memoir, *Erratic North*, about the ten years he spent roughing it in the Quebec bush, Vietnam War resister Mark Frutkin pays a visit to the

Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, the city where he now resides. Frutkin is dismayed that there are no references to the “tens of thousands of draft-age Americans” who immigrated to Canada during the era, particularly when they contributed so heavily to the “struggle for peace” mentioned in the visitor’s guide. Similarly, the editors of *Crossing Lines* Allan Briemaster and Steven Berzensky are disheartened that there has been little attention paid to the impressive numbers of “gifted and diverse” women and men who moved to the peaceable kingdom during the war years, as no substantial anthologies of their poetry have appeared. Since the anthology includes poems by seventy-six poets (one-third of whom are women), and since the editors suggest that as a result of this large migration of politically motivated Americans, Canada may have the most poets per capita in the English-speaking world, this critical neglect seems particularly glaring.

Aside from the shared lament over the lack of recognition afforded these “dodgers,” Frutkin, Briemaster, and Berzensky also observe that many who emigrated tended to be politically leftist, well-educated, and well-off. (Those without financial resources and access to post-secondary educations were less able to avoid the draft, giving rise to the saying “Rich man’s war, poor man’s fight”). Most of these poets (resisters, deserters, and those morally opposed to the war) arrived at formative stages in their lives and admit that it was Canada that made them. Frutkin, too, acknowledges it was the time he spent reading and writing in the backwoods of Canada that turned him into a poet (three of his poems appear in the anthology) and award-winning fiction writer. And like Frutkin, many of the poets represented in the anthology have amassed substantial bodies of work in different genres. Both texts also demonstrate that while these writers were influenced by American writers, many were also mentored by Canadian

poets such as Livesay, Acorn, and Purdy, and inspired in the early 1970s by writers such as Bowering, Cohen, Ondaatje, and MacEwan. Frutkin quotes lines from Lampman's poetry in his memoir, and his struggles to survive in the hostile Canadian wilderness resemble those presented in poems by Atwood and Birney.

Moreover, while both texts offer exceptional insight into the Vietnam War—"its aftermath, continuing repercussions, parallels to current events, as well as war in general" (*Crossing Lines*) and look back with anger (but occasionally with nostalgia), at the experiences of fathers/brothers/friends that fought in previous wars, both texts also depict the era more generally. Several of the poems in *Crossing Lines* describe what it was like to grow up in the US during the 1950s and 60s; others tell of the loneliness poets felt while adapting to life in the true north; and, this being Canada, other poems mention the need to "toughen up for the cold." Similarly, Frutkin's memoir, which embeds numerous history lessons on wars dating back to the *Iliad* (including accounts of his Jewish grandfather's escape from Belarus and his Quebec neighbours' resistance to World War Two), may also be read as a chronicle of the back-to-the-land movement so inextricably tied to the era.

Frutkin, who describes himself as a "wanderer caught in up great movements and abandoned at a seemingly random place," further compares himself to a "geographic erratic," or an "individual stone [...] dropped by glaciers" across in Canada. But just as these "loner stones" eventually blend into the landscape, Frutkin, too, puts down roots and makes a permanent home in Canada. Likewise, only four of the poets in the anthology have returned to America. The editors note that the rest have intermingled so well that their American origins may come as a "revelation" to readers. But while the defining characteristic of these poet-immigrants is their "profound aversion to

war and a longing for peace," they remain saddened by the tragic irony that "history . . . replicate[s] itself." They bemoan that "a costly military adventure continues," and Frutkin concludes his memoir with the plea that human beings "stop doing this to ourselves and one another over and over again."

Given that Americans have often viewed Canada as a safe haven from militarism or political harassment; and that many of these "dodgers" have clearly proven beneficial to Canada's academic and cultural institutions and to Canadian society at large (the poets represented in the anthology are also musicians, teachers, professors, environmentalists, publishers, psychiatrists, photographers); and that Canadians have refused to participate in the Iraq War, it is exasperating that the Canadian government continues to deny refuge to US soldiers who have refused to fight in Iraq (or who have served tours of duty and witnessed human-rights violations such as torture and now regard the war as immoral), even though the majority of Canadians believe we should welcome these courageous women and men with open arms.

Recueil de nouvelles en traduction

Len Gasparini, trad. Daniel Poliquin

Nouvelle noirceur. Éditions de l'Interligne. 18,95 \$

Compte rendu par Patricia Godbout

Ce recueil de nouvelles de Len Gasparini en traduction française fait partie du petit nombre d'ouvrages à être recensés deux fois plutôt qu'une dans les pages de *Canadian Literature* (numéro 187). Cela tient au fait qu'il l'a d'abord été—par John Eustace—peu après sa parution en version originale sous le titre de *Demon in my View* (Guernica, 2003). Et voici qu'il attire de nouveau l'attention de la critique en paraissant en français quelques années plus tard aux

Éditions de l'Interligne. Le verdict d'Eustace était que bien que le talent de l'auteur fût distribué de manière inégale dans ses pages, ce recueil de nouvelles présentant une image souvent dérangeante de la civilisation et de ses travers en valait le détour. Dire que la lecture de la version française, *Nouvelle noirceur*, appelle plus ou moins le même constat semblerait relever de l'évidence. Il ne faudrait pourtant pas oublier que la traduction d'une œuvre littéraire n'en est pas moins, en langue d'arrivée, une production nouvelle, qui doit être reçue comme telle. On sait aussi que certains auteurs, comme Gabriel Garcia Marquez, ont dit de leur œuvre traduite—par exemple, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* dans la version anglaise de Gregory Rabassa—qu'elle se lisait mieux que l'original. Précisons d'emblée que le bonheur inégal de lecture de ces nouvelles en français ne tient nullement—bien au contraire—à l'adresse du traducteur Daniel Poliquin, lui-même romancier reconnu et présenté comme tel sur la quatrième de couverture du livre. En fait, il est manifeste que les quatorze nouvelles de Gasparini que contient ce recueil sont systématiquement bien servies par la plume de Poliquin. Celle-ci est particulièrement habile dans les dialogues, souvent crus, auxquels le traducteur insufflé vraisemblance et truculence, entre autres lorsque ceux-ci mettent en scène des Franco-Ontariens de Windsor, ville natale de l'auteur. Ces quelques nouvelles à saveur autobiographique, qui nous font pénétrer dans l'univers souvent sombre d'une certaine adolescence tourmentée, seraient même à classer au nombre des traductions qui surclassent l'original. Au sortir du livre, on ne sait trop si la *noirceur* qui habite le monde des expériences et des sentiments décrits par Gasparini est *nouvelle*—pour renvoyer au titre français du recueil—mais on apprécie l'absence de fard et de complaisance avec laquelle ce trouble des êtres nous est révélé.

Lethal Chat

Sky Gilbert

Brother Dumb. ECW \$26.95

Reviewed by Tanis MacDonald

The ironic features of Sky Gilbert's latest novel, *Brother Dumb*, include the standard disclaimer on the copyright page. Any "resemblance to persons living or dead" is not only *not* coincidental; it is necessary for reading *Brother Dumb* as a historiographic metafiction that examines literary celebrity, public prurience, and autobiographical compulsion. *Brother Dumb* requires that readers know about a particular twentieth-century fiction writer who is as famous for his reclusive life as he is for writing an iconic youth-oriented novel of disaffection. You know: that book about a guy who's sincere as hell and all, and just can't stand phonies. Knowing that said author protects his privacy in a litigious manner, Gilbert couldn't refuse the disclaimer, but the book's metafictional features, right down to the simple one-colour cover, are part of the book's cultural nod to living a private life that has invited public admiration and public disdain in equal measure. Positioning his novel as the first-person narrative that the reclusive author has been writing for years, Gilbert teases out the tension between autobiography and fiction as the author claims himself as his once and future subject. What will be revealed in this final book, written for the eyes of the elusive "perfect reader"?

Gilbert answers with *Brother Dumb*: a fictive autobiography, wherein the beleaguered author character warns of evil abroad in the world, along with the frustrations of being misunderstood and the poisonous pretensions of university professors and literary critics. The author also dishes out plenty of philosophical spirituality and a heavy dose of self-justification. Sound familiar? It ought to. The literary ventriloquism of *Brother Dumb*—note-perfect without being

slavishly imitative—breaks out into more hazardous territory when it delves into the black hole in the author's biography. The novel begins as a satire when Gilbert plumbs criticism, reception and style, and matches them with biographical anecdotes. But in explaining the author's war experience, Gilbert's novel becomes something more agonizing, more vulnerable, more difficult to read. *Brother Dumb* contains the homonym "brotherdom," and in the end, the novel is a story of extreme disconnection: a man's refusal of his own body as "a place where sex and death sit cosily, like old friends, having a lethal chat over a cup of tea."

As a holy pseudonym that the narrator desires, Gilbert offers the appellative "Brother Dumb" partially in jest. The narrator is anything but dumb in the sense of being mute; nor is he ignorant or unknowing, though he longs to be relieved of the burden of knowledge. This misanthropic, emotionally-stunted man carries forward the legacy of twentieth-century violence, and Gilbert's story of art and refusal is rich with reminders of the existential vicissitudes of corporeal existence, and of how pain shuns the spotlight of language. Writes the narrator to his unidentified perfect reader, "I know you won't try to analyze this. That's why I let you read it."

Fiction et réalité sociale

C.H. Grignon, G. Guèvremont, A. Laberge, Ringuet, et A. Rivard; Josée Bonneville et André Vanasse, dirs.

Trois visions du terroir : récits et nouvelles. XYZ
12,00 \$

Noël Audet

La terre promise, Remember! XYZ 16,00 \$

Compte rendu par Sophie Bastien

Lanthologie pédagogique *Trois visions du terroir* contient quatorze courtes nouvelles de cinq auteurs différents appartenant à la littérature québécoise du terroir. Cette première partie de l'ouvrage est enrichie

de photographies et de notes en bas de page qui apportent des précisions lexicales et contextuelles ou qui fournissent des références bibliographiques. Les nouvelles n'apparaissent pas selon un axe diachronique, mais plutôt, comme l'indique le titre, selon la vision du terroir qu'elles dégagent. Dans la deuxième partie, le « dossier d'accompagnement », élaboré par Josée Bonneville et André Vanasse, distingue en effet trois visions de la vie rurale : la conception idéaliste, représentée par Adjudant Rivard et Claude-Henri Grignon; son contraire, la conception naturaliste, avec Albert Laberge et Ringuet; et la conception réaliste, position mitoyenne incarnée par Germaine Guèvremont. Après un exposé des contextes sociohistorique et littéraire, chacune de ces conceptions est définie, les auteurs correspondants sont présentés et leurs textes, commentés. Des sujets de dissertation, un tableau chronologique et une bibliographie clôturent le livre.

Nous sommes d'abord reconnaissants à Josée Bonneville et à André Vanasse pour leur sélection de nouvelles encore peu connues mais combien intéressantes, écrites par les auteurs même de romans classiques du répertoire québécois (*Un homme et son péché, La Scouine, Trente arpents, Le Survenant...*). Bien sûr, les choix éditoriaux soutiennent un objectif didactique et visent à illustrer des idéologies. Mais l'analyse fine et nuancée que propose ensuite le dossier pédagogique ne manque pas de convaincre le lecteur de l'exemplarité de ces récits idoines. Le dossier recèle cependant une faiblesse rédactionnelle. Plusieurs types d'erreurs s'y trouvent : syntaxe, orthographe grammaticale, ponctuation, etc., en plus des tics de langage et des répétitions. Cette négligence est si notable—et si regrettable vu le mérite de l'entreprise et la qualité du travail de fond—que nous souhaiterions une édition corrigée.

Si la production narrative de *Trois visions du terroir* couvre la première moitié du XX^e siècle, le rapport au réel se traite avec

une imagination autrement plus débridée au tournant du siècle suivant. Il faut lire le roman *La terre promise, Remember!* de Noël Audet, pour constater à quel point.

À l'instar des personnages de contes qui pratiquaient la chasse-galerie avec un canot volant, Emmanuel Doucet s'envole lui aussi, mais sur un cochon parlant nommé Remember. Et à la différence du canot, son moyen de transport est capable de déplacement temporel, en plus du voyage spatial. Ainsi, Emmanuel et Remember parcourent-ils l'histoire du Québec, depuis la première expédition de Jacques Cartier en 1534 jusqu'à la crise du verglas en 1998. À tour de rôle, ils racontent et commentent les événements historiques avérés autant que des anecdotes de la petite histoire, reliées aux ascendants d'Emmanuel. À l'occasion ils établissent des analogies entre des éléments anciens et le Québec moderne, ou fournissent des informations linguistiques.

L'aspect historique du roman, surtout, fournit un éclairage fort valable en multipliant les détails authentiques sur des personnages ou des faits socio-culturels. Comme l'indique la bibliographie, l'auteur a puisé son inspiration tant dans l'historiographie contemporaine que dans des documents d'archives—qu'il cite ici et là dans son récit.

Un autre mode intertextuel se laisse également découvrir, avec un subtil plaisir : des citations littéraires, celles-là intégrées sans guillemets ni italiques. Malgré sa propension didactique, Audet est d'abord un artiste de la langue et anime le contenu événementiel d'une faconde inventive dont ressortent l'humour et la fantaisie. Cependant, certains procédés, comme les jurons et les injures, et certains sujets, comme le sexe, qui créent à priori une vitalité colorée, deviennent très vite si récurrents que le lecteur ressent une impression de recette lassante.



Isn't That Funny?

Eva Gruber

Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature: Reimagining Nativeness. Camden House us\$65.00

Robert Nunn, ed.

Drew Hayden Taylor: Essays on His Works. Guernica \$20.00

Drew Hayden Taylor, ed.

Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality. Douglas & McIntyre \$22.95

Reviewed by Lisa Close

A careful and well-researched first publication, *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature* attempts to explicate the intricate relationship between Native identity, literary representation, and humour by engaging with a wide range of texts by Native writers. While the impersonal approach used by Gruber seems perhaps somewhat ill-suited to the subjective theme of Native humour, the book does provide a structured exploration of the topic for academic readers.

Generally, Gruber argues that Native writers use humour as an effective strategy for negotiating with existing stereotypes of Native identity, which results in imagining Nativeness anew. The book is divided into four chapters; the first two provide a historical and theoretical foundation, whereas the final two focus on textual analysis. Chapter One traces the genealogy of humour in Native communities, citing evidence from early accounts of European travellers, oral tradition, and contemporary Native writers. Focusing on Native literature, Gruber clearly leads the reader through an overview of texts in which humour plays a prominent role. Chapter Two considers definitions of humour (from largely Western sources) and theories of cultural representation. Chapter Three focuses on the means by which comic effect is produced. Formal elements, literary devices, and linguistic structure (originating

both from Native and Western traditions) are examined using close readings of specific texts. In Chapter Four, the previous analysis of “how” humour is created moves to “what” the humour entails and “why” it is employed. Highlighting the connection between humour and cultural survival, Gruber concludes that laughter opens up more flexible definitions of Nativeness through Native literature.

One of the sub-themes that runs (albeit hastily) through Gruber’s book is the complex relationship between the non-Native literary critic and Native literature. This theme is picked up by Robert Nunn in his introduction to *Drew Hayden Taylor: Essays on His Works*. Asserting that his interest in Taylor’s work originates in delight and “fun,” Nunn almost immediately complicates the laughter Taylor evokes. Can Taylor’s audiences indulge in simple enjoyment without seriously considering the conflict and oppression that are often the sources of his humour? Several essays in the collection also address and grapple with the way that Taylor destabilizes Native identity and Native and white relations with a wit that leaves neither side of the constructed binary “safe” from his biting insight. Any reader interested in the complexities of intercultural relations as explored or sparked by literature, even beyond a specific concentration on Drew Hayden Taylor, will appreciate these essays.

Nunn’s organization of the collection is exemplary, with each contribution picking up a thread from the essay prior. Birgit Däwes’ article begins the anthology by intrinsically linking identity and representation, specifically showing the way Taylor’s model for intercultural relations emerges in his work. Nunn follows by arguing that Taylor uses “Trickster humour” to execute an almost violent deconstruction of the means by which individuals identify self and other. The trick lies in the interrogation of identity and identification from

all sides. Extending similar arguments to Nunn’s, Jonathan Dewar and Kristina Fagan variously note the satirical microscope Taylor puts both Natives and non-Natives under. Arguably the strongest of the contributions is Rob Appleford’s “Your Hand Weighs Exactly One Pound,” a sophisticated exploration of “Indian humour” in Taylor’s work, particularly the role of the listener in the economy of laughter. Appleford’s purpose, “to point out the misrecognitions inherent in an unreflexive acceptance of ‘Indian humour’ as natural, straightforward and unproblematic as an interpretive trope,” should give the non-Aboriginal literary critic, in particular, pause for thought.

This collection is rounded out by Ric Knowles and Monique Mojica’s “Introduction to *Girl Who Loved Horses*,” which Nunn argues begins to lead readers away from a focus on humour to an area much in need of further exploration: the “spiritual dimension” of Taylor’s work. Thus, Nunn points to a gap in scholarship right before closing the collection with interviews and a biography of the author, leaving the dialogue regarding Taylor’s work open to new contributions.

Nunn’s use of the term “fun” to describe his study of Drew Hayden Taylor’s work is equally appropriate to describe the enjoyment of reading *Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality*, compiled and edited by Taylor. As a “textbook about some of the most private issues in Native culture,” this provocative book brings together many and varied voices to open discussion on intimate topics such as writing erotica, two-spirited aunts, and pubic hair.

The sheer variety of subject matter and authors in *Me Sexy* is the most striking facet of this collection. From Joseph Boyden’s “Bush Country,” an entertaining attempt to determine whether or not Native people have less pubic hair, to Lee Maracle’s “First Wives Club,” a sexy Salish-style creation story, there is something to satisfy (or at least shock) almost any reader. Several

of the contributors offer a humorous and casual tone, while others are more sombre. For instance, Marius P. Tungilik's "The Dark Side of Sex" maintains a serious and sensitive attitude to the topic of child sexual molestation. The majority of the works draw from personal experience, while some document a strong engagement with academic research. Michelle McGeough's "Norval Morrisseau and the Erotic" is a good example of the latter, in which McGeough traces erotic elements from Anishnaabe oral tradition in Morrisseau's art. Other dimension-adding themes in the text are the relationship between sex, language, and literature; shifting attitudes towards sex and sexuality in Native communities due to colonization; and the importance of sexuality to identity.

The specific and varied writings of each contributor function together in a broader context to fulfil one of Taylor's purposes for the book: to challenge dominant culture's static and conflicted views on Native sexuality. What emerges is a vibrant, healthy, and downright sexy look at a subject area that has been largely neglected or ignored, particularly in the academic community. All readers will find something to engage with in *Me Sexy* and will likely be re-educated in the process—coupled with laughter and a little blushing.

Destination Canada: the Dream and the Nightmare

Rawi Hage

Cockroach. Anansi \$29.95

Darcy Tamayose

Odori Cormorant \$22.95

Reviewed by Carrie Dawson

In *Cockroach* Montreal is seen to be "infested with newcomers." This description of the city is as ironic as it is angry, because it is uttered by an immigrant who identifies

with the "vermin" that are widely seen as signs of squalor and also of perseverance. Hage makes much of his unnamed protagonist's ability to survive on very little in a hostile climate. Indeed, the protagonist survives against his wishes: the story opens with his botched suicide and proceeds to describe the circumstances that provoked it. At the story center are a number of conversations between the protagonist and a well-meaning but wildly naïve counselor who is a stand-in for the Anglo-Canadian establishment that champions diversity but has little real understanding of or interest in difference. Though often predictable, some of these conversations are very engaging, particularly when Hage explores the counselor's hunger for her client's stories of suffering and strife in the "old world." Unfortunately for her "the fuckable, exotic, dangerous foreigner" refuses to oblige her. Nor does he oblige us. At the risk of aligning myself with Hage's counselor (which is certainly the way that the book positions its white Canadian readers), I also regretted that the protagonist did not offer a more developed account of his feelings or mental processes.

Where I wanted explanation I received allegory because, at moments of extreme self-loathing, the protagonist literally turns into a cockroach. Here, Hage is obviously indebted to Kafka, but also to Camus, Sartre, and Fanon. As an existential exploration of the concrete conditions of human existence for impoverished immigrants, the book is very incisive. But it is also uneven, because, in the last third of the book, Hage changes modes and *Cockroach* becomes something of a thriller: the spare, energetic prose that characterizes most of the novel often lapses into cliché and a number of underdeveloped characters are introduced. That said, when the protagonist agrees to help a fellow immigrant and friend avenge herself against a man who tortured her in Iran, he discovers a kind of community.

So, on the last page of the novel, he tosses his gun, shakes his wings “like a dancing gypsy,” and turns towards his underground home with a sense of new possibility.

Darcy Tamayose’s *Odori* is also about immigrants to Canada. But there the similarities end. *Odori* is as lyrical as *Cockroach* is caustic. As farmers and artists, the Alberta-based Japanese-Canadian family upon which it is centered is as deeply connected to the prairie soil as they are to the waters around Okinawa, their ancestral home. The novel is structured as a kind of dream sequence: it opens with a car accident that leaves the protagonist in a coma, and most of the story is composed of her dreams and memories.

At the heart of the novel are twin sisters, Emiko and Miyako. After their father’s death, they are sent to live with their grandparents in Okinawa, where one learns the traditional dance, *odori*, and the other cultivates a profound appreciation for the natural world. With the bombing of Pearl Harbour and the ensuing Battle of Okinawa, the sisters are torn apart and their lives are forever changed. The part of the novel that deals with the treatment of Okinawans by invading American and Japanese soldiers is powerful and very well-rendered, but parts of the book are much less successful. First of all, while the book is not straightforwardly realistic and successfully employs elements of magic realism, it also has a number of grating coincidences; for example, one character prays that her brother be cured of his colour-blindness and her prayer is immediately answered; another hums *odori* music and whispers “dance” to a comatose daughter who instantly awakes. Secondly, while the author and her characters are keen aesthetes, their attempts to communicate beauty often fall flat or are inadvertently comic, as when one character looks admiringly at her husband and thinks that he is “the conflation of a Viking warrior and a Buddha.”

Upon finishing *Odori*, I was reminded of its opening line: “It was easy to get lost

in the predicable beauty of the southern Alberta hills.” Despite its evocative use of Okinawan myth and its very trenchant representation of mid-twentieth-century Okinawan history, the sometimes clichéd and “predictable beauty” of the prose made it difficult to get lost in *Odori*.

Teen Wives and Mothers

Sarah N. Harvey

The Lit Report. Orca \$12.95

Shelley Hrdlitschka

Sister Wife. Orca \$12.95

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Galway

Orca has recently published two novels that, among other issues, deal with teenage sexuality, marriage, and pregnancy. Sarah N. Harvey’s *The Lit Report* is narrated by seventeen-year-old Julia Riley, who learns that her best friend, Ruth, is pregnant. Coping with this situation has a profound effect on the girls’ understanding of romance, religion, self-esteem, and parental relationships.

Ruth’s parents are rigid in their religious beliefs and appear hypocritical and intolerant as they reject their daughter upon learning of her pregnancy, and believe that their son “is gay and thus in mortal danger of eternal damnation.” Harvey balances this portrayal with Julia’s mother who, though she shares the same faith as Ruth’s parents, is much more open-minded.

The author strives for a similar balance in her portrayal of the negative and positive aspects of parenthood, but does not engage thoroughly with all the realities of unplanned pregnancy. For example, after reading a few words about abortion, Ruth says, “I can’t do it. . . . And not just because of the burning in hellfire thing, either. I mean, I don’t really believe that. . . . But it still seems . . . wrong.” This cursory discussion of abortion leaves one feeling that the novel does not do full justice to the subject of teenage pregnancy. Indeed, the novel opens with the narrator

saying “I’m not going to lie to you,” but the relative ease with which the girls hide the pregnancy, and the convenient circumstances that enable Ruth to keep her baby, contribute to a feeling that this portrayal of teenage pregnancy and parenthood is not entirely realistic.

Harvey’s novel is eminently readable, narrated by a witty character who peppers her tale with literary allusions ranging from Dickens to Vonnegut. There is much that will appeal to adolescent readers, including the account of how Julia is transformed by her friend’s experience into a more mature, confident young woman. This novel will also interest those concerned with the ways in which young adult fiction deals with themes of sex, pregnancy, religion, and child-parent relations.

Orca’s other recent work is Shelley Hrdlitschka’s *Sister Wife*, set in the fictional town of Unity. This novel has three teenage narrators, all with very different temperaments. The central character is Celeste, whose voice is the first and the last that the reader hears. She is on the verge of her fifteenth birthday when the story opens, but some of her typical teenage struggles are compounded by the fact that she has been raised in a polygamous community. The second narrator is Celeste’s thirteen-year-old sister Nanette, who does not question the community’s doctrine in the way that Celeste does. Offering a third narrative perspective is Tavana, an older teenage girl from “the outside” who, though not legally adopted, has recently joined Celeste’s family.

Tavana is a former child prostitute who lived on the streets, and the story of her troubled childhood reveals some of the flaws in mainstream Canadian society. Celeste, meanwhile, illuminates the negative aspects of a smaller community whose religious practices push girls into marriage and motherhood at an extremely young age, even against their will. Celeste feels powerless to avoid the fate that awaits her once

she turns fifteen: marriage to a much older man chosen for her by “the Prophet,” followed quickly by motherhood. Meanwhile, her sister Nanette is happy to embrace a polygamous lifestyle and parenthood while still a young teen, offering yet another perspective on life in Unity.

Sister Wife is compelling reading that, while highlighting the misogynistic and repressive aspects of Unity that leave Celeste feeling trapped, manages to portray a polygamous world in a convincing, rather than merely sensationalized, way. Each narrator is, in her own way, an example of a strong female character, and together they highlight the complexities of both teenage and adult attitudes towards a variety of issues. Hrdlitschka successfully uses multiple narrators to reveal the different perspectives that young women can have on questions of religion, sex, marriage, and motherhood, and this novel is worthy of attention from those interested in the ways in which young adult fiction addresses such issues. Both *Sister Wife* and *The Lit Report* offer a range of perspectives on the complex and often contentious issues of teenage pregnancy and marriage.

Charting Indigenous Pasts and Futures

Karl S. Hele, ed.

Lines Drawn upon the Water: First Nations and the Great Lakes Borders and Borderlands. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$85.00

Marie Wadden

Where the Pavement Ends: Canada’s Aboriginal Recovery Movement and the Urgent Need for Reconciliation. Douglas & McIntyre \$24.95

Reviewed by Keavy Martin

In June of 2009, Canadian authorities shut down a border crossing at Akwesasne in response to a peaceful protest against the arming of border guards in Mohawk territory. Local spokespeople pointed out that

the presence of guns not only poses a threat to the community but violates the sovereignty of the Akwesasne Territory, which is intersected by both the Canada-U.S. and Ontario-Quebec borders. This event serves as a reminder of the need for studies like *Lines Drawn upon the Water: First Nations and the Great Lakes Borders and Borderlands*, the recent addition to Wilfrid Laurier's Aboriginal Studies Series.

Edited by the Anishinaabeg historian Karl S. Hele, this collection of scholarly essays offers a mainly historical overview of the Great Lakes watershed, of the negotiations between the colonial British and American governments, and of the ways in which the Indigenous peoples of the region have maneuvered around the drawing of the international border. As Catherine Murton Stoehr writes in her contribution, "[i]t is a truism to say that the borders between nation-states are political fictions; however, those fictions have been turned into Western fact by the national orientation of historical inquiry." *Lines Drawn upon the Water* thus works to nuance understandings of Great Lakes colonial history and to problematize the boundaries between Canadian and American, settler and Native, and colonizer and colonized.

The extent to which the study of borderlands constitutes a new or rising field—as several of the contributors declare—is questionable, as the framework calls to mind the now-canonical work of scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa, Mary Louise Pratt, and Homi Bhabha. The collection's strength, rather, lies in the specificity and detail of its components, many of which highlight a particular people (Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Métis), historical figure (the Flemish Bastard, Tenskwatawa, E. Pauline Johnson), or locale (Sault Ste. Marie, Walpole Island, Six Nations). Although most of the chapters are grounded in careful historical research, the collection arguably also explores the borderlands between disciplines, as its

authors discuss the political ramifications of Indian Status legislation (Hele, Shields), the literary and anthropological constructions of local identity and history (Philips and McDougall, Lischke), and the potential for a sustainable land-ethics in the multicultural and multinational Great Lakes region (Fehr).

Hele writes that he and the other contributors "hope to overcome the limitations in perspective imposed by the border . . . and to establish new connections despite the imposition of what is, in reality, a nebulous line drawn upon the water." The book is marked, however, by a tension between this stated desire to *look past* the border and a *recognition* of the boundary which inevitably shapes the lives and histories of the local peoples. In other words, the collection itself exhibits the often simultaneous activities of drawing and erasing the border (as exhibited in the cover illustration by Lorraine Trecroce). Yet as Phil Bellfy (White Earth Chippewa) astutely points out, "[w]hile a border implies 'division,' [it] . . . may also be viewed as a strong link that has served to maintain unity. . . ." This sense of the border as a connective thread also serves to tie together the diverse and occasionally conflicting pieces of Hele's collection. Readers will come away with an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the Great Lakes region and with a new appreciation for the benefits of regional (rather than, or in addition to, national/ethnic) studies.

Marie Wadden's *Where the Pavement Ends: Canada's Aboriginal Recovery Movement and the Urgent Need for Reconciliation*, though published by a trade press (Douglas & McIntyre) and therefore aimed at a broader audience than Hele's academic collection, also bears witness to the ways in which state-sponsored initiatives have disrupted the lives of Indigenous peoples. In this book based on a series of articles written in 2006 for the *Toronto Star*, Wadden documents the legacies of addiction and abuse that have been bestowed upon First

Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities by a history of government-initiated displacement, disempowerment, and attempts at cultural assimilation. Wadden is upfront about the audience and purpose of her book: she is writing primarily for a mainstream non-Aboriginal readership with the intention of rallying public support for Aboriginal healing initiatives which, though effective, are consistently undermined by a lack of government assistance.

The time that Wadden has spent in communities, and in particular her personal connection with the Penashue family in Labrador, no doubt contributes to the sense of urgency with which she writes about the need for reconciliation, or healing. In describing social problems in Aboriginal communities, Wadden walks a difficult line between capturing the attention of non-Aboriginal Canadians and reinforcing the stereotypes which already dominate the media. At times, Wadden's tone tends toward the apocalyptic—or echoes, at least, the century-old rumours of the 'dying Indian'—as she writes that she "ha[s] come to believe that the very survival of the first peoples of this country is at risk." However, the vast majority of the book actually emphasizes the persistence and *agency* of Indigenous peoples, as Wadden highlights the hard work and successes of Aboriginal leaders like Dr. Marjorie Hodgson, Tshaukuesh (Elizabeth Penashue), and Phyllis and Andy Chelsea, and of grassroots initiatives like the Community Holistic Circle Healing process at Hollow Water, Manitoba.

Throughout *Where the Pavement Ends*, Wadden contrasts the potential of community-run, culturally specific initiatives with the inefficiency of INAC. She has learned, she says, that "[g]overnment bureaucracies are lousy at helping to solve human problems." However, Wadden's final section, "Recommendations and Action Plan," strangely mimics the top-down bureaucratic approaches that the author

has spent so much time critiquing. Of far greater value are the book's twenty-one chapters, which emphasize the human face of a past and present too often obscured by geographical and conceptual distance.

D'un étang gelé aux étoiles

Maurice Henrie

Le chuchotement des étoiles. Prise de Parole 20,00 \$

Michel Ouellette

Frères d'hiver. Prise de Parole 11,95 \$

Compte rendu par Benoît Doyon-Gosselin

La beauté du récit *Frères d'hiver* réside dans sa difficulté à le classer dans un genre singulier. Tel que l'indique le sous-titre, il s'agit d'un « récit poétique et polyphonique ». En fait, les multiples focalisations de la narration permettent au lecteur de comprendre que Pierre vient de perdre son frère cadet, Paul, qui s'est suicidé sans raison apparente sur un étang gelé. Le frère aîné trouve par la suite un cahier violet intitulé *Journal d'accompagnement* qui dévoile certaines réflexions du suicidé. Simultanément, Wendy, une collègue de Paul, observe Pierre à distance sans que l'on sache pourquoi. À la fin, on apprend que Paul a été amoureux de Wendy et qu'il a écrit une suite de poèmes pour sa muse.

Dans ce livre, Michel Ouellette, un dramaturge franc-ontarien mieux connu pour la pièce *French Town* (Prix du Gouverneur général 1994), agence la polyphonie des narrateurs afin de fournir au compte-gouttes les informations nécessaires à la compréhension de la diégèse. Ainsi, dans ce court récit de 66 pages, les entrées numérotées de I à VI donnent le point de vue de Pierre comme narrateur homodiégétique, les entrées portant le titre de « WENDY » sont le fruit d'un narrateur hétérodiégétique qui décrit les observations du personnage féminin et enfin les sections tirées du journal d'accompagnement sont écrites de la main de Paul. La deuxième partie du livre

constitue le recueil de poésie *Mes appétits* (séparé en deux parties : « Saisons rimbal-diennes » et « Inappétence apparente ») qui jette un peu de lumière sur la vie du défunt.

Un peu à la manière d'une enquête policière, le lecteur zigzague de récit en récit afin de saisir les motivations des personnages et surtout des raisons derrière le suicide de Paul. En créant un faisceau de sens lié au froid et à l'air glacial de l'hiver, Ouellette suggère l'effritement des relations familiales et la perte de l'amour filial des deux frères. Ceux-ci ne renouent qu'avec la mort du plus jeune qui—on le constate dans son journal—gérât mal le quotidien : « L'autre jour, j'ai fait l'expérience de ma disparition. J'ai relu tout ce que j'avais écrit. Pour constater que j'étais un miroir qui se regarde dans le miroir. » Un texte à découvrir même si le recueil de poésie en fin de parcours ne semble pas à sa place.

Curieux roman que ce *chuchotement des étoiles* où un couple semble habiter une galaxie en attendant la mort de façon inconsciente. L'écrivain franco-ontarien Maurice Henrie nous avait habitué à des œuvres plus achevées avec entre autres le roman *Une ville lointaine* et surtout le recueil de nouvelles *Les roses et le verglas*. Dans *Le chuchotement des étoiles*, Pierre et Odette habitent une maison où il se déroule des événements particulièrement troublants. Leurs grands enfants se font du souci pour eux. Normal, car le voisinage consiste en « quelques planètes et quelques astéroïdes qui crois[ent] paresseusement et qui lui[s]ent dans le vide spatial ». En raison de perturbations spatiales, Pierre semble incapable de terminer ses tâches en tant que traducteur à la pige parce que son ordinateur efface à mesure le travail accompli la veille. Bref, le couple à l'aube de la retraite se cherche.

Le vieillissement étrange d'Odette suivi de sa mort rapide permet aux enfants de ramener Pierre parmi les humains. Si les premiers jours se passent bien, l'homme malheureux finit par divaguer autant

physiquement que psychologiquement jusqu'à ce qu'on le retrouve assis près d'un fleuve à la suite d'une escapade de deux jours sans boire ni manger. Pierre décide alors de repartir vers les étoiles de sa maison pour peut-être trouver un sens à sa détresse existentielle. Finalement, la conclusion inéluctable arrive : « Alors, épuisé, il se coucha entre deux constellations et s'endormit d'un très long sommeil. »

Séparés en courts chapitres, le roman peine à trouver un rythme et les personnages nous laissent de glace. Malgré la présence de nombreux mystères, notamment un masque qui observe Pierre dès son réveil et un enfant qui lui demande au téléphone s'il est le créateur du ciel et de la terre, le lecteur y trouve difficilement son compte. En fait, à l'instar de la maison perdue dans l'espace, le personnage principal se perd dans les méandres de ses pensées tout en entraînant son lecteur avec lui. Sauf que l'on n'en sort jamais. Empêtrés dans une histoire sans histoire, personnages et lecteurs finissent par perdre l'intérêt de vivre ou de lire. En fin de parcours, on ne peut s'empêcher de penser au *Alexandre Chenevert* de Gabrielle Roy, roman qui ressemble plutôt à une interminable nouvelle psychologique au cours duquel le personnage éponyme cherche et cherche, et ne trouve que sa propre mort.

(Black) Community Historiography

Sharon A. Roger Hepburn

Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Canada. U of Illinois P US\$40.00

Stephen Kimber

Loyalists and Layabouts: The Rapid Rise and Faster Fall of Shelburne, Nova Scotia, 1783-1792. Doubleday Canada \$34.95

Reviewed by Maureen Moynagh

Given how little there is in the way of Black Canadian community history, two new books presenting accounts of the

Buxton settlement in Ontario and of Shelburne, Nova Scotia ought to be particularly welcome. While Sharon Roger Hepburn's *Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Canada* ultimately represents a useful contribution, Stephen Kimber's *Loyalists and Layabouts: The Rapid Rise and Faster Fall of Shelburne* lacks the kind of rich, nuanced and critical historiography that is warranted.

Hepburn traces the development of Buxton from its conception and founding in order to try to account for its status as the "most successful all-Black community established in Canada before the U.S. Civil War." She compares it not only to similar communities in Canada, like Dawn and Wilberforce, but also to free Black communities in the US like Brooklyn, Illinois and the Beech and Roberts settlements in Indiana. The force of these comparisons is ultimately to credit Canadian legal structures and political receptivity to fugitive slaves as well as William King's paternalist approach to free Black settlement with the stability, relative prosperity and longevity of Buxton as a community. While she does represent the racist opposition to the founding of Buxton in ways that belie the mythology of Canada as Canaan, and while her portrait of King, an abolitionist who became a slaveholder upon marriage, is not uncritical, Hepburn writes against the grain of recent Black historiography and without explicitly engaging in the debates her work addresses. Nor does Hepburn offer any discussion of methodology; *Crossing the Border* is fairly conventional narrative history.

Nevertheless, her use of rich, archival materials ranging from census data and marriage records, to maps, deeds, newspapers, voters lists, and association records yields a detailed picture of the Black settlers in Buxton. Hepburn represents their educational pursuits, the place of churches in the community, the types of employment settlers engaged in, and offers a description of community

structure, all of which highlights the ethic of self-reliance that developed in Buxton. In fact, the central contradiction in Buxton's founding between King's declared interest in creating the conditions for independent Black citizens to thrive and the considerable evidence of his effort to control every facet of community life is in some sense mirrored in the structure of Hepburn's book, which focuses on King in the first five chapters, and on the community members themselves in the remaining five. Still, there is much of interest here, such as the presence of several interracial couples in the community, the relatively high literacy rates, and the racial integration of Buxton's churches and schools. Had the descriptive narrative only been accompanied by analysis and an explicitly theorized historiography, *Crossing the Border* would have been a much stronger book.

In *Loyalists and Layabouts*, Stephen Kimber writes about the founding of Shelburne, Nova Scotia, by Loyalists both White and Black, at the end of the eighteenth century. Kimber begins by confessing that he is not a historian, but a journalist, and that he is aiming at what he calls, somewhat redundantly, "historical narrative non-fiction," largely by focusing on the stories of those he regards as the "central characters" in the history of Shelburne's founding, and by narrating that history from the point of view of those historical figures. It is clear, then, that this is not a book to which scholars will turn for a responsible, well-researched history of a Loyalist community. A glance at Kimber's very thin bibliography confirms that this is a popular retelling of the available historical narrative. For a scholarly account of Black Shelburne, nothing has yet surpassed James W. St. G. Walker's *The Black Loyalists: The Search for the Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870*, from which Kimber cribs extensively for his representation of the Black Loyalist residents, their relationship with abolitionist John Clarkson, and the eventual exodus

of many to Sierra Leone in 1792. There is a place for popular history; in fact, as a means of making more evident the role Black people have historically played in the founding of Canadian communities, popular histories are as urgently needed as scholarly histories. But Kimber is no Adam Hochschild, and *Loyalists and Layabouts* is no *King Leopold's Ghost*.

This book disappoints in a number of respects. The heavy-handed alliteration and hackneyed phrasing of the book's title are reproduced throughout the text in a way that quickly becomes tiresome. For the portraits of Shelburne community members, Kimber relies heavily on extant historical accounts, and on memoirs like that of David George, which he then re-interprets and re-narrates, imputing motive and sentiment, not to mention drawing conclusions that he confesses in his notes he has no evidence to support. Readers interested in learning about the lives of figures like George, Boston King, and John Marrant would be better served by consulting their narratives and diaries, available through Canada's Digital Collections under Black Loyalists: Our History, Our People. Discussion of racial inequality and the unjust treatment of Black residents of Birchtown, the segregated Black community on the periphery of Shelburne, or indeed, of Birchtown's role as safe haven for runaway slaves in the province is confined to three pages. Kimber's aim is ostensibly to make the history of Shelburne's founding "come alive" through his loosely historical portraits of its Loyalist settlers, but a non-academic audience would be both better served and, I submit, more effectively engaged by a more responsible and analytical account of Shelburne's early years.



Three Men and a Feminist

Gerald Hill

My Human Comedy. Coteau \$14.95

Adam Getty

Repose. Nightwood \$16.95

Niels Hav; Patrick Friesen and P.K. Brask, trans.

We Are Here. BookThug \$15.00

Nicole Brossard; Robert Majzels and Erin Mouré, trans.

Notebook of Roses and Civilization Coach House \$16.95

Reviewed by Emily Carr

In Gerald Hill's fourth collection, *My Human Comedy*, Stan Still—the poet's everyman alter ego—ponders country graveyards, high school graduations, hometown hockey heroes, poetry manuals, and pigeons shitting on the barbeque. Hill's poems are safe and familiar, treading well-worn metaphorical ground—"books / . . . flaunt their fonts, bring / the whole bookcase down"—and espousing country values—"schoolchildren pour / from the entrances late for the goodness of their next step." These homegrown sentiments will appeal those who are looking for a quick, reassuring, and often humorous read.

The problem with Hill's poems is that sometimes they know too well what they mean, leaving little room for discovery or for surprise. Hill's infrequent gestures towards Dante, moreover, make me wonder why the title of the collection alludes to the *Inferno*. The most unsatisfying poem in the collection is, in fact, the only one that directly references the *Divine Comedy*. After quoting Dante's "Heavenly Messenger," "My Cock" attempts to "speak the truth about my cock" through simile, "like the so-called gopher he's quick to rise, / ready for danger, gentle in both or / one of your hands." It's hard to know what to say about these lines; I like Stan Still and I want to give him the benefit of the doubt but the simile sounds dangerously adolescent. I'm also endeared

by Hill's sincere, albeit old-fashioned, investment in poetry. I can't help but wonder, however, why—if he hopes to reach a more academic audience—Hill fails to follow his own advice that “no line should imply / so certainly the next?”

The poems in Adam Getty's second collection, *Repose*, take more risks but also struggle to settle into verse. Though Getty flirts with formalism in rhyme schemes and repeated refrains, his poems read like lineated prose. Take, for example, these lines addressed to Wordsworth: “Turning back he spies a hint of light on the red walls / of houses facing him and, under it, the bars of shade are a cage / over which he will some day take wing and fly.” Some day Getty just might take wing; his voice, however, isn't yet sure enough of itself to bear the weight of the poetic giants who crowd his poems with Byzantine icons, Albion banks, and wet petals on a black bough.

To borrow a line from Getty's title poem, these lyrics are like coiled springs “being pressed to take on more” than they can handle: to juxtapose the mythic and quotidian so as to forge a practical spirituality that bears witness equally to the prophet and the prostitute. Unfortunately, the poems often get stuck between worlds, doomed in their attempt to make “shadows scale my windshield / like Huns over Rome's wall” to “lower and languish in their lengthening lament.” Getty has not yet succeeded to, as the blurb on the back of his book claims, “put new wine into old wineskins.” *Repose*, however, is only Getty's second collection and there are moments when the poet's sense of responsibility to the hog slaughterer and the student selling salmon yield startlingly visceral images—“ragged meat still clinging to the bone”—that suggest Getty might, in his next collection, accomplish his self-appointed task of restoring poetry to workaday relevance.

Niels Hav's *We Are Here*, translated from the Danish by Patrick Friesen and P.K.

Brask, suffers from similar shortcomings: the poems flounder in clumsy comparisons like “Human mentality is a mystical hotel” and your eyes are “like two metaphysical novels / each with its own plot” and in transparently lineated prose like “What are we to do about the poets? / Life's rough on them / they look so pitiful dressed in black.” The poems are crisp, humorous, and accessible; they verge, however, on cliché in their attempt to search out truths that hide like “lizards / in the dark,” to liken love to the thirst of elephants, and to defend poets as insane children who are “infested with poetry like secret lepers.”

I wonder, as I read, if the humor and music of Hav's originals have been lost in translation? Perhaps English is not the right container for Hav's observations on dialect, silence, happiness, bitterness, becoming a grownup, and promotional pens. Perhaps the economy of Hav's prose has an appeal impossible in English iambs. Perhaps, if I took the time to learn Danish, these poems would, as “Dialect” promises, demonstrate that love doesn't need classy clothes and “can be directly expressed.” Perhaps.

Robert Majzels' and Erin Mouré's generous translation of Nicole Brossard's *The Notebook of Roses and Civilization*, in contrast, proves that the Quebecois poet's sensuous syntactical experiments resonate in English as well as in French. It's no surprise this text was short-listed for the Griffin Prize: Brossard's perspective is daring, willing to risk unexpected juxtapositions of “syntax and paintings,” “cars and fiction,” and “seashells and reality.” The poems echo with the experience of a world made luminous by desire: “balancing on the tip of an I / suspended by the feverish joy of July / or salivating before the dark / of a present filled with whys.”

Brossard's collection offers few answers; her poems, rather, revel in the immediacy and indeterminacy of the body's physical present. Feeding all the senses, Brossard

engages us “far beyond crude words” to explore the “fragments of happiness that traverse the body... elsewhere and in the wild blue yonder.” The text’s three “soft links” are Steinian portraits that infuse the life of everyday objects—slices of bread and cheese, legs and elbows, ice cubes at cocktail hour, a chamois on a windshield—with domestic eros. The deft, understated lyric sequences, “Notebook of Roses and Civilization” and “Blue Float of Days,” interspersed between these prose poems investigate a reality restarted by the female—dare I say feminist?—gaze. In fact, what is most remarkable about this collection is Brossard’s ability to articulate feminist identity politics within a classically feminine architecture of roses, summer evenings, and the scent of jasmine. The combination is risky and refreshing and illustrates Brossard’s uncanny talent for time and again, making it new.

Men in the Trees

Edward Hoagland

Early in the Season: A British Columbia Journal.
Douglas & McIntyre \$24.95

A.K. Hellum

Listening to the Trees. NeWest \$22.95

Reviewed by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands

Edward Hoagland’s journal *Early in the Season* begins June 6, 1968, the day after Robert Kennedy’s assassination. Hoagland feels the unrest of the time: “a national bewilderment, and meanwhile the centurions of the status quo proclaim that more of the status quo—a more tightly clinched status quo—is the solution.” But Hoagland is on a plane moving away from all that: from the war in Vietnam, from Manhattan smog, even from his new wife Marion, five months pregnant. He is going for two months to remote northern British Columbia for stories for a new book (they eventually serve as the basis of his novel *Seven Rivers West*).

He has just finished writing about an earlier trip to the region, *Notes from the Century Before* (published 1969). He wants more: more incredible stories from “old timers” about their experiences of the mining and trapping frontier. He wants different: more introspection and reflection than before, as befitting an about-to-be father. But he also wants confirmation: that at 35 he is still “fearless, an innocent, a rather good woodsman, and even more of an optimist than I am now,” still in all ways a man despite his recent domestication.

There are some outstanding bits in Hoagland’s journals: some brilliant glimpses of rivers, trees, and rocks, “the beauty [of a peak-studded view] so concentrated, excessive it is slapstick”; some fine stories about frequently brutal labour and relationships in an unforgiving landscape with “so many black flies . . . you needed to hold your breath to keep from breathing them in.” But while it may be true that the journals are now 40 years old and should be read in context (e.g., he attempts to formulate Native/white relations amid dollops of local racist vocabulary) his constant, casual sexism is almost unbearable: “With some of these old-timers, it’s a little like seducing a girl to get them to talk to you. They *want* to, but they don’t want to” (that’s a mild example). Hoagland’s apparently elusive masculinity is sometimes overwhelming: on many days, we can’t see the trees (or the gold in the rocks) for the “fungus infection on [his] prick.”

A.K.Hellum does not have Hoagland’s literary virtuosity, but *Listening to the Trees* affords a more interesting view of the forest nonetheless. A professional forester with five decades of experience in Norway, Canada, South America, and Southeast Asia, Hellum offers reflections on his own work, and also on the trees themselves and human relations with them in these different places. Although there are “old timers” here, too, Hellum’s backcountry experiences are largely his own, and some

of them make good stories, such as one in which he has to keep up with a guide jogging through torrential rain—not thinking about snakes, spiders, and panthers—in Guyana’s Moraballie Forest Reserve. But the real characters in the book are the trees, and Hellum’s ability to get them to tell their stories involves a much more humble and patient form of listening than Hoagland’s.

Hellum’s concern is the hubris of most of what passes for forestry practice in the 20th century: the expectation, for example, that one can clearcut an indigenous forest, replace it with a plantation, and have a sustainable ecosystem predictably emerge from it all. Although he documents a few successes, “the good examples are so few and scattered in comparison to the failures, it is hard not to feel gravely disheartened by what [he] has witnessed.” Increasing commercial pressures on forests and forest-dwellers do not suggest much respite, as trees are increasingly “pressured into becoming our servants.” Hellum, however, remains committed to the possibility of good forestry; he insists that foresters must develop *intimacy* with the trees—he calls it love—in order to understand and defend them against ever-greater exploitation. “Since we are bound to keep on logging our forests it is important to regenerate them well and ecologically and not to lose our sense of boundary between the forests as places of wonder and our urban worlds.” Although Hellum is no less historically-bound than Hoagland in his view of the trees, his commitment to listening to them carefully offers us a view of the forest that speaks also to the future.



Two Women, Two Writers

Blanche Howard and Allison Howard, eds.

A Memoir of Friendship: The Letters Between Carol Shields and Blanche Howard. Viking Canada \$35.00

Arthur Motyer with Elma Gerwin and Carol Shields

The Staircase Letters: An Extraordinary Friendship at the End of Life. Random House Canada \$25.00

Reviewed by Veronica Thompson

Early in *A Memoir of Friendship*, Blanche Howard writes to Carol Shields:

By the way, I absolutely loved *Touchstones: Letters Between Two Women* [Patricia Frazer Lamb and Kathryn Joyce Holwein]. What resonant chords—in that era I too was devouring *The Mandarins*, *The Outsider*, and most of the others they mention.

Readers of Howard’s and Shields’ letters will find themselves equally enchanted. Their letters span almost 30 years, beginning in 1975 when Shields sold her first novel (*Small Ceremonies*) to McGraw Hill, and contacted Howard for some advice. This first correspondence leads to hundreds of letters, and later emails, that reveal the details of these women’s personal and public lives, and of their reading and writing.

The first two chapters of the letters, titled “Two Women” and “Two Writers,” encapsulate the movement of all of the letters that follow. The letters are organized chronologically, but also grouped thematically as indicated by chapter titles such as “Ambition,” “Obsession,” “Rejection,” “Fragility,” “The Meaning of Life.” Each chapter begins with a brief introductory note from Howard.

The quotidian and momentous details of family life—the marriages of their children, the births of their grandchildren, accidents and illnesses, countless Christmas dinners—are shared alongside the momentous and quotidian details of the two women’s careers: teaching, political campaigning, accounting, writing, reading, revising, reviewing, and publishing. For many

readers the professional challenges and achievements will be the most interesting details of the letters, in particular the collaboration that produced Howard and Shields' *A Celibate Season* and its journey to publication, but the letters also contain a fascinating record of the literature the women were reading, their astute assessments of that literature, and their responses to reviews of their own and others' works. Not surprisingly, Shields and Howard were avid readers and active reviewers themselves, and reviews are often the subject of their letters; they were read closely, and sometimes critically; and often commented upon as "insightful," "cruel," or "too academic." Although filled with literary lives, allusions and analysis, the letters are not merely professional, but deeply personal, and the reader shares in the experience of a close and gracious friendship.

The Staircase Letters is also a collection of letters between two women and two writers, although differently configured. The two women are Elma Gerwin and Carol Shields; the two writers Carol Shields and Arthur Motyer. While Howard and Shields' friendship develops spontaneously and deeply over 30 years, the relationship between Motyer, Gerwin, and Shields presented in these letters is more deliberate. Elma Gerwin, a Canadian adult literacy advocate and educator, reaches out to Motyer, once her English professor at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec, and to Shields, with whom she shares a cancer diagnosis. Gerwin and Motyer are long time friends, "Carol was someone Elma deeply loved," but Motyer and Shields have never met. Together they will "make a special journey," a "perilous voyage" towards death. *The Staircase Letters* span the final years, 2001-2003, of Gerwin's and Shields' lives.

The letters are organized into three chapters, each with an epigram from one of Shields' novels. The first chapter begins with an epigram on happiness from *Unless*; the second

on love from *The Republic of Love*; the third on death from *The Stone Diaries*. The title comes from an image in a Shields' letter, which unfortunately isn't reproduced but is summarized by Motyer, in which the staircase is a metaphor for her life, and she descends "the staircase of her years" as a strategy to achieve sleep. The letters are not dated, but woven into Motyer's own narrative, a story equally preoccupied with the way he has lived his own life, and how to approach his own death: "I think now... about dying as the last living thing I must do." At the time of publication Motyer was 81.

Both collections contemplate life, love, literature, and what Shields called "the writer's fragility!" Despite the literary and publishing successes of Motyer, Howard, and Shields, which vary but in each case are considerable and in Shields' unquestionably so, each writer harboured insecurity, and the letter writers are acutely aware of the length of time it takes to hone writing skills. Insecurities permeate *The Staircase Letters*, and Motyer's self-described "fumbling and awkward" "failure with words" is painful for him, and at times for the reader. Throughout *The Staircase Letters*, Motyer often repeats, summarizes, and quotes from the letters, rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. The correspondence seems embedded in his unhappy memories of what seems to have been at times an unhappy life.

The two collections share many themes, and in many cases uncanny similarities. The letters reveal supportive working relationships between the correspondents; both Howard and Shields provide editorial comments on each other's work, so too does Gerwin on Motyer's writing. They also reveal shared appreciations for ideas, thinking, literature, and publishing. They share generosity of and gratitude for friendship. Both end in loss and deep sadness and in recognition of the gift of friendship. Ultimately, however, *A Memoir of a*

Friendship celebrates a friendship and two women; *The Staircase Letters* celebrates two women and mourns a friendship.

Québec réécrit ses influences

Krzysztof Jarosz [dir.]

Romanica Silesiana, no. 2 : « *La Réécriture dans la littérature québécoise* ». Presses Universitaires de Silésie 4,75 \$

Compte rendu par Ariane Tremblay

Le deuxième numéro de *Romanica Silesiana*—une revue polonaise d'études et de traduction littéraires—se consacre entièrement à la pratique de la réécriture dans la littérature québécoise. Ce recueil réunit les actes du colloque *Réécriture*, qui s'est tenu les 12 et 13 octobre 2007, en Pologne. Les études qui forment ce numéro sont donc centrées sur les pratiques littéraires d'écrivains québécois dont les écrits font état du remaniement d'une œuvre autre. Vingt-deux québécois, tous chercheurs européens et québécois, s'adonnent, dans ce numéro, à l'étude de l'écriture imitative. Au corpus d'études succèdent également, comme le veut le projet initial de la revue naissante, six comptes rendus d'ouvrages qui s'intéressent aux problématiques de la recherche en littérature d'expression française.

Par sa forme même, le collectif répond à une organisation méticuleuse. Les articles se répartissent sur quatre axes d'étude précis. Certains traitent d'écart et de références parodiques ou critiques d'œuvres québécoises envers une certaine tradition littéraire (Resch, Warmuzinska-Rogoz, Mercier, Vignes, Jarosz, Sawicka, Krzykowski) ; d'autres se consacrent plutôt à l'évocation de mythes classiques, réinterprétés, on s'en doute, à la lumière de la culture contemporaine (Grzybowska, Minelle, Sadkowi, Piccione, Bourneuf) ; d'autres encore se penchent sur les œuvres d'auteurs d'origine étrangère ayant migré au Québec et traitent des confrontations textuelles entre la culture

d'origine de ceux-ci et celle d'emprunt (Mouneimné-Wojtas, Kwaterko, Smart) ; les derniers, finalement, s'intéressent aux avatars de l'écriture de soi et à la pratique autotextuelle (Kapolka, Beaudet, Vurm, Figas, Filteau, Mottet, Gauvin).

L'intérêt scientifique de cet ouvrage est indéniable. Premier recueil polonais monothématique consacré aux écrits québécois, ce numéro permet, d'une part, d'en arriver à une vision analytique concernant l'une des orientations prise par l'ensemble littéraire québécois. De plus, ce regard résulte d'études écrites par des chercheurs étrangers—pour la grande majorité—à la sphère québécoise. La publication de ce collectif contribue, en ce sens, à une affirmation plus objective des écrits québécois comme maillons appartenant à une littérature autonome, digne d'être élevée au rang de sujet d'étude. D'autre part, ce numéro illustre toute sa richesse en ce qu'il observe une tendance propre aux écritures contemporaines, soit cette façon qu'a, de nos jours, la littérature de se construire en puisant dans son propre espace. Les vingt-deux articles viennent, chacun un peu plus, nourrir la réflexion sur ces pratiques intertextuelles multiples en s'abreuvant, pour la plupart, à la théorie genettienne élaborée dans *Palimpseste*.

Il subsiste, cependant, une mince ombre au tableau : le large thème de cet ouvrage appelait le choix d'un corpus fort diversifié. Il faut avouer que l'adoption d'un axe de recherche aussi englobant—en autorisant la sélection de textes de tout genre et de toute époque—donne à la revue certaines allures de fourre-tout. Toutefois, il n'en demeure pas moins que les études de cette revue, en refusant de rapprocher les pratiques de réécriture et l'idéologie de la mort du roman, contredisent avec brio la thèse trop largement répandue de la disparition de la littérature dite majeure. Les auteurs y arrivent en illustrant les mille et une forces inventives attribuables au remaniement littéraire du corpus québécois.

Of Cottages and Women

J.M. Kearns

ex-Cottagers in Love. Key Porter \$19.95

Reviewed by Julie Cairnie

In her 1994 autobiography, *Under My Skin*, Doris Lessing recalls a moment from her youth when an older man remarked on her beauty and her one (to him) physical fault: her breasts weren't symmetrical. That Lessing can recall this moment and its impact fifty years later highlights men's power over women's understanding of their bodies. Frankly, when J. M. Kearns's debut novel, *ex-Cottagers in Love*, begins with the following line, "Her arms were a little too long," I immediately felt that this wasn't a book I would enjoy. While there is value in understanding the ways in which women's sense of self and body can be determined by men's evaluations, I wasn't sure I could endure an entire book from the perspective of a forty-something man who whines about his professional and personal failures, and has a concomitant dysfunctional understanding of women. The novel is presented from the perspective of this man, Dave Moore, and from the perspective of his nephew, George. While George is going through actual puberty, Dave's is of the protracted variety. Both are "ex-cottagers" in love: in love with women and obsessed with the former family cottage. It is the inclusion of George, an introspective and thoughtful boy, that keeps this novel from teetering over into the abyss of middle-aged self-indulgence. It seems that *ex-Cottagers in Love* is not only an account of men's insecurities in the face of feminism, although it sometimes veers in this direction.

It is really difficult to know how to read this book. Do I read the opening observation (and this is not the only instance of valuation in the novel) at face value or as the beginning of a serious and sustained reflection on the insecurities which result from men's loss of, as RW Connell puts it,

the "patriarchal dividend"? The novel is set in 1988 and moves between Los Angeles, where Dave works as a paralegal and meets his love interest, Maggie (she of the abnormal arms), the small town in Ontario where Dave's family lives, and the site of his family's former cottage in Muskoka. The narrative is predominantly Dave's, but George takes over at points. It is their relationship to women and "the cottage" which is at the centre of the text, and these two obsessions (there is no other word for it) are often intertwined. With its particular focus on men and boys' anxieties and crises—some reviewers have described the book as Canadian "lad-lit"—it doesn't seem to have women readers in mind, perhaps especially academic feminist readers. Kearns has recently published two self-help manuals: *Why Mr Right Can't Find You* (2007) and *Better Love Next Time* (2008). In comparison to the novel, these books interpellate (relationship-advice-addicted) women as readers.

ex-Cottagers in Love includes the adolescent boy's perspective on girls in a fairly predictable way, tools to satisfy impulsive lust, but George also has an ambivalent sense of self, and a lot of anxiety results from his interactions with girls. Similarly, Dave is subdued by the women he meets. Dave has a PhD in Philosophy, but never gets an academic job; instead, he works as a poorly-paid paralegal. The only academic we meet in the novel is Judith, a feminist (possibly lesbian, Dave speculates) Women's Studies professor. Even after a somewhat hostile debate about Virginia Woolf, the subject of Dave's dissertation, he describes, in fact dismisses, her as "cute." After his initial critical observation, Dave describes Maggie as "perfect"; in fact, she is masturbatory material, similar to Sophia Loren in *8½*. Later, she is described as "wholesome porn." Maggie is only ever reflected in the voyeur's view. She is a body, possessed and without desire: for instance, when she frankly tells Dave that she is not attracted to him, he

claims that “she was lying.” Is this a novel which sublimates anger about the regression of men in a feminist and affirmative action environment? The novel is set in 1988 and is presented as a reflective account of a cottage lost and a woman found. Still, there is no sense of the primary narrator’s development. Who does he become? How does he refine his relationship with Maggie? While women are viewed through the voyeur’s lens, men are given short shrift too.

Masculinity studies has burgeoned in the last two decades, and there have been several efforts to develop a non-binary theory of gender. Unfortunately, *ex-Cottagers in Love* tends to polarize men and women, as men drool over women and women try to repel them or help them to mature. There is no substance to men and women’s relationships, and no substantial women in the novel. This is a reflective narrative, but Dave never really grows up: he is a forty-something who resents his parents for selling the family cottage and is petulant with Maggie. While it is important to reveal men’s insecurities and anxieties, and the ways in which these tend to be displaced onto their relationships with women, there is no sense of complexity and evolution here. *ex-Cottagers in Love* would benefit from a truly reflective retrospection.

Into Africa?

Larry Krotz

The Uncertain Business of Doing Good: Outsiders in Africa. U of Manitoba P \$24.95

Nina Newington

Where Bones Dance: An English Girlhood, An African War. U of Wisconsin P US \$26.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

Well aware of the dangers of writing voyeuristically about Africa and its problems, and of scripting oneself into the continent and its people, Larry Krotz opens

The Uncertain Business of Doing Good by declaring, “When you pick up a book about Africa, it is almost inevitably not so much about Africa as about us.” Not presuming to claim more than an outsider status, he regularly reminds readers of his relatively brief visits to a few precise African locations between 1992 and 2004. Nonetheless, Krotz cannot avoid generalizing, speculating, and evaluating in a non-fiction account whose very title suggests an exposé of western naïveté and ineffectiveness.

The Uncertain Business of Doing Good is organized into an introduction and four loosely linked sections: the first, “Angola, 1992,” describes a documentary film project exploring what was optimistically, but erroneously, viewed as the beginning of a period of peace which would end Angola’s bitter civil war; the second, “Nairobi, Kenya 1997,” focuses on an ongoing research project among HIV-resistant prostitutes in one of the city’s shantytowns; the third, “Arusha, Tanzania 2002,” provides a partial account of one of the Rwandan genocide trials; and the fourth and final section, “Kisuma, Kenya 2004,” describes an AIDS-related project involving a controlled study of the role of circumcision in lowering rates of HIV transmission. In each section, Krotz balances a subjective personal response with the voices of outsiders and Africans—respectively, the givers and receivers of aid—and seeks hope and optimism in each encounter. Yet Krotz’s tone often reflects failure and frustration, especially as the scenarios draw to a close: the Angolan ceasefire fails in the aftermath of a national election; the lives of Kenyan prostitutes remain relatively unchanged while extensive research uncovers no means to replicate their natural immunity; the UN-sponsored genocide trial in Arusha appears unfair, if not unjust; and the study in Kisuma demonstrates a significant reduction in rates of HIV infection after circumcision, but is hindered by delays and appears unlikely

to have a major impact on the devastation caused by the AIDS virus.

Perhaps most significant, however, is the lack of a clear audience for *The Uncertain Business of Doing Good*. Those familiar with Africa, and specifically African research and aid projects, will appreciate Krotz's brief, yet poignant and nostalgia-inducing descriptions of bustling markets, makeshift taxis, vibrant shantytowns, and pot-holed roads. His accounts are interesting, his reactions are thoughtful, and the core question he asks about the role of outsiders in Africa—how does one balance the fact that ostensibly “doing good” is so much fun?—is provocative and relevant. Yet, while *The Uncertain Business of Doing Good* is a gentle and engaging book which makes for a thoughtful read, it does not add significantly to our understanding of the complex problems of aid to the developing world, or of the often ambiguous relationships between donor and recipient. A reader is left feeling vaguely unsatisfied, like a tourist completing a somewhat random four-stop continental tour of Africa.

Nina Newington's novel, set in Nigeria between 1965 and 1968, during the early years of independence and the beginning of the Biafran civil war, is also rooted in personal experience, but of a far more ambiguous kind. As she notes in her Preface, “I lived in Nigeria from when I was seven until I was ten but, before writing this book, I had almost no conscious memory of that time.” The novel, written in the voice of the child she imaginatively was, or may have been, “came from an unknown place inside” herself and was inspired by a list of “incidents, things, and people” from recovered memories.

Newington writes with immediacy and intensity, exploiting the potential of a first-person narrator who is fascinated by the power of her own stories and those of others, yet often confuses or conflates the two as she strives to create a meaningful

narrative out of lived experience. The conventional innocent eye of the *Bildungsroman* allows the author to convey a consistently ironic perspective of neo-colonialism in post-independence Nigeria, and to explore this in the context of the narrator's growing awareness of gender expectations as well as her prepubescent sexual experiences. Like Krotz, Newington is careful about not presuming to understand or speak for her African characters. Christina, who works as a nanny for the narrator's family, looking after her and her younger brother, remains a fascinating, yet elusive character. She haunts the novel and its narrator, who in spite of her youth recognizes that Christina is “guarding a secret place in her mind and she only lets herself visit it sometimes.”

Both Newington and Krotz embrace the risk of writing as outsiders about a continent and its people often reduced to generalization and cliché, and their sensitivity, sincerity, and clearly delineated focus make their works engaging and occasionally provocative.

Questions de filiation

Andrée Laberge

La rivière du loup. XYZ 25,00 \$

Andrée Laberge

Le fin fond de l'histoire. XYZ 25,00 \$

Compte rendu par Julie Gaudreault

Ces deux romans comportent plusieurs similarités, parmi lesquelles la question de la filiation est centrale. Dans *La rivière du loup* (2006), le fils adolescent, dont l'existence en déroute est surveillée par une « protectrice » autoritaire et par la direction de l'école, voue un amour et un respect inconditionnels à « [son] loup de père ». Loup tant au sens propre que figuré, plongeant toujours davantage dans la folie et peu doué pour la parole, le père est la cause des maux et des troubles du fils. Les tribulations de ce personnage inquiétant instruisent le procès de la figure archétypale du père.

Est-il mauvais et innocent, ou encore mauvais et coupable? Le roman discute ce dilemme moral du début à la fin, si bien que ce personnage ambigu de loup anthropomorphe—homme ou bête, être de raison ou de pure émotion, le roman demeure indéfinissable—s’inscrit dans la veine des êtres qui peuplent les fables. C’est cependant par la voix du fils que l’auteur développe la dimension pédagogique de sa créature : « il fallait des raisons autrement plus sérieuses que celles imaginées et forgées de toutes pièces pour mettre mon loup de père en cage, à cause de cette tendance humaine à voir de la bestialité partout et à attribuer aux autres nos intentions les moins nobles pour s’en soulager et s’en défendre. »

Le fin fond de l’histoire (2002), plus réaliste, se déroule durant le Sommet des Amériques tenu dans la ville de Québec en 2001. L’auteure y exploite déjà le thème du besoin de filiation en relatant la quête d’identité douloureuse de deux jeunes gens aux origines inconnues. Le tumulte entourant l’événement politique est la cause indirecte de leur rencontre et leur permet d’en découvrir davantage sur eux-mêmes : une jeune femme métis est au chevet de sa mère adoptive et seul un infirmier compatissant, un « bâtard », enfant jadis abandonné, peut l’aider. Ce dernier comprend et maîtrise le délire de la vieille en jouant le rôle . . . de son fils. Le métissage demeure le thème nouant minutieusement toute l’intrigue, qui vise à élucider la mystification dont la jeune Métis a été bercée. D’où vient-elle? Si la solution de cette énigme relève de l’intrigue, la raison pour laquelle elle entreprend sa quête est tout sauf circonstancielle. Elle décide d’aller « jusqu’au fin fond de cette histoire pour enfin [s’y] inscrire, non pas comme une erreur de la nature, mais comme un membre à part entière de la communauté, liée par le sang à ses semblables ».

Ainsi, le fils du loup et la jeune Métis n’ont de cesse de se réclamer de leurs racines

biologiques afin de trouver la paix. *La rivière du loup* charrie donc dans son cours l’histoire du couple improvisé—d’enfants adoptés—se formant dans *Le fin fond de l’histoire*. En étudiant la nature des liens susceptibles de fonder une identité personnelle, ces deux romans cherchent à montrer qu’ils peuvent être multiples—par ailleurs, la pluralité des narrateurs nourrit un sentiment d’incertitude, de vision kaléidoscopique, et la narration est conçue pour dérouter la lecture, ces caractéristiques narratives contribuant à un effet de brouillage recherché—mais professent un parti pris pour l’unité identitaire qu’assure le lien biologique. Le contraste étonne, mais il rafraîchit, évitant l’écueil de la désillusion.

L’historienne condition

Yvan Lamonde

Historien et citoyen. Navigations au long cours.

Fides 24,95 \$

Compte rendu par Maxime Prévost

Cet autoportrait intellectuel, ou, pour le dire comme l’auteur, ce « retour autobiographique », tire sa justification du fait que tout interprète du passé porte en lui l’ensemble de l’historienne condition. C’est en effet de l’influence de l’un des plus brillants descendants de Montaigne, à savoir Ralph Waldo Emerson, que se réclame Yvan Lamonde, historien et citoyen opérant ici un retour sur son long et fructueux parcours qui a donné jour à une œuvre immense, tant sur le plan qualitatif que quantitatif. Dans son *American Scholar* essai de 1837, Emerson esquissait la figure d’un intellectuel du Nouveau Monde empreint de « *self-reliance* », c’est-à-dire à la fois ambitieux et serein, fort de sa conviction de parvenir à des synthèses originales selon une perspective qui ne soit plus européenne. Armé de cette référence, invoquant aussi le patronage du Gaston Bachelard de l’*Essai sur la formation de l’esprit scientifique* qui plaidait en faveur

« d'une démarche d'identification, de reconnaissance et d'aveu de ce qu'ont pu être pour un scientifique les à priori de ses choix, de ses possibles préjugés, de ses intuitions », Lamonde propose un retour sur son propre parcours, retraçant sa démarche scientifique, des premières impulsions de jeunesse aux sommes colossales des dernières années (notons l'*Histoire sociale des idées au Québec* 1760-1896, 1896-1929 et, en voie d'achèvement, 1929-1960, ainsi que la codirection du projet *Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada*, qui a donné lieu à la publication de six volumes), en passant par son travail d'historien des idées, de biographe, d'éditeur et de bibliographe (« Autant j'ai pensé qu'une société qui n'a pas une histoire intellectuelle de sa durée a peu de chance de se percevoir comme mature et souveraine, autant je pense que le contrôle bibliographique du savoir ou d'un savoir donné peut seul éviter les recommencements naïfs et consolider les fondations. ») Le paradoxe est que ce regard rétrospectif constitue une excellente introduction à l'œuvre d'un grand historien, dans laquelle sont synthétisées les lignes directrices de sa pensée et ses principales conclusions (on y trouvera notamment un commentaire explicatif sur la fameuse formule $Q = -F + GB + USA^2 - R$).

À la fin de son ouvrage, Yvan Lamonde demande : « Pourquoi y a-t-il si peu d'historiens qui se présentent et qui sont connus comme intellectuels ? » Sans doute est-ce parce qu'un savoir d'érudition comme l'histoire « avance à pas de tortue et avec la carapace idoine ». Pourtant, l'historien met au jour un passé sans lequel le présent doit demeurer lettre morte. « En ce sens, l'historien a beaucoup à dire du présent, à propos du sens des discours et des actes contemporains. » Tout au long de sa carrière, mais jamais davantage que dans ce dernier livre, Yvan Lamonde aura été fidèle à ce programme. Après lecture d'*Historien et citoyen*, on se prend à espérer qu'il succèdera maintenant du présent de la culture

québécoise, tant soit peu amnésique, qui ne « sait plus si, ni de quoi, il y aurait encore lieu de se souvenir ».

Communities of Print

Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black, eds.

History of the Book in Canada: Volume 2: 1840-1918. U of Toronto P \$89.00

Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon, eds.

History of the Book in Canada: Volume 3: 1918-1980. U of Toronto P \$85.00

Reviewed by Eva-Marie Kröller

Among the most important resources in Canadian literary study to have come along in recent years are the three volumes of the *History of the Book in Canada*, published in English by the University of Toronto Press and in French by the Presses de l'Université de Montréal. Bilingual scholarship on such a scale (vols. 2 and 3 are each appr. 650 pages) has not been attempted since the 1960s, but unlike some of the projects of the Centennial decade that fizzled when the enthusiasm of the era died down and the money dried up, publication of this project has been completed with dispatch.

Throughout, the *History* pays attention to the exchange of print between Canada's anglophone and francophone cultures, but it does so with an erudite understanding of the expanding economy of publishing beyond the nation. Writing about the New Brunswicker Samuel Douglass Smuthe Huyghue, who took his literary and artistic fortunes from Canada to Great Britain and from there to Australia, Gwendolyn Davies calls his migrations "a case study of how the increasingly mobile world of Victorian society could open to Canadians the possibilities for global experience." The *History* is, however, equally attentive to regional expressions of print. Contributors often read these as origins of national identity, but also as indications of the diversity and tensions within

it. In her discussion of cookbooks, for example, the distinguished bibliographer Elizabeth Driver calls “[t]he period when residents of the Canadas began to compile their own cookbooks . . . momentous” because “[t]hrough ‘homemade’ texts, they could articulate, codify, and set down their own food traditions,” as opposed to those imported from Great Britain or France. In one of several illuminating comparisons of cultural practice throughout the volume, she points out that compilations of local recipes for charity were a custom in anglophone but not francophone communities where women tended to congregate through church-related activities, but recipes or customs came of course also from the numerous ethnic groups for whom English or French was not the defining language. As is illustrated with Driver’s subject, contributors’ nets are cast wide, and include guidebooks, sports writing, music sheets, almanacs, advertisements, magazines, and mail-order catalogues, as well as discussing legal, scientific, scholarly, and religious publications: indeed, the French title refers to *imprimés*, a more appropriate term but one difficult to translate.

In ranging impressively across types of discourse and the institutions that sustained them, these essays do not subscribe to the frequently convoluted vocabulary of cultural studies, although they share much territory with them. Throughout, the tone and method remain uniformly scholarly and jargon-free, but this by no means excludes wit. One of my favourite pieces in volume 3 is “The Image of the Book in Advertising,” co-authored by Russell Johnston, Lyndsey Nowakowski-Dailey, Michelle Preston, and Jaime Sweeting, which looks at ads for Du Maurier cigarettes, Lux Soap, and Molson’s Golden Ale. All of them feature people reading, but while a book, or better yet, whole shelves of them lend a man authority, it signifies loneliness in a woman. In the 1960s, however,

a book was bad news for either gender because “bookish people” were increasingly deemed “unhappy.” Here, as elsewhere, the *History* is alert to social change, eschewing impressions for hard facts: its conclusions are often bolstered with statistics. This precision is all the more remarkable as the individual essays are brief and often leave one wanting more: many of the authors have published books on the subject of their essay, but there is still such a wealth of uncharted material here that one way of assisting students in search of a thesis topic would be simply to hand them one of these volumes and ask them to browse.

The *History* is exemplary in documenting the relationship between print and Aboriginal people, and the interactions of print and orality. Vol. 3, for example, contains Blanca Schorch’s “Intersections between Native Oral Traditions and Print Culture” and Brendan Frederick R. Edwards’s “Reading on the ‘Rez.’” These essays are placed toward the beginning and the end of the volume respectively and the table of contents of Vol. 2 features a similar frame with contributions about Aboriginal communities of print and Aboriginal communities of readers. The illustrations in these and other chapters are informative and interesting, even if the quality of reproduction is not always first-rate. An image of the *Kamloops Wawa*, for instance, shows the teaching of shorthand through Chinook, and of Chinook through shorthand, and there is a page from Albert Lacombe’s *First Reader in the English and Blackfoot Languages*.

During the four years Coral Ann Howells and I worked on the *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*, the *History of the Book in Canada* never left my desk and it often provided guidance that could not be located in the same reliable quality anywhere else. This is one of those essential publications that make one wonder how one ever got along without them, and the achievement is quite simply monumental.

Lieu de mémoire

Marie-Andrée Lamontagne

Les Fantômes de la Pointe-Platon. Éditions du Noroît 21,95 \$

Compte rendu par Louise Frappier

Les œuvres publiées dans la collection « Lieu dit » aux éditions du Noroît proposent une rencontre entre un écrivain et un lieu, le texte devenant « mémoire d'un espace qui revit à son tour grâce à lui ». Au hasard de la découverte du « rude paysage » de la Pointe-Platon, « pointe de roche, massive et stable, s'avancant dans la mer » à quelques kilomètres de Québec, la narratrice du récit de Marie-Andrée Lamontagne entreprend de raconter, dans une perspective mi-fictionnelle et mi-historique, l'histoire du domaine Joly-De Lotbinière à travers les personnages qui l'ont habité, « fantômes » avec lesquels s'établira un dialogue transcendant le temps au rythme d'une promenade poétique au sud du Saint-Laurent.

Dans une langue riche truffée de références diverses, l'auteure fait revivre des personnages colorés, à commencer par Pierre-Gustave Joly, jeune immigrant français qui choisit de s'établir au Canada en 1820, et dont le mariage avec Julie-Christine Chartier de Lotbinière fera le gestionnaire de la seigneurie qu'elle apporte en dot. Homme cultivé à l'esprit curieux et aux grandes ambitions, c'est à lui que revient l'initiative de la construction, en 1851, d'une résidence somptueuse sur le domaine. « Maple House » appartiendra ensuite au fils de Pierre-Gustave, Henri-Gustave Joly, qui fut député à Ottawa puis Premier Ministre du Québec en 1878-1879. La résidence, qui sera occupée par de nombreux personnages de marque au cours des XIX^e et XX^e siècles, accueillera ainsi en ses murs, en 1941, l'impératrice d'Autriche et reine de Hongrie en exil à l'invitation du propriétaire d'alors, Alain Joly de Lotbinière, petit-fils du précédent.

L'histoire du domaine de Joly-Lotbinière recréée par Marie-Andrée Lamontagne se clôt sur l'apparition d'un dernier « fantôme », Edmond Joly de Lotbinière, fils de Monsieur Alain et de Madame Agnès, qui révèle l'admiration qu'éprouvait sa mère pour les jardins de la Sissinghurst, demeure de l'écrivaine et maîtresse de Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West. Devenu la propriété de la province de Québec en 1967, le domaine de Joly-Lotbinière est riche d'une histoire que l'auteure s'est efforcée de retracer contre « l'oubli destructeur », dans une langue stylisée qu'accompagnent de magnifiques photographies du domaine.

Narrating Tragedy

Patrick Lane

Red Dog, Red Dog. McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Lisa Moore

February. Anansi \$29.95

Jessica Grant

Come, Thou Tortoise. Knopf \$29.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

Recently, I had a conversation with an author-friend about the nuts-and-bolts of writing. When the topic of narrating tragedy came up, he suggested (with the caveat that he may have been paraphrasing, unwittingly, a “how-to” manual for novice writers, or possibly a famous author) that no character's experiences, however dark, should ever be without *some* humour. No believable life, my friend said, is ever unremittingly bleak.

Although I suspect that my friend is right, I'm not sure that Patrick Lane would agree; certainly his debut novel suggests a different writerly philosophy. Best known for his poetry and creative non-fiction, Lane is a highly-decorated veteran of the CanLit scene. *Red Dog, Red Dog*, confirming its author's place among CanLit's elite, was shortlisted for the Giller Prize, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, the Amazon.ca/Books in Canada Best First Novel Award, and the

Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. Consequently, while *Red Dog, Red Dog* feels, to me, too heavy-handed to be counted as Lane's best work, my review comes with its own caveat—namely that I may well be wrong.

Set in the Okanagan valley of British Columbia during the late 1950s, *Red Dog, Red Dog* introduces readers to a community of characters with astonishingly dysfunctional backgrounds and, for the most part, hopeless futures. Although the main "action" of the novel takes place over the course of one week, the narrative sweeps back in time to tell the back-stories of its central characters, the Stark family. As the novel progresses, we come to know Elmer, a troubled itinerant labourer, who married Lillian, a bride too young to have developed the skills necessary to raise her sons, much less cope with the stillbirths of her two daughters and her husband's murder of her would-be step-daughter. As a child, Tom, the youngest of Elmer's and Lillian's sons, suffers the indifference, and sometimes the outright abuse, of his parents; Eddy, their eldest, is so doted upon by his mother that readers must entertain the possibility, at least, of incest. As adults, after Eddy (now a reckless heroin-addict) murders a neighbour in a robbery-gone-wrong, Tom (more steady, though no less embroiled in a social sphere marked by drugs, violence, and petty crime) tries to cover for his brother but in so doing is forced to confront the limits of loyalty.

This is not a story void of some glimmer of redemption and the writing itself—most notably those passages narrated from beyond the grave by Alice, one of Lillian's stillborn daughters—is as evocative as readers might expect. "Oh, my sisters," says Alice, "the stories swirl. They are wrong water trapped by rocks." And, later, voicing the lack that 'dogs' all of the characters in this novel, she says, "I listened to the howls of the coyotes in the hills, the seething grasses, and the clatter of the far trees. Even the stones cried out. I lie among them now, a shroud around

my bones, and try to think of what love might be." But in inundating the reader with a world marked by generational pain, anger, and brutality, *Red Dog, Red Dog* is neither for the faint of heart nor the weak of stomach and the novel will leave some readers wondering, gorgeous poetic-prose aside, about the point of it all—since we know, virtually from the get-go, that what most of the characters need to experience, but probably never will, are those ostensibly-universal qualities of compassion, hope, and love.

In *February*, Lisa Moore transports readers, again and again, to the *Ocean Ranger*, a mobile drilling unit that malfunctioned off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland in February, 1982, resulting in the death of all 84 men aboard. Subtly embedded in the novel are lessons about Newfoundland history and the contemporary culture of the region, but the narrative focuses on one widow's grieving process over the course of more than two decades. While we first meet Helen O'Mara in late 2008, and follow her through to early 2009, her "present tense" experiences are shadowed—or, rather, overshadowed—by her husband's death: she cannot stop herself from repeatedly attempting to reconstruct, to the best of her imaginative abilities, Cal's last moments on the *Ocean Ranger*. Upon first hearing about the accident, Helen becomes "outside." This, she says, is the "best way to describe what she felt: She was banished. Banished from everyone, and from herself." Left with four children to raise on her own (albeit with the occasional help of her plucky, no-nonsense sister Louise), Helen feels "pressure to pretend" that she is "on the inside, with them" but, for the better part of the novel, she only pretends. Reflecting on the nature of the ocean that took her husband, she says, "It is still and self-combusting. Hungry and glutted with love. Full of mystery. Full of void. Full of God. Get down on your knees before this creature. It is the centre of the outside." Helen's challenge is to find a way back

“inside”: understandably, given the strength of her bond with Cal and the depth of her loss, this is no small feat.

By no means plotdriven —our author is Moore, after all, whose short fiction (*Open*, 2002) and previous novel (*Alligator*, 2005) garnered richly-deserved accolades—*February* nonetheless engages readers with the genuine possibility that Helen may never entirely recover. She may be resilient but she is human, as are the two other central characters in the novel: John, Helen’s son, and Jane, the woman he accidentally impregnates during their brief affair in Iceland. In a sense, Moore’s narrative constructs John as a mirror to his mother. Faced with her first real chance at love, post-Cal, Helen must come to terms with the loss of her first, epic love: is she (pardon the cliché) able to put her heart on the line again? John, afraid of commitment, wonders whether or not he has it in him to do right by his child and her mother: can he model his father’s integrity? Ultimately, Helen and John are equally, though differently, haunted by the man they lost in February, 1982, and each must find a way to overcome the past in order to fully inhabit the present.

Unlike *Red Dog, Red Dog*, *February* offers readers occasional relief from its weighty subject matter—less in the form of outright humour than via moments which illustrate the powerfully nurturing presence of familial love and community support—but *Come, Thou Tortoise* earns the gold star for finding lightness in tragedy. A thematic sequel to her collection of short fiction, *Making Light of Tragedy* (2004), Jessica Grant’s first novel also concerns itself with death, in this case the sudden passing of Audrey Flowers’ father, Walter. Aptly nicknamed “Oddly,” our first-person narrator shares the story’s telling with Winnifred, her tortoise, and neither woman nor reptile disappoints. Winnifred, occupant of a papier-mâché castle, provides witty insight into Audrey’s emotional state (around the

time of her father’s death, she is grappling with the end of a relationship with Cliff, her mountain-climber beau). Clearly misdiagnosed as a child with a low IQ, Audrey word-plays her way through the narration of her upbringing (before her father dies, he is in a “comma,” not a coma), wary of overly-serious people with “*accent-cir-conflexe*” eyebrows. She is utterly unique but no more so than Walter (her neuroscientist dad), Uncle Toby (her devoted “other” dad who may not be her father’s brother), Verlaine (Walter’s deceptively business-like Swiss lab assistant), and Judd (the quirky creator of malfunctioning Christmas lights and Audrey’s eventual love interest).

Grant’s achievement in *Come, Thou Tortoise* is that every page of the novel is as heart-breakingly sad as it is belly-achingly hilarious. To pass the time while her beloved Audrey is away, Winnifred, perched on her would-be-actor/tortoise-sitter’s Shakespeare plays, studies footnotes, mistaking them for exponents (“Come, thou tortoise!⁶⁰” is, for her, “Come, thou tortoise to the power of sixty!”). Audrey, affectionately fooled by her father to believe that his lab-mouse, her pet Wedge, could live into his twentieth year, searches for the missing mouse in order to distract herself from the pain of Walter’s death. When Uncle Toby retreats to England, Audrey is compelled to follow and what she finds is a man who “looks bluish. Beaten around the eyes . . . like a pirate. Or like someone whose brother just died. Or like someone whose true love is dead.” The writing is consistently moving and, like Audrey herself, clever in the extreme.

Whether or not my friend is right about finding balance between darkness and light in the narration of tragedy, the strengths and weaknesses of Lane’s, Moore’s, and Grant’s novels are tellingly summarized by what readers will carry away from each. *Red Dog, Red Dog* leaves us with broad strokes of gothic gloom, some of which we would sooner forget; *February*, reaching

toward hope through its vivid portrayal of one wounded Newfoundland family, makes us want to remember its characters and their struggles; and *Come, Thou Tortoise*, a fresh and original take on both loss and its aftermath, marks an “oddly” memorable novelistic debut.

Mitraille littéraire et balles perdues chez Céline et Ducharme

Marie-Hélène Larochelle

Poétique de l'invective romanesque : L'investif chez Louis-Ferdinand Céline et Réjean Ducharme. XYZ
25,00 \$

Compte rendu par Stéphane Inkel

L'essai de Marie-Hélène Larochelle, qui emprunte ses outils à la pragmatique et à la sociolinguistique aussi bien qu'aux travaux récents sur la rhétorique, souffre d'une sorte de crue terminologique qui finit par emporter son objet (et son lecteur) au fil des pages. L'ouvrage n'est pourtant pas sans qualité; l'invective est certes un objet fort pertinent, surtout lorsqu'on s'applique à le repérer chez des écrivains aussi friands d'hyperboles que Céline ou Réjean Ducharme, en ceci qu'il permet une interrogation soutenue de la rhétorique de la violence chez ces deux furieux (du moins chez le premier Ducharme, de *Lavalée des avalés* jusqu'à *La fille de Christophe Colomb*).

S'appliquant de manière assez scolaire à repérer les lieux communs de l'invective, de la pratique de la cruauté à la scatologie ou à la sexualité, il faut attendre le deuxième (et dernier) chapitre pour que l'analyse, de plus en plus assurée, se concentre sur ce qui s'avère l'aspect déterminant du dispositif de l'invective, la dimension de la « resémantisation », dont le volet « insultant » n'est au fond qu'un cas de figure possible d'une poétique qui a en effet choisi de délaissier la part commune (et donc politique) de la langue

pour investir les marges et se constituer par le fait même une posture d'énonciation. Marie-Hélène Larochelle insiste ainsi avec raison sur le fait que c'est à même un « matériau visuel préexistant » que réside l'originalité d'une « rhétorique de l'outrage » qu'elle a choisi de soigneusement distinguer de toute considération morale—choix tout à fait désigné quant à la perspective de l'analyse, même si l'on peut regretter l'évacuation des pamphlets lorsque la politique de « l'objet invective » est abordée. L'essai se clôt ainsi logiquement sur la question de l'adresse, vocatif en effet au fondement d'une pratique de l'invective qui n'a toutefois pas le même sens chez les deux écrivains.

Or, en raison du choix de la pragmatique afin d'étudier ce qui est bien un « événement » (proche en cela du *performatif*), l'invective se voyant définie comme un ensemble de « mots-projectiles » dirigés vers le lecteur (« L'œuvre est faite pour marquer, voire blesser, le public qu'on veut faire sortir de ses gonds. »), on s'étonne que cet effet soit négligé au profit de l'analyse de la « créativité » qui se cache derrière, sauf pour la conclusion un peu courte où violence et provocation sont décrites comme « une invitation à la rencontre » au sein de l'espace romanesque. On s'étonne d'autant plus que l'auteure s'oppose vigoureusement à « la critique qui insiste sur les voies du cathartique pour ramener cette parole inacceptable dans le droit chemin ». Soit. Mais alors, objectera-t-on, en quoi le relevé des lieux communs travestis et utilisés dans la construction de l'invective, même lorsque c'est pour révéler le « tabou » social qu'un tel usage permet de lever, rend-il le tranchant à cette parole agressive? C'est toute la question du lieu de l'invective qui est ainsi posée : arme du polémique insérée dans un contexte romanesque, qu'advient-il de la violence, à qui s'adresse-t-elle, à quelle fin? Questions complexes que l'essai parvient à soulever, à défaut de toujours bien les circonscrire.

Drôles d'angoisses

Mélanie Léger

Roger Roger. Prise de parole 15,95 \$

Compte rendu par Kinga Zawada

Mélanie Léger, jeune artiste acadienne, récipiendaire du Prix Bernard-Cyr pour l'avancement du théâtre francophone au Canada en 2006, vient de publier son premier texte dramatique. *Roger Roger* a été représenté en 2005 au théâtre l'Escaouette avec la collaboration du théâtre Alacenne où l'auteure est codirectrice artistique.

Créée au cours d'un atelier intensif d'écriture faisant partie d'un bac en art dramatique, cette pièce, absurde, comique, fantaisiste et vaudevillesque, se compose de vingt tableaux suivis de deux épilogues possibles.

« J'ai l'impression que la pièce doit parler de mes angoisses personnelles à l'époque où j'étais, parce que je ne savais pas qu'est-ce qui allait se passer », déclare Léger. Effectivement, le personnage principal, Roger, est « un adulte de 27 ans qui habite encore chez ses parents et qui ne foutra jamais rien d'excitant de sa vie! » Diplômé en sciences politiques pour plaire à son père, électricien pour « payer sa van », le protagoniste échappe au train-train quotidien en écrivant ses rêves d'aventure dans des lettres sans destinataire qu'il dissimule dans un *Playboy*. La rencontre de la timide Annie, qui, elle, se confie à son micro-ondes, va le tirer de la monotonie de sa routine pour l'embarquer dans une relation amoureuse truffée de tendresses et de maladresses.

« C'est important de faire quelque chose qui va émerveiller, faire sourire, faire rire et faire passer un bon moment », confie l'auteure. Mission accomplie puisque la gestuelle, le comique des situations et l'humour des apartés ne manquent pas d'égayer et de distraire. En plus de divertir, l'écriture émouvante et cocasse de Léger réussit à mettre à nu les angoisses, peurs, et inquiétudes face à l'autre et face au temps qui

passé : « On est jeune, heureux, on rit et, du jour au lendemain, on a trente ans. C'est laid de vieillir. » La pièce de la jeune dramaturge acadienne est un savoureux montage de diverses techniques et styles où l'on se plaît à reconnaître l'influence de Ionesco, Beckett et Vian, ce qui en ferait un très bon choix pour un cours d'art dramatique.

A Smashing Undertaking

Lewis MacKinnon/Lodaidh MacFhionghain

Giant and Other Gaelic Poems/Famhair agus dàin Ghàidhlig eile. Cape Breton UP \$15.95

Reviewed by Lindsay Milligan

As is noted in its introduction, MacKinnon/MacFhionghain's publication marks a tremendous accomplishment for Gaelic in Canada. A vibrant part of Nova Scotian culture, Gaelic has been elided from contemporary publishing in Canada and as such this collection of poetry, entitled *Giant / Famhair*, is remarkable as a symbol of Canada's renewed interest in Gaelic.

It would, however, be a mistake to reduce this collection to its symbolic importance for its place in and contribution to Canadian Gaelic literature. The poems that compile this collection are presented in Gaelic with English translation on facing pages. Many of the poems can be read as parables for the changing use of Gaelic in Nova Scotia. Indeed, like the giant of its title, language itself seems to tower over this collection, influencing the way in which each poem is read and encouraging a multiplicity of meanings. The poems are set out in five sections with certain preoccupations (heroes and social class) and images (wood and sweat) creating a structural unity. But even where it is not in the foreground, Gaelic and the challenges MacKinnon must face as a Gaelic author (not to mention CEO for the Office of Gaelic Affairs in Nova Scotia) are never far from the surface (as in "Aftermath / An Iarbhair").

Often breaking with newer orthographic conventions to help capture the flavour of Nova Scotian Gaelic, many of these poems are musical and sonorous in the Gaelic, and retain much of their integrity in English translation. What cannot be captured in these translations, however, are the playful ways in which MacKinnon engages with Gaelic, exploiting its rhythms, sounds, and even grammatical constructions. These are skilfully shaped to create poems with structural coherence (as in “The Churning / Am Maistreachadh”). By necessity, many of the English translations diverge from the Gaelic original in terms of line and end stops, and sometimes forego narrative clarity in favour of retaining the integrity of mood.

Overall this is an impressive first collection by MacKinnon, who is already well known as a Gaelic singer and songwriter. Whether in English or Gaelic, *Giant* is a delight, but perhaps it is best read as it is presented: in dual languages. It will be interesting to see how MacKinnon’s poetry matures and whether the issue of language itself, which is so resonant in this first collection, remains as salient an interest in future work.

Jeux d’esquive

Catherine Mavrikakis

Omaha Beach : un oratorio. Hélio trope 15,95 \$

Catherine Mavrikakis

Le ciel de Bay City. Hélio trope 24,95 \$

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

Mavrikakis signe ici deux titres percutants, lire nécessaires, car si plusieurs auteurs ont abordé les thèmes de la mort, de la guerre, du destin, et des répétitions de l’histoire, ils ont été bien peu à vouloir les détacher du lyrisme qui vient tout « naturellement » s’y greffer.

Je dis naturellement parce que le lyrisme est ce qui tient lieu de panacée à l’homme qui tend à fuir son état de souffrance ainsi que sa responsabilité ontologique et que ces réalités-là (le débarquement de Normandie,

par exemple) se présentent à la conscience entourées de motifs qui ne leur appartiennent pas ou si peu . . .

Ainsi les personnages d’*Omaha Beach*, mise à part Angélica que sa mère nomme la pythie, se leurrent et Mavrikakis fait tomber un à un chacun de ces motifs qui devraient sous-tendre les histoires qu’ils s’inventent en aparté pour ne laisser place qu’à la vérité, c’est-à-dire qu’il n’y a pas de lien possible entre les vivants et les morts, que nos souvenirs sont autant de chimères, que l’histoire n’est pas assumée et que « la douleur est irrésistiblement neuve, vierge ».

Visiter un cimetière dédié aux anciens combattants, assister à des cérémonies d’honneur, porter la robe noire, fleurir des tombes, ou refuser à votre descendance le droit d’aspirer à une vie « meilleure » en la drainant dans votre fantasme auto-culpabilisant ne constitueront jamais des actes rédempteurs, pire ils n’empêcheront pas les tragédies à venir. Mais le noeud du problème réside peut-être dans le fait que le concept même d’empathie est illusoire, et qu’il n’y a que les cadavres familiers et encore chauds pour nous causer une peine réelle, alors que l’on couvre les autres d’idées. Morts pour la patrie, la justice, la liberté! Non. Chair à canon plutôt et instruments de l’histoire, oui, bien sûr.

Or, si dans *Le ciel de Bay City* les personnages se retrouvent aussi en relation avec leurs défunts, le climat, lui, est différent. Denise et sa soeur Babette ont fait le choix de quitter l’Europe et de laisser derrière elles les traces de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. D’ailleurs Denise ne parle à sa fille, Amy, ni de ses grands-parents, ni d’Auschwitz. Dès lors on pourrait être porté à croire que leur relation sera plus saine mais elle est très conflictuelle. Il y a entre elles une volonté de rupture et cet abandon du deuil accroît leur crise identitaire.

Sous le ciel mauve de Bay City, dans cette Amérique présentée sous son pire jour, c’est-à-dire prise sous le joug de la

consommation effrénée, de la solitude, et de l'indifférence, la vie ne remplit pour l'adolescente aucune promesse.

Salutaire confession

Melchior Mbonimpa

La terre sans mal. Prise de parole 23,95 \$

Compte rendu par Caroline Dupont

Au moment où on fait sa connaissance, Teta Rébecca, Africaine de quarante-cinq ans établie à Toronto depuis deux décennies, est « coincée dans une impasse », aux prises qu'elle est avec une santé mentale chancelante, conséquence d'épreuves qui l'ont profondément meurtrie. Sollicitant l'écoute attentive du père Robert, cet ancien missionnaire dans la paroisse africaine de sa jeunesse qu'elle souhaite maintenant prendre « à témoin de l'injustice que la vie [lui] a infligée », Teta entreprend une confession-fleuve qui révélera de sombres événements : une enfance marquée par les troubles entre castes et par la fuite, mais surtout peut-être par les conflits familiaux découlant de son statut de fille illégitime; une vie de jeune adulte bouleversée par l'assassinat de son ambitieux mari ministre des Finances, puis par l'abandon de son Rwanda d'origine (cependant jamais directement nommé) se doublant des dures réalités de l'exil au Canada avec ses trois fils; un présent hanté par le spectre de la folie, au sein duquel se creuse le fossé des générations et des cultures entre elle et ses enfants, rebelles à son autorité et aux aspirations qu'elle entretient pour eux. Un peu à la manière des deux exils qu'elle a connus, le long pèlerinage de la mémoire accompli par Teta représente à son tour une échappatoire, celle qui lui permettra de s'arracher non plus à des lieux géographiques devenus dangereux, mais à une vie ponctuée d'échecs et de désillusions.

Pourtant, si ce récit de confession forme à lui seul tout ce que retient le résumé de la quatrième de couverture, il ne couvre

dans les faits que dix des dix-neuf chapitres du roman, une anomalie qui peut d'abord confondre le lecteur. On notera néanmoins le caractère déterminant du vaste témoignage de Teta, réappropriation du passé par laquelle elle s'affranchit de sa condition, puis retrouve ce qu'il lui reste d'humanité pour commencer une nouvelle vie. C'est cette renaissance que la deuxième moitié du roman s'emploie à relater, s'attardant aux études universitaires entreprises par la protagoniste, à la relation amoureuse qui se noue entre elle et John Khan, son ancien professeur d'anthropologie d'origine afghane et, surtout, à leur établissement en Afrique des Grands Lacs.

L'ironie du titre lorsqu'on confronte le mythe de la terre promise auquel il fait référence à la réalité de Teta au Canada n'échappera à personne. Si « terre sans mal » il y a, elle se situe peut-être davantage, en deuxième partie de roman, dans cette terre africaine que retrouvent les nouveaux époux prêts à s'engager au cœur de l'action, dans un ambitieux projet humanitaire par lequel ils travaillent à redonner sa dignité à un groupe exploité en rendant habitables les lieux où il se trouve marginalisé.

Essayiste très attaché aux problèmes de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs, Melchior Mbonimpa choisit ici d'user de la fiction pour imprimer un tour romanesque à ses sujets de prédilection, parmi lesquels l'immigration et le métissage, mais aussi l'équité et la capacité des peuples à se responsabiliser. Se déployant dans un style imagé où fleurissent çà et là proverbes, mythes et légendes, mariant souvent de belle façon, en les comparant ou en les assimilant les uns aux autres, des éléments de cultures occidentale et africaine, *La terre sans mal* n'échappe cependant pas à de légers glissements vers l'essai. De notre point de vue, de tels penchants essayistiques, qui l'orientent tant vers la politique que vers l'anthropologie, enrichissent d'autant ce quatrième roman de l'auteur, qui demeure d'une lecture fort agréable.

A Question of Representation

Barbara Meadowcroft

Gwethalyn Graham: A Liberated Woman in a Conventional Age. Women's Press \$24.95

Branko Gorjup, ed.

Margaret Atwood: Essays on Her Works. Guernica \$20

Reviewed by Sarah Galletly

The question of critical under- (and even over-) representation is often a thorny one. The reasons why one author will be immortalized in multiple biographies, essay collections, and critical studies, while another slips into obscurity are multiple and often hard to justify, making the process of critical “recovery” contentious. Are we right to believe scholars who argue that certain authors *deserve* to be rescued from relative obscurity, or do we need to be more—not less—discerning in choosing who we metaphorically bring back from the dead?

In a new biography, Barbara Meadowcroft makes a convincing case for the need to focus more critical attention on Gwethalyn Graham—a key literary celebrity of the 1930s and 40s. Graham won two Governor-General's Awards, her most famous novel *Earth and High Heaven* (1944) even making it to number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, yet she still remains relatively obscure in contemporary Canadian literary scholarship. In this biography Meadowcroft attempts to reposition Graham not only as a significant feminist author of the inter-war years, but also as one of several writers—among them Hugh MacLennan and Gabrielle Roy—who brought Montreal into the Canadian literary imagination in the 1940s. In addition, the biography highlights Graham's importance as a commentator on anti-Semitic tensions in French Canada.

In her research, Meadowcroft was forced to rely heavily on the recollections of family and friends of Graham, many of whom had

conflicting perceptions of her character, and who might have been reluctant to acknowledge her faults. For example, Graham's role as a neglectful mother is largely glossed over in the biography, presumably to avoid losing reader sympathy. While these factors may lead us to be cautious of fully accepting the portrait offered, they do not detract from the impressiveness of Meadowcroft's achievement in reconstructing the life of such an elusive figure.

The extensive discussion of Graham's literary output is both the volume's great strength and its weakness. I challenge anyone to finish the biography without a strong urge to seek out Graham's own books, since Meadowcroft reveals the quality of her writing and encourages critical investigation of it. She makes especially strong cases for re-evaluation of lesser known works—*Swiss Sonata* (1938) and *Dear Enemies* (co-written with Solange Chaput-Rolland, 1963)—both of which encapsulate the cultural moments of their conception. However, there is a tendency in earlier sections of the biography to depend too much on the semi-autobiographical manuscript “West Wind.” While containing many parallels with Graham's childhood, it is far from straight autobiography, and thus cannot be seen as reliable evidence of her early experiences.

Regardless of the reader's interest in, or awareness of, Graham's literary output, this biography presents a touching portrait of the burden of literary celebrity. With the success of *Earth and High Heaven*, Graham felt stifled and constricted, and she lacked the support of a female writing community, something which became increasingly valuable to authors in the 1960s. Experiencing the stigma of single-motherhood in the 1940s, Graham discovered the freedom to write, but during the fifties, having become a faculty wife, her literary output declined significantly.

If Gwethalyn Graham has been starved of critical attention, Margaret Atwood

suffers from a surfeit. The sheer volume of Atwood criticism produced over the last four decades has led many critics to succumb to “Atwood fatigue,” and has created a daunting environment for anyone wishing to contribute to this already bloated critical corpus. Are we reaching a point where anything of critical or literary value has already been mined from Atwood’s back catalogue? Or are there still new avenues to be explored and new approaches to be implemented?

If Branko Gorjup’s recent collection is anything to go by, this search might indeed be coming to an end. Serving almost as a compilation or “best of” of Atwood criticism, *Margaret Atwood: Essays on Her Works* contains ten essays—only one of which is not a reprint—and an interview with Atwood. It includes contributions by several key figures in Atwood scholarship such as Barbara Hill Rigby, Coral Ann Howells, and Lorna Irvine, many of which are hard to locate or out of print. This said, the structure of the collection, which focuses chronologically on Atwood’s novels from *The Edible Woman* (1969) to *The Blind Assassin* (2000), assigning one essay for each, leaves little room for comparison between and among the novels or for assessment of the development of ideas and styles across the Atwood canon.

Rigney’s essay, “The Roar of the Boneyard: *Life Before Man*,” is an obvious exception, skilfully referring to other Atwood novels and poems of the period to reinforce the argument. Irvine’s “The Here and Now of *Bodily Harm*” is also worth noting due to her weaving of Northrop Frye’s infamous statement “Where is here?” into her larger discussion of chronology and the split between first- and third-person narrative in the novel. However, the decision to focus the collection solely on Atwood’s novels restricts its scope. Since the main aim of the volume is to provide a broad overview of “Her Works,” the absence of any discussion

of her poetry, short stories, or work in other media is disappointing.

This collection seems well-suited for libraries in need of a staple collection of Atwood criticism, but for any academic with a serious interest in Atwood, many of these essays will already be familiar, which will limit the book’s appeal.

Regards croisés sur l’œuvre poliquinienne

François Ouellet, dir.

Lire Poliquin. Prise de parole 27,95 \$

Compte rendu par Emir Delic

Réalisé sous la direction de François Ouellet, *Lire Poliquin* rassemble les textes qui découlent d’un colloque tenu à l’Université McGill les 16 et 17 mai 2006 et qui abordent l’œuvre de Daniel Poliquin. Si la production littéraire de cet écrivain franco-ontarien remonte à 1982, l’attention et la reconnaissance publiques et critiques à son égard ne se manifestent véritablement qu’à partir du début des années 1990. Depuis, son œuvre s’est révélée comme l’une des plus imposantes de la littérature franco-ontarienne et lui a valu de nombreux prix et distinctions. Cet ouvrage collectif s’inscrit assurément dans une continuité par rapport à ce développement du discours critique, mais il en marque également un jalon important. Cela tient, à mon sens, en grande partie à la conjonction de trois types de regard qui modulent la composition du recueil et auxquels François Ouellet fait allusion dans son introduction. Pour ma part, je leur attribue les épithètes suivantes : rétrospectif, personnel, et actuel.

Le regard rétrospectif, bien qu’il affleure dans tous les textes, se donne à voir surtout dans l’introduction. En plus de faire un excellent tour d’horizon des textes regroupés dans *Lire Poliquin*—d’où d’ailleurs mon choix de ne pas les présenter ici en détail—,

François Ouellet y dresse, en effet, un bilan très objectif et juste de toutes les études de fonds de l'œuvre poliquinienne parues avant mai 2006.

Vient ensuite le regard personnel, celui que pose Daniel Poliquin lui-même sur « [s]on propre corps à corps avec la langue, celle du citoyen, celle surtout de l'artiste qui écrit ». Ainsi, dans son intervention intitulée « Confidences pour intimes », l'écrivain retrace intégralement son cheminement artistique et l'évolution de son œuvre.

Que les articles savants qui suivent ces deux textes d'ouverture procèdent d'un regard actuel sur l'œuvre de Poliquin, cela ne devrait pas étonner. Des treize textes investis par cette perspective, les quatre premiers traitent d'aspects divers reliés aux structures narratives (François Paré, Nicole Bourbonnais, Lucie Hotte, Michel Lord). Animée dès ces premières études, la problématique des façonnements identitaires se précise dans les analyses suivantes (Jimmy Thibeault, Marie-Ève Pilote, Lyne Girard, François Ouellet) pour être ensuite reprise dans un article portant sur l'ironie (Johanne Melançon) qui éclaire, à sa manière, les dispositifs dynamiques et dynamisants de la narration et des parcours identitaires. Les deux contributions suivantes se penchent sur *La Côte de sable (Visions de Jude)*, la première examinant le « mythe de la Frontière » (Jean Morency) et la deuxième la constitution d'un « sujet femme » (Claudie Gagné), alors que les deux dernières interventions abordent, quant à elles, les rapports qu'entretient l'œuvre de Poliquin avec le Québec (Patrick Bergeron, Robert Yergeau).

L'entrelacement de ces regards rétrospectif, personnel et actuel sur l'œuvre de Poliquin, opéré habilement non seulement à l'échelle globale du recueil mais aussi au sein même des articles, consolide sans aucun doute la qualité et l'intérêt de cet ouvrage. *Lire Poliquin* nous livre, au final, des études dont la majorité témoignent de rigueur et de finesse analytiques et qui mettent en relief

nombre de thématiques centrales de l'œuvre poliquinienne tout en invitant à d'autres lectures, à d'autres regards.

Lectures en miroir

François Ouellet et François Paré

Louis Hamelin et ses doubles. Éditions Nota Bene
25,95 \$

Compte rendu par André Lamontagne

Les œuvres à quatre mains, qu'elles soient pour l'écoute pianistique ou le plaisir de la lecture, exigent dextérité, rythme et un pacte fusionnel. C'est là le pari que tiennent François Ouellet et François Paré en consacrant une étude au romancier Louis Hamelin et renouant ainsi avec leur aventure épistolaire de *Traversées* (2000). Le prototype du genre, dans le champ de la littérature québécoise, est la correspondance entre André Brochu et Gilles Marcotte publiée il y a près de trente ans. Là où *La littérature et le reste* se voulait un débat théorique sur les enjeux de la critique, *Louis Hamelin et ses doubles* est un essai à deux voix qui couvre de façon rigoureuse la production narrative d'un des écrivains québécois les plus importants des vingt dernières années. Chacun des six romans de Hamelin, ainsi que son recueil de nouvelles, donne lieu à une lettre de François Paré à laquelle répond l'autre François. Quatre études autonomes entrecoupent l'échange épistolaire.

Au-delà de la multiplicité qui caractérise l'objet de leur étude, Paré et Ouellet parviennent à décrire ce qui est au cœur de l'entreprise de Hamelin : une manière d'habiter le territoire physique, culturel, et identitaire, partagée entre la filiation impossible et l'importance fondatrice du mythe et de l'intertexte. De *La Rage* à *Sauvages*, les deux universitaires suivent les migrations de l'écriture de Hamelin, proposant des interprétations complémentaires (socio-critique, thématique, mythocritique, et

psychanalytique) et développant les pistes de lecture ouvertes par l'autre. Si les deux auteurs possèdent leurs propres traits critiques et diffèrent parfois d'avis dans leur appréciation des œuvres, ils proposent à l'unisson une lecture oedipienne des récits d'Hamelin, une lecture qui démêle les rapports conflictuels entre le moi et l'autre, le rebelle et la collectivité, le Québec et l'Amérique continentale, une lecture qui souligne la cohérence d'un projet littéraire et ontologique voué à l'émancipation d'un sujet autochtone enfin réconcilié avec la mémoire et la nature.

Malgré son apport à la modernité québécoise et sa durée esthétique et idéologique, l'œuvre de Louis Hamelin n'avait suscité jusqu'ici aucune monographie. L'étude de Paré et Ouellet vient donc combler une lacune criante, mais demeurera une référence incontournable par la qualité de ses analyses et la richesse de sa lecture intertextuelle.

Récipiendaire du Prix Gabrielle-Roy 2008, *Louis Hamelin et ses doubles* est un ouvrage d'érudition de lecture agréable, habilement ponctué d'inserts autobiographiques qui donnent un visage aux deux épistoliers et éclairent le métier d'universitaire; une étude écrite sous le signe de l'amitié entre les deux François et du respect sans complaisance pour leur double écrivain.

De l'espace et du temps

Pierre Raphaël Pelletier

La Grande Sortie. L'Interligne 13,95 \$

Marcil Cossette

Sur le parvis des nuages. David 15,95 \$

Guy Cloutier; René Laubiès, Frédéric Benrath et Julius Baltazar, illus.

L'étincelle suffit à la constellation. Noroît 20,95 \$

Compte rendu par Emmanuel Bouchard

La lecture du dernier recueil de Pierre Raphaël Pelletier fait songer au paradoxe gionisque du voyage immobile, non

seulement parce qu'au fil du texte, le poète semble « renonce[r] / à l'obsession d'arriver quelque part », mais également parce que le train qui y défile traverse surtout des territoires intimes, verticaux. Ce train, représentant le cours d'une vie, les mouvements de l'âme ou de l'amour, le pouvoir créateur ou le relais entre deux rives (ou deux vides), constitue l'axe central de ce livre d'une belle sobriété. En « coup[ant] / à travers tous les langages », il sait représenter le mouvement de l'écriture, la difficulté, le désordre ou même la violence de la poésie « qui courbe l'espace » en voyageant, elle aussi.

L'alignement de ses wagons indistincts, leurs détours ou leurs déraillements montrent encore les aléas et les distorsions d'une existence que le langage n'a pas toujours le pouvoir d'ordonner (« je mène à bien / tous mes échecs »). Au terme du parcours—en toute logique—la *sortie* annoncée dans le titre et au début du recueil n'est pas davantage circonscrite dans un lieu fixe ou fermé.

Dans son premier recueil, Marcil Cossette explore avec sensibilité le rapport au temps et à la nature. La première partie du livre, « Âmes de jadis », convoque l'enfance et le passé, moins pour en dresser un portrait figé ou lointain que pour en signifier la permanence : « Les mains de ma mère à pétrir les pâturages / Mains de terre et de fleurs / . . . Protectrices et du nid et des œufs / Enroulées dans son tablier / Je vous espère encore ». Ce mouvement du temps—ou *dans* le temps—se révèle dans les évocations assez nombreuses de l'aube, du clair-obscur et du printemps, qui apparaissent comme autant d'éclousions dans cette œuvre où toute forme de violence semble exclue. Si quelques poèmes sont plus faibles, l'ensemble témoigne d'une attention soutenue aux détails et à la beauté du monde, où prennent part l'amour et les circonstances de son partage. La constance du ton et du rythme assure l'unité de ce livre écrit dans une langue précise et évocatrice (« Des milliers de gouttes d'eau d'érable / ramassaient une musique »).

L'étincelle suffit à la constellation n'est pas exactement ce « livre très simple » mentionné par Guy Cloutier dans le poème 49. Ses 98 poèmes, répartis en trois sections, forment une figure complexe aux branches nombreuses, dont le déploiement s'accomplit dans des limites thématiques pourtant bien précises : le pouvoir du langage et de la poésie et le rapport du poète avec l'écriture. Dans sa forme même—signalons, par exemple, l'emploi généralisé de la deuxième personne, la reprise fréquente de certaines formules ou l'usage de coordonnants au début des poèmes—le recueil reproduit le tourbillon de l'écriture dans lequel semble fréquemment plongé le poète : « Et tu écris sans répit / obéissant à la passion de connaître / à vivre de mort mourir de vie / mais le chant ne te grise que pour mieux te livrer / à ton poème quand il te requiert dans son péril ». Lieu de refuge ou d'accomplissement, de révélation ou d'enseignement, objet familier ou insondable, le poème, au singulier, mène la marche du lecteur dans cette œuvre riche d'une intelligente composition.

At the Centre of the Storm

Jacques Poitras

Beaverbrook: A Shattered Legacy. Goose Lane
\$35.00

Reviewed by Susan Butlin

Expatriate Canadian William Maxwell “Max” Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, has flitted in and out of Canadian history and cultural affairs since the early twentieth century and it is ironic that some one hundred years after he first burst on the scene as a proponent of the Canadian War Memorial's art commissions during World War One, his name and reputation as a cultural philanthropist is under revision. Jacques Poitras' compelling book, *Beaverbrook: A Shattered Legacy*, is the story of the recent bitter battle between Beaverbrook's heirs, the two

charitable Beaverbrook foundations, and the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, New Brunswick, centering on whether or not its founder, Beaverbrook, intended certain paintings in its world class art collection to be permanent gifts or loans.

Jacques Poitras must be commended for his diplomacy and for his ability to attain the cooperation of both sides in the dispute. *Beaverbrook: A Shattered Legacy* is an important addition to other works exploring the life of Max Aitken which include Gregory Marchildon's *Profits and Politics: Beaverbrook and the Gilded Age of Canadian Finance* and Anne Chisholm's *Beaverbrook: A Life*. It is of particular significance in the present climate of provenance searches and ownership claims in the art world.

Its principal cast includes politicians, curators, and holding centre stage, the late Max Aitken himself, his two wives, and four generations of family. However, in the light of Aitken's biography the book would have benefited by including a fuller discussion of his life. Largely lost to the reader are stories of his interesting acquaintances, or the story of his rise from New Brunswick-born colonial to millionaire newspaper owner who served in Winston Churchill's war cabinet. He was a powerful man who gained admittance to the circle of Edward VIII. Little of the glittering excitement of Aitken's life is evoked by Poitras. Nor has the author examined Aitken's early promotion of Canadian art and artists in the Canadian War Records Office in London during World War I. Aitken was instrumental in the plan to commission Canadian artists—including A.Y. Jackson, David Milne, and Florence Carlyle—to record his homeland's involvement in the war overseas and on the home front.

Ironically, in *Beaverbrook: A Shattered Legacy* there is a disappointing lack of engagement with the man at the centre of the story. While the volume contributes to the continuing dialogue surrounding

Aitken, lacking is a critical insight and analysis into Aitken himself and the drive and goals which led him to become involved with Canadian art and cultural institutions over a period of half a century, culminating in the founding of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. The book is admirably stocked with facts and quotations yet the narrative tends toward the dry and dispassionate. The author tends to focus on the events of the court case itself, missing the point of convergence around Max Aitken himself.

Matrices et dédales

Joël Pourbaix

Dictature de la solitude. Éditions du Noroît 17,95 \$

Monique Deland

Miniatures, balles perdues et autres désordres.
Éditions du Noroît 18,95 \$

Robert Berrouët-Oriol

En haute rumeur des siècles. Éditions Triptyque
16,00 \$

Normand Géois

Le même souffle. Éditions du Noroît 14,95 \$
Compte rendu par Émilie Théorêt

Le livre de Joël Pourbaix révèle une riche profondeur sémantique qui s'accroît au rythme de la descente du sujet dans sa nuit intérieure. Empruntant d'abord les sentiers du récit de voyage, où il s'enfonce et se perd dans des quartiers labyrinthiques, le sujet poétique, en quête de lui-même, va à la rencontre de l'autre, car « pour trouver il faut être trouvé ». Ici, l'autre prend la forme d'une femme « indienne » (lire autochtone), porteuse d'une culture où l'homme s'enracine dans la nature, ne faisant qu'un, et où la vie et la mort s'inscrivent dans une continuité. Puisant à même ces principes, la parole cesse lentement d'être dictée par l'auteur, afin d'émerger naturellement. Il s'agit de faire la lumière sur ce qui tombe dans l'oubli, se laisser guider par ce qui est perdu. Il faut cesser de colporter le bonheur

des uns afin de cacher l'agonie des autres. Ainsi, c'est dans le dialogue que le je devient nous, que le nous donne souffle au je. En insérant le « Journal de la Louve » au cœur du recueil, l'écriture prend la forme d'un dialogue. Le sujet fournit à l'Indienne un fil d'Ariane. Par le fait même, la Louve détient aussi le secret du chemin qui permettra au sujet de sortir de son propre dédale. La genèse d'un nouveau monde peut donc advenir, si nous nous laissons créer par les êtres qui nous côtoient, par la matière poétique. Le créateur, s'il n'est pas dictateur, n'est pas l'auteur de sa création, mais l'inverse.

Dans *Miniatures, balles perdues et autres désordres*, avec force et violence, on explore aussi l'imagerie du labyrinthe. En ce cas, c'est pour mieux confronter et traquer tous ces démons et ses cadavres qui jonchent le « champ de l'horreur ». Le recueil de Deland gouverne l'enfantement d'une bête, comme une traversée dantesque. Un monstre qui s'est développé en soi, fils de la fureur. Un monstre que l'on désire à la fois « aimer, vivre et tuer », car cet enfant effraie. Il revient pour manger Saturne, pour tuer ce démon qui s'est imposé au sein du sujet. Il oblige donc le sujet à affronter la bête, mais il permettra aussi de sortir de l'enfer. De fait, la fille « imbibée de mémoire » détient le fil du récit, alors que la poésie, tout aussi effrayante, constitue le fil d'Ariane. L'écriture oblige à revisiter l'oubli, la brutalité de la mise à mort de la bête intérieure jusqu'au « retour des oiseaux ».

Développant à sa manière ce rapport ambivalent avec son monstre personnel, Robert Berrouët-Oriol aborde son île haïtienne. D'ailleurs, tout nous ramène à cette insularité, à cette volonté d'exprimer une voie nationale douloureuse, de l'épigraphe d' Aimé Césaire aux illustrations de Frankétienne, en passant par le rappel de la date d'indépendance d'Haïti. Le poète entreprend une « bête cartographie des siècles » de ce lieu-histoire, cet espace-temps. Tel un « matelot vêtu de signes »,

il accoste cette île-femme aux cuisses ouvertes, lieu d'invasions de toutes sortes et de tous les temps; cette île-mère au sein sec, incapable de nourrir son fils; cette île adultère, infidèle, et décatie. Le poète devient cartographe, sa calligraphie trace les contours de cette femme dispersée. Comme le ressac, il rapatrie les signes, il redéfinit la mémoire des berges. Pour ce faire, il colle ses lèvres à elle, s'y abreuve, y cherche ses mots, s'accouple à elle, la chevauche. Son crayon-verge devient la semence d'une île recrée, de son île-matrice, puisée au cœur de ses marées intérieures.

De la mère patrie, nous passons à la mère de chair. Il s'agit encore de la matrice, point de départ et nécessaire retour pour tout homme. Toutefois, Normand Géniois ne nous mène pas vers un lieu-femme, mais vers une femme-lieu. Hommage à la mère : aimante, travailleuse, amoureuse et maternelle, le recueil révèle l'expérience d'un fils accompagnant sa conceptrice jusqu'à la mort. Au travers d'une nature évocatrice aux accents romantiques, on le suit dans ses souvenirs de jeunesse jusqu'aux derniers moments douloureux avant la mort, et enfin dans l'après, où certaines images le hantent encore. Mais ce souffle de la vie qui s'éteint « éveille-t-il une autre matière »? Sous l'interrogation pointe l'espoir, car cette vie n'insuffle-t-elle pas la matière poétique?



« À l'endroit du noeud »

Pascale Quiviger

La Maison des temps rompus. Boréal 24,95 \$

Compte rendu par Matthew Jordan Schmidt

« À l'endroit du noeud, les cordes se confondent—c'est là que nous vivions », raconte la narratrice de *La Maison des temps rompus*, dernier roman de Pascale Quiviger. Tel un noeud de marin, cette histoire se tisse en contorsions et confusions constantes, en entremêlements de fins et de commencements, de corps et d'âmes et surtout de moments. Histoire racontée et vécue uniquement par des femmes, le roman entraîne le lecteur dans un monde méconnaissable, monde où des fictions adoptent des allures réelles, où le temps s'arrête, voire « n'existe pas » où le siège de la narration fluctuante et hypnotique, la maison des temps rompus, permet à la narratrice d'examiner les fils entrecroisés de la vie féminine.

À la dérive dans une vie alcoolisée et pleine de tristesse, même si elle ne décèle qu'à moitié la nature de sa maladie, la narratrice tombe sur un abri inattendu, une maison en bord de mer qui arrête le rythme habituel du temps et amplifie l'espace de son monde pour lui enlever son « apnée ». Dans le « dedans du dehors », la narratrice avoue qu'il faut « commencer par la fin ». Ainsi se déchaîne une série d'inversions constantes qui aboutit à la dissolution de chaque individualité dans la suivante, mère dans sa fille, fille dans sa mère et, finalement, narratrice dans deux identités reliées par la tristesse et le souvenir d'une tragédie mortelle. Joueuses du jeu « miyoyoumi », Lucie et Claire, deux rayons de lumière, se confondent l'une dans l'autre, l'une fille adoptive de la mère de l'autre, et l'autre mère adoptive de la fille. Et le noeud « éternel »—Quiviger ne permet jamais à son lecteur d'oublier l'importance de ce mot omniprésent—ne fait que commencer.

Dans sa maison protégée, la narratrice confie : « J'écris pour mes femmes aimées, celles qui participent sans bruit à la transmission de menus savoirs à propos du courage et de la lenteur des nuits, de l'étrénesse des jours, de leur lumière. » Les pages qu'elle écrit dans cette maison des temps rompus « viennent pour réparer », réparation rendue possible par l'évanescence du temps. Tous les moments se mêlent ainsi dans le « pendant du maintenant » et tout espace aussi, d'où la dissolution de tout élément—bois, feu, vent, terre—dans l'être inquiet de la narratrice.

Ce qui reste, c'est le noeud, boule de moments, d'émotions et de cordons ombilicaux attachés à des filles tristes, handicapées, avortées et prématurément mortes, à des filles radieuses et rayonnantes. Ce qui reste, c'est l'écriture et la paralysie temporelle qu'elle octroie à son auteur. Est-ce vraiment une maison au bord de la mer et en marge du temps qu'occupe la narratrice? Ou est-ce, au contraire, l'encrier de ses fictions, seul espace capable de réécrire la tragédie de la petite Odyssée, l'horreur de la séparation? Pourquoi pas les deux? Quant au noeud, les cordes se confondent.

Leftist Women Writers

Candida Rifkind

Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada. U of Toronto P \$50.00

Reviewed by Louise H. Forsyth

Comrades and Critics is the first literary history of socialist modernism in 1930s English Canada. Rifkind situates female writers alongside male colleagues as they dedicated themselves in various ways during difficult times to the nationalist project of revitalizing Canadian society and its cultures. In so doing, Rifkind provides a fascinating perspective on a complex decade during which the left in Canada shifted away from its preoccupation with the revolutionary

imperatives of international Communism toward evolutionary processes supported by social democracy and liberalism. The book traces the course chosen by writers, cultural workers, activists, and intellectuals as they engaged with social conditions in a force field fraught with tensions between scarcity and abundance. These writers and thinkers were acutely conscious of widespread hardship and injustices in Canadian communities and so were seeking that form of leftist thought most likely to alleviate terrible suffering. From the beginning of the decade, they deemed completely unsatisfactory the dominant literary, aesthetic, and political traditions still prevailing in Canada. And so they cast their gaze upon what was going on in the world beyond national borders. Their desire for revolutionary changes in culture and society attracted them to the international scene, where a variegated spectrum of socialism and literary modernism resonated powerfully with their sense of outrage and urgency for change.

It was a time when feminist priorities were almost invariably subordinated to other demands for social justice, such as those based on class or ethnicity. Speaking of the masculinist literary and socialist culture of the time, Rifkind affirms and demonstrates that “both socialism and modernism understood the radicalisms of their projects in thoroughly gendered terms.” Still, despite implacable gender hierarchies and symbolisms, many women were active in social movements and literary creation. Rifkind’s focus throughout the book on women as artists and activists keeps attention focussed on her fundamental question regarding the salience of gender stereotypes in cultural representations of reality: “How do gender stereotypes intersect with the representations of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, age, and sexuality deployed in the decade’s socialist and modernist writing and rhetoric?”

Rifkind features the influence of leftist thought, literary modernism, and real social conditions in the long poems, essays, fiction, theatre, ideas, and activism of Dorothy Livesay. Livesay's powerful presence is felt throughout the book. Rifkind also devotes a chapter to the long modernist, leftist poem of Anne Marriott, *The Wind Our Enemy*. Stressing the role of theatre as a sociocultural medium in poverty-stricken communities, Rifkind discusses plays by Toby Gordon Ryan and several others. While much of the fiction of the period was short and published in small magazines, the times being tough for publishing houses, Irene Baird managed to produce a shattering novel, *Waste Heritage*, about mass unemployment, the 1938 Vancouver sit-down strike, and police brutality. Rifkind has provided considerable information on these and many other writers; her detailed analyses of their works as both literature and sociopolitical commentary are cogent and probing. Focussing on their concern with individuals' lived realities in difficult times, Rifkind shows the ways in which a combined manifestary rhetoric and a documentary aesthetic are central to their experimentation with literary form.

Rifkind's fine scholarship provides a refreshing perspective on a decade in Canadian literature, society, and political thought that, for most of us most of the time, has become mired in facile received ideas. The classism, sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism underlying these dominant ideas have never before been so thoroughly studied. She has assembled a body of elusive material—poems, plays, fiction, manifestos, documentaries, and articles—and she has developed an effective methodology combining the sociology of literature and feminist cultural criticism to study them. She thereby develops a convincing argument favouring the recognition of the period as amazingly dynamic and culturally rich.

The creative and intellectual energy of the 1930s might well have seduced a young generation of writers and social militants into adopting an idealistic and insurrectionary outlook that later seemed naive and utopian. However, the rich artistry of their works becomes apparent when read in the context of the specific historical moment. Their freshly revealed relevance allows us to better position them in the historical flow into the 1940s and 1950s, as Rifkind does so well in her concluding chapter.

À tire-d'aile

Martin Thibault

Un oiseau moqueur sur l'épaulé. Éditions du Noroît 18,95 \$

Edgard Gousse

Les oiseaux se taisent et me regardent. Triptyque 17,00 \$

Compte rendu par Emmanuel Bouchard

Dans le sixième recueil de Martin Thibault, la figure du poète est comparée tour à tour à un enfant, à une sage-femme et à un épouvantail, triple métaphore qui éclaire au moins partiellement ce regard sur les choses et les êtres qui émane des poèmes : badin ou amusé, ludique, rebelle, peut-être cynique et, simultanément, protecteur, accueillant, tendre, et fécond. L'amour qui est « aveugle le jour » et qui « la nuit se laisse voir de face », constitue « les bases de [l']écriture » de ce livre, qui aborde le sujet sur différents modes, en en soulignant maintes fois l'aspect insaisissable ou « monstrueux ». Quand le poète parle du rêve, de la vie, de la mort, du silence, ou du poids des mots, il le fait avec cette même voix qui toujours semble résister à l'abstraction pour privilégier des images ou des situations concrètes, faisant du poème un spectacle : « pour ancrer dans le ciel / vos promesses intenable / vous lui demandez d'accrocher / son lourd désir de vivre / au cerf-volant de l'âme // mais un jour comme aujourd'hui / le

vent tombe / et la main s'ouvre // il faudrait rêver autrement ». Au fil du recueil, on croit reconnaître le souffle de l'oiseau qui chuchote quelque chose à l'oreille du poète.

Celui qui traverse *Les oiseaux se taisent et me regardent* est moins facile à cerner, et cela est dû sans doute au verbe foisonnant d'Edgard Gousse, qui multiplie les images et les associations inusitées dans les deux « Corps-textes » qui composent ce recueil étonnant. Comme le titre des sections le suggère, une étroite relation s'y dessine entre corps et discours, a fortiori entre corps et poésie, qui est bien exprimée dans le poème « Le pouvoir des mots » : « il y a tellement de mots pour dire / les saisons l'ouragan le hurlement / qu'on ferait mieux d'en supprimer / quelques-uns pour laisser place / au mot qui embrasse qui étreint / qui dit l'amour le merveilleux / qui dit la tranquillité dans un coin / au-dedans de nous-mêmes ». Outre l'amour, le silence, et la poésie qui, comme chez Martin Thibault, occupent une place centrale dans les poèmes, la question identitaire, qu'elle soit envisagée sous un angle individuel ou collectif, marque de façon incontestée l'écriture de ce livre, dont un des derniers textes intitulé « Giboyeuse Amérique » honore trois poètes et militants, deux Cubains (Jesús Cos Causse et Nicolás Guillén) et un Salvadorien (Roque Dalton), ardents défenseurs de la négritude ou de la révolution. Une poésie (et une poétique) de la mémoire aux accents surréalistes.



History as Narrative

Peter Unwin

The Wolf's Head: Writing Lake Superior.
Cormorant \$20

John DeMont

Coal Black Heart: The Story of Coal and the Lives it Ruled. Doubleday Canada \$34.95

Wayne Johnston

The Old Lost Land of Newfoundland: Family, Memory, Fiction, and Myth. NeWest/CLC \$8.95

Reviewed by Ryan Porter

By frequently and unabashedly mythologizing the past, popular histories are often magnificently crafted, but historically fuzzy narratives. To succeed, they must recognize their role as stories first and annals second. Two recent works meet with varied success, while Wayne Johnston's latest text examines the investments we sometimes have in keeping that line between history and myth blurred.

Peter Unwin's *The Wolf's Head: Writing Lake Superior* is rife with speculation, poetic license, and sketchy academic rigour (which are precisely the book's strengths), and they produce an engaging, brisk, and punchy read. For good or for ill, this is history unfettered; it fuses local lore with detailed research into a narrative of the largest great lake.

Lacking a consolidating thesis, the book has a peripatetic gaze that explores a number of Superior's myths and personages. While it moves chronologically, the book begins not with millennia-old First-Nations' experience, but with little-known early Europeans: largely violent exiles who traveled forbidding distances to "cross over and lose themselves in a 'savage' civilization." The framing quotes may distance the author from the concept of savagery, but one wishes Unwin had similarly framed "cross over" to avoid implicating himself in notions he's ostensibly critiquing.

These early sections concern the friction between First Nations and early-"White"

settlers. Unwin's excoriation of the Jesuits seems warmed over; that they were pedantic, blind, and unimaginative men has become *de rigueur*, but surely they weren't fully reprehensible. This lack of nuance hinders Unwin's disputation here, particularly during his reexamination of the life and legend of Bishop Frederic Baraga, a man of enormous ability, faith, and accomplishment. Unwin's main contention seems that the Bishop's diary wasn't written with the same force and pizzazz as Unwin's book itself.

Calling Unwin's style "tough" would associate it with an approach that it at once resembles and transcends. Here is Unwin's description of a Warden at Pukaskwa National Park recalling the day he informed parents of their daughter's drowning: "He attempts a dry laugh entirely unrelated to humour; the tense exhalation of a man trained to attach radio collars to wolves and contain the spruce budworm, not to stand next to parents white with shock and grief on the shores of a beach." One can't help but get caught up in Unwin's grim pithiness.

While shedding light on lesser-known aspects of the lake's history (a fascinating chapter documents Neys' WWII POW camp, which reads like an inverted *Stalag 17*), Unwin has a tendency to deflate the more ubiquitous legends; for instance, the captain of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* was negligent and bull-headed, and the shabby boat's descent below the waves seemed inevitable. Really, Gordon Lightfoot alone walks out unscathed from Unwin's look at the "*Edmund Fitzgerald* Industry." Moving between American and Canadian shores, from the long past to the present, and among the fabled mining community of Silver Islet, the collapse of Superior's commercial fishery, and the overlooked "role of pie in the overall history of North America," the book's 230 pages offer, to be sure, a condensed and selective but often engaging history: Superior's greatest hits (or "twits"

considering Unwin's unrelenting approach to European settlers).

Yet as one turns to the Bibliography, taking a needed deep breath after the litany of tragedies that litter the "battleground of Superior," that demure voice in the brain's stern begins to question why quotes aren't identified, tired myths of the Canadian wild are reiterated, and somehow, between these pages, the sperm whale has become extinct. Unwin does, however, spin some fabulous yarns.

That skill in storytelling is the missing element in John DeMont's *Coal Black Heart: The Story of Coal and the Lives it Ruled*. The cover implies DeMont will take the reader through an "international history" of coal, perhaps from coal hotspots like West Virginia, to China and to Russia. His gaze, however, moves mainly between Cape Breton and the UK and reveals more than you may have wanted to know about DeMont's family, which has a long history in the business. The familial framing device is intended to give a personal face to the book's massive historical range, but DeMont's insistent usage often jars and ultimately encumbers.

DeMont sometimes struggles to maintain his central narrative, the rise and fall of Cape Breton's coal industry, as the bones of absorbing passages lack connective tissue. The book begins with a broad sweep of coal's part in the ascent of modern empires, and subsequently develops an exposé on the inflammatory role the rock played in provincial and national labour relations. Through it all, the author too often indulges in an inconsistent portrayal of the coal miner as either romantic primitive or economic victim.

DeMont first became "obsessed" with coal while covering the Westray mining disaster for *Maclean's*. His personal experience during the aftermath as well as his depictions of the horrendous and all too-frequent mining accidents provide some moving

passages. The mining life was precarious, and these sections convey well the claustrophobic horror of dying underground, or sometimes, even worse, the tragedy of not dying at all.

The author captures the idiosyncrasies of his interviewees, but even here his collage-like presentation of grizzled miners reminiscing about 'the days' leaves one flipping back to become reacquainted with sequence. An egregious lapse occurs in the chapter documenting the strikes of the 1920s, which is framed as a tête-à-tête between Besco head Roy Wolvin (Roy the Wolf) and labour leader J.B. McLachlan. DeMont mentions, but fails to substantiate, Wolvin's sinister mystique, a problem for both those not familiar with the history and the narrative's persuasiveness. And while he clearly sides with the strike, after one particularly moving quotation describing the striking families' virtual starvation, he gallingly calls the source a "bleeding heart": a surprising remark from an author who creates so much sympathy for the miners by lambasting corporate and government injustice alike. Combine that with his many irritating asides to the reader, and DeMont's voice frustrates rather than leads. In fairness, though, I was working with an "uncorrected proof," and for his final copy the author may have ironed out the sketchy continuity, endowed the four-page Bibliography, and scaled back his vexing presence in his own text.

Wayne Johnston's diminutive *The Old Lost Land of Newfoundland: Family, Memory, Fiction, and Myth* flirts with the maxim that 'good things come in small packages.' This lecture was part of the University of Alberta's Henry Kreisel Lecture Series, and the scant forty-seven pages also contain a foreword, an introduction, and an excerpt from the brilliant *Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. The lecture reflects on the impact Newfoundland's confederation had on the identities of the province and

Johnston's family. Here the familial frame works marvelously, since the Johnstons become a microcosmic window onto the social rifts hewn out by Newfoundland's 1949 "annexation," as the Johnston patriarch calls it. These rifts still fester, as the polarized and often hilarious response to Johnston's "controversial" *Colony* reveals. And while Johnston retreads old territory, he broadens his scope by examining the unstable relationships among collective memory, communal identity, history, and fiction. Newfoundland may be the focus of the lecture, but certainly not its terminus. Johnston is a remarkable humourist and personality, both of which adorn this admirable but too-brief text.

Grasping Ondaatje

Joan Elizabeth von Memerty

Michael Ondaatje: Distance, Clarity and Ghosts. An Analysis of Ondaatje's Writing Techniques Against a Background of War and Buddhist Philosophy. VDM Verlag \$97.42

Lee Spinks

Michael Ondaatje. Manchester UP \$22.95

Reviewed by Sofie De Smyter

It is not given to every author to see the volume of his works surpassed by the amount of critical attention devoted to them, but it is safe to say that Michael Ondaatje was already familiar with the uncanny nature of scholarly fame well before the publication of Lee Spinks' and Joan Elizabeth von Memerty's recent monographs. Although they take the same author as their subject, Spinks and von Memerty approach their field of research from widely divergent angles. Whereas von Memerty's publication mainly focuses on *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and *Handwriting* (1998), Spinks' much more wide-ranging study aims to be "the fullest account of Ondaatje's work to date" and this especially "for students and readers coming to his work for the first time." The fact that

Distance, Clarity and Ghosts is a published master's thesis and *Michael Ondaatje* a volume in Manchester University Press's *Contemporary World Writers* series explains many of their differences as well as their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Relying on notions from Buddhist philosophy as well as ideas of "clarity" and "distance," von Memerty seeks to better comprehend the effect of Ondaatje's techniques of writing on his readers. Although the book's eight thematically oriented chapters offer occasional moments of insight, coherence is at times difficult to find, even between the paragraphs making up a single chapter. Some of the information provided is incorrect (both *Anil's Ghost* and *Handwriting* are wrongly dated; Sarath, one of the protagonists from *Anil's Ghost*, is continuously referred to as Sareth), and interpretations are sporadically based on mistaken attributions (an argument related to a character wearing a certain T-Shirt, for instance, is based on the wrong character), or insufficiently motivated (the idea that Ananda may be a co-conspirator in Sarath's death may strike many readers of *Anil's Ghost* with surprise). Nevertheless, it seems justified to suggest that the book is more true to its small-scale promises than Spinks' monograph to several of the favourable expectations created on its back flap.

Admittedly, writing on Michael Ondaatje is never an easy undertaking, especially not in view of the complexity of the writer's oeuvre and the bulk of critical material devoted to it. Composing a study that takes this double difficulty into account, that is moreover easily digestible by newcomers to his works and caters to the editorial demands of the series it forms part of is even harder. Apart from some typographical errors, editorial oversights (the Cliftons are repeatedly referred to as the Cliffords), and other mistakes (*Anil's Ghost's* Ananda was not commissioned to paint the eyes on the destroyed Buddha statue, but on a new

one), the book's nine chapters, including a "Contexts and Intertexts" and "Critical Overview and Conclusion," do offer their readers a well-informed introduction to Ondaatje and his major writings.

To some extent, however, the references to concepts used by, among others, Deleuze and Guattari, Hallward, and Nietzsche (the subject of another monograph by Spinks) complicate the introductory aims of the monograph. Although these allusions fit in with the series' aim to offer, in addition to good introductions, "original theses," they often lack the explanatory context that is vital to readers not familiar with these terms. This want of a sound theoretical introduction may make some of the book's arguments hard to follow and even seem far-fetched. The suggestion that *Coming Through Slaughter* is in "many ways an exemplary post-colonial work," for instance, is insufficiently substantiated. The references to critical theory repeatedly appear too unfocused to enable substantially innovative readings of Ondaatje's oeuvre. Despite Spinks' often astute interpretations, readers well familiar with Ondaatje's works and their scholarly criticism might therefore find the back flap's presentation of the book as "an original reading of his writing which significantly revises conventional accounts of Ondaatje as a postmodern and/or postcolonial writer" slightly overblown. Connoisseurs of postcolonial and postmodern criticism may experience the same uneasiness with respect to the book's claim to make "a distinctive contribution to debates about postcolonial literature and the poetics of postmodernism."

What is more, although the scarcity of footnotes linking Spinks' interpretations to those of other Ondaatje critics may be partly attributed to editorial demands of brevity, the list of bibliographical references is astonishingly short, and the selection of critical articles is never convincingly motivated. It is a mystery as to why the critical

overview is postponed until the final chapter where it moreover occupies only ten pages. More problematic is that no articles or monographs from the period 2006-2009, including Annick Hillger's insightful *Not Needing All the Words*. Michael Ondaatje's *Literature of Silence* (2006), were taken into account. The fact that the publication of a book does not happen overnight—Spinks' *Michael Ondaatje* was originally due in 2008—is not sufficient to justify this omission. A paragraph acknowledging the critic's knowledge of Hillger's monograph, and a multitude of equally influential articles, would have made the book's claim to be "the fullest account of Ondaatje's work to date" somewhat more acceptable. That Ondaatje's *Divisadero* (2007) was left out of consideration for a full-scale analysis is understandable, but, again, the fact that it does not receive even one sentence of attention is regrettable (*Anil's Ghost* is still referred to as "Ondaatje's most recent novel").

In short, although each of the books—and, partly due to its scope, especially Spinks'—adds to the critical efforts to grasp Michael Ondaatje's oeuvre, von Memerty's lack of coherence and Spinks' inability to fulfil the promises made on the dust jacket may somewhat compromise their achievements, especially to readers very familiar with Ondaatje and his critical reception.



Women Who Roughed It

Barbara Williams, ed.

A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada: The Journals, Letters, and Art of Anne Langton. U of Toronto P \$55.00

Maggie Siggins

Marie-Anne: The Extraordinary Life of Louis Riel's Grandmother. McClelland \$32.99

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

Anne Langton was an immigrant to Upper Canada in 1837 who, like the better-known Strickland sisters before her, left an elegant English home due to the collapse of her father's business to make a new life in the bush with her brother John (who had immigrated four years earlier), her parents, Thomas and Ellen, and her mother's sister, Alice. For the first decade, she kept a seasonal journal that was at intervals sent back, with sketches and letters, to her brother William and his family in Manchester. Her intention was, she wrote, to furnish "an evening's amusement . . . and a little matter for thought and conversation." First printed privately by a niece in 1904 and then published in Toronto in 1950, the journals are republished here in expanded form with notes and introduction by Barbara Williams. Williams' introduction provides an excellent overview of the Langton family, a history of the journals' publication, and the social contexts of immigration, women's memoirs, and female artistry; some of Langton's landscapes and portraits are reproduced. Williams is to be congratulated on a thoroughly researched edition. Its record of hardships endured makes for fascinating reading, all the more so because Langton herself, writing to inform and reassure family members, is finally unrevealed.

The jacket cover, presumably by Williams or approved by her, describes the journals as tracing Langton's "physical and psychological transformation from cultivated Englishwoman to hard-working pioneer

settler." She was, undoubtedly, transformed, enduring challenges and dangers that no one would have predicted for the privileged girl who traveled in Europe with her family. She describes in detail the unaccustomed labour in which she immersed herself: washing clothes and bedding, scrubbing floors, assisting in the slaughter of farm animals, hanging mosquito netting (to little avail, it seems—the bugs were apocalyptic), dressing pigs' heads, and tending the sick, all with scant help from servants, who were difficult to keep and often untrained. She occasionally contrasts the activities considered appropriate for a lady in the New World with the different ideas of home, noting "How strangely one's ideas accommodate themselves to the ways and necessities of the country one is in!" But overall, the journals make few references to the past, for it seems to have been a moral principle for Langton, and certainly a strategy of successful living, to neither dwell on her old life nor look ahead to an uncertain future. She also refrains from outpourings of feeling that might distress her family. As such, the journals fall well short of providing a psychological portrait of transformation.

Postcolonial and feminist frameworks, duly rehearsed in the introduction, are also of limited value for this text. Contact with Aboriginal inhabitants is rare, and the few encounters mentioned by Anne and her brother John, though cited by Williams as evidence of colonial "assumptions and prejudices," seem inconclusive. John, for example, laughs at himself for having expected to encounter a primitive being with an unpronounceable name, finding instead "a respectable-looking young man, dressed decently like a Christian." Anne observes a group who appear in a "state of complete idleness" but nonetheless "happy." Genteel codes of femininity—Williams' "primary lens" for reading Langton—take us little further. Where Williams sees

"gentlewomanly pique" and consciousness of competitive "social ranking" in Langton's reference to bush newcomers, I see a light-hearted joke about the poorness of the roads and the impossibility of maintaining social standards in the wild: "You cannot imagine how perfectly *comme il faut* rough log walls appear to us now; when we have got our striped green print up we shall feel as grand as queen Victoria amidst the damask hangings at Buckingham Palace. Hitherto I fancy we have more English elegancies about us than most of our neighbours, but the Dunsfords, I expect, will quite eclipse us, for they, it is said, are bringing a carriage out with them. I hope they do not forget to bring a good road too." Williams' desire to find evidence of proto-feminist self-assertion leads her to statements unsupported by textual evidence, such as the groundless "The more Langton wrote, the more conscious she was that she was a woman daring to write." On the contrary, she was likely to mock herself in a self-deprecating manner or recount a hardship in comic fashion.

In their determined good cheer, lack of pretension, and refusal of inwardness, Langton's journals are indeed revealing documents, even while they tell us little about the writer's psychology or resistance to gender codes. The voice we most often hear is one that turns difficulty into occasion for resilience or spiritual strengthening. Langton's religious and family training (she frequently mentions trust in Providence), combined with her admirable personal qualities of selflessness and serenity, enabled her to undergo the wreck of her hopes not only without complaint or depression but with active interest and a sense of adventure. Our own culture's emphasis on power, victimhood, and confession means that we have almost lost a framework for reading such an account.

Maggie Siggins' *Marie-Anne: The Extraordinary Life of Louis Riel's*

Grandmother attempts to tell the story of another brave woman: Marie-Anne Gaboury, a French-Canadian peasant born in 1780 near Rivière-du-Loup (now Louiseville, Quebec) who married Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière, a fur-trader, and traveled with him by canoe to the Red River Valley and the prairie forts. The hardy couple, surviving blizzards, famines, and warfare amongst Native groups, lived in the West for the rest of their lives, hunting buffalo with the Cree, Ojibway, and Métis, and eventually helping to found the Selkirk Settlement. The book presents a lively portrait of fur trade society, with its complex racial politics and cut-throat competition. Unfortunately, little is known about Marie-Anne (including her relationship with her grandson), and the biography is necessarily speculative, as when we are told that “Marie-Anne’s mother must have carefully probed her daughter’s motives. . . . Apparently Marie-Anne convinced her that [her choice to follow Jean-Baptiste] was entirely her decision.” The mother-daughter colloquy, like so many other encounters in the book, is intriguing, but we cannot know whether it actually took place. Possessed of only the bare facts of her subject and without letters or other written accounts, Siggins cannot provide us with legitimate access to inner lives. Marie-Anne and her husband thus disappear from the narrative for long stretches while we hear about events occurring around them. Moreover, Siggins seems to take the lack of documentary evidence as an invitation to indulge in sweeping generalizations, telling us at one point that “Father Vinet might have given Marie-Anne a breviary. . . . Perhaps now and then, for the good of the ‘savage’ soul, she could recite the psalms, hymns, lessons, and prayers, the heart of the Catholic daily worship, although whether a woman performing this ritual was acceptable to God was questionable indeed.” From what

evidence does Siggins draw this bitter indictment of Catholic bigotry? Despite providing a substantial bibliography, she does not consistently indicate her sources. The story of Marie-Anne’s time and place is engagingly told, but Marie-Anne remains obscure.

Textual Paradoxes

Mila Younes

Nomade. David \$22.95

Reviewed by Valerie Raoul

This is the second volume of Mila Younes’ account of her life as a woman of Berber origin whose parents migrated from the Kabylie region of Algeria to Paris. In the preface to the first volume, *Ma mère, ma fille, ma soeur* (2003), Younes explained that life writing, for her, is “un outil de réflexion à la fois personnelle et aussi collective sur la condition des femmes.” She recounted her own painful experience, as a teenager, of an arranged marriage to a man from the same background, as well as her own mother’s difficult life. Although her family was not religious, she blames the problems faced by women like herself on her parents’ traditional, patriarchal culture. While proud of being part of a long line of courageous Kabyle wives and mothers, Younes denounces the negative effects of lack of choice and personal freedom for women in that community. Abandoning her son to his father’s family, she seized an unexpected opportunity to travel to Quebec in the hope of more freedom, while realizing that she remains closely tied to her family in many ways.

Nomade traces her first impressions of Quebec, where she initially revels in the anonymity of becoming rootless but soon realizes that France offered more stable employment and better social benefits than Canada. In Quebec she discovers how French she is. Swiftly adopted into a milieu of artists, she marries again and acquires

immigrant status as well as another child. Unwilling to abandon her daughter, when the couple separate and the father moves to British Columbia with the child, she reluctantly follows him. In Vancouver, she finds a niche among the many francophones in Kitsilano, and later on Salt Spring Island. Her artistic talents emerge, in both painting (the striking cover of this book is by her) and writing, which both begin as therapeutic exercises. Her allegiance to an ethnic minority in Algeria enables her to establish contacts in the First Nations community, engaged at that time in road blockades. While the first book focused on women's oppression, the second extends her concern to minorities, particularly those whose traditions are threatened with extinction.

The style in both works is very direct, characterized by short, almost breathless

sentences that convey the author's engagement and determination. The text is full of paradoxes: tradition is both good, to be preserved, and bad, to be confronted and overthrown; the narrator appears as a courageous seeker after truth and devoted mother, but also at times as someone determined to survive who turns situations to her own advantage. The "naïve" style and tone camouflage an underlying exposure of guilt mixed with innocence, of writing as not only a means to self-understanding but also a weapon of self-justification. This memoir could be usefully compared with another by an Algerian-French immigrant to Quebec, Norah Shariff's *Les Secrets de Norah* (2007). Both raise important questions about individual self-representation in relation to collective identities and the desire to forgive and to be forgiven.



Unigraphics ad to be placed here.
Keyline does not print.

Inks of Knowledge, Permanence, and Collectivity

A Response to *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry*

Niigonweddom James Sinclair

I've always hated pencils and erasers.

I was first forced in grade two to use them, in handwriting class.

"We use pencils and erasers because we're just learning, and practice makes perfect. This way, we can get rid of mistakes and keep the page clean," my teacher said.

I loved pens, in all their ink-filled permanency. Black. Blue. Red. Even though I was told not to, every chance I got I filled my scribbler with blots, strokes and smudges. Let the page be messy, I thought. Full of my beautiful, consistent, every-few-second mistakes. My errors made my occasional successes *that* much sweeter.

Even if I did get a D.

Now that I'm grown up, I continue to see pencils and erasers everywhere. And though people are still learning,—and hopefully all of this practice is leading somewhere (I've given up on perfection)—erasing and keeping the page clean has resulted in some dangerous consequences.

For one example, take Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard's recently-published *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2008).

In it, Widdowson and Howard attempt to resurrect widely discredited and blatantly Eurocentric anthropological theories of human "cultural evolution" (first suggested by Edward Tylor [1832-1917] and "refined" by Lewis Henry Morgan [1818-1881]) along progressivist lines to make arguments that Native societies were "savage," "neolithic" and "barbaric," while Europeans were simply at a more complex and advanced "stage of cultural development" (11). This is evidenced in Aboriginal peoples, at first contact, never having "writing," the "alphabet," and "complex government institutions and legal systems" (12). It is the embracing of these "undeveloped" cultures, still steeped in "obsolete features," that results in today's Aboriginal peoples having "undisciplined work habits, tribal forms of political identification, animistic beliefs, and difficulties in developing abstract reasoning" (13). In their parameters—where European historical "development" is the linchpin of all value, complexity, and "civilization"—Widdowson and Howard, of course, ignore that although Native communities never had European-based alphabets and governing structures, they did have intricate signification systems (e.g. Anishinaabeg petroglyphs, Mayan codices, or Iroquois wampum), multi-dimensional governing institutions (like the Five Nations Confederacy, clans/totems, and the "red" and "white" Muskogee Creek town councils), and diverse legal systems (embedded in such principles as reciprocity, mediation, and responsibility), worthy and meritorious on their own terms.¹

If Widdowson and Howard were simply practicing their Eurocentrism in their scribbles, they should be allowed to think and write whatever they want. But instead they attempt to influence the rest of us by employing their 'findings' to make baffling governmental recommendations, devise a reductionist history, and "solve aboriginal problems." Although they claim to be attacking the "Aboriginal Industry" (lawyers, consultants, anthropologists and Native peoples themselves) and "a self-serving agenda" (9), it is clear the authors are most interested in influencing Canadian government policy. In subsequent chapters, the authors call Native land claims processes delusional, anti-Canadian, and illogical (resulting in further marginalization and isolation from "productivity"); declare that the current "accommodation(s)" of "aboriginal practices and beliefs" in the Canadian justice system "actually attempts to prevent justice from being served"; and pronounce Aboriginal traditional "knowledge," "spirituality" and "medicine" anti-scientific, "quackery," and a pack of "lies" (82-3, 98-9, 104-5, 132, 176-7, 180, 183, 237, 239-40).² They also make similarly arcane points in regards to Aboriginal claims for child welfare, health care, education, and environmental management.

Everyone, Widdowson and Howard argue, must get beyond the "distortions" that "aboriginal problems were caused by the destruction of viable and 'sovereign nations' during European conquest" and heed "objective" research (like theirs) that "proves" that Aboriginal cultures remain "undeveloped" and have little worth in today's world (49-65). They celebrate and defend "the residential school system" as one institution that necessarily facilitated a "civilizing" process where "components of [a] relatively simple culture" were "discarded" and a "more complex" one can enter (25).³ The "fact" is, the authors claim, "obliterating' various traditions is

essential to human survival. Conservation of obsolete customs deters development, and cultural evolution is the process that overcomes these obstacles. . . [T]he 'loss' of many cultural attributes is necessary for humans to thrive as a species in an increasingly interconnected and complex global system" (25). Then, in perhaps the most ironic moment of the book, Widdowson and Howard invoke John Lennon's "Imagine" to "dream" of a time when Native values based in "tribalism," "kinship relations" and "difference" are eliminated so "we can become a global tribe and the 'world can live as one'" (259-64).⁴

With pencil and eraser firmly in hand, and backed by a mainstream university press, Widdowson and Howard have composed an all-too familiar song of assimilation in the name of "progress." Their one-dimensional politics, historicism, and century-old arguments are known well by First Nations peoples, communities, and nations who continue to endure ongoing attacks on their personal, communal, and national sovereignties. The notion that this type of myopia is precisely why the current climate exists and perpetuates itself—not to mention that the authors' "dream" of *more of the same*—is nowhere in their pencil marks. The truth that, like their Western counterparts, expansive Indigenous intellectual systems, languages, governments, and cultures change, grow, and adjust, and *just might* have valuable contributions to "human survival" "development" and the "interconnected and complex global system"⁵ is lost on them—since they never write this, they can't really erase it.

And if these ideas stopped here, I might too. These authors' view of Indigenous peoples, their relationship with Canada, and the ways they should "develop," are endorsed by scholars such as Tom Flanagan (author of *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, McGill-Queens UP, 2000), political think-tanks such as the Frontier Centre for

Public Policy, and national *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wente. Their vision is also strikingly mirrored by many practices and policies of the federal governing Conservatives and Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and, sometimes, their predecessors, too. For example, take the now eleven-year-old cap of 2% on social, education, and economic funding for Native governments and their reserves, the refusal on September 13, 2007 to ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the renegeing on the 2005 Kelowna Accord—an agreement between the federal government and all major Native organizations that was supposed to broker a wave of Indigenous self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, and a “new” relationship with Canada—with virtually nothing put in its place.

Or, most recently in February 2009, consider the moves by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to radically change post-secondary funding for First Nations students. Essentially, if followed, what has been historically claimed and affirmed as a treaty right by both Canada and First Nations will become a loan-based, provincially-run program. INAC’s “official” explanation: Native students can learn “fiscal responsibility” by taking out loans, “value” education more, and colleges and universities “are not” in “the original wording” of the treaties. The change in policy directives has expectedly been met with tremendous backlash.

There are other examples in other arenas.

Go to any major department or new-age store. There you’ll find air-fresheners, souvenirs, and toys dressed up in colourfully painted, plastic and chicken-feathered head-dresses, dream catchers, and smudge kits, with complete instructions on how “real” Indians use them. Like static, archaic, and empty relics, these items are easily explained, objectified, and (most important) cheap. Erased are the historical, intellectual, and

political significance of these items—treated as if legal, governmental, and social contexts and ownerships can be extracted, removed, or fixed in a tragic, disappearing past. Put in their place are ridiculous notions of authenticity—as if Native expressions and ideas haven’t changed in centuries.

Want others? Try the reality that there are no federally-recognized Indigenous language rights in Canada, while French and English enjoy protection, support, and money in all of their “official status” glory. Consider the fact that when Indigenous peoples defend their claims to territories and land they are labeled in the media and the public as illegal “squatters” interested in “anarchy” and “violence” (e.g. Oka, Caledonia, and protests against the Vancouver-Whistler 2010 Olympic construction projects). Think about how most ordinary Canadians don’t know that they are standing on treaty land *right now*, or that all of us benefit from treaties, or that each of us have ongoing responsibilities to uphold obligations as parts of these agreements.

I state all of this to show that Widdowson and Howard, while egregious in their claims, are not alone. While many have (rightfully) focused their efforts on engaging and upending their simplistic arguments, there is much more work that needs to be done. One-sided stories, erasure, and a landscape free of Native claims of sovereignty, land, and historical contributions still make up the bulk of North American culture. It’s the norm. When people speak up and insist on Canada’s messy past being raised, discussed, and recognized, they are labeled ‘separatists,’ ‘angry,’ and accused of perpetuating ‘falsehoods’ and ‘delusions’—often to avoid responsibly and ethically engaging with their ideas. Then attempts are made to clean up the page, as Native peoples and their allies are ironically asked: “Why can’t you just be happy that Canada allows you to live, speak, and be free?”

Some change is happening. For all of the myopia and self-imposed ignorance embedded in these discourses, there is also responsible, ethical, and well-researched scholarship—most of which is provocative, rich, and multi-layered in its complex and diverse treatment of Indigenous peoples, communities, issues. Work produced by Native scholars in Canada such as Chris Anderson, John Borrows, Glen Coulthard, Paul DePasquale, Olive Dickason, Jo-Ann Episkenew, Kristina Fagan, Daniel Heath Justice, Linc Kesler, Emma Laroque, Bonita Lawrence, Neal McLeod, David Newhouse, Deanna Reder, Leanne Simpson, and Cheryl Suzack (just to name a few) and non-Natives such as J. Edward Chamberlin, Renate Eigenbrod, Daniel Francis, Daniel Morley Johnson, Gordon Johnston, Peter Kulchyski, Keavy Martin, Sam McKegney, Arthur Ray, and countless others, are models we should aspire to as responsible scholars and ethical researchers. Their work proves that all Canadians can partake in, learn from, and engage with Indigenous histories, practices, and intellectualism to make the spaces we share meaningful, respectful, and beneficial for all. Change is slow, but it's happening.

With all ideas, practices, and policies—ones we agree with and ones we don't—Native Studies scholars must thoroughly interrogate and question our underlying claims, use reputable evidence to support our own, and always encourage honest and informed dialogues and debates among thinkers of diverse political and ideological opinions. Of course, this will result in spirited discussion, for these issues are about our collective futures and relationships as Native peoples, Canadians, immigrants—and sometimes all three. We must therefore adopt, both personally and in our scholarship, a principle of respectful inter-responsibility embodied in the notion that we are ultimately neighbours, colleagues, and partners in this shared space

called Turtle Island, or North America. We must also remind ourselves, and others, that Native nations and Canada, both historically and today, are more interrelated, interconnected, and reliant on one another than people tend to remember, recall, and conceptualize. "We are a métis civilization," as John Ralston Saul writes in *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada*, a people influenced by over five centuries of contact, influence, and growth with one another, and "[t]his influencing, this shaping is deep within us" (3).

And there's something else we can do.
Use our pens.

Rather, we can perceive the world and, in the ink of that knowledge, express our thoughts. We can speak of the beautiful ugliness in the history of this land. Insist on the permanency of Indigenous homes here. Reflect upon all of the nations and treaties that make up these spaces. Theorize Indigenous, settler, and Canadian intellectual histories, while recognizing that each have specific, rich, and important epistemologies, contributions, and histories that can dialogue. Sing about our interactive experiences, and ultimately learn from one another. Share stories, reflect, and listen—always listen.

And we can—perhaps most of all—make, accept, and cherish the messy blots, strokes, and smudges of our experiences on this earth, on these streets, in this life. Insist on this—even if it seems difficult, strenuous, and stressful—because this changes the world. Years of resistance and courage in the face of erasure, for example, is what made the Indian Residential School Apology on June 11, 2008 happen. These tenets of Indigenous life are, in fact, why all of us are still here.

No matter how many professors, politicians, and citizens say that Aboriginal peoples, communities, nations are simple, static, and "dying," as long as we do these things, Indigenous futures—and in turn our

collective diversity, interests in equality, and inter-relationships with one another—will be ensured. I guarantee it.

Thanks to the undergraduate students in Native Studies at McGill University, who asked me to write the foreword for the first issue of their journal *KANATA*, on which this opinion piece is based.

NOTES

- 1 For reputable and detailed research on this, I recommend Charles Mann's *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Vintage, 2006) or Arthur Ray's *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began: An Illustrated History of Canada's Native People* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2005) as excellent starting points.
- 2 This is only a minor sampling of these authors' grandiose statements and recommendations. For more, see chapters entitled "Land Claims: Dreaming Aboriginal Economic Development" (81-105), "Self-Government: An Inherent Right to Tribal Dictatorships" (106-28), "Justice: Rewarding Friends and Punishing Enemies" (129-59) and "Traditional Knowledge: Listening to the Silence" (231-48).
- 3 Widdowson and Howard claim that when Native peoples and their advocates label the "missionaries' efforts as 'genocide'" this "obscures" the reality that residential schools were important movements in Native "cultural development." Although they admit that "[a]lthough the missionaries deserve criticism for the methods they employed in attempting to bring about this transition," they claim that "[m]any of the activities held as destructive to aboriginal peoples—the teaching of English, the discouraging of animistic superstitions, and encouraging of self-discipline—were positive measures intended to overcome the social isolation and economic dependency that was (and continues to be) so debilitating to the native population" (24-5).
- 4 The use of the song by Widdowson and Howard is ironic on several levels. "Imagine," which appeared on John Lennon's 1971 number-one album *Imagine*, is widely known as holding an anti-war, anti-violence, anti-religious, and anti-capitalistic message, which doesn't quite mesh with the authors' Eurocentric, assimilationist

agenda, nor the interest in such violent policies as residential schools. In addition, the fact that historically the song was written in response and resistance to the Vietnam Conflict—a war devised out of nationalistic, patriotic, and ideological conformity, not to mention the deaths of 6 million people and a long-standing occupation by Americans—and experiences that virtually mirror Aboriginals' in North America, seems lost on the authors. Or, perhaps Widdowson and Howard are literally interested in Lennon's intentions, as envisioned and embodied in his music video of "Imagine." It features a cowboy-dressed John Lennon walking through a forest, holding hands with a stoic and Pocahontas-looking Yoko Ono, when the two discover a beautiful house, enter a room completely painted white, and a timid Ono sits mutely while Lennon sings (ending only when he decides to kiss her).

- 5 For more provocative ideas and opinions on what the Indigenous peoples' perspectives on, and potential contributions to, globalization and world economic development, see Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz's edited collection of essays and opinions by twenty-seven scholars and activists from across the world, entitled *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 2006).

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Articles

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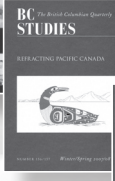
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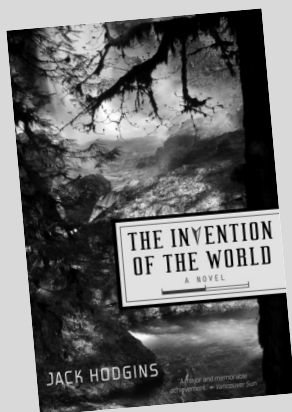
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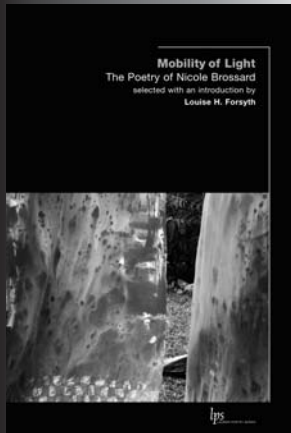
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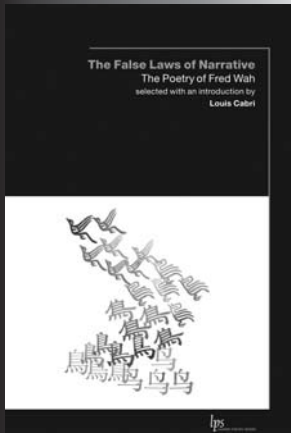


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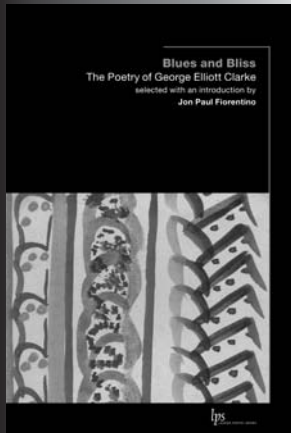
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