

# Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

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Articles of approximately 6500 words (including Notes and Works Cited), double spaced, in 12-point font size, should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1. Submissions should include a brief biographical note and a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

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*Canadian Literature*, revue universitaire avec comités d'évaluation, reçoit des soumissions d'articles, d'entrevues et autres commentaires portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs oeuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

Les manuscrits, d'une longueur approximative de 6500 mots, doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux anonymisés), adressés à l'Éditeur de *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z1, et accompagnés d'une note biographique (100 mots) et d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

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NOTE: "Letters," a space for posting responses to material published in *Canadian Literature* is now available on our website. Also available is an online searchable index for all previous issues of *Canadian Literature* from 1959 to 2005. This more efficient and user-friendly online index will replace the paper supplemental index we have published in previous years.

# Gabrielle Roy contemporaine / The Contemporary Gabrielle Roy

Jane Everett & Nathalie Cooke

Ce dossier bilingue réunit des textes issus d'un séminaire qui a eu lieu en novembre 2003 à l'Université McGill et qui était organisé par le Groupe de recherche sur Gabrielle Roy, équipe basée au Département de langue et littérature françaises de l'Université McGill et co-dirigée par Jane Everett, François Ricard et Nathalie Cooke de l'Université McGill et Sophie Marcotte de l'Université Concordia.

Depuis la mort de Gabrielle Roy en 1983, son oeuvre n'a cessé d'apparaître comme l'une des plus importantes et des plus significatives de la littérature canadienne et québécoise contemporaine. Outre la faveur croissante dont elle jouit auprès du grand public lecteur, cette oeuvre reçoit une attention privilégiée et soutenue de la part de la critique universitaire et spécialisée, qui en propose constamment des lectures nouvelles, fondées sur les paradigmes et les préoccupations théoriques les plus actuels.

Il en est ainsi des études auxquelles a donné lieu le séminaire. À partir de perspectives et d'approches différentes, les collaborateurs et collaboratrices nous proposent des lectures qui font valoir, chacune à leur manière, la pertinence de cette oeuvre et de ce regard créateur dans leur contexte d'apparition, mais aussi—le paradoxe n'est qu'apparent—leur *contemporanéité* et même leur *nouveauté* dans le contexte qui est aujourd'hui le nôtre. De plus, comme le fait remarquer Jessica Langston dans sa conclusion (201-02), il est rare que les universitaires travaillant dans les domaines des littératures canadienne-anglaise et québécoise se rencontrent pour étudier une même oeuvre. Cette interdisciplinarité n'a pu qu'enrichir nos échanges.

Jean Morency examine la signification de la présence de Gabrielle Roy et de son oeuvre dans les écrits de Jacques Poulin et de Michel Tremblay, tandis que Lori Saint-Martin s'interroge sur le lien entre les textes de la romancière et ceux d'une autre écrivaine québécoise, Ying Chen. Lianne Moyes s'intéresse aux fonctions dévolues à la figure du Mont-Royal dans *Bonheur d'occasion* et les compare à celles d'autres représentations littéraires de « la Montagne ». Roxanne Rimstead et Agnès Whitfield nous convient, respectivement, à une étude du regard que jette Gabrielle Roy sur la vie des Inuits du Québec, représentée à travers l'histoire d'Elsa dans *La rivière sans repos* (1970), et à une réévaluation du rôle joué par Hannah Josephson, la première traductrice de *The Tin Flute* (1947), la version anglaise de *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945).

Nous tenons à remercier le Département de langue et littérature françaises, le Département d'anglais et l'Institut d'études canadiennes de l'université McGill pour leur soutien financier et logistique, ainsi que le Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture et le Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada.

**T**his bilingual collection presents papers from a colloquium held at McGill University in November 2003 organized by the Gabrielle Roy Research Group, a research team based in McGill's Department of French Language and Literature and led by Jane Everett, François Ricard, and Nathalie Cooke of McGill University, as well as Sophie Marcotte of Concordia University.

Long after Gabrielle Roy's death in 1983, her work continues to claim its place as one of the most significant literary oeuvres in the contemporary literary canons of Canada and Quebec. Enjoyed by general audiences, Roy's writing also receives a privileged and sustained audience among literary scholars, who take advantage of insights gleaned from contemporary theoretical frameworks and literary perspectives to shed new light on Roy's well-known body of work.

Such critical insights formed the basis of the colloquium. Although differing in their approach, all participants affirm the continuing relevance of Roy's work and authorial perspective to their own particular methods of analysis. Further, and paradoxically, they all insist on the contemporaneity of Roy's oeuvre and its insights within the context of the present moment.

Moreover, as Jessica Langston noted in her concluding remarks (201-02), it is unusual for academics working in the fields of English-Canadian and Québécois literature to come together to study the same author; to be sure, such interdisciplinarity enriched the exchange.

Jean Morency looks to the traces of Gabrielle Roy and her work in the writing of Jacques Poulin and Michel Tremblay, while Lori Saint-Martin explores the relationship between Roy's novels and those of the well-known Québécois writer Ying Chen. Lianne Moyes scrutinizes Roy's treatment of Mount Royal in *The Tin Flute* in relation to the literary treatment it has received at the hands of other Montreal writers, in Roy's time and our own. Roxanne Rimstead and Agnes Whitfield invite us, respectively, to look anew at Roy's depiction of the Inuit in Quebec, particularly through the story of Elsa in *La rivière sans repos* (1970), and at the role played by Hannah Josephson, the first translator of *The Tin Flute* (1947), the English version of *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945). Additional papers from Lee Brotherson and Paul Socken extend the work of the colloquium.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of McGill's Department of French Language and Literature, Institute for the Study of Canada, and Department of English, as well as that of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture.

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RÉJEAN BEAUDOIN  
PRINCIPAL EDITOR, NUMBER 192

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# Call for Papers

## *Proposed Special Issue: Diasporic Writing in Canada*

### GUEST EDITOR, SNEJA GUNEW

All non-Aboriginal Canadians and many Aboriginal Canadians can be categorized in some senses as “diasporic.” The degree to which we feel that this label applies to certain kinds of writing is complex. To be “québécois de vieille souche” (of deep roots), or to be of Acadian or Loyalist descent often means that one is not categorized as “diasporic.” One’s family history here allows an exemption from such labels as “multicultural,” “immigrant,” or “diasporic.” Bearing these historical and theoretical questions in mind, *Canadian Literature* encourages papers on writers who might be viewed as “diasporic,” in their self-perceptions, style, themes, or theoretical concerns.

### SOME QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT SPARK A RESPONSE:

- *Are Newfoundland writers living off the island diasporic?*
- *Are Aboriginal writers living outside their traditional territories diasporic?*
- *What are the nuances of sense reflected in such terms as “diasporic,” “multicultural,” and “immigrant,” and how should we view them in literary discussions?*
- *What are the generational effects of diaspora? To what extent (and for how long) are writers burdened with conveying diasporic histories, representing diasporic communities?*
- *How have diaspora and related concepts been affected by cheap air travel, the internet, the relative wealth and privilege of at least some categories of new citizens, varying mainstream pressures to assimilate through time, racism, and other social forces?*

### SUBMISSION DEADLINE: JUNE 1, 2007

All article submissions will undergo a double-blind peer review process. For details on submission, visit [canlit.ca/submit](http://canlit.ca/submit). Send three copies of your paper (approximately 6500 words including notes and Works Cited; MLA style; two copies with the author’s name removed) to:

**The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall,  
The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1.**

- *Canadian Literature* is planning special issues to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2009. One issue will focus on the impact of the literary-scholarly journal in Canada, and on Canadian writing.
- We also envision an issue to be published in 2010 focusing on “Sport and Canadian Writing.” Full descriptions and details will be posted to the website:



# **canlit.ca/call**

## Port de voix (extrait)

*Pour J. B.*

Gravir sa propre voix  
pour voir seulement  
sa gorge  
au loin l'appel  
S'y jeter, tête première  
comme on se laisse tomber

Comme on laisse tomber  
sa vie, son souffle  
s'évanouir  
en ce qui va de soi

Monter, monter  
Laisser faire  
l'air  
S'y accrocher pourtant  
Jusqu'à sa perte, s'accrocher  
portant son chant perdu  
au sommet de sa voix  
cassée  
qui va céder  
qui va chanter

Chanter haut  
par amour des hauteurs seulement  
De l'air  
Tout le poids de son corps  
pendu au cou  
des branches  
aux cordes au cou  
tremblantes, gémissantes, appelantes : vocales

(« *Est-ce le vent qui porte la voix...*  
*ou la voix, le vent ?* »)

Cette chaleur dans la voix  
qui se dégage  
où frémir  
d'être homme  
où frémir d'être  
seulement

Ce nœud dans la gorge  
Où passer  
sa petite vie  
sa mort  
où n'en plus finir de finir  
de monter, de monter

Tomber

# De Gabrielle Roy à *La Mémoire de l'eau* de Ying Chen :

histoire d'une rencontre littéraire

**S**i les parents se survivent dans leurs enfants, comme on le dit souvent—c'est le bonheur et le drame des uns et des autres, Gabrielle Roy l'a bien montré—, les écrivains disparus vivent non seulement dans leurs propres écrits mais aussi dans ceux d'écrivains plus jeunes qui en portent, d'une façon ou une autre, la marque. Hommages, références directes à l'auteur ou à ses livres au sein d'une œuvre de fiction, réécritures, parodies, reprises explicites ou implicites d'un thème, d'un personnage, d'une trousse formelle, d'éléments géographiques ou onomastiques : les formes de rencontre sont presque infinies. Si les rapports de parricide à l'égard des devanciers ne sont pas rares,<sup>1</sup> les reprises dont il sera question ici disent plutôt la continuité, la reconnaissance, la gratitude et la complicité. Aller plus loin, certes—c'est toujours pour aller loin qu'on écrit—, mais en prolongeant, pas en reniant, ceux qui ont précédé.

À n'en pas douter, Gabrielle Roy figure parmi les écrivains québécois qui ont joué ce rôle d'inspirateur et de guide. Elle qui vivait retirée et évitait les salons littéraires a pourtant exercé une grande influence. Fervent lecteur de *Bonheur d'occasion*, Michel Tremblay raconte son émerveillement à y voir dépeinte, dans une langue savoureuse et avec un sens dramatique sans faille, la vie du petit peuple montréalais (*Duchesse*, 254-256 et *Ange*, 159); jusque-là, dit-il, il n'avait trouvé cette qualité d'émotion que dans les romans français. C'est donc une autorisation à écrire dans la langue d'ici et sur le « vrai monde » qu'il puise dans la lecture de Gabrielle Roy. Jacques Poulin la place, lui, aux côtés de ses écrivains états-uniens de prédilection (Hemingway, Brautigan...), faisant d'elle une grande romancière des Amériques; il loue avant tout la

perfection de son style. Robert Lalonde dit apprécier surtout la profondeur des émotions exprimées dans ses livres. Le narrateur du *Figuier enchanté* de Marco Micone, en visite dans son Italie natale après des années passées au Canada, affirme avoir vécu avec la famille Lacasse « les deux jours les plus émouvants de l'été » (84). Gabrielle Roy a donc influencé toute une génération d'écrivains masculins.<sup>2</sup> Parallèlement, et de façon différente—tant la lecture que l'écriture comporte une dimension sexuée—, elle a marqué de nombreuses femmes créatrices. Au-delà de la beauté du style, des intrigues captivantes ou de la vérité des émotions exprimées—ce qui ne veut évidemment pas dire qu'elles y soient insensibles—, ces romancières et dramaturges ont vu en Gabrielle Roy un modèle féministe et une mère littéraire. « Ce sont nos mères », écrit justement Jovette Marchessault (24) à propos des créatrices du passé. La référence à Gabrielle Roy inscrit ainsi les femmes plus jeunes dans une « généalogie féminine » (Irigaray 30) qui fera l'objet des pages qui suivent.

Pourtant, dans un premier temps, Gabrielle Roy et les femmes de sa génération intéressaient peu les critiques féministes. Dans *Quand je lis je m'invente*, par exemple, Suzanne Lamy célèbre la nouvelle écriture au féminin que pratiquent France Théoret, Nicole Brossard et d'autres, mais balaie du revers de la main les écrits des grandes devancières comme Anne Hébert, dont elle avait fustigé *Les Fous de Bassan* en 1982, et Gabrielle Roy. À propos de cette dernière, Suzanne Lamy juge peu mobilisatrices les « hontes chuchotées des mères de Gabrielle Roy, [les] paroles d'émerveillement et de tendresse de ses institutrices » (31), sa prédilection pour le roman—genre traditionnel peu susceptible, selon Lamy, de renouveler les perceptions—et la neutralité de son écriture, qui ne pose pas la question de la différence sexuelle. Mais était-il vraiment raisonnable d'exiger des écrivaines nées autour de 1910-1915 qu'elles aient les mêmes audaces formelles et langagières que celles qui, nées trente ou quarante ans plus tard, ont pris la plume dans un Québec déjà en voie de modernisation? Avec le recul, il semble évident que, grisées par la nouveauté des textes de la nouvelle écriture au féminin parus à partir de 1973-1974 environ et désireuses de fonder une nouvelle lecture, certaines critiques féministes ont commis un peu vite un matricide à l'égard des écrivaines fondatrices.<sup>3</sup> Ce matricide leur semblait sans doute nécessaire pour rompre avec les constructions patriarcales de la femme et bâtir une nouvelle sororité féministe entre égales, entre contemporaines. À la généalogie maternelle, considérée comme une source d'aliénation—c'est de sa mère qu'on apprend à se transformer en « petite femme » soumise—, on a voulu

substituer une relation horizontale entre sœurs, fondée sur la réciprocité et la complicité.

Mais était-il vraiment nécessaire de choisir entre ses mères et ses sœurs, de se couper des créatrices du passé, de déprécier leur travail? Sur ce point, me semble-t-il, les créatrices—romancières et dramaturges, notamment—ont vu beaucoup plus clair, dans un premier temps, que les critiques littéraires, et ont compris plus tôt l'audace des nos romancières dites classiques. Nombre d'entre elles ont ainsi rendu hommage à Gabrielle Roy dans leurs écrits.<sup>4</sup> J'aimerais rappeler brièvement trois créatrices—Jovette Marchessault, Francine Noël, France Théoret—qui ont souligné à leur façon leur dette à l'égard de Gabrielle Roy, exemples que j'ai étudiés ailleurs (Saint-Martin, *Voyageuse*), avant de me pencher sur un cas différent et inédit, celui du premier roman de Ying Chen, *La Mémoire de l'eau*.

### De quelques formes de filiation

Dans la pièce de théâtre *La Saga des poules mouillées*, publiée en 1981, Jovette Marchessault met en scène quatre grandes créatrices québécoises du passé : Laure Conan, Germaine Guèvremont, Gabrielle Roy et Anne Hébert. Tout en restant fidèle à leurs données biographiques, Marchessault leur prête un langage cru, au service d'un refus absolu de l'ordre patriarcal, dont on ne trouve nulle trace dans leurs oeuvres publiées. C'est donc une attitude anachronique, voire déformante, qu'adopte la dramaturge. Fait intéressant, c'est surtout à Gabrielle Roy que Marchessault attribue la violente révolte qui est d'abord la sienne propre. A-t-on le droit de transformer ainsi un être réel? Il est permis d'en douter. Et pourtant, la Gabrielle Roy de la pièce, qui, au fond, n'est pas si loin de la vraie, malgré les apparences—même si la verdeur du langage que lui prête Marchessault l'aurait horrifiée—, fait l'éloge de la relation mère-fille, critique la religion catholique et dénonce la maternité imposée. Ainsi, Marchessault offre une vision poétique, voire mythique, plutôt qu'historique ou réaliste, des créatrices du passé; à sa façon, elle reste fidèle à Gabrielle Roy, surtout à celle, plus révoltée et plus critique, des romans inédits, *Baldur* et *La Saga d'Éveline*.<sup>5</sup> En dépeignant ses devancières comme des féministes—de manière parfois rapide, voire cavalière, il faut bien le dire—, Marchessault annonçait en quelque sorte la critique au féminin, qui allait transformer notre vision des créatrices du passé.

Francine Noël, dans *Maryse* (1983), met en scène une héroïne aux origines populaires qui s'identifie fortement à la jeune protagoniste de *Bonheur d'occasion* : « C'était bête à dire, mais de tout le fatras littéraire qu'elle était

obligée de connaître pour passer sa licence, Florentine Lacasse, frêle et malade, était le seul personnage avec lequel elle se sentait des affinités » (198). *Maryse* reprend donc, en le situant au cœur des années soixante-dix, le drame de la jeune fille de milieu populaire qui cherche à s'en sortir. Grâce aux études universitaires, au travail, à l'amitié entre femmes et, paradoxalement, à sa stérilité—mais peut-être surtout grâce au contre-exemple de Florentine—, Maryse parvient à vivre autrement. Le retour à Gabrielle Roy et aux grandes problématiques de *Bonheur d'occasion*—la classe sociale, l'aliénation amoureuse, le rejet, par la fille, de la vie misérable de sa mère— permet à la fois de reconnaître l'importance de ce roman pour l'écriture des femmes et de le mettre à jour.<sup>6</sup>

Les références à l'œuvre royenne peuvent aussi être plus feutrées, plus discrètes. Dans *Laurence*, par exemple, France Théoret multiplie les parallèles onomastiques, événementiels, formels (recours à un certain réalisme social) et thématiques avec *Bonheur d'occasion*, mais aussi avec la vie de Gabrielle Roy elle-même. À défaut de pouvoir en faire la démonstration ici (moins explicites, les parallèles exigeraient une longue analyse), disons simplement que Laurence elle-même, née vers 1905, est une femme de classe populaire de la génération de Gabrielle Roy, issue d'une famille qui ressemble à celle des Lacasse (mère vieillie avant l'âge par les maternités et le travail, père amateur de combines douteuses, frère chétif proche du Daniel de Gabrielle Roy) et appliquée à concilier la liberté personnelle et la solidarité familiale. Ainsi, entre les références à l'œuvre royenne et celles qui visent plutôt la biographie de la romancière, les échos se multiplient. France Théoret tisse une toile complexe où s'enchevêtrent les questions qui obsédaient déjà Gabrielle Roy : comment s'y prend une jeune femme ambitieuse pour vivre autrement que les mères soumises qui l'entourent? Comment rompre avec la mère sans la trahir? Comment liquider la dette envers ses origines?

Après ce rapide survol de quelques-unes des façons dont des créatrices ont repris l'œuvre royenne, examinons un autre parallèle, inédit cette fois et peut-être plus étonnant : il s'agit de *La Mémoire de l'eau*, premier roman de la romancière québécoise d'origine chinoise Ying Chen, qui semble renvoyer, cette fois, à l'ensemble que forment *Rue Deschambault* et *La Route d'Altamont*.

### **D'une rencontre littéraire**

À prime abord, le rapprochement entre *La Mémoire de l'eau* et l'œuvre royenne paraît ténu. Toute rencontre intertextuelle ne peut être ici qu'implicite; aucune référence à Gabrielle Roy, en fait aucune référence québécoise,

n'y apparaît. L'action se déroule en Chine, entre 1912 et l'époque contemporaine; ce n'est qu'à la toute fin du roman que la narratrice quitte la Chine à destination, non pas de Montréal, mais de New York. Les différences culturelles sautent donc aux yeux; les événements historiques évoqués ne sont pas les mêmes que chez Gabrielle Roy; la toile de fond politico-sociale (chute de l'empereur, luttes intestines, montée du communisme, etc.) est beaucoup plus fortement soulignée chez Ying Chen. Les techniques qu'emploient les autres créatrices pour renvoyer à Gabrielle Roy—références directes à sa personne ou à son œuvre, parallèles onomastiques ou autres—sont impossibles ici. *La Mémoire de l'eau* dépeint un autre monde, un univers plus sombre, soumis à de grands bouleversements sociaux et obéissant à ses codes propres. Et pourtant, on est en droit de parler d'une sorte de « rencontre » entre l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy et celle de Ying Chen.<sup>7</sup>

Au niveau formel d'abord, on peut parler d'affinités frappantes. *La Mémoire de l'eau* est bel et bien un roman, puisqu'on y trouve une grande unité thématique et que certains personnages, comme la narratrice et surtout la grand-mère, y évoluent du début à la fin. Cela dit, il est construit à la manière d'un recueil de nouvelles. Les textes qui le composent portent un titre plutôt qu'un numéro de chapitre, et la plupart sont complets en eux-mêmes; on pourrait en modifier l'ordre sans que l'ensemble en souffre. On voit tout de suite la différence entre la composition en quelque sorte plus ouverte de ce roman et celle, par exemple, de *L'Ingratitude*, troisième roman de Chen, divisé en petites parties sans titre et qui se suivent selon une logique, une progression implacables. À peu de choses près, c'est la différence entre la composition de *Bonheur d'occasion* et celle de *Rue Deschambault*; le second finit par former un tout, mais pas de la même façon que le premier. Un chapitre de *L'Ingratitude* ou de *Bonheur d'occasion*, s'il était repris en revue, serait perçu comme un extrait, pas comme une œuvre en soi; tandis qu'un des textes de *La Mémoire de l'eau* ou de *Rue Deschambault*, publié seul, serait autosuffisant aux yeux de qui ne connaît pas le recueil. Certes, chaque fragment de ces deux livres prend tout son sens au vu de l'ensemble, lorsque jouent les échos et les résonances, mais l'effet de lecture n'est pas le même que dans une œuvre suivie, unifiée. Prenons l'exemple, dans *Rue Deschambault*, de « L'Italienne », où Christine raconte l'histoire du voisin qui bâtit une maison pour accueillir sa femme fraîchement arrivée de la terre natale, puis l'amitié entre la mère de Christine et cette femme, enfin la mort de celle-ci; s'il enrichit la grande problématique de l'immigration qui fascine Gabrielle Roy en plus de nous faire comprendre, grâce au bonheur conjugal de



l'Italienne, que la mère de Christine est moins bien mariée, ce texte pourrait tout de même être retranché sans que l'ensemble en paraisse amputé. On pourrait en dire autant de certains textes de *La Mémoire de l'eau* : s'ils sont liés entre eux, la structure de l'ensemble demeure lâche. La composition de ce roman est d'ailleurs curieuse : les premiers chapitres racontent la vie de la grand-mère de façon chronologique; les chapitres suivants présentent de façon plus anecdotique la vie d'autres personnages, brisant ce qui avait semblé être la ligne narrative du roman; les deux derniers portent sur la narratrice. On trouve donc au début et à la fin du roman deux portraits de femmes de générations différentes, interrompus par d'autres brefs récits de vie, qui racontent en peu de pages une longue période recoupant pour l'essentiel celle du fil narratif principal.

Jean-Pierre Boucher (41) rappelle la prédilection de Gabrielle Roy pour les recueils : même ses romans sont souvent composés de fragments distincts et titrés (*La Petite Poule d'eau*) ou encore précédés de textes brefs (*La Rivière sans repos*). Boucher voit dans *Rue Deschambault* un recueil-ensemble dont les nouvelles forment un tout cohérent, soigneusement composé. Le mode de construction employé dans *La Mémoire de l'eau* rappelle en tous points celui de Gabrielle Roy : brefs textes dont le titre apparaît sur une page à part,<sup>8</sup> de façon à souligner leur unicité, mais mettant en scène des personnages issus d'un même milieu et liés entre eux, de sorte que l'ensemble de ces textes pourtant distincts forme un tout cohérent doté d'une certaine progression narrative.

Tout comme *Rue Deschambault* ou encore *La Route d'Altamont*, *La Mémoire de l'eau* nous fait revivre l'histoire d'une jeune fille, narratrice à la première personne, à travers celle de sa famille et de ses proches. Son histoire personnelle est donc en même temps celle d'un milieu et d'une appartenance; la narratrice s'appréhende d'abord moins comme individu que comme membre d'une collectivité (c'est d'ailleurs le sens du rêve que fait la narratrice de *La Mémoire de l'eau* à la toute fin du roman, dans lequel elle voit flotter dans l'eau autour d'elle autant les membres de sa famille que le président Mao). Cette vision d'un soi lié aux autres explique peut-être pourquoi, au lieu de se placer d'emblée au centre de sa propre histoire, la narratrice regarde, écoute et consigne de biais, pourrait-on dire. Dès l'enfance, elle est représentée en observatrice, en future créatrice; écrire, c'est d'abord—avant même la rupture mais aussi, et peut-être surtout, après—dire son appartenance. On se rappelle certains titres de Gabrielle Roy, comme « Alicia », « Wilhelm », ou « Ma tante Térésina Veilleux », auxquels

répondent, chez Ying Chen, « Grand-tante Qing-Yi », « Oncle Jérôme » ou « Les aventures de Ping ». Centrés autour d'un personnage dont ils racontent généralement la vie dans une sorte de durée récapitulative, ces segments n'ont parfois qu'un rapport indirect avec la vie de la narratrice. Puisqu'il raconte toute une série de vies parallèles, l'ensemble, qu'il s'agisse de *Rue Deschambault* ou de *La Mémoire de l'eau*, ne crée pas une tension dramatique soutenue; même si la lente maturation de la narratrice et son arrivée à l'âge adulte en constituent la trame principale, de nombreux textes ouvrent d'autres voies, d'autres perspectives.

Du fait même de cette organisation ouverte, la perspective temporelle de *La Mémoire de l'eau* rappelle aussi celle de *Rue Deschambault*. En effet, si l'ensemble s'organise selon une progression essentiellement chronologique, de l'enfance de la narratrice (et même avant, chez Ying Chen) à son jeune âge adulte, il n'est pas linéaire pour autant. À l'intérieur de chaque livre, s'ouvrent d'autres temporalités, celles des vies passées et présentes qui se déploient parallèlement à celle de la narratrice : celle de l'oncle Majorique, par exemple, dans *Rue Deschambault*, ou encore celle de la grand-mère ou de M. Saint-Hilaire dans *La Route d'Altamont*, celle de l'oncle Jérôme ou de Ping dans *La Mémoire de l'eau*. L'ensemble est donc fait d'embranchements et de ramifications, à l'image justement de l'arbre généalogique qui l'inspire. De plus, le retour final qui s'effectue par le biais de l'écriture, nous y reviendrons, instaure un temps circulaire (voir Boucher et Ricard). Chez Chen comme chez Roy, se dessine un grand thème : le devenir individuel à travers les générations de vies effacées, laborieuses ou oisives, les sédentaires et les nomades, les soumis et les révoltés. Ici encore, la forme brève, en jouant sur la continuité et la discontinuité (Boucher 40), permet à la fois de brosser des portraits d'individus parfois disparates et de les juxtaposer afin de montrer l'influence du milieu sur la narratrice. De l'ensemble des portraits de la famille et de l'entourage se dégage peu à peu celui de la jeune protagoniste.

Tout enfant qu'elle soit, Christine joue un rôle de premier plan dans plusieurs nouvelles de *Rue Deschambault*, à titre de petite fille ou d'adolescente curieuse du monde qui l'entoure, puis de femme d'âge mûr qui, au présent de l'énonciation, s'interroge sur son passé, sur les défaillances de la mémoire et sur le sens du temps, de la vie, de la mort, de l'amour.<sup>9</sup> Par contraste, plusieurs épisodes de *La Mémoire de l'eau* ont lieu avant même la naissance de la narratrice, qui, si elle les tient forcément de la grand-mère, se comporte un peu comme un narrateur omniscient; Christine semble parfois dotée elle aussi de cette mémoire ancestrale. Le projet de raconter la vie de la

grand-mère rappelle celui qu'avait Gabrielle Roy d'écrire le grand roman de l'enfance de sa mère et de sa migration, petite fille encore, du Québec vers le Manitoba,<sup>10</sup> roman d'avant sa propre naissance donc, roman des origines féminines. La narratrice de Ying Chen parle moins d'elle que des autres, moins d'elle en tout cas que de la grand-mère : des dix chapitres que compte *La Mémoire de l'eau*, cinq portent exclusivement sur la grand-mère, trois autres sur ses proches, deux seulement sur la narratrice. Mais au niveau énonciatif, celle-ci affirme sans cesse sa présence, comme Christine, puisque le simple fait de dire « Ma tante Térésina Veilleux » ou « grand-mère » situe le personnage dont il est question par rapport à une énonciatrice qui s'affirme en filigrane. Ainsi, dans *Rue Deschambault* comme dans *La Mémoire de l'eau*, la présence du « je » ou du « nous » familial rappelle le regard à la fois tendre et critique de la narratrice, même si cette dernière ne joue par moments qu'un rôle restreint.

La présence, dans les deux romans, d'êtres venus d'ailleurs fait émerger une réflexion sur la différence et l'identité. Dans *La Mémoire de l'eau*, l'histoire de l'oncle Jérôme, Français qui rejette la France, apprend le chinois et devient un intime de la famille, soulève la question de l'Autre, du rapport entre les peuples et du sentiment de se sentir « étranger chez soi » (81), si important chez Gabrielle Roy comme chez Ying Chen.<sup>11</sup> Malheureux en France, l'oncle Jérôme « ne se contentait pas encore de jouer au Chinois, il voulait être un vrai Chinois ». Se pose alors la question suivante : « Mais existe-t-il un vrai Chinois? » (85). On croirait presque entendre la mère de Christine, dans *Rue Deschambault*, dire à sa voisine, après avoir pris un locataire noir qui enrichira singulièrement la vie de la petite famille : « Mais les étrangers sont rarement aussi étrangers qu'on croit » (20). Les discours identitaires crispés font place à l'ouverture (s'il n'y a pas de « vrai » Chinois, il n'y a pas non plus d'étrangers) et au désir de la rencontre,<sup>12</sup> même si le ton est sans doute moins optimiste chez Chen. Le mouvement migratoire de la fin des œuvres—départ de Christine pour l'Europe et de la narratrice de Ying Chen pour l'Amérique—a pour origine cette brûlante interrogation identitaire : qu'est-ce que l'exil? Pourquoi se sent-on étranger chez soi? Comment devenir soi-même malgré sa famille?

Si nos deux créatrices mettent en scène une narratrice dont le moi s'affirme à travers l'exploration de l'histoire du clan—ancêtres, famille immédiate et plus lointaine, amis et connaissances—, la lignée principale est formée de la grand-mère, de la mère et de la narratrice elle-même. Cette relation sur trois générations, fréquente dans l'écriture migrante, s'observe plus rarement

chez les écrivaines dites « de souche », où la relation duelle (mère-fille) prend souvent toute la place.<sup>13</sup> On sait le rôle important que joue déjà la grand-mère chez Gabrielle Roy; dans *La Route d'Altamont*, cette femme, malgré sa faiblesse physique et les failles de sa mémoire, inspire à sa petite-fille, pour qui elle fabrique une poupée, à la fois le désir de la création et le goût du voyage : la poupée ne porte-t-elle pas une pèlerine et une petite valise? (Boucher 52-53). À certains égards, la narratrice de Ying Chen trouve sa grand-mère plus affirmée que sa mère, malgré ses pieds bandés, et surtout, plus complice d'elle-même; le personnage de la grand-mère est très longuement développé, tandis que presque rien n'est dit de la vie de la mère, que la narratrice n'évoque qu'à propos des différends qui les opposent. Lorsque celle-ci rentre les pieds en sang ou la cheville tordue après avoir trop marché en souliers à talons hauts pour faire plaisir à son fiancé, la grand-mère ne la juge pas, alors que la mère voudrait lui interdire les chaussures européennes (ce qui, prévisiblement, ne fait que les rendre plus attirantes); grâce à son expérience des pieds bandés, la grand-mère sait soigner sa petite-fille, dont elle s'occupe avec douceur. Le chapitre se clôt sur les mots suivants : « Grand-mère me donna le reste de ses pansements » (126), qui saisissent avec tendresse et ironie la compassion de la grand-mère en plus de relever le peu de progrès qu'ont réalisés les femmes. En effet, la grand-mère a eu les pieds bandés contre son gré, alors que la petite-fille revendique haut et fort le droit de porter les inconfortables chaussures qui entravent sa mobilité; si les pieds bandés font davantage souffrir que les talons hauts, la narratrice, par la juxtaposition des deux « mutilations », insiste plutôt sur le parallèle que sur les différences.<sup>14</sup>

Comme la grand-mère de Christine, qui a suivi son mari du Québec natal vers le Manitoba, celle de la narratrice de *La Mémoire de l'eau* quitte sa ville d'origine peu après son mariage pour s'établir à Shanghai, où son mari a acheté une usine. Ces femmes sont donc des migrantes, comme le seront plus tard, à leur image mais autrement, leurs petites-filles. La différence entre les trajets migratoires des unes et des autres s'explique par le passage du temps : les grands-mères n'ont pas décidé de leur sort, alors que les petites-filles partiront de leur propre initiative et seules, pour se libérer de la famille dont la grand-mère ne pouvait ou ne voulait pas s'affranchir. Lorsque la grand-mère se réjouit, à la fin de *La Mémoire de l'eau*, de voir que « la petite [lui] ressemble » (133), on comprend que cette ressemblance est liée davantage à la mobilité et au désir de recommencement qu'à une similitude physique.

À travers l'évocation des mères et des grand-mères, apparaît, dans *La Mémoire de l'eau*, la question de l'oppression des femmes, traitées en inférieures et contraintes à l'obéissance. On sait que ce thème préoccupait aussi au plus haut point Gabrielle Roy.<sup>15</sup> Entre la Chine féodale, puis communiste, et le Manitoba catholique, les différences culturelles sont énormes. Et pourtant, le regard critique porté sur les normes sociales—obligations de la maternité, soumission au mari—rapproche les deux œuvres. Dès la première page de *La Mémoire de l'eau*, Lie-Fei, la grand-mère, apprend, en 1912, qu'« une femme qui faisait quelque chose était dangereuse [...], qu'une femme n'était bonne que lorsqu'elle avait un fils » (11, Chen souligne), alors que, dans *Rue Deschambault*, la mère commente avec des voisines le triste cas d'une femme qui, comme elles toutes, a trop d'enfants parce qu'« il fallait bien qu'elle fasse son devoir » (34), thème qui apparaît dans plusieurs nouvelles du recueil (« Petite Misère », « Les déserteuses », « Ma tante Térésina Veilleux »). Lorsque Lie-Fei est initiée à la hiérarchie sociale en vertu de laquelle « le fils doit obéir au père, le père au supérieur et le supérieur au roi », elle s'écrie avec joie : « Ah bon, je n'ai plus à écouter ma mère! » (12) Or si on s'empresse de lui rappeler que la mère prend le relais du père auprès de la petite fille, le lecteur a déjà saisi la relation conflictuelle à la mère qui est au centre du roman de Ying Chen comme de l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy.

Mais avant d'aborder ce sujet, attardons-nous un instant au ton sur lequel Ying Chen fait sa critique sociale. Pas plus que la grand-mère, qui semble peu se formaliser de l'autorité masculine à condition d'échapper à celle de sa mère, la narratrice n'exprime sa colère, sa révolte devant ce que le texte décrit pourtant comme de grandes injustices. On pourrait en dire autant, de façon générale, du ton de Christine dans *Rue Deschambault*. Comme la Gabrielle Roy de l'œuvre publiée, et à la différence de celle des romans inédits, où éclate une critique féministe passionnée (Saint-Martin, *Voyageuse...*), Ying Chen préfère l'ironie à la colère et le chuchotement au cri.<sup>16</sup> Sa narratrice montre longuement les injustices, mais sans les commenter, de façon à nous inviter à tirer nos propres conclusions. À l'innocence de la jeune Christine qui dévoile, sans la comprendre encore, la souffrance des femmes—on voit là tout le parti qu'on peut tirer, narrativement parlant, de la fausse naïveté d'une toute jeune fille—correspond le ton neutre, parfois durement ironique mais de façon entièrement implicite, de Ying Chen. À propos de l'opération destinée à bander les pieds de la grand-mère, la narratrice affirme que l'aïeule « apprendrait plus tard qu'elle n'avait pas plus

souffert de l'opération que les autres petites filles, parce que c'était un grand spécialiste qui s'en était chargé moyennant une grosse somme » (16). Le décalage temporel (« elle apprendrait plus tard ») souligne l'écart entre la réaction spontanée de la petite fille et la soumission qu'on lui inculque; la mention de l'autorité masculine et du prétendu pouvoir de l'argent (la petite fille ne souffre pas de la mutilation si on paie bien le médecin) montre à quel point cette enfant, et les femmes qui l'obligent à subir l'opération, évoluent dans un monde d'hommes. Mais la critique sociale demeure implicite, comme dans le passage suivant, tiré de *Rue Deschambault* : « Du reste, je m'étonnai beaucoup en ce temps-là que, trop malade pour soigner elle-même ses enfants, ma tante ne le fût pas assez pour ne point passer tout son temps à en mettre au monde » (163). La confusion syntaxique de ce passage mime l'incompréhension de la petite fille, tournant en dérision la prétendue logique des adultes et donc, par implication, tout un système social. Le monde des grandes personnes, chez les deux romancières, est celui de l'hypocrisie, de l'absurdité et de l'injustice. Cela dit, la révolte de la narratrice n'éclate jamais ouvertement, dans la colère et la violence (comme ce sera la cas, entre autres, dans *L'Ingratitude*, ainsi que dans les inédits royens). Elle s'exprime par des moyens indirects, tels que l'humour, l'ironie et les jeux de la perspective enfantine. La contestation sociale est donc, chez Ying Chen et Gabrielle Roy, à la fois très nette et feutrée, comme si la narratrice n'avait pas voulu s'engager à fond.

Tout au long de *La Mémoire de l'eau*, il est ainsi question des pieds bandés de la grand-mère, symbole de l'asservissement des femmes. On pense bien sûr à Éveline, la mère de Christine, qui, sans être mutilée physiquement, est présentée à maintes reprises comme prisonnière de la maison conjugale et de la maternité. Peut-être la scène des talons hauts chez Chen rappelle-t-elle aussi « Les bijoux » de *Rue Deschambault*, où on voit Christine, adolescente, se parer comme une idole et se perdre dans la contemplation de son image dans la glace : pour être libre, il faut échapper à l'emprise de la norme, représentée chez Roy par le miroir et le maquillage, chez Chen par les chaussures à talon haut et le regard critique du fiancé de la narratrice, auquel elle tient à plaire.

L'oppression que subissent la mère et la grand-mère est ainsi au centre du texte de la fille et détermine son propre trajet narratif. Chez Chen comme chez Roy, il s'agit, au fond, de se sauver la vie en refusant de ressembler à la mère, qui incarne l'asservissement des femmes et le conformisme social dont pourtant elle est la première à souffrir. Pour devenir une femme libre, pour échapper aux contraintes sociales, il n'y a qu'un seul moyen : rompre

avec les origines, partir. On ne peut devenir soi-même qu'ailleurs, très loin. C'est ainsi que Christine, comme Gabrielle Roy, choisit le départ pour l'Europe, et que la narratrice de Ying Chen ne voit d'autre possibilité que l'émigration, même si, au dernier moment, elle doute également de cette solution. Le rêve qu'elle fait dans l'avion, et dans lequel son fiancé lui enjoint de rester en Chine afin de demeurer une vraie femme, lui inspire un vif désir de fuir; si les raisons du départ ne sont jamais expliquées, sinon de cette façon indirecte, on comprend qu'il s'agit d'échapper aux origines et, plus particulièrement, aux contraintes sociales liées à la féminité et au mariage. Quitter la mère et ce qu'elle représente, partir en Europe ou en Amérique : c'est ainsi qu'on naît à soi-même. *La Mémoire de l'eau*, comme *La Route d'Altamont*, se clôt ainsi par la rupture, définitive ou en voie de le devenir.

Et pourtant, celle qui est partie au loin fera un retour par le truchement de l'écriture. On sait à quel point la mère est centrale dans les écrits de Gabrielle Roy. Dans *La Mémoire de l'eau*, on voit le même retour vers les origines surtout féminines, le même besoin de consigner la vie des générations passées. Comme l'œuvre royenne est issue, du moins en partie, des récits de la mère,<sup>17</sup> *La Mémoire de l'eau* repose dans une large mesure sur les récits de la grand-mère, du moins implicitement, puisqu'elle est seule à pouvoir renseigner la narratrice sur sa jeunesse lointaine. Ainsi, par-delà la rupture nécessaire à une existence autonome, l'écriture marque un retour (« refaire ce qui a été quitté », selon le titre de François Ricard, emprunté à Roy elle-même), un hommage, voire un prolongement de la vie et des paroles des aïeules.

La perte, la mort scandent ces deux romans : mort de la grand-mère au début de *La Route d'Altamont* et mort de la mère à la fin, mort de la grand-mère à la fin de *La Mémoire de l'eau*. Ici encore, l'écriture, acte de rupture, permet de célébrer des retrouvailles par-delà la mort et la distance. Les dernières lignes de *La Mémoire de l'eau* ressemblent de façon saisissante à celles de *La Route d'Altamont* :

Ma mère déclina très vite. Sans doute mourut-elle de maladie, mais peut-être aussi un peu de chagrin comme en meurent au fond tant de gens.

Son âme capricieuse et jeune s'en alla en une région où il n'y a sans doute plus ni carrefours ni difficiles points de départ. Or peut-être y a-t-il encore par là des routes, mais toutes vont par Altamont. (Roy, *Route*, 156)

Grand-Mère Lie-Fei est morte de vieillesse six mois après mon départ. D'après ma mère, grand-mère avait été contente que je parte, bien qu'elle crût que « l'odeur de l'eau était partout la même ».

« La petite me ressemble, avait dit grand-mère. » (Chen, 133)

La mort liée de près au départ de la femme plus jeune, voire provoquée par lui, le recours au paysage métaphorisé (collines, eau),<sup>18</sup> l'évocation finale des trois générations de femmes (directement présentes chez Chen, métaphoriquement chez Roy à travers les collines étroitement liées à la grand-mère)<sup>19</sup> et, enfin, l'expression d'un espoir timide (car toutes les routes ne passeront pas forcément par Altamont et le recommencement est peut-être illusoire) : cette note mi-douce, mi-amère clôt les deux livres en rappelant ces vies enchevêtrées et leur renaissance douloureuse dans l'écriture.<sup>20</sup>

Des livres, donc, composés de portraits de famille, de la juxtaposition desquels commence à émerger l'identité personnelle; des « romans » formés de textes brefs qui disent, sans doute mieux qu'une forme plus unifiée, la mouvance identitaire, le départ, le jeu entre continuité et rupture. Des livres qui, sous couvert de raconter de petites histoires de famille, proposent une profonde méditation sur l'identité, sur le temps, sur la mort.<sup>21</sup> Des livres dont la narratrice dénonce, de manière discrète mais ferme, l'oppression des femmes; des œuvres où le départ, l'exil permettent de rompre avec le destin des aïeules. Des livres de rupture, donc, puis de retour dans et par l'écriture, de retrouvailles, par-delà la mort, avec celles qu'il a pourtant fallu quitter pour vivre. Connivence manifeste, donc, entre deux esthétiques, deux sensibilités voisines.

## **Conclusion**

Nous avons vu les moyens variés qu'ont inventés les créatrices pour rendre hommage à Gabrielle Roy : mise en scène de la romancière comme personnage chez Jovette Marchessault, reprise d'un personnage royen chez Francine Noël, ou encore multiplication des échos textuels chez France Théoret. Pour ce qui est de Ying Chen, il faudrait sans doute faire la part des convergences qui relèvent soit de l'écriture des femmes de façon générale— Gabrielle Roy n'a pas le monopole de la réflexion sur le rapport mère-fille, par exemple—, soit de la problématique migrante, notamment l'exil et le retour.. Cependant, j'espère avoir mis au jour des résonances, une sorte de « rencontre » textuelle plus profonde, plus intime.

Ainsi, cette « rencontre » avec l'œuvre royenne réunit des auteures de générations différentes (Marchessault est née en 1938, Ying Chen en 1961) et aux projets d'écriture très dissemblables. Si Gabrielle Roy inspire les écrivains des deux sexes, elle semble intéresser les femmes pour des raisons qui leur sont propres : alors que les hommes influencés par elle soulignent soit la beauté de son écriture, soit l'émotion vive qu'elle sait susciter chez le lecteur,



les femmes semblent frappées avant tout par sa vision féministe. (Chez les deux sexes cependant, la question de la classe sociale et de la légitimité revient souvent : autant Michel Tremblay que Francine Noël et France Théoret la soulèvent.) La difficile relation mère-fille, l'oppression des femmes, les études, le travail et le voyage comme moyen d'y échapper : voilà les thèmes auxquels elles reviennent sans cesse en les mettant à jour. Venues à l'écriture trente ou quarante ans après Gabrielle Roy, à une époque où la vie des femmes se transforme, où les institutions même les mieux établies chavirent, Marchessault, Noël, Théoret, Chen et d'autres sont naturellement en mesure d'aller plus loin qu'elle. Mais elles ne l'oublient pas, bien au contraire.

Comme le rappelle encore Suzanne Lamy (34), l'intertextualité au féminin fonde une communauté de femmes créatrices, empêche l'effacement de leurs paroles et rend visibles et actuelles les écritures de femmes. On peut ajouter que, pratiquée de façon intergénérationnelle—Lamy, nous l'avons vu, envisageait davantage l'échange entre contemporaines—, l'intertextualité facilite la venue à l'écriture, permet de mesurer les progrès accomplis et ouvre la voie à un dialogue avec le passé qui échappe au piège du matricide.

#### NOTES

- 1 Selon Harold Bloom, la relation des écrivains vis-à-vis de leurs prédécesseurs, si nombreux et si prestigieux qu'ils semblent inégalables, tient d'un conflit oedipien dans lequel le « fils » doit montrer qu'il dépasse, voire anéantit, le père. Sandra Gilbert et Susan Gubar affirment que les femmes qui écrivent manquent plutôt de modèles féminins et préfèrent au matricide symbolique une célébration des créatrices du passé.
- 2 Voir Duchaine sur Tremblay et Socken sur Poulin.
- 3 Le « matricide » féministe, en l'occurrence la tentative d'éliminer en soi l'héritage empoisonné de la soumission enseignée par la mère, constitue un temps fort de l'écriture des femmes des années 1970. Voir Saint-Martin, *Nom*.
- 4 Il serait intéressant d'étudier de la même façon la postérité littéraire d'Anne Hébert, qui a touché également de nombreuses créatrices.
- 5 Pour une analyse du contenu féministe des romans inédits de Gabrielle Roy, voir Robinson, « Féminité » et Saint-Martin, « La critique » et *Prisonnière*.
- 6 Voir aussi Nutting.
- 7 Qu'on puisse parler d'une rencontre directe est chose presque certaine puisque, entre 1989 et 1991, Ying Chen a fait d'abord des cours de propédeutique, ensuite une maîtrise en création littéraire à l'Université McGill, où plusieurs professeurs font lire les œuvres de Gabrielle Roy, et notamment *La Route d'Altamont*, à leurs groupes. Comment imaginer qu'une nouvelle venue décidée à s'établir au Québec et à y écrire en français des œuvres de fiction pourrait passer à côté des textes de Gabrielle Roy, surtout dans un tel milieu d'études?

- 8 La longueur moyenne des textes est d'environ 12 pages chez Ying Chen et de 14 pages chez Gabrielle Roy; *La Mémoire de l'eau* comporte 10 textes ou chapitres, *Rue Deschambault* 18.
- 9 Pour les jeux temporels chez Gabrielle Roy, voir Crochet, Phi et Wicktorowicz. On trouve dans *La Mémoire de l'eau* aussi quelques rappels énonciatifs de la présence de la narratrice, que ce soit de simples déictiques (« Aujourd'hui, mon père ne peut évoquer cet événement sans manifester une admiration évidente pour son père » [44]), une interprétation ou un jugement de la narratrice (« De toute façon je décèle, dans la décision que mon grand-père avait prise de s'exiler... » [45]; « ...grand-mère avait une cousine qu'elle considérait comme sa sœur et dont le nom me semble très beau » [51]) ou encore une référence à l'exactitude de la mémoire (« Elle devait être la petite-nièce de mon défunt grand-oncle, si je ne me trompe pas » [55]).
- 10 Gabrielle Roy a travaillé sporadiquement à ce roman, resté inédit, entre 1945 et 1965. Pour la datation des manuscrits, une étude génétique approfondie et une édition critique, voir Robinson, « Édition ».
- 11 Ying Chen reprendra ce thème—qui mériterait une lecture comparée approfondie—dans *Les Lettres chinoises*, son deuxième roman, notamment par le biais du personnage de Sassa.
- 12 Pour des études de la dimension interculturelle des écrits de Gabrielle Roy, voir Chung, Dansereau, L'Hérault, Resch et Shek.
- 13 Voir Green et, pour une étude approfondie du rapport entre les générations féminines chez trois écrivaines migrantes, Brunet. Pour la relation mère-fille chez Roy, voir Bourbonnais, Gilbert Lewis, Harvey, Saint-Martin, *Nom* et Smart.
- 14 À propos du parallèle entre pieds bandés et chaussures à talons hauts, voir aussi Lequin.
- 15 Pour des lectures féministes de Gabrielle Roy, voir aussi Clemente, Green, Pascal, Saint-Martin, *Voyageuse* et Whitfield.
- 16 Pour l'ironie de Gabrielle Roy, voir Joubert.
- 17 Voir Boucher, Bourbonnais, « Gabrielle Roy, de la redondance... », Gilbert Lewis, Harvey, Pascal, Saint-Martin, *Nom*.
- 18 Chez Roy, ce sont les collines qui, liées au Québec natal de la grand-mère, évoquent le voyage initiatique de Christine et de sa mère (Boucher 50-52) et le retour vers les origines; dans *La Mémoire de l'eau*, c'est la rivière aux eaux boueuses dans lesquelles poussent les lotus qui sont le symbole des pieds bandés, donc de l'asservissement des femmes. L'odeur de la rivière poursuit les personnages où qu'ils aillent, rappel à la fois des origines féminines et de la nécessité d'y échapper. (À ce sujet, voir Brunet.)
- 19 Dans certaines scènes de *La Route d'Altamont*, on voit la mère servir de porte-parole de la grand-mère exactement de cette façon.
- 20 On pourrait encore évoquer ici le jeu des dédicaces: *Bonheur d'occasion* est dédié à Mélina Roy et *La Mémoire de l'eau* « à ma grand-mère »; la première nouvelle de *La Route d'Altamont*, « Ma grand-mère toute-puissante », ressuscite cette figure en lui prêtant une force quasi mythique.
- 21 Pour Robert Vigneault, Gabrielle Roy pratique une forme hybride, « entre récit et essai », en intégrant dans la fiction une méditation existentielle ou encore un questionnement sur les mystères de la vie.

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## The Wings of Young Fairies

An infusion made from the wings of young fairies can cure cancer. Facing into the setting sun mid-October or mid-May, breathe in the peaceful smell of distant rain. Sit or stand. Raise the cup chosen from memory's cupboard – perhaps the mug your father used at breakfast or the hand-painted china used only for chocolate at Christmas. Be alone. With your eyes closed in the face of the warmth just as the sun dips away, kiss the lip of the cup as the sun kisses the lip of the earth goodnight. Take a moderate mouthful. Only one. Swallow. You will feel the wings flutter to the sickness. The fairies willingly give them up.

## News and Gender in Gabrielle Roy

**G**abrielle Roy featured the newspaper prominently in both her Montreal novels, *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945) and *Alexandre Chenevert* (1954), and continued such attention years later in the short story, "Un jardin au bout du monde" (1975). Within all three texts, the newspaper is used to characterize the husbands in Roy's fiction and their relationships with their wives: men react aggressively to newspapers and radio bulletins, connecting far more passionately with the world in general than with their family. Whether reacting to newspapers, or more generally, men demonstrate macho reactions conforming to an ideology of dominant masculinity. Roy's women are defined by very different texts, so that all three works exhibit a strongly gendered dichotomy.

"Un jardin au bout du monde" allows a ready distillation of elements signified by newspapers. The story depicts an old Ukrainian couple, Stépan and Martha Yaramko, living in an isolated corner of Alberta where they spend every evening in the same way. While Martha, who is devoted to her flower garden, reads the seed section in an Eaton's catalogue, Stépan's attention and emotional commitment are absorbed by the newspaper: "Stépan, d'une pile d'un journal en langue ukrainienne imprimé à Codessa, tirait un vieux numéro, peu importait lequel, il les avait tous lus. Néanmoins, en enchaînant péniblement les mots et les phrases, il arrivait à se mettre encore en colère contre cet absurde effort des hommes partout dans le monde pour améliorer leur sort" (127). The husband's interest is in the world at large while his wife is concerned with the home and family.<sup>1</sup> The difference between the two is so acute that they no longer speak, thus providing, as Pierrette

Daviau has observed, an “image parfaite de l’incommunicabilité” (81). Trapped in this mute relationship, Martha suffers the profound alienation of one whose deeper feelings remain uncommunicated: “Comment font donc les sentiments que l’on n’exprime jamais, qui vivent repliés dans les plus lointaines retraites de l’âme, que l’on ne nomme même pas, comment font-ils pour ne pas mourir?” (128). Stépan’s alienation fuels his egotism, filling him with a sense of superiority over a world he views with contempt. He reacts with anger and his aggressive feelings are often turned against his wife. Martha’s illness and approaching death produce, however, a change of heart in her husband, whose softened approach finds expression in a strongly suggestive gesture. He sacrifices his old newspapers to her flower garden, protecting her plants from the frost by wrapping them with his precious nightly reading matter. The conclusion of this story questions Stépan’s whole value system and perception of reality. For many years, he had scorned Martha’s flower garden,<sup>2</sup> preferring instead what was reported to him by newspapers, despite their being so out of date as to have lost all relevance. His reversal of values at the end of the story shows that he has at last grasped the greater importance of a real and present relationship.

As in “Un jardin au bout du monde,” both Roy’s city novels depict males strongly interested in newspapers. In *Bonheur d’occasion*, men are pictured with one tucked under the arm (253) or under the epaulette of a uniform (396). They are shown reading the newspaper in a variety of settings: in the *Deux Records* café (44, 154, 252) which has “de nombreux journaux, hebdomadaires, quotidiens, illustrés et périodiques” hanging above the counter (41); at home (91, 366); in the street (252, 401); in overcrowded streetcars where passengers are described in such a limited way—“des bras levés, des journaux dépliés, des dos affaissés” (78)—as to be reduced visually to the mere essence of newspaper readers. The radio equivalent, regular news bulletins, are even more pervasive since they fill the air and completely surround the city dweller, as Emmanuel finds when he walks the streets:

De chaque boutique, grande ouverte sur son passage, s’échappait une voix métallique et forte. Une phrase se perdait; de la boutique suivante, la même voix continuait une autre phrase décousue. Cent appareils de radio, à sa droite, à sa gauche, derrière lui, devant lui, lançaient des bribes de nouvelles et faisaient de leur mieux pour lui rappeler l’agonie dans laquelle le monde se débattait. (316)<sup>3</sup>

Newspapers or radio bulletins are equally present in *Alexandre Chenevert*. Since this novel focuses far more on a single character than does *Bonheur d’occasion*, the role of newspapers is largely shown through Alexandre’s

intense preoccupation with them. His mind overflows with current affairs. From the cold war to a dockers' strike, from the arms race to a plane crash, reports so crowd Alexandre's mind that his view of the world matches the disjointed opening scenes of an MGM newsreel: "Un lion rugit; une danseuse lève la cuisse, un tank s'enflamme" (9-10). Alexandre has fallen completely under the spell of newspapers, which are shown to dominate the city: a newspaper van goes by with its advertising hoarding: "LISEZ L'AVENIR DU PAYS" (206); a kiosk selling newspapers "de presque toutes les capitales du monde" offers headlines which cry out to be read (206-07). The disembodied voice of the newsreader becomes so familiar to Alexandre that each radio presenter has become one: "Or, cette voix de radio, à travers les années, paraissait la même à Alexandre, toujours souple, toujours persuasive" (12). Moreover, Alexandre participates himself in the dissemination of news by imitating the newsreader style over lunch. Newspaper in hand, Alexandre updates his friend Godias on world affairs, prefacing each point with a reference to his reading: "Je viens de lire" (51); "J'ai lu" (52); "As-tu lu?" (54). Though Godias is opposed to Alexandre's choice of newspaper, he is nonetheless devoted to another daily, *Le Pays*, a copy of which he brings to the cafeteria (56). The news has infiltrated city life to such a degree that, on three separate occasions, it forms part of the meal ritual. Thus the bank manager, Emery Fontaine, listens to "le journal parlé en beurrant ses toasts" (72); at the cafeteria, Alexandre places a newspaper against the salt shaker and, despite the horrifying headlines, proceeds to eat lunch: "Et tout en mangeant son pain, il lut que dix officiers étaient pendus en Palestine pour chaque condamné à mort" (49); in a café, taxi drivers listen robotically to horrifying news reports while eating their sandwiches: "Les mâchoires fonctionnaient au rythme des nouvelles énoncées" (206). For these taxi drivers, the news reader, unseen and enclosed within a sound-proof studio, has taken on a Big Brother status. The news has so intruded upon their lives that—"mâchant des paroles débitées par un speaker invisible" (206)—they seem to be eating the very words they hear.

Though ever present in both novels, the newspaper is read by men and not women. Thus while men in the *Deux Records* café are absorbed in their newspaper, the proprietor's wife, Anita Latour, prefers to leaf through a magazine (154). In *Alexandre Chenevert*, the contrast is again drawn along gender lines, Eugénie expressing impatience with her husband's fascination: "Je te l'ai déjà dit: tu lis trop, Alexandre! Des meurtres, des calamités" (19). Gendered reading choices are again evident in a scene from *Bonheur d'occasion*



where Rose-Anna's attention is caught by a newspaper hoarding: "Et cette femme, qui ne lisait jamais que son livre d'heures, fit une chose extraordinaire. Elle traversa rapidement la chaussée en fouillant déjà dans son sac à main; et à peine arrivée sur le trottoir d'en face, elle tendit trois sous au vendeur de journaux et dépla aussitôt la gazette humide qu'il lui avait remise" (239-40). The only time a woman buys a newspaper in either city novel is in this episode,<sup>4</sup> but Rose-Anna's sole motivation is to learn of news which may impact upon her son, a soldier who may soon be sent to war. Patricia Smart has seen that this episode clearly distinguishes masculine and feminine polarities in the novel: war, the topic most mentioned by newspapers in either novel, is thus sharply contrasted with maternal love (199). Rose-Anna's exclusive dependence on her prayer book is a natural extension of her maternal love<sup>5</sup> since it is easy to guess the subject of any prayer offered by this long-suffering and saintly mother. Eugénie Chenevert also eschews newspapers. She greatly prefers radio serials over news broadcasts, Alexandre often protesting "en agitant les feuilles de son journal" (105). These serials are no doubt highly sentimentalized dramas typical of the period. They reflect a strongly romantic streak in Eugénie which is especially evident following her hospitalization for a menopausal complaint. Her illness seems to have produced avid longings worthy of a Madame Bovary. Everything that Alexandre has failed to provide—"une tendresse constamment visible, des prévenances, la joie d'être comprise entièrement, la gaieté, des paroles exquis, des soins charmants"—Eugénie "le voulait pour ainsi dire sur-le-champ" (90). Newspapers and radio serials are thus contrasted in order to differentiate this couple, one whose attention is fully trained upon world events and the other who desires the "attention profonde et constante" (102) of a husband who seems the very antithesis of the romantic hero she seeks.

Men are so preoccupied with the world beyond their home that, as with Yaramkos, all verbal communication seems to have ceased within their relationships. At home with Rose-Anna following his latest loss of employment, Azarius shuts himself away in a world of dreams. Significantly, Rose-Anna's gaze is fixed on Azarius while his own attention is entirely consumed by the outside world, as shown by his opened newspaper: "Elle le regarda fumer sa cigarette par petites bouffées, assis tranquillement auprès du poêle de cuisine, le journal de la veille déplié sur ses genoux, et elle éprouva de l'amertume" (91). Rose-Anna's dependence upon her husband is as evident as Azarius' remoteness, and while she is unhappy because of her husband's unreliability, he cheerfully excludes her from his mind and recalls a life beyond the home:

“Il eut un soupir de bien-être, songeant à ces matins froids où, de son taxi en station, il guettait les passants” (91). It is extraordinary that in the midst of Rose-Anna’s anger about her husband’s unemployment, Azarius can so unashamedly find comfort in gilded memories of what has actually been a highly erratic work record. The newspaper is thus used to picture this man’s ability to transport himself away from the demands of a relationship and to invent a rewarding identity through endless “jongleries” (92). Unable to penetrate Azarius’ universe of dream and self-deceit, Rose-Anna sees her husband as perpetually committed to “vivre dans le vague” (172). Little wonder that, as we saw with Martha Yaramko, Rose-Anna despairs of ever being able to communicate within her marriage: “Au fond, la plus grande souffrance de sa vie de mariage tenait peut-être justement à ce sentiment que, dans les décisions importantes, elle ne pouvait prendre appui sur aucun des siens” (172).

Eugénie Chenevert is no less frustrated by an inability to share her more intimate feelings. Following a period in hospital where she chats freely with other women, she is tempted to do the same with her husband: “Une idée lui ayant traversé la tête, elle pensait: ‘Tiens, cela intéressera peut-être Alexandre’” (105). But Alexandre, forever concentrated on the calamitous state of the world, discourages her with his “visage maussade” (105). Thus the Chenevert marriage anticipates its mute Albertan counterpart in “Un jardin au bout du monde,” Alexandre at one point concluding: “Pour s’entendre entre mari et femme, entre collègues, entre amis . . . , il ne devait y avoir que ce moyen: le silence” (92).

Not only is the newspaper allowed to monopolize a husband’s mind and thus frustrate his wife, but it also supports the conventions of the dominant male. Reporting as it does in *Bonheur d’occasion* on World War II, the newspaper is seized upon by men to boost their ego and aggression. At home, Azarius is a very different being from the voluble and self-opinionated habitué of the *Deux Records* café. This inconsistency in his behaviour is especially evident in his voice:

Dans cet homme contrit, tassé auprès du feu, il eût été difficile de reconnaître, même de loin, le discoureur des Deux Records. . . . Sa voix même n’était plus celle qu’il employait au dehors pour donner son avis, exprimer ses vues audacieuses et généreuses. C’était un timbre conciliant, presque humble et où l’on aurait pu saisir parfois un accent de défaite. (92-93)

As Lori Saint-Martin has seen in this novel, women are excluded from male “lieux de parole” where affairs of the world are discussed (Portrait 521). Thus in the café, Azarius’ voice is restored. He takes an active part in

conversations which, informed by the newspaper and the radio, centre almost exclusively on war. Its proprietor, Sam Latour, sets the tone: “il aimait parler guerre et politique” (42). He even plays at war with Azarius, the café counter standing for the Maginot line which separates the two men, one representing France and the other Germany. As the novel progresses, aggression intensifies within both these men, as they feed on news from abroad. In an extended description of Latour’s response to a news broadcast, Roy depicts to the point of caricature a man fully consumed by hatred. He swears: “Cré bateau . . . Quand est-ce qu’ils vont les arrêter, ces diables de Boches-là?” (250); he adopts threatening poses: “Sam hochait la tête et ponctuait ses réflexions d’un balancement de ses fortes épaules ou bien portait les mains sur son ventre et tirait sa ceinture d’un geste belliqueux et déterminé” (251); his fury recalls “de grosses colères d’enfant” (251) and “un béliet irrité” (251). Earlier a “gros homme jovial, les joues pleines, le rire facile” (42), Sam Latour has now become so dehumanized that he roars like a lion (252) and has adopted an entirely bestial body language: “Il donnait des coups de mâchoire en tirant sur son col comme un animal pris dans les brancards” (252). Latour’s bellicosity is matched, however, and even exceeded by Azarius who displays an increasing appetite for newspapers: “Azarius en achetait maintenant un ou deux tous les jours” (366). In the climactic last chapter, both men are at the railway station to see off the departing soldiers. It is the only occasion when Latour is seen outside his café, which has become a kind of war headquarters, complete with a map of Europe pinned to the wall (252). But for all Latour’s bravado and “violentes invectives” (396) against the enemy, his voice is not the loudest. Among soldiers heading off for war, Azarius is the most aggressive, his booming voice reflecting a fully restored confidence:

Mais plus forte et persuasive que toutes s’élevait la voix d’Azarius Lacasse. Avec l’autorité d’un sergent, il allait entre les militaires et les apostrophait en petits groupes. “Dites-leur, en France, de tenir bon d’icitte à ce qu’on arrive.” Il tira un journal plié sous l’épaulette de son uniforme. Il l’ouvrit en grand et découvrit une manchette: Les alliés se replient sur Dunkerque. Alors Azarius frappa de tout son poing dans la feuille qui se fendit. (396)

Newspaper in hand, Azarius then approaches a young soldier: “Toi . . . , t’es bon pour en tuer une trentaine, hein, d’Allemands!” (397). Azarius desires more, however, than a military victory. He wants the opportunity to kill Germans personally: “Mais tue-les pas toutes, laisse-moi-z-en une couple, toujours. Finissez-la pas trop vite c’tte guerre-là!” (397).

A similar self-importance and aggression<sup>6</sup> are evident in Alexandre, and, like Azarius, he will use newspapers to urge himself on. His apparently altruistic concern for the world is actually motivated, as Paula Ruth Gilbert has noted, by an “egocentric superiority” and a hostile intolerance toward those, especially Eugénie and Godias, who fail to share his understanding (104-06). Thus the insomniac Alexandre assumes a quarrelsome superciliousness over his wife who manages to sleep so soundly at night: “Pour dormir aussi complètement ne fallait-il pas être sans réflexion et sans réelle sensibilité?” (13). Likewise with Godias over lunch, Alexandre’s condescension knows no bounds. He lectures his friend endlessly, “en marquant sa supériorité par un petit coup sec du menton” (53) and is deeply offended that Godias has failed “s’enrichir au contact des pensées, des lectures qu’il lui communiquait” (54). Not only does Alexandre’s gesture with his chin recall that of Sam Latour, but the bank teller has also taken on Latour’s animal belligerence: “Le nez assez long, un peu recourbé, lui donnait quelque ressemblance avec ces oiseaux de proie très solitaires, peut-être malheureux, et que l’on dit méchants” (15). He also shares with the café owner the same abusive expression when apostrophizing enemy nations, both men using the term “traîtres” (*Alexandre* 18, *Bonheur* 243, 244).

In the final chapters of the novels, Alexandre behaves like Stépan Yaramko in valuing more dearly those closest to him than does the world at large. Azarius’ enlistment is a clear affirmation of a militaristic evolution. These starkly different choices are in part determined by how these men come to regard the truth and relevance of newspapers. In *Bonheur d’occasion*, men view newspapers as dogma, as evident in Alphonse’s reasons for enlisting: “Y a de l’avenir dans l’armée! que je me disais. Puisque le petit gars et le vieux et tous les journaux dans la ville le disent, ça doit être vrai” (328). Azarius’ increasing identification with what he reads in the newspaper eventually leads him as well to join the army. Though at first, self-delusion goes no further than his opinionated conversational style at the *Deux Records* café. He readily admits to Jean Lévesque that he is too old to go to war: “Ne trouvez-vous pas que c’est le devoir de la jeunesse d’aller se battre? Ah, si j’avais encore mes vingt ans!” (46). Azarius’ envy of young men is explained by the strong community approval accorded to those who, like his son, Eugène, have enlisted. Fittingly, in the *Deux Records* café, a number of men offer Eugène their “muette approbation” (252) now that he has joined the army, so transforming this hitherto undistinguished individual’s perception of himself into that of an almost mythical hero: “Il était la jeunesse vaillante et

combative en qui l'âge mûr, la vieillesse, les faibles, les irrésolus ont placé leur confiance. Un défenseur des opprimés, des femmes, des vieillards, voilà ce qu'il était. Le bras vengeur de la société outragée. Dans ses prunelles jaillit une ardeur agressive" (252). If the aging Azarius is to become such a valorous figure, he must firstly reappropriate youth. Once he finally decides to enlist, he at first keeps it from his wife, but she, ever intuitive, senses the man's rejuvenation: "Il allait d'un pas plus hardi, plus vif" (365). Azarius' behaviour warns Rose-Anna that something is brewing in the "inconceivable jeunesse de cette nature" (366). When, with unbridled jingoism, Azarius bids farewell to fellow soldiers at the railway station, his identity has completely merged with that of a young soldier. The transformation is physically evident, as Emmanuel observes. Not only has Azarius recaptured the vitality of youth, but Emmanuel also notices that he has also thrown off the weight of married responsibility: "Était-ce l'homme qu'il avait vu profondément accablé, il n'y avait pas plus d'une semaine? Était-ce le mari de Rose-Anna? Mais cet homme paraissait aujourd'hui à peine plus âgé que lui-même . . . Une vigueur émanait de lui, presque irrésistible" (397). This fictitious self overrides all else, even the pain he will cause Rose-Anna by enlisting, self-deceit extending to the belief that he is sacrificing for his wife. The full extent of Azarius' self-delusion may be gauged by the strong similarity between how he now regards himself and the reconstructed self-image Eugène had derived from joining the army:

Il évoqua jusqu'aux champs de bataille fumants de sang humain, mais où un homme se révélait dans sa force. Il eut un grand besoin d'aventures, de périls, de hasards, lui qui avait si misérablement échoué dans les petites choses. Et même, lui qui s'était trouvé incapable de secourir le malheur qui l'entourait, il fut saisi d'une fièvre intrépide à la pensée de combattre les grandes afflications ravageant le monde. (393)

Within this distorted view of reality, Azarius conforms to the model of social masculinity, assuming the same youthfully heroic attributes as his son: strength, fearlessness and idealism.

While Azarius is drawn more and more into the world of macho fantasy, Alexandre inhabited this world from the outset. He becomes so worked up about international affairs and so self-important that he must remind himself, and then only grudgingly, that problems such as the Palestinian conflict are "hors de sa compétence et de sa responsabilité" (14). Likewise, he very reluctantly concedes that war, treaties, and the atomic bomb, "rien de tout cela n'était au pouvoir d'Alexandre" (14). This ridiculously inflated view of

himself explains his outrage that “l’on pourrait faire la guerre sans son consentement” (96). Like Azarius, Alexandre pictures himself as a hero: he is delighted by his physical resemblance with Gandhi (10) and declares that he would rather go to prison than pay his taxes in case they are used to buy armaments (97). This constant focus on the wider world allows Alexandre to imagine a connection with people he has never met, Godias taking offence at the “âpreté avec laquelle Alexandre défendait de parfaits inconnus” (52). But both men are worried about a world they do not know at first hand. They often quarrel “au sujet d’êtres et d’événements de plus en plus éloignés de leur entendement” (55). Such an almost exclusive concern for strangers to the detriment of his own family does not go unnoticed by Eugénie Chenevert when she criticizes her husband for fasting in response to Gandhi’s assassination: “on ne jeûne pas pour un Hindou” (219).

Alexandre Chenevert remains in thrall to newspapers, preferring them to everyday life, until a turning point in his development, catalyzed by the experience of lac Vert. Despite extensive analysis of this episode (Socken 11-36; 55-63, Shek 199, Ricard 92, Roy-Cyr and Della-Zazzera 119, Hughes 88-92), critics have failed to notice the place of newspapers in what happens at lac Vert. When Dr Hudon recommends a holiday for Alexandre, he seems to be advising a shedding of his patient’s old ways: “Partez, Monsieur Chenevert . . . Débarrassez-vous” (136). Alexandre wastes no time in taking the doctor’s advice, hurrying to buy a newspaper. Amazingly, this passionate consumer of news is interested only in the holiday classifieds: “Pour la première fois de sa vie, il ignore les manchettes, les gros titres. . . . Cette vaste humanité, toujours en brouille au sujet d’huile, de coton, de traités secrets, laissait tout à coup M. Chenevert indifférent, ennuyé. Il se plongea dans les petites annonces” (141). In the first chapter, this holiday is prefigured in Alexandre’s escapist musings about a retreat which, complete with forest, cabin, and the absence of newspapers and radio, will be perfectly realized at lac Vert: “Il imagine une forêt profonde. Il allait, se frayant un chemin dans un silence parfait. Il trouvait une cabane abandonnée. . . . Il n’y avait là ni journaux, ni radio, ni réveille-matin. Alexandre s’apaisait (20). The repetition of “ni” reinforces a definition by exclusion, heralding the actual experience of lac Vert, which will produce a purging: “absence de tout: des hommes, du passé, de l’avenir, du malheur, du bonheur; complet dépouillement” (157). Newspapers and the many concerns they constantly bring to Alexandre’s attention are thus set aside at lac Vert.

Once the influence of newspapers is removed, the masculine aspect of Alexandre's existence is weakened. He then becomes aware of the "maternelle sollicitude" (168) of nature, which, as Marie-Pierre Andron has shown, has a strongly feminizing effect upon Roy's characters (*imaginaire* 209-15). By visiting lac Vert, Alexandre experiences nature in a similar way to Martha in her garden. In her study of "Un jardin au bout du monde," Agnès Hafez-Ergaut has noted that Roy is among many writers who have portrayed the garden as a privileged space, symbolizing "la quête de soi," a process which leads the protagonist, like Voltaire's *Candide*, to accept "la réalité telle qu'elle est et non telle qu'il l'espère" (1). In this context, Edmondine Le Gardeur, the farmer's wife at lac Vert, functions, as noted by Andron, as a "leurre" and a "contre-modèle" in initiating Alexandre to a new view of life (*imaginaire* 30). He spends the evening with her and her children; though present, Edmondine's husband contributes nothing to the conversation and even dozes after dinner. It is thus an exclusively feminine influence which so affects Alexandre on this decisive occasion, helping him to throw off the old embittered self: "le vieil Alexandre ronchonneur, solitaire et insociable, était bien mort enfin. Un autre avait pris sa place" (187). Edmondine thus assists Alexandre to dismiss his tormented relationship with the world and to learn instead to cultivate real and intimate links to others: "Alexandre éprouva que lui-même, ce soir, en faveur d'Edmondine heureuse, en faveur d'un seul être heureux, pouvait enfin pardonner à Dieu la souffrance jetée si libéralement aux quatre coins du monde" (188). The lac Vert episode is clearly nuanced. After all, Alexandre's initial delight soon gives way to boredom (197). As well, Roy mocks the le Gardeur family for apparently finding such happiness in agricultural self-sufficiency (184). Though no advocate for such a narrow and selfish existence, the novelist nevertheless uses lac Vert to portray an important character development.

Upon his return to the city, Alexandre is once again drawn through habit to newspaper headlines. He is, however, quick to criticize himself: "Il avait très bien vécu sans [les manchettes de journaux] pendant quelques semaines. Pourquoi cette soudaine et fébrile curiosité pour les désastres?" (206) Similarly, when he encounters the taxi drivers listening to a news broadcast, Alexandre is shocked by the implausibility of the situation: "cette invraisemblable relation des humains plongeait Alexandre dans l'effarement" (206). Like Alexandre before lac Vert, these city workers are focused on people far away and unknown to them. Shortly after, Alexandre confirms more explicitly his new

detachment from world affairs: “Qu’ils s’occupent de *leur* guerre, de *leur* paix, de *leur* sécurité” (218). Later in hospital, as he begins to connect with those nearest to him, it is plain that Alexandre has let go of the wider world in favour of his family and acquaintances: “Il s’était démis assez volontiers de celles de ses responsabilités qui . . . ne le concernaient pas du tout: la Palestine, l’Inde surpeuplée et mal nourrie, la possibilité d’une autre guerre. C’était même curieux à quel point tout cela avait cessé de le tracasser” (276-77).

Wary now of his reaction to newspapers, Alexandre rejects his imaginary and grandiose role in the world they depict. Unlike the increasingly egotistical Azarius, Alexandre eventually acknowledges his own self-centredness: “il fut bouleversé de se reconnaître plus égoïste qu’il ne l’avait cru” (268). Moreover, he takes the next step and moves closer to others in his entourage, trying “se mettre à leur place” (277). As Andron has noted, Alexandre becomes “un instrument de réconciliation, un petit homme qui réconcilie les hommes entre eux et leur fait accepter leur nature humaine et leur dimension vulnérable” (1996, 134). Patricia Smart’s comment on Jean Lévesque, whose “égoïsme” she sees as the means by which “l’homme se distancie du maternel-féminin” (212), clearly applies to Azarius’ abandonment of Rose-Anna at the end of *Bonheur d’occasion*. By contrast, Alexandre, whose wife had earlier complained about their marriage and “l’égoïsme des hommes” (94), tries to reach out to her from lac Vert by writing a letter. Significantly, he finds, following his evening with Edmondine Le Gardeur, that he cannot compose the letter he had long wanted to publish in the newspaper. It is not surprising that this man of no special intellectual talent is incapable of “un si grand projet” (191). Instead of high-minded advice on world peace, Alexandre can only produce jargonized fragments of sentences, “en droite ligne de son journal à cinq cents” (193), and these he rejects. His letter to his wife, containing trite advice on health and financial prudence, and even the wish that Eugénie consider jam-making as practised by Edmondine Le Gardeur, is clearly no masterpiece of expression. Alexandre cannot have been entirely happy with it as he never posts it, leaving Eugénie to discover it accidentally in the pocket of her husband’s suit in the last days of his life. Nevertheless, beginning “Ma bonne Eugénie, tu vas me trouver bien changé . . .” (274), the letter clearly communicates enough of the dying man’s intimate self for his wife to regret the imminent loss of someone she barely knew (274-275) and they at last discover, albeit awkwardly, their love for each other (p. 275).<sup>7</sup> Roy thus returns to the technique of contrasting two very different texts so as to distinguish masculine and feminine attitudes. Significantly, Alexandre has now turned from an often aggressive obsession



with the wider world toward a sincere engagement with those around him. This change helps to explain his new contentedness and why, so unlike Azarius, he aspires to neither youth nor heroism in order to be happy. The memory of ascending Mont Royal as a young man, one of the “joies anciennes” (9) so yearned for at the beginning of the novel, has lost all its appeal. Simple daily experiences now fill Alexandre with a new joy, “plus de joie même qu’en sa jeunesse, d’être jeune et indemne” (221).

The concept of what a “real man” should be is fundamental to the texts studied: Gabrielle Roy’s male characters drawing upon newspapers and the news media generally to focus upon the wider world and bolster their self-image. Presumably, Roy’s attitude is ambivalent given her unquestioned solidarity with all people in such texts as *Fragiles lumières de la terre*. Nevertheless, she warns of the danger of a one-sided theoretical interest in world events. In these works, she stresses males detaching themselves from a partner to bond with a world represented by newspapers. The perception that newspapers and other forms of news convey the only reality creates in turn an inauthentic self-perception in which husbands assume an imagined heroism which blocks meaningful communication with a spouse. While Azarius constructs such a deluded idea of self that he finally participates in the military adventures which newspapers describe, Alexandre eventually stops deceiving himself. Although Alexandre had always sought truth in newspapers (12, 19, 56, 206, 207), he finds it at last in the here and now of personal relations. This new certitude shows in his very appearance. Alexandre’s face, earlier so forbidding, exudes a “douceur” (290) at the end of his life, his entourage gathering from him that “la seule assurance, sur terre, vient de notre déraisonnable tendresse humaine” (290). The same strongly emotive words, “douceur” and “tendresse,” also constitute Martha Yaramko’s sole reality, her flowers: “elles semblaient soutenir qu’elles étaient le vrai de cette vie, sa douceur, sa beauté, sa tendresse. Oh, les petites folles! Elles avaient l’air de prétendre être elles seules dans le vrai” (130). Like Alexandre at the end of the novel, Martha has no interest in distant places. For her, Edmonton is “irréelle” (129) and she even questions whether, beyond her own locality, “il y eût des villes, de vastes agglomérations, et que tout cela, le monde, les pays, les sociétés humaines, existait en vérité” (129). Martha is certain however that the “vie de son âme” (167) is in her garden. Similarly, Alexandre learns through his own experience of nature at lac Vert that reality resides in one’s immediate surroundings, in everyday relationships. Martha’s flowers, rather than newspapers, have the last word.

## NOTES

- 1 Martha's fascination with Eaton's catalogue in "Un jardin au bout du monde" clearly reflects her maternal devotion since, when she first began reading it, she longingly studied the fashion pages, picturing herself elegantly dressed and able to "rejoindre ses enfants qui n'auraient plus eu honte d'elle" (127). Having lost almost all contact with her children, Martha's present interest in it is restricted to the seed pages, since, for the old woman, flowers are a substitute for her offspring: "De la main, Martha les caressait, comme elle eût caressé quelqu'un de trop naïf, de trop jeune pour comprendre, un enfant par exemple. Les fleurs n'étaient-elles pas, par leur naïveté, une sorte d'enfance éternelle de la création" (130).
- 2 As Sophie Montreuil has observed, "Toute l'hostilité de Stépan est ainsi dirigée contre le jardin de sa femme, d'où l'impact du rapprochement final, lorsque c'est à lui que Martha doit de voir ses fleurs 'intactes pour un jour encore', jour qui sera celui de sa mort" (360). See also Lori Saint-Martin (Portrait 518).
- 3 See also 251 and 298.
- 4 Indeed the only other time that a woman even reads a newspaper in either novel is when, toward the end of *Bonheur d'occasion*, Rose-Anna glances indifferently at a newspaper headline which refers to war refugees. Typically, she relates this news item to her own family situation: "Comme nous . . . en marche . . . toujours en marche" (366).
- 5 She also reads religious pamphlets ("toute sa vie spirituelle s'alimentait à de sèches brochures de piété" [362]), but these may be seen as a complement to the prayer book. See also Nicole Bourbonnais' discussion of Rose-Anna's maternal devotion (107-08).
- 6 The strong link in *Alexandre Chenevert* between newspapers and male aggression is symbolically represented when Alexandre makes a hat out of a newspaper for his grandson, Paul. Placing the hat on his head, the little boy takes up an imaginary rifle and shouts: "Pan! je te tue. T'es mort" (107).
- 7 This relationship, though improved, is far from perfect and is not presented without some qualification. Despite the somewhat ethereal character of the last pages of the book, Roy does not idealize marriage in this novel any more than she does so elsewhere in her writings (see Pierrette Daviau's observations on the antithetical nature of the Royan couple [61-92]). When Alexandre romantically proposes that they could both live at lac Vert, Eugénie only agrees in the knowledge that his terminal illness will never allow it (279). Similarly, her objection at the end of the novel to the anonymous donor of a mass for her late husband sounds a false note, underlining her failure to appreciate Alexandre's full worth (289). Roy's ambivalence towards marriage may also explain why she prefers to show Alexandre in close communion with Edmondine at lac Vert and with Violette Leduc in hospital (282-83), rather than with his wife.

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# SHADOWS

## I

A mule and its shadow lengthen themselves  
down the track, carrying sacks  
of darkness and oranges. The farmer casts  
a giant insect before him, which leads him  
as though he were blind. Their heads bow  
in prayer or nostalgia, as the angelus tolls  
from memories of shadows of a church in the valley.  
Echoes of the bells ring from reflections  
in the mirrors of neon-lit bars in town.

## II

A gypsy lights a cigarette in the square.  
He ascends and blows away with its smoke.  
The moon gave him his silken suit.  
His ivory eyes perfectly unbutton  
his imperfectly lit lot. A telephone  
in an empty booth hangs up on itself.

# Writing the Montreal Mountain:

## Below the Thresholds at which Visibility Begins<sup>1</sup>

**A** city, Michel de Certeau argues in his chapter “Walking in the City” from *The Practice of Everyday Life*,<sup>2</sup> is not what can be seen from a vantage point above the city but rather a text composed by the movement of pedestrians through city space, a network of idiosyncratic routes and paths that do not figure on maps. De Certeau is interested in the “ordinary practitioners of the city” (93) who live “below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (93) and who “make use of spaces that cannot be seen” (93) from on high. Among these ordinary practitioners are “walkers . . . whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (93). Their movements, crossings, pauses, everyday routines, and unexpected choices constitute the city, yet are imperceptible or “illegible” (Highmore 6-8) high above it. For de Certeau, the map-like overview that “makes the complexity of the city readable and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text” (92) is inadequate to the task of representing or of managing the city. The city, he suggests, is an unruly network of embodied practices, a system of bodily articulations akin to language whose enunciations take the form of “pedestrian speech acts” (97), “walking rhetorics” (101), and “turns of phrase” (100). In the critical universe of de Certeau, the literary text has no monopoly on the process of *writing* the city.

Taking New York as an example, de Certeau observes that “To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city’s grasp” (92).<sup>3</sup> De Certeau does not discuss the circumstance of a city such as Montreal

which is organized around a mountain, a mountain with three distinct peaks,<sup>4</sup> on which people live and walk. He does not consider the possibility of a lookout arrived at by foot, or which is part of a home. The vantage point for de Certeau's "voyeurs" (92) is the 110th floor of a skyscraper. Nor does "Walking in the City" address the question of differential access to particular spaces or vantage points. Nevertheless, its critique of the "panorama-city" (93), its attention to those who constitute the city by walking it, and its understanding of the city as the "most immoderate of human texts" (92), a text written and rewritten by a myriad of practices, can guide a reading of the Montreal mountain in texts such as Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944), Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945), Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945), Roger Viau's *Au milieu, la montagne* (1951), Yves Thériault's *Aaron* (1954), MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1958), Gérard Bessette's *La bagarre* (1958), Leonard Cohen's *The Favourite Game* (1963) and Gail Scott's *Heroine* (1987).<sup>5</sup> In spite of their substantial differences, these works all stage—on the mountain—encounters between and within Montreal communities, and inquire into the relation of characters to urban social space.

Consistent with de Certeau's analysis, each of these works dramatizes the limits of looking, that is, the extent to which the city exceeds the occlusions and "imaginary totalizations produced by the eye" (93). At the same time, each complicates and nuances de Certeau's account of the view from above. More specifically, each constructs the lookout and the one who looks as part of the city. In most of these novels, the mountain is not simply a vantage point from which order and legibility are projected but a social space or, more accurately, three distinct social spaces, each organized by the meanings attributed to it, by the encounters, conversations, and reflections it makes possible and by the relations of power it exposes. Rather than reduce the character who looks to a pair of eyes, these typically present the viewer as an ordinary practitioner of the city, who *walks* up to or down from the lookout on the mountain. In other words, the voyeur is also a walker; little place is available for a binary formulation such as "voyeurs or walkers" (de Certeau 92). A character who is given a view from the mountaintop is often, although not always, a figure for the external narrator or a porte-parole for the writer. In any case, she helps dramatize the contingencies of the scene of looking as well as the tensions that structure the narrative—and the city of Montreal.

### Voyeurs and Walkers

In texts by Graham, Roy, and MacLennan published in the mid-1940s, “the mountain” is frequently Westmount and is associated with the economic and social privilege of the wealthiest members of the anglo-Protestant community.<sup>6</sup> In *Bonheur d’occasion*, set in 1940, Westmount is crucial to the text’s construction of Montreal’s social geography: “Mais au-delà, dans une large échancrure du faubourg, apparaît la ville de Westmount échelonnée jusqu’au faite de la montagne dans son rigide confort anglais. . . . Ici, le luxe et la pauvreté se regardent inlassablement, depuis qu’il y a Westmount, depuis qu’en bas, à ses pieds, il y a Saint-Henri. Entre eux s’élèvent des clochers” (36). This much-cited passage comes from a sequence in which Jean Lévesque is the focalizer. Jean never climbs the mountain but, like Florentine, he is heavily invested in moving up the social ladder (see Babby 53-55; Viselli 99). Yet to associate the mountain in Roy’s text primarily with this dream of upward mobility<sup>7</sup> is to overlook the relationship of Rose-Anna and of Emmanuel to the mountain. Rose-Anna and Emmanuel are the two characters who climb the mountain. They are also, Anthony Purdy suggests, the two focalizers who “stand out” in *Bonheur d’occasion*, the former for her “intuitively compassionate vision” and the latter for the questions he asks (44-45). Florentine and Jean, on the other hand, can only look up at the mountain, locked as they are within a dynamics of looking and being looked at which, in Purdy’s view, sustains consumer capitalism (50-52; see also Babby 13-16). Emmanuel, more than Rose-Anna, *looks* at the expensive stone, wood and metals of the Westmount mansions but his moments of voyeurism, like Rose-Anna’s, ultimately serve the novel’s critique of prevailing social relations.

Although dependent upon an external narrator who functions, in de Certeau’s terms, as voyeur, as all-seeing eye (92-93), *Bonheur d’occasion* is, at the same time, the product of walkers. The text is a trace of Roy’s walks into St. Henri as well as on the mountain (Ricard 222-224). When Rose-Anna walks up the mountain to see Daniel in hospital, for example, she stops and takes in the view of the city: “Rose-Anna contempla le spectacle à travers sa fatigue pendant qu’elle reprenait haleine; elle n’eût même pas l’idée de chercher au loin l’emplacement de sa maison. Mais, d’un coup d’oeil, elle mesura ce qui restait à gravir avant d’arriver à l’hôpital des enfants qu’on lui avait dit situé tout au haut de l’avenue des Cèdres” (225). Rather than lifting her clear of the city, the view confronts her with the material conditions of

her own life: factory smoke, inadequate space, and the monotony of rooftops. Her walk, which is made more difficult by her pregnant body, is prompted by necessity rather than leisure. As Rose-Anna walks through Westmount, chastising herself for not having been able to nourish her children better and, potentially, for having provoked Daniel's illness, Roy emphasizes the gap between living conditions in St. Henri and in Westmount, but also the interrelationship of the two, the extent to which the poverty of St. Henri is imbricated in the wealth of Westmount.

The mountain scenes in *Bonheur d'occasion* give a sense of what it might mean, in de Certeau's terms, to practice the city from below rather than from above. Roy's characters are, geographically and in social class, literally "from below," but practising the city from below is also a function of the text's attention to the corporeal and the sensorial, to the movement of bodies through the city, and to the pedestrian acts of "walking, wandering or 'window shopping'" (de Certeau 97). In *Bonheur d'occasion*, considerable attention is given, for example, to the experience of climbing Westmount. When Emmanuel walks up the hill, he carries St. Henri with him:<sup>8</sup> "Toute l'inquiétude, toute l'angoisse du bas quartier semblaient s'être collées à lui au départ, et plus il était monté haut, plus elles étaient retenues, tenaces à son corps" (336). The feeling of uneasiness and, eventually, of anger destabilizes him and leads him to ask: "Nous autres, ceux d'en bas qui s'enrôlent, on donne tout ce qu'on a à donner: peut-être nos deux bras, nos deux jambes. . . . Eux-autres, est-ce qu'ils donnent tout ce qu'ils ont à donner" (337). As Emmanuel leans on the parapet at the summit, he does not take in the whole city. Burdened by questions of social justice, he focuses on a light in St. Henri that might be the light on the house where Florentine lives. His climb, like Rose-Anna's, takes him closer to, rather than away from those in St. Henri.

If Roy's text brings the city below the hill to bear upon the scene from above, MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945) shows that one is never entirely "out of the city's grasp" (de Certeau 92), even in a Westmount mansion in the early 1930s:

From his library windows McQueen could look over the tops of his elms to the city. . . . Faintly, like the snore of an enormous beast he had managed to control but still distrusted, the noise of the city stole up the hill, through the branches of the trees and into his windows. It was a minor sound at this hour of the night, intermittent and far away. (269)

Although he stands at the top of the city, Huntly McQueen is high enough to escape its smoke, light, and noise yet too close for comfort: the "beast"



below requires careful management and control. As if to emphasize the continuities between McQueen's state of ease and the distress of the many on relief, the text goes on to present his reflections on the subject of unemployment: "Take the working classes. One was supposed to feel sorry for them, but candidly McQueen believed that their troubles were of their own making" (269). Throughout *Two Solitudes*, McQueen has access to extraordinary vistas, yet he is utterly blinkered. The scene in his Westmount home echoes an earlier scene during the last year of World War I, in his office on the top floor of a building on Saint James Street, an office which "overlooked one of the panoramas of the world" (105). "McQueen's satisfaction," the narrator explains, "constantly renewed itself through his ability to overlook all this" (105).

MacLennan, like Roy, uses scenes in which characters contemplate the city from above to question the presumption of the Westmount elite. However, whereas *Bonheur d'occasion* gives Rose-Anna and Emmanuel a view, and takes their perspectives seriously, *Two Solitudes* lends little credence to the perspective of a character such as Marius. Unlike Rose-Anna and Emmanuel, Marius never walks up the mountain. As Linda Leith points out, he is presented, like McQueen, as limited and retrograde in his vision (52). In *Two Solitudes*, Paul and Heather are the characters given a perspective from the mountain. In Leith's terms, they represent a "new wave of tolerance and liberalism that descends . . . from Yardley and from Athanase Tallard" (52).<sup>9</sup> Heather and Paul are able to stand for a new Canada because their sense of Montreal and of the social comes from walking the city as well as looking down at it.

Both characters, in different ways, draw attention to what cannot be seen from on high. Paul's intimate, walking knowledge of Montreal gives him a certain breadth of vision when he looks out at Montreal. His Montreal (of 1921) includes the East, the church spires, the islands, the Lachine canal, and the factories of Verdun, as well as the homes of the wealthy (251). What is more, his reflections, as he walks up Mount Royal, on changes in his social and economic circumstances (249-250) are in many ways more crucial to the narrative than the scene on the summit. Indeed, the lookout is only one stop on a long walk that takes him from the apartment he shares with his mother in the McGill ghetto, up the mountain, down the mountain, through downtown, to the port, and back home. In the chapter immediately following Paul's walk up Mount Royal, there is a parallel scene on Westmount, albeit more than ten years later, in which Heather leaves alone from a dinner party at McQueen's and looks out over Montreal: "Spread below, the city

was moon-coloured, the great sweep of it starred by lights; it was almost like looking upside down at a patch of night sky" (267). The Westmount vantage point, a location which allows Heather to see "only a portion of the city" (267), has its limits and she soon gives it up to be with Paul. What Heather sees at the lookout is less important than what she imagines, especially about the people in the houses around her: "She wondered how many of them were lying down there now with eyes closed in lightless rooms. How many of them were young, conscious of a warm, silent form beside them?" (268). Heather's attention to spaces of intimacy, part of the text's project of bringing Paul and Heather together, is also presented as a desire to live "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (de Certeau 93).

### Of Parks and Lovers

In addition to being associated with alternative views of the social, views which complicate the figure of the social ladder, the Montreal mountain is a space of leisure in works by Graham, Viau, Thériault, and MacLennan. The tension between mountain as social ladder and space of leisure can, to some degree, be attributed to the fact that Mount Royal is a public park and Westmount and Outremont, wealthy residential neighbourhoods. Compare, for example, Paul's walk up Mount Royal with Emmanuel's walk up Westmount. Whereas Emmanuel, like Marc Reiser in Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*, is acutely aware of being somewhere he does not belong, Paul is able to feel a part of Montreal in all its heterogeneity. Indeed, in the middle of the city, the Mount Royal park takes the place of the rocky, wooded spaces Paul used to know around the village of Saint-Marc. Only when Heather, whom Paul associates with the more affluent world of his childhood, rides by on horseback does he feel uneasy. In the novels of Graham, Viau, and Thériault, lovers meet, walk and, in some cases, ski on Mount Royal. At stake is the question of access to the spaces of Westmount and Outremont or, in the case of *Aaron*, access to worldly success. Such access is limited for at least one member of the couple and, in this way, these narratives of heterosexual love<sup>10</sup> expose the uneven social relations which structure Montreal.<sup>11</sup>

Before turning to *Earth and High Heaven*, *Au milieu, la montagne*, and *Aaron*, I would like to pause over MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night*, a novel which was written after the other three but whose idealization of the mountaintop scene provides a helpful contrast to the scenes structured through difference which I read in this section.<sup>12</sup> In *The Watch*, looking out at the city is the moment of union for two generations of anglo-Protestant

lovers. Sally, a member of the younger generation, describes the view of Montreal in the mid-1950s in terms reminiscent of those of Heather in *Two Solitudes*: “It was just as if the whole sky had turned upside down and fallen flat all around the mountain without putting the stars out” (39). Later in the novel, her mother Catherine recalls the evening of Jerome Martel’s proposal in the 1930s: “He took me up to the Lookout on Westmount Mountain and we stood staring down for hours like a single person” (152). Interestingly, MacLennan’s 1959 text makes no distinction between Westmount and Mount Royal. As George explains to Sally, ““When I was your age the top of Mount Royal had genuine prestige. Once I was there with a girl and she asked if this meant we ought to get married”” (39). In *The Watch*, the lovers have a sense of entitlement: they feel comfortable standing for hours at the mountain lookouts. Looking down at the city, they become one with each other by way of a single panoptic gaze and, in so doing, they contain the city’s unsettling heterogeneity, a heterogeneity which is marked elsewhere in the text by the rift between employed and unemployed, between French and English, between newcomers and those who “know the city in their bones” (255).

Graham’s *Earth and High Heaven*, whose events unfold during 1944, addresses the anti-Semitism which underwrites anglo-Protestant privilege in Westmount (see Ravvin; Coleman). Lawyer Marc Reiser turns away from a party in the Drake home in Upper Westmount, a party he is ready to leave, to take in the view of Montreal:

The whole city lay spread out below him, enchanting in the sunlight of a late afternoon in June, mile upon mile of flat grey roofs half hidden by the light, new green of the trees; a few scattered skyscrapers, beyond the skyscrapers the long straight lines of the grain elevators down by the harbour, further up to the right the Lachine Canal, and everywhere the grey spires of churches, monasteries and convents. Somehow, even from here, you could tell that Montreal was predominantly French, and Catholic. (6)

Marc, a Jewish man from a small town in Northern Ontario, is still fascinated by this view as he falls in love with Erica Drake a few minutes later. Looking out from the Westmount drawing room, he is able to gain a certain perspective on the social, cultural, and religious differences that structure both the city and his relationship with Erica (see Coleman 167-170). However, this view is contingent upon the vantage point, a vantage point that would not routinely be available to him. As soon as Charles Drake discovers that Erica is dating him, Marc is banned from the house and is never represented looking out over Montreal again. Even when Marc and Erica walk on Mount

Royal, they do not go to the observatory. In Graham's text, as in Roy's and MacLennan's, this shift between looking and *walking* is significant.

Graham subtly contrasts Westmount, site of Charles Drake's home, with Mount Royal, site of the public park designed by Frederick Olmsted. Given the number of people "on bicycles, on foot, or riding by in carriages," Mount Royal reminds Erica of roads in Europe (119). As she and Marc walk on the mountain one Sunday, Marc makes reference to the character of Hans Castorp from Thomas Mann's 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain*. As an anti-fascist writer (see Beddow 138-140), Mann would have been an important literary and cultural figure for Graham. *The Magic Mountain* is a suggestive intertext for a reading of mountain scenes in *Earth and High Heaven* insofar as it highlights the coming together in a mountain sanatorium in Switzerland of various, often conflicting intellectual currents and cultural practices. Mount Royal is a similar space of encounter and of possibility for Marc and Erica.<sup>13</sup> In Westmount, however, Marc must leave Erica at the door of her father's house before heading for the streets below: "it was as though Charles and Margaret Drake were determined to put Marc down on the level on which they apparently thought him to be, and not as he actually was" (120). Charles Drake eventually shifts his attitude. However, the text's challenge to anti-Semitism lies less in the latter shift than in Erica's critical reflections upon the codes which govern interactions among communities in Montreal (see Coleman 170) and in the text's exploration of spaces where different communities coexist across tensions and contradictions.

In Viau's *Au milieu, la montagne*, whose events span a period from 1927 to summer 1935, Mount Royal park is such a space of (dis)continuity.<sup>14</sup> But here, Mount Royal is set against Outremont rather than against Westmount. Dramatizing the relationship between a woman whose father is often unemployed and a man from a wealthier family, Viau's text is reminiscent of *Bonheur d'occasion*. In *Au milieu, la montagne*, however, there is a greater gap in the social and economic status of the lovers, a gap not easily negotiated by Jacqueline, whose family rents a flat on rue Plessis in the East or by Gilbert, whose family owns a house in Outremont. An event early in the novel suggests the irreconcilability of these differences: Jacqueline's father's attempt to cut wood from an already fallen tree in Outremont in order to keep his family warm during the winter ends with the landowner demanding a price per cord that, however reasonable, Jacqueline's father cannot pay (121-123). As in Roy and Graham, the mountain represents economic privilege to which

Jacqueline has limited access—except for the ski slopes of Mount Royal. Until Gilbert takes her to the observatory on Mount Royal, Jacqueline's only experience of the view from the mountaintop is a childhood trip to Westmount and Outremont with an uncle who had a car (52-53; 167). On that trip, Jacqueline's mother remains silent about her work cleaning houses in these neighbourhoods.

At the same time, Viau's text shares Graham's vision of Mount Royal as a public park, a space which is especially crucial to Montrealers who have no land of their own. The mountain is "au milieu," between the East and the West and, as such, is not so much a vantage point as a space for the meeting of differences. Insofar as Jacqueline and Gilbert happen upon one another while skiing on the mountain and insofar as Mount Royal's "place du Belvédère" allows them to contemplate together "leur ville" (233), the mountain is presented as a democratic space, a space for all Montrealers. The city is "theirs" not because they *see* the same thing, not because they become "one," as do Catherine and Jerome in *The Watch* but because of a shared sense of belonging within the city and of ethical relation to each other. Over the course of several conversations prior to the scene at the lookout, each begins to recognize and allow for the difference of the other, difference that is expressed, among other things, in their geographies of the city: whereas Jacqueline is familiar with the port, for example, Gilbert is familiar with the mountain (163-168). Although Gilbert ultimately gives in to his parents and leaves Jacqueline, Viau's text reinforces the idea of the mountain as the exclusive space of the wealthy. *Au milieu, la montagne* dramatizes the betrayal of a dream, a dream of democratized space even more than a dream of upward mobility which would give Jacqueline access to the mountain only through the middle class. Indeed, a tension wavers between the individual's failed opportunity for advancement and the disruption of class ideologies produced by Jacqueline's relationship with Gilbert.<sup>15</sup>

In Thériault's *Aaron*, none of the characters lives on the mountain, but Mount Royal park is nonetheless the place in which the lovers, Aaron and Viedna, negotiate the material circumstances of their lives, specifically, the way their cultural and religious identity as Jews circumscribes their chances of prosperity in 1920s and 1930s Montreal. In Socken's terms, *Aaron* dramatizes "the confrontation between tradition and change in the modern world and the absence of a mediating force" (131).<sup>16</sup> The mountain is crucial in figuring this confrontation between discourses of tradition and of modernity,

between the spiritual and the secular. What Aaron finds walking on Mount Royal, Socken points out, is not sacred laws handed down from generation to generation, laws associated with the orthodox Judaism of his grandfather Moishe, but “modern culture in the form of a young woman, Viedna” (132). Aaron’s relationship with Viedna unfolds more on the hillside than at the lookout but in one scene the two stand at the summit: “D’où ils étaient, ils dominaient Montréal” (80). In this scene, Viedna explains that Canada has not allowed her father to forget his Jewishness. Aaron, who would like to construct Canada (equated here with Montreal) as a positive space for Jewish immigrants, finds that he cannot. In spite of “dominating” the city, then, Aaron and Viedna have no mastery over it; looking is not synonymous with power. They stand well above the streets in which they are routinely aggrieved, yet the streets are strangely with them. Aaron, like Viedna, eventually effaces his Jewishness and breaks with his heritage, gestures which suggest the need for change both in Moishe’s rigid understanding of that heritage and, importantly, in attitudes toward Jews in Montreal.

### Resisting Imaginary Totalizations

Early in “Walking in the City,” de Certeau wonders “what is the source of this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts” (92). By “the most immoderate of human texts,” de Certeau understands the city as a trace structure of movement, exchange, and quotidian practices which appear nowhere on maps of the city. Each writer discussed in this section raises a question similar to that of de Certeau and each uses mountaintop scenes to stage and interrogate the terms of its own representation. Insofar as the main characters are writers, the texts of Bessette, Cohen, and Scott are able to raise conceptual issues related to the process of writing the city within the time and space of the narrative. The question in Bessette’s *La bagarre*<sup>17</sup> is not simply why the desire to look down on the city but why *write* such a scene. One of Bessette’s characters, Jules Lebeuf, wants to write a novel about Montreal, a novel that would bring the city to life in all its complexity (29). As Gilles Marcotte explains,

Écrire, pour lui [Jules Lebeuf], écrire un roman, c’est inévitablement, nécessairement, écrire le roman de Montréal, créer Montréal, lui “donner une âme.” Il met ainsi en plein jour un désir qui habite, plus ou moins masqué, bon nombre de romanciers montréalais. Dans un des passages les plus explicites du roman, à ce propos, Jules Lebeuf monte au sommet du mont Royal—comme le font, depuis le

XIXe siècle, la plupart des écrivains québécois qui ont voulu saisir Montréal, le donner à lire dans sa totalité—et appelle pour ainsi dire la ville à l'existence. (29)

When Jules finally puts pen to paper, he begins with a scene, narrated in the third person, in which a man contemplates the moving patterns of light he sees from the Mount Royal observatory at night. Such a perspective affords both an overview of the city and, importantly, a way to begin. To begin a novel in such a way is, as Marcotte suggests, to replay a paradigmatic scene in Quebec writing. It is also to replay a scene of New World conquest, a scene which reaches back to the sixteenth century, to a moment often taken to be originary in histories of Montreal: Jacques Cartier's climbing and naming of Mount Royal in 1535.<sup>18</sup>

Given that Jules dreams of writing a "new world" novel, a novel in French but of Montreal (and not France), the mountain might seem a plausible place to start. However, as soon as Jules sets down the scene, he questions its romanticism, its grandiloquence, and its pretence to represent the city:<sup>19</sup>

"D'où me vient la manie de commencer par une vue panoramique?" Il fallait au contraire débiter dans le vif du sujet, au milieu d'une scène; . . . "Une vue panoramique! Quelle naïveté! Pourquoi pas un recensement de la population montréalaise? Ce serait tout aussi intelligent! À l'ouest, les Anglais; à l'est, les Canadiens. Entre les deux, une coulée israélite." (97)

The problem of the mountaintop view is one of representation, of how to frame a narrative and of how such framing organizes social space. Practices of seeing, Jules' comments suggest, are also practices of space. In many ways, Jules' comments dovetail with those of de Certeau: the view from above allows subjects to map urban space, to determine various routes, zones, and lines of demarcation, but it cannot capture the city's illegibility, the ways in which subjects inhabit the city, the ways in which they "speak" the city through their movements. As David Leahy points out, conversations Jules has with his friends Sillery and Weston suggest that language is a conundrum for Jules and is, perhaps, key to his inability to write. Leahy cites, for example, Jules' desire to make his language more "French" and his resistance to suggestions that he write across several languages (Leahy, "The Carnavalesque" 70; Bessette 57). Is *La bagarre* the novel Jules is struggling to write?<sup>20</sup> Certainly, *La bagarre* operates at street level, intercalating different modes of discourse or ways of speaking, allowing the reader to "assemble" the city, and refusing to present an image of Montreal in its entirety. The narrative perspective, while omniscient, is not panoramic. Moreover, as it is presented in *La*

*bagarre*, Jules' mountaintop scene is a scene of writing—at a folding table in a Montreal apartment—as well as a scene of looking. In this sense, Bessette's text incorporates the way in which space is lived or practised as well as the way in which it is seen.

In Cohen's *The Favourite Game*,<sup>21</sup> the self-questioning and self-mockery in which Jules engages after writing his scene on the mountain, are integrated into the very discourse of the novel so that every line or passage potentially subverts its own meaning and value. The following passage, for example, both replays the conventions of the night-time view from the mountaintop and marks its difference from those conventions. Moreover, it slips between external and internal narration; the "he," a young Jewish man from Westmount named Lawrence Breavman, is also the "I":

He looked in awe at the expanse of night-green foliage, the austere lights of the city, the dull gleam of the St. Lawrence.

A city was a great achievement, bridges were fine things to build. But the street, harbours, spikes of stone were ultimately lost in the wider cradle of mountain and sky.

It ran a chill through his spine to be involved in the mysterious mechanism of city and black hills.

Father, I'm ignorant.

He would master the rules and techniques of the city, why the one-way streets were chosen, how the stock-market worked, what notaries did.

It wasn't a Hellish Bunny Hop if you knew the names of things. He would study leaves and bark, and visit stone quarries as his father had done. (38)

The discourse of romanticism which Jules Lebeuf rejects in his own writing—and which one finds in MacLennan's *The Watch*—is present here in the "chill through his spine," in "the mysterious mechanism of city and black hills" and, above all, in the "awe" Breavman experiences in the face of that which lies beyond him. Cohen's text, however, undermines the atmosphere of wonderment and fear by breaking the passage into single-sentence paragraphs, and by shifting registers between the extraordinary and the mundane, the serious and the frivolous. If a reader is tempted to believe Breavman's commitment to "master the rules and techniques of the city," the final assertion about studying leaves and bark, and visiting stone quarries, suggests that something is amiss both in Breavman's strategy and in the rules and techniques to be mastered.

Another of Cohen's lines, "Westmount is a collection of large stone houses and lush trees arranged on the top of the mountain especially to



humiliate the underprivileged" (48), is similarly multi-voiced. This statement, which is never spoken out loud but which raises questions about the terms of its own enunciation, surfaces in the narrator's account of Breavman's and Krantz's confrontation with several francophone men in a downtown dancehall. The statement has the unruly status of being what Breavman and Krantz "*knew* . . . [the francophone men] wanted to hear" (48, my emphasis). As Sherry Simon observes of the confrontation, "Neither side has much of a vocabulary beyond the stereotypes they've been taught about each other" (17). In this sense, the statement says as much about the clichés of Montreal's social geography and about the volatile mixture of fear, overstatement, appeasement, complicity, and self-interest which lies behind the statement as about relations between Westmount and the underprivileged. In *The Favourite Game*, Westmount is not nearly as orderly or stable as it might appear. Breavman's obsessive rounds of the park<sup>22</sup> near his family's house, for example, involve examining the upper ponds for "sail-boat wrecks or abandoned babies or raped white nurses" (69). Beneath the surface of everyday life in Westmount is violence. Breavman's critique of and flight from Westmount is fraught with contradictions, contradictions that structure his identity as a "refugee . . . from Westmount" (85) as well as "his penance through manual labour" (110). A totalizing view, Cohen's text suggests, is suspect, and a totalizing critique—of the kind one finds in the statement about Westmount—even more so.

Cohen offers an apparently straightforward response to de Certeau's question of what is gained in looking down on the city. "The park," explains the narrator, "gave the young merchant princes views of factories so they could imagine power" (69). Breavman is ambivalent toward his own status as "young merchant-prince." In one scene, he "look[s] gravely from the lookout to guarantee the view" (69); in another, he and his friend Krantz "practis[e] a soft-shoe routine at the Westmount Lookout, delighting in their own absurdity," then "[sit] on the stone wall, their backs to the river and city" (81).<sup>23</sup> Views of factories are no guarantee of power; they simply allow the viewer to imagine a privileged position within relations of power. Power, like the view from the mountaintop, is unstable and intangible. It can only be imagined through a repeated act of looking in order to be "guaranteed." McQueen, we remember, looks out at the city on more than one occasion in *Two Solitudes*. That "McQueen's satisfaction *constantly renewed itself* through his ability to overlook all this" (105, my emphasis) signals the

importance of repetition in the performance of power. Breavman's acts of dancing at the Lookout and of turning his back on the view are gestures of privilege, but they are also refusals to participate in the process of renewing or guaranteeing the view.

Scott's *Heroine*<sup>24</sup> opens with a scene at the Mount Royal lookout, a scene which insists in its own way upon the impossibility of guaranteeing the view:

Sir. You can on-ly put ca-na-dian monee in that machine. No sir. No foreign objects nor foreign monee in that macheen. It's an infraction you see. The guard's finger runs tight under the small print. The wooden squirrels in the rafters are silent. The Black tourist descends the steps with an astonished stare towards the telescope aimed at the city skyscrapers. (9)

In this passage, the public spaces of the lookout and the chalet on Mount Royal are once again sites of encounter, not between lovers but between an African-American tourist and a Québécois coffee machine guard. The guard is concerned with the rules. Yet the rules, "no foreign objects nor foreign monee," are disrupted by the guard's use of a language not his own and by the difficulty, in Montreal, of distinguishing foreign from familiar. The scene is also about authority, about who calls whom "Sir." As Nicole Markotic has observed, Scott's text undercuts the guard's authority "by pointing out the halting English he uses to politely address [the] tourist" (38). Given the number of factors in play, the relations of power which subtend the scene are highly unruly. The francophone official both adopts a position of authority in relation to the African-American tourist and defers to him by speaking English. In a sense, the guard is obliged to adopt English in order to be understood by the American. If the tourist "descends the steps with an astonished stare," the astonishment has to do with the recognition that he is in another country and that he cannot use American money in either the coffee machine or the telescope. As Frank Davey suggests, the tourist's position of power "as an American, as one enabled to travel, as one standing on top of the mountain" is presented by Scott's text as "a winnable position, one only recently won" (63). The relative tenuousness of this position is signalled by the fact that the guard's discourse silences the tourist.

But the tourist is not consistently silent. In an episode from the second section of the text, the unnamed "Middle," the heroine engages in an automatic writing exercise based on "*la cartographie du hasard*" (76). At the same time, she remarks upon her male comrades' inability to address differences of sexuality and gender in their surrealist views of protest and desire. After

becoming disenchanted with the scene at the McGill Gates where she is sent by the toss of a coin, she climbs the steps to the chalet on the mountain. Before reaching the top, she comes upon R, one of the surrealists, in conversation with a “Black guy” (78) who questions the parallels R draws “between the québécoise and Black revolutions” (78) and who undermines R’s illusions about Canada as free of racist violence. The African-American points out that if he appeared in a novel, the writer would be likely “at every mention . . . [to] state [his] colour” (78). Of course, up to this point in the text, *Heroine* is guilty of precisely this convention. The heroine, who like Jules Lebeuf is trying to write a novel, is overwhelmed by the contradictions and runs back down the mountain. At the bottom, she reflects upon her writing and upon her surrealist practice but in ways symptomatic of her own take on protest and desire: “If I were to start the novel what would be the opening? Quick, free associate. A shrimp in the labia” (78). The trip up and down the mountain, then, provides her with two of the elements she needs to write the first two paragraphs of *Heroine*: the tourist who, as Markotic points out, “is eventually allowed to lose the adjective” (38-39), and the “small point” on which the water from the faucet falls as the heroine lies masturbating in the bath (9).

Scott’s text returns again and again to the scene of tourist and telescope. Through the lens on the mountain, the tourist sees things that do not figure in other accounts of Montreal as seen from above: a field of car wrecks, a grey woman who sleeps in parks and wanders the downtown area, a demolition pit, acts of political resistance, graffiti, the cafés of the Main, the flashing sign for the WAIKIKI TOURIST ROOMS above the apartment of “I,” the woman narrator.<sup>25</sup> Looking through the telescope might be read as a metaphor for the process of narration. However, the brief, externally-narrated accounts of what is seen through the lens consistently give way to lengthy, internally-narrated passages from the perspective of the heroine in the bath. What is narrated exceeds the physical and temporal constraints of the bath as well as the telescope. Allowing one scene to open onto the next, and making “each body . . . an element signed by many others” (de Certeau 93), Scott’s text operates by way of metonymy or, to be more specific, contiguity, a form of adjacency that emphasizes material links. This compositional strategy of assembling elements whose only relation to one another is their contiguity marks a substantial departure from a realist practice of metonymy which presents a part of the city and allows readers to extrapolate a sense of

the whole. Such proliferating lateral movement speaks to de Certeau's metaphor of the city as "the most immoderate of human texts" (92), as composed of practices and pathways that are not visible from on high. In *Heroïne*, then, the view from the mountain is part of the text's project of practising the city from below. The telescope is not primarily a device for taking in or representing a view of the city. Rather, it is a technology that draws attention to the apparatus of looking and reminds readers that there is always a lens mediating the view of the city.

### Unlikely Links

Although my discussion is organized in roughly chronological order, my project is not so much literary historical as genealogical (see Foucault). To construct a genealogy of the Montreal mountain would require the examination of a far greater range of discourses and practices than I have considered. A literary genealogy is, in this sense, a preliminary gesture. A genealogy is based not on lines of continuity of the kind that generate a literary tradition, but rather on contradiction and discontinuity, on unlikely links among texts written in different languages, among texts marked by different aesthetic practices, among texts that figure in several fields of writing (Québécois, anglo-Quebec, Canadian, Montreal) at the same time, and among texts that may be deemed more—or less—"significant" in a given field at a given moment. Approaching my corpus genealogically allows me to attend to the specificity of each text and, at the same time, in the place of any supra-historical or totalizing perspective, to allow connections and contradictions to emerge. Among these contradictory connections is the link between the figure of the grey woman in *Heroïne* and that of Rose-Anna in *Bonheur d'occasion*. Indeed, in spite of substantial differences, both figures insist upon the "murky intertwining daily behaviours" (de Certeau 92) of bodies and streets, and both bring the city below to bear upon the view from above.

Particularly striking in these nine texts are the continuities and discontinuities in the constructions of Westmount, Mount Royal, and Outremont.<sup>26</sup> If, as I suggested earlier, Westmount is central to texts published in the mid-1940s, Mount Royal also plays a role in those texts (Graham, MacLennan), and is increasingly a focus in subsequent decades. Mount Royal is characterized as a democratic space, a space for lovers to meet (Graham, MacLennan, Viau, Thériault), a space of interaction and sometimes antagonism among communities (Roy, Graham, MacLennan, Cohen, Scott), a space of

inter-generational conflict (Thériault), or of inter-class conflict (Viau), and a space for breaking the frame of realist representation (Bessette, Scott). Like Outremont in *Au milieu, la montagne*, Westmount is a figure of social hierarchy in *Bonheur d'occasion*, *Two Solitudes*, and *The Favourite Game*. But the Westmount of the latter texts, more than Viau's Outremont, also enables the elaboration of alternative social visions. What is more, the interventions of Cohen's text open new avenues for reading *Bonheur d'occasion* and *Two Solitudes*. Breavman's ambivalence and self-irony are very different from McQueen's self-satisfaction, even when that self-satisfaction is ironically undercut by MacLennan's text. However, Cohen's text allows us to read Huntly McQueen's act of looking as his way of representing for himself, and for others, his social and economic privilege. Similarly, the earnest tone of *Bonheur d'occasion* differs substantially from the instability and excess of *The Favourite Game*. Yet the questions Cohen's text raises about the statement "Westmount is a collection of large stone houses and lush trees arranged on the top of the mountain to humiliate the underprivileged" invite us to revisit our readings of *Bonheur d'occasion*.

The application of linguistic analysis to non-linguistic practices—for example, de Certeau's analogy of city to language system and of walking to language practice (97-102)—has its limits. These limits make it difficult for de Certeau to account for the *contingencies* of the view from the top, that is, the question of access to the vantage point, the combination of looking and walking we find in many of the texts and the role of the mountain as site of encounter and intervention. At the same time, de Certeau's idea that subjects constitute the city through their everyday practices, actualizing certain possibilities and displacing others, allows both for agency and for social change. The heroine's climb up Mount Royal in Scott, Erica's and Marc's walk in Mount Royal park, or Emmanuel's climb up Westmount are, in de Certeau's sense, "pedestrian speech acts" (97) and "walking rhetorics" (100) that intervene in the organization of urban social space. Literary texts are not, specifically, the everyday practices de Certeau has in mind in "Walking in the City." In fact, de Certeau's text makes us reflect upon the use of visual metaphors in literary analysis as well as upon the pitfalls of literary mappings which attempt to make the city "readable." Yet, as I hope to have shown, literary texts also enable critical understanding of the oversights of de Certeau's analysis and of the productive cultural work of scenes on the Montreal Mountain.

## NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Richard Cassidy and Najla Bahri for their research assistance and to SSHRC for financial support.
- 2 Because I incorporate phrases from de Certeau into my sentences, I have used the English translation of his text, *L'Invention du quotidien*. Otherwise, my practice is to cite texts in their original language.
- 3 For a discussion of how to read de Certeau's use of the World Trade Center after 9/11, see Marla Carlson.
- 4 "Mount Royal" can be used to refer the landform as a whole, that is, to all three peaks but given the specific literary, social, and cultural meanings associated with each peak, I use the names Westmount, Outremont, and Mount Royal. The latter refers to the peak with the Chalet, the Peel Street Lookout, and Frederick Olmsted's park.
- 5 For a sense of the range of texts which feature the Montreal mountain, see Bryan Demchinsky and Elaine Kalman Naves, Barbara Godard, Monique Larue, and Antoine Sirois.
- 6 In the words of Sirois, "Sur le plan social, [la montagne] illustre surtout une domination financière et, ou, ethnique" (268). For Larue, "la montagne est une illustration trop saisissante de l'échelle sociale de la ville pour que cet aspect ne soit pas fréquemment évoqué" (86). Santé Viselli suggests that there are two mountains in Gabrielle Roy's works; whereas *La montagne secrète* poses a philosophical and aesthetic challenge, Westmount, in *Bonheur d'occasion*, poses a social and moral challenge (98).
- 7 Paul Socken notes Mount Royal's association with "secular values (amusement, skiing) and, in the Quebec imagination, with worldly ambition (cf. *Bonheur d'occasion*)" (136). He is not alone in the latter view but, as I argue, more attention needs to be given to the critique of "worldly ambition" (136) that informs Roy's text. Although "Mount Royal" can refer to all three peaks, it would be more accurate to call the mountain of *Bonheur d'occasion* "Westmount."
- 8 Babby contrasts Jean's and Emmanuel's climbs, characterizing the former as "strictly visual" and the latter as "physical" as well as visual (54-55).
- 9 Leith is troubled, however, by the text's use of the marriage of Heather and Paul to resolve French-English tensions. "Paul cannot," she argues, "both bridge the solitudes in his own person and represent French Canada" (52). That the hardships of Marius and Émilie are used as a kind of lesson against Quebec nationalism is, in her view, a weakness of MacLennan's text (57).
- 10 The mountain is also a space mapped by gay men. See, for example, texts by Michel Tremblay, John Raymond Woolfrey, and Luther Allen.
- 11 In the fiction of Mordecai Richler, the street is far more important than the mountain. Nonetheless, the adventures of Jake Hirsch and Duddy Kravitz in *St. Urbain's Horseman* reveal the comical side of parks and lovers: "They found some butts, lit up, and climbed Mount Royal in search of couples in the bushes" (38).
- 12 Earlier versions of my readings of *The Watch*, *Earth and High Heaven*, and *Heroine*, versions which focus more on the mountaintop scene as sublime encounter, were presented in Madrid at the 1997 meeting of the Spanish Association of Canadian Studies and published in the conference proceedings.
- 13 In Montreal fiction, Mount Royal is not always constructed as a space of positive encounter. In Ted Allen's 1949 short story "Lies My Father Told Me," for example,

- a boy's sleigh-ride on the mountain with his grandfather is interrupted by francophone children throwing stones and shouting "Juif . . . Juif . . ." (51).
- 14 The treatment of Jewish characters, however, is not the same. As Ben-Zion Shek notes, Viau's novel is one of those in which "la caricature du Juif atteint au grotesque" ("L'image" 259). See *Au milieu, la montagne* (65; 221).
  - 15 Shek suggests that Jacqueline is resigned to her "lot" (*Social Realism* 162); Maurice Lemire compares Viau's novel unfavourably to Roy's: "Ainsi la remise en question par Gabrielle Roy d'un capitalisme, sans ressources pour nourrir décemment les hommes, mais plein d'expédients quand il s'agit de les faire s'entretuer, se réduit chez Viau à un phénomène de stratification social normal dans toute société qui s'urbanise" (87); and David Leahy shows how the gender (and class) transgressions of the effete figure, Serge, an upper-class gay man, parallel the class (and gender) transgressions of Jacqueline, and how neither is successful in their attempts to "pass" ("Race, Gender" 38-41).
  - 16 The modernity-tradition dichotomy, Robert Schwartzwald argues through Linda Cardinal, Claude Couture, and Claude Denis, is a false one which is sustained, among other things, by "anglo-American political theory's tendency to identify 'others' who fall outside its universalistic articulation of modernity-as-individualism with 'collectivism' and 'tradition'" (118).
  - 17 The action of *La bagarre* takes place toward the end of the 1940s.
  - 18 Given that indigenous histories of the place now known as Montreal pre-date (and post-date) this moment, the latter moment is hardly originary.
  - 19 Similar reservations might be raised with regard to mountaintop scenes in MacLennan's *The Watch*, published a year after *La bagarre*. MacLennan's text does not fall completely into the trap Lebeuf sets for himself and ultimately resists. After all, it does not use the mountaintop scenes to open the novel and it ironizes the first of the two scenes through George's intervening comments on the feasibility of love at eighteen below (30). At the same time, however, MacLennan's text does offer a panoramic view, focus on the lights of the city, and engage a quasi-romantic discourse of the sublime and the beautiful.
  - 20 Leahy suggests as much when he argues in a footnote that "*La bagarre* . . . serves as an example of what was lacking in Lebeuf's writing and imaginary" ("The Carnavalesque" 81n27).
  - 21 Various cultural and political references, along with the date "August 1958" (231), suggest that the novel is being narrated/written in the late-1950s about a childhood and adolescence in the 1940s and 1950s.
  - 22 Identified by Demchinsky and Kalman Naves as King George Park (177).
  - 23 This turn away from the city toward Westmount takes a different form in Richler's *Joshua Then and Now*. A resident of Lower Westmount, Joshua "ascends the mountain into Upper Westmount" on his walks not to take in the view of the city but "to peer boldly into living room windows" and "to [seek] out old classmates to bait. St. Urbain urchins who had struck it rich" (108). Joshua Shapiro, the son of a prizefighter, is married to the daughter of a Westmount senator. The text's satire is directed inwards at Joshua's own class envy and at what he considers to be the pretensions of the new Jewish establishment as well as at W.A.S.P. privilege. Westmount of the mid-1970s is shown to be heterodox, a place which disturbs the easy assignment of class or cultural identity to geography.
  - 24 The moment of narration takes place in October 1980 but the heroine's thoughts reach back to the late 1960s and 1970s. Within the heroine's narrative, *Heroine* appears to be both already written and still to come.

- 25 Davey reads the tourist's relation to the telescope as "a long history of male dominance" which connects him to Jon, the other "specular man" (64). I read the relation as ambivalent, riddled with contradictions; the tourist is both a "specular man" and a man who is able to see the derelict spaces and subjectivities of the city.
- 26 In many ways, my corpus leaves me better equipped to discuss Westmount and Mount Royal than Outremont. The francophone inter-class dynamics which often feature in literary portraits of Outremont are not a major focus of this essay. Nevertheless, texts such as Ringuet's *Le poids du jour* (1949), Réjean Ducharme's *L'hiver de force* (1973), Francine Noël's *Maryse* (1983), and Denise Bombardier's *L'enfance à l'eau bénite* (1985) would be important to consider in a longer study.

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# Fée

*(pour Caro)*

Ce soir ma fille  
Tu veux être fée  
Une toute petite fée  
Aux ailes de mouches argentées  
Déliçates comme ta main suspendue  
Par la ficelle de ton sommeil

Mais ton rêve  
Ton rêve  
Entre les mauvais doigts  
Précarité insoupçonnée  
Ébrouement d'un nouveau chagrin

Ce soir aucune crainte  
Seule la légèreté  
De ton désir d'enfant  
La légèreté de l'être fée  
La légèreté

Mon amour  
Je crois avoir compris

Moi aussi je voudrais  
Prendre cette forme féminine  
Influence sur la destinée humaine  
Fée du logis  
De tes songes évanescents

# Used People:

## *La Rivière sans repos* as Postcolonial Poverty Narrative<sup>1</sup>

Sa vie s'usait au reste à tenter de suivre le progrès, un maître difficile le progrès : savait-on ce qu'il voulait et jusqu'où il entraînerait les gens!<sup>2</sup>

Gabrielle Roy, *La Rivière sans repos*

Quand revenait l'été, on la revoyait, un peu plus usée, un peu plus courbée, passer au bord du ciel profond, parallèlement à la chaîne lointaine des vieilles montagnes les plus rabotées de la Terre.<sup>3</sup>

Gabrielle Roy, *La Rivière sans repos*

**A**t roughly the same cultural moment in which *La Rivière sans repos* was set, one of Canada's most prominent economic historians, Harold Innis, reading a paper before the American Economic Association in 1950,<sup>4</sup> remarked that constant change in technology (telephone, radio, TV, etc.) coupled with the capitalist push to increase production and consumption in industrialized societies eclipsed the recognition of balance and proportion in earlier societies. Over half a century later, Ronald Wright would draw a similar conclusion about blindness and progress in his Massey Lectures entitled *The Short History of Progress*,<sup>5</sup> observing that the drive toward change is often short-sighted, if not a trap, since progress tends to serve the "inertia, greed and foolishness" of elites within social pyramids. Gabrielle Roy's novelistic rendering of the intercultural relations between Inuit and whites in *La Rivière sans repos* critiques progress in a similar way, laying bare the power relations behind the apparently natural "march of time."

The *Inuuk* at the centre of Gabrielle Roy's *La Rivière sans repos* are used up and worn out (as in the meaning of "*usée*" in my epigraphs) in many senses over the generations. Mother and daughter, Winnie and Elsa, are worn out by the sacrifices of mothering, the weight of adapting to the white

man's progress, poverty, the harsh elements of the tundra, hard domestic labour, and even by the natural process of aging. As Mother Courage figures, they inhabit the text largely as survivors. As in her urban novel, *Bonheur d'occasion* (*The Tin Flute*), Roy juxtaposes the role of the mother with that of the state and the community to raise questions about social injustice and mothering amidst poverty. Yet in this book, written 25 years after *Bonheur d'occasion*, women's poverty is narrated in the context of the economic and cultural disenfranchisement of the Inuit in Canada. It is in this sense that I refer to the Inuit as "used people," implying exploitation. Even though "used" is the "*faux ami*" of "*usée*" (worn out, used up), the novel develops the themes of fatigue and exploitation side by side. While acquisitiveness keeps Elsa from material poverty for most of the story, it contributes to the profound sense of cultural fatigue underlying the postcolonial poverty narrative, the fatigue of being both used and used up, while never "getting ahead."

When colonization displaces traditional values and everyday practices, the culture shock reverberates beyond the construction of race. Inuit lives are swallowed by progress: it destabilizes their family structures, their eating habits, their homes, and their human relations. Importantly, however, Roy dramatizes the complicity of the colonized subject, who learns to crave progress through mimicry and the training of desire on material wealth. Elsa's acquisitiveness and her drive to earn a wage and buy her son a way out of their racially abject position lead to spiritual impoverishment emblematic of the dislocation of the Inuit. The worn out lives referred to in my epigraphs are respectively Winnie's and Elsa's. Surprisingly, the first citation about progress describes the aged mother while the second, about aging and fading into the natural landscape, describes her daughter. The doubling of mother and daughter, in addition to tracing a cosmic cycle of mythic time, underscores what their everyday lives have in common: they both attempt across generations to meet their children's expectations when those very expectations have been transformed by colonial contact and capital.

This novel teaches very well because it is a textured story of material lives and, despite being written by a non-native who visited the North very briefly as a tourist and journalist, is among those rare sustained fictional treatments in Canadian literature of how wealth, technology, and consumerism in the guise of progress shape indigenous subjectivity. Roy's novel depicts the Inuit of Ungava Bay having abandoned, for the most part, the traditional nomadic ways of their ancestors and having moved into fixed communities to mimic the white ways of progress—both through consent and coercion. But the

trap of progress brings a loss of balance and proportion as time and a mother's care are segmented into commodified spaces. Consumerism, in Elsa's everyday life, mediates her relations with others, her sense of self, and the way she mothers. Since Roy's text is both romantic and resistant (both colonial and anti-colonial), however, it is not my goal to defend its politics, but rather to decode the ideology of representations of progress and colonial contact so that the pedagogical potential of the novel will be more apparent. When we attempt to read everyday lives instead of merely theorize colonial power relations, our reading of this novel pushes us to inquire about the specific concrete and lived realities in Inuit communities.

### **Re/Viewing the Genesis and Reception of the Text**

*La Rivière sans repos* as a poverty narrative with a postcolonial critique puts the complex everyday experience of "used people" centre stage not simply to lament their fate, but also to find a space for solidarity with their struggles. At the same time, Roy universalizes their struggle against the march of progress and linear time, pulling it beyond the culturally contingent toward the mythic. Originally identified primarily as a story of faith, spirituality, and humanism (Gagné, Sirois, Ricard, Socken, Hughes), *La Rivière sans repos* has more recently been interpreted as a story about various forms of alterity based on race, colonization, and gender (Dansereau, Babby, Pascal, Chapman). It is both, and more. Myth, allegory, and social realism come together in this transgeneric work: a decidedly materialist bent colours an odd mixture of colonial and anti-colonial politics.

Earlier readings focused on the mythic dimension of the text, its characters, and its humanist discourse of abandonment and aging. These readings tended to stress the universal aspects of the narrative. The wide sky, the sound of the sea and the restless river, and the alternately brutal and tender horizon of the tundra create an elemental, if not cosmic, setting and a universal frame for this story of contact. The allegory of dislocated souls spirals into the mythic, universal, and cosmic realms, beginning with the birth of a blonde, mixed-blood baby who embodies the meeting of cultures and appears as wondrous as a new star in the sky, "*l'apparition dans leur ciel d'une étoile inconnue*" (94). Jimmy's alterity, the product of miscegenation, is mostly wondrous and beautiful in the text, until by the end of the story, he abandons his Inuit mother to flee south and join the white man's airforce, to "pass" as white. Contemporary readings tend to favour an analysis of interracial relations that focus on racial difference, hybridity, and miscegenation.

The mixed-blood child and his adoring mother are modeled on a mother and baby whom Roy had seen in her brief trip to the region years before writing the novel. According to "Voyage en Ungava," Roy had been particularly struck by a mixed-blood Inuit mother who played adoringly with the curls of her blonde baby. That vision of racial contact as dislocation, both wondrous and somehow sad, inspired the novel (Ricard 386-7; Gagné 1976, 376). In fictionalizing the incident, Roy would change the mother to a "pure" blood (authentic) Inuk, and the baby to a blond-haired, blue-eyed cherubic figure (Ricard), thus more easily staging a precise moment of cultural contact in the rape of Elsa (and her people) by the American GI (who embodied the occupying non-native forces).<sup>6</sup> Roy then uses realism to show that both the imposition of white man's desire and the reshaping of Inuit desire lead the community of Old Fort Chimo to cross the river and follow progress. The Inuit have moved from an indigenous culture of sharing, use value, and nomadism to the market culture of accumulation, exchange value, and wage labour. Elsa embodies desire channelled into the frantic buying of toys, food, and clothing, and the equally frantic cleaning and work schedule of white society, while the police, schools, hospital, and the company store embody the institutional authority of capital, race, and state. The two stories of contact, stories of both individual and collective desire, flow beside each other symbolically and realistically throughout the narrative. Both stories unfold a deep ambivalence toward progress among the Inuit characters, who alternately consent to and resist the coercion and seduction of Western culture.

In order to understand the modernity of the myth alongside the bite of social realism, it is necessary to engage with the text through more than a mythopoeic reading or a postcolonial reading focused on racial relations. In reading the text as postcolonial poverty narrative, critical of the role of capital in personal relations, we sound the greatest depth of Roy's social critique of contact in the North. In an essentially "contaminated" text, in which a white author ventriloquizes the thoughts and lives of Inuit and mixed-blood subjects rather than reporting their "authentic" voices (Brydon), the ethics of speaking for the Other is raised: how does the author stage history, and how do we in turn read and teach the text? As my epigraphs demonstrate, the novel disrupts the discourse of progress by interrogating the direction of changes brought through cultural contact, but it also reinscribes certain colonial assumptions from within the discourse of progress. For example, the Inuit are represented as closer to nature than to civilization in images

such as those of the indigenous woman naturally aging and blending into the mountains and the rock. (Chapman remarks that white characters are sometimes objectified in the novel by being compared to nature, but to animals or birds, “not land, rock, and wood” as Inuit characters are [56-58].) The realism, however, is carefully grounded in the cultural specificity of Inuit/white contact in Ungava Bay in the late 1940s and 1950s. The story weaves its paradoxical themes of entrapment and freedom, restlessness and rootedness (echoed in both the French and English titles), from a continuum of social and spiritual possibilities situated between the extremes of abandonment and caring in the context of territorial and economic disenfranchisement. Entrapment is also reflected in the micropolitics of everyday life: for example, a Northern double-consciousness emerges through which some of the Inuit, most notably Elsa, begin to see themselves as the whites see them: in need of constant labour, cleaning, and consumption in order to flee the backwardness, laziness, and filth projected upon them and their people through a discourse of progress. Elsa rushes home from cleaning the white woman’s house to buy goods she has seen there and to scrub and rearrange the disorder in her own home, and the other Inuit return home from Elsa’s hut to see the disorder and poverty of their own homes. The double-consciousness of themselves as object is rapidly reproduced as they mimic white ways, trying to curl the hair of their babies, bringing electricity into their homes, reading the books and consuming the films from the South, following the laws and spiritual teachings of the Whites.

Marc Gagné writes “*La Rivière sans repos* illustre la douloureuse alternance à laquelle l’homme se condamne quand il veut accorder sa marche à celle du progrès” (1973, 88). In his trilogy of detailed articles on the novel, Gagné juxtaposes the mythic dimension of the works against documentary sources, most notably “Voyage en Ungava,” Roy’s reportage on her one-week trip to the region in 1961 (a manuscript unpublished until 2000, but to which Gagné had prior access). Almost ten years after Roy’s trip, she would reposition the two villages she had visited, Old and New Fort Chimo, so that they appear in the novel to be directly opposite one another on the Koksoak river instead of a several kilometres downstream from each other. This imaginative displacement by the realist text would allow Roy to better dramatize the dislocation of the Inuit after contact: in other words to stage history. In the final scene of the novel, rich with dramatic effect, Elsa will pace the riverbank, torn between the old and the new settlement, while holding both in view.



In 2003, one of the first postcolonial readings of the novel appeared in *Quebec Studies*, comparing the positioning of the Inuit in the novel and the author's earlier travel notes, as well as in notes by some of the first white missionaries and traders in Ungava Bay. Rosemary Chapman's reading contextualizes the work within colonial history and is able to bring together the documentary and mythical elements of the story in a more coherent way than Gagné had previously, largely through an understanding of alterity and postcolonial theories of history and métissage. Chapman locates the anti-colonial thrust of the work in its depiction of Jimmy as a mixed-blood baby and métissage as historical process rather than merely essence. But the dominant trend in postcolonial and multicultural criticism has been to read hybridity as exoticized rather than conflictual space without weighing how colonization displaces earlier cultural practices through a discourse of progress grounded in conflicting economic interests and the lure of capital. A focus on race relations in the text attributes the violence of colonial contact to racism and profit-seeking in the past; but history tells us that the two are usually intertwined and ongoing under neocolonization (Young). Hence, I would like to shift focus from mother and son to the mother and daughter and to their material struggle as a site of resistance. Like many of their people, the Inuuk at the centre of the novel, Elsa and Winnie, are survivors of cultural invasion, racial marginalization, abandonment, harsh climate, poverty, and the profound imbalance in their lives brought about by progress itself. While Chapman locates the ideology of the story in relations between Second and Fourth World subjects, including the author herself, the development models of separate Worlds (First, Second, Third, and Fourth Worlds) can not be used in an unproblematic way without being unduly homogenizing. The (neo)colonization of the Inuit by capital cannot be subsumed within a discourse of development (Worlds) because the latter itself wields assumptions about progress. Roy was sensitive not only to the minority ethnic status of the Inuit and the historical occupation of their land, but also to the ongoing unequal economic relations resulting from "progress." For this reason, she gave attention to Elsa's complicity in her own inferiorization within a social hierarchy based on class, status, and gender as well as race. Roy's rendering of the (neo)colonization of the Inuit by capital, however, was by no means a polemic stance on class or technology. Instead, the novel's textured realism revealed the importance of class and poverty to women's everyday lives.

The tale is presented as a locally situated and cross-generational testimony that demands a moral reckoning with the past. To this end, the opening of the novel mimics local truth claims to stage the text as oral testimony: "Ainsi en témoigne, telle qu'on la raconte là-bas, l'histoire d'Elsa, fille d'Archibald et de Winnie Kumachuk" (94). Yet, generically, the novel imagines beyond testimony and documentary to create a more empathic form of realist illusion based in psychological realism and rooted in a second level of meaning, a national and humanist allegory. Marc Gagné reports that Roy refused to consult her earlier travel notes when writing *La Rivière sans repos* several years after her trip to Ungava Bay because she wanted to enter the space of her imagination and feel the truth of the region empathetically and imaginatively rather than in any documentary way (1976). At the same time, her knowledge of the culture was limited to that of the non-native outsider. Both on the level of allegory and realist testimony, however, the novel functions as counter-history to interrupt the culture of consumerism and the seemingly natural path of colonization and progress with other values and alternative subjectivities, and most importantly the details of material lives.

*La Rivière sans repos* is Roy's most socially critical work since earlier social realist novels (*Bonheur d'occasion* and *Alexandre Chenevert*); but it also remains one of Roy's lesser known books, even in its English version as *Windflower*. The original French version appeared through Boréal in 1970, comprised of a collection of three short stories, "Trois nouvelles esquimaudes" followed by the longer story about Elsa, from which the collection took its title *La Rivière sans repos*. The English version, translated by Joyce Marshall, appeared in the same year, but without the three "Eskimo" (sic) stories. (Inuit are called "Eskimaux/Eskimo" throughout the text according to the practice of the time.<sup>7</sup>) The other three stories, though written much later than Elsa's, in fact after its translation into English, opened the French publication in order to problematize and perhaps depersonalize the relation of the Inuit to the trappings of progress. This contextual function is evident in the titles: "Les satellites," "Le téléphone," and "Le fauteuil roulant." In his biography of Roy, François Ricard reports how emotionally devastated the author was by the flat rejection of the novel by her long-standing English publisher Harcourt Brace and how she was further disappointed by the later refusal of McClelland & Stewart to include the other three "Eskimo" stories alongside the novel about Elsa (423-24, 414). The English version today is still a translation of only the longest, more individualized story about Elsa.

Both French and English versions of the work were transitional texts, appearing in the same year, but functioning differently in their respective linguistic and literary traditions. By “transitional” in English Canadian literature, I mean that *Windflower* falls between a modernist use of realism to testify to social injustice and a postmodern questioning of history and representation for postcolonial ends. Although three and a half decades after its translation, when postcolonial criticism has become one of the most popular means of analyzing, teaching, and constructing Canadian literature in English (much more so than with Québécois and Franco-Canadian literatures), critical interest in *Windflower* as a work about mimicry and miscegenation among the Inuit has been slight. Like other transitional texts in which a non-native author attempts to recuperate stories of an indigenous other, such as *The Diviners* and *Klee Wyck*, *Windflower* has perhaps been undervalued during the last few decades because of the hegemony of postmodern aesthetics. The novel may have appeared behind the times stylistically when English-Canadian literary criticism was beginning to privilege discursive play and postmodern fiction as preferred modes of postcolonial critique while eschewing realism as monologic (Moss). Even though Babby argued convincingly in 1984 that the novel engages with reality and spectacle as well as mimicking it, the problem of reception involves ideology as well as form. *Windflower* may have appeared contaminated ideologically because of the use of realism to recuperate stories of social injustice, the humanist and spiritual solutions to social ills, and the ambivalent portrayal of indigenous subjects shaped by an underlying ideology of romantic nationalism that idealized contact.<sup>8</sup>

As Janet Paterson and others have confirmed, the advent of postmodernism occurred later for the novel in Quebec than in English Canada. Ricard speculated that in the 1960s and 1970s Roy was perceived largely as a writer of “classics” who had already said what she was going to say. Furthermore, Ricard claims, her failure to embrace separatism at the height of the *Révolution tranquille* meant that by focussing on the Inuit she was writing against a “counter-culture in full swing” (428). Her enduring humanism and use of realism led to the perception by many that she was out of step with the times both politically and stylistically (407, 410-12). In Quebec, the focus on the Inuit as colonized other was perhaps out of step with the times, especially during a period when colonization of the French by the English and the clergy was foremost in the popular imagination.

According to Gagné, the genesis of the text was prolonged: six years germinating and two years in the writing (1976, 367). In reading from Roy's travel notes, one is struck by the difference in tone between the description of the region by Roy the traveller and the region as it was imagined empathetically by Roy the novelist. "Voyage en Ungava" insists upon the sadness of the landscape, more often than not, commenting in surprise and disappointment, from the point of view of an outsider, on the monotony and loneliness, and apparent deficiencies of the tundra: for example, the dwarfed nature of the trees and the harshness of the climate, the "beauté tragique" (Gagné 370, 372, 379). The opening lines of the novel sketch the northern landscape from a similar point of view, as "rude," and "terrible." Chapman interprets this distance as the colonial eye cast on the landscape and on the Inuit by Roy, and documents how closely Roy's colonial point of view coincides with that of earlier missionaries and traders in the region (48-54).

The narrator focalizes through several different characters to juxtapose various standpoints toward the region, many of them tied to the land. Numerous tender descriptions include those of mother and son picnicking on the beach and studying stones and drift wood for animal shapes (131-33); the grim but haunting landscape around Ian's hunting cabin (159-160); and the passing of seasons (153). In contrast to this attachment to the landscape, the settlement of New Fort Chimo seems alien through the eyes of Uncle Ian, one of the few Inuit to reject progress and keep living nomadically on the other side of the river. To him, the new town represents a concentration of human life that seems random, distant, and crowded, with bungalows thrown together like dice, and with a meaningless concentration of human life that smothered him (188). Archibald, yet another Inuit character, is calmed by the familiar sound of motors and fears the wilderness, hurrying back to town as fast he can travel. In the person of Elsa, however, the greatest variety of attitudes to progress will emerge as she attempts to negotiate an alternate space of identity.

Estelle Dansereau has analyzed the discursive strategies of the text in which the inner thoughts of the Inuit characters as Other are reported indirectly by a narrator rather than directly with a gesture of appropriation (1996). (See also Babby and Chapman.) Dansereau argues convincingly that the use of shifting focalization and subject positions, and indirect discourse allows the narrators of all four stories to effect a collaboration with the Inuit characters as dispossessed subjects, but without anchoring their speech in generalizations or negative discursive structures or appearing to dominate their thoughts

(471-3). Chapman suitably queries whether shifting narrative positions are enough to constitute a claim that Roy is speaking for the Inuit in an anti-colonial manner in the text. I would suggest that this narrative “collaboration” derives mostly from a respectful empathy that Roy maintains as a liberal humanist. The homogenizing tendency of humanist myth is tempered by her detailed observation of everyday reality and power imbalances.

When Roy visited the region briefly in 1961, as Chapman points out, she spoke little directly to the Inuit but rather through interpreters (53), refusing to speak English to them. (What Chapman does not explain, however, is that to Roy’s mind they should have been learning French, not English, since they were in Quebec, while also preserving their own indigenous languages [Gagné juil.-sept. 1976: 375]<sup>9</sup>). In Roy’s use of pronouns and the space given to non-native speakers in the travel notes, Chapman notes that Roy positions herself mostly as outsider and colonial, whereas within the novel, the narrative techniques construct both insider and outsider views, creating ambivalent colonial and anti-colonial strains in the text. A postcolonial reading of the novel as poverty narrative demonstrates that when Roy speaks through fiction as “the white Inuit,” the field of contamination is not merely exoticized or ventriloquized as ethnic difference, but historicized as the space of dispossession and the supplanting of hunting, gathering, and tribal sharing by a capitalist economy in the North. The aesthetics of this postcolonial novel are deeply rooted in its concern for social justice and testimony, but at times exude pathos. While the problems of appropriation, pathos, ventriloquism, realism, and national allegory have in the past been seen primarily as “pitfalls” of representing the Other in postcolonial fiction, they are currently being re-examined with a more supple approach to the aesthetics of resistance, given the discursive options of the author at the time and the myth of authenticity (Brydon, Moss).

### **The “White Inuit” according to Roy: Contact, Consumption, and the Contaminated Text**

Roy’s own ambivalence toward colonization emerges when she writes at length in her travel notes about her exchange with a telephone company employee who pushes the sale of luxury phones on the Inuit; after initial harsh criticism, she concludes that one must laugh about the *folie* since it is difficult to find the guilty party: “*Il est tout le monde à la fois, personne en particulier*” (Gagné juil.-sept. 1976: 379). Within the novel the cultural politics of contact are ambivalent, slipping sometimes into romantic idealism.

When Inez and Elsa meet in the cemetery and reflect on the origins of mixed blood babies and conclude that soldiers spawning babies far and wide (like the seeds of a windflower) is perhaps the solution to racial strife in the world, the text romanticizes the connection between (neo)colonization and war. This proposition gives the English title, *Windflower*, a primarily fatalistic ring, since progress, war, and colonization seem as natural to humanity as the restless river in the French title. Through the symbol of the river, Roy paradoxically conflates progress with nature and critiques it for disturbing nature.

The novel replays a romantic stance toward miscegenation and war in the final pages when Elsa muses over whether her son's fate will be similar to his father's, the American GI. She wonders if Jimmy will end up as a soldier in Vietnam, attracting the attention of a shy young girl, "drawing her aside" (*attirer à l'écart*) in hiding: "Tout se répétait dans la vie." (228). Chapman interprets this scene as a desire "to expand the circle of métissage" (57), but does not comment on the idealist gesture of naturalizing the sexual use, if not rape, of women in occupied territories. Nonetheless, Roy does strike an understated critical note in this scene through irony when Elsa recognizes from the newspaper reports that the Vietnamese look much like the Inuit. Such moments underscore a political analysis of war (as in *Bonheur d'occasion*) and of racial hierarchies as well. Chapman rightly suggests that the historical markers of the Korean and Vietnamese Wars anchor the Inuit lives in a particular historical period rather than leaving them essentialized in nature (57, 59). For the astute reader, the passage also demonstrates the way the colonized people of one country are used to colonize those of another—in this case, both in the name of capital.

The ambivalence in this work is not the celebrated ambivalence of post-modern aesthetics, but rather ambivalence about conflict and resolution, counter-history and mythical humanism, realism and allegory, social criticism and idealism. With current re-evaluations of transitional texts and postcolonial aesthetics in mind, we can reread *La Rivière sans repos* and *Windflower* as counter discourse that oscillates between the romantic and the resistant, the colonial and the anti-colonial. However, most of the space of the novel and most of its cultural work is devoted to disrupting colonialism and consumerism by testifying to the history of disenfranchisement of the Inuit, and in particular, of Elsa, and the "use" that colonizers and capital make of her, her female body, her mother's love, and her territory.

The second most important space in *La Rivière sans repos* is given over to the humanist goals of the novel, which encourage empathy and spiritual reflection on the universal level of myth. Ricard reports in his biography that Roy was generally unconcerned with politics and interested mostly in writing. But her humanism led her to a worldview that was engaged and caring. It may be argued that several features of the novel serve to romanticize the plight of the Inuit, if not appropriate their voice: the pathos of the realist story, the elemental and universalizing quality of the myth, the omniscient position of the narrator, the reinscription of binaries (progress and tradition) as an ever-present paradox, and the intermittent conflation of indigenous characters with nature and innocence, not to mention the caricature of their physical features. But one cannot overlook that Roy's realism and her allegory are aimed carefully at the radical critique of colonization with its discourse of progress, its culture of acquisitiveness, its systemic use of the Inuit as market and labour, its physical displacement of them (from Old to New Fort Chimo), and its cultural invasion and dislocation of the Inuit as a people.

Throughout the novel, overt passages referring to the historical occupation of the North by non-natives multiply (first for whales and fur, and then motivated largely by military concerns in the 1950s), commenting critically on the adjacent role of the church, schools, the Hudson's Bay Company, competing levels of government, and the newspapers themselves in the dislocation of the Inuit. Importantly, when Elsa and her son flee with Uncle Ian to the other side of the river to pursue a traditional nomadic life, the police are sent to bring Jimmy back to school. The RCMP were routinely used to round up Inuit children for schooling and language training, if not for residential schools (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 4-6). McMillan notes that the federal government of the period encouraged resettlement of the nomadic people into towns or for relocation in other regions in order to better "administer their Inuit charges" (286-7; see also Pritzker on Ungava Inuit 536). At one point, Thaddeus rejects the idea that the Hudson's Bay Company exploited them but in the next breath pronounces: "L'histoire des Esquimaux et l'histoire de la Compagnie n'en font qu'une..." (142-3), collapsing the longer history of the Inuit into that of European trade and settlement.

Unlike other aboriginal peoples to the South, the Inuit were not the target of mass genocide nor did they suffer the expropriation of the majority of their land, but the coming of progress after contact was more rapid, albeit later, in the North than in the South. Since the transformations (that is from

nomadic to town-dwellers, hunting to wage labour, traditional languages and values to non-native enforced schooling) took place largely within one generation, newly settled villages contained people who had lived nomadically beside others who were born in towns (McMillan, Pritzker). Though this widespread and rapid transformation of Inuit life resulted in numerous negative effects such as illness, malnutrition, a breakdown in traditional family and education, and inadequate housing, by the 1960s, the Inuit had mounted strong resistance to neocolonization. Most notably they launched one of Canada's largest successful land claims movements, which resulted in the creation of Nunavut (our land), a mainly Inuit territory about the size of France which represents roughly one fifth of the land mass of Canada (Pritzker, 523). The national advocacy and activist association established in 1971, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, and circumpolar alliances with other Inuit have buttressed land claims and the movement to preserve traditional languages and customs. Lest the title of this paper "Used People," and Roy's critique of colonization imply the defeat of a people, we need to recognize the relative autonomy of the Inuit compared to that of other aboriginal peoples to the South. We also need to note, as expressed by the character of Uncle Ian, that historically the threat to autonomy has come whenever non-native capitalist culture discovers treasures in the North or the North itself as treasure. Ian laments the interest in their land shown by the Whites since the lines of war crossed the pole. Whereas once their land was considered too poor to tempt outsiders, now their position is strategic and their land holds worth for others in its minerals and other treasures: "Ah, pauvres nous, finit-il en une sorte de souhait, que Dieu nous garde des trésors!" (170).

Old Fort Chimo was the remains of a Moravian mission (1811) and a nearby Hudson Bay fur trading post dating back to the early 1830s, and New Fort Chimo was a larger, mixed white and Inuit settlement developed around the airport and the strategic use of the North. Although not mentioned in Roy's narrative, the actual naming of Fort Chimo (pronounced "shee mo") was, ironically, based on the mispronunciation of the Inuit phrase "saimuuq," meaning "Let's shake hands!"—frequently the first words heard by the European whalers, fur traders, and missionaries when they encountered the Ungava Inuit (Nunavik Tourism Association).<sup>10</sup> Misnaming or renaming is central to the discourses of discovery and progress and thus to postcolonial writing: in the early 1960s when Roy visited briefly, the place was still named through misrecognition.<sup>11</sup> In 1980, the new Fort Chimo would change its name to the Inuit word, Kuujuaq, meaning "great river."



On the allegorical level of the text, the early rape scene prefigures cultural invasion and misrecognition. It signifies the ambivalence and the imbalance of power between the indigenous people and those who occupy their land. Granted, there is an underlying human dimension to the scene whereby the young woman and young man are simply experimenting with natural desire, but the tone of the encounter is set ultimately by self-interest and abandonment when the GI fails to recognize Elsa or the baby after he has used her as a sexual outlet. Yet the rape itself does not position Elsa uniquely in the victim position. She, like the other Inuit girls, is predisposed toward seduction by white culture in the form not only of romantic movie stars, but also of pre-packaged notions of romance and white superiority. Elsa encounters the GI by surprise on the road, walking home with her girlfriends after watching films at the mission. Though the Inuit girls laugh at the odd practices (kissing) and plot twists of Western romance and the ugliness of Clarke Gable, even their stance mimics the movies as they walk with their arms linked around each others' waists "*comme elles l'avaient vu faire au cinéma*" (95). Elsa's limited resistance to the rape issues from the unreality of the moment of contact with the GI for when he pushes her down and jumps on her, she feels panic mediated by unreality and humour: "*Hors cette panique, tout était cependant tel qu'au cinéma, étrange, lointain, à peine vraisemblable*" (100). The unreality of the moment suggests that both seduction and coercion are at play in a (neo)colonialism that sends film images on ahead of armies and businessmen to fill the heads of the indigenous people. But capital follows closely. The rapist presses bills into the hand of his victim immediately after the assault, an action both realistic and allegorically significant. Elsa does not call the encounter rape, and the priest alone implies she has been too compliant. It is left for readers to perceive the imbalance of power between Elsa's innocent compliance and the GI's covert taking of pleasure without asking. Roy adds the detail of his wearing sunglasses to imply coldness and deceit, and when Elsa later spies him marching with other soldiers, he will not acknowledge her. Feminist readers will recognize the covert power of male specularisation as he sizes up and selects Elsa as target of both desire and disgust.

Elsa will encounter the young GI who fathers her baby along the road between the airport and the village: the mythic questing between progress and traditional Inuit culture and the mythic mixing of races in the person of Jimmy are set realistically in the history of "development" of the region. The greatest foray by whites into Kuujuaq occurred in World War II, with the

building of the highway to an American army airbase in 1945. The airbase was later bought back by the Canadian airforce and used widely during the building of the Distant Early Warning Line for air defense. While Elsa's back and forth movement between the old and the new has most often been read as an impasse between the binaries of the past (nomadic, Inuit culture) and the future (the white man's progress and technology) or as a spatial metaphor for cultural cleavage and lack of belonging (Dansereau 1996, 462), the road throughout the story appears as a site of ambivalence and hybridity within which racial categories are destabilized and contaminated through contact. For example, although the priest attempts to control intercultural relations by showing movies to segregated groups of whites and Inuit, the young soldiers and the Inuit girls keep coming together on the road outside the village. Furthermore, when they do come together, it is the Inuit especially who appear deeply changed by contact.

When contact is sexualized early in the novel, Elsa's own ambivalence is crucial. White society will invade with its industrialized, technological, and militarized culture that will seep into most aspects of her everyday material and spiritual life. Hence, I do not agree with Chapman's reading that Elsa's experience of hybridity is one of wearing a series of masks between cultures. If one pays close attention to desire within Elsa's story, the contamination of one culture by another is as evident as the binary opposition or separateness of the two cultures. Furthermore, rape/seduction lays the groundwork for a realistic story of cultural invasion by cinema, telephone, radio, western medicine, non-native law, education, airports, highways, and the company store, an invasion that is inexorable and penetrating in its offerings.

The revolution in technology is important to the "trois nouvelles esquimaudes" preceeding Elsa's story in that they prepare the reader for a wider understanding of dislocation and a deeper understanding of the paradox of consent and coercion. The earlier stories disrupt the discourse of progress by questioning the use of the telephone, the wheel chair, and the hospital in the context of the balanced lives of other cultures. The unfolding of the pros and cons of progress in the form of better communication and medicine make readers reflect on colonial assumptions that these innovations were necessarily improving Inuit lives. Yet, instead of pure nostalgia for a pre-contact golden age, Roy depicts her characters enjoying as well as ruing the trappings of "progress" (tea, hospitals, the telephone, schooling, housing, wheelchairs, baseball, processed food, clocks, and a large variety of com-

modities). The absence of these “trois nouvelles esquimaudes” in the English version is regrettable because it diminishes the postcolonial critique and complexity of the novel. The first story, “Les satellites,” dramatizes the advent of airlifts of the sick and hospital care as a means of prolonging life artificially; the second, the advent of the telephone as a novel form of interacting at a distance; and the third, “Le fauteuil roulant,” the advent of the wheelchair as a means of giving mobility to the infirm and the aged. All three stories reflect the paradox of progress and technology that offers, on the one hand, comfort or instant gratification not available in pre-contact times but interferes, on the other hand, with more traditional, balanced cultural practices and expectations based on different notions of caring and community. The airlift to a hospital saves Deborah from her imminent death, but prolongs her life so that she becomes a burden on her family and must face death a second time. The telephone is a new human presence and means of reaching out across the cold or of complaining to the white authorities, but it also provides a way of checking up on each other, invading privacy, and avoiding the pleasure of closer human contact. The wheelchair brings similarly mixed blessings, allowing Ian, an invalid, to be taken out on the tundra and see parts of the shoreline that he has never seen before. Yet it seems like such a gadget and a game that the children forget about old Ian one day and abandon him to the elements overnight during a storm, leaving him perched precariously on a hill alone against the rain and the wind.<sup>12</sup> In all cases, technology ultimately distances members of a community whose earlier culture taught close ties, balance, and interdependence to fight against the elements.

### **Mothering through Poverty/Poverty through Mothering:**

Sa vie s'usait à lui acheter d'aussi riches vêtements et d'aussi charmants jouets qu'en avaient les enfants de Madame Beaulieu. Pourtant, même seule ici avec lui, sans autre témoin de leur élégance que le ciel lointain, elle en était heureuse comme d'un obscur et merveilleux devoir accompli.

Gabrielle Roy, *La Rivière sans repos*<sup>13</sup>

In *La Rivière sans repos*, consumerism mediates mothering as well as time and community. The novel focuses on how a mother uses up her life trying to bridge the gap between needs created by consumer capitalism and colonial culture and the difficulties faced by an aboriginal single mother. As a domestic, Elsa works such long hours that she will become alienated from her son

by leaving him in his grandmother's care. Hence, progress mediates mothering in negative ways, segmenting time into a commodity. The domestic details explain Elsa's confinement in the cage of progress and consumer culture: she works with her eye on the clock so that she can buy her son white bread, hamburger, snow suits, warm baths, and toys. In passages such as the following, the perverted desire of consumer fetishism is shown to hold the key to the cage: "Mais, ayant touché son premier mois de salaire et couru d'une traite au magasin, elle fut abasourdie de voir tout son argent dépensé avant même d'avoir pu s'en rendre compte. Par ailleurs elle avait pu entrevoir bien d'autres objets qui lui faisaient envie. Elle pensa donc continuer à travailler encore un peu..." (121). The novel is a nuanced reflection on how women as mothers may be complicit in reproducing colonial values. Its subtext signals the limits of economic disenfranchisement and mothering when they meet the broken promises of progress and materialism. Elsa's loss of Jimmy to non-native culture and the richer South echoes the key scene in *Bonheur d'occasion*, when the poor, francophone mother from Saint-Henri watches hopelessly as her child embraces expensive toys and an English nurse in a Westmount hospital. Both mothers know that the other culture holds more riches, attention, and hope than their poor homes can provide.

Elsa's choices for raising more capital to care for Jimmy according to white ways are limited, given the new system of wage labour. She can work more hours, but she cannot easily aspire to a promotion or another position. As one cultural anthropologist has observed, the system implanted by whites in Inuit territory was "caste-like" more than class-like since

Qallunaat, the White, [were] generally temporary residents of the north. As government administrators, teachers, missionaries, shopkeepers or police, these non-natives held the positions of authority. Status differences were clearly evident in the communities, often with the Qallunaat occupying a separate part of the town. Failing to understand the nature of the new institutions, and not speaking the language in which they were conducted, the Inuit found themselves excluded from the realm of decision-making. Only in recent years have the Inuit begun to reclaim control over their lives. (McMillan 286)

Ironically, Elsa's acquisitiveness, her overwork, and constant cleaning, which seem to promise to lead her out of poverty and into progress, culminate in an epiphany that warns her against progress. As a domestic, she feels alienated from her own work: she is frustrated at cleaning another woman's house instead of her own, and senses the unreality of her maid's uniform, as if she is acting out a role in the cinema in front of the white women taking tea (123-24). In the latter scene, Elsa questions class/caste difference and rejects

it as artificial: in reality they are all mothers together. Fighting the alienation that has crept between Jimmy and her, Elsa decides to escape from wage-labour back into a more traditional culture of nomadism and subsistence. Following Ian on the hunt is not merely a return to the past or to nature, but to a different social system of caring for one another. Besides subsistence and sharing, her reverting includes breaking the incest taboo to couple with her uncle, a concession to the hunter/man and isolation of nomadic life. But no suggestion of rape figures in this concession to male power—there is even a fleeting suggestion of female desire on Elsa's part. This segment of the narrative represents a different, older economy based on survival and male dominance with its own use for women, yet one in which sex is tied to caring rather than abandonment.

When forced back to the New Fort Chimo, Elsa will return to wage labour through piecework, sewing dolls and souvenirs, an activity that replaces house-cleaning for non-native women. The commodification of the Eskimo dolls shows how progress swallows tradition as well as the present. As realism, the novel reflects a trend emerging in the 1960s: Inuit arts and crafts (mostly in the form of soapstone carving, but also in the form of clothing, boots, and dolls) were being commercialized with the encouragement of the federal government to fill the gap left in the new economy after whaling and furs had lost a market. Turning from domestic service to entrepreneurship may appear to be progress. But the novel indicates that the introduction of the light bulb will keep the mother sewing long into the night in order to earn more cash. And so her past entrapment in the time, capital, and technology of the new culture repeats.

While Elsa has often been read mythically in the continuum of Roy's Mother Courage figures, she should also be read materially as a poor woman, a female domestic, a disenfranchised Inuit, and a single mother. Yet Elsa suffers none of the dreadful shame or panic over poverty and illegitimacy that the women in *Bonheur d'occasion* do. The Inuit community around her refuses to shun her son as illegitimate, partly because of his mixed racial status and the way his light hair and skin are viewed as miraculous. Also, a relative absence of shame surrounds the whole notion of "illegitimacy." The priest alone, importing part of the European and Christian fixation with paternity and ownership of children, expresses negative attitudes toward the pregnancy. Although the novel portrays the single mother in a largely self-imposed isolation from her community, in traditional Inuit social communities, even after contact, extended family parenting, if not informal

adoption, were common solutions to teenage pregnancy (Archibald). Pritzker reports that offspring from non-kin sexual relations were regarded as fully legitimate in Inuit communities (522) and Archibald suggests that in some Inuit communities teenage pregnancies may even have been expected in order to provide an adopted first child for doting grandparents. That, under patriarchal capitalism, the weight of responsibility for parenting falls on the single mother with her limited access to capital represents an upheaval in the nature of caring in the postcolonial poverty narrative, but it also betrays a Western angle of vision. Traditional Inuit culture saw parenting styles shift with the seasons: ranging from a much-extended or tribal form of childcare among ten or twenty families in the summer camp to smaller, yet often extended, family units during the nomadic periods of the winter hunt (Pritzker, McMillan).

The playpen is a powerful image of the shift in mothering under colonization. Bought by Elsa in mimicry of the non-native mothers, it is regarded with horror by the grandparents and Inuit neighbors who practice a different concept of child care based on tolerance and freedom. From recent discussions of parenting in Inuit culture, we learn that “isuma” or the profound respect for the mindset of others leads to parenting that is highly tolerant for at least two reasons: first one should not intrude upon the mindset of another within the family, and second, children are perceived not to have developed their isuma and thus should be distracted or ignored rather than punished for wrong doing (Qitsualik).<sup>14</sup> Elsa’s impatience with Winnie’s parenting arises from different notions of control over the child in spirit and in body as well as Elsa’s internalized racial shame for the disorder of her parents’ home. In showing the single mother establishing largely self-imposed distance from extended parenting, the novel tends to represent a non-native view of the single mother, albeit one that is not marred by great shame over illegitimacy. Further, Elsa’s disrespect for and competition with the elder Winnie defies traditional culture according to which “elders were revered for their wisdom and knowledge, including their valuable advice and expertise in the area of child rearing and parenting” (Kanatami 4). Yet another rift with Inuit child-rearing is Jimmy’s abandonment by his biological father leaving him without a male model to show him his role in a hunting culture. Through close modeling on adult behaviour within both the extended and nuclear units, rather than through formal schooling, cultural memory and education were transmitted in pre-contact Inuit communities (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 4-5). Elsa would carry her baby in her arms rather than on her

back in Winnie's traditional way (126), because he was half white and "afin qu'il vit loin devant lui" (128). This concession to progress in the style of mothering trains the boy in the habit of looking far in front of him, prefiguring allegorically his escape to the South, where he will eventually join the white man's army. The only word Elsa will have from him is indirect news of an incomplete message, filtered through interference in the radio when an unidentified "American" pilot talks to other villagers. In his abandonment of his mother and his choice to join the airforce, Jimmy represents assimilated Inuits and their seduction by technology. Less ambiguous than his mother's fate, his lifeline suggests the faster, more complete assimilation of future generations and the strategic use of the North for military purposes.

As in *Bonheur d'occasion*, war and motherhood face off in *La Rivière sans repos* and represent different ways of caring for and using the young. Toward the end of the novel, the disembodied voice believed to be that of Jimmy, an airplane pilot who radios when flying over the community, may be an ironic nod to an ascended Christ figure (Chapman 58)—Jimmy gone white and thus elevated from the abject. But the anonymous radio voice is also emblematic of the loss of human contact. It configures the distancing presence of a society that worships technology and capital, the false gods of progress and war (See Gagne, juil.-sept. 1976). As in Roy's opening stories about the telephone and the wheel chair, technological innovations often displace more direct and balanced means of human care and contact. Progress carries the Inuit further—but further from each other.

Of the three women aligned in the course of the coming-of-age story—Elsa herself, Winnie, and Elizabeth Beaulieu—the text demonstrates that the most sorrowful, the most lost and dislocated emotionally is the white middle-class housewife, who looks idly and forlornly through her window each day at the foreign landscape. On the level of realism, she may suffer from post-partum depression (Babby); on the allegorical level, her behaviour suggests an absence of caring within the non-native system of production and exchange. Mme. Beaulieu's sense of dislocation and sadness emerges not only despite her possessions, but also because of them. When Elsa is working too hard, the narrator reports that she begins to take on the thin, harassed look of her employer and the other young white women who were always anxiously setting themselves more and more difficult goals (129).

Out of sympathy, Elsa mothers her white employer as well as cleaning house for her. The policeman's wife suffers from depression and boredom in her husband's northern posting, dislocated as she is in a place she cannot

find beautiful, despite her ironic name Elizabeth *Beaulieu*. In contemplating her employer's severe melancholy, Elsa begins to question the ways of the whites, whom she has tried so hard to emulate. In her soulful interrogation, she enumerates Mme. Beaulieu's possessions and wonders why these comforts do not protect the white woman from sadness. Here, Roy underscores the void and deception at the base of consumer culture as well as Elsa's empathy for the white woman:

Pourquoi Madame Beaulieu souffrait-elle autant? Elle avait tout: de beaux enfants, une riche maison sur son roc lui servant de piédestal pour voir le pays en entier, un intérieur douillet, des tapis de laine, des images au mur, et surtout un mari aimant qui chaque soir, en entrant, s'informait avec sollicitude: " Est-ce que tu ne vas pas un peu mieux aujourd'hui, ma petite chérie?" La créature la plus choyée, la plus aimée de Fort Chimo, n'en était pas moins souffrante et triste. Ce chagrin sans cause apparente inquiétait Elsa plus que ne l'eût fait un malheur ordinaire, comme il en serait arrivé à elle ou à sa mère par exemple. La tristesse des Blancs devait être le signe que personne n'y échappait. Vaguement le progrès lui en paraissait parfois la cause. Alors elle prenait peur de cette force terrifiante qui était peut-être au-delà de toute endurance humaine. (148-149)

Whereas Uncle Ian as nomadic hunter and male provider was repulsed by the non-native style of the village settlement (the randomness, smallness, insignificance, and crowded nature of the houses against the landscape) Elsa, the mother and nurturer is repulsed by the deception and sadness *within* the houses. Moreover, when she mimics the whites too perfectly in her own house, the other Inuit become uncomfortable and will not stay for long. Indeed, in such a stern, sterile, and commodified domestic space, Elsa can find no home or sense of belonging.

Toward the end of her journey, Elsa's silhouette is tragically comic as she balances a white woman's hat on her short body and totters on high heels. Instead of modeling herself on her mother and Inuit women, she has donned the costume of the white woman (219). Here she negotiates class as well as racial difference. Like numerous domestics from other minority communities in Canadian literature, Elsa wears "borrowed beauty" (Tynes), and does so awkwardly as evidence of her dislocation, mimicry, and stunted aspirations within a class as well as a racial hierarchy. Yet in the new space at the end of her journey, usually interpreted tragically as an impasse, Elsa has rejected mimicry as a strategy of surviving colonization. On the beach beside the great river, she cuts a different figure from the unbalanced woman on ill-fitting heels. Hers is the mythic figure of the outlaw, the witch, the obstinate,



Aboriginal woman who, though wounded by progress, at times steps in and out of its path to create her own space.

Over 60 years of age at the time of writing the collection of stories, Roy examines death, care, abandonment, and progress as spiritual and social matters both across cultures and for all of humankind, but she also questions how Inuit women, in particular, negotiate these spiritual and social roles throughout their reproductive years and at the end of their lives. On a mythic level, Roy invokes the image of the witch and the wise woman to draw our attention to the suppressed power and desire in these displaced women. When Winnie competes for Jimmy's love, she cackles like a witch ("elle avait tout l'air d'une sorcière réjouie de ses tours"[146]), when Inez meets Elsa in the cemetery, her head is brimming with memories: "Elle n'avait plus de dents, peu d'ouïe, presque rien de sa vue d'autrefois, mais des souvenirs plein sa vieille tête branlante" (172). And when Elsa, turned part nomad, part homeless woman, paces the beach at the end of the novel, she is mostly freed from domestic labour and material possessions. After losing Jimmy, Elsa also loses the taste for wage labour, selling her sewing machine and closing up her house to live a hybrid, nomadic existence. Pausing long enough for one preferred domestic task only, in front of a cauldron of wash water, Elsa is sketched paradoxically as both empowered and worn out—an Inuk rebelling as homeless woman, witch, and outlaw:

Elle dormait tout habillée. Elle n'avait plus de lit à faire, ni non plus de repas à préparer, car elle mangeait ce qu'elle avait sous la main, une bouchée de n'importe quoi, quand elle avait très faim. Il n'y avait qu'une corvée ménagère à laquelle elle restait fidèle, sa lessive; elle la faisait sur la grève, dans un baquet d'eau mise à chauffer sur un feu de rebuts. Quelquefois elle avait de vieux pneus à brûler dont la fumée noire empestait. À travers, on la distinguait à peine qui attisait le feu. (224)<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Elsa figures homelessness and dislocation rather than mythical power or playful ambivalence and displacement. The result of contact is mostly loss. Hospitals, schools, and domestic labour, and mothering itself—all sites of caring among people—are mediated by capital: they all come with a price tag. The ambivalence of progress is resolved in a final image of abandonment and homelessness, suggesting that Roy was not willing to rest her reflections on undecidable paradox. She was commenting critically on the effects of ambivalence in a new economy of (un)caring.

Yet homelessness and dislocation do have a radical potential in the novel as an outlaw space. The in-between space is partially of Elsa's own making:

somewhere between the refusal to be carried away by progress and the impossibility of returning to the traditional culture. Within it, Elsa enacts a form of bricolage, a declaration of difference, not simply a static space of impasse. She lives outside of the village, “une incorrigible nomade,” an abandoned mother, a prematurely-aged, made woman who repeats herself. In materialist terms, she is gathering and scavenging, yet owning her own domestic labour instead of a working for a wage (240). “Un salaire, un emploi, la sécurité! . . . qu’aurait-elle fait de tout cela! Alors qu’elle ne tenait plus qu’à acheter, au prix de son travail, le droit de rester ensuite à ne rien faire auprès de la rivière, pour se sentir, comme elle, emportée, délivrée.” (225). She solves the problem of doing one’s washing out of doors when fuel is lacking by stirring a pot of boiling wash water over a burning tire, cleaning through the black smoke. Elsa’s is not a liminal space of endless possibilities and discursive play unbound by hierarchies, nor is it an aestheticized space of pure paradox; it is rather a new imaginative space bound by the material and historical circumstances of place and time: the beach, the loneliness, the cast-off mother reusing cast-off products of industrial culture like old tires. The women at the centre of this novel are not merely caught tragically and helplessly at an impasse between cultures and generations, nor merely used up by a system that extracts their sexual services and their domestic work, they are also set in restless motion to show how Inuit women survive these cultural moments. The final scene shows Elsa now become Winnie (232), a mythic aged woman walking the beach, bent over, cackling, smoking, blowing upon a plant as soft as the hair of a child and letting go the migratory seeds. The myth suggests that survival itself can be, after all, a fine means of resistance.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to FQRSC and SSHRC for funding this research and to research assistants, Natasha Dagenais and Jackie Hall. Special thanks also to Ben-Zion Shek for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft and to the anonymous readers from *Canadian Literature*.
- 2 “Her life was being used up, moreover, attempting to keep up with progress, a difficult master progress: did anyone know what it wanted and where it was leading people?” (*Windflower* 35)
- 3 “When summer returned, there she would be again, a little more worn, a little more bowed, passing along the rim of the broad sky, parallel to that distant chain of ancient mountains that are the most abraded on earth.” (*Windflower* 151)
- 4 In “Industrialism and Cultural Values,” Innis reflected on the lack of understanding between industrialized, capitalist societies and the earlier societies they displace “...an

attitude described by Samuel Butler: “‘All progress is based upon a universal innate desire on the part of every organism to live beyond its income.’ The concern with specialization and excess, making more and better mousetraps, precludes the possibility of understanding a preceding civilization concerned with balance and proportion. Industrialism implies technology and the cutting of time into precise fragments suited to the needs of the engineer and the accountant. . . . Constant changes in technology particularly as they affect communications, a crucial factor in determining cultural values (for example, the development of radio and television), increase the difficulties of recognizing balance let alone achieving it.” (323)

- 5 Taking a long view of history and prehistory, Wright questions whether progress knows its own way and critiques, in particular, the way capital and social hierarchies may determine that route at the expense of those caught up in what he refers to as “progress traps”: “Civilization is an experiment, a very recent way of life in the human career, and it has a habit of walking into what I am calling progress traps. A small village on good land beside a river is a good idea; but when the village grows into a city and paves over the good land, it becomes a bad idea. . . . This human inability to foresee—or to watch out for—long-range consequences may be inherent to our kind, shaped by the millions of years when we lived from hand to mouth by hunting and gathering. It may also be little more than a mix of inertia, greed, and foolishness encouraged by the shape of the social pyramid. The concentration of power at the top of large-scale societies gives the elite a vested interest in the status quo.” (108-9)
- 6 Gagné does some research into the incidence of illegitimate births at the time of Roy’s visit to Fort Chimo in 1961 and finds that most families are extended or nuclear, but about thirty per cent were not married (1976).  
Gagné does not appear to have statistics on the number of mixed-blood births at the time. The novel itself claims early in the text that there were many such births. Interestingly, Olive Dickason claims the earliest evidence of mixed blood births among the Inuit could be traced back to the fifteenth century where sightings of blond and red-headed babies among the Inuit suggested sexual contact with the Vikings or defecting fishermen (146).
- 7 The practice of using “Inuit” instead of the popular misnomer “Eskimo” (raw meat eaters) became official in 1977 after it was adopted at the first Inuit Circumpolar Conference held in Alaska that year. It was part of the strategy for a pan-Inuit movement to create unity among the people formerly known as Eskimo from Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Russia, and other areas in the Arctic (McMillan 292, see also Petrone).
- 8 See Margery Fee’s discussion of romantic nationalism in Canadian literature and the ideological implications of ritual sharing, gift-giving, and coupling between natives and non-natives.
- 9 Education of Inuit in Nunavik (Quebec) has apparently been more progressive in encouraging the Inuit to teach and cultivate their own language than other areas of the North (Kanatami 6).
- 10 According to oral testimonies in a recent history of Nunavut by McGill-Queens University Press, the traditional act of greeting practised by the Inuit was not to shake hands, but to raise their hands in the air to indicate that they held no weapons. Both oral testimonies and early photographs testify to the practice (Bennett and Rowley 132). For our purposes here, it is interesting to note that one cannot peel back all the layers of hybridity to reveal the authentic and thus misrepresentation itself is a relative term.

- 11 Chapman comments on the colonial significance of place names (50-51). In the novel all of the Inuit characters bear European names, yet in Inuit culture the ritual of naming has tremendous importance, especially given that the bearer of a name is believed to incorporate characteristics belonging to the previous owner of the name (Ooston). Some Inuit remember that although they had been given English names by missionaries who could not pronounce their Inuit names, they continued to use their Inuit names privately amongst themselves (Hansen).
- 12 The abandonment of the elderly was a practice in some Inuit communities, but it was a solemn ritual (Pritzker, McMillan), not a careless game as in the story of the wheel chair.
- 13 "Her life was becoming used up buying him clothes as costly and toys as charming as those possessed by the children of Madame Beaulieu. Yet even alone with no other elegance to all this elegance but the distant sky, she was as happy about it as at the performance of some obscure and marvelous duty" (*Windflower* 41).
- 14 "If there is a single characteristic that typifies Inuit culture, it is the concept known as *isuma*. As with so many concepts unique to Inuit, *isuma* is difficult for non-Inuit to grasp. It refers to the innermost thoughts and feelings a person has—their mindset. A fundamental tenet of Inuit society was the sacred nature of *isuma*: that another's mind was not to be intruded upon. Young children were thought not to have fully developed *isuma*, and were consequently considered exempt from adult responsibilities. Misbehaving children were not scolded or punished—the parents instead distracted or ignored them. This was not casual indifference, but rather the belief that the child was simply not old enough to be taught how to behave." (Qitsualik)
- 15 "She slept fully clothed. She no longer had beds to make or even any meals to prepare, for she ate whatever she chanced to have, a mouthful at random when she felt very hungry. There was only one household task to which she remained faithful, her laundry; she washed on the beach in a tub of water heated over a fire of rubbish. Sometimes she had old tires to burn. Through their evil black smoke she would be seen only dimly, stirring her fire." (*Windflower* 135)

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# If it was the sea we heard

*Penelope's Song*

Whose sea?

The sun up this early and how.

Going forth from the knees to a truant happiness.

Will be finished in one tall order, they assured us, pecking  
wives on cheeks, rubbing the curly heads of children.

The rustle of wind through sheep shit and sand flies.  
The usural torpidity of the morning and its general  
direction of decay.

A moment's density in their eyes offered up the shy event  
of our reckoning to a pampered heart.

They took long oars to water as the end of privileges of  
place and turned heels to breaker with morning sun upon  
the rosined water, their bodies hip-deep in the swelling surf.

Through the surf's ebb and draw, they moved the stalwart  
ship.

Every utterance we gave was the true one.

They set sail to wind, canvas snapping.

As they moved into the furthest wave with its broken back  
upon the buried reef, blue water from sudden depths  
beyond the shifts and shoals of doubt, our hands tired.

We turned our backs upon the ocean roar.

These men over the ocean's small but growing depths,  
I remember.

Of doubt, these soiled ghosts?

Theirs was the calm of raging waters, fettered by borders  
of acceptable blame.

The end I see in this old order dismantled nightly, step for  
step ahead, to an end greeded by sleep.

Much doesn't care for my place in this story of unlikely  
return.

A tearmoist body a man could wreck against.

Night ravels me.



# La figure de Gabrielle Roy chez Jacques Poulin et Michel Tremblay<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

S'il est permis de prendre acte de la fortune d'une œuvre littéraire ou de l'influence exercée par celle-ci, il s'avère souvent difficile de mesurer avec précision son impact réel chez les autres écrivains et de saisir les modalités exactes selon lesquelles s'opèrent sa transmission et son incorporation à de nouveaux univers littéraires ou à de nouvelles sphères culturelles. C'est ainsi que dans son ouvrage sur la question des transferts culturels franco-allemands, Michel Espagne souligne à juste titre le caractère problématique de la notion d'influence littéraire, une notion qui « tend à rabattre la dynamique de l'échange du récepteur sur le producteur de message » (32) et qui « suppose plus qu'elle ne démontre l'existence d'une relation immédiate, quasiment magique, entre les deux » (32). De plus, toujours selon M. Espagne, « la notion d'influence suppose que les relations entre les cultures s'opèrent dans un espace dont l'homogénéité est artificielle, un espace strictement littéraire » (32) alors qu'en réalité « les médiations expliquant qu'un écrivain se soit laissé inspirer par un auteur étranger peuvent être de nature multiple, faire intervenir des considérations sur les voyages, l'histoire et la diffusion des livres, les institutions d'enseignement » (32). Il en résulte que les études consacrées aux influences littéraires ont souvent tendance à surévaluer la part du producteur (l'auteur source) au détriment du récepteur (l'auteur cible), en négligeant de considérer comment ce dernier, loin de se limiter à subir passivement l'influence en question, tend à la transformer de façon dynamique et créatrice, au terme d'un processus marqué par des tensions, des décalages et des distorsions.

Dans le texte qui suit, je me propose donc de mesurer, autant que faire se peut, la fortune de l'œuvre littéraire de Gabrielle Roy au Québec, mais en tentant justement de saisir les modes particuliers de transformation ou de transposition de cette œuvre chez deux écrivains bien connus, Jacques Poulin et Michel Tremblay. Je me pencherai surtout sur l'usage tout à fait particulier que fait le romancier Jacques Poulin de l'intertexte royen et de la figure de Gabrielle Roy elle-même. Comme nous le verrons, l'analyse conjugée de cet intertexte et de cette figure dans les romans de Jacques Poulin permet de mieux saisir et mettre en perspective l'impact que les écrits de la romancière venue du Manitoba ont pu avoir chez un auteur comme Michel Tremblay.

### La fortune de Gabrielle Roy au Québec : une hypothèse

Pour commencer, j'aimerais formuler une hypothèse ou, pour être plus précis, exprimer une intuition. On sait que le discours critique au Québec met souvent l'accent sur la position charnière qu'occupe *Bonheur d'occasion* dans l'évolution du roman québécois. Au sein de ce discours, *Bonheur d'occasion* devient en quelque sorte le prototype du roman urbain qui propose enfin une vision réaliste de la ville, vision conforme à l'évolution de la société québécoise vers la modernité et l'urbanisation. Bien que cette vision soit juste, elle est devenue en quelque sorte un poncif de la critique au Québec. Pourtant, quand on y regarde bien, *Bonheur d'occasion* parle autant du village dans la ville que de la ville elle-même, qui joue souvent un rôle aliénant et déstructurant auprès des personnages du roman, à l'exception de Jean Lévesque. Il me semble que, dans *Bonheur d'occasion*, Gabrielle Roy parle avant toute chose de la communauté, de la petite communauté, c'est-à-dire d'une réalité qui s'avère une valeur non seulement bien canadienne-française, mais aussi canadienne tout court, comme elle l'avait bien montré quelques années plus tôt dans ses reportages destinés au *Bulletin des agriculteurs* sur les peuples de l'Ouest canadien. Je ne cherche pas ici à nier l'importance d'un roman comme *Bonheur d'occasion* dans le mouvement d'expression de la réalité urbaine au Québec, mais bien à relativiser la lecture qu'on en fait trop souvent.

Je pense que la véritable postérité de *Bonheur d'occasion* ne peut être envisagée qu'à la lumière de l'évolution subséquente de l'œuvre littéraire de Gabrielle Roy, qui a contribué à insuffler progressivement dans la conscience littéraire du lectorat québécois une dimension continentale ou nord-américaine, modifiant son rapport traditionnel à l'espace, à la communauté et du même coup à l'altérité. À partir de *La petite poule d'eau*, Gabrielle Roy va surtout explorer la réalité de l'Ouest et même du Nord canadiens, mais

sans que son œuvre cesse pour autant d'être considérée comme celle d'une romancière canadienne-française, devenue québécoise un peu à son corps défendant. Dans cette perspective, on peut supposer que les romans de Gabrielle Roy se rapprochent davantage de ceux d'Yves Thériault, avec qui ils présentent de nombreuses similitudes, que de la lignée des romanciers dits de la ville. À la rigueur, le discours sur l'américanité du roman québécois, en autant qu'on puisse faire abstraction des fondements idéologiques de ce discours, n'aurait sans doute pas épousé les mêmes contours si l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy n'avait pas été progressivement infléchie vers l'expression d'une réalité continentale où les grands espaces, la nature sauvage et les petites communautés humaines prenaient une place de tout premier plan. Au fond, l'évolution d'une certaine littérature québécoise, que cette dernière participe de l'expression de la ville ou de l'imaginaire des grands espaces, aurait sans doute été bien différente si l'œuvre Gabrielle Roy n'était pas venue la travailler de l'extérieur et de l'intérieur en même temps. C'est en effet l'œuvre d'une écrivaine canadienne-française, mais dont la formation littéraire et intellectuelle se trouvait dégagée en bonne partie des canons esthétiques d'une tradition jugée sclérosée,<sup>2</sup> qui est venue donner une impulsion décisive à l'expression romanesque au Québec. Dans *La détresse et l'enchantement*, Gabrielle Roy a d'ailleurs très bien exprimé comment le théâtre de Shakespeare, avec ses « grandes paroles faites pour retentir indéfiniment dans l'âme qui les a accueillies » (138), lui a permis d'échapper à la mentalité d'assiégés qui régnait alors à Saint-Boniface:

Je n'étais pas sans m'apercevoir que notre vie en était une de repliement sur soi, menant presque inévitablement à une forme d'assèchement. Le mot d'ordre était de survivre, et la consigne principale, même si elle n'était pas toujours formellement énoncée, de ne pas frayer avec l'étranger. Il me semblait sentir s'échapper de moi tous les jours un peu plus de force vive. (139)

### **La figure de Gabrielle Roy dans les romans de Jacques Poulin**

Dans un texte publié en 1995 et intitulé « Jacques Poulin: héritier spirituel de Gabrielle Roy », Paul Socken a relevé les nombreuses ressemblances entre les romans de Jacques Poulin et ceux de Gabrielle Roy: interrogation sur le rôle de l'écriture et de l'écrivain, quête d'un monde d'harmonie, de tendresse et d'unité, contestation des rôles traditionnels dévolus aux hommes et aux femmes, omniprésence des images de l'eau et de la maison, tonalité autobiographique, dépouillement de l'écriture, etc. « Les parallèles sont frappants, écrit Paul Socken. Poulin a évidemment lu Gabrielle Roy, a été profondément influencé par elle et a délibérément intégré sa vision du monde dans la sienne.

Le style, le ton, les idéaux, les images, les valeurs et la sensibilité sont produits d'esprits frères » (602). Pourtant, la figure de Gabrielle Roy n'apparaît qu'assez tardivement dans l'œuvre de Jacques Poulin, comme dans celle de Michel Tremblay d'ailleurs. Il faudra ainsi attendre la publication du sixième roman de Poulin, *Volkswagen blues*, paru en 1984, pour y voir apparaître la première mention de Gabrielle Roy. Eu égard aux nombreuses analogies entre les œuvres des deux romanciers, cette situation peut sembler assez étonnante, d'autant plus que chez Poulin, le recours au procédé de l'intertextualité n'était pas récent. Ainsi, dans *Jimmy*, roman publié en 1969, Poulin faisait déjà allusion pour la première fois à son romancier fétiche, Ernest Hemingway. Dans *Le cœur de la baleine bleue*, paru en 1970, où le recours au procédé en question devient encore plus systématique, le réseau intertextuel se ramifiait passablement, en attribuant cette fois une position centrale à un poème très connu de Saint-Denys Garneau, « Cage d'oiseau ». Pourtant, les romans de Gabrielle Roy ne faisaient pas encore partie de ce réseau, comme si le rôle dévolu à Gabrielle Roy était encore trop profondément intériorisé pour être revendiqué explicitement.

Comme l'a remarqué Paul Socken, il est possible de noter, dans l'œuvre romanesque de Poulin, une trajectoire qui ne va pas sans rappeler celle de Gabrielle Roy. À l'instar de son illustre devancière, Poulin inaugure son œuvre romanesque avec un roman moderne et urbain, *Mon cheval pour un royaume* (1967), pour effectuer ensuite une forme de retour vers les thèmes de l'enfance, de la nature et des paradis perdus. Dans *Le cœur de la baleine bleue* (1970) notamment, l'enfance devient le « pôle intérieur » que l'écrivain cherche à atteindre, si ce n'est la finalité de toute écriture. Les rapports entre ce roman et *La route d'Altamont*, paru quatre ans plus tôt, n'en deviennent que plus évidents, d'autant plus que *Le cœur de la baleine bleue* questionne directement la féminisation de la sensibilité et de l'écriture, comme on peut le constater dans cette phrase écrite par Jacques Poulin, une phrase qui évoque bien plus l'écriture de Gabrielle Roy que celle d'Ernest Hemingway (un écrivain dont Gabrielle Roy constitue peut-être la contrepartie féminine) : « Ce paysage qui m'habite depuis toujours et dont je vais bientôt voir l'ensemble, ce n'est rien d'autre que l'enfance elle-même » (*Le cœur* 191). On pourrait émettre les mêmes réflexions au sujet d'un roman comme *Les grandes marées*, publié en 1978, soit trois ans après *Un jardin au bout du monde* (1975), roman qui module les mêmes idées du jardin d'éden et des grands espaces continentaux présentes dans les nouvelles de Gabrielle Roy.

Si l'on en revient à *Volkswagen blues*, on peut noter que, dans ce roman, l'écrivain Jack Waterman est présenté comme un lecteur inquiet et parçimonieux: « Il avait ses auteurs favoris, dont il avait lu tous les livres, mais ces auteurs n'étaient pas nombreux : Hemingway, Réjean Ducharme, Gabrielle Roy, Salinger, Boris Vian, Brautigan et quelques autres. Et il avait ses livres préférés, qu'il relisait souvent et qui étaient pour lui de vieux amis » (42). L'intertexte de départ est ici *Fragiles lumières de la terre*, un recueil d'essais paru en 1978, dont plusieurs mettent en lumière la vie des pionniers dans l'ouest de l'Amérique du Nord, ce qui constitue d'ailleurs le thème central de *Volkswagen blues*. Dans un épisode du roman de Poulin, le livre de Gabrielle Roy est mis en parallèle avec *La pénétration du continent américain par les Canadiens français*, un essai de Benoît Brouillette publié en 1939. Dans cet épisode, Jack essaie de trouver le livre en question dans sa bibliothèque, mais il cherche un livre à couverture bleue, alors que cette couverture est rouge, comme le lui fait remarquer la Grande Sauterelle. Cette insistance sur la couleur est significative quand on sait l'importance du bleu chez Poulin : couleur de l'âme, le bleu est aussi associé à l'écriture, comme en font foi les titres de trois romans de Poulin: *Le cœur de la baleine bleue*, *Volkswagen blues* et *Les yeux bleus de Mistassini*. L'hésitation sur la couleur du livre de Brouillette est d'autant plus significative qu'elle est redoublée par une hésitation sur son titre : Jack parle en effet de *L'exploration du continent américain*, alors qu'il s'agit de *La pénétration du continent américain*, ainsi que l'observe la Grande Sauterelle. On l'aura compris, cet épisode suggère deux conceptions de l'écriture, une conception féminine, caractérisée par le bleu et qui renvoie à Gabrielle Roy, et une conception masculine, caractérisée celle-là par le rouge et qui renvoie peut-être, par-delà le livre de Brouillette, à Ernest Hemingway.

Dans *Volkswagen blues*, on retrouve un autre passage important consacré à Gabrielle Roy. Jack Waterman demande à la Grande Sauterelle si elle aime *Fragiles lumières de la terre* ; elle répond simplement qu'elle l'aime beaucoup. Je me permets de citer ici un long passage de ce roman :

Il aurait aimé lui dire que le titre du livre de Gabrielle Roy prenait une signification spéciale quand on savait que cette femme était très belle et vulnérable et que ses yeux verts étaient brillants comme des lumières. Il aurait voulu lui dire aussi de ne pas lire trop vite, parce que l'écriture de Gabrielle Roy était très personnelle et que, par exemple, il était toujours intéressant de regarder à quel endroit dans la phrase elle plaçait ses adverbes. Mais il ne voulait pas déranger la fille une autre fois dans sa lecture, alors il se tut. Il fut renvoyé à sa propre écriture. » (47-48)

Il est intéressant de noter ici que le recours à l'intertexte royen correspond non seulement à une visée thématique, comme c'est généralement le cas, mais aussi à des considérations de nature humaine et esthétique, en ceci que Poulin fait directement référence à la figure de Gabrielle Roy, c'est-à-dire à sa beauté, sa fragilité et son regard lumineux, ainsi qu'à son style si original et particulier. Quand on sait jusqu'à quel point Jacques Poulin est partisan d'une écriture sobre et minimaliste, on peut s'étonner qu'il valorise l'adverbe de cette façon, mais il vise justement à établir une relation très étroite, constative pourrions-nous dire, entre le sujet écrivain et l'écriture elle-même.

Un dernier point mérite d'être noté en ce qui concerne *Volkswagen blues*. Si le recueil *Fragiles lumières de la terre* occupe une place importante au sein de son réseau intertextuel, il faut plutôt regarder du côté d'un autre texte de Gabrielle Roy publié à la même époque pour saisir tout le sens du roman de Jacques Poulin. Il s'agit naturellement du récit *De qui t'ennuies-tu Eveline?*, publié pour la première fois en 1979, dans un tirage limité. Les deux œuvres sont en effet caractérisées par plusieurs thèmes communs, comme le voyage transcontinental, la quête du frère disparu et la valorisation des gens simples et ordinaires. Dans cette perspective, on peut penser que Jacques Poulin fait un clin d'œil discret à Gabrielle Roy quand il décrit « la lumière chaleureuse des yeux verts » (207) de la femme du *Bull rider*, croisée aux environs de Chimney Rock, dans l'Ouest américain.

Dans le roman subséquent de Jacques Poulin, *Le vieux chagrin* (1989), la figure de Gabrielle Roy réapparaît à deux reprises. La première occurrence se trouve dans un passage où Jim, le personnage principal du roman, raconte le départ de sa femme, qui l'a quitté pour un autre homme (surnommé Superman) en emportant avec elle tous les livres de Gabrielle Roy, sauf un: « Ce qui me désolait, ce n'était pas seulement que la bibliothèque ressemblait à un mur ébréché, c'était aussi que je perdais tous les livres de Gabrielle Roy, qui étaient parmi ceux que j'aimais le plus au monde. Je croyais qu'ils m'appartenaient, mais je me trompais: ils étaient tous à ma femme, sauf le plus ancien qui s'appelait *Bonheur d'occasion* » (92). Dans une perspective intertextuelle, on peut interpréter cet épisode de plusieurs façons. Dans les romans de Jacques Poulin, on sait que les histoires d'amour finissent mal, en général: ce ne sont jamais que des *bonheurs d'occasion*. C'est d'ailleurs ce qui poussera Jim à avouer: « Quelquefois, pour écrire, on ne trouve rien d'autre que les débris de sa propre vie » (113). Pour Jim, le départ de sa femme se fait sous le signe d'une double perte, celle du passé commun et celle des souvenirs, ce que suggère l'image du mur ébréché et la disparition des livres à tonalité

mémorielle de Gabrielle Roy. Dans la deuxième occurrence, Jim se rappelle cette fois une histoire que lui aurait racontée Gabrielle Roy :

Gabrielle Roy passait tous ses étés à Petite-Rivière-Saint-François, au bord du fleuve, dans un chalet accroché au flanc d'une colline. Elle avait l'habitude de sortir sur la galerie du chalet, le matin, pour se brosser les cheveux ; avant de rentrer, elle nettoyait sa brosse, laissant ses cheveux partir au vent. Elle avait remarqué les allées et venues d'un merle qui avait l'air de nicher dans un buisson au fond du jardin, puis elle s'était habituée à sa présence. Mais en septembre, après la migration des oiseaux vers le Sud, elle avait découvert, en s'approchant du buisson, que le merle avait tapissé son nid avec les cheveux qu'elle avait perdus au cours de l'été. (147)

En comparant ce passage avec le précédent, on ne peut qu'être frappé par le fait qu'il engage lui aussi une réflexion sur la fuite du temps, suggérée par le motif de la chevelure, et sur la mémoire, figurée celle-ci par l'image du nid.

Dans *La tournée d'automne*, roman publié en 1993, on trouve plusieurs échos de la figure et de l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy. Ceci n'est d'ailleurs pas étonnant quand on sait que le roman raconte l'odyssée d'un bibliothécaire assez peu conventionnel qui parcourt l'est du Québec au volant de son bibliobus. Par exemple, il y est fait mention d'une femme âgée qui raconte à notre bibliothécaire qu'elle a autrefois été institutrice dans un petit village situé « au bout du monde » (il s'agit en fait de Saint-Ferréol-les-Neiges, à l'entrée du comté de Charlevoix). Sous le visage ridé de la vieille femme, il n'est pas difficile de reconnaître Gabrielle Roy, le narrateur observant « qu'elle avait des yeux verts, des yeux étonnants, qui semblaient avoir un don spécial pour accrocher la lumière » (55) et « qu'elle avait dû, autrefois, être une très belle femme » (58). Il lui confiera d'ailleurs un exemplaire de *Ces enfants de ma vie*, de Gabrielle Roy. On le voit, Poulin allie de nouveau le procédé de l'intertextualité à la transposition fictive de la figure de Gabrielle Roy. Comme dans *Le vieux chagrin*, l'inscription de la lecture des œuvres de Gabrielle Roy vient comme redoubler l'histoire d'amour vécue par les personnages du roman et conférer au thème de la fragilité inhérente aux relations humaines une coloration toute en demi-teinte, un peu comme chez Gabrielle Roy. Voici, par exemple, comment est figuré dans le roman le chef-d'œuvre inachevé de la romancière : « À cause de la fatigue, par moments la tête de Marie s'inclinait très bas sur son épaule, et alors il apercevait derrière elle un des livres qu'il aimait le plus au monde, *La détresse et l'enchantement*, avec le nom de l'auteur, Gabrielle Roy, en lettres mauves comme les épilobes qu'ils avaient vus partout sur la Côte-Nord » (172). Le narrateur semble hésiter entre le visage de Marie et le livre de Gabrielle Roy, cette dernière étant par

ailleurs associée au paysage québécois par la couleur mauve et le foisonnement des épilobes.

C'est toutefois dans le dernier roman de Jacques Poulin, *Les yeux bleus de Mistassini*, publié en 2002, que la figure de Gabrielle Roy apparaît avec l'insistance la plus significative. Désormais atteint de la maladie d'Eisenhower, une variante imaginaire de la maladie d'Alzheimer qui affecte les écrivains en mal de renouvellement et d'inspiration, Jack Waterman en arrive à confondre ses romans avec ceux de Gabrielle Roy, ce qui ne semble guère étonnant au terme de ce parcours des romans de Poulin. En déambulant sur la rue des Remparts, Jack Waterman s'imagina ainsi qu'il y a de la lumière à la fenêtre de l'appartement d'une certaine Gabrielle, qui revient d'un voyage dans l'Ouest où elle a été assister aux funérailles de sa mère. « Il raconta qu'elle avait passé son enfance dans cette région. C'était près de là que commençaient les grandes plaines couvertes de blé et inondées de soleil ; elles étaient si vastes qu'on ne pouvait les traverser en une seule journée et qu'on avait l'impression, lorsque les tiges ondulaient au vent, de se trouver en pleine mer, environné d'une houle qui courait vers le bout de l'horizon » (*Les yeux bleus* 38-39). Mais cette fragile lumière de la terre n'existe que dans l'imagination de Jack ; au retour de sa promenade dans le vieux Québec, il remarque que la lumière est maintenant éteinte, et son compagnon Jimmy observe qu'elle est devenue « aussi sombre que le reste du ciel et que le fond de mon cœur » (*Les yeux bleus* 41). Ce rappel discret de la disparition de Gabrielle Roy annonce ainsi la disparition prochaine de Jack, qui devient de plus en plus confus et qui en arrive à ne plus distinguer *Volkswagen blues* et *De quoi t'ennuies-tu Eveline?*, confondant allègrement les prénoms de Théo et de Majorique (Poulin utilise Majorque), ce qui fait dire à Jimmy: « Où allons-nous . . . si le vieux Jack en arrivait à confondre ses personnages avec ceux qui avaient été mis au monde par un autre écrivain? » (*Les yeux bleus* 67).

Autre exemple : à l'occasion d'une fête qui a lieu dans la librairie de Jack, une femme s'écrie tout à coup qu'elle « [a] un livre dans la tête » (*Les yeux bleus* 164). On lui demande donc de décrire ce fameux livre, ce qu'elle fait de son mieux :

Un livre avec plusieurs histoires séparées, expliqua-t-elle. Et dans l'une de ces histoires, il y a une femme qui s'est perdue en roulant sur un chemin de campagne, au bout du monde, et qui aperçoit des collines bleues. . . Attendez un peu, ça me revient : « Une chaîne de petites collines bleues, à moitié transparentes. » Cette phrase, je m'en souviens parce que, dans le temps, je l'avais apprise par cœur. Par contre, j'ai oublié le titre du livre. . . (*Les yeux bleus* 164).



Tout le monde aura reconnu sous ce livre *La route d'Altamont*, sauf naturellement Jack Waterman, qui croit pour sa part qu'il s'agit d'une phrase extraite de son dernier livre.

Il est significatif de noter que Jack Waterman confond uniquement ses livres avec ceux de Gabrielle Roy, et non avec ceux d'un autre écrivain, comme Hemingway par exemple. Jacques Poulin cherche-t-il à nous suggérer l'importance déterminante que représente pour lui l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy, qui joue un rôle structurant au sein de sa propre entreprise esthétique, autant sur le plan formel que thématique ? Dans *Chat sauvage* (1998), par exemple, Jacques Poulin louangeait l'écriture de Gabrielle Roy, une écriture qu'il décrivait comme étant « à la fois sobre et harmonieuse » (26), tout en suggérant l'importance de conserver vivaces les liens avec une certaine mémoire collective:

Je sentis alors, plus nettement que les autres fois, que des liens mystérieux et puissants m'unissaient à ce curieux vieillard. Des liens qui n'étaient pas du même ordre que les rapports professionnels. Des liens qui avaient quelque chose à voir avec mes parents décédés, avec l'âme voyageuse de mon frère et le pays incertain vers lequel nous étions tous emportés depuis le commencement du monde. (154)

On peut penser que la figure de Gabrielle Roy symbolise de quelque façon ces liens avec la tradition canadienne-française, une tradition marquée simultanément, selon Jacques Poulin, par le mouvement et le flou identitaire, ce que suggère d'ailleurs l'expression du « pays incertain », empruntée à Jacques Ferron (qui a d'ailleurs écrit lui aussi sur l'Ouest canadien, quoique sur un mode dysphorique, dans « La vache du canyon »). Ceci contribuerait à expliquer la présence en filigrane de Gabrielle Roy dans les romans de Jacques Poulin, romans qu'on pourrait lire comme autant de fragments d'une biographie imaginaire consacrée à Gabrielle Roy. De plus, toutes ces considérations éclairent un passage souvent cité de *Volkswagen blues*:

Il ne faut pas juger les livres un par un. Je veux dire : il ne faut pas les voir comme des choses indépendantes. Un livre n'est jamais complet en lui-même ; si on veut le comprendre, il faut le mettre en rapport avec d'autres livres, non seulement avec les livres du même auteur, mais aussi avec des livres écrits par d'autres personnes. Ce que l'on croit être un livre n'est la plupart du temps qu'une partie d'un autre livre plus vaste auquel plusieurs auteurs ont collaboré sans le savoir. (186)

### **La figure de Gabrielle Roy chez Michel Tremblay**

Comme l'a bien montré Richard Duchaine dans un article paru en 1992, les *Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal* de Michel Tremblay engagent tout un

processus de « communication » ou de « dialogue » avec *Bonheur d'occasion* de Gabrielle Roy. Avancé l'hypothèse que les *Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal* « dessinent un trajet allant d'une venue au monde . . . à une venue à l'écriture » (42), Duchaine insiste sur le rôle déterminant joué, à cet égard, par la lecture du roman de Gabrielle Roy, tel que raconté dans *La duchesse et le roturier*. Selon Duchaine, on pourrait « à la limite, qualifier les romans de Tremblay de réécriture de celui de Gabrielle Roy ou encore proposer que l'écriture des *Chroniques* s'inscrit dans une entreprise qui vient questionner plus globalement l'itinéraire scriptural d'ensemble de Gabrielle Roy » (49).

Par ailleurs, Michel Tremblay a raconté, dans *Un ange cornu avec des ailes de tôle*, les circonstances entourant sa découverte émerveillée de *Bonheur d'occasion*, à l'occasion d'un voyage avec ses parents en Gaspésie. En fait, il avoue qu'il n'a rien vu ou presque de la Gaspésie, littéralement envoûté qu'il était par sa lecture du roman de Gabrielle Roy, sauf quand ses parents l'obligeaient à regarder le paysage. « Je fermais le livre à contrecœur, je jetais un coup d'œil blasé sur les splendeurs de mon pays » (156), rappelle Michel Tremblay, comme pour mieux souligner que les rues de Montréal et surtout leur représentation livresque définissent ses appartenances les plus profondes. Pourtant, ce qu'il trouve dans *Bonheur d'occasion*, c'est moins l'expression de la ville qu'une vision dégagée du discours religieux encore dominant dans le Québec de l'époque, vision se situant en marge de la morale catholique: « C'était la première fois que je lisais un roman écrit dans ma ville où la vertu et le bon ordre ne régnaient pas en maîtres absolus, où la religion catholique ne répondait pas à toutes les questions, où Dieu n'était pas au bout de chaque destin, et je n'en revenais pas » (Tremblay 158). L'écriture de Gabrielle Roy se trouve ainsi dégagée de la doxa, se déployant plutôt en marge de cette dernière, pour prendre les dimensions paradoxales d'une « grande tragédie du petit monde » (Tremblay 159). *Bonheur d'occasion* est ainsi perçu comme une œuvre de réconciliation, parfaitement accordée à la réalité du Canada français et de son « sort collectif de petit peuple perdu d'avance, abandonné, oublié dans l'indifférence générale, noyé dans la Grande Histoire des autres et dont on ne se rappelait que lorsqu'on avait besoin de chair à canon » (Tremblay 163):

Et tout ça . . . ne se passait pas dans un lointain Paris du dix-neuvième siècle . . . ni dans les tranchées de la Berezina pendant les guerres napoléoniennes, mais chez moi, dans ma langue à moi, dans ma sensibilité à moi, dans ma compréhension du monde à moi, si insignifiante fût-elle. J'étais plus que simplement bouleversé par la grande qualité de l'écriture et par le sens dramatique de l'auteur, j'étais pâmé, reconnaissant de l'existence même d'une œuvre aussi forte écrite

dans mon pays, dans mon fond de province, dans ma ville! La chose était donc possible! (159)

Le chapitre en question met donc surtout en évidence l'immense talent, voire le génie, de Gabrielle Roy. Ceci étant dit, l'épisode se termine sur un échange significatif entre Michel et sa mère, qui est celle qui lui a fait découvrir le Livre. Elle lui explique qu'elle savait qu'il aimerait *Bonheur d'occasion* et qu'il comprendrait « plus que les autres tout c'qu'y'a là-dedans » (Tremblay, 1994, p. 164). Elle lui dit: « Tu comprends, c'est rare que quelqu'un parle comme ça de nous autres, les femmes... Toi, t'écoutes... Des fois, je me dis que Gabrielle Roy, a' devait écouter un peu comme toi quand est-tait p'tite » (164). De cette manière, Michel Tremblay (le futur écrivain) est mis en relation avec Gabrielle Roy, par l'intermédiaire de la figure de la mère, qui joue le rôle de destinataire auprès de deux écrivains. La mère occupe d'ailleurs une place aussi importante chez Michel Tremblay que chez Gabrielle Roy, et j'aimerais terminer cette étude en mettant en évidence une autre filiation entre Gabrielle Roy et Michel Tremblay, par l'entremise de la figure de la mère justement.

Comme Gabrielle Roy, la mère de Michel Tremblay a passé son enfance dans l'Ouest canadien. Elle appartient ainsi au même univers que la romancière du Manitoba. Toujours dans *Un ange cornu avec des ailes de tôle*, Tremblay insiste sur les origines « compliquées et mystérieuses » de sa mère, née au Rhode Island mais élevée dans un petit village de la Saskatchewan. Il s'interroge:

Comment ma mère s'est-elle retrouvée à Montréal au début des années vingt pour épouser mon père? Je l'ignore. Je pourrais téléphoner à l'un de mes frères pour le lui demander, mais je préfère penser appel du destin, fatalité incontournable et aventures rocambolesques à travers l'Amérique traversée deux fois à la recherche de l'amour et du bonheur... Je suis un enfant de Jules Verne, de Victor Malo et de Raoul de Navery, et j'ai toujours supposé avoir une mère de roman d'aventures. (15)

On peut ainsi supposer que chez Michel Tremblay, l'influence exercée par Gabrielle Roy a été en quelque sorte surdéterminée par l'image de sa propre mère, associée aux grands espaces du continent nord-américain et des plaines canadiennes. Tremblay écrit ainsi que « [l]a Saskatchewan a toujours flotté dans l'appartement de la rue Fabre, puis dans celui de la rue Cartier, gigantesque fantôme aux couleurs de blé mûr et de ciel trop bleu » (16). Les récits de sa mère en viennent à se confondre avec ceux de Gabrielle Roy, dont « elle dévorait les œuvres en poussant de longs soupirs douloureux » (16).

En marge de l'écriture urbaine de Tremblay se profile ainsi une nostalgie profonde des grandes plaines de l'Ouest, qui se surimprime à celle qui se dégage, par exemple, de *La route d'Altamont*, comme en témoigne ce dernier passage que je me permettrai de citer:

Quand maman nous racontait les plaines sans commencement ni fin, les couchers de soleil fous sur l'océan de blé, les feux de broussailles qui se propageaient à la vitesse d'un cheval au galop, les chevaux, justement, qu'elle avait tant aimés, avec un petit tremblement au fond de la voix et les yeux tournés vers la fenêtre pour nous cacher la nostalgie qui les embuait, j'aurais voulu prendre le train, le long train qui prenait cinq jours pour traverser tout le Canada, la mener au milieu d'un champ sans limite bercé par le vent et le cri des engoulevants et lui dire : « Respire, regarde, touche, mange tout le paysage, c'est mon cadeau » . . . Je ne suis jamais allé en Saskatchewan et les champs trop plats, trop grands, trop bien bercés par le vent me fendent le cœur. (Tremblay 16-17)

## Conclusion

L'étude du rôle joué par l'intertexte royen et par la figure de Gabrielle Roy dans les romans de Jacques Poulin et de Michel Tremblay nous aura ainsi permis de saisir un mode particulier du processus des influences littéraires, dans le sillage des réflexions de Michel Espagne sur la nécessité de respecter la dynamique complexe de l'échange entre un auteur produisant un message et un autre auteur qui reçoit ce message de façon volontaire et active, en se l'incorporant et en le transformant. Comme on a pu le constater, Jacques Poulin et Michel Tremblay se perçoivent comme des héritiers, fussent-ils indignes, de Gabrielle Roy ; mais ce qui les fascine chez la grande romancière, c'est non seulement son talent et son génie, mais aussi le fait qu'elle soit parvenue à exprimer une réalité populaire, celle des « gens ordinaires » formant le tissu communautaire de la société canadienne-française et même canadienne tout court. À cet égard, il est intéressant de constater que Poulin et Tremblay, qui ne se cachent pas pour affirmer qu'ils sont indépendantistes, sont littéralement fascinés par l'Ouest canadien, non pas tant par les montagnes Rocheuses que par les grandes plaines du Manitoba et de la Saskatchewan, qu'ils décrivent de façon presque identique. Ceci n'exclut nullement leur attachement pour la ville, qu'il s'agisse de Montréal (pour Tremblay) ou de Québec (pour Poulin). Mais cette fascination jette un pont entre leur conscience québécoise et une conscience canadienne-française qui lui est antérieure, conscience qui se trouve incarnée par Gabrielle Roy et par la figure de la mère. Or, cette conscience canadienne-française n'est pas présentée sous un jour honteux et passéiste comme c'est souvent le cas, mais

comme une composante essentielle de l'identité et de la mémoire collectives du Québec. L'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy représente justement pour eux l'un des véhicules de cette conscience, et c'est ce qui explique son rôle structurant dans les romans des deux auteurs.

#### NOTES

- 1 Ce texte s'inscrit dans le prolongement d'un projet de recherche en cours intitulé « Évolution de la conscience littéraire nord-américaine dans le roman québécois (1945-1960) » et subventionné par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (2004-2007).
- 2 Par exemple, dans *La détresse et l'enchantement*, Gabrielle Roy décrit dans quel contexte lui est venu son goût pour la littérature anglaise : « Je me souviens du vif intérêt que je pris à la littérature anglaise aussitôt que j'y eus accès. Et pour cause : de la littérature française, nos manuels ne nous faisaient connaître à peu près que Louis Veuillot et Montalembert : des pages et des pages de ces deux-là, et rien pour ainsi dire de Zola, Flaubert, Maupassant, Balzac même. » (71)

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## Grey exchange

A grey exchange  
That mocks  
Mucks  
And pales  
Our history of colour  
You were golden licks  
Of laughter  
Lifting me back over  
When the edge grew slippery  
And I leant out  
Too far  
You were radiance buddy  
Complete  
Smudged incredible  
Unmatched  
Like nature  
Now they paint you  
Clouded quartz  
It cuts  
Did I trade you the sheets  
For the full spectrum  
Of life's yellow  
And the rest?

## Behind the “Powderworks”: Hannah Josephson and *The Tin Flute*

**S**ome time in the fall of 1946, when she was working on the English translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* for the New York publisher Reynal and Hitchcock, the version which would also be published in Toronto by McClelland & Stewart, the American translator Hannah Josephson committed an unfortunate mistake. She was almost halfway through the book. The young heroine, Florentine, her thoughts full of Jean Lévesque, has just heard Emmanuel Létourneau's declaration of love and wiped his kiss off her lips. Eugène, her brother, has enrolled in the army; her father, Azarius, is out of work. Her little brother Daniel's illness is quickly worsening. Fore-shadowing the increasingly dramatic tensions of the novel, the start of the next chapter is marked by the fierce squalls of the close of winter:

La fin de l'hiver s'entourait de nuages et de soudaines rafales. Tôt cet après-midi, des nuées basses s'étaient amassées sur le versant sud de la montagne et les vents avaient chargé le bas quartier.

Vers huit heures du soir, *la poudrerie se déchaîna*. Les volets disjoints battaient; on entendait parfois comme une déchirure de zinc au toit des maisons; les arbres noirs se tordaient avec des craquements secs au coeur de leur tronc noueux; les vents crépitaient sous des poignées de grenade. Et la neige continuait à tourbillonner . . . (Roy 1945 197, my emphasis)

Guided by European French usage, or simply unaware that “poudrerie” is the Quebec word for snowstorm, Josephson translated the portentous phrase, “la poudrerie se déchaîna” by “the powderworks exploded”:

The winter was coming to an end in overcast skies and sudden squalls. Early that afternoon, a bank of clouds settled on the south slope of the mountain and the wind swept down on Saint-Henri in the valley.

Toward eight o'clock in the evening *the powderworks exploded*. Loose shutters banged; from the roofs of the houses came the sound of tin being ripped off; windowpanes rattled under a fusillade of musketry; trees writhed and cracked in agony; and the snow went on falling.<sup>1</sup>

This unfortunate mistake would seal Josephson's fate in Canadian literary history for over half a century. Her translation would later be considered "dated" (Stratford, Introduction) and criticized for "grave errors in interpretation" (O'Connor, "Translations" 1127). Josephson would also be faulted for not leaving place names such as Pointe-Saint-Charles in French (Sutherland 12) and for using standard English for the anglicisms and archaic expressions in the speech of Roy's working class characters (Montpetit 141). However, her "powderworks" blunder is considered her "most famous" (Ricard, *A Life* 264). This mistake is inevitably mentioned when her work is discussed (Godard 514; Montpetit 139) and has given Josephson her unenviable reputation as the author of a "*notoriously poor*" translation (Kousta 1125; O'Connor, "Translations" 1127, my emphasis). By itself, or as a symbol of her "unfamiliarity with Quebec" as an American (Kousta 1125), this mistake has obscured the immense popular success of the novel in English. Despite the status of *Bonheur d'occasion* as a classic in English as well as in French (Calder 992; Walker 105), Josephson and her translation have been summarily, and I believe unjustly, dismissed in Canadian literary and translation circles.

Contemporary translation theories now recognize that no translation is perfectly faithful, that the translation process is never neutral (or error-free), and that judgements of translations are themselves value laden. Since the 1970s, translation scholars have shifted their focus from a primary interest in issues of linguistic equivalence and evaluation to a broader analysis of the macro-structural relationships between the source culture and the target culture (Toury). From this perspective, comparisons of translations and originals, rather than serving to qualify the translations themselves as good or bad, become a way of identifying the sites of cultural difference and the implications of convention and ideology (Venuti; Bassnett). A specific strand of feminist translation scholarship has also developed that seeks to reclaim the lost or neglected history of women as translators (Krontiris).

Inspired by these approaches in translation studies, I look behind the "powderworks," so to speak, in order to offer a broader framework for understanding Hannah Josephson's project as the first, and only American,



translator of Gabrielle Roy. Based on preliminary findings of research for a biography of Josephson, which will include a comprehensive reassessment of the literary, intercultural, and ideological dimensions of her translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* and its reception, this study necessarily raises more questions than it answers. Even at this stage, however, this hitherto uncharted episode in Canadian/American literary relations clearly has much to reveal about the history of literary translation in Canada, and about how issues in Canadian nationalism and translation theory may well have affected critical readings of Gabrielle Roy's seminal novel in English.

Perhaps the first and most compelling question is precisely why such a small translation error should have proven so costly. Certainly, "la poudrerie déchaîna" would have been more correctly translated by "the snowstorm unleashed its fury."<sup>2</sup> Saint-Henri is usually situated at the foot of the mountain, or in the lower part of town, as opposed to "in the valley." Nonetheless, these seem relatively minor inaccuracies or infelicities in a passage that is generally effective in rendering the dramatic intensity of the moment. Furthermore, the context itself attenuates to some degree the negative effect of the "powderworks" error. As Edmund Wilson has observed, "No powderworks has yet been mentioned, but the explosion is given for the moment a certain plausibility by the description that follows of crackling trees, rattling shutters and tearing roofs" (173-74). This atmosphere is reinforced by the "poignées de grenade" of a neighbouring sentence in the original French text,<sup>3</sup> not to mention the generally ominous backdrop of the war, both in the book and in the minds of the translator and her initial readers.

Nor can one cite poor sales or lack of literary recognition as contributing factors in the criticism of Josephson's work. In fact, her American translation played a key role in ensuring the success of *The Tin Flute*, and more importantly in furthering Gabrielle Roy's career. As François Ricard records, reading the translation in manuscript form, John Beecroft of the Literary Guild of America, "sensing a best-seller" (*Une Vie* 283, translation mine), decided to include Gabrielle Roy's novel among the "Book of the Month" selections. Signed on 18 December 1946, the Guild's contract with Reynal and Hitchcock would guarantee initial sales of 600,000 copies, and Roy a minimum of \$46,500 in royalties, offering her the financial independence that would enable her to live as a writer. On 2 June 1947, with Reynal and Hitchcock's assistance, Roy would sign another lucrative contract for almost \$67,000, this time with Universal-International Pictures for the movie rights for the book (Ricard, *Une Vie* 282-84).

The impact of Josephson's translation was not restricted to the American context. In the period immediately following World War II, when many French literary figures had taken refuge across the Atlantic, fame in the United States also facilitated celebrity in France (Sirois, "Prix littéraires" 147; Godard 499). In 1947, Roy received the coveted Prix Fémina for *Bonheur d'occasion*, becoming the first Canadian writer to win a major French literary prize. Back at home, it was Josephson's American translation that earned Roy the Governor General's Award in the same year, only books written in English (or translated from French) being eligible at the time.

### Skirting the "Powderworks"

Exactly how criticism of Josephson's translation came to coalesce around the "powderworks" mistake, and the precise evaluative criteria involved, are not easy to determine. Peggy Hitchcock, the wife of the American publisher, herself brought the manuscript of the translation to Gabrielle Roy in Montreal in December 1946. Roy's biographer suggests that the author "only glanced at it for lack of time and because she had total confidence in the translator. She showed it to Hugh MacLennan, however, who told her that the translation was good" (Ricard, *A Life* 264).<sup>4</sup> In a letter written to Bill Deacon on 29 May 1947, MacLennan would express some reservations (Lennox 251), although his wife, Dorothy Duncan, published a glowing review of the book in *Maclean's* the same month. While Duncan may have written her review on the basis of the original text, it is more likely, in Antoine Sirois' assessment, that she consulted the English manuscript read by MacLennan (Sirois, "Gabrielle Roy" 471). As his biographer Elspeth Cameron has noted, despite the publication of his famous Montreal novel, *Two Solitudes*, in 1945, MacLennan was himself far from fluent in French (169). His literary stature may nonetheless have influenced Gabrielle Roy, who was impressed by Duncan's article. It is "the most complete, most intelligent article that anyone has written about me,"<sup>5</sup> she wrote to her agent's secretary, Francine Lacroix, in July 1947 (qtd. Ricard, *A Life* 266).

On what MacLennan's concerns were based, and perhaps more to the point, to what degree they were shared by McClelland & Stewart, are unclear. Was the evaluation of Josephson's translation a factor in the choice of Harry Binsse as translator of *La Petite Poule d'eau* published by Beauchemin in 1950? Ricard states only that "since Hannah Josephson, who had translated *The Tin Flute*, was not available, the publishers had turned to Harry Lorin

Binsse" (*A Life* 316).<sup>6</sup> What is evident is that neither reservations about the translation, nor the fact that the original had in the meantime been revised, prevented the republication of the Josephson translation on several occasions. McClelland & Stewart would include the novel in their New Canadian Library Series in 1954, and the book would be reprinted in 1958, 1959, 1961, 1964, 1965 and two times in 1967 (Sirois, "Gabrielle Roy" 469).

Both the original and the translation, it must be remembered, had initially been received "most favourably" in English Canada (Sirois, "Gabrielle Roy" 473, translation mine). A reviewer for *The Winnipeg Tribune* considered Roy's style "simple and effective, the strength of her French writing showing through in translation" (G., J.M. 12). Edith Fowke, writing in *The Canadian Forum*, declared the book "one of the most satisfying and adult novels yet to appear in Canada" (93). While she noted that the text is "sometimes stilted and awkward, sometimes not in key," and wondered "how much this is a result of the translation," she nonetheless concluded "these are minor criticisms. The book as a whole is a powerful piece of work" (93-94). Reviewing *The Tin Flute* for *Lectures*, Vera Dammann, on the contrary, had only praise for the translation: "Hannah Josephson has done a good translation. In certain passages, I even find she has corrected some of the heaviness of the style of the original. Furthermore, she has not attempted to render French-Canadian speech by American slang, and for that she should be congratulated" (247, translation mine).<sup>7</sup> Except for a quick criticism of the "somewhat silly" English title, an anonymous reviewer for the *Catholic Record* lauded the "penetrating pen of Gabrielle Roy to whose credit goes the writing of one of Canada's first big literary achievements" ("Canadian Novel" 2).

Against this generally positive backdrop, the first significant criticism of Josephson's translation would appear to be signed by Alan Brown, who would himself translate several works by Roy for McClelland & Stewart in the late 1970s and 1980s. In an article published in 1956, Brown criticizes the Josephson translation, citing some "mistakes of interpretation": "odd" for "curieuse," "insufferable" for "pus endurable," "thingamajig" for "zing-et-ling" (64-65). These seem quite minor quibbles; Brown's own interpretation might be questioned on some of these points. No mention is made of the "powder-works" blunder. Brown's primary criticism is directed at Josephson's translation of the dialogues of Roy's working class characters: "Their speech may present some difficulties to English-speaking readers who spurn (as they should) the translation" (64). He does not elaborate on any further reason

for distrusting the translation, other than the inadequate rendering of “Street-French in Montreal,” noting in this respect that the “translator admittedly had a hard assignment” (64).

In his 1958 introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of *The Tin Flute*, Hugo McPherson raises the issue of translation only in general terms. Praising Gabrielle Roy’s “flair for capturing with an uncanny fidelity the accent and idiom of French Canada (whether rural *patois* or Montreal *argot*),” he offers a short reflection on the difficulties of rendering such speech patterns in English: “Unhappily, the reader of the English translation must take this gift largely on trust, for the market-place French of Quebec is no more to be translated than such familiar English as: ‘I’m feelin’ kind of droopy’; or, ‘Yer loaded, aintcha, ya lush!’” He concludes that “We must be prepared, then, to believe that certain awkward expressions are not Miss Roy’s blunders but the inevitable defeats of translation” (ix).

While this might be taken as an indirect criticism of the Josephson translation, McPherson attaches it rather to a further reflection on the “translation of profanity which, in French, often employs religious expressions” (ix). He ends with a compliment to Josephson: “Very often, however, the French comes through beautifully by undergoing a sea-change” (x). One might add that McPherson himself is not without making a slip of the translator’s pen. In the same text, he inaccurately observes that the Lacasse family name “means ‘box’ or ‘locker’” (McPherson 1958: vi).<sup>8</sup> In his remarks on *The Tin Flute* in *The Literary History of Canada* (1965), McPherson makes no criticism of the translation, noting only that Roy’s “work, in translation, has been so influential that it cannot be ignored” (703).

By 1980, however, when McClelland & Stewart published a new translation of *The Tin Flute* by Alan Brown, the decision was publicly attributed to the ill repute into which the Josephson translation had fallen. In his preface, comparative literature specialist and literary translator Philip Stratford observes, “After thirty years the rather old-fashioned version of *The Tin Flute* by Hannah Josephson has become dated. It reads like a mid-forties film” (Introduction n.p.). In 1992, in the only existing article-length study of the two English translations of *Bonheur d’occasion*,<sup>9</sup> Marie Montpetit “supposes” that the “new translation of the work was required because certain errors had been noticed and needed to be corrected, including the famous *poudrerie* translated as ‘powderworks’” (139, translation mine).<sup>10</sup> Like Brown, her primary focus is on the translation of dialogue: she questions Josephson’s decision to use standard English. The “anglicisms and archaisms”

of working-class Montreal spoken French, she argues, are “inseparable from the content of *Bonheur d’occasion* because they contribute to emphasizing the themes developed in the novel” (145, translation mine).<sup>11</sup> Her criticism also extends to Brown’s own translation. By “failing to render anglicisms and archaisms adequately, both English translations indirectly reduce the socio-economic dimension of the novel” (146, translation mine).<sup>12</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most definitive judgement is that of John O’Connor in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* in 1997. Critical, as well, of Brown’s “highly unsatisfactory retranslation,” he reserves his harshest words for Josephson’s translation, citing, without providing any specific examples, “its grave errors in interpretation throughout.” Furthermore, he observes, “Roy’s major revisions to her novel in the 1947 French edition immediately made the Josephson translation [published in the same year!] as obsolete as it was unreliable” (1127).

Such judgements remain characteristic of the current status of Josephson’s translation in both English and French-language literary criticism in Canada. At the same time, inexplicably, given how adamant these criticisms are, and the cultural icon status of *Bonheur d’occasion* and *The Tin Flute*, in the almost 60 years since both first appeared, the translation has attracted little scholarly analysis. There has been only one article-length study of the translation of dialogue in the Josephson and Brown translations, focusing on the treatment of archaisms and anglicisms, no in-depth comparison with Brown’s version, and no attempt to assess objectively the different cultural, economic, and political factors that condition her particular translation process. Even the basic questions as to who Hannah Josephson was and how she came to be connected with *Bonheur d’occasion* have not been asked. The snowstorm has taken its revenge, it would seem, and in a certain symbolic irony, Canadian scholars have left her out in the cold.

### **The American View**

Hannah Josephson fares little better in American scholarship; if she is mentioned at all, it is as the spouse of Matthew Josephson, an important and highly visible American literary figure. In the early 1920s, the Josephsons were part of the wave of American writers who headed to Paris. There, aligned with French Dadaists, Matthew edited two short-lived but highly contentious international journals devoted to artistic experimentalism, *Broom* and *Secession*. During the 1930s, back in the United States, he became a frequent contributor to the *New Republic*, *New Masses*, and other left-wing journals.

This was also the period when he wrote his best-known work: *The Robber Barons*, a “now classic muckraking inquiry into the accumulation of great American fortunes in the 19th century” (Whitman 334). A prolific writer “with a generalist approach to the art of letters,” he was a “successful popular historian, biographer and journalist” (Shi 1). The French connection was to remain a fundamental element of his career, leading to biographies of Rousseau, Zola, and Stendhal. As his *New York Times* obituary points out, “unlike many of his countrymen whose café friends were mainly other Americans, Mr. Josephson took the pains to make friends with French writers and artists” (Whitman 334).

Hannah, who married Josephson in 1920, at the age of nineteen, and lived with him for the rest of her life, has suffered the historiographical fate of many other spouses of public men. The heading of her obituary in the *New York Times* reads, “Hannah Josephson, Author, Dead at 76,” acknowledging her important study of the Lowell girls of the Massachusetts textile mills, *The Golden Threads*, as well as her biography, *Jeannette Rankin: First Lady in Congress*. However, the capitalized subtitle is revealing of the perception of her secondary stature: “Wrote With Her Husband Biography of Al Smith—She Was Also Editor, Translator and Reporter.” Interestingly enough, in the article itself, a passing mention is made of her role as the translator of “Gabrielle Roy’s *The Tin Flute*” (Anonymous 1423). Unlike her husband, Hannah does not merit an entry in the *American National Biography*.

As a result, what we can glean of Hannah Josephson’s life through published sources comes to us primarily through the prism of her relationship with Matthew Josephson. Not unexpectedly, in the only comprehensive biography of the latter, *Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian*, by David E. Shi, Hannah’s connection with Gabrielle Roy recedes within the emphasis on American literary history. Shi describes Hannah’s activities in 1946 and 1947, when she was busy translating *Bonheur d’occasion* and watching her translation soar on the best-seller lists in the United States: “Still vivacious and attractive at middle age, Hannah was an amazing woman, at once a caring wife, concerned mother, efficient house manager, gracious hostess, research assistant, and intelligent conversationalist” (237). Of the heady times she must surely have had with *Bonheur d’occasion*, there is no mention. We do learn that Hannah had begun “a career of her own, first as translator of Aragon and then as a historian and biographer” (237). In December 1947, Matthew Josephson remarked that “Hannah also aspires to be an ‘author’ . . . A year later he again complained that Hannah’s literary interests interfered

with his own freedom, as well as affecting their relations together.” During this period, Hannah, it seems, was “always fatigued, and distracted, and even ill at times” (237).

Nor does the fact that a good part of her writing and translation was done in collaboration with her husband serve her cause. Together Matthew and Hannah published *A Season in Hell: The Life of Arthur Rimbaud* (1931), a translation of Jean-Marie Carré’s essay, *La vie aventureuse de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud*, and *Memoirs of Egotism*, their rendition of Stendhal’s *Souvenirs d’égotisme* (1949). In both cases the introductions are signed only by Matthew Josephson. Curiously, for the volume of work by the French Surrealist poet that Hannah co-edited with American writer Malcolm Cowley, *Aragon: Poet of the French Resistance* (1945), she herself signed the introduction, and the division of editing and translation work is clearly delimited. A sign of changing times, or readjustments within the Josephson household, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities, A Political Portrait Drawing on the Papers of Frances Perkins* (1969) is presented as co-authored by Matthew and Hannah Josephson.

However, this exception does not rescue her from her double handicap with respect to American scholarly interest: her role as literary spouse and her activity as translator. In both cases, she is defined outside, and in relation to, the male realm, in her function as companion to men and reproducer of texts. In a curious irony, Josephson, whose own writings sought to reclaim the forgotten history of the Lowell mill girls and Jeannette Rankin’s efforts on behalf of peace and women’s suffrage, has herself fallen into the same lost space from which she has rescued other women. Dismissed as a translator, she has fared no better as a biographer.

### **De-fusing the Powderworks**

Roy and Josephson both had experience as journalists; both spent time in France; both exhibited a left-wing understanding of social problems; and both were especially sensitive to women’s issues. Of course, such intermingling strands of commonality and difference do not prove that Josephson and Roy had a similar cultural and political vision of otherness. That the American translator, through her personal background and values, shared, at least to some degree, Roy’s *vision du monde* does not necessarily ensure that she was a particularly perceptive reader, or translator, of *Bonheur d’occasion*. That being said, in so far as some of their shared social and feminist values can also be found at the heart of the novel, it is difficult to justify the reductive dismissal of Josephson’s translation current in Canadian literary criticism.

Clearly, much more research is needed to uncover fully what lies behind the “powderworks.” This essay identifies some of the directions such research might take. First, the development of the “powderworks” criticism is worthy of more scrutiny. Following the paper trail of the criticism and determining more precisely its context and motives would be instructive. In this respect, one might well explore the role played by Gabrielle Roy’s subsequent Canadian translators in discrediting the Josephson translation.

Brown would seem to be among the first to systematically attack Josephson’s translation. The first specific, published reference to the “powderworks” occurs apparently in an article by Harry Binsse, who replaced Josephson as Roy’s translator in 1950. Writing in the 22 September 1962 issue of the *Montreal Star*, Binsse discusses the financial and linguistic difficulties raised by literary translation between English and French in Canada. Since “translations cost money,” and the Canadian market is small, he observes, it is useful to tap into “the United States and British markets,” but this requires “persuad[ing] a New York and a London house that the book is marketable for them as well as in Canada, and this process can be costly and time-consuming” (2). Within this American/Canadian publishing context he then broaches the quality of Josephson’s translation:

This brings us to a second difficulty, the pitfall—often leading to pratfalls—in the language itself. At the beginning of Chapter XII of “The Tin Flute,” Miss Roy, in describing a blustery late winter afternoon in St. Henri, remarks that “la poudrière éclata [sic]. . .”<sup>13</sup> meaning that powder snow began to fly. In the English version this appeared (and continues to appear) as: “Toward eight o’clock in the evening the powderworks exploded,” which is all the more startling since neither before nor after, in the whole length of the book, is there the slightest allusion to a powderworks. Of course, the excellent new Canadian Dictionary or the Canadian edition of Cassells would have spared the translator this boner but at the time they did not exist, and who, even today, has ever heard of either in New York? (2)

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, cooperation may have been the word of the day, but there is no doubt that the 1950s and 1960s were marked by increasing efforts, in both Canadian Anglophone and Franco-phone communities, to develop national literary institutions. Resulting frictions between Canadian and American publishers were not uncommon. To what degree these frictions, and Josephson’s status as an American, affected the assessment of her work, needs to be addressed. One might also ask whether there was not some modicum of self-interest behind the criticisms by Brown and Binsse as Canadian translators vying with American translators for limited translation opportunities.



It would be useful to ascertain whether there was any attempt on the part of McClelland & Stewart (and if not, why not) to revise the translation in keeping with Gabrielle Roy's own revisions of the original text, and to correct any small infelicities in the translation arising from Josephson's lack of familiarity with Montreal topography. O'Connor's assessment, for instance, that the translation was "obsolete" as soon as it was published, given Gabrielle Roy's "major revisions" to the original in 1947, would seem excessive. As Sirois points out, Roy's initial corrections were in fact relatively "minor," involving changes to only some "200-300" words ("Roman" 133).

Attributing the need for a new translation only to weaknesses in the Josephson version does not appear to be completely transparent. In a letter written to Gabrielle Roy on 20 December 1976, Jack McClelland first links the idea for a new Canadian translation to the Canadian political situation. "I think its publication might be effective in terms of the problem of Canadian unity," he writes Roy, ". . . you are unique in being the only Canadian writer who has totally bridged the gap between the two cultures" (Solecki 218). No mention of translation issues is made, and the letter ends on a more commercial note:

We will be starting early in the new year to distribute books directly in mass-market paperback. I believe that 250,000 copies of the new translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* could be sold in English-speaking Canada in a very short period of time, and I feel sincerely that this could have a useful effect on understanding our country. (Solecki 219)

In her reply, Roy refers to "your continuing interest in a new translation," suggesting that the initiative was indeed the publisher's rather than her own. While in agreement that Alan Brown "is the man for the job" (Solecki 220), she expresses some reservations about the project and its commercial (and political) success:

I myself hesitate a great deal, though, for naturally I would love to work with Alan at some time or another—a good translation, a really good one, can only be achieved at that cost, I think—I dread plunging myself in that big book of which I am truly weary. . . . I wonder if you are not under an illusion when you expect another boom of this book. . . . And I can't see that it could do much to draw us together. (Solecki 220-221)

Obviously, the reasons behind the new translation are far more complex than the "powderworks" error so often evoked, involving, no doubt, inter-related political, financial, and editorial considerations.

Changing Canadian discourses on translation since *The Tin Flute* was published have possibly also affected opinions of the translation. In an article published in 1988, O'Connor admits to having "happily accepted Hannah Josephson's version of what Gabrielle Roy had to say," when he "first encountered French-Canadian literature—*The Tin Flute*, as it happens—in translation in high school." It was "in 1970-1971," he continues, while registered in "the Master's program in Canadian Literature at the Université de Sherbrooke," that he was "taught to be far more skeptical about the accuracy and reliability of Canadian translations" ("Violets" 115). This may reflect in part the political tensions of the period in Quebec, and a new perception of the need for accuracy in translation (Claxton); it may also be related to issues raised by Brown and Binsse or broader debate within the translation community.

The 1970s were a key period in the history of literary translation in Canada (Whitfield, *Writing* 8-11). While French-English literary translation was initially viewed as building bridges between the two cultural communities (Stratford *Literary*), it was also beginning to be attacked for being assimilative, and not sufficiently sensitive to Québécois cultural difference. In an article that captures some of these tensions, E.D. Blodgett suggests that Roy "has been translated so assiduously that it often takes Anglophone readers a long time to discover that her novels, Englished as *The Tin Flute* and *Where Nests the Water Hen* (to name the most English), were composed in French. That may be the translator's ideal, but it is assimilation with a vengeance" (26-27). This claim springs exclusively from Blodgett's approach to the theory of translation; he offers no empirical evidence in the article to back it up. A more recent analysis by Barbara Godard on how works by Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, and Marie-Claire Blais circulate in English, based on concepts from the French sociologist Bourdieu, offers another example of how theory may precipitate conclusions. Godard claims that Josephson's translation has not only "contributed considerably to the 'quiet assimilation' of *Bonheur d'occasion*, by transforming the novel into a universal drama celebrated by American critics for the intensity of its 'romantic pathos.'" The textual effects of that manipulation established a model of ethnocentric translation for books translated in the United States and imported into Canada" (514).<sup>14</sup> Again, no empirical evidence is offered to substantiate such a generalization.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, the relation between the translated text and the social, literary, and cultural values of the target culture is at the core of descriptive translation

studies. For the proponents of this approach, which texts are translated, and how they are translated, reflect the dominance of target culture norms (Bassnett 6-8). To establish the particulars of *The Tin Flute*, it would be important to situate Josephson's translation with respect to American literary and social values during the immediate post-war period. An analysis of the American reception of the translation, compared to similar reception studies in French and English Canada, could expose some of the differences in how both publics read the book. This approach would offer a broader understanding of the cultural (i.e. Canadian vs American) issues at work in the Canadian evaluation of the Josephson translation. It would also identify any ways in which Josephson's translation and her relation to American literary traditions served (or not) to enhance the American reception of the book and trouble the Canadian waters. Such an analysis could also be extended to a comparison of her translation with that of Alan Brown. One of the motives behind the new Canadian translation may have been to realign the French original with respect to changing reader values within English Canada. As McClelland's letter to the author suggests, notwithstanding financial considerations, the new translation was, in effect, a way to re-launch the classic.

Such a macro-structural approach would not be complete without delving into the context in which Josephson herself worked: The impetus for her involvement in the project; the nature of her relations with her publishers (in New York and in Toronto) and with the author;<sup>16</sup> the conditions, financial and other, under which she prepared the translation; and her approach to the translation itself. Nor should it be forgotten that when Josephson embarked upon her translation of *Bonheur d'occasion*, she was already an accomplished translator, with at least one edited anthology of translations and three book-length translations in print. Besides her collaborative work with Matthew Josephson and Malcolm Cowley, these included Louis Aragon's *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale* (1941) and Philippe Soupault's *Le temps des assassins* (1946), both substantial volumes. The Aragon book alone is almost 600 pages in length. Nor had her translation work gone unrecognized outside the United States. In 1946, under a slightly different title, *Aragon: Poet of Resurgent France*, Pilot Press of London released a British edition of the anthology she co-edited with Cowley.

An examination of these earlier translations would provide useful insight. cursory analysis suggests that Josephson's work on Aragon and Soupault is most closely linked to their political activity, and more specifically to their

role in the French resistance movement, as opposed to their poetry and contribution to the Dadaist movement. For the Aragon anthology, Cowley edited the poetry and Hannah the prose. The two texts she herself translated are both short essays, including “An Appeal to French Intellectuals,” written by Aragon as head of the National Committee of Writers (Southern Zone), and a moving article entitled simply “Free!”, published by Aragon after the liberation in the underground resistance newspaper, *La Drôme en Armes*, that he published with his wife, Elsa Triolet. One catches something of Josephson’s tone, and motivation, in her introduction to the anthology. After reference to Aragon’s “poems of heartbreak, . . . his poems to Elsa his wife and his country,” she writes: “This book is presented by several of Aragon’s friends in homage to the poet and the fighter, whose achievements in a period of terror and catastrophe may well give heart to men and women of good will everywhere” (Josephson and Cowley xi).

Grounded in the emotions generated by World War II, this uplifting appeal to “men and women of good will” finds an echo in the often collaborative nature of Josephson’s work as translator. The Aragon anthology contains translations by Rolf Humphries, Kenneth Muir, Louis MacNiece, Sally Wood, William Jay Smith, Grace Wallace, George Dillon, Stephen Spender, and Waldo Frank. *A Season in Hell* includes previously published translations of poems by Rimbaud by J. S. Watson, Jr., Lionel Abel, Joseph Shipley, and T. Sturge Moore. From 1949 to 1965, in a natural extension of such initiatives, Josephson was librarian and editor of publications at the American Academy of Arts and Letters Library in New York. Research may confirm whether through her numerous literary connections she was acquainted with contemporary American theories of text and translation. Matthew Josephson, for instance, corresponded with Amy Lowell, an early associate of Ezra Pound, an important influence within the American translation workshop tradition (Gentzler).

Whatever the precise results of such research, this first glimpse behind the “powderworks” offers a far more intriguing vista than the general dismissal of Josephson’s accomplishments would imply. Indeed, we need to re-assess not only her rendition of *Bonheur d’occasion*, but also her literary contribution as biographer and intercultural agent. As a symbolic return of the repressed—her work straddles four distinct and conflicting literary institutions (French, American, English-Canadian and French-Canadian/Québécois)—retrieving her story from under the snowstorm may not only lead to a better understanding of how Roy’s work has been read in English,

but also provide a closer view of the uncertain “powderworks” of intercultural communication.

#### NOTES

- 1 Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute*, Translated by Hannah Josephson, 1947. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library No 5, 1969, 98. My italics.
- 2 This is merely a suggestion to capture the sense in English of the French expression. As in many translation contexts, there are a variety of possible, accurate translations.
- 3 Interestingly enough, in what Gabrielle Roy considered her final revised version of the novel, the word “grenades” has been replaced by “grenaille” (153). For details on the different editions of the novel, see Antoine Sirois’ “*Bonheur d’occasion*, Roman de Gabrielle Roy,” 133.
- 4 The French reads as follows: “n’y jette qu’un coup d’oeil rapide, faute de temps et parce qu’elle fait entièrement confiance à la traductrice. Elle le montre cependant à Hugh MacLennan qui lui dit que la traduction est bonne.”
- 5 The French reads as follows: “l’article le plus complet, le plus intelligent qu’on ait rédigé sur moi.” Letter to Francine Lacroix, the secretary of Gabrielle Roy’s agent, Jean-Marie Nadeau, 15 July 1947.
- 6 The French text reads as follows: “comme Hannah Josephson, la traductrice de *Bonheur d’occasion*, n’est pas disponible, on a recours aux services de Harry Lorin Binsse.”
- 7 The French text reads as follows: “La traduction de Hannah Josephson est bonne. Par endroits, je trouve même qu’elle corrige quelques lourdeurs de style de l’original. Du reste, la traductrice n’a pas essayé de rendre en argot américain le parler populaire franco-canadien. De cela, elle doit être félicitée.”
- 8 The word “casse” literally means breakage. Used in the frequent, familiar expression, “il va y avoir de la casse,” it is more aptly translated by “there’s going to be some rough stuff.”
- 9 Although its title might suggest a more technical study, “How do you translate ‘regard’? Rewriting Gabrielle Roy,” an article by Lorna Hutcheson and Nathalie Cooke, addresses “the translation of her public image across the cultures of French and English Canada” (118).
- 10 The French quotation reads as follows: “Nous supposons que la nouvelle traduction a supplanté l’ancienne parce que certaines erreurs avaient été signalées et devaient être corrigées, par exemple, la fameuse poudrière devenue « poudrière ».”
- 11 The French reads as follows: “Les anglicismes et les archaïsmes sont inséparables du contenu dans *Bonheur d’occasion* parce qu’ils contribuent à accentuer les thèmes exploités dans le roman.”
- 12 The French reads as follows: “Le gommage des anglicismes et des archaïsmes dans les deux traductions anglaises a diminué la dimension socio-économique du roman d’une façon passive.”
- 13 Binsse has himself made a slip of the pen here, and quoted Roy’s text incorrectly.
- 14 The French reads as follows: “la traduction, réalisée pour l’éditeur américain et reprise par l’éditeur canadien, a beaucoup fait pour faciliter cette ‘assimilation tranquille’ en transformant *Bonheur d’occasion* en un drame universel célébré par les critiques américains pour l’intensité du ‘pathos de l’amour.’ Les effets textuels de cette manipulation

établissaient un modèle de traduction ethnocentrique pour les livres québécois traduits aux États-Unis et importés au Canada.”

- 15 Recent work on twelve important contemporary Canadian Anglophone translators, including Godard herself, would suggest that a variety of translation models are at work, none of which is directly linked to Josephson’s translation. See Whitfield, *Writing between the Lines*.
- 16 The Fonds Gabrielle Roy includes only one letter from Josephson to Roy, written in 1946. While this pales before the extensive correspondence between Joyce Marshall and Gabrielle Roy, it would seem in keeping with the sparse exchange of letters with her two other translators, Alan Brown and Harry Binsse.

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## Luck of the Draw

**Joan Barfoot**

*Luck.* Knopf Canada \$32.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Fraser

The smart-aleck narrator of *Luck* is so full of teasing rhetorical questions, pert observations, truths one dare not tell, and wildly original ideas that without so much as a glance at the hero and heroine, the reader falls in love. However, a romance with this witty voice may have serious repercussions: it may change your understanding of love, death, grief. An affair with this voice will surely vex your beliefs about violence and love making, integrity and betrayal, body and spirit. But don't worry, despite the gravity of the content, the form of the affair is fabulous infatuation.

The novel begins with an equivocating comment on the fine line between good and bad luck, and then the narrator turns to the sudden death of seemingly fit middle-aged Phil as an example. While he is lucky to have passed from life to death without any pain, his wife Nora, a painter, waking beside him, not knowing she has been sleeping with a corpse, is not, by the standards of the narrator, so lucky. Instead of the expected grief one should feel in this situation, *Luck's* narrator has the reader grinning foolishly and the amusement has only just begun. There are two other women in the house who come running at the new widow's scream: first Beth, a very beautiful recovering murderer who models for Nora's paintings; second

Sophie, an international aid worker scarred from her encounter with evil, currently a house-keeper for Nora and Phil, and healing by means of her, now abruptly ended, clandestine affair with Phil. Despite all of this material for sadness, the reader's grin remains, becomes wolfish at times, and occasionally leaps into out-loud laughter, which is rare in a novel about a man suddenly dead, a widow, a mentally ill model, and a traumatized do-gooder.

The narrator hovers and flutters like a bat around the three women with their varying ties to Phil. The narrator's echo vision flits from consciousness to consciousness, reaction to reaction, until by a kind of sonar circling knowledge appears.

The three women, like all of us, are in an unstable relationship with luck. And Barfoot recounts their own personal experiences with bad luck: a shallow manipulative mother for Beth, who tours her on the beauty pageant circuit as if she's a doll not a daughter; philanthropist parents for Sophie, who cause her in childhood to become "addicted to virtue"; and philistine townspeople for Nora, who turn on the artist, believing her paintings offensive to their religious convictions. Each of the three women learns how to heal and recover from her own bad luck; however, the ballast of this novel is the bad luck of others, elsewhere, seemingly without any possibility of ever changing or being healed. Sophie returns from the refugee camp in Central Africa with the "bony grip" of Martha Nkume firm on her dreams.

The exploration of luck centres on the refugee camp where workers have come from the lucky part of the world—Europe and North America—to aid those in the unlucky part of the world—Central Africa. However, finding time in their busy day of caring for the wounded and starving, three of the aid workers, the lucky ones, rape Martha Nkume's young daughter, who is near death, an unlucky one. Sophie's reaction to this discovery is to fall apart. The therapist she is sent to asks "Sophie to consider why, when, and how ideas of virtue and sacrifice might have gotten so tangled together." Joan Barfoot's novel asks the same question and possible responses within the book further tangle rather than untangle these ideas.

Does Nora the artist escape painful feelings about the bad luck of others through her montages? Sophie thinks so: "Put her in a refugee camp and only the figures and shapes might appeal. The lumps and bumps of impromptu graveyards would form tapestries, and reaching arms would be slips of fabric, wonderfully embroidered. How chilly, eerie and enviable." Does Phil bring luck back into Sophie's life by replacing in her heart and soul the bony grip of the unlucky mother with the lover's grip he gives her while betraying his wife? Sophie thinks so: "she needs time to remember Phil's hands, carefully trace all those bumps, scars and lines so that she doesn't drift in the practised direction of forgetfulness." Sophie envies the way Nora can turn her luck into a critically acclaimed, expensive piece of art; yet she chooses to keep alive the memory of those who suffer. Although dead before the novel begins, and ambiguous as he cheats on his wife, nonetheless, Phil's hands help carry the burden of bad luck.

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## New Francophone Writing

**Lucie Hotte and Johanne Melançon, eds.**

*Thèmes et variations. Regards sur la littérature franco-ontarienne.* Prise de parole 30,00 \$

**Larry Steele, Sophie Beaulé and Joëlle Cauville, eds.**

*Appartenances dans la littérature francophone d'Amérique du Nord.* Le Nordir 20,00 \$

**Hédi Bouraoui**

*Transpoétique. Éloge du nomadisme.* Mémoire d'encrier 19,50 \$

Reviewed by Louise H. Forsyth

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These recent publications provide evidence of the rich diversity of contemporary francophone writing in Canada and North America. Two of the books, *Thèmes et variations* and *Appartenances*, contain conference proceedings: one on Ontario writers, another on North American writers. The third, *Transpoétique. Éloge du nomadisme*, is a collection of short essays. These writers have produced poetry, novels, plays, short stories, essays, and songs. They offer wide perspectives on geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century—travel, migration, exile, *vagabondage*, feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, alternative sexualities. At the same time, they have not forgotten the issues underlying traditional francophone themes—speaking a minority language, personal and collective identity, personal and collective memory, attachment to place and cultural traditions, family and social relations, spirituality.

The notion of *la francophonie* has evolved at a remarkable rate since its appearance in the 1960s and 1970s. In the beginning, writers and artists drew their subjects and themes primarily from a shared sense of belonging to a specific national entity. Such entities, whether or not they were independent countries, were often disadvantaged and stuck in situations that François Paré has cogently captured in the epithet *l'exiguïté*. Questions of identity, space, otherness, and

injustice were particularly urgent. The writers discussed in the conference proceedings show through the evolution of their work that they were able to address these questions, while renewing their artistic vision in ways that move beyond the discourse of victimization. At the same time, the faces of *la francophonie* have been changing radically. In recent decades, writers whose ancestors were not part of founding Canada have become integral to the sociocultural fabric of the country. These writers may have spent years on the move, carrying ties to other places around the world. They have their own experiences with institutionalized religions, and, in many cases, speak other languages in addition to French.

These three books demonstrate the remarkable adaptability of this country's French-speaking people in staying abreast of rapid social changes, producing works that reflect divergent experiences, developing theoretical positions that illuminate new senses of personal and collective identity, and rendering porous the walls of fear and even hate that all too often separate peoples with distinct cultural traditions. The writers and critics in these volumes appear to be unanimous in celebrating, not regretting, *le métissage*. The disintegration of the binary structure reflected in the tenacious metaphor of Canada's *two solitudes* is frequently mentioned with approval.

Most of the articles in the two books of conference proceedings offer probing analyses of works by several individual writers, as well as plenary addresses, papers on broader theoretical issues, a writers' round table, and a general discussion. The major themes identified in the articles are the quest for identity, the Other and otherness, writing, space, love, the body, violence, and death. Formal elements studied include narrative strategies, humour/irony/parody, characterization, language as both discourse and trope, and intertextuality.

These two volumes of analyses are welcome

additions to a growing body of literary criticism on francophone literature. However, *Thèmes et variations* is poorly bound. It falls apart as soon as it is opened. As well, the article "Grand-Pré: lieu de mémoire, lieu d'appartenance" in *Appartenances* appears a poor fit in the volume. The approach of this historical study, which makes almost no mention of contemporary writers, seems out of touch with questions being addressed in the other essays.

Hédi Bouraoui, author of *Transpoétique*, has been a prolific writer throughout a long career as writer and professor. He has published numerous volumes of poetry, novels, and essays. His literary work shows him to be a remarkable pioneer of the approach that characterizes the writing of authors discussed in the conference proceedings: the passion for cultural *métissage*, mobility, openness, and commitment to language and writing as the way to shatter tenacious boundaries between people. *Transpoétique* is a collection of 17 short, exquisitely poetic and erudite essays, many of which were previously published. The first seven essays illustrate Bouraoui's frequent use of neologisms and portmanteau words, some of which are: *nomaditude*, *nomadité*, *transculturalité*, *interculturalité*, *transculturalisme*, *nomader*, *transpoétique créaculture*, *originalitude*, *transcréation*. They signal his objective to blend cultures and imagine previously unknown cultural syntheses for which words did not previously exist. The book is a *summum* of his vision of boldly breaching stultifying reality, at the interstices of which poets, who have freed themselves from clichés, ideological hegemony, and binary thought, might plunge in order to open spaces for *plurivocité*. Bouraoui articulates in his essays a poetic imperative that engages both ethics and aesthetics.

The second half of the book contains essays that provide commentaries on several cultural voices that make up Canada's diverse mosaic, with particular attention paid to

aboriginal and other previously silenced voices. These essays apply Bouraoui's theoretical position as developed in the first half of the volume.

*Transpoétique* also contains two particularly poetic essays. "Méditerranée: métaphore vive," the book's central essay, expresses the author's personal sense of finding his place on three continents, belonging simultaneously to many cultures, and drawing spiritual and intellectual nourishment in all of them. The final essay reiterates in a fresh and intense poetic mode all that Bouraoui has said so far. It is a particularly compelling call to commitment to poetry, openness to cultural diversity, and energy for radical social change.

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## Doctors in Distress

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**Vincent Lam**

*Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures.* Doubleday  
Canada \$29.95

Reviewed by Maria N. Ng

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The title of emergency physician Vincent Lam's collection of short stories could be misleading. Is the book about ancient medical rituals? Is "bloodletting" a metaphor for ethnic violence by another ethnic writer? However, once the reader overcomes this not particularly alluring title, she will find a dozen entertaining and rewarding stories.

The stories in *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* begin with two of the recurring characters trying to get into medical school and trying to sort out their feelings for each other. (The curious conceit of this book is that all four characters are known only by their last names: Ming, Fitzgerald, Chen, and Sri.) Although these stories could be read as stand-alone narratives, they are linked both by the characters as well as the characters' relationships to one another as revealed gradually in each story. So Ming, an ambitious Chinese woman, becomes first, Fitzgerald's lover ("How to Get into

Medical School, Part II"), then, Chen's wife ("Contact Tracing"). The book begins when these young people are full of hope and false—as well as forced—idealism for their chosen profession; the book ends with the portrait of a functioning but essentially cool marriage between Ming and Chen. In-between, the reader learns about "code blue" (when a patient suffers cardiac arrest) and "Vee-fib" (for ventricular fibrillation), and what happens to a dead body during an anatomy session.

Some stories are not for the faint-hearted. In "Take All of Murphy," Ming, Chen, and Sri take turns carving up a man that Sri, the most humanist of the trio, names Murphy, but whom Ming, the most rational (and the least sympathetically portrayed), insists on calling the "cadaver." "Take All of Murphy" is also the most accomplished piece: it is alternately terrifying, humorous, and touching. The story shows that Lam can create individuals with whom the reader can empathize. Sri is tentative with his first cut; Ming shows a callousness that irks and Chen is the mediator, the peacemaker, who tries to reach out to everyone. For instance, when they saw through the ribs to get at the organs, Ming's comment is "Smells like barbecue." Sri wants to react but says nothing. Later, Chen makes excuses for Ming. In some of the best passages, the gory details only serve to highlight the poise with which Lam writes: "The daytime of sun had been replaced by the fluorescent-bathed, white-washed-concrete daylight . . . as the inverted parts of bodies were given belated and temporary glimpses of light." This reviewer laughed out loud at this exchange—Ming cuts through the penis "with one long arc of the scalpel" and asks Sri and Chen: "Someone want the testicles?"

Once the four characters become qualified physicians, professional stress accumulates and their methods of dealing with it form part of the character development. Fitzgerald, who appears in six of the stories,

grows from a callow and infatuated young university student to someone with a mean streak that threatens to erupt at any provocation ("Eli"). He resigns from the hospital when his drinking problem becomes a liability. In "Night Flight," Fitzgerald is a doctor specializing in evacuating patients from remote locations or places where necessary medical attention is lacking. The story reads like a James Bond episode: exotic locale, human life at risk, the "hero" being asked to make pressing decisions surrounded by possible dangers (airport closing down, a forest fire threatening the flight route), and attempts to resuscitate a dying man during the flight to "civilization." "Night Flight" also sets up "Contact Tracing," in which Fitzgerald has contracted SARS during one of his missions and finds himself in a neighbouring hospital cell to Chen.

The collection comes full circle in the last story, "Before Light." Chen is a successful doctor married to another successful doctor. His reward is a Mercedes that he drives with aggression on the freeway: he has cultivated an attitude that is the equivalent of medical head-butting. Confronting a cantankerous colleague, Chen tries to "tower over him . . . and hope that he will tilt backwards so far that the chair will fall over." After his over-night shift, Chen repeatedly falls asleep at his wheel driving home, although the rational decision would be to call a taxi. Thus, if one takes these stories as a series of portraits of the maturing process of a physician, Chen has become a skilled professional but a flawed human being.

This very promising book whets the reader's appetite for Lam's future works. Not every story has the same complexity and sophistication found in the best ones, but all are readable and intriguing in their own ways. Lam has also made a conscious decision to use medical terms wherever they are appropriate instead of providing paraphrases; but a glossary is available at the end of the stories for clarification.

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## Memoirs and Musings

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**Susan Musgrave**

*You're in Canada Now ... A Memoir of Sorts.*

Thistledown \$18.95

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Reviewed by Leila Bryce

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Beginning with an account of her teenage "junkie libido," Susan Musgrave's *You're in Canada Now* depicts the author's life journey—the discovering of her values and self-awareness. Her relations with her family and friends and her work as a writer provide the backdrop and perspective from which she presents not only her personal evolution, but what it means to be Canadian.

Musgrave divides the book into six stages, but the sections overlap, starting with her early unrelenting and uninhibited "desire . . . to be desired" that led to her parents' institutionalizing her for nymphomania, and which was later followed by her abandoning her husband for a Colombian drug smuggler in a not dissimilar impetuous pursuit of the "spirit of [her] own lust." Toward the end of the book, the "mystery" of "energy" that drew her to strangers as lovers has evolved into a more all-encompassing approach to love and its connection to suffering that is part of the mystery of life itself; in the last section, "A Grief Observed," which is largely made up of tributes to deceased loved ones, she writes, "For me to move on will mean resettling my sights on a target much bigger than my boundless love"—or, in other words, focusing on living "in harmony with the moon and tides."

The chapter "Heroin Christmas," with its familial anecdotes, is named after some blackly humorous and not-so-festive occasions such as "PMS Christmas when Mum over imbibed and ran out into the road . . . and cried, 'Hit me, nearest semi.'" In the same section, Musgrave sees a likeness to her own suicidal tendencies as a teenager when her daughter also attempts to overdose on

Tylenol, comforting herself that it is “just a phase” for the girl as it was for herself. A humour and outlook shared among them also emerges elsewhere in the book—whose full title includes the phrase “You’re in Canada Now, Motherfucker”—such as the dedication “To my mother,” in which Musgrave writes, “thank you . . . for everything you’ve taught me including never judge a book by its title.” Later in the book, Musgrave tells of an occasion when, while having her possessions searched by a prison official before being permitted to visit her incarcerated drug-addict, bank-robber husband, her chip-off-the-old-block daughter informs the inspector that, of their magazine assortment, *Martha Stewart Living* is “the *really* subversive one.”

If “to shake up the status quo” is Musgrave’s goal as a writer, she succeeds in her comparison of competitive sports with war in her “Political” chapter. In “The Mindless Touch,” she criticizes the competitive materialism that often replaces other values:

It’s a bloodthirsty struggle to win—whether it be a war or the Olympics. . . . Both are worlds filled with weeping: with joy (on winning gold), with disappointment (on losing gold), or with grief when your loved one comes home in the same box as his medal for valour.

Musgrave’s own subversive touch in questioning corrupt values and the authorities who promote them is further evident when she criticizes the American war on terrorism, invoking an apocalyptic allusion to “tanks slouching towards Baghdad” and suggesting that the September 11th hijackers “could have been a kind of terrible solution” or way of causing people to turn to more “authentic” values. Furthermore, by her final chapter, which she suggests is “reflective” as opposed to “reactive,” she nonetheless reiterates her political—and poetic—views in the image of “*The face of Osama bin Laden [which] bears a striking similarity to our conceptions of Jesus.*”

By examining her own life, beliefs, and goals as a writer, Susan Musgrave brings together her personal quest for balance in her life and her desire for balance in the world around her. Through her self-portrait, she presents *You’re in Canada Now . . . A Memoir of Sorts* as a reflection of her evolving values as an individual, but equally, it is a reflection of her desire for there to be “respect [of] all people, in their diversity” in Canada as a whole.

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## Going Downstream

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**Norman Henderson**

*Rediscovering the Prairies: Journeys By Dog, Horse, and Canoe.* Touchwood \$19.95

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**Myrna Kostash**

*Reading the River: A Traveller’s Companion to the North Saskatchewan River.* Coteau \$24.95

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Reviewed by Jenny Kerber

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The recent centennials of Saskatchewan and Alberta have been marked by the publication of numerous books celebrating the historical, cultural, and geographical diversity of the prairies. What better way to get to know the diversity of a given terrain than by following the course of one of its many life-sustaining arteries? These books by Norman Henderson and Myrna Kostash invite readers on two very different kinds of river journeys across the prairie provinces, but share a common concern for the value of natural continuity in the midst of the increasing fragmentation resulting from the vagaries of politics and the pressures of human activity.

In *Rediscovering the Prairies*, Norman Henderson, a grasslands specialist who works at the University of Regina, invites the reader on a series of three journeys down the same stretch of the Qu’Appelle River from Katepwa Lake in Saskatchewan to its confluence with the Assiniboine River in Manitoba. On each trip Henderson uses a different mode of early prairie travel—the dog travois, the canoe, and the horse travois

—diligently training and preparing for months in advance. This repetitive structure in the narrative is tricky since it risks boring the reader, but in Henderson's hands the strategy succeeds, as each mode of transportation leads to a startlingly different experience of prairie river terrain. Where the quiet mode of travel afforded by the canoe allows the author to approach a diversity of wildlife on the river, for example, the dog travois, in contrast, allows Henderson and his canine travel partner to move up and down steep coulees and travel along overgrown oxcart tracks made by traders working for the Hudson's Bay Company in the fur trade era.

Henderson's choice of the Qu'Appelle for his subject matter invites comparison with Trevor Herriot's 2000 volume, *River in a Dry Land*, which covered roughly the same terrain in a much lengthier book. Unlike Herriot's book, however, which tends to read the river through a biographical lens, Henderson's work eschews biography in favour of excerpts of historical travel narrative by figures such as Alexander Henry the Younger and Henry Youle Hind. While Henderson resists making the kinds of claims about authenticity and personal transformation that frequently appear in contemporary non-fiction nature narratives, he does write with clarity and conviction about the environmental transformation of this set of prairie landscapes by European culture, reserving special vitriol for the heedless pollution of the river. The book concludes with the assessment that the history of European settlement on the grasslands has been one of "cycles of environmental disaster" caused by the settlers' failure to accept the inherently "catastrophic nature of life on the grasslands in the manner of their original inhabitants." For such an otherwise subtle and engaging book, this conclusion strikes this reader as too easy in its naturalization of prairie hardship, particularly in light of demonstrations by environmental historians that cul-

tural factors such as government policy and economics have often played a key role in how prairie residents—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—have responded to the physical environment and its "natural catastrophes."

While Henderson's book clearly situates itself in a European (and overwhelmingly male) prairie travel narrative tradition, Myrna Kostash's *Reading the River* pays much greater attention to the prairie river as a polyvocal site of cultural and historical experience. The aim of the book, according to Kostash and her research associate Duane Burton, is "to gather together as wide a variety of stories and tales and anecdotes and reports as we could find that had something to say about the writer's or the poet's observations or feelings about the Saskatchewan River." As an anthology, the volume succeeds admirably, taking the reader downriver on a journey accompanied by voices ranging from a Piikani (Peigan) telling of a creation story, to accounts of the river by early women travellers, to depictions of urban riverscapes by contemporary poets. True to its subtitle as a "traveller's companion," the book's chapters may be read at random, and Kostash's judicious arrangements of narrative responses to the river result in some refreshing juxtapositions: for example, a narrative about the explorer David Thompson and the contemporary adventurers who trace his path upriver from the parkland into the Rockies is followed by an account by Edmonton drag queen and former resident of Rocky Mountain House Darrin Hagen, who envisions the river as a means of queer travel downstream to the city. The text is also accompanied by a rich archive of photographs, as well as a useful map that traces the river's path.

If these two books have a shared weakness, it lies in their textual apparatuses. Both lack indexes, thereby hindering each work's usefulness as a reference. Similarly, no page citations are given for the texts each author

draws upon, meaning that the curious reader must expend considerable energy to track down the sources of specific passages. One hopes that subsequent editions of these books will strive to better combine respect for the prodigious research each author has undertaken with the needs of academic and non-academic readers alike.

In spite of these minor quibbles, these two books remain essential reading for anyone interested in prairie waterways and their histories as economic instruments, transportation and communication routes, sources of hydroelectric energy, and as metaphors. "What is a river for?" asks Kostash in her conclusion: it is a question that will demand rigorous thought and conversation if these lifelines of the prairies are to be wisely nurtured and enjoyed by generations to come.

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## Black and Bruised Blues

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**Pamela Mordecai**

*The True Blue of Islands.* Sandberry \$12.95

**Pamela Mordecai, ed.**

*Calling Cards: New Poetry from Caribbean/Canadian Women.* Sandberry \$14.95

**Louise Delisle**

*Back Talk: Plays of Black Experience.* Roseway \$16.98

Reviewed by Katherine Verhagen

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Blues singers will rarely sing of their hardship just for their own emotional release. The blues reach down deep and when Billie Holiday sings "Good Morning, Heartache," many souls are waking up, drying their eyes. But the blues are not just about people singing about and identifying with suffering. The blues are about "keepin' on, keepin' on": preserving determination, strength, and wisdom.

No one can write sorrow like Pamela Mordecai. As a poet, she evokes the slow and difficult process of accepting personal trauma in many shades of pain: smelt blue

for a firing gun, indigo blue for a night that witnesses murder, and flame blue for the shots that are fired. In *The True Blue of Islands*, the ninth book in the Sandberry Press "Caribbean Poetry Series," Mordecai sings her loss as a chorus in a ballad of grief and determination. The song is not only hers and it is not without hope. She opens with the tale of Great-Granny Mac, an ex-slave, who survives physical brutality, familial separation, and rape by using cunning, creativity, and medicinal skills to buy her freedom. Mordecai propels her characters forward, allowing them to gather sure-footed strength and understanding along a treacherous path that they often must walk alone. The most cutting wounds, Mordecai suggests, are those inflicted by one's "own," whether as a result of being the property of a slave owner of African descent, being molested as a girl by a priest while seeking sanctuary, or being a shunned member of a community because of mixed-race identity. She challenges any *downpressors* who seek to overcome her spirit, whatever race or gender they may be. She speaks for those who have been silenced too soon in their own struggles. With a versatile voice, Mordecai sings in harmony with a ballad, a child's nursery rhyme, a dub rhythm, but she attunes the ear to the blues within the melody.

*Calling Cards* is the first anthology in the Sandberry Press "Anthology Series." As editor of the anthology, Mordecai creates a collection of chapbooks or "calling cards" of Caribbean-Canadian women poets who mostly have not yet published their own collected works. Just as there were too few opportunities for Anglo-Caribbean women writers to publish when Mordecai was the editor of *Jamaica Woman* (1980), so too are the opportunities few for "new writers [especially poets] to get published, even in Canada where small presses abound." Times are hard for poets writing "in the vernacular Englishes of the Caribbean," more likely to



find specialized small press publishers to take on their work, like the late Sister Vision Press. The poets use a combination of Standard English and vernacular English from Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines. Celia Ferrier, Nan Peacocke, Keisha Silvera, Janet Somerville, Mary Lou Soutar-Hynes, and Jennifer Walcott use Standard English like an instrument. They use it as Mordecai does in *The True Blue of Islands*:

We control this  
supposed English  
language employ it.

Yet, I find it too simplistic to say that there is a sharp distinction between the poets' use of S.E. (Standard/supposed English) and its vernacular. For instance, when Celia Ferrier invokes the (S.E.) epic voice in her recollection of her father, that section is one verse among many in a ballad to her childhood. Though the register is changed, the rhythm is unbroken. Throughout the anthology, the poets demonstrate seamless code-switching between two languages, S.E. and vernacular. By doing so, they suggest that an imposed and imperial hierarchy of Standard English as a language over vernacular as a derivative dialect is as "supposed" and inaccurate as it would be to say that because blues is derivative of gospel, it is not music.

In the long time of slavery, gospel lyrics often held clues for African American slaves to follow the Underground Railroad to Canada and to freedom. However, not enough has been written about the history of African Canadian enslavement, a discordant note in our multicultural song of racial harmony. Louise Delisle performs in and writes plays about that too-often-unheard subject and is the founder of the Black Pioneers Acting Troupe. George Elliot Clarke trumpets her praises in his foreword to her work, being one of the few public intellectuals to sing out that, yes, there were slaves in Canada. Therefore, Delisle is an important

playwright to read as she records and performs that hidden history which is an important part of our Canadian heritage. As well, she is a virtuoso of keeping time, pacing her plays in either abbreviated glimpses into pain and suffering or long, dark gazes into family tragedies. For instance, in "A Slave's Day in Court," Delisle encapsulates hope and despair within a few simple stage directions, as in the heavy incline of a defendant's head. Though sympathetic characters like the Magistrate attempt to promote justice, their small efforts are often overcome by the mercilessly quick pace of courtroom proceedings. In "The Days of Evan," Delisle writes a slow movement for bittersweet family memories and the private time of Susan and the ghost of her husband, Evan. Subsequently, the tale of his indictment, legal processing, incarceration, and hanging is brutally quick as the four jurors decide his fate even before the proceedings begin. Time moves forward and Sandra, in "Winnie's Elephant," asks "[w]hat is the use of talking about it now?" A slave-spirit who haunts the present, literally, replies "[y]ou are free." That freedom has been earned by those forgotten from the past. Therefore, Delisle writes these plays so that all Canadians will hear their lost hope and freedom.

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## Green Liberalism

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**Simon Hailwood**

*How to Be a Green Liberal: Nature, Value and Liberal Philosophy.* McGill-Queen's UP \$27.95

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Reviewed by Graham Good

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Liberalism is at present under attack from several quarters. For the Left (especially in Europe), "neo-liberalism" is the ideology of global capitalism, which exports injustice and exploitation around the world. For the Right (especially in the United States) "liberalism" is a fatal weakness in the culture, a cause of irreligion, moral decay, and social decline. Both of these views reflect partial or

false conceptions. The Left wrongly equates liberalism with capitalist economics, neglecting its political and cultural dimensions, and failing to acknowledge the liberal critique of capitalism. This critique, prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, is actually more cogent and realistic than the radical critique, since it aims to curb capitalism rather than indulge in the romantic-revolutionary longing to "overthrow" it. The Right wrongly equates liberalism with the misuses (as conservatives understand them) of the freedoms provided by a liberal state. In using "liberal" as a term of abuse, the Right confuses the choices it disapproves of with the existence of the right to choose.

There is now a third, and unfortunately sometimes equally misconceived, attack. This view holds that liberalism has encouraged a purely instrumental attitude to Nature as simply the sum of earthly resources for human development. Liberalism, it goes on, is "anthropocentric" or "speciesist," concerned only with human interests to the detriment of Nature, and leading to the cruel and disrespectful treatment of animals and the environment generally. This is a major theme in "Green" thinking, and there are several variants on it. Sometimes the Judeo-Christian tradition is blamed for showing God as giving humans "dominion" over all other creatures. Sometimes modern science is blamed for fostering a "disenchantment" of the world, depriving Nature of spiritual significance and opening the way to its ruthless exploitation. Sometimes liberalism is associated with a selfish individualism which has broken up a traditional sense of community both with fellow humans and with non-human beings.

Simon Hailwood's book is mainly concerned with the Green version of anti-liberalism, but in the process he usefully defines liberalism in a way that corrects the Left and Right distortions. He points out that liberalism arose in Europe in the wake of the religious wars and persecutions of the

seventeenth century, and champions the idea that individuals should be free to pursue their own religion and, more broadly, their own idea of the good life. The state, in liberal thinking, should not impose a single comprehensive definition of the good life on all its members, but should separate personal choices of belief and lifestyle from public institutions (such as law) which would be binding on all. Public values like tolerance, civility, and respect provide the necessary framework for individual and group self-realization.

The bulk of Hailwood's book is a carefully reasoned and persuasive argument that liberalism, properly understood, is in fact compatible with eco-philosophy. Some Greens argue that the liberal state tends to treat ecological living as a merely personal definition of the good life, and hence cannot effectively safeguard the interests of Nature, since many will not want to choose such a lifestyle. Hailwood argues that though some liberals have adopted a purely instrumental attitude to Nature (one which sees only its value for humans), this attitude is not essential to liberalism. Why? Because respect for what he calls the *otherness* of Nature can be defined as a necessary public value binding on the society as a whole, not simply an optional, private value chosen by some but not others. In other words, respect for Nature is part of the framework, rather than a choice within the framework. For Hailwood, ecological living should not be motivated merely by the human interest in avoiding catastrophic consequences for ourselves, but also in a *disinterested* (though he does not use this term) respect for Nature as *other*. The liberal idea of disinterest, derided by the "hermeneutic of suspicion" that currently dominates the humanities, is actually vital to the conservation of Nature. Hailwood, as a Green Liberal, is defending the compatibility of two philosophies which others have held to be incompatible. Thus much of the book is taken up with arguing

against those he partly agrees and partly disagrees with, i.e. Greens who are critical of liberalism, and liberals who are not, or not sufficiently, Green. Hailwood conducts the arguments with scrupulous fairness and clarity, and in so doing he provides an excellent example of how such debates should be (but often are not) conducted: reasonably and fairly, without caricature, distortion, or imputing ulterior motives to other writers.

Ultimately it is capitalism, not liberalism, which needs to be drastically curbed in order to avoid ecological disaster. It is quite wrong, though common, to associate capitalism exclusively with liberal democracy: capitalism has willingly done business with non-democratic regimes of every stripe, from Fascist (Nazi Germany) to Communist (present day China). It would be tragic if the liberal values of individualism, tolerance, and personal freedom, won in hard struggles against many forms of tyranny and intolerance, were identified with an economic system which could well bring on environmental catastrophe if not restrained. Hailwood's precise and careful argument cuts through the muddles and distortions that have, in some minds, made liberalism seem the enemy of Green ethics.




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## What's New?

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**Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane, eds.**

*Breathing Fire 2: Canada's New Poets.* Nightwood  
\$24.00

**Carmine Starnino, ed.**

*The New Canon: An Anthology of Canadian Poetry.* Véhicule \$23.95

**Derek Beaulieu, Jason Christie, and Angela Rawlings, eds.**

*Shift & Switch: New Canadian Poetry.* Mercury  
\$19.95

Reviewed by Moberley Luger

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In their introduction to *Breathing Fire 2*, Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane write that "all [they] wanted was to give good poets across Canada an opportunity to present their writing." While they do, indeed, collect some very fine poetry, this intention is troubling: it takes for granted that Crozier and Lane are in the position to award such an opportunity, and it assumes a definition, which never gets explained, of a "good poet." In part, readers trust Crozier and Lane's judgment of "good" based on their reputation: the first edition of *Breathing Fire* included such prize winning success stories as Stephanie Bolster, Michael Redhill, and Karen Solie. And if prizes are any measure of goodness, the poets anthologized in this new edition are good indeed: almost all of the 33 poets (selected from 300 submissions) have been short listed for, or awarded, some sort of literary prize. Accolades aside, however, it is difficult to assess what makes this poetry worthy; Crozier and Lane simply state that "a great land will always create great poetry."

The chosen poems are anecdotal, personal, confessional. They are examples of what Derek Beaulieu, in the introduction to his own anthology, calls (though, negatively) "finely wrought epiphanic moment[s] of personal reflection." With the exception of Nathalie Stephens' poetry (which could be called "experimental," also found in *Shift &*

*Switch*), these poems are traditional, free-verse lyrics. They speak of beauty and desire (Brad Cran, Adam Dickinson), of seasons and weather (Tammy Armstrong, Amy Bespflug, Chris Hutchinson to name a very few); they convey the identity formation of their speakers. There are some notable—and appreciated—deviations: Joe Denham's muscular fisherman poems, Shane Book's, "*Litost*: A Style Manual," in which he circles an untranslatable word, the excerpts from Steven Price's recently published collection, *Anatomy of Keys*. These poets are good because they are good at *what they do*: like Bolster, Redhill and Solie, and Crozier and Lane before them, they make personal moments lyrical and accessible. They represent the next generation of Canadian poets who will likely teach in our Creative Writing programs and continue to win our literary awards.

Like Crozier and Lane, Carmine Starnino sought out the "good" when sifting through 400 books to put together *The New Canon*; he concludes his 21 page introduction with the call that we "read good poems to read good poems." Unlike Crozier and Lane, however, Starnino explains his "good"—in an introduction that is engaging if, at times, overly polemical (written to engage those who love, or love to hate, David Solway's *Director's Cut*, or Starnino's own essay collection, *A Lover's Quarrel*). Starnino champions a very specific style of poetry: the formal kind. He argues that the most innovative poems come out of the oldest traditions. "Why," he asks, "should traditional form make innovation impossible?" This question is directed specifically at the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry movement which he calls, rather boldly, "nonsense." While some will object to Starnino's conservative tastes, his introduction is absorbing and provides a necessary context to the poetry that follows.

Though Starnino is a fervent New Formalist, the poetry he ultimately collects has wide appeal. Many of Canada's most

acclaimed poets—even those who don't write strictly in form—are included. The selections range from the truly formal (Elise Partridge, Barbara Nickel) to the looser lyric (Diane Brebner, Steven Heigh-ton). In each case, though, Starnino's selections reflect his taste: that is, in this anthology, for example, Christian Bök does not verge on L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry and David McGimpsey does not write about baseball. And while, on their own, the poets selected in *The New Canon* do not all necessarily warrant canonization (three, for instance, are also "Canada's New Poets," found in *Breathing Fire 2*), together they form an impressive collection. Whether or not it is the form that makes them so, the poems here are indeed, as Starnino says, full of "individuality, authority and linguistic initiative."

Apparently, these are three qualities that editors Derek Beaulieu, Jason Christie and Angela Rawlings also looked for when editing *Shift & Switch: New Canadian Poetry*. Their end product, however, is very different. "An alternative must be offered," Beaulieu writes in his introduction, referring to the confessional lyric, Canada's predominant poetic form. *Shift & Switch* collects poetry that challenges the notion of what a poem can be. Jamie Hilder's "slogan poems" are photographs of signs he has hung on highways; they intervene, literally, in their surroundings. Rob Read's "hieroglyphs" are visual puns, provocative clip-art. Jon Paul Fiorentino's sonnet is a binary code. These poems are not "formal" in Starnino's sense, but they certainly work with form. By making and breaking their own rules (several reinvent the sonnet, many have visual parameters on the page), these poets experiment with the boundaries of poetry.

Even if the poetry in *Shift & Switch* does not appeal to a reader aesthetically (though, in a sense, isn't that appeal what makes a poem "good"?), the anthology itself makes an important contribution to Canadian

literature. It does the job an anthology should do: it culls a large body of work to make a case for the importance of a selected few—and for its own importance in the culture. In fact, all three of these anthologies do this job. If one reads these collections individually, s/he could quibble with the selection of poets, or with how unabashedly the editors rally for their selections. Read together, however, they provide a useful snapshot of Canadian poetry.

## Queer As Folk Etymology

**Katherine Barber**

*Six Words You Never Knew Had Something to Do with Pigs.* Oxford UP \$24.95

Reviewed by Ramona Montagnes

Back from a recent trip to New Orleans, my husband claimed to have learnt the etymology for the word “fence” as in “fenced goods.” According to his tour guide, buccaneers in the 1800s sold stolen goods from the premises of St. Louis Cathedral. While the church apparently sanctioned the transactions, it did not sanction the trampling of the flower beds surrounding the property; it subsequently erected a fence outside of which the parties could conduct their business.

Having just read Katherine Barber’s *Six Words You Never Knew Had Something to Do with Pigs*, I suspected this explanation was a folk etymology (an inaccurate and unnecessarily complicated word history). And so, taking Barber’s advice, I checked in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which informed me that the first recorded use of the word “fence” in relation to stolen goods was by Rowland in 1610.

Barber’s lively and somewhat irreverent book does more than rail against folk etymologies. It begins with a short summary “Bluff Your Way in Etymology” that coasts through language history and its movements such as the “the French squishing syndrome” and the “great vowel shift.” From there, this etymological wordbook is organized accord-

ing to the seasons—the thematic hook used on the CBC radio show from which the book originates.

The organization is pleasing to those who like to dip into books (thank goodness for the indices for the rest of us) but readers should not expect to find a continuous theme linking the sections. “Pigs” are limited to only those “six words” referred to in the title. Seemingly, words related to cows and goats play a larger role in our language. And the book ends rather abruptly, even ominously, on the word “retire,” a word which has its roots in “martyr” and “pull”—as on the medieval rack.

Word histories are generally fascinating but of particular interest to Canadians are the histories of Canadian words that distinguish us from Americans. Many of these words stem from First Nations languages (chipmunk, toboggan, and whisky jack) and from the French and English colonists (bumf, emmets, figgy duff, toque, and toe rubbers). The more modern words reflect our love for the great outdoors and holidays: Canadian National Exhibition (“exhibition” in this sense a Canadianism), May Two-Four Weekend, March Break, shack (for cottage), and Cottage Country. There are also regional differences: “dainties” on the West Coast means an assortment of pastries, whereas in Ontario, the same word stands for underwear. Caveat emptor.

Barber also clears up some misconceptions regarding our use of what we believe to be modern words. “Bulimia” (*bolismus*) was first used in 1398, “toast” in 1400, “ketchup” (without tomatoes) in 1650, and “weapons of mass destruction” in 1937. Adults who abhor the teenage use of the word “like” as an intensifier (“He got, like, really upset”) should be aware that Fanny Burney in 1778 wrote “Father grew quite uneasy, like, for fear of his lordship’s taking offence.”

In her role as “Canada’s Word Lady,” Barber argues that we should accept changes in words and their usage. She questions

purists who are against the evolution of nouns to verbs: do these people never “mail” letters, “book” hotel rooms, “butter” toast, or take planes that “land”? What she won’t accept, however, is the dreaded folk etymology. When you consider the word “the hooch” in folk etymology is believed to be derived from the chemical formula of ethanol, but in reality it comes from the Tlingit word “Hutsnuw,” you can see that when it comes to the history of words, the truth is often more interesting than fiction.

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## Beauty and the World

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**Susan Glickman**

*The Violin Lover*. Goose Lane \$22.95

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**Martha Baillie**

*The Shape I Gave You*. Knopf Canada \$19.95

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Reviewed by Emily Doucet

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*The Violin Lover* begins with Ned Abraham, violinist and doctor, taking a walk after a concert. Ned’s enjoyment is interrupted by the discovery of a corpse floating in the Thames. He contemplates helping but decides: “today he would just be Ned, lover of architecture and music . . . and not Dr. Abraham, patcher-up of the broken and the maimed.” The troubling selfishness of aesthetic enjoyment is the central preoccupation of this novel.

There is also Jacob, young piano prodigy, and Clara, his young widowed mother. Like Ned, these two struggle with the expectations of an external world. Jacob is “not so much desirous of learning as of *becoming* music, so he could shut out everything else.” Clara spends her days fulfilling a series of roles. In a representative moment Clara undresses before her nightly bath. We are told that “her shoes sat waiting by the front door, released from their obligation to take her out into the world.” As she continues, she thinks, “there were always so many layers to strip away before she could find herself.” Susan Glickman’s characters are

vulnerable to a world that has no interest in the creative.

Ned befriends Jacob. This connection leads to an affair between Ned and Clara, baring the creative cores of the couple as the writer investigates whether the attachments of the so-called real world can coexist with the inner, true life. Glickman deliberately paces the relationship. It is consummated after an anti-Semitic riot and so begins a resistance to the world typified by all the escalating conflict of a world in jeopardy. The relationship is, however, finally made impossible by its attachment to the world that it began by avoiding.

Glickman’s emphasis on the ordering nature of art over the chaos of life suggests that the two cannot coexist. The disconnect is, however, not entirely redemptive. The solitude required for the aesthetic moment—a necessity confirmed by the failure of the lovers’ attachment—limits the possibility of any aesthetic rejuvenation of the world. As the angel atop the Christmas tree at a recital remarks, in a moment of whimsical narration, “people, God bless them, always got in the way of the music.”

Instead, Glickman argues for an amoral retreat from the world that threatens the aesthetic sphere. The novel finishes with an anecdote about an international music conference held in 1939, which “unanimously adopted 440 cycles per second for the note A in the treble clef.” If aesthetic ecstasy is a space in which pollution seems impossible, it is also guilty of a certain blindness. Clara articulates this ambiguity when, after a moment of musical rapture at a concert, she asks her son if “the feelings in this music, [t]he yearning, you know, the sacrifice” are real. This central question of *The Violin Lover* is never really answered.

Martha Baillie’s *The Shape I Gave You* also looks to answer Clara’s question about the relation between art and truth. Pianist Ulrike Huguenot receives an unexpected letter from the sculptor Beatrice Mann, the

lover and illicit correspondent of Ulrike's deceased father Gustave. Beatrice tries, through writing, to make sense of her life in the aftermath of her daughter's tragic death. In Baillie's novel, however, the relation between art and the world is very different.

Baillie argues that it is art that makes things real, that things are heavy with meaning. Beatrice describes one of her pieces, which takes tree stumps and makes them look like tires. She writes, "I want each tire to be beautiful." The aestheticization of the world contrasts with the aesthetic segregation in *The Violin Lover*. After an encounter with Gustave she describes her journey home: "Everything was terribly real—the cars in the next lane, the drivers behind their steering wheels . . . the salt I licked from my cheek, all these belonged to the same acute afternoon."

Baillie pairs this acute reality with reminders that if the world is beautiful, and painfully real, it is also made anew by each person who notices it. Beatrice reminds us that the Gustave of her letters is of her own creation. The same is true of all relationships in the novel. As these relationships are narrated by the speaker; they are given shape in a way both true and personal.

As with *The Violin Lover*, this novel records an artistic crisis. Beatrice writes to Ulrike: "Ines is dead and no more stories are possible." This crisis, however, is overcome through the act of narration. Beatrice follows each sentence of defeat with another sentence and so the stories continue. By the end Ulrike writes back: "I find that much of what is true is unbearable. Expressed in music, the truth is more bearable. By the end of your letter, you'd convinced me it is the truth you're after." This articulation of the midwifery of art in the service of truth, and the pairing of this truth with Beatrice's letter, resolves the creative crisis of the novel.

Unlike the ambiguous coda that ends *The Violin Lover*, *The Shape I Gave You* is redeemed through personal passion filtered

through the lens of an artistic statement. *The Violin Lover*'s uneasiness with its passion is a more complex position, perhaps, but a less successful one. Glickman's attempts to marry form and content are less successful than Baillie's who also uses different and occasionally warring narrative perspectives. Glickman's choir of narrative voices is meant to suggest a musical piece with several instruments, but if unity is an attribute of music, it is not one shared by the characters of the novel, and so the structure destroys itself with each new perspective introduced. Perhaps the tonal shifts, from prose to poetry to musical theory and back are also meant to be strategic. In the end, *The Shape I Gave You* has a tightness that *The Violin Lover* lacks. While the elements of Glickman's writing are lovely—indeed *The Violin Lover* has more "underlineables" than *The Shape I Gave You*—the sum is more stilted than its parts.

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## Histories of Contact

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**Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, eds.**

*Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past.* UBC Press \$85.00

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Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

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In recent decades, feminist social historians have been turning their attention to a variety of new sources of research to create a more sophisticated picture of relations of gender and race in Canadian colonial life. Using documents that include reports by Indian Affairs agents, missionaries' diaries, court records, social workers' notes, newspaper reports of murder trials, and accounts of Victoria Day pageants, *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past* aims to present a nuanced account of the material practices and social relations through which colonialism was embodied and resisted in Canada's distant and more recent pasts. Citing Mary Louise Pratt's influential idea of the "contact zone," the editors define the colonial arena

as a diverse social terrain: not only the site where colonial rule was imposed, though that is always kept in view, but also a fluid space in which peoples encountered one another and, despite radical asymmetries of power, were mutually changed. The emphasis, then, is on interaction, negotiation, and adaptation by variously positioned individuals in a shifting border zone. Such is the salutary, though unevenly practised, emphasis of the collection.

The most interesting work in these essays examines how historical abstractions such as colonial authority, discourses of normalcy, racism, and resistance are embodied in particular relationships, choices, articulations, and practices: we find attention to particularity in Sherry Farrell Racette's examination of records of economic transactions demonstrating the central contributions of Indigenous and mixed-race women to the fur trade; these women not only adjusted to new economic realities but also left a lasting mark on the region through their skill at dressing the men who travelled and traded in the West; in Jean Barman's study of the furor over dance halls in Victoria, BC, where transient groups of miners consorted with local Aboriginal women, the emphasis is not only on public attitudes to Aboriginal women but on the women's claims to public space; Myra Rutherdale's analysis of the letters and reports of missionaries and public health nurses in the Arctic demonstrates their ongoing preoccupation not only with physical hygiene but with clothing style as well, stressing "conversion" to Western dress as material evidence of spiritual transformation; in turn, the peoples they sought to convert had their own responses to the inculcation of modern hygiene and clothing. The number and variety of documents consulted in all of these essays enable the construction of rich and multi-layered historical accounts.

I found particularly engaging those essays that focus on individual lives, as in Cecilia

Morgan's examination, through letters and newspaper reports, of two Mohawk women who, from the 1930s to the 1960s, managed the anxieties and opportunities of public exposure and performance to raise white audience awareness of the history and modern situation of Aboriginal people in Ontario. Morgan's attention to the personal letters of her subjects, Bernice Loft and Ethel Brant Monture, make for compelling, illuminating reading. And I was not surprised to enjoy, and learn from, Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson's always readable and subtle analysis of Pauline Johnson's texts and public image. I was also impressed by Jo-Anne Fiske's examination of conflicting accounts of residential schools, an analysis focusing on the metaphor of motherlessness that is often employed to explain both the sacrifice of the Catholic devout who left families to teach in the schools and the pain of Aboriginal children torn from their homes to be educated there. In her nuanced and provocative reading, Fiske shows how this metaphor can sometimes link and sometimes irreparably separate the experiences of teachers and students, and it enables Fiske to explore, without apology or shrillness, the incommensurate meanings of this central cultural symbol.

The less successful essays are those that approach their sources with an argument already formulated, in each case the rather unsurprising verdict that the colonial project sought to impose white, middle-class values of sexual chastity, faithful monogamy, domesticity, and the work ethic on Aboriginal, poor, and immigrant families. What this often seems to have amounted to in practice was social workers', missionaries', and government agencies' belief that families were happier and more productive, and children better off, in homes where the parents were married, did not drink, and kept the house clean. It's hard to find such assumptions particularly reprehensible, and these essays fail to prove that their application



was consistently biased, heartless, or hypocritical. Sometimes the evidence actually contradicts the framing argument. So convinced is Joan Sangster of the innately punitive and coercive nature of all state regulation that even expressions of concern and sympathy are read negatively. In one of numerous questionable interpretations, she quotes from a 1950s juvenile court file stating of a delinquent girl that “she admits . . . she has been promiscuous with different boys . . . and was apprehended for having intercourse with men behind the dance hall . . . she can hardly be blamed for taking sex intercourse as a matter of indifference . . . she was apparently initiated at a young age by her brother.” Despite the explicitly non-judgemental phrasing in the report, Sangster’s sole comment on the passage is that, “As in other cases, incest was assumed to be *her* moral problem” [emphasis in the original]. Such sweeping and, in this case, inaccurate assessments of the evidence seriously undermine the essay, which pays only lip service to the “specificity, complexities and contradictions” it names in its introductory discussion.

Unfortunately a number of the essays on moral regulation are similarly dogmatic, failing to argue carefully or attempt scholarly objectivity. Jean Barman’s assertion that missionaries’ and other reformers’ concerns about the degradation of Native women in Victoria amounted to “moral rape”—a coercive stripping of their agency and dignity to justify reformers’ presence—is considerably overstated and under-supported. Of the very few clergymen quoted, the most damning evidence she provides is a Methodist minister’s comment that the women who frequent dance halls “are the lowest order of the pagan community around us, degraded by vices unknown among them before the advent of their present white associates,” a statement that blames white men at least as much as Indigenous women and hardly merits Barman’s outraged response. The repeated suggestion in these essays that no

good ever came from moral or social regulation and that resistance to such regulation was always “bravely and creatively negotiated” is not systematically defended, and relies on a binary logic as simple as that it claims to contest. In such cases, ideological commitment overshadows scholarly rigour.

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## From Dar es Salaam to Bombay to Calgary

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**Anar Ali**

*Baby Khaki’s Wings*. Viking \$32.00

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**Anosh Irani**

*The Song of Kahunsha*. Doubleday \$29.95

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Reviewed by Kit Dobson

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These two books, by writers who have graduated from the very productive Creative Writing program at the University of British Columbia, are significant achievements for both: a strong second novel for Irani, a rapid follow-up to 2005’s *The Cripple and His Talismans*, and a first volume of short stories for Ali, which comes in advance of a first novel, tentatively entitled *False Departure*. These two writers from different routes in the South Asian diaspora offer readers crisp, precise writing that affirms their abilities and creates strong promise for their future work. Both bear the marks of having worked their way through a highly professional writing program that produces tidy materials while allowing its students a wide and expressive range; these books were a pleasure to read for their style and grace, even while their authors are handling disturbing and difficult topics.

*The Song of Kahunsha* is grounded in the lives of orphaned and homeless children in Bombay (a name that Irani pointedly retains in spite of the city’s official renaming as Mumbai). It is resolutely set in the streets and unapologetic for the cruelty and ugliness to be found there, yet it seeks moments of transcendence and connection between and

among its characters. While Irani's *The Cripple and His Talismans* offered a magic-realist version of Bombay, *The Song of Kahunsha* only toys with such a mythical escape, as its characters remain trapped in lives of poverty. Its young protagonist Chamdi imagines another Bombay, which he calls Kahunsha, in which the distress and misery of the current city vanish. As much as he wishes to realize this other place, it does not arrive in the course of the novel; instead, he is removed from a modest life at an orphanage and thrust among the homeless young beggars and petty crooks of the city. He falls in with two young children of his age named Guddi and Sumdi, who initiate him into the systems of the streets. Predictably, Chamdi becomes smitten with Guddi, the only correspondingly aged female character in the book. Chamdi's devotion to his new friends, however, is complicated both by the rules of street life—in which everyone in the district is subordinated to the rough, thuggish Anand Bhai—and by the surrounding geopolitical events, in which Muslim and Hindu tensions are exploding anew across the city, reaching into the lives of the poor.

Irani's book is narrated, for the most part, over the course of a few days, beginning with the time that Chamdi leaves his orphanage on a putative quest to find the father who left him there, and culminating in a moment of violent strife between the Hindus (who have taken Chamdi in) and the neighbourhood's Muslims. These structural tensions go unresolved: Chamdi realizes the futility of his paternal quest—its completion is just too unlikely in the mixed-up world of the city—and the sectarian violence is set to continue. Instead of simplistically resolving these narrative and socio-political elements, the book arrives at an oceanfront moment shared by Chamdi and Guddi, in which they remember better times and affirm their commitment to the future, to the imagined city that might be.

The stories of Anar Ali's *Baby Khaki's Wings* use similarly intelligent narrative designs, often offering a possibility for closure that is then deferred. They jump in and out of magic realism, alternating between the simplified and lustrous settings of childhood and the cold difficulties of adult life. Narratives revolve around Ismaili characters living either in Africa or Canada, with the earlier stories being set in east Africa and the later ones landing more squarely in Alberta. *Baby Khaki's Wings* is deeply impacted by the events that have affected eastern Africa's Ismaili communities: its characters range from Ismailis in Uganda and Kenya displaced by Idi Amin and the racial backlash of that period to newcomers to Trudeau-era Alberta, who face new forms of discrimination and abuse at the hands of whites. These politicized settings, however, are not accompanied by didacticism or simplistic dualisms between victims and victimizers; instead, the stories shy away from easy conclusions in their movements toward open endings, thereby offering space for thought.

From the opening, parable-like story "The Weight of Pearls," through the title story, Ali offers readers a vision that transcends everyday expectations. The Imam drifts through Dar es Salaam, two sisters imaginatively transport themselves into Bollywood settings, and a baby saves its ayah or wet nurse by flying off into the sky with her. The later, Canadian settings retain the glow of these stories, as the trucks that pull in to fill up at Mansoor and Layla Visram's rural gas station waft in from the darkness that surrounds it, bringing with them the threat of racialized violence. Stories set in a Calgary that, we must suppose, exists in the none-too-distant future (complete with the "Ralph Klein Auxiliary Hospital"), focus upon women who work to handle their lives of transnational displacement. Some women handle their immigration to Canada gracefully, while others lose their footing and

struggle amidst the details as employment fails and their money is misappropriated. The lives of these immigrants are set against lustrous comparisons to life in Africa and, while neither locale is set up as better than the other, the contrasts are apparent.

Both of these writers are spare stylists: Irani's short sentences evoke the child's mind that controls the point of view, while Ali uses an unpretentious palette that allows her stories to unfold without rhetorical excess. *The Song of Kahunsha* has a circular narrative structure, returning to and rewriting its opening lines, but otherwise proceeds in a straightforward manner. *Baby Khaki's Wings* is more varied, as is fitting in a book of short stories, and is the more pleasing for it. These two books and authors deserve to be followed with interest.

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## The Privilege of Age

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**P.K. Page**

*Hand Luggage.* Porcupine's Quill \$16.95

**Elizabeth Brewster**

*Bright Centre.* Oberon \$16.95

Reviewed by Sara Jamieson

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In her new collection of poems, *Bright Centre*, Elizabeth Brewster states that "It is the privilege of age / to repeat / to write the same poem / in a different mode." It is a privilege that P.K. Page, too, claims for herself in her latest book, *Hand Luggage*. Both poets revisit earlier material in ways that contradict the stereotypical association of age with mere repetitiveness, and instead acknowledge the trickiness of memory, the seductions of nostalgia, and the paradox of an aging self that neither changes nor remains the same. *Hand Luggage* is a "memoir in verse" that traces a chronological narrative, beginning with Page's childhood in 1920s Alberta. Introducing a young self "masked as a malamute, mutable, moody," Page establishes the densely alliterative texture of the entire work. Leaving childhood and Canada

quickly behind, she devotes the bulk of the poem to the years when she accompanied her husband Arthur on his diplomatic postings to Australia, Mexico, and, most memorably for Page, Brazil. Many episodes will be familiar to readers acquainted with Page's *Brazilian Journal*, but are retold with significant shifts in emphasis. Her telling of her first night in Rio, when she mistook the noise of fireworks for revolutionary gunshots, contains the image of "Arthur as pale / as the moon in his nakedness" leaping out of bed to inspect the commotion. This account does not appear in the *Brazilian Journal* version of events; Page's retelling invests the scene with a new drama and poignancy, making it a tender memorial to Arthur, who died in 1999.

Page's habitual fascination with multiple selves is mapped across the life course in a way that stirs up questions concerning the politics of race and class in a global context. She repeatedly questions the extent of her former complicity with the racism of some of her peers in the "world-wide white club" of international diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s, but the poem does not consistently destabilize colonialist ideology. Indignation at the relegation of Aboriginal art to the basement of a gallery in Melbourne is followed by a vaguely paternalistic reference to "our" Aboriginal art by "Algonquin and Cree." Later, the comparison of poverty in Canadian cities to the *favelas* of Rio punctures first-world assumptions of superiority, but the impact of this parenthetical aside is compromised by its containment within the poem's lilting tetrameter rhythm: in reading this 93-page poem, I did find myself craving more metrical variation.

Accustomed to the privileges of diplomatic life, Page returns to Canada as a person whom she suspects her younger self would not have liked very much "had [they] been introduced." Imagined meetings between older and younger selves also occur in *Bright Centre* but are less politically charged, as in

the Dickinson-esque "If I Should Meet Myself," an uncollected poem from 1945. "By The River Again" is a return poem in the manner of "Tantramar Revisited," in which Brewster measures the gulf between ambition and achievement within a familiar but changed landscape. To the ghost of herself at 20, the poet offers the modest assurance that "the next sixty years / will not be as good as you hope / nor as bad as you fear." This tone of quiet melancholy dominates the entire second half of the book, which is filled with elegies for lost friends and family. These are brief, short-lined poems with domestic settings and colloquial diction, infused with a nostalgia held in check by the awareness that "youth is always golden / at least in retrospect." Two poems set in Jewish cemeteries explicitly address Brewster's recent conversion to Judaism, and explore the issues of faith and community that dominate the first half of the book. The first half is relentlessly interrogative as Brewster tries to explain her conversion to confused friends who ask "'Why?' 'How?' 'When?'" In poems composed almost entirely of questions she struggles to interpret the teachings of Moses and Maimonides. Peppered with untranslated Hebrew words, these poems reflect Brewster's own intensive study of various theological texts, and can seem impenetrable to readers unfamiliar with their religious context.

While Brewster is preoccupied with questions of death, ranging from the motives of suicide bombers to the experience of having outlived so many of her friends, the final poem, "Fear No More," concludes the book on a hopeful note, affirming the "gentle endings" of Shakespeare's late plays. This contrasts sharply with *Hand Luggage*, where the poet's sense of the irreconcilable tension between the world's beauty and its misery leads through to a startlingly pessimistic final vision of a planet where bigotry prevails and "things' only get worse." *Hand Luggage* and *Bright Centre* are engaging books by

women who have both lived long, travelled widely, pursued serious study of different mystical traditions, and who are ultimately led to very different conclusions about the world.

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## Vers une esthétique de l'altérité

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**Francine Allard**

*Les mains si blanches de Pye Chang*. Tryptique  
17,00 \$

**Clara Ness**

*Genèse de l'oubli*. XYZ 20,00 \$

**Simone Piuze**

*La femme-homme*. Éditions David 17,00 \$

Compte rendu par Simona Emilia Pruteanu

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Le ton littéraire à la mode ces temps-ci au Québec est donné par l'*écriture migrante*, production textuelle appartenant à « ces étrangers du dedans » pour citer Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand. Cependant, ces trois romans de « souche québécoise » essaient avec succès une écriture différente qui s'interroge à son tour sur la position de l'autre, sur l'identité et partant sur la situation de l'écrivain dans le contexte de la mondialisation.

Comme *Il nome della rosa* de Umberto Eco, le roman de Francine Allard, *Les mains si blanches de Pye Chang*, peut se lire à plusieurs niveaux: métaroman sur l'« art du roman », puisque le narrateur, Sylvain Dupont, vendeur de confiseries de jour, se transforme en écrivain de nuit ; roman expérimental ou roman policier, car l'intrigue rappelle celle d'un polar, aussi surprenant vers la fin que le *Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, par exemple; même ici il faut remarquer le clin d'œil que l'auteure fait à son lectorat, par la *mise en abyme* et surtout par l'avance que l'écriture prend sur le réel, en l'annonçant.

Cependant, la polémique qui sous-tend la narration peut se résumer dans la question

suivante: comment écrire *québécois* dans le contexte des *écritures migrantes*? L'onomastique des personnages des romans de Sylvain Dupont apporte une réflexion sur « l'exotisme » préféré par la plupart des écrivains québécois: « Ils préfèrent les noms exotiques qui leur assurent plus de crédibilité. Sauf Michel Tremblay. Lui, il a compris qu'il n'y a pas plus exotique pour les lecteurs français que les noms de chez nous. » Au lieu de peupler son roman de personnages « exotiques », Francine Allard se fait la voix de Sylvain Dupont, un homme qui sait assumer ce « je » et construire sa psychologie en tant qu'orphelin de mère et amoureux de sa meilleure amie qui aime plutôt les femmes; c'est de loin la partie la plus intéressante de ce roman.

Femme-écrivain et narrateur homme, c'est aussi la recette suivie par *Genèse de l'oubli* de Clara Ness. Titre paradoxal qui donne le ton du roman, mais, comme l'a souligné Paul Ricœur, l'oubli n'est jamais définitif: il s'agit de recommencer, de renouer avec son passé, mais avant, il faut qu'on oublie, et qu'on se rappelle ce qu'on a essayé d'oublier. Le roman présente la vie d'un jeune couple: Hadrien, parisien établi au Québec, et son épouse Ariane, jeune fille née dans une famille de Sainte-Foy. La naissance de leur fille Lili, « la petite qui a les deux passeports », et la mort du père d'Hadrien sont deux événements qui remettent leurs vies en perspective. D'une part, Hadrien est obligé de rentrer en France, après onze ans, et il doit s'avouer: « oui, c'était beau, c'était bon de retrouver cette partie de lui-même qu'il avait enfouie au plus profond de son être. » D'autre part, Ariane renoue avec sa famille et retourne dans « la banlieue, ce que l'Amérique avait inventé de plus laid », car elle pense que sa fille devrait au moins connaître ses grands parents québécois. Le roman s'achève sur l'espoir de la réconciliation, avec le projet du couple d'emmener leur fille à Paris dans un avenir proche. Loin d'être seulement un roman sur le malaise

d'être Français au Québec ou sur la relation ambivalente entretenue par le Québec avec la France, *Genèse de l'oubli* est un roman « familial » qui semble proclamer qu'on vient tous de quelque part, qu'on l'accepte ou pas.

La réflexion sur les relations avec les parents ou l'absence de ces modèles identitaires est au coeur du roman de Simone Piuze, *La femme-homme*. Histoire d'amour entre un adolescent et une inconnue plus âgée dans le contexte d'un Québec des années 1960 et d'une société qui ostracise l'étranger: « Elle venait de nulle part. » Le narrateur, Jean Courtemanche, tombe amoureux d'une femme étrange qui vit seule dans la forêt. Cet écart de la norme sociale et tous les autres attributs qui la rendent si différente des gens du village (on apprendra qu'elle est en fait peintre) sont synthétisés dans le surnom que Jean lui donne: la femme-homme, puisqu'elle cumule à la fois les attributs de la mère et du père. Tout comme dans les romans de Allard et Ness, dans celui de Piuze la relation avec les parents pose problème à la configuration identitaire de l'individu. Le père de Jean a abandonné sa mère, tout comme le père de William, son demi-frère, le fera à son tour quand il apprendra sa grossesse. Le modèle masculin est donc absent de la vie des adolescents, et c'est la femme-homme qui se charge de l'initiation de Jean dans plusieurs domaines: elle lui apprend comment allumer le feu, comment pêcher, elle lui montre le monde à travers des atlas et l'initie finalement à l'amour physique.

La faiblesse du roman réside surtout dans le dénouement, mais on peut y lire une tentative de subversion des stratégies romanesques traditionnelles et un accent mis sur l'écriture plus que sur le sens. La scène où Jean découvre la femme-homme égorgée dans sa maison est très peu cohérente du point de vue narratif. S'agirait-il du fantasme exacerbé de l'adolescent qui, en se trouvant abandonné par la femme-peintre, l'imagine violée, tuée et enterrée sans que personne

jamais ne le sache? C'est peut-être sur ce point du signifié que la cohérence est retrouvée : les trois romans semblent faire écho à la plaie culturelle fondatrice de l'écriture québécoise : abandon de la mère France et trahison des pères de la nation. Ce n'est pas sans raison que Jean et William ont des pères différents, francophone et anglophone respectivement, les deux ayant abandonné la mère et leur progéniture.

## Leonard Cohen: Travels with the "Tourist of Beauty"

**Leonard Cohen**

*Book of Longing*. McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Reviewed by Ira Nadel

This review follows upon a Leonard Cohen year. From financial disarray to artistic success, Leonard Cohen has been a cultural Everyman: in August 2005 it was the cover of *Maclean's*; in February 2006, the induction of five of his songs into the Canadian Songwriter's Hall of Fame; May 2006 saw the release of his new album *Blue Alert*; and on 21 June 2006 a feature documentary entitled, "Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man" opened in theatres throughout North America. And after some 22 years—his last book of original poems was *Book of Mercy* in 1984—Leonard Cohen has published a new book.

At first, it is hard to know what to call *Book of Longing*: poetry, prose, autobiography, song or art? A portion of the text reproduces Leonard's handwriting to provide authenticity and intimacy, while other sections reveal his talent at computer-generated images. But he unifies the book with themes we have encountered and experienced as early as *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Death of a Lady's Man*. They include loss, remorse, isolation, and that damned search for love and companionship.

As always, the heart "is in sad confusion," although this time it has an edge of humour:

I'm angry with the angel  
Who pinched me on the thigh  
And made me fall in love  
With every woman passing by

Wit, however, mellows the disillusionment, as if age has not altered but intensified desire. The quest is the continued search for love.

In *Book of Longing*, Cohen sees light rather than darkness, a smile not a frown. Even the postponement of the book—it had been promised years ago—is subject to humour. In his poem "Delay," after the narrator comments on his great capacity to hold back, he turns a negative into a positive, congratulating himself that he was "able to delay this book well beyond / the end of the 20th century."

But Leonard has not lost his flair, nor his sense of the surreal in the cause of love, which the opening of "Split" displays:

What can I do  
With this love of mine  
With this hairy knob  
With this poison wine  
  
Who shall I take  
To the edge of despair  
With my knee on her heart  
And my lips in her hair

His answer is simple. Split his love in two so that "there's one part for me / and there's one part for you."

Numerous self-portraits populate the collection, creating a mirror text offering visual glimpses of Cohen in states of confusion and clarity, some images displaying both. "A private gaze" shows a stocky, well-built Cohen who criticizes his stocky, well-built image. But another, entitled "We will all be airbrushed," and dated 25 January 2003, shows the poet disconsolate and frail. *Book of Longing* is a book of portraits capturing Cohen looking through his dreams to discover what has happened and where he has been with a whimsical sense of uncertainty expressed in the caption

“one of those days when the hat doesn’t help.”

Poetically, the prose-like poems reverberate with a personal voice that never quite settles. And while the language has ripened, Cohen’s experiences have not. They are always new as he transforms himself into “a tourist of beauty / in full disappointment / ready to fall in love / with a ghost.” But this is recognition, not regret.

*Book of Longing* is a self-reflective, confessional work, an omnibus collection with certain contributions reaching as far back as 1973. The drawings complement the text, heightening Cohen’s presence and reaffirming his characteristic pose as the energetic lover of longing:

The old are kind  
The young are hot,  
Love may be blind.  
Desire is not.

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## Donner à voir

**Francis Catalano**

*Panoptikon*. Tryptique 17,00 \$

**Herménégilde Chiasson**

*L’oiseau tatoué*. La courte échelle 9,95 \$

**Antonio D’Alfonso**

*Un homme de trop*. Noroît 18,95 \$

**Fulvio Caccia**

*La chasse spirituelle*. Noroît 15,95 \$

Compte rendu par Noële Racine

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Dans *Panoptikon*—du terme « “panoptique” signifi[ant] “qui voit tout” »—Francis Catalano propose une poésie passablement dissemblable de celle de ses premiers recueils. Celle-là « permet[trait, selon l’auteur,] de voir sans être vu » (quatrième de couverture) le véritable visage du monde actuel et de le montrer comme tel, c’est-à-dire ridé par les désastres naturels, les guerres, le terrorisme et l’appât du gain que nourrissent, si l’on en croit le poète, les « conseillers financiers fins renards requins ». Aux côtés de ces textes

qui renouvellent la thématique de l’engagement, se trouvent des poèmes ludiques mais non superficiels. La force du recueil réside sans conteste dans la forme et la typographie, ingénieuses et étonnantes, que n’auraient sans doute pas désavouées les poètes formalistes ou encore l’auteur de *Calligrammes*. En outre, ces vers convoquent également l’ouïe, puisque, par moments, ils coïncident avec une sonorité pure qui n’atteint toutefois pas la virtuosité de l’exploré de Claude Gauvreau ou des glossolalies d’Antonin Artaud. Malgré tout, *Panoptikon* se révèle un recueil astucieux devant lequel il convient d’être tout yeux, tout oreilles.

*L’oiseau tatoué*, recueil de poésie d’Herménégilde Chiasson, attire aussi le regard du lecteur. Les textes sont effectivement accompagnés par des eaux-fortes (de David Lafrance) qui suggèrent une atmosphère de détresse et d’enfermement. Elles illustrent ainsi la solitude et l’étouffement caractérisant l’univers du « je » énonciateur des poèmes. Ce dernier, déserté par l’être qu’il aime, déambule, depuis la nuit jusqu’au matin, dans une ville froide et pluvieuse. De ses égarements, naît un chant en quête de « musiques à naître » qui se transmue en un soliloque continu et dénué de tout artifice. Dans cette optique, le recueil peut être lu comme un seul et long poème ou, plutôt, comme un récit en vers libres et non ponctué. Le « je » y relate le parcours de sa déroute et les personnes qu’il rencontre lors de son errance, dont une « caissière » portant un tatouage. Simple mais authentique, cette œuvre destinée à un public adolescent ne ferme pas les yeux sur « [l]es doutes sans réponses » qui surgissent de tout bouleversement. Partant, le courage dont elle est tissée lui donne une humanité et une beauté qui se voient à l’œil nu.

Ce qui saute aux yeux, dans *Un homme de trop* d’Antonio D’Alfonso, c’est la composition du recueil (quelque peu similaire à celle de *L’apostrophe qui me scinde*) qui réunit des textes de facture et de contenu fort

disparates. Les poèmes mettent parfois en scène un « je » qui, supplicié par ses angoisses, recherche une libération dans la volupté charnelle et le « vortex d[u] désir ». Ici, ils décrivent la nature, prennent des accents de mystique païenne, puis racontent des échecs relationnels. Là, ils parlent de « [t]axidermie », de diverses villes (Hull, Ottawa, Montréal, etc.) et de maints artistes (Fellini, Aristophane, Coleridge, Modigliani, Bogart, etc.), quand ils ne peignent pas des comportements d'animaux. Si l'absence d'uniformité de ton du recueil aurait pu être estompée par un classement plus efficace des poèmes, certaines images poétiques, sans être fulgurantes, parviennent cependant à interpeller le lecteur. Ainsi, de beaux passages —comme « La chanson du shaman à Sedna » et ces vers splendides : « Passer par le feu remédie tout refus de soi »—compensent pour les extraits plus faibles, dont le poème clausulaire « Où on fête ce soir? ». Voilà donc un recueil perfectible qui vaut tout de même un coup d'œil.

Pour sa part, le recueil de Fulvio Caccia pose un regard sur *La chasse spirituelle* (titre qui fait allusion à un manuscrit perdu de Rimbaud) que mènent les membres d'un « tandem improbable, [d'un] duo incertain » afin de se rejoindre et de former la dyade « Je tu ». Dans ces lignes, l'auteur reprend un vocabulaire et des images (comme celle, obsessionnelle, de la « morsure ») qui lui sont chers, en plus de recréer la structure rythmée des écrits composant *Aknos*. La poésie de cet ouvrage, gâtée par plusieurs coquilles, et qui n'a malheureusement pas le souffle captivant des textes de *Scirocco*, demeure fragile en plus de manquer quelquefois de subtilité. Elle offre néanmoins un ensemble cohérent de poèmes qui peuvent être perçus comme un dialogue dramatique au sens littéral du terme. Ils forment, en effet, un « théâtre de l'incarnation » d'avantage qu'une « monodie », parce qu'ils comportent un « prologue » et trois « [a]cte[s] », sans compter que le « je » énonciateur des

textes donne, par le biais du discours rapporté, une voix tangible au « tu », auquel il adresse souvent des questions. En somme, il s'agit de l'histoire d'une passion aveugle montrée en vue rapprochée, puis d'un recueil qui, comme *Panoptikon*, *L'oiseau tatoué* et *Un homme de trop*, donnent à voir, dans l'œil même du poème, une poésie du regard.

## Une enfance mémorable

**Françoise Clément-Bowden**

*Trois fois passera.* Prise de parole 18,00 \$

Compte rendu par Paul Genuit

Françoise Clément-Bowden est une femme sentimentale; elle a conservé trois objets offerts en cadeaux par chacun de ses trois grands-pères qui ont marqué de souvenirs indélébiles son enfance : un *Petit Larousse illustré*, un coffret de bois et une petite aquarelle représentant les collines de la Gatineau un jour d'automne ensoleillé. Ces objets ont fait partie de sa vie quotidienne et ont gardé présent à son esprit ceux qui les lui ont donnés.

Comme il arrive souvent en évoquant l'enfance, à moins que celle-ci n'ait vraiment été profondément malheureuse, on se rappelle surtout en prenant de l'âge les moments les plus agréables. Dans ce récit romancé, l'auteure réussit à recréer avec charme et vivacité les années vécues auprès de ces trois êtres qui ont accompagné son enfance et son adolescence.

La mère d'Ariane était décédée de la grippe espagnole; le père a été atteint lui aussi, mais il s'en remettra. Ce sont les grands-parents maternels qui ont recueilli la quasi petite orpheline pratiquement dès sa naissance. La grand-mère Philomène représente « la voix de la raison, du bon sens, de la prudence et de l'ordre en toutes choses ». Le grand-père William est à l'opposé de ce personnage austère; bon vivant, spontané, généreux, il initie la très jeune enfant aux contes de Perrault, aux histoires de bûcherons,



de voyageurs, de géants et de sorcières qui lui donnent le frisson et développent son imagination. Elle écoute sur disque la voix de Caruso, d'autres artistes du temps, et la musique de Chopin et de Saint-Saëns.

William fait venir de France *La Jeunesse illustrée* pour sa petite-fille qui devient une « liseuse acharnée ». Elle se cultive ainsi, et reçoit un autre très beau don de ce grand-père, celui d'apprendre à goûter et à aimer la nature. Le grand-père paternel s'appelle Henri. Originaire de Marseille, il a épousé une jeune orpheline émigrée d'Irlande, farouchement catholique. L'enfant habite là deux mois par an. Elle découvre les bonnes odeurs des fruits mûrs du verger qui pénètrent partout dans la maison, jusqu'aux draps du lit moelleux qui sentent « les pommes fraîches ». Henri sait travailler le bois avec patience, avec amour, et Ariane apprend le travail bien fait. Chez lui, elle voit de temps en temps son père qui s'est remarié, a deux enfants et s'occupe plus de sa nouvelle famille que de sa première fille.

Au contact de ces personnes d'un certain âge, la personnalité de l'enfant se forme : « À quatre ans j'étais déjà habituée aux plaisirs tranquilles des grandes personnes. Au besoin, j'inventais mes passe-temps, car j'appréciais – comme aujourd'hui, d'ailleurs – ce précieux quant-à-soi, cette solitude qui n'en est pas une qui permet de passer de la rêverie à l'activité au gré de sa fantaisie et qui se passe facilement de la présence bruyante des autres. » Puis, elle est mise au courant de la culture ancestrale de ses grands-parents : la Provence d'Henri, l'Irlande de sa femme, Nana Kit, qui lui conte les légendes celtes, le *banshee*, par exemple, cet être « qui annonce la mort imminente d'un membre de la famille », les *leprechauns* qui « sont la personnification fantaisiste de l'espoir humain ».

Quand, au début de l'adolescence, William décède et que Philomène ne reçoit plus rien de la pension de son mari, Ariane ne se désespère pas. Elle appelle « période grise »

cette époque où elle doit céder sa chambre à des pensionnaires et coucher sur un lit pliant dans un minuscule réduit. Puis, avec Philomène, elle déménage dans la grande maison d'une tante, et c'est là qu'elle rencontre celui qu'elle appelle son troisième grand-père, Grampa Davis. Originaire du pays de Galles, il a mené une vie aventureuse dans l'Ouest canadien avant de devenir maître-jardinier responsable des jardins du Parlement et de ceux du gouverneur général. À sa retraite, il ouvre un atelier de dessin et de peinture. Il a une grande influence sur Ariane qui suit ses cours et aspire à devenir artiste. Elle dit adieu à sa période grise et entre dans sa période bleue qui la mènera, jeune fille heureuse et équilibrée, vers l'âge adulte car elle a le don de s'enthousiasmer pour tout ce qu'elle a pu apprendre auprès de ceux qui ont pris soin d'elle.

Françoise Clément-Bowden, dans un style simple et élégant, fait partager au lecteur les découvertes de l'enfant à mesure que s'éveille son esprit au contact des trois grands-pères (et grands-mères) qui ont modelé sa jeunesse.

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## Au pays de l'inexistence

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**Laurent Chabin**

*Écran total.* Triptyque 18,00 \$

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**Yves Boisvert**

*Romans de la poésie.* XYZ 20,00 \$

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Compte-rendu par Laurent Poliquin

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Il y a de ces lectures qui conviennent au hamac, d'autres, d'un esprit fort différent, terroristes dans leur genre, des lectures qui déchirent, lacèrent et dont la circonvolution se replie sur votre chair. Voici deux inclasables qui ne conviennent pas aux lectures du dimanche, commis par des auteurs qui ont pris du galon au fil des œuvres et dont le capital symbolique reluit dans la petite chapelle de la poésie québécoise (Boisvert) et de la littérature jeunesse (Chabin).

Avec *Écran total*, Laurent Chabin nous présente le récit délirant d'un hurluberlu de Calgary, qui perd un peu trop son temps à regarder des âneries télévisuelles, dont ces émissions de mendicité tiers-mondiste, qui usent à bon escient de l'archet du sentimentalisme le plus primal.

D'entrée de jeu, à cette époque de barbarie, où le terrorisme est d'un convenu pour les désabusés de la machine sociétale, cette lecture brutale arrive à point nommé. Catherine Mavrikakis, qui en a écrit la postface, voit juste en disant à propos d'*Écran total* :

La lecture de Chabin [...] me permet de concevoir la folie intrinsèque à la perte d'alibi du moderne et de sentir de façon singulière, affolante la démesure démente de notre contemporanéité, la dinguerie d'une mondialisation de l'abominable à laquelle nous assistons en spectateurs béats, repus tous les jours.

La réussite de Chabin n'est pas d'ordre littéraire. Sa plume est alerte, sans être originale; la phrase courte respire Céline ou Sollers, sans plus. Ce sont les procédés du divin Marquis qu'il faut relever ici. L'utilisation d'une voix narrative qui, sans être personnelle—bien que le personnage soit de Calgary, tout comme son auteur—se fait complice vulgaire et insensible à la fantasmagorie du réel. L'abject se marie au quotidien pour forcer l'odieux à davantage de lucidité.

Le modernisme de Yves Boisvert dans *Romans de la poésie* est d'un ton et d'un goût fort différent. À plat sur ma table de travail, il faut d'abord mentionner la laideur concommée de la couverture de ce livre « inclassable » au dire de l'éditeur. Le lecteur a droit à une économie de graphisme pour attirer son regard sur ce qui semble être, à première vue, un ramassis de manuscrits tirés d'un tiroir, le temps d'une publication. Quoi dire d'un livre dont le projet semble si flou, qu'il me faudra le lire pour en tirer quelque chose de bien. Soyons sérieux. En fait, *Romans de la poésie* présente un court-

circuit de plusieurs genres littéraires, permettant ainsi à l'auteur de jouer sur les différents paliers d'un discours sur l'écriture. Une stratégie qui semble vieillir, souhaitons-le, et dont certains auteurs (je pense à J.R. Léveillé) se sont amusés (et s'amusent encore!) pendant quelques décennies, notamment à vouloir pontifier sur le signifié et le signifiant. Heureusement, *Romans de la poésie* crée un décalage discursif qui se démarque d'un ouvrage de bon ton sur la poétique actuelle. Toutefois, l'ensemble est lourd; l'humour à sens unique n'égayerait que les plus vintistes de l'auteur. Même en partageant les vives politiques de ce drôle de livre, il en faut davantage pour apprécier à sa juste valeur une œuvre absconse qui a le mérite de contenir quelques jolis poèmes. Souhaitons d'autres rendez-vous dans l'écriture poétique de l'auteur de *Mélanie Saint-Laurent*.

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## Surface Dwellers

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**Douglas Coupland**

*JPod*. Random House \$34.95

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Reviewed by Brett Josef Grubisic

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For better and for worse, *JPod* confounds. Its form and content spawn such monster questions as, "What should a twenty-first century novel be?" and "What criteria for evaluation are valid for self-consciously new fiction?" The promise of this stimulation, however, is undermined by another response *JPod* incites: "Why am I not fully enjoying this novel?" And it's this third question that shouts loudest for attention. The answer to it is relatively simple: because—and in contrast to contemporary realist fiction (such as, for example, Camilla Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly* or Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk*, in which the mimetic storytelling and characterization effectively draw readers into fictional worlds both probable and psychologically resonant)—*JPod* is steadfast in its refusal of earnest or in-depth examination of social conditions or evolution of character

consciousness. It commits instead to frantic playfulness even as it touches over and over again on sombre themes with global implications. Adroit and inventive enough as farcical comedy, its concomitant effort to be an incisive investigation of “the age of Google” produces minimal results.

An initial five-second perusal of *JPod*’s contents reveals Coupland’s formally conspicuous but peculiarly unimpressive mode of play. Of the novel’s 516 pages, a novella’s worth of them pose as genre-transgressing and arty, dedicated to capturing an apparently random assortment of textual flotsam and jetsam (*mots trouvés* so to speak), matter that’s visible on any day to anyone who uses email, notices magazine ads, or opens their eyes: a hoax letter from the Nigerian Department of Petroleum Resources, “Closed course Professional driver,” “Bankers Box® Econo/Stor® 789,” and “Nicole-Kidman.net: Your #1 Resource for ALL THINGS Nicole Kidman...”

Arguably, these pages are designed to give readers pause, to prompt them to ponder the significance of our hourly exposure to such a deluge of low-grade information. Repeatedly transposing the material from “life” to novel and isolating it on a blank page, though, does not make it especially interesting or provocative, just as hanging it within a frame on a white gallery wall would not alchemically transform it into profound vanguard art.

Yet elsewhere, Coupland has set aside additional pages—depicting *pi*’s first one hundred thousand numbers (pages 383–430), the 8,363 prime numbers between 10,000 and 100,000 (pages 246–263), and the 972 three-letter words allowable in Scrabble (pages 275–279). This trivia has a different tenor insofar as it originates with a pivotal pod of characters, whose uninspired work projects (rendering textures for video game environments) lead their fidgety, bored, and undirected intelligences toward anxious jokiness and games. Still, considering that

when a character does say, “I’ve just emailed all of you the first hundred thousand digits of *pi* [with one incorrect digit thrown in],” the statement indicates action and hints at psychological motivation; actually including 47 pages of numbers illustrates nothing further.

While the novel’s remaining 360 pages incorporate letters, interviews, “cartoon” colleague profiles, and one character’s autobiographical sketch, they are also narrated conventionally, capturing over three parts about six months of the antic misadventures of Ethan Jarlewski (along with those of his family and colleagues), circa now.

Ethan and his fellow characters are, naturally, wisecracking, compulsive, restive, pop-culture quoting, and strangely uninvolved (alienated and/or narcissistic: it’s difficult to determine) Coupland Characters™, and so simultaneously flat and interchangeable, despite the effort the author makes to distinguish them from one another. Like their sitcom analogues, they are amusing types swept up in crazy plots; as such, a reader will pay attention to their one-liners and the “What next!?” aspects of their circumstances, but does not come to care about (or really remember) them or their plights whatsoever.

Even so, the frantic comic element of the story is winningly exuberant, as though a sketch for a mordant comedy series Coupland might pitch for HBO. There’s a mom (who runs a successful grow-op in a well-heeled Vancouver neighbourhood and blithely kills a dealer who steals from her), a dad (whose second adolescence is consumed with dreams of made-in-Vancouver movie stardom), and a brother (involved with shady real estate schemes, Asian gangs, and human trafficking). The whole ensemble cast—including a ballroom dancer/gangster and a lesbian-feminist living in a commune—is zany, and Coupland’s puppet-master management of their strings is clearly inspired.

Ethan Jarlewski, the glue binding them all, is Coupland’s standard issue protagonist;

in fact, his vocabulary, clever observations, and self-absorption are reminiscent of pool-side *Generation X* characters circa 1991. This thirtysomething code-writing cog divides his time between being a good son for his parents and their absurd needs and demands, and cracking jokes and passing time at Jpod, his six-member (Jarlewski, Jackson, Joyce, Jespersen, Jyang, and John Doe) section of colourless cubicle space within the offices of a video game producer. He's also the vehicle through which Coupland strives to examine symptoms of contemporary culture critically. These aspects of *JPod*—which include Coupland himself as a jaded character given to cynical commentary and Ethan's journey through an industrial factory wasteland in a Chinese province—seem glib or else half-baked, as though the author's ambition to explain "the now" outweighs his ability to render it sensible.

Read for its comedy, *JPod* does not disappoint. It's as a novel promising to throw a "sharp, pointed lawn dart into the heart of contemporary life" that *JPod* veers off target. Coupland's big novel is stuffed with amusing lines and zany scenes, but cannot hold attention as well when it grows serious, aiming to become an anatomy of "contemporary life."

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## Sacred Pains

**Nancy Holmes**

*Mandorla*. Ronsdale \$15.95

**Lazar Sarna**

*He Claims He Is The Direct Heir*. Porcupine's Quill \$14.95

**Andrew Steinmetz**

*Hurt Thyself*. McGill-Queen's UP \$16.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

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Poetry as sacrament makes about as much sense as poetry as profanation, and they are probably the same thing. This in itself is not terribly interesting. What is interesting is that there are so many ways to make sacred and to profane.

Nancy Holmes' fourth book of poetry, *Mandorla*, is a meditation on religious iconography, disability, and, especially, motherhood. Sometimes the mother is saintly, sometimes the child is blessed, and often both in poems that pose as recognitions, if not themselves sanctifications, of what the prosaic world does not seem to notice. These tendencies are alternately attractive and irritating, the way a self-confessed discoverer of some sacred mystery can offer enlightenment but also may smugly withdraw and stick to archly observed acts of private veneration. So, to cite an instance of the former outcome, "Platytera" (from "Iconography," the best section of the book) studies incarnation, specifically the inconveniences of so-called immaculate conception:

her body is a dream home  
God won at the fair.  
Her own fingers would have sold  
Him the lucky ticket.

She wants to buy it back  
but God loves the floor plan.  
He can hardly wait  
to move in.

The poem ends with one grim guarantee of interior design plans: "a butcher block / for sure."

Only some of this book's poems share such insight, humour, and genuine tension. By contrast, for example, "The Children Forget My Fortieth Birthday" is the narrator's self-consolation, a "be thankful for what you have" ditty. Although her children may be inconsiderate gits, she should "treat each day / like a birthday // when I am given mysterious presents / I can't seem to open." The use of "seem" in that last line is especially cloying—either you can open a present or you can't—in this pious (and piously corny) poem. For Holmes, children are made to be forgiven. If God is a pushy, abstracted patriarch in *Mandorla*, the son is "Special Needs Jesus," whose measure is wrongly taken by standardized tests from schools and by Pontius Pilate.

The wryness of Lazar Sarna's *He Claims He is The Direct Heir* is hard not to like, though it can be slippery. If Jackie Mason had become a rabbi, he might have wise-cracked a line like "You wouldn't like the beans they serve here. / I counted them for you" (from "I Waited For You"), and a more embittered Wallace Stevens might have announced "No one is actually on the shore / to greet sea-crashed men, / except the shore." Perhaps, then, the book's title is a hint that this is something of a ventriloquist act: these poems, which occasionally adopt instructive and even prophetic overtones, are words thrown from an unknown distance by unknown parties. Wit comes in small, neat parcels ("Depending on where you stand / the firing squad is a team effort, / fresh air, rah-rah") that will probably be too small and neat for some, but this is a book better dipped into than read straight through. It is definitely a gathering of occasional pieces, with the unevenness such a gathering almost invariably entails but conveying, too, a good deal of rough-edged poignancy.

History, usually Jewish history, is a common theme, though Sarna might be said to play it a little too safe with some of his glibness, skimming along the surface of facts and names. Theodor Herzl is remembered in "Herzl's Beard":

he could have been transparent  
like a Mahler converting for a job  
like a Freud thinking through his thighs  
like a Dreyfus accusing himself  
of not being a better Frenchman or  
like any nervous Jew  
checking Messiah's watch.

The oscillation between identifying Herzl as someone with an individual identity and classifying him as "like" others, "like any nervous Jew," might reflect an uncertainty about Zionism or a collective "Jewishness," but it seems less a pointed expression of ambivalence than a lack of commitment to the subject. Such fuzziness troubles a number

of poems in the collection, where a light dose of surrealism passes for seasoning, but readers will find something fresh to bite into here.

Andrew Steinmetz's *Hurt Thyself* is a book of bathroom and bedroom mirrors. Each poem is a reflection, an extension (and sometimes a perverse sanctification) of the narrating persona. At times this tendency is unabashed, particularly when it comes to erotic moments which, when not simply possessive, threaten to become hopelessly onanistic:

I like dressing you. I like that  
I am the one, the only one  
you trust with these final attentions,  
these flourishes and formal touches,  
the one who arranges  
the bouquet on the dresser,  
the man who decants your image  
into the mirror.

The repetition of the mirror ("mirror, mirror, who is more pretty / than them all? More like: what does she see / in me, and vice versa") is perhaps meant to signify a sameness between a man and wife, the theme of the first third of the book, but the gratification expressed is sometimes hard to stomach (remember, "I am the one, the only one").

Consider "Describe Your Pain," in which the narrator shows no little pleasure at having caused his lover pain during the previous night's sex. He hopes that her doctor knows how "wonderful // it had been, until much / later when you woke up crying." He implores her, at the end of the poem, having recalled the "holding" and "rocking" of their bodies: "Before // it leaves / you, describe your pain." Her pain attests to the force and size of his penis ("In the taxi, you whispered / that I'd 'busted an ovary'"). Or note how the remembrances of the way the narrator's family shared a bathroom, "waist deep in the mirror image," suggest that the poem "Upper Body" is misleadingly titled: "Do you hold 'it' when you go? / Little pricks, they never showed me right." *Hurt Thyself* isn't really

about *thee* at all, except insofar as *thou* and *thy* hurt gratifyingly reflect and measure the big prick.

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## That Tyrant, I

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**Mitchell Parry**

*Tacoma Narrows*. Goose Lane \$17.95

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**David Zieroth**

*The Village of Sliding Time*. Harbour \$16.95

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**Iain Higgins**

*Then Again: Something of a Life*. Oolichan \$17.95

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Reviewed by Rick Gooding

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Early in the autobiographical *Tacoma Narrows*, Mitchell Parry proclaims his distrust of autobiography: “First remove that tyrant, I. / No plucking, no coddling—no time / for gentleness. Knock it out, / chip free the stubborn tooth.” The moment, like the later claim, “I’m still learning to let lost things stay lost,” is partly disingenuous. Parry’s debut collection excels in retrieving lost moments—if not lost things—and uses autobiography to surprisingly expansive effect. Candidly but without bitterness, Parry chronicles loss, recounting the failure of a marriage and the death of a father. Yet there are also very funny moments, notably in “Drunk, with Axe,” and times when Parry all but disappears as he contemplates the losses of others.

Much of *Tacoma Narrows* has appeared in *Pottersfield Press*, *Malahat Review*, and *Antigonish Review*, but the collection feels remarkably coherent. In “On Sparrow Song,” lines on a Nick Drake recording enrich a reference to the songwriter in “St. Pat’s,” and a description of verglas establishes the private background and central metaphor of the mournful “Sang d’encre.” But while the collection’s title piece acquires much of its force from earlier poems, the close connections between and among poems are not invariably successful. More than half of the collection deals with birds—some 20 different species—and the references eventually become tiresome. Moreover, the intercon-

nectedness of the poems virtually insists that we follow the autobiographical thread running through the book, but that thread is not always clear, and I often found myself checking the acknowledgments to fill in details.

Many of Parry’s best poems are meditations on visual arts—a painting of a goldfinch by Dutch master Carel Fabritius, a photo by Vancouver artist Jin-me Yoon. Parry deftly teases out the implications of images, most movingly in “Burn Unit,” a touching meditation on a photo by photojournalist Raphael Gaillarde which explores the complex trust between a burn victim and the three men who carry her down a hospital corridor:

In the end, it’s the body  
we come back to—rags, bones,  
flesh. Picture her rising from the tub,

held up, supported by water’s  
buoyancy. When they lift her  
she sinks

back into herself. She knows  
this is a kind of love, these hands that  
wrap her with a tenderness difficult  
to bear.

Parry’s approach to lineation and stanza form is less confident than his visual sense. There are experiments with set forms—the sonnet, the ghazal, the rhymed stanza—but Parry displays a preference for unrhymed couplets and tercets that are so heavily enjambed that the forms remain purely visual. The lack of a clear poetic idiom seems the one clear indication that *Tacoma Narrows* is a first collection.

David Zieroth’s first poems appeared more than 30 years ago, and his work has been widely anthologized. *The Village of Sliding Time*, Zieroth’s tenth book, reveals its strengths more slowly than *Tacoma Narrows*, but his handling of lineation and metre is sure-footed, and patient readers will be rewarded. The long title poem, an exploration of Zieroth’s childhood in Neepawa, is

bracketed by “How I Came To Be,” which traces the circumstances of the poet’s conception, and “Had I Stayed on the Farm,” both a poignant evocation of a life not lived and a deftly understated affirmation of the actual course of events.

In the title poem, the poet answers a knock at his apartment door to find “a younger / teenaged boy / come to take me back // and guide me through / what I thought had gone.” The poet and his younger self return to the Manitoba of Zieroth’s youth, before negotiating their way through contemporary North Vancouver, this time with the mature poet guiding the youth through “towers / even his spacey dreams / could not foresee.” At times Zieroth silently interrogates his younger self, wondering “what skills of his / I’ve lost,” but the emphasis rests firmly on the landscape and community of Zieroth’s childhood—his family, the immigrant farmers, Métis trappers, townsfolk, the men and women who sought to leave, and the ones who were destroyed by staying. What emerges is not so much how Neepawa made the poet who he is, but the circumstances that created a longing to leave.

Precise and minimalist, emotionally restrained, and alliterative, *The Village of Sliding Time* depends for effect on sound and connotation rather than conspicuous figures of speech. Zieroth’s preference for long vowels and short lines in which lineation does the work of punctuation imposes a slow, deliberate reading which reflects the sometimes hesitating exposition of the poet’s memories. The death of Delbert is fairly representative: the lineation, the tendency of alliteration to span line breaks, and the two-to-four beat lines culminating in the series of heavy stresses that close the episode:

later word came back  
he broke the bank somewhere  
his luck manic till the end  
the manager sure he was cheating  
at cards  
and later his body returned

down from that coolness  
into the corner of a quarter section  
its tidy fence  
against which the summer  
beat until the wood went white

Iain Higgins’ debut collection will likely attract a narrower audience. Consisting of short poems and prose poems followed by the lengthy autobiographical title piece, *Then Again: Something of a Life* is a less rewarding exploration of self and community than Zieroth’s book, while the collection as a whole is less coherent and has fewer memorable moments than Parry’s. The poems abound in allusion, wordplay, and neologisms, and Higgins often plays with clichés—“The new Kingdom Come: virtual smorgasmopolitanism”—but the devices often seem clever for the sake of cleverness. To my mind Higgins’ best poems—for example, “Field Notes for My Sons”—explore fatherhood, and they succeed because the subject matter restrains Higgins’ verbal exuberance. Elsewhere, the language borders on the kind of obscurity I associate with the eighteenth-century poet Christopher Smart: Higgins’ rarefied verse may be intellectually adventurous, a virtuoso performance, but appreciating it depends on a specialized background that perhaps only Higgins possesses.

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## Incisive Mnemography

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**Linda Spalding**

*Who Named the Knife: A Book of Murder and Memory.* McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

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Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

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Nancy Miller, a noted critic of autobiography, experiments with interweaving memoir and scholarship in the books *Bequest and Betrayal* and *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People’s Lives*. In so doing, she comes to regard the genre of the memoir as “not about terminal ‘moi-ism,’ as it’s been called, but rather a rendez-vous, as it were, with the other.” So although writing a memoir is

supposed to be a fairly self-involved undertaking, the genre paradoxically urges practitioners to encounter the other people who have shared their lives, to name the connections to them, and to attempt to understand how those relationships shape lives. That our encounters with others, no matter how fleeting or how serendipitous, can have long lasting repercussions is explored in Linda Spalding's biography-cum-memoir, *Who Named the Knife*, where she details the intersections between her own life (plagued by its own failed connections) and that of convicted murderer Maryann Acker. The result is a genre that I would call mnemography, a term used by Richard Smyth to name memory-writing that blurs the boundaries between one's own story and the story of one's culture.

The premise of *Who Named the Knife* is that Spalding, now an editor at *Brick*, served on the jury of Acker's trial for murder. Acker and her husband were charged with killing two men—one in Arizona and one in Hawaii—and Spalding serves on the Hawaiian jury in 1982. She keeps detailed notes in a yellow journal until one fateful day when she is five minutes late for court, and she is dismissed. The twist of fate haunts her, leaving her to wonder if the verdict would have been different had she remained on the jury. The catalyzing moment of the narrative remembered some 20 years later yokes together the themes of roads-not-taken and the meaning of justice. But violence lies at the heart of this story: the violence of the murders, the violence of being dismissed so abruptly from the jury, the vaguely identified parental and jealous violence that Spalding herself faced, the violence of injustice, and—more obliquely but no less intriguingly—the violence that attends acts of writing and naming. Jonathan Goldberg, in his study of writing materials, remarks that “at a basic level, writing begins with a tool of violence, the knife or razor, and it produces the point of the quill as another cutting edge.”

Spalding's text never strays far from that cutting edge where justice, the pen, and the knife all come together, intersections that are metaphorically embodied by the correspondence itself.

The title of the book (the knife is named Justice, by the way) points not only to the logical difficulties of the court case, but to the violence of naming. Being named by “Justice” shapes Maryann Acker's life, and Spalding's correspondence leads her to ponder the distance between who the law thinks we are and who we might, as humans, actually be. More than this, Spalding raises the impossibility of knowing. Because we cannot know, the memoir/biography veers away from the “merely personal” (as Jane Tompkins might say) to consider social and cultural repercussions of being named in various discourses (law, gender systems), thereby lifting the narrative firmly into the realm of mnemography. Spalding seems to suggest that her life could easily have followed the same path as Acker's. By the time Spalding half-flippantly writes “everyone should have a prisoner,” it is pretty clear that everyone does, and that we are thwarted in our attempts to get to know her whether she exists in or out of our own heads. There is no clear-cut acquittal for the prisoner at the end of this memoir, but it works as an ending because there is no acquittal for any of us either. The epigraph for the book from Peter Handke, “Justice had been done, and I belonged to the nation of criminals,” is ambivalent, addressing the plight of Linda Spalding or Maryann Acker. It addresses the reader too who becomes implicated, and who in fact eagerly joins, in this metastasizing plot of interconnected lives.

I mention mnemography because generic issues are brought to the fore in this interesting book but not in such a way that they dominate. The book is simply a gripping read, unravelling its connections in a satisfying way while simultaneously showing how biographical acts can seep like damp



rot across a prison wall until they stain the broken pieces of a memoirist's life. This mnemography explores the fragility of memory (as Spalding tests it against court transcripts or the contents of recovered manila envelopes) and the persistence of regret: that she was late for court, that Acker did not understand court proceedings well enough, that they both tried too hard to please men, that connections they should have solidified could not be. Regret is the stick that goads the two women back to their past and sends Spalding down the murky pathways of mnemography. The declensions of regret and violence are accessible and recognizable to readers even as they provoke us toward imagining creative or critical practices that are performative, incomplete, and tentative, catalysing investigations of our tangled connections with the "other."

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## Conflicts in History

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**Tim Cook**

*Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars.* UBC Press \$29.95

Reviewed by Marlene Briggs

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Tim Cook narrates the untold stories that shape official histories, a genre typically more maligned than celebrated. His ambitious and informative survey also reviews academic, popular, and semi-official publications on the World Wars. *Clio's Warriors* explores the consolidation of defence archives as well as the production of relevant research on air, ground, and naval forces from 1914-2000. Despite important methodological limitations, breadth and flair characterize this work of intellectual military history. Cook succeeds in dislodging monolithic conceptions of official history even if he does not provide a self-reflexive overview of the field. In the process, however, he invites military historians and others to reflect on the shifting reception of watershed events in the twentieth century. This overdue investigation is

vital for scholars of war and conflict in Canada.

Three individuals, namely Sir Maxwell Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), A.F. Duguid, and C.P. Stacey, exerted enormous influence in military history before 1960. Cook, a sympathetic biographer, situates each man in his institutional milieu. Stacey receives the most extended treatment; Duguid, however, is a fascinating subject. The latter, a decorated veteran, never produced an official history series despite assiduous immersion in the Great War records. Duguid's striking portrait is one among many photographs featured in the book. His caution and reticence contrast with Aitken's hyperbole and Stacey's industry. Aitken rather than Duguid bolstered national autonomy through heroic myths of Canadian martial prowess; G.W.L. Nicholson eventually completed *Canadian Expeditionary Force* (1962), but Duguid's lost opportunity expedited Stacey's authorized publication program after 1945.

Cook reconstructs the myriad contingencies and constituents animating archival institutions and their officers. In this manner, he illuminates "the history behind the history." Competing conceptions of war writing among amateurs and professionals, and among academic and commissioned practitioners, complicated official historiography. Furthermore, generals seldom published campaign retrospectives, opting instead to exercise power behind the scenes; battles at Ypres (1915), Mons (1918), Hong Kong (1941), and Dieppe (1942) fuelled internal controversy. As Cook concedes, vested interests constrained specific state-sponsored histories. More fundamental divisions between civil and military institutions in modern democratic society, however, demand recognition. The author laments the embattled status of his profession in the contemporary academy, for example, without attending to its complex causes.

Cook also scans varieties of academic and popular history. Yet tensions between official

and unofficial perspectives on the World Wars warrant detailed exposition. Narratives at odds with the goals and methods of established research are central rather than incidental to collective memory. Pierre Berton, for example, deserves more substantial coverage. Additionally, public debates prompted by documentaries such as *The Kid Who Couldn't Miss* (1982) and *The Valour and the Horror* (1992) exceed the scope of tactical specialists. The exclusions organizing official records underscore the boundaries of military history; throughout, Cook rightly espouses a critical attitude to documents only to leave the restricted mandate of the defence archives unchallenged. Perhaps unofficial historiography dedicated to civilians, conscripts, minorities, and women merits the systematic (re)appraisal Cook accords to official histories.

The author analyzes selected war memoirs; broader intersections between history and literature transcend the aims of the study. Allusions to renowned writers include Charles G.D. Roberts, Stephen Leacock, Charles Yale Harrison, Farley Mowat, and Timothy Findley. Cook notes the abiding impact of *The Wars* (1977), as well as the film adaptation (1981), on successive generations. In fact, Findley's self-conscious mediation of archival research merits the attention of military historians: "As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you'll never find. This is what you have." As Cook, too, clarifies, disputes and vicissitudes determined the documentary record in the first instance. Precisely because skeptical responses to official history and national myth stimulate imaginative writing on the World Wars in Canada, *Clio's Warriors* may be helpful to literary scholars.

Whither military history? Cook opens a welcome dialogue on its prospective directions. When he invokes the Greek goddess Clio as his muse, however, this historian of conflict simplifies conflict between historians. Cook promotes his specialty at the expense

of sustained engagement with interdisciplinary and theoretical developments. Categories such as experience, memory, and testimony, for example, require rigorous examination; unfortunately, this book dismisses burgeoning research on historical trauma. In short, Cook is ambivalent about the future of his field. He validates innovation while upholding tradition; he readily discerns biases and gaps in his predecessors if not his mentors. Paradoxically, he staunchly defends military history and calls for its transformation. Without question, an operational paradigm cannot encompass research on conflict. Yet the approaches Cook heralds, especially cultural history and gender studies, have already renovated conventional interpretations of war even as they continue to unsettle the standard priorities of military history.

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## Diverse Voices

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**Linda Cullum, Carmelita McGrath, and Marilyn Porter, eds.**

*Weather's Edge: A Compendium of Women in Newfoundland and Labrador.* Killick \$24.95

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Reviewed by Jennifer Delisle

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I tell you there is not enough time  
to understand all I need to know

—Agnes Walsh

These final lines of Agnes Walsh's poem "Oderin," collected in *Weather's Edge: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*, could be the motto of the entire book. The compendium, as the editors admit in their introduction, is both extremely diverse, and necessarily selective, skipping between genres, voices, time periods, and subject matter with almost overwhelming energy. The book includes poetry, short stories, letters and diary entries, memoirs and personal reflections, and oral history, as well as academic articles from history, sociology, social work, women's studies, health care, and education. Many of the contributions are previously unpublished, and as the editors

indicate, one of the goals of the book is “to present as much writing by and about women as possible to the widest audience possible.” This goal has certainly been achieved.

Rather than organize the book into sections by theme, time period, or genre, the editors have structured the book into “sequences or chains of writing,” allowing poems and academic articles to speak to each other in interesting ways. For those who sit down and read the book from start to finish, as I did, this structure is engaging and effective, though it may be frustrating for those who intend to use the book as a reference.

The “creative” pieces are for the most part finely crafted and memorable, with contributions of poetry and stories from some of the province’s finest writers, including Lisa Moore, Mary Dalton, and Michael Crummey. It is an odd choice, however, to finish the book with Crummey’s “Her Mark.” While this is a lovely poem, with a tone of reflection and finality appropriate to the end, in this book about women, written almost entirely by women (there is only one other male author), giving a man the last word takes away from both the poem itself and the book’s ending.

Several pieces fall under the “Letters and Diaries” category, and include archival documents written by women from a variety of class backgrounds. A few of these pieces form interesting glimpses of Newfoundland and Labrador’s past, such as artist Rhoda Dawson’s letter, illustrated with small sketches, from her winter with a family in Labrador in 1932, and Frances Cluett’s 1918 letter to her mother describing the horrors she has witnessed as a nurse in France. Other contributions, however, suffer from a lack of context; Frances Pye’s diary entries form a well-written account of her arrival in Labrador in 1926 as a replacement teacher for a boarding school, but at less than three pages we are just getting into her story when the section ends, and we end up knowing very little about her or her experience.

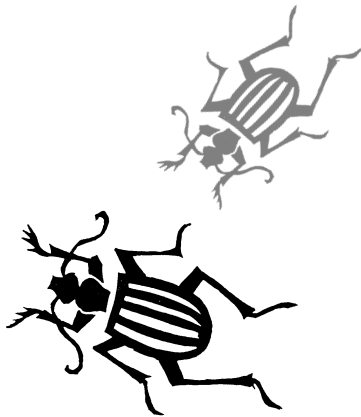
Similarly, Moira Bowring’s 1950 letter to her mother-in-law, outlining her need for a servant, is probably part of an interesting archive revealing the concerns of this prominent merchant family. But this one letter by itself is perhaps an unfair fragment of her life and voice, and the chatty, personal note is oddly juxtaposed against, and threatens to diminish, the polished creative work of Bernice Morgan and Robin McGrath.

The strength of the book is in its scholarly articles and reports. These are pieces that the average reader will not normally come across. They are, however, written accessibly, ranging over topics as diverse as nineteenth-century nursing in St. John’s, to twenty-first century sexual violence in St. John’s bars. The articles on historical topics are fascinating; Willeen Keough’s essay on Irish women and the intersection of Catholicism and pagan superstition in the nineteenth century reveals the powerful roles that women often played in communities on the Avalon Peninsula. A number of articles concentrate on the impact of the cod moratorium and subsequent government retraining programs. Brenda Grzetic’s article examines the circumstances that led many women to join their husbands in the boats over the last few decades, and the inequity of EI policies that credit women’s fishery-related work to their husbands. Articles like Grzetic’s point to aspects of the fishery collapse that are often invisible in the mainstream media. Many other current economic and social issues are also covered, in pieces such as Jane Robinson’s examination of women’s housing in the province. As the editors note in the introduction, reports like Robinson’s often have very limited circulation as policy work, but are an important part of “feminist knowledge.” Much of this work is interesting and surprisingly readable, and its inclusion is central to their mandate of bringing a variety of women’s issues to the fore.

The less successful contributions are the articles that discuss women’s issues outside

of a specifically Newfoundland context. Linda Parsons' essay, "Did I 'Choose' to be Marginal? Structural Constraints on Individual Career Choice," for example, is an important discussion of contractual positions in academia, but its scope of reference is Canada at large. There is no specific reference to Newfoundland and Labrador, and it therefore seems out of place in this collection. Also out of place is the penultimate piece, Michelle A. Smith's "Feminism: Our Basis of Unity: Premises, Principles and Practices," which is an excerpt from a book of the same name intended for use as a "mentoring tool" for feminist organizations in the province. While I am sure the chapter is useful in its intended context, the fact that it directly addresses organizations with feminist advice for operations alienates the individual reader, and makes its arguments seem simplistic and irrelevant.

It is difficult to imagine the audience for this book. Those who enjoy Newfoundland literature can find most of the poems and short stories collected elsewhere, and there are no pieces of literary criticism in *Weather's Edge*. A few of the academic topics are obscure and may be of interest to only a very select few. But those who have a general interest in Newfoundland and Labrador history and society will find this an engaging, if eclectic, read.



## Troubling Visions

**Jason Gileno**

*Tattoo Joint*. Guernica \$15.00

**Tomson Highway**

*Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout*. Talonbooks \$15.95

**Alex Poch-Goldin**

*Yahrzeit*. J. Gordon Shillingford \$14.95

Reviewed by Ingrid Mündel

Jason Gileno's *Tattoo Joint* tells the story of Joint, a blind tattoo artist, who, in trying to escape his past has ended up in a small town, a kind of existential no-place where this witty, offbeat, and self-consciously cerebral play unfolds. The play opens with the reclusive Joint receiving a visit from Alexandra, a young woman who tells Joint, "I want you to make me invisible—because I hate the attention that this body attracts." The thematic opposition between visibility and invisibility manifests itself in the unusual relationship between Joint and Alexandra. Joint refuses (or is denied) surface visibility not only through his blindness but also through his "invisible" tattoo parlour—there is no sign, and no one in the town even knows the tattoo place exists. Paradoxically, when he does create tattoos, he resists tattooing clichéd images that he feels only obfuscate rather than reveal beauty; rather, he "tattoo[s] in search of perfect beauty. The ideal." In contrast, Alexandra sees herself as cursed with hypervisibility, a flawless beauty that she hopes Joint will be able to erase.

The play's primary metaphor of visibility also reveals the dangerous edge of idealized gender stereotypes. Alexandra, as the embodiment of "ideal" beauty, is literally hunted by men who see her as a fulfillment of their romantic desires. Whether the play is working more to call into question the very notion of ideals, or to challenge what people will do in the pursuit of an ideal, is unclear. Nevertheless, Gileno's play raises interesting questions about art, embodiment, isolation, and beauty.

Tomson Highway's *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout* also tackles questions of visibility, but in this case Highway's play works to make visible a particular history of cultural genocide in Canada: how the Native peoples of British Columbia lost their lands and their language to white settlers/inlanders without their remote approval or consent. The play unfolds around a historical document, a list of grievances signed by 14 Chiefs of the Thompson River basin, and a historical event, the presentation of this signed deposition to Sir Wilfrid Laurier upon his visit to Kamloops, BC in 1910. While the play addresses 100 years leading up to the occasion of the "Great Big Kahoonah of Canada's" visit, the narrative action takes place over the course of a single day and is told from the varying perspectives of four Shuswap women: Isabel, Delilah Rose, Ernestine, and Annabelle. As the women busily prepare for meeting the Big Kahoonah—baking, sewing, berry picking, hunting—they also engage in debate and dialogue about what has happened to their land and their community.

Highway explains in his introductory notes that the play is written in English, but in the "spirit of Shuswap," (i.e. a language driven by the "Trickster" impulse) making it "hysterical, comic to the point where its 'spill-over' into horrifying tragedy is a thing quite normal." Indeed, the emotionally turbulent pitch of the play is evident in the clever movement from exaggerated and playful banter one minute, to sudden, serious debate the next. What consistently anchors the emotional rise and fall of the play is the recognition that the European settlers'/ invaders' imposed notion of ownership means "they can take anything." In fact, "they" even took the river. The sheer absurdity of "taking a river" is comically highlighted by Isabel, who exclaims, "How in the name of George and the dragon can someone come along, bend over, pick up a river, and carry it off into the distance away over yonder as if it were a sack jam-packed with potatoes?"

By the play's end, a sense of unhinged hysteria dominates, illustrating the deep tragedy, the devastating absurdity, and the irrevocable historical consequences of the gradual loss to the Native Peoples of BC, of not only their hunting, fishing, and grazing rights, but also their land and language. While grounding the play in very specific historical details, Highway nevertheless gives emotional urgency and resonance to a history that is not and should not remain relegated to a forgotten past. He offers a visceral reminder that what happened in 1910 continues to be a lived history of injustice in Canada.

The final play, Alex Poch-Goldin's *Yahrzeit*, uses inter-generational, political, and gendered tensions troubling a Jewish Canadian family to investigate difficult international conflicts in the Middle East and Europe. A stroke has left Meyer Jacobs, the cantankerous patriarch of the family, without the use of his right hand, a reality that fuels his irritable tirades and opinionated takes on everything from proper bath etiquette to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meyer's demanding and comic behaviour both draws in and repels those around him—Mark, his son, who expresses sympathy for the dispossessed Palestinians; Devon, an endlessly curious young African-Canadian neighbour; Jackie, Meyer's world-wise lesbian daughter; and Ruzika, Meyer's no-nonsense Serbian caretaker.

At the end, in an interesting analogy for the disruption of nationalistic ties under globalization, the Jacobs family's sense of togetherness is shaken despite Mark's and Jackie's attempts to rally around their dying father. Mark tells Meyer, "I can't do this anymore. I can't look after you . . . Jackie was right, she couldn't grow here. That's why she left." Yet, the play suggests that the dissolving of the family/nation makes possible new kinds of growth. Like the trees that Meyer continues to buy in Israel in memory of his wife, Meyer "grows" a new family that crosses racial and ethnic boundaries to

include Devon, Ruzika, and Ruzika's sons. *Yahrzeit* ends with Meyer offering a utopian—if somewhat clichéd—vision of peace: “If I plant a tree, one day an Arab and a Jew can sit and share the shade.” However, Meyer’s peaceful vision seems at odds with his inability to resolve present and past conflicts with those closest to him; therefore, Ruzika’s response, “So now you are paying for the future,” can perhaps be read as a double-edged commentary that highlights both what Meyer mortgages (his past and present) and what he gains (a future of possibility) with this utopian vision.

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## An Impossible History

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**Paul Yee**

*Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver.* Douglas & McIntyre \$45.00

Reviewed by Christopher Lee

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The publication of a revised edition of Paul Yee’s *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver* is a welcome event that will be of benefit to anyone interested in Asian Canadian Studies. Yee, whose children’s fiction has received the Governor General’s Literary Award among many other honours, wrote the first edition to accompany an exhibition of the same name held at the Vancouver Chinese Cultural Centre in 1986 (the book was published in 1988). The title, he tells us at the start, comes from the old Chinese nickname for Vancouver.

*Saltwater City* tells the story of an immigrant community that sought to escape upheavals in China only to encounter racism in Canada. Yee shows how racial exclusion functioned not only through the legal regulation of immigration and citizenship, but also through labour practices, economic hierarchies, popular culture, and city planning. The chapters take us through different periods in Chinese Canadian history: from early migrations to the establishment of a Chinatown community; the rise of a second

generation whose military participation during World War II partially paved the way for their enfranchisement; the paranoia of the Cold War era; the liberalizing of immigration policy in 1967; and the diversification of the community as a result of those changes. While this story is not new, few writers possess Yee’s grace and polish. An archivist by training, Yee has used his professional skills to collect an impressive array of photographs, primary sources, and interviews.

*Saltwater City* has been out of print for some time now. The new edition features a redesigned (and improved) layout and includes a new chapter that updates the reader on developments since the book’s original publication. Since the original edition has been extensively reviewed elsewhere, I want to focus the remainder of this review on the last chapter. Yee’s attempt to update his narrative can tell us much about the current state of Chinese Canadian Studies and why a book like *Saltwater City* is increasingly impossible.

The first edition effectively ended its story with the opening of the Chinese Cultural Centre in 1980 and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden in 1986. Both projects, along with the Saltwater City exhibition, symbolized the Chinese community’s coming-of-age. The book’s celebratory tenor is immediately evident in the original preface, which declared, “[early Chinese immigrants] had faith that things would be better for future generations. They have been proven correct.” Armed with this optimism, Yee suggests that Chinese Canadian history is necessary in order to understand “the broader history of Vancouver and Canada itself.”

The preface to the new edition has a noticeably different tone. The early sense of triumph has been replaced with the awareness that much of Chinese Canadian history remains unknown to non-Chinese as well as to many new Chinese immigrants. Moreover, the moment of promise that produced the

first edition seems to have faded with the “resurgence of anti-Chinese feeling” after 1986. In order to explain these newer forms of racism, the last chapter summarizes changes in Canadian immigration policy during the 1990s, which were designed to attract immigrants with skills and capital. The arrival of these newcomers led to various conflicts over property values, house design, public school instruction, cultural integration, and city zoning. New immigrants faced racial hostility in addition to other difficulties in adjusting to their new surroundings. Even though Yee cautiously hopes for an end to anti-Chinese racism and the possibility of successful integration, the new edition concludes with the far more ambiguous observation that the community is changing.

The diversity of the Chinese community today—large-scale immigration from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the People’s Republic of China, Vietnam, and other places—poses additional challenges to writing community history, a problem that is especially noticeable as the final chapter tries to cover much social history while struggling to connect itself to the rest of the book. While the book attempts to locate recent developments within its narrative of community expansion and diversification, it is questionable whether that framework can address the experiences of more recent immigrants. For example, a narrative of Taiwanese immigration (which has actually been occurring since the 1960s) would require a very different story of (Asian) colonialism and migration. While the new edition of *Saltwater City* gestures towards these experiences, it simply cannot adequately represent them within the limited space of the text.

My point is not to fault Yee in any way for writing an incomplete community history. Rather, it may no longer be possible to write a general history of the Chinese in Canada just as it is impossible to speak of a Chinese Canadian community. Yee considers these difficulties, but concludes that the “racial

visibility” of Chinese Canadians links recent immigrants to the early pioneers. He is, I think, correct to underscore the centrality of race over ethnicity, but we should nonetheless ask why Chinese Canadians should be considered independently of other racialized groups, especially other Asian Canadians.

If it is no longer possible to write a history of Chinese Canadians, then now seems to be the right time to encourage the writing of multiple histories (*Saltwater City* already attempts to do this by including diverse voices). To that end, the recently established Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia has made it its mission to encourage grassroots history writing in the hopes of illuminating a wider range of experiences. The Society has recently published *Finding Memories, Tracing Routes: Chinese Canadian Family Stories* (edited by Brandy Lién Worrall, see [www.cchsbc.ca](http://www.cchsbc.ca)), a diverse collection of creative non-fiction. All this activity, though, would not be possible without *Saltwater City* and Paul Yee’s vision and eloquence. For these reasons, we should all be grateful that *Saltwater City* is again available.

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## Speaking, Pausing for Breath, and Gardening

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**Sharon Proulx-Turner**

*what the auntys say*. McGilligan \$16.95

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**Salimah Valiani**

*breathing for breadth*. TSAR \$16.95

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**Olive Senior**

*Gardening in the Tropics*. Insomniac \$11.95

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Reviewed by Erin Wunker

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*what the auntys say* is part creation myth, part oral epic. Sharon Proulx-Turner’s book rests on a firm foundation; divided into four sections, the structure alludes to the four cardinal directions, four elements, and four seasons. This is where traditionalism ends and re-vision, in the sense of looking with new eyes, begins. Proulx-Turner articulates

a woman-centred epic that “weaves these stories into one long birth of one old metisse lady.” *Metisse*, one of the many inventive terms in the text, “means metis woman-girl / two half bloods not half and half like cream.” Guided by the omniscient voices of the auntys, Proulx-Turner weaves “a story of growth and pain and a nation birthing out from an / unfamiliar egg.” The egg motif is maintained throughout the interconnected narratives. In the first section, “a few eggs short of a picnic,” the old woman is birthed from the “backbone of the land” and protects the stories of her people although “they thought she’d died of a heart attack.” This is a text of survival and transformation. The old lady becomes the trickster/storyteller when the traditional trickster, the “young crow or raven nuzzles deep into her spine.” All women are both “that old lady only twelve years old / ashamed of her fear,” and the “women circles keeping time.”

With incisive wit, Proulx-Turner pokes fun at token multiculturalism; one can “plant a moose plant a bear / adopt a salmon or a hare,” but it is of no real value because “crow doesn’t tell bear’s story.” Some jarringly successful enjambments of language alert the reader that much in the world is a matter of changing perception: “words refracted / readjust the text / read just what’s on the page.” Finally, this text takes up the multifaceted feminist poststructural question of language. “How am I going to put the mother back in the language?” Proulx-Turner’s narrator asks, lamenting that there are “all those eggs and just one basket.” The book draws its conclusion from a determination to avoid closing dialogue. In the final poem, there is a call to “change the past so’s we can change the storm / says the old lady to that turtle egg.” Changing the past, in these poems, is about a continuation of dialogue “where words are rare redyellow clay / soft and serious / fast-talking silence stills the pain / to hear the feel / to feel the hear.”

*breathing for breadth* is Salimah Valiani’s first collection of poetry. The volume is

divided into seven sections, each of which attempts to maintain the conceit of its title. Unfortunately, the poems making up the sections appear arbitrary in their relation to the titles. The first section, *Wheezing*, begins with the poem “Grandma.” The poem opens with a loose sort of lyricism; “Bright yellow / dark red / Green chilies turn / my lips / hot red” scans with the same cadence a metro-nome might. The poem continues with incremental repetition of colour. However, instead of long lines broken off to mimic the sound and action of wheezing, the poem’s short lines and heavy rhymes fall flat: “You / lose your mein, / urine splashing free / . . . / Gray / in your dread.” The second poem, “Grandpa,” falls victim to a similar fate. This time, the unrhymed couplets virtually leap off the page in their exuberant cadence: “Eating your fingers / ’cause you think they are food / Calling your father / ’cause you think he’s alive.” There is no laboured breathing here. The remainder of the first section is comprised of a disparate group of poems. From an elegy for the East Hastings section of Vancouver (“smog fused with foam and cushy green moss”), to a foot-noted poem about cooking yogurt curry (“The texture is sumptuous / the rice is good / but the coloring is funny”), to a poem about the music of the body (“Blood-beat beating / but only below / . . . / His belly burst / . . . / bowels and scrotum eased”), it is difficult to determine what holds these poems together under the unifying theme of “wheezing.”

The other sections follow suit. While *Sighing*, *Breathlessness*, *Blowing*, *Gasping*, *Cucumber Breaths*, and *Inhaled Breaths* each have moments of loveliness, on the whole the poems suffer from an overly didactic stylistic. The most poignant lines are the least worked over: in “Sarafa Bazaar, Karachi” the simplistic line breaks direct the reader over a body, “It is a feast for the ears / neck / wrists / fingers / toes.” While it is clear that Valiani has had a wealth of experiences,



many of which have rendered her an activist for change, this rarely come through effectively in her poems.

Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics*, on the other hand, is a polished and thematically cohesive collection. The concrete poem "Gourd" stands alone and opens the collection, setting the stage for the poems to follow: "hollowed dried / calabash humble took-took / how simple you look. But what / lies beneath that crusty exterior? / Such stories." Senior organizes her poems into four sections. *Travellers' Tales* begins with "Meditation on Yellow," a poem about the colonial plundering of Indigenous people's land and culture. The narrator's calm, biting observations are deftly wrought, "But it was gold / on your mind / . . . / Though I couldn't help noticing / . . . / silver was your armour / silver the cross of your Lord." The second section of the poem finds the narrator "At some hotel / overlooking the sea . . . / served by me / skin burnt black as toast / (for which management apologizes)." While this poem is a scathing catalogue of thousands of years of the exploitation of humans by other humans, Senior's voice never becomes sanctimonious. Instead, her consciousness comes through in uncomplicated and searing phrases: "So I serving them / coffee / tea / cock-soup / rum / Red Stripe beer / . . . / But they still want more / . . . / Though I not quarrelsome / I have to say: look / I tired now." Senior's narrator forces the reader to acknowledge her responsibility to and for the human condition.

The following sections sustain this clear, unflinching voice. *Nature Studies* is comprised of shorter poems. These poems, like "Gourd," are filled with stories just beneath their tough exteriors. Through the motif of indigenous plants, Senior interweaves tradition and myth with the lived reality of colonized peoples. Similarly, *Gardening in the Tropics* tells of the disparate things one might find digging in the rich tropical soil. All of the poems in this section begin with the line "Gardening in the Tropics," but what follows is always a

surprise: "you'll find things that don't / belong together often intertwine." The final section of the collection, *Mystery African Gods in the New World*, situates various deities in the new globalized world.

Senior's collection is the best kind: the poems beguile the reader with their inventive style and wit. You cannot leave this volume without feeling the weight of damage that colonialism has produced, but neither can you leave it feeling hopeless. Senior's poems incite action, hope, and the possibility of a better future—but only after a great deal of work has been done.

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## Scar Tissue

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**Rudy Wiebe**

*Of This Earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest.* Knopf Canada \$34.95

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Reviewed by Amy Kroeker

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In *Of This Earth*, Rudy Wiebe traces the enduring marks left on his childhood by life, death, community, faith, and story. Reminiscent of a gathering around a kitchen table, where a family sifts through a box of forgotten mementos, the book is memory layered upon memory, suffused with aching loss and warming familial love.

Wiebe returns to his boyhood home in Speedwell, Saskatchewan, an isolated farming community. Farm life in the 1930s is difficult, and his family sweats to clear and cultivate the stony land to pay off the government debt incurred by their immigration from Communist Russia. Life is a serious, unforgiving thing and suffering is a given in a world where cleansing water scalds, warming fire sparks warnings of the eternal damnation facing those who incur God's "wra-a-a-ath," and the "way of a man with a maid" mysteriously links to the concealed work of the stud horse.

But life in Speedwell is also one of home and hearth, family and community. Drawn together by a shared past of trauma and

torture under Stalin and a subsequent refuge-taking in Canada, Speedwellers share “tweeback” and memories, bread of body and bread of mind and spirit, as well as a deep-rooted faith in God.

Faith is the foundation for Wiebe’s family, a foundation on which his mother rests her never-ceasing prayers for brothers lost in Stalin’s Russia, a daughter whose heart worsens beyond what little medical intervention is available, and a son whose near-fatal encounter with a horse results in a lifetime of motion-induced nausea. This foundation also provides a rumbling bass line to the four-part harmony of the hymns that fill the church and permeate the young Wiebe’s waking hours.

Hymns of joy and longing for home are transcribed first in the Mennonite Low German and then in English and provide a layer of sound in a multivocal text. Low German words and phrases become a counterpoint to the English way of speaking and knowing; always present is the ambiguous yet compelling tension of the “shifty differences” between the language of home and the language of the outside world. Reproductions of his sister’s journal harmonize with the story as remembered by Wiebe, and family photographs become windows to the past as Wiebe explores the story behind each frozen moment.

Helen, Wiebe’s sister who “died too young,” lingers just beneath the surface of the narrative, often breaking through to conscious memory by way of a picture, a transcription of her journal, or a brief pause in one of the many stories that recall something about her before continuing. When Helen’s death comes, it comes mediated through another of Wiebe’s voices. The scene is wrenching, the loss is devastating, and, like Wiebe’s mother, we feel the overwhelming desire to escape because the suffering is too great. The searing loss of his sister marks Wiebe so much so that Helen has a presence in this story almost greater than that of those living as she haunts its edges.

A story of childhood, this is also a story of a writer as he experiences “the gathering power of words.” Whether sliding between High German, Low German, and English in church or hearing his parents reminisce with family friends about life before Canada, the emerging writer absorbs language, and Wiebe reminds us that his generation was “imprinted with story in our mother’s wombs.” This imprinting underlies later experiences with the written word, those books which “always said exactly the same thing,” the stories through which he filters his life in preparation for the later filtering of his life through his own stories.

Always beneath his feet and providing a foundation for his experiences is the land. Land that seems to grow stones in an attempt to thwart the weary farmer. Land that remains barely contained, despite laughable attempts to survey, map, and depict. Land that whispers to him of previous and current occupants, the great chief Big Bear who will become the focus of much of his later life, and the Cree who inhabit the edges of the settled land and prompt in him the child’s question, “why [are] they so poor?”

Wiebe is doubly (sometimes triply) present as he explores the way we shape (and are shaped by) memory; the adult of the present returns to the experiences of the child of the past, often by way of signposts offered by schoolteachers now grown old, by siblings and their spouses now celebrating years of marriage and by journals, photographs, and school records. Present events recall past incidents, and stories beget stories as layer upon layer of memory builds into a beautifully realized story of a boyhood.

Rich, heartbreaking, and stirring, *Of This Earth* captures the experiences of a young boy in moving, vivid language, and Wiebe once again delivers a story “seen, [a story] heard in your head through your eyes, exactly.” He deftly traces the tissue of memory, grown over but always a reminder of the scars that have marked him, and

presents a powerful story of laughter, love, and loss.

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## Blk, Wht, Read All Over

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**Shawna Lemay**

*Blue Feast*. NeWest \$16.95

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**Margaret Christakos**

*Sooner*. Coach House \$16.95

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**Nina Berkhout**

*This Way the Road*. NeWest \$16.95

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Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

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These poetry collections offer palettes in white with startles of colour. Lemay's *Blue Feast* features a rhapsodic poppy, while Christakos' colourful, enigmatic cover image is at her own direction. Berkhout's stark black-and-white cover doesn't reveal the fervour within. The three sensual works invite different demands of the reader, and if the works belie the expectations set up by the covers, each should be read if only for the varied approaches to love and disaster.

*Blue Feast*, Lemay's fourth collection, features an unsettled writer/narrator who wishes to fade into creation: "I would rather in the final draft / leave myself out." In several poems, the bleakness of winter corresponds to writing that does not liberate. Lost in liminality, toward the end of part one ("A Kind of Gray Dream"), the speaker, "learning to love snow," is disturbingly caught: "I want to escape INTO, not from." Some redemption is offered by friendship, in a series of delightful poems, in the book's second section. Though some metaphors, such as "[t]he curdled dream placenta," reach too far, other images of domesticity are successfully invoked, creating a familiar world, the quotidian expressed somewhat elegiacally. Of cut flowers: "right now the blooms don't know / they're dead, amputated, glorious."

Lemay's style is careful, almost too safe, with questions, epistrophe, and balanced structures, the word "balance" often appearing. The last sentence of Lemay's initial note

says, "The reader who wants these poems is the reader who understands the complicated joy that is entwined with sadness." Indeed, in "Alibi," the speaker "believe[s] in nothing so well as contradictions." Beauty, teased from "the dazzling balance / between aloft and alighted," exists in several poems, which, though striking, are occasionally static. A pretty capture arrests and then stops. The initial note, followed unnecessarily by three epigraphs, questions the general reader's ability to enjoy this lyrical book, with images of doors, windows, and puzzlingly, a lion; and themes of friendship, power, and tenderness in familial love.

In "Daring Instruction," the third part, the Gerald Lampert award-winning poet takes off. Its many analogies for a long-term marriage range from the comic (as in retakes on what Tolstoy and Sayers have said), to the domestic (a disagreeable sewing machine, a book with the wrong passages underlined), to the unusual ("Van Gogh's mud-caked boots"), to the profound:

but that's what a marriage does  
throws white pebbles ahead on the path  
and hopes  
the birds don't swallow them for lack  
of bread crumbs.

Christakos' *Sooner*, her sixth poetry collection, is less overt than Lemay's, suggested as early as the epigraph, "And if this is the ending / You know how you got here." Time is fluid: "Sooner is loot for later" and "Time / is on verily cunt." Winner of the ReLit award for poetry and the Bliss Carman Poetry Award, Christakos is inventive.

Threat runs through the first two of the book's seven sections. "Grass" splices storylines through a summer night with the underlying choreography of a Hide-and-Seek game on steroids: "Nobody knew how long / a night was once it started." This disquietude increases in "Lucent," a brilliant, haunting sequence, focusing on a modern-day Prufrock who *does* seek out the faces, who has more

intention. Public vs. private space is explored on many levels as the subject takes a train ride away from his wife and children to his next destination, where "He would instruct his own prudery to take itself / for a walk down the path while he unmasked." "[T]he river unspindled" is one of many shining metaphors. The voyeuristically compelling sequence demands rereading and becomes richer each time.

The collection's third, fourth, and fifth sections focus on language at the expense of semantics, as poems experiment with linguistics, line breaks within words, poetics, and criticism. "Semi-intelligible insignia" of "The Groin Area (Wet Version)" seems an apt descriptor for much of the work; others might find its language play joyous. Unclear references, as in "On Beckett's *Play* Via Minghella (Download)," despite a note on its origin, make for a difficult read, and the repetition, twice, of "feces / Oflove [sic]" does not encourage.

At the same time, the penultimate section, "Retreat Diary," is mordantly funny with its ungendere subject he/she, to which appropriate pairings are applied. It becomes gratifying to anticipate what cleverly disjunctive pairing will next appear. In an apparent effort to be scrupulously fair, each female marker is followed by a male: "his/her bra/jockstrap," "Dyke/fag," "Pavarotti/Mouskouri," "teat/schlong," "hymen/foreskin," "Missy Elliot/Eminem." The long poem is a larkly exploration of sexual and writerly drives, with an interrupting apostrophe ("O, error!") and a discussion of the hole in the lexicon because "slets" is not a recognised word. The teasing sequence ends enigmatically: "Is she or he inside or outside identity when he or she stuffs it in her or him."

Berkhout's *This Way the Road* (her third collection), a long narrative, melds the *Hindenburg* Zeppelin disaster with a modern-day love-story between a museum worker, Helen, writer of text for a museum exhibit of the *Hindenburg*, and a sculptor, Jules, who

works by layering whiteness on objects, even an eyelash of his lover. The slim sequence of poems has the heft of a novel, with clever plots, engaging characters, compelling images, the historical tragedy close to home and audacious through archetype and myth made new. Jules and Helen live near Garbage Kingdom Antiques and an insane asylum, the neighbourhood peopled with a prophetic "Man in White" and "a crone [who] cuts shadows," "our profile . . . a janiform head." The reader learns (with pleasure) about the *Hindenburg* explosion as Helen, arranging the exhibit, does, such as when the curator outlines various crash theories. The poems include his notes, journal entries, several dialogues, lists (such as of provisions for the airship and the completed dishes), an answering machine message, as well as several excerpts from historical documents incorporated seamlessly. Red, with its connotations of violence and passion, colours the blackness, the whiteness. Love and disaster are not temperate.

Titles of the three sections—"Ascension," "Flamebirds," and "Into Thin Air"—are beguiling, as are those of individual poems. The too-elliptical title of the book, explained midway, "(Virgil: this way the road to the stars)," is starker than the titles within, such as "Pulling on my tendons / as if cables of a hot air balloon." Helen primarily narrates Parts One and Three, while the Flamebirds of Part Two offer a complicit voyeurism of those who taunt "we know / what happens to Jules and to Helen." Escaping in the *Hindenburg* airship, the flamebirds and companion readers, as seers, can watch Jules and Helen from a distance. Though we are aware of the outcome—all things must go up in flames—it is intriguing to watch the slow, complementary descents of the airship, of the love affair. Insider status exposes the extraordinary in the ordinary: "eating birds as others / glide past us."

In the last section, Helen continues with a new exhibit, archly called "Mission

Accomplished: two thousand leagues under,” while the previous display “[r]est[s] in pieces.” Berkhout, a nominee for the John Hirsch award for the most promising Manitoba writer, offers a beautiful book that, of the three collections, asks exactly enough of the reader.

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## How Should We Remember?

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**Jocelyn Létourneau; Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott, trans.**

*A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec.* McGill-Queen's UP \$27.95

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Reviewed by Adele Holoch

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In a place where memory is a motto, what role should the past play in shaping the future, and what are the responsibilities and ramifications of remembering? Jocelyn Létourneau's *A History for the Future*, a collection of articles previously published in Canadian, American, and European journals, considers “the challenge of turning [the past] into a narrative that will contribute to building a better society and establishing a legacy that is liberating for the heirs—in this case the Quebecers of tomorrow.” A scholar of twentieth-century Quebec history who holds the Canada Research Chair in the History and Political Economy of Contemporary Quebec at Université Laval, Létourneau won widespread acclaim and Quebec's 2000 *Prix Spirale* for non-fiction for the original French edition of his work, published in 2000 as *Passer à l'avenir: histoire, mémoire, identité dans le Québec d'aujourd'hui*.

In its English edition, translated by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott, Létourneau's work stands as an important contribution to the continuing consideration of Québécois identity. Neither a retelling of Quebec's history nor an attempt to map its future, *A History for the Future* is instead a remarkably nuanced and insightful exploration of

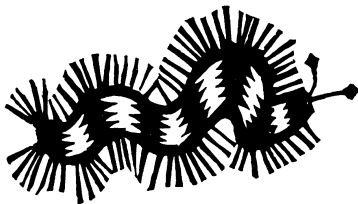
how Quebec's complicated past can be transformed “into a regenerative consciousness through the production of a narrative of recognition, mourning, and hope.”

If Quebec's motto, *je me souviens*, suggests that the process of remembering is a cornerstone in the preservation and ongoing creation of Québécois identity, Létourneau argues that Québécois' collective memory is too firmly rooted in a history defined by obstacles and losses, and their hopes for the future too fixed on the idea of an independent state, to serve as a viable foundation for the future. In his first chapter, “Remembering (from) Where You're Going: Memory as Legacy and Inheritance,” Létourneau describes a writing exercise wherein a group of undergraduates were asked to describe the history of Quebec from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Reflected in the students' responses was an understanding of Quebec's history as one of oppression, and a belief that Quebec's collective cycle of defeat could only be broken when Quebec establishes its independence. *Il se souvient*. Létourneau writes, “In fact, their memory is precise in that it is simple, focused, and assured. And that is certainly a problem, if not a failure, in terms of a memory for the future.” For Létourneau, Quebec's identity hinges not on a fixed, absolute history, but on a defocused process of remembering that will “open the future as wide as possible . . . [and] create conditions such that the concept of fixity never prevails.”

Significantly, the open future Létourneau envisions for the Québécois community is one wherein the apex of possibility is not necessarily political sovereignty. In his second chapter, “Going from Heirs to Founders: The Great Collective Narrative of Quebecers as Revisited by Gérard Bouchard,” Létourneau argues that Quebec's “constitutive ambivalences, its intermingled facets, its constant fits and starts” are fundamental to what Quebec was, is, and will be. Through the remaining chapters of *A History for the*

*Future*, "What History for the Future of Canada?", "The Fate of the Past: Risks and Challenges of Turning the Past into Narrative (Notes on Jacques Godbout's *The Fate of America*)," "Toward a Revolution of Collective Memory: History and Historical Consciousness Among Quebecers of French-Canadian Heritage," and "What Should We Pass On? Moving into the Future," Létourneau threads his argument that Quebec's hopes for the future should rest not on an independent state, but in the continued play of the tensions that have made the Québécois community what it is today. He asks, "Are ambivalence and cohabitation, in tension with the 'other' necessarily suicidal options for the community, an abdication of the task to be accomplished, a rejection of the utopian solidarity? Could it not be, rather, that they express a certain reflective wisdom—a wisdom tested by the ancestors and bequeathed to their descendants—in the building of a present and a future along the felicitous line of pragmatism, mutual respect for cultures, and friendship?" Quebec's constitutive ambivalences, Létourneau concludes, are neither a failure nor a barrier to a distant, neatly articulated, and perfectly realized identity, but rather, central to a promising future for the community.

A thoughtful testament to the complexity of Quebec's history and an insightful and ultimately hopeful consideration of the community's future, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec* is an essential text for anyone interested in Québécois identity.



## Culture Up and Away

**Adam Muller, ed.**

*Concepts of Culture: Art, Politics & Society.* U of Calgary P \$49.95

Reviewed by Len Findlay

This is an uneven collection of eleven essays (four of them by Canadian scholars, five of them previously published). Alas, the editor's lengthy introduction is as uneven as the efforts that follow. One may learn a lot from working through this volume, but some of what one learns may be misleading, while relations among the three terms of its subtitle—art, society, and politics—are too seldom recast in any original or arresting way. This is not a book to be read continuously from cover to cover, nor one that I would be inclined to re-read in its entirety. Indeed, it strikes me as neither a good book for beginners nor particularly satisfying fare for anyone well versed in the study of culture.

In the opening 40 pages Adam Muller tries to frame the topic under the alarming cliché, "Unity in Diversity." In his opening sentence we travel back to Herodotus. We then shift to etymology in a fast-food version of Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* and *Keywords*, too much of it drawn uncritically from a 1987 introductory cultural anthropology text by Lewis Langness which is virtually invisible in the literature in several disciplines with which this reviewer is familiar. Nor, tellingly, is Langness an authority upon whom any of Muller's contributors draw. Muller then turns to Marvin Harris, a major figure, of course, in the development of cultural materialism, but he does so only to borrow a citation to Turgot without giving any sense of Turgot's highly pertinent place in economic history or sufficiently underscoring that an emergent "science of mankind" was highly selective in its understanding of human diversity and fiercely acquisitive in its attitude toward nature. Matthew Arnold has "evolutionism"

bizarrely ascribed to him along with a belief in culture's "inherent excellence." We then get a potted history of anthropology as somehow key to understanding culture. A number of irritatingly brief allusions to complex bodies of work ensue, before Muller discloses his own bias while expressing two attractive but ill-found hopes: first, that his editorial judgment will foster the "spirit of rigorous interdisciplinary exchange and debate;" second, that the reader will come to recognize the "importance of analytic philosophy and liberal political theory to the systematic and comprehensive study of culture."

The intermittently smug Eurocentrism of Muller's Introduction is reinforced on the first page of Christoph Brumann's defence of the concept of culture, where he claims that "scepticism over the culture concept has its origins in deconstructionist and post-structural thought." How many Aboriginal thinkers did he wonder about, never mind listen to or read, before he made that claim? In a book published by a Canadian university press, such narrowness is unacceptable, and reminds one of the damaging absence here of work written from a First Nations, Inuit, or Métis standpoint. But then Brumann goes on to talk about Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis as "far from controversial within his own discipline" and widely accepted beyond it, and to distinguish between the "Political right wing" and "papal encyclicals." In fairness, this essay was first published in 1999, but why then reprint it here? Muller apparently wants to take literary theorists down a peg or two by looking to disciplines other than his own, and by republishing the likes of Geoffrey Hartman, Jacques Barzun, and Martha Nussbaum, who wish respectively to recapture culture for masters of the right sort, for a properly educated general audience sharing a genuine "popular culture," and for academic first world dispensers of frameworks and norms to "ordinary non-philosophical people" worldwide—if such there be. Nussbaum's

claim that the "ideas of Marxism . . . originated in the British Library" reclaims the bookish arrogance she claims to disavow. It also illustrates the recurrent suspension or travesty in this collection of culture's social determinants.

Fortunately, there are much better contributions from lesser names. Mette Hjort, for instance, offers a shrewd defence of "critical" multiculturalism, in part through linking it to the "place of consensus or conflict within our pedagogical imaginaries." In the most compelling piece, Imre Szeman declares that the "humanities have become marginalized as a result of their inability to continue to grasp the concept that they have committed themselves to understanding." Instead, they have become the "guardian of the good against commodity culture and commodity aesthetics" while a good deal of creativity and critique have migrated to pro-capitalist locations where commodification is king. In claiming (in line with Henry Giroux) that "contemporary mass culture constitutes a concerted form of 'public pedagogy'" Szeman joins Hjort, Martin Roberts in his essay here on "Film Culture," and Jim Parry on "Sport, Universalism, and Multiculturalism" to give a more open, persuasive, energizing sense of where and how cultural knowledge is produced and applied, and how the "new critical humanities" should understand their task in the "global present" where guardians are humoured and gangsters feted, yet critical resistance thrives not only in new locations but in newly mediated, historically specific versions of location itself. Cultural trends may be dominated by economic and academic elites, but a buckler is born every minute.



## Keeping watch, seeing home

**Wayne Grady**

*Bringing Back the Dodo: Lessons in Natural and Unnatural History.* McClelland & Stewart \$29.99

**Harry Thurston**

*A Place Between the Tides. A Naturalist's Reflections on the Salt Marsh.* Greystone \$22.95

Reviewed by Charles Dawson

"An essay," Wayne Grady writes, "is a pearl that began with an irritating grain of sand." The incisive, witty, and delightful pearls in *Bringing Back the Dodo* demonstrate Grady's sense of what an essay can do, of how it might meander, snoop, and swoop across time and ideas, thereby depositing the reader in new places. Most of the essays began life as extended columns in Canada's *explore* magazine, from which pages acted as "seed-beds" for the smiling "perennials" presented here. Smiling, yes: the essays are infused with a delight in learning and a roving curiosity. While the facts unearthed are often sobering, the writing is so deft one is simply transported. Grady's combination of wit and passion is well suited to the topics of extinction, wayward GM experimentation, cloning, and evolutionary biology, and why there are tropical fruits in your supermarket in mid-winter (and why you might buy them). He also includes a fascinating review essay of work by Bill McKibben and Margaret Atwood.

I was taken by Grady's discussion of parasitism, the Harvard onco-mouse, genetics and cloning research, the conceptual and practical history of the garden, and how ecological restoration is sprouting seeds of hope in collaborative work between the Alderville First Nation and others (both bipedal and conifer). That essay takes you from a brief and compelling account of Galileo to contemporary projects that ameliorate the "rift between ourselves and nature." It is that rift that causes Grady so

much alarm: he has the facts to hand to be seriously concerned, and he has the fluency and charm to deploy those facts effectively. The net effect on me was an exhilarated, joyous alarm (a useful combination, for it fosters the desire and capacity to sustain both wonder and concern) at our capacity for both recklessness and invention. That juncture between the creative and destructive urges of our species recurs in the essays. As Grady asks, "If we love nature so much, why are we so set on destroying it?" That is not an easy question to answer, but his informed engagement with evolutionary biology, contemporary research, and the cultural roots of our behaviour make *Bringing Back the Dodo* a compelling and informative work, rounded off by a beautiful meditation on home and belonging that brings Grady to the fore by sharing family and homeplace, tracking journeys, keeping inquiry and possibility alive through his love for all life.

Home, belonging, attentiveness, care: so many of the qualities Grady practices and longs to foster are evident in *A Place Between the Tides*. Poet and ecologist Harry Thurston's latest work is composed in classic form: a month-braced record of one year by the salty Old Marsh by Nova Scotia's Tidnish River (near Amherst). The book takes the reader from January to December but is also the culmination of a decade's careful observation. Thurston returned to his boyhood patch: "Improbably, in midlife I had found my way home after a long, circuitous journey" and sets out to "compile a phenology of the salt marsh." This naturalist has "put down roots" and, like Grady, thought and worked his way into a bioregion that resonates with memory and feeling, and something beyond the aesthetic. He is the naturalist as "tuning fork," "keeping watch," the attentive participant who sows hope through keeping local and alert. Thurston's focus on and affection for place is succour to Grady's alarmed global appraisal:



It is a rare and beautiful thing, the reward for staying in one place and keeping watch. Travel yields diversity; residence, intimacy. Staying in one place, looking and looking while the seasons rotate around you, reveals the patterns inherent in the familiar. It is like an experiment repeated over and over again, until some reproducible truth is teased out. Probability becomes an ally that in time reveals the sublime, snares the evanescent.

The salt marsh, perhaps the ultimate ecotone, “at one hour land, and at another sea,” is Thurston’s anchoring point and mental lode-stone. Watching the season’s shift from winter’s still to the fecundities of late spring and summer, Thurston’s prose is measured, full of factual detail that uses the observed action of a species outside his study as a springboard into memory, yarn, or reportage. Reminiscence weaves with direct, informed, and thorough observation as Thurston hones his attentiveness. And there is plenty of wild-life to attend to: gaspereaux (alewives), falcons, minks, willets, smelt, *spartina* grasses, flood, snow, seals, and marsh snails (with their inbuilt alarm that sends them ascending grass stalks every 12 hours to avoid the rising tide) fill the pages: this is not an account of loss, devastation, and urban encroachment; rather it is one of returning, renewal and affirmation, a work that seeks to record, without histrionics, a unique environment and the workings of one of its most observant, informed inhabitants. Nova Scotia and the planet are the richer for his account of a lively, lovely remnant, even as, Grady reminds us, those remnants vanish. Whether “we” can all afford to slow down and watch, whether we even can—is one of the many questions these books have left with me, even as they provide compelling evidence of the need to do so.

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## Poems of Witness

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**Margaret Avison**

*Momentary Dark: New Poems.* McClelland & Stewart \$17.99

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**Dionne Brand**

*Inventory.* McClelland & Stewart \$17.99

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**Catherine Hunter, ed.**

*Before the First Word: The Poetry of Lorna Crozier.* Wilfrid Laurier UP \$14.95

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Reviewed by Hilary Clark

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When Margaret Avison’s *Concrete and Wild Carrot* won the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2003, the judges wrote that “‘wonder, readiness, simplicity’—the gifts of perception Avison attributes to her Christian faith—imbue every poem . . . with a rare spirit of disorderly love.” Most of the poems in Avison’s *Momentary Dark: New Poems* are similarly characterized by wonder and receptiveness to everyday phenomena, but they are not simple, or only deceptively so. Notations on trees, city streets, weather, and changing seasons, develop with the lightest touch into meditations on ultimate things—but off-balance, skewed by striking word choices and skillfully off-kilter line breaks.

The poem “A-luff” is a good example of how a “disorderly love” of the world and of language can shake up a few lines. In a note, we learn that “a-luff” means windward, “heading into the wind.” In a manner reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Avison heads into the wind of creation and lets it buffet her verse. The watcher in “wind-wild March” is

aloof:  
a-luff – behind  
glass-glare but lolloping  
out on the deep  
  
where cresting green  
and crystal comber-drops  
plunge into sea-moil, for  
this blink of time within  
a new creation’s new  
morning.

In its enjambed lines of uneven length, the poem itself lollops forward to a concluding shout of praise, “re- / creation’s: ‘Let there be Day!’”

While a few of the poems in *Momentary Dark* seem a little flat, most are gems of daily praise that repay close rereading. In “Poetry Is,” Avison offers a poetics: “Poetry is always in / unfamiliar territory,” its “eye . . . astray” looking for “little stuff” to “tuck away in / [its] little basket.” These “scraps” have no use; they simply lead to more looking, more gathering—glancing epiphanies. Avison’s little scraps resist anything more than a moment’s closure, thrown forward as they are to the next insight, and the next: “three rubied berries,” perhaps, or pigeons’ “bare pink feet in the cold.”

Dionne Brand also watches and gathers in *Inventory*, a book-length poem that keeps a “vigil for broken things”: in it she bears witness to violence and the corruptions of power, and draws up inventories of the daily dead: “I have nothing soothing to tell you, / that’s not my job, / my job is to revise and revise this bristling list, / hourly.” All through the seven sections of the poem, Brand lists the fatal consequences of power. Section I suggests the many ways America has insinuated itself into us: taking in “their love stories” and “their war epics” through American movies and TV, we are “imprisoned . . . in their ghosts.” Section III is the poem’s centre of gravity, a relentless and moving inventory of deaths in war zones and elsewhere, as gleaned from the TV hour by hour:

—twenty-seven in Hillah, three in fighting  
in  
Amariya, two by roadside bombing,  
Adhaim,  
five by mortars in Afar, in firefight in  
Samarra  
  
two, two in collision near Khallis.

The impact (and horror) of this list derives from the fact that it is still a *poem*, characterized by eloquent repetitions and sound

play: “mortars,” “Afar,” “Samarra”; “collision,” “Khallis.” The poetry of mourning has always been with us; Brand brings the elegy into the post-9/11 world of global violence and urban chaos. There are some moments of respite, if not of consolation: in Section IV, for instance, we see the connections that may spark between strangers, “clasping what is foreign whole.” There is some respite also in the mind’s ability to escape and “step into another life”: “I wish I had beautiful legs / to get me to another planet.” And even if “happiness is not the point,” we read in the last pages that another focus can be found in the natural world, “the surface of the earth, how it keeps springing back, / for now,” and in the body, “the expiration of any breath, its succeeding intake, / the surprised and grateful lungs.” These moments are included in the inventory, but they are not meant to soothe: more dead are added to the tally each day. “Things, things add up”: *Inventory* is not an easy book, but it is haunting.

Catherine Hunter’s *Before the First Word: The Poetry of Lorna Crozier* is a volume in the Laurier Poetry Series introducing contemporary Canadian poets. Hunter has selected poems from eight books by Crozier, going back to 1980, and has provided a useful introduction to her work. Hunter points out a “strong elegiac impulse” in Crozier’s poetry, which often dwells on absence, “life as a series of losses.” In her Afterword, Crozier touches upon this theme of absence: addressing the importance of unknowing as an impetus to poetry, she suggests that “resistance [to language] is often the place where poetry starts.” In a poem, “you capture the ephemeral significance of what would otherwise be lost.” Certain poems in *Before the First Word* are particularly elegiac, skirting around something lost or dreadful, resistant to words: these include such well-known poems as “Mother and I, Walking” and “Fear of Snakes,” in the latter the tortured snake’s “beautiful green / mouth

opening, a terrible dark O / no one could hear." Elegy also characterizes such seemingly light poems as "Poem about Nothing" and "Quitting Smoking": "The shape of your mouth around an imaginary cigarette is an absence you can taste." And in the tradition of pastoral elegy, one of the loveliest poems gathered here is "Wildflowers," whose lists of flower names—"Evening Primrose, Yarrow, Wild Flax," "Windflowers in the Cypress Hills"—function as a charm summoning the past, evidence of "the heart's strange fondness / for what is lost."

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## The Ties that Bind

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**Drew Hayden Taylor**

*In a World Created by a Drunken God.*

Talonbooks \$16.95

**Daniel David Moses**

*Pursued by a Bear: Talks, Monologues, and Tales.*

Exile Editions \$23.95

Reviewed by John Moffatt

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A stranger appears in the doorway, announces that he is your half-brother and informs you that the father you have never known will die of kidney disease if a compatible donor cannot be found. You may be that donor. What do you do? The act of defining moral obligation drives Drew Hayden Taylor's *In a World Created by a Drunken God*. Half Native and half-European, Jason Pierce is in the process of moving out of his Toronto apartment, and moving on from a failed relationship, when Harry Deiter arrives from the US with his startling news and his request.

The power of words to wound almost immediately begins to eclipse their power to heal. Taylor skilfully handles Jason's response, which evolves from incredulity to anger as Harry struggles to convince him that he has a duty to his biological father. Taylor displays his gift for sharp, spare, comedic dialogue in Jason's efforts to deflect Harry's earnest appeals, but as the title might suggest, the

play has more in common with *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* than with the *Blues Trilogy*. Jason's often witty use of Native/European and Canadian/American stereotyping ("Hold on there, Kemosabe. The 'It was meant to be' philosophy only works for Native people. Manifest Destiny is your bag.") progressively sours, to the point he can say "Sarcasm's all I've got right now. That and a kidney," as he tries to convince Harry, and himself, that he has a moral right to indifference.

Harry is sincere, but his rhetoric is as invasive as Jason's is evasive. He relies heavily on a pop psychology that lets him tell Jason to "Put the wounded child behind you" and on cloying false oppositions, such as "There are three types of people in the world: Those that poison wells. Those that mow the lawn. And those that build hospitals. Which are you?" Still, he is allowed despairing moments of insight, challenging Jason's claim to indifference with the questions, "Are you penalizing him because he's your father? . . . What if he were a stranger?" and "By running away, aren't you committing the same sin that you accuse my father of?" By contrast, Daniel David Moses' *Pursued by a Bear: Talks, Monologues, and Tales* embraces connection, on both the personal and public level. Moses resists the narrow either/or dichotomies that haunt the characters in Taylor's play, aligning his perspective early in the collection with the syncretic capacities of the Trickster, who is a recurring presence in the book and "whose extremes . . . are an accepted part of his artificiality, and the contradictions, evidence of his humanity" ("Spooky"). In pieces such as "Queer for a Day" and "'Adam' means 'Red Man'" he acerbically comments on tokenism and how the politics of inclusion often force individuals into the kinds of dichotomizing situations they were, in theory, meant to diffuse, while in "The 'Or' Question" Moses conveys his frustration with polarizing questions such as, "But are you a Native

writer or a Canadian writer? . . . When one's eyes don't glaze over, one is tempted to answer 'yes.'"

Issues of identity and ethos often provide the occasions for these texts, but *Pursued by a Bear* is primarily about creativity. In the recursive nature of an ongoing conversation, Moses revisits the processes behind his *Coyote City* and *The Indian Medicine Shows*, and his collaboration with Tomson Highway and Keeshig-Tobias in *The Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster*. Among the many highlights are the discussion of the use of ghosts in "Spooky" and "How My Ghosts Got Pale Faces," where Moses explores the transformative power of theatre to bridge conceptual barriers between the natural and the supernatural, the real and the unreal, the reality and the representation.

Moses sheds further light on his dramatic practice in "Of the Essence," where he distinguishes his approach from the traditional Western insistence on conflict in literature in favour of what he calls "contrast," drawing on compositional analogies from the visual arts. These ideas are more fully developed in the concluding essay "'A Syphilitic Western': Making *The Medicine Shows*" ("my first play with white characters"), in which he traces the difficult development of that play, which challenged his Delaware/Iroquois rejection of "conflict" in its depiction of a violent nexus of violence, racism, and sexuality. Moses describes himself as initially "afraid to take responsibility for the wounded, monstrous human beings the play presented," but moves towards a vision of later plays which will contain "aspects of myself and of what it means to try to be a balanced, healthy man or sissy or Indian in the new world that was created as a wound on the back of Turtle Island." In *Pursued by a Bear*, words retain the comic, healing value that was ultimately and tragically lost to the characters of *In a World Created by a Drunken God*.

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## Desire and Art

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**Michael Healey**

*The Innocent Eye Test*. Playwrights Canada P \$17.95

**Brad Fraser**

*Cold Meat Party*. Playwrights Canada P \$17.95

**Larry Tremblay**

*The Ventriloquist*. Talonbooks \$15.95

Reviewed by Shannon Hengen

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These three plays share a thematic concern with the limits to, dangers, and strengths of the power of art: writing, filmmaking, singing and composing, and painting are central, allowing easy association with an audience sharing these artistic interests. Particularly for the Tremblay play, that interest is essential; for the Fraser and Healey pieces, other themes and issues arise to appeal to a more general audience. The power of desire links these three works as well, especially its indifference to standard categories of preference and safety.

Healey's *The Innocent Eye Test* combines elements of farce with realistic discourses on beauty and despair, love and hate. A Canadian art dealer desperate for the sale of a fine and thoughtful work finds himself amid international espionage at an Italian resort; national prejudices complicate things further for the cast of seven characters from Ukraine, Ireland, Canada, and the US. Various successful couplings at play's end underscore the triumph of the appreciation of beauty over the study of aggression, terrorism, and war. For action, the Canadian male art dealer becomes caught up in an exchange between the Ukrainian and the Irish character for plutonium from Chernobyl while he is being persuaded to sell the painting of the play's title for the American's quasi-drive-through art gallery in Las Vegas; he also becomes drawn to an attractive clairvoyant woman. Add, among other things, a gay CIA agent and look-alike briefcases—one containing plutonium and the other \$180,000 US—and much ultimately comic misrecognition occurs.

Healey's light and effective handling of a destruction/creation debate is achieved through the American entrepreneur who believes initially that people do not really know what they want. He himself undergoes a change by moving from a businessman who wants a painting the size and colour of "The Innocent Eye Test," and has no interest in what the painting attempts to say or do, to an admirer of both the piece and its artist, Mark Tansey (whom Healey credits in his introductory matter), and a worthy champion of the value of opening dialogue between what might seem inaccessible high art and a wide audience. Similarly, the Ukrainian seller of plutonium moves from bitterness to heroism, having been charmed by the resort's sensual appeal.

Funny and wise, this play succeeds despite the difficulty presented by its main character, Samuel Kneck, criticized, mocked, or misunderstood by other characters throughout because of his lack of substance. Unable to argue effectively with the American or Ukrainian, unwilling to declare himself or take action until forced, and rewarded with the woman of his fantasies only because she—a clairvoyant—apparently reads his mind as clear of any alarming thoughts (or perhaps any thoughts at all), Samuel irritates. Uri, the fatally ill plutonium seller, disturbs the play's happy ending by warning Samuel in the closing lines that "Someday soon, guys like me are gonna stop paying the debts of guys like you. Okay? But not today. Not today, Canada!"

Brad Fraser's *Cold Meat Party* delightfully complicates easy notions of identity through a cast of seven characters spanning those in mid-career to those as yet without them. Brought together in Manchester, England for the funeral of a friend, a successful writer, "A gay pop star, a feminist filmmaker and a homophobic politician" relive their days together as university students and in the process begin to revise themselves. Finally, old errors and heartbreaks overcome, at

times contentiously, couples dissolve and reform in surprising and satisfying ways. "I don't believe in the tyranny of innate sexual persuasion," claims an admitted sexual addict who in the world beyond Fraser's play would be labelled simply bisexual. And just as the usual sexual identity of the characters is questioned, so is the value of their life's work and commitments: each of the three main middle-aged characters in confronting a serious physical ailment seems also to face shortcomings and disappointments with candour and wit, somehow suggesting hope. The ultraconservative member of Parliament hints at a revision of his political views even as he prepares to undergo voluntary castration to relieve a lifelong phobia; the formerly drunk and promiscuous filmmaker with cancerous breast tumours, and the aging and failing HIV-positive pop star, choose one another as companions and enact a kind of marriage at play's end—"I'm here for you. In sickness and in health"—while preparing to pray over the coffin of their late friend and lover. Prayer in this circumstance, associated earlier with the fundamentalist MP, undercuts any facile assessment of character or theme. Still, the preoccupation of these figures with worldly success and indeed with sex, booze, and drugs gives superficial veneer to the work, potentially leaving audiences with doubt about the depth of the characters' change.

Obsessions with art and desire drive Tremblay's psychological study, *The Ventriloquist*. No doubt intriguing to watch, although perhaps somewhat compromised by being a translation from the French, this piece concerns a young woman who determines the fate of those around her by writing fiction with a magical Parker pen. She then figuratively becomes the ventriloquist of the title, although we meet her at play's opening as a puppet helpless in the hands of a male professional. No children's story, this study takes us fully into incestuous lust and a similarly dangerous and consuming drive to impose

one's will upon the world through writing. Of the nine characters to be played by four actors, two of them—the young woman, Gaby, and her main interlocutor, Doctor Limestone—occupy the centre of action and dialogue, Doctor Limestone's Method bringing Gaby to a psychic nadir that reveals her passionate attraction for and revenge upon a brother who betrays her. Profound youthful trauma, extreme isolation from normal human contact, wild, even megalomaniacal creative ambition unleavened by laughter and delivered in a non-realistic style render this play the least accessible of these three while sharing thematic concerns with the other two.

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## Humour et tragédies

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**Mariel O'Neill-Karch et Pierre Karch (dir.)**

*Théâtre comique de Régis Roy (1864-1944)*. Éditions David 25,00 \$

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**Robert Marinier**

*Épinal*. Prise de parole 15,00 \$

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**Esther Beauchemin**

*La Meute*. Prise de parole 17,00 \$

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**Herménégilde Chiasson**

*Le Christ est apparu au Gun Club*. Prise de parole 16,00 \$

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Compte rendu par Eric Paul Parent

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On pourrait croire que Régis Roy n'a rien à nous apprendre en tant que dramaturge et que les cinquante années qui nous séparent de lui sont un obstacle insurmontable à l'appréciation de son théâtre. Pris individuellement, ses farces en un acte et ces monologues semblent enfantins, parfois même ridicules. Toutefois, en lisant son œuvre complète d'un seul trait, force est de constater l'influence de l'écriture de Roy sur la dramaturgie canadienne-française contemporaine. De même que Roy a emprunté ses héros et ses situations aux auteurs qui l'ont précédé, on reconnaît chez les auteurs d'aujourd'hui les « Baptistes » et les « Jeannots » à qui il a prêté voix. On devine

même un lien de parenté entre la langue vernaculaire parlée par les « habitants » de Roy et celle des « matantes du Plateau Mont-Royal » de Michel Tremblay.

Largelement méconnu du public de notre époque, le théâtre de Régis Roy trouve d'excellents défenseurs en Mariel O'Neill-Karch et Pierre Karch. Bien que le commentaire des auteurs précédant chaque pièce demeure superficiel, faisant remarquer au lecteur à l'aide de passages tirés du texte des évidences que ce dernier aurait aisément noté lui-même, l'introduction, la chronologie de la vie de Roy et le tableau des représentations de ses pièces sont des outils précieux qui permettent de situer l'œuvre dans son contexte sociohistorique. Les nombreuses notes en bas de pages et les corrections et clarifications apportées aux textes de Roy par les auteurs facilitent grandement leur lecture. D'ailleurs, sans ces explications des référents culturels, l'humour de Roy demeurerait souvent hermétique. L'œuvre de Roy est un trésor qui mérite d'être exploré par nos metteurs en scène contemporains.

Il n'est pas surprenant de constater que malgré la distance géographique qui les sépare, on trouve plus de similarités que de différences entre les œuvres de Marinier et de Beauchemin et celle de Chiasson. Bien sûr, chacun exprime sa région et sa perception du monde en usant de son propre langage. Cependant, leurs textes révèlent tous les déchirements, les rêves et les valeurs qui animent nos communautés. Si Régis Roy s'adressait à une communauté catholique canadienne-française pour qui l'instituteur, le professionnel et le curé du village faisaient figure d'autorité, Marinier, Beauchemin et Chiasson décrivent un monde aux prises avec la paranoïa, qui se méfie de l'autorité et qui met en doute les discours religieux. Les textes de Marinier, Beauchemin et Chiasson sont trois huis clos à l'intérieur desquels se débattent des humains prisonniers d'une danse de la mort, d'un duel qui décidera du salut de chacun.

Bien que le prétexte d'*Épinal* soit mince, la rencontre entre l'Homme et le Waiter de Marinier ouvre la boîte de Pandore, révélant au grand jour les coulisses de la conscience humaine. Dans le bar d'un hôtel, deux hommes s'affrontent verbalement. Le Waiter qui utilise le chantage pour torturer l'Homme deviendra lui-même la victime avant la fin de la pièce. L'intelligence de Marinier est de ne jamais tout dire, de laisser au spectateur la tâche de supposer les véritables intentions des protagonistes. Cette histoire simple révèle ce qui se cache en chacun de nous : un désir de vivre quelque chose de grand, de défoncer les façades qu'impose la vie en société, de contrôler le hasard. Une œuvre cruelle qui ne recule pas devant la bienséance.

Dans *La Meute*, Esther Beauchemin s'inspire d'un fait divers pour mettre en scène cinq enfants abandonnés par leur mère qui sombre dans une folie causée par la mort de son mari. Entourés d'une meute de chiens qui les protège de l'extérieur, mais les empêche aussi de quitter leur refuge, les enfants engagent un combat contre la réalité et l'autorité. Alors que l'aînée prend conscience du drame qui se dessine, les plus jeunes enfants se fondent toujours plus à la meute de chiens qui les garde.

L'écriture épisodique de Beauchemin rappelle le bulletin de nouvelles télévisé et doit plaire à un public adolescent habitué à ce genre d'écriture. Si elle manque de nuance, cette pièce dépeint avec justesse le désarroi que ressentent la majorité des jeunes adultes lorsqu'ils apprennent à concilier l'émotion de l'enfance à la raison de l'adulte. La pièce de Beauchemin traite de la peur de « l'autre » qui anime presque tous nos débats de société actuels. Toutefois, elle traite aussi de la crainte de devenir « l'autre », c'est-à-dire de se perdre soi-même, de perdre son individualité lorsqu'on se soumet à un idéal de société. Le texte de Beauchemin est conçu spécialement pour un public adolescent, mais les adultes s'y reconnaissent aisément.

Le personnage de Conrad d'Herménégilde Chiasson n'a jamais su atteindre son plein potentiel. Assis à une table du Gun Club, une bière à la main, Conrad, « mécanicien de génie », vit son chemin de croix tel un héros tragique. Il a quitté son emploi avilissant et confie son mal de vivre à son meilleur ami Simon. Au fil des tableaux, Conrad s'enfonce de plus en plus dans son désespoir, parlant comme l'homme de la rue, mais parsemant son discours de passages de la bible qu'il a « appris par cœur ». Tel le Christ qui pouvait sauver tout le monde sauf lui-même, Conrad fonce droit vers la mort. Incapable d'aimer la femme de sa vie, incapable de se guérir lui-même, Conrad est trahi par ceux en qui il avait le plus confiance. Une pièce empreinte à la fois de simplicité et de symbolisme.

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## Collaborative Research

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**Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers, with Members of the Kainai Nation**

*'Pictures Bring Us Messages' / Sinaakssiiksi aohitsi-maahpihkookiyaawa: Photographs and Histories from the Kainai Nation.* U of Toronto P \$29.95

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Reviewed by Dee Horne

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Contemporary museum curators are well aware of the ethical responsibilities not only of caring for the museum holdings, but also of attempting to rectify colonial practices or at the very least consulting with First Nations communities and establishing respectful and collaborative relationships. Alison Brown and Laura Peers, a researcher and a curator from the Pitt Rivers Museum of the University of Oxford, found 33 photographs of Kainai (also known as Blood) people that Beatrice Blackwood took in August 1925, brought back to the museum and catalogued and archived. In 2001, Brown and Peers decided to take the photographs back to the Kainai Nation and consult with members of the community to understand how the descendants of the subjects in the photographs

view the images and the stories and histories that the pictures relate. Specifically, they set out to examine the photographs and colonial issues of race and acculturation of Blackwood's time as well as to view the photographs in the geographical and cultural contexts of the Kainai people today and to respect the need of the Kainai people to articulate their past as well as their present experiences and to share these images with their children. In *'Pictures Bring Us Messages'* Brown and Peers discuss why such collaborative practices are essential and share their own process of collaborating with the Kainai Nation.

The subject of the book is as much about Brown and Peers and the relationship they have with members of the Kainai community as it is about Blackwood. Brown and Peers looked at the photographs, along with field notes and a diary, and consider them in the context of Blackwood's time and in light of the different meanings the project had for anthropologists then and now. Trained as an anthropologist, specializing in physical anthropology, Blackwood's goal "involved gathering genealogies and collecting measurements to try to understand which behaviours and physical appearances were responses to social and economic circumstances and which were inherited." Funded by a Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fellowship in the social sciences, Blackwood took a three-year research trip to Canada and the United States between 1924 and 1927 to conduct physical measurements and mental tests of diverse cultural groups. In addition to her interest in community members' transitions between tradition and modern times, Blackwood was "interested in how older, 'purer' groups responded to racial 'mixing.'" That she did not find the correlation between intelligence and physical characteristics racist or problematic is not surprising since Blackwood was part of the very colonial society whose assimilationist efforts she documented.

What is surprising is that Brown and Peers often present Blackwood and her research in a more sympathetic light and speculate, rather than provide substantive evidence that Blackwood became more aware of the racist implications of her research and questioned it.

Still, the authors are to be commended for their "collaborative, community-based methodology in which the Kainai worked with them to shape the research questions and process, advised them on cultural protocol, and reviewed research findings." They follow the model of Roslyn Poignant's *Encounter at Nagalarra* (1996) in which the author returned photographs that her husband had taken several decades earlier to the Australian Aboriginal community. Of particular relevance to museum curators and archivists is the detail that Brown and Peers provide about the formal protocol agreement that was the basis for the Kainai-Oxford Photographic Histories Project as well as the process for ensuring that mutual goals were realized.

The book is well organized. The authors discuss the context in which photos were produced and offer examples of Kainai resistance to assimilation (Chapter One); Blackwood's images in the context of her career and her scholarly objectives and challenges (Chapter Two); their own methodology, objectives, and process (Chapter Three); the responses of those Kainai community members whom Brown interviewed to the photographs and the pervading themes that came out of these interviews (Chapter Four); the implications of the Kainai meanings and institutional implications, specifically the need for museums to include indigenous perspectives and to consult and make their collections accessible to the communities (Chapter Five); access and stewardship, and ways these might be improved (Chapter Six); their conclusions, advocating collaboration and co-management and foregrounding the imperative of consultation



and respectful relations with the community (Conclusions).

What messages do these pictures bring and what stories do they tell? This depends not only on who is taking or viewing the picture but also on why they do so. To many members of the Kainai community, these photographs are a record of their history and connection with their relations. The photographs also reflect, and are a product of, a colonial relationship. Still the photographs do illustrate the transition between traditional and modern practices, and the social conditions and relationships that informed them. Specifically, in her photographs of residential school children, Blackwood documented colonizers' efforts to assimilate Kainai and to deprive them of their traditions. We see the effects of the agrarian revolution and struggle for land and rights of the Blood people. And we hear stories that make us laugh if only to mask the underlying tragedy. For instance, *Ponokaiksiksinam* (Martin Heavy Head) relates how his great-grandfather took a trip only to discover that the "whole Reserve was following them!" *Ponokaiksiksinam* explains that this was but one of the ways that the Bloods resisted government officials who tried to make them farm. Through such acts of resistance the Kainai people survive. While collaborative projects like the one documented in this book are a step in the right direction, one can hope that someday soon the Kainai will write their own book and reclaim these and other cultural artifacts that have been taken from them.



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## Renaming Stillness and Travel

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**David Seymour**

*Inter Alia*. Brick \$17.00

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**Lisa Pasold**

*A Bad Year for Journalists*. Frontenac \$15.95

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**Ven Begamudré**

*The Lightness Which is Our World, Seen from Afar*. Frontenac \$15.95

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Reviewed by Antje M. Rauwerda

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What is striking about these volumes of poetry by David Seymour, Lisa Pasold, and Ven Begamudré is the way in which the wider world of place and persons orients individuals to help them locate themselves. In each case, inanimate geographies, the minutiae of specific locations, and the intimacy of human interrelationships ground identity. These authors find themselves "homed" by their unorthodox connections with the things and people that surround them. A key distinction between the works of these three poets is the importance of movement. Connectedness is embodied by stasis and silence in Seymour; by movements through alien landscapes in Pasold; and by the not-quite stillness or comfort of being in-between places in Begamudré.

Seymour's poems are sometimes the rhetorical equivalents of still-life compositions: "Photograph of an Old Room" or "the Cat Forgets" isolate moments in time and the speaker's response to those specific, stilled moments (in the latter, "the face of the mind [is] washed clean"). In the first section of *Inter Alia*, "Nomenaature of the Semi-Precious," Seymour uses descriptions of semi-precious stones to fossilize, and so fix in time, moments of individual experience: "You are difficult and disappointed / on the long drive home from the party: / love can be citric, even stern when you let it" ("Peridot"). The stones impose peaceful reflection: "The muteness of heavy snowfall and a chestnut- / brown warmth" ("Topaz").

They impose the silence that Seymour suggests is necessary for finally understanding that “we’ve listened in the wrong direction our whole lives” (“Almandine”). The theme he develops of silence and stillness as salvific seems, initially, counterintuitive, as in the line “because silence is an open window in the house” (“A Word on Silence”). I would have thought silence produced isolation (closed windows) rather than connection, but Seymour advances a different argument, emphasizing an essential paradox: in private, quiet moments in which time and self both feel isolated, connectedness and understanding of one’s place in the world are most fully achieved. Thus even his sequence of prose poems based on Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter), “The Sinful Songs,” ends with Ledbetter’s musing on his immobility, “does it matter whether he hates or loves this silence?”

Pasold’s *A Bad Year for Journalists* chronicles connections arising from mobility rather than stillness. She describes a photojournalist posted to cover “a refugee crisis” (the anonymity of the location evoking the myriad of countries that currently have refugee crises in “Press”). Here the voyeurism of photography (“close up of wounds, some involving / children. *is what you wanted, isn’t it?*”) is juxtaposed with a friendship/affair with a print journalist: “*I don’t need a lover, I / just need—he sees what he wants it / to be. she doesn’t*” (“Press”). The plot of the poems, as they build on one another, suggests an attempted but failed transition from photographing in Africa to living in Canada, as in the vignette about a Canadian one-night stand disrupted by a call from overseas: “In the midst, morning hangover mist, the cell phone / Call from Djibouti, *I was wondering / how you were doing*” (“Venus and Psycho”). The unnamed “he’s” and “she’s” of these poems act out relationships that are a backdrop to identity crises provoked by exposure to wars overseas. Transitions produce self-redefinitions.

In Moscow, “she” interviews a 14-year-old assassin who has named himself Samuel Oki after her predecessor. “She” wonders if “she’ll leave namesakes? children taught to murder who’ll name themselves after her” (“Kinshasa”). The lines emphasize the inevitability of dislocations (a Canadian in Moscow talking to a boy who has adopted a West African name) as well as the reciprocity of self-identity and surroundings.

In *The Lightness Which is Our World*, Seen from Afar, Begamudré, like Pasold, writes about dislocation and renaming as a reciprocal process that reconstitutes both place and person. Unlike Pasold (or Seymour), he finds himself caught predominantly between two places: Canada and India (though the collection does include chronicles of his travels in Europe as well). He writes with humour in “The Road to Khandahar,” “There is also a Kandahar in Saskatchewan . . . There is also a Ceylon. The railway named it Ceylon because the local postmaster did not want it named after him. His name was Aldred.” The geography becomes more personal when Begamudré observes that “Hally means small village—in Kannada, my father’s mother tongue. He grew up speaking Kannada. He settled in Canada.” And it becomes still more personal when Begamudré says of Karnataka, “This is the proper name of my home state, but I often call it Mysore. It was renamed after the state boundaries were redrawn on linguistic lines. That happened the year I was born, so I can call it Mysore if I wish” (“The Road to Khandahar”). He influences place in his choice of names, but he is also renamed; in “Tampering,” a Vancouver taping of “Reach for the Top” finds a technician shortening Venkatesh to Ven and a Parisian professor adding an *accent aigu* to the end of Begamudré. Significantly, it is these tampered names that define the author; he writes as Ven Begamudré, altered by the geographies he has travelled through and by the ways

they have renamed him. Thus the opening sequence of poems ("Beligge," "Pakshigalu," "Prema," "Hagalu," "Nagarahavu," "Kopa," "Rathri," "Ane," "Shoka") ought not to be read as exotic fragments of a putatively authentic India, but rather as narrativized mythologies as mystical and unknowable to their translated author as to any other reader.

Begamudré suggests worlds (Canada, India, France, Italy) that are at once outside and inevitably integral to the identity of the migrant. Pasold similarly suggests a reciprocity between travel and constructions of identity (even in such intimate relationships as those between lovers). And Seymour, without international dislocation, suggests the silent interconnectedness of place and identity in moments of stillness. All three poets describe stillness in the experience of transience, and see redefinition as integral to self-identification.

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## Translators Uncovered

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**Agnes Whitfield, ed.**

*Writing Between the Lines: Portraits of Canadian Anglophone Translators.* Wilfrid Laurier UP  
\$65.00

Reviewed by Glen Nichols

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*Writing Between the Lines* will find a useful place on the shelves of students, researchers, and general readers interested in translation in Canada. Whitfield observes that literary translators occupy a mysterious, unfamiliar, and often invisible profession. So, recognizing the need to showcase prominent English Canadian literary translators (defined according to Whitfield by name recognition, awards won, prominence on book covers), to "delve beneath biography in order to capture the intercultural spirit," she assembled this "first comprehensive, inside view of the practice of Anglophone literary translation in Canada." Twelve English Canadian literary translators (William Hume Blake, John Glassco, Joyce Marshall, Philip Stratford,

D.G. Jones, Patricia Claxton, Sheila Fischman, Barbara Godard, Ray Ellenwood, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, John Van Burek, and Linda Gaboriau) are profiled by academic critics in substantial essays of 20 to 30 pages each. This collection is in fact only one half of a two-volume project; the French-language mirror of this volume (*Le métier en double: portraits de traductrices et traducteurs littéraires*) is published by Fides (2005) and features comparable essays on 14 French-Canadian translators).

Each essay covers significant biographical information about the translator, discusses how the subject got involved with translation, looks at the translator's relationship with the source authors and his or her methods of work, discusses the style of translation and gives examples of texts in comparison with the originals, summarizes the importance of the translator's work on the literary landscape, and finally includes a substantial bibliography listing both the translator's own work (translated texts as well as any published discussions about translation) and secondary resources about the translator. Where the translators are still alive, the contributors include first-hand interview material; in other cases references are made to the translators' own analysis of their work.

The essays have been very consistently edited and are without exception interesting and detailed, but the strong editorial hand has tended to level out the individual voices of the contributors, making cover to cover reading a bit tedious. However, for most readers dipping into the volume for information on particular translators this would not be noticed. On the other hand, the essays reveal the rich diversity in translation approaches from Lotbinière-Harwood's and Godard's insistence on the presence of the translator's voice in the target work to Claxton's and Fischman's assumptions about the translator's position of invisibility. This book should be required reading for any student of translation, an inspiring ground-eye view

of the profession, a sampling of the diversity and richness of the work that has been done in Canada.

Whitfield's introduction is thorough and gives a useful overview of the themes that arise in the individual essays, linking various ones in different ways. The bibliographies of secondary sources might have been more useful as a collective list at the end of the volume rather than in each essay. Likewise the use of endnotes instead of in-text parentheticals for all references means a lot of flipping back and forth.

However, these are quibbles. This is a fine "first view," substantial and very useful for researchers, interesting for casual readers who want to know about their favourite translator, and inspiring for translation students to see the diversity of models of literary translation and the sometimes circuitous paths one takes to translation. The approach to highlight only "prominent" translators is a fine beginning. It has been done with balance (for example between translators dealing with Quebec and those with non-Quebec source authors) and tact; however the book does not address its own role in furthering the canonizing of these translators, and I look forward to future work that examines less prominent figures and their role on the margins of Canadian literary translation.

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## Jesus Christ, Merna!

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**Barbara Mitchell and Ormond Mitchell**

*Mitchell: The Life of W.O. Mitchell: The Years of Fame, 1948-1998.* McClelland & Stewart \$39.99

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Reviewed by Frances W. Kaye

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On the cover, the familiar face gazes at us between the tousled white hair and the trademark turtleneck. This genial second volume of Mitchell's biography follows him from after the first great success of *Who Has Seen the Wind* to the end of his long and varied career. Written by his son and daughter-in-law, the biography is unusually intimate

and precise. While the first volume told of Mitchell's life before his children were born, almost all of the second volume covers years that Orm and later Barbara shared with Bill and Merna Mitchell, giving it great immediacy and depth, especially in portraying the rancorous but supportive and loving relationship between Mitchell and his wife, Merna. The focus, however, remains on W.O. Mitchell, writer and teacher.

Both Mitchell's output and his influence are astounding. The volume traces his work as fiction editor at *Maclean's* in the late 1940s and his relations with colleague Pierre Berton, with Ernest Buckler, whom Mitchell unceasingly encouraged, and with Farley Mowat, who would later wound Mitchell by ignoring his genuine help and accusing him of requesting only sentimental fiction. The next phase of Mitchell's life is the extraordinarily popular *Jake and the Kid* radio scripts that Mitchell wrote for the CBC. Like *Who Has Seen the Wind*, these shows presented Saskatchewan to all Canadians as a distinct and wryly attractive homeland, as well as enhancing the "Canadian content" and reputation of CBC. Writing weekly scripts was enormously demanding on their author, but allowed him to make a living as a writer, unusual for a Canadian in the 1950s. Later Mitchell tried to work with CBC television and the National Film Board, but those projects were less successful. Adapting the radio scripts to short stories did succeed, and many readers born long after the radio broadcasts have come to appreciate his characters as a result. Mitchell, who had loved acting since he was a boy, also wrote a number of stage plays—which were more successful than his television adaptations, but less so than the radio plays.

The biography goes on to cover Mitchell's teaching career as writer-in-residence at the universities of Calgary, Alberta, and Windsor, and his work as the director of creative writing at the Banff Centre. Toward the end of his life, Mitchell's greatest triumphs came

on the lecture circuit, where he became, in the eyes of his enchanted audiences, the homespun Jake Trumper—story teller, Canada's Mark Twain.

The main focus of the biography is on Mitchell as novelist, and particularly on *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* (1981) and on what may be the most important novel of the second part of his career, *The Vanishing Point* (1973), a book whose themes had occupied Mitchell for twenty years, since his experience teaching on the Eden Valley Stoney Reserve in Alberta. Like *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *Vanishing Point* attacks religious hypocrisy, bigotry, and racism, enemies Bill and Merna Mitchell opposed with decency and courage throughout their lives. Yet despite the lively and well-observed Stoney characters and Mitchell's long mutually satisfying friendships with Stoney people as observed by his son, something in Archie Nicotine and the other characters does not seem to live up to Mitchell's life experiences. As Mitchell remembered in an interview he taped with his son and daughter-in-law in 1981, the final form of the book—and the title—had come to him in an epiphany about the “vanishing point,” the place in a perspective drawing where parallel lines appear to meet. “I realized how relevant this silly thing was to my concern about the red segment of society, which is now in a state of despair and about to be sucked down the vanishing point.” That belief in “vanishing” seems to undercut the intensity of Mitchell's Stoney characters.

This second volume of an extremely congenial two-volume biography will be useful to Mitchell's many readers and admirers. Ormond and Barbara Mitchell are in command of telling details and point out Mitchell's shortcomings as well as his strengths. Yet their great affection for and knowledge of their subject makes his views seem normative to his biographers—even when the views partially undercut the work.

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## Plays in Theory

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**Ric Knowles, ed.**

*Judith Thompson: Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre. Volume Three.* Playwrights Canada \$25.00

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Reviewed by Anne Nothof

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This volume of essays continues a critical series on English Canadian drama, under the general editorship of Ric Knowles, that complements the publication of plays by Playwrights Canada Press, and provides an important resource for scholars and students. Judith Thompson is considered by some critics (Toles, Nunn) to be Canada's “best” playwright, and is probably the most analyzed playwright in the canon. The ethical ambiguities and the social and psychic violence in her works have inspired a wide range of responses from critics and audiences: anger or empathy, confusion or catharsis. In his introduction, Knowles outlines a rationale for the choice of the reprinted essays in this volume: they represent a variety of theoretical approaches over a 20-year period, and collectively they consider all of Thompson's eight full-length plays. Knowles also provides a clear overview of the theoretical trends in drama criticism, and the interconnectedness of the book's essays. This volume points to the rich intertextuality of Canadian theatre criticism but also evidences an imperative to engage in elaborate theoretic constructs which can eclipse the plays under analysis. However, the plays can inspire cogent philosophical ruminations extending beyond those ideas expressed in the plays themselves. This collection demonstrates the importance of critically considering the profoundly human dilemmas often enacted on the world stage. As Knowles suggests in his introduction, these onstage depictions constitute a journey towards understanding.

George Toles' essay, “‘Cause You're the Only One I Want:’ The Anatomy of Love in the Plays of Judith Thompson,” expresses a

"traditional humanist" perspective according to Knowles, who has some reservations about its "universalizing" tendencies, though he accepts its more recent resurrection as "radical" or "ethical" humanism in Kim Solga's essay. Indeed, in most of the essays, the imposition of critical formulae on Thompson's plays demonstrates how slippery terminology can be. Toles perceives the lineaments of Greek tragedy in Thompson's plays, and usefully compares them to the stories of Flannery O'Connor, in which marginalized individuals may be shocked violently into a state of grace. In a detailed explication of *White Biting Dog*, he rationalizes the sacrificial death of a woman as a way of achieving "psychic unity." This detached critical proclivity to see the many dead women in Thompson's plays as the means by which men [may] achieve salvation, is evident in several essays in this collection, particularly in Claudia Barnett's "Judith Thompson's Ghosts," in which she states that "being alive has less to do with breathing than with embracing and enacting identity."

In his foundational essay "Spatial Metaphor in the Plays of Judith Thompson," Robert Nunn traces the prevalent Freudian motifs, particularly in *I Am Yours*, as expressions of unacknowledged desire or dreams "that bring to the consciousness metaphors that only slowly reveal their meanings and continue to colour our lives." His identification of "what is beneath or behind the surface" is similarly interpreted in Jen Harvie's "Constructing Fictions of an Essential Reality," which focuses on Thompson's most produced play (in Canada and abroad) *Lion in the Streets*. Harvie's thesis is that the play "combines a powerful level of realism with equally powerful deconstructions of reality." In "Environmental Affinities: Naturalism and the Porous Body," Laura Levin reconfigures this argument in terms of the much maligned term "naturalism," which she recuperates as Strindberg's "high natural-

ism," after a convoluted theoretical journey via Raymond Williams, and completely bypassing Émile Zola.

Julie Adams uses audience response theory to configure possible (and contradictory) meanings for *I Am Yours*: the audience is "drawn into the emotional fabric of the play and implicated in the action," yet also functions as a "mediator." In "Going North on Judith Thompson's *Sled*," Sherrill Grace identifies conventional gendered binaries in Thompson's epic Canadian history play: "North = wilderness, mystery, otherness, and the feminine"—space of death and transfiguration; "South = civilization, familiar norms and social reality, and the masculine." Both Craig Stewart Walker and Penny Farfan provide more sympathetic readings of *Sled* in their essays, "Judith Thompson's Social Psychomachia" (from *The Buried Astrolabe*) and "Monstrous History" respectively. Walker references Catholic mysticism—spiritual redemption through the conception of the Godhead within the soul, as imagined in the birth of a baby. Farfan believes that Freud's notion of the "uncanny" is the best way into Thompson's plays: "moments wherein that which has been repressed manifests itself in everyday objects so that what is known, familiar, comfortable and 'homely' becomes at once unknown, strange, frightening, and 'unhomely.'" Farfan also provides a useful postcolonial reading of *Sled* as exposing a history of violence and oppression.

Both Dalbir Singh and Robyn Read consider the nature of the "monstrous" in *Capture Me*, the latter drawing on the "monster" theories of Margrit Shildrick to accord with Thompson's own views that the monster, like the "lion," is the evil within us, which can be opposed only by "pure forgiveness" (typically felt by a doomed woman). Even *Habitat*, which was reviewed negatively when it premiered at CanStage in Toronto, is accorded a densely theorized vindication in Kim Solga's commissioned essay, "Building

an Ethical Architecture: Judith Thompson's *Habitat* and the Shape of Radical Humanism." Both the play and the theory are recuperated in a critical *tour de force*, which "complicates the material" by citing the philosophies of a trio of female ethicists, but finally clarifies through a lucid consideration of the communal implications of the play's title.

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## Rueful Affirmative

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**Dany Laferrière**

*Vers le sud*. Boréal \$22.50

Reviewed by Mark Harris

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The great Argentine fabulist Julio Cortazar constructed *Rayuela* so that it could be read in two completely different ways. Readers could either peruse Chapters 1 through 56 and call it quits, or else follow the voluntary code that inserted 98 other chapters into the text (including one, Chapter 131, that had to be read twice). In similar fashion, Milorad Pavic published two versions of his *Book of the Khazars*, one "male" and one "female," the two texts differing by only one letter, but this letter was supposed to make all the difference in the world.

At first glance, it might seem as if Dany Laferrière was trying to execute similar alchemy in *Vers le sud*, but I suspect that his motivations were somewhat different from those of his Argentine and Yugoslavian predecessors. Put baldly, the truth is this: 15 of the novel's 20 chapters originally appeared, in slightly altered form, as short stories in *La Chair du maître*, a collection of tales published almost a decade earlier. Closer inspection reveals that nine of *La Chair*'s constituent parts were lopped off, the sequence of events was radically rearranged, and five entirely original chapters were composed to give *Vers le sud* more continuity.

To be fair, even the "copied" texts have been slightly recast, sentences expanding or contracting according to the novel's narrative needs. Thus, "L'après-midi d'un faune," the

second story in *La Chair du maître*, informs the reader that "J'ai dix-sept ans et je vis à Port-au-Prince, sur la rue Capois, près de la Place du Champs-de-Mars," while "L'après-midi d'un faune," the first chapter in *Vers le sud*, more expansively declares "J'ai dix-sept ans (on me donne facilement beaucoup plus à cause de ma taille et de mon caractère taciturne) et je vis à Port-au-Prince, sur la rue Capois, près de la Place du Champs-de-Mars."

The changes effected were clearly meant to give more focus to the story, a rather broad overview of Haitian society in the 1970s now concentrating more closely on the sexual tourism enjoyed by older white women from Canada and the US with dark-skinned beach boys a third their age. Not so coincidentally, this is also the theme of Laurent Cantet's 2005 feature *Vers le sud* (Story 13; Chapter 11), which, of necessity, was culled from *La Chair du maître* (*Vers le sud* would not appear in book form until a year after the film was released), a circumstance which raises yet another disturbing question.

Should Laferrière's 13th book (14th, if you count the published screenplay of *Comment conquérir l'Amérique*) therefore be seen as a movie novelization? If so, it is by far and away the best cinematic tie-in ever penned, which sounds impressive until you remember how absolutely dismal such works usually are. Indeed, more than one first-rate author has used a nom-de-plume for this sort of endeavour, fearing with some justice that their reputations might be permanently tarnished by even a fleeting association with such a despised sub-genre.

On the other hand, one cannot forget how many times Laferrière emphasized, in the aptly titled collection of interviews *Je suis fatigué*, how exhausted he felt by the non-stop literary production that had followed the success of his impishly titled first book, *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*. Perhaps the cannibalization of *La Chair du maître* owes more to the depletion of anecdotal resources than it does to any

sweetheart movie deal. After all, the author does claim to be able to live without writing. Who knows? Maybe he really means it.

In any case, we must now ask the question, which of these two umbilically-bound books deserves to be passed down to posterity? Inevitably, this query is even more vexatious than the ones already addressed. It also involves a choice of preferred disciplines. For the sociologically-minded, *La Chair du maître* is probably the more intriguing of the two tomes, since its social range is considerably broader, and the presence of the Tontons Macoutes and the other ghosts of Haiti's troubled past are far more oppressive.

As a sustained character study, however, *Vers le sud* would have to be accorded the laurels. Structurally, we segue back and forth between mainly very young, mainly male Haitians in search of just about anything, and mainly middleaged, mainly female North Americans in search of love (their husbands, when they are there at all, are much less sympathetic subjects, carnal but joyless exploiters). What Laferrière describes here is a rather delicate economy of need. Even if what is "supplied" doesn't quite match what is "demanded," the relations here are far less toxic than the ones obtained in Jean-Christophe Rufin's similarly-themed *La Salamandre*. Love might be rare, but at least liking is not.

Both *La Chair du maître* and *Vers le sud* fall into Laferrière's Caribbean cycle of books and, as such, are not always as immediately accessible to Northerners as are his hilariously mordant looks at Quebec's largest city. While the author never lets us forget his immigrant "outsider" status, no other writer (not Marie-Claire Blais, not Leonard Cohen, not Mordecai Richler, not Yves Beauchemin, not even Michel Tremblay) has ever written a book that captured the essence of Montreal as effectively as Laferrière did in *Chronique de la derive douce*. His recollections of growing up in a tainted Garden of Eden, conversely, might be central to his

own experience, but some dimension of this complicated coming-of-age process must remain forever opaque to non-Haitians.

Indeed, Laferrière is at his greatest when also at his funniest. Who can forget that memorable line from *Comment conquérir l'Amérique* when a cab driver in Port-au-Prince observes, "Paraît qu'à Montréal ça joue dur dans le taxi ces jours-ci . . . Mon frère Dieuseul m'a dit que les gens se plaignent qu'il y a trop de chauffeurs haïtiens, alors imagine notre problème ici."

Most writers can make us sad, but very few can make us happy. Laferrière belongs to this highly select minority, so without suggesting that he should ignore the grimmer side of existence, hammer and tong battles like the one fought above never occur when the author is really in his element which, for want of a better term, could fairly be described as "the rueful affirmative." The world might be going to hell in a handcart, but the courageously joyful can still ride it like a skateboard.

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## Back to Juno

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**Tim Saunders**

*Juno Beach: 3rd Canadian and 79th Armoured Divisions.* McGill-Queens UP \$18.95

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Reviewed by Chris Leach

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Operation Overlord, the 6 June 1944 Allied invasion of Nazi occupied France, has inspired a massive historiography. The Canadian part of the invasion on two beach landing sectors collectively named "Juno" has been quite well served in a relatively small Canadian military historiography that is prone to placing war experience into the process of nation building as opposed to being concerned with operational or tactical analysis. In his *Juno Beach*, Tim Saunders has certainly asserted the Canadian national agenda, but, through a heavy reliance on first-hand accounts of the battle for the beaches, his narrative offers a sense of the



tactical problem faced by the Canadian and British soldiers. If war can create a sense of national consciousness, the quotes and anecdotes in Saunder's book need little embellishment to satisfy the stated intent of promoting the "deeds of Canadian soldiers" in a positive light.

This short work of 190 pages is illustrated copiously with photographs and contemporary maps giving the reader a good sense of the towns and terrain through which Canadian soldiers fought. The narrative itself is succinct. After very brief introductory chapters that provide context to the invasion and describe the opposing forces involved, the battle narrative is sub-divided into chapters and sections dealing with the actions of each Canadian unit fighting in its particular Juno beach sector ("Nan" or "Mike"). Rarely distracted, the narrative focuses primarily on the assault on the beach and the advance into the immediate hinterland. Saunders sings the praises of the Canadian military from its "highest reputation in the Great War" to the training and successful landing of the "tough Canadian soldiers" on the beaches of Normandy. Other allied formations, such as the 48th Royal Marine Commandos and the various armoured units of the 79th Armoured Division, are only discussed because of their direct participation at Juno. The German forces, including primary accounts from their perspective, are quite briefly considered and largely provided as the foil to the Canadians.

Immediately apparent in the battle narrative is the author's decision to limit his own text in favour of extensive use of anecdotal evidence drawn from soldier accounts. Quoting from official records, orders, officer's despatches, unit war diaries, and personal journals, Saunders provides a very direct link with the events. Occasionally, further analysis or explanation of the broader context of the operation would be useful. For example, the fact that British and Canadian objectives for D-Day were not entirely ful-

filled is quickly dismissed; the objectives were part of appropriately ambitious planning that defined them as contingencies. The reader is largely left to the foregoing battle narrative to decipher the more immediate reasons why the Canadians failed to penetrate deeper beyond the beaches. However, the personal accounts are nicely woven together and one gets a sense of the experience from within the limited narrative scope of an infantryman or a tanker or a medic.

The lack of footnotes, or even a bibliography, and the absence of explicit historical argumentation make *Juno Beach* of limited formal academic value. Clearly written for a wider public, the narrative is well constructed and its use of soldier's accounts is edifying and often powerful. Finally, Saunders offers a very useful guide to visiting the relevant sites of the Juno beach assault and other D-Day related locations. With its accessible script and personalized accounts of the action, this book will be valuable to visitors to these sites. *Juno Beach* brings alive the events memorialized in France today in Commonwealth cemeteries and the many museums dedicated to the invasion and the sacrifices of Allied soldiers.

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## Of Note

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### Margaret Atwood

*The Tent*. McClelland & Stewart \$24.99

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On 26 May, 1995 Vancouver Public Library's new Central Library opened at 350 West Georgia Street. Strikingly enough, this impressive building designed by Moshe Safdie is built on the model of the Roman Coliseum: a rectangle in an ellipse of 35,150 square meters, with its colour, from granite quarried in Horsefly, BC, perfectly matching the terracotta of its original counterpart. Located downtown on one of the busiest arteries in Vancouver, which leads to the

Lion's Gate Bridge, and rising in the midst of 30-storey glass and metal high rises, this library strikes me as a powerful visual reminder of the resurgence of Antiquity in Canadian contemporary life. This resurgence, which can also be interpreted, *pace* Birney, as a haunting performed by the ghosts of the Old World, is not only present in architecture: it occupies a special place in literature. One needs only think of Sheila Watson, Robert Kroetsch, or Anne Carson, to name but a few of the Canadian writers who have been particularly interested in myths.

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is probably the most eloquent instance of this revisiting of Greek mythology. Atwood's latest small collection, *The Tent*, also illustrates this trend. It is composed of three parts, and 35 pieces that could diversely be called short stories, narrative poems, fables, and proverbs. The revisiting of Antiquity is particularly visible in "It's Not Easy Being Half Divine" and "Salome Was a Dancer," which respectively stagedirect contemporary trash versions of Helen of Troy and Salome, but it is also perceptible in some of the drawings by Atwood that accompany a few stories. The drawing that is juxtaposed to "Salome Was a Dancer" is paradoxically not influenced by Antiquity but has affinities with the illustrations of the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*. The drawing set in between the two pages of "Impenetrable Forest" is on the contrary very much influenced by the art of Egyptian design as are the twin illustrations of "Eating the Birds." The curlicues in the drawing which illustrates "Voice" best emblemize Atwood's design: they commingle the fabulous and the mythic veins by transforming the traditional Greek motif used to frame a mosaic into a series of arabesques symmetrically arranged on each side of a woman whose skirt seems made of scales. As can be expected from Atwood's art, be it verbal or visual, the result is not sweetly decorative: it is disquieting. Everything in this collection is meant to dispell

quiet certainties. The drawing on the cover is red and black and the wolves or foxes or coyotes on each side of the tent have tails which rise into the sky like flaming trees. Atwood is not holding up a mirror to nature: one of her pieces is entitled "No More Photos," she is holding up a lamp to the citizens of "post-colonial" (the title of another stern piece) democracies and like Diogenes, the cynic philosopher from Antiquity, she is looking for an honest man. Atwood is a prophet: she is writing on the wall, she is carrying a torch, and she speaks from the cave to warn us against the illusions we live by. Her writing is chilly and terse and economical. A cross between La Roche Foucault's maxims and Augusto Monterroso's short shorts, it also resembles her own former excursions in the field of the miscellaneous: *Good Bones* or *Murder in the Dark*. Atwood excels at short pieces: an unrelenting poet, she demands of us that we feel responsible: *we did that, to them*. She leaves us wiser and sadder. — HÉLIANE VENTURA

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**Peter Such**

*Earthbaby*. Ekstasis \$21.95

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**Karl Schroeder**

*The Engine of Recall*. Red Deer P \$26.95

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What makes good science fiction? And what makes good SF good fiction? As SF has gained literary ground over the past half-century, these questions have become both more and less relevant. In the two books under review, they still appear pertinent.

Although he has written in many genres, Peter Such is perhaps best known for his novel about the Beothuks, *Riverrun*. Now, with *Earthbaby* ("a riverrun book"), he has tried his hand at science fiction. In the too near future of 2039, global warming has raised the seas, and North America lives under the techno-Christian-fundamentalist "Lifeist Christian Soldier syndicate," ruled by its General Foreman, President thanks to

a rigged election. But NASA is sending five astronauts, representing various factions, to bring a newly built space habitat near Mars into full, independent operation, a hope for future exploration of space. All of which Such establishes in the opening chapters. After a safe lift off, the army tries to kill NASA's civilian head, Andrew Tremayne, because, as the astronauts discover, Foreman has placed atomic weapons on board the supposedly peaceful habitat. The plot unfolds in two linked narratives, one the "social dynamics" journal kept by "Dr. Lillith Shawna-dithit" on board Earthbaby, the other a thriller concerning Tremayne and the various revolutionaries he joins in their battle against Foreman's army. Such does a good job of laying in little snippets of information indicating how the world has reached its desperate state. Yet much of the "science" is bluff. On the whole, *Earthbaby* works quite well as a thriller. As a study in human relations it has its good and bad moments. As science fiction, it stumbles occasionally.

Author of three fine novels, Karl Schroeder knows his science and writes sharp tales with finely nuanced characters who feel at home in their various future worlds. In the ten stories in *The Engine of Recall*, he ranges from a near future Earth to the farthest reaches of the galaxy, but his central interest remains how his characters live through the challenges their environments offer them. These stories range widely. Two concern a shy isolate who willingly explores such dangerous places as Chernobyl for various government and corporate agencies, finding answers to problems no one even guessed existed there. Others deal with a mother on a dark world who receives information about an impending disaster, a rebel who escapes from her space colony on board an alien ship, a pilot who wants to believe that an ancient alien culture was peaceful but finds a different horrifying truth. Even the earliest stories demonstrate his sense of character, especially his understanding of loners, as well

as his ability to imply a wholly different future culture in just a few specific details. Indeed, Schroeder offers a perfect example of the best SF today, fully cognizant of scientific possibilities, and wholly able to construct societies and cultures whose inhabitants fill out the stories to be found in such futures.

— DOUGLAS BARBOUR

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### André D. Beaudoin

*La grosse ferme d'à côté.* Service ADB 15,00 \$

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Cet ouvrage est divisé en dix-neuf tableaux qui suivent chronologiquement pendant toute une année la vie d'une famille d'agriculteurs composée de Martin et Céline Beauregard, couple dans la jeune quarantaine, et de leurs quatre enfants.

Nous ne replongeons pas dans l'idéologie agriculturiste qui a longtemps régné sur les lettres canadiennes-françaises. Nous sommes bien à la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce qui n'exclut pas la nostalgie d'un soi-disant bon vieux temps. En effet, l'agriculteur est désormais aux prises avec diverses difficultés économiques : le prix des céréales stagne, celui du lait fléchit, le nombre de fermes diminue à cause des coûts d'exploitation et du manque de relève. Ce sont surtout les petits producteurs qui ne peuvent tenir le coup : « L'avenir n'est pas dans les fermes laitières de 35 vaches. » Or, si les producteurs de lait augmentent leurs quotas, cela est très coûteux aussi.

L'histoire commence par une soirée donnée à l'occasion de l'anniversaire de Céline Beauregard. Quelques agriculteurs du coin se retrouvent autour d'un plat de spaghetti et, en plus de parler de tout et de rien, ils sont évidemment amenés à discuter des difficultés qu'ils ont à survivre. Lors de cette soirée, le lecteur apprend qu'un des invités, François, il y a déjà deux ans, s'était départi de son quota de lait, et qu'un autre, Jean-Gilles, vient d'en faire autant du sien.

Cette dernière révélation est un choc pour Martin Beauregard qui espère toujours

pouvoir vivre de la production de son lait. C'est qu'il aime bien son métier, Martin, et la vie au grand air: « le bruit de la neige, qui craquait sous ses pas, plaisait à ses oreilles, même si elles étaient assourdies par l'épaisse tuque qui coiffait sa tête. » Il ne se plaint pas de traire les vaches soir et matin, de laver les trayeuses, d'aller d'une étable à l'autre, de les écurer, de s'occuper du vêlage, de soigner les vaches: « Prendre le temps de les brosser, d'assurer leur confort et de rendre les lieux attrayants faisait partie de ses passions. Il aimait la senteur de l'étable et se rappelait souvent les commentaires que sa belle-sœur lui avait faits un jour: « Dans ton étable, Martin, ça pue bon! »

Martin serait donc un homme heureux si les contraintes de la vie d'agriculteur n'étaient si lourdes. Il commence à se poser des questions. Ce qui le tourmente met du temps à devenir clair dans son esprit et se manifeste d'abord par des accès de mauvaise humeur: il devient morose, nerveux, maussade et s'emporte facilement, tout cela à cause de la crise qui frappe le monde agricole.

Au cours de l'année, Martin et Cécile n'ont guère de distractions. Ils se permettent quand même une fin de semaine à Québec où ils ne trouvent rien d'autre à faire que de s'amuser à une bataille d'oreillers dans leur chambre d'hôtel. Une cabane à sucre marque la fin de l'hiver et Martin est heureux à l'idée de se remettre à la culture du sol. Au cours de l'été, ils font un pique-nique avec des amis.

Un jour, Ti-Paul annonce qu'il a renoncé à son quota de lait pour placer son argent. Il a suivi des cours à l'université et appris à boursicoter. Alors que toute la vie paysanne semble s'écrouler autour de Martin, son fils Alexandre, lisant dans *La Terre de chez nous* qu'un certain Garneau veut vendre sa terre, manifeste un vif intérêt pour ce terrain. L'espoir renaît dans la famille Beauregard.

Ce livre au style simple et au langage clair, plutôt prosaïque, nous montre le travail des agriculteurs, l'environnement, les relations entre voisins et gens du même métier, et

gens de la ville aussi. Martin Beauregard est ancré sur sa terre et dans ses habitudes; il est impuissant face aux mutations qui touchent le monde paysan, et il souffre de devoir subir les événements qu'elles entraînent sans pouvoir les influencer. — PAUL GENUIST

### Emily Carr

*Wild Flowers*. Royal BC Museum/UBC Press \$19.95

*Wild Flowers* (printed here for the first time, with its idiosyncratic spelling intact) assembles several sketches Emily Carr began writing in 1941 and abandoned later that year to focus instead on the publication of *Klee Wyck*. Kathryn Bridge writes an informative afterword to this edition, recounting the history of the manuscript, quoting from Carr's letters and defensive diary entries. One friend to whom Carr had shown her work had complained that the typescript had no "plot." ("Of course not," writes Carr, "but it had life.") Carr goes on: "People demand something to pin their thoughts to. The rusley silent growing the breath of life is not enough." Bridge's editorial decision to illustrate the sketches with full-colour botanical paintings by Victoria-based Emily Henrietta Woods, who once taught art to Carr, perhaps goes against Carr's sense that the words should speak for themselves, but Woods' paintings add immeasurably to the attractiveness of this edition.

While the vignettes as Carr left them are both uneven and unfinished, much "breath of life" shows through. Affirming that "Every exalted garden aristocrat has its beginning in a wild flower and if that garden flower is left to its own devices it will sneak back to wildness," Carr opens the series with a call to pay attention to the uncivilized and undomesticated. The sketches that follow, most vigorous when most vernacular, portray some twenty different flowers, from daisies and wild roses to ghost flowers and brown tulips. Sometimes they turn into nascent stories, as

with “Mint,” or personal anecdote, as with “Catnip.” Sometimes they strive for eloquence and fall short, as with her painterly attempt to describe the “straight” yellow of stonecrop: it is not burning, nor butter, not canary, nor toasted, but is the “yellowest of all the yellow flowers.” Other times they bristle admirably, as when Carr complains that “people” sentimentalize the willow and turn catkins into “pigmy monstrosities,” or when she defends the “queenship of . . . skunkiness” that is the right of the skunk cabbage. One plant whose name she cannot remember she calls an “outlaw,” “a self-assertive bouncer.” Another (“fireweed”) she calls “exceedingly touchy,” but adds that it is “a hider of scars, a healer . . . the flower of flowers for a new, raw country which must suffer cruel disfigurement in the process of taming.”

Such images—of taming, blood, and disfigurement—suggest alternative ways to read this text: as an account of normative standards of judgment *in society*, and of the private tortures of those who see differently. In the vignette about “Broom,” with its avant-garde vocabulary, the species is less a plant than a “Blatantly gorgeous” process—which (says Carr) the vapid “tourist,” who goes around “Bleating, blaailing over . . . gilded glory,” will never understand. For broom is *not native* but an interloper who “sprang [up] and jazzed our land.” Strong words, for 1941. The sketch nevertheless closes almost resignedly: “Women tried making broom wine. . . . Nobody liked broom wine. . . . But Broom went on invading and the tourist went on maudling.” — W.H. NEW



## Brian Wright-McLeod

*The Encyclopedia of Native Music: More Than a Century of Recordings from Wax Cylinder to the Internet.* U of Arizona P \$34.95

This book is long overdue and a valuable resource for musicians, musicologists, and anyone who has ever wanted to know more about Native music. Brian Wright-McLeod, the author of this ambitious, but as he acknowledges far from complete, compendium, is certainly qualified. As a Native radio host, Native music columnist, and reviewer, he realized the need for this volume since much information about Native musicians has been ignored, marginalized and/or misrepresented. The burning question that fuels this book is: what is Native music? Wright-McLeod argues that what makes the music Native is a combination of the music and the musicians. Like the musicians, the music has been transformed over time, adopting different forms and styles “to become the hybrids of modern sounds we recognize today.”

Following a thoughtful introduction, the author structures the Encyclopedia into seven categories: the Arctic/Circumpolar Region, Chicken Scratch, Contemporary Music, Flute Music, Peyote Ritual Music, Powwow Music, and Traditional/Archival Music. Each section begins with a concise, accessible, and informative overview and history. These introductions give useful context and background, inspiring readers to learn more. For each musician, the author provides discographies, appearances, and, where applicable, selected film and television appearances. Wright-McLeod is the first to admit that this is not a comprehensive collection and points out that he is “more concerned about cataloging the music of indigenous peoples rather than providing a massive overview of American-based folk music derived from Native origins.”

Musicians will want to read and re-read this book. For the casual reader, the contem-

porary music section is the most interesting because it gives short biographical summaries not only of such well known musicians as Robbie Robinson and Buffy St. Marie, but also of very influential musicians, for example Mildred Bailey, the famous pre-war jazz singer, who have Native ancestry. As you thumb through the pages, you learn all sorts of interesting information. For instance, Dennis Banks, co-founder of the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) was a recording artist as was Russell Means (another A.I.M. radical). The author also illustrates the influence that Native music has had on popular music and on musicians like Santana and The Band. Jessie Ed Davis, for example, was a pivotal guitarist in the Rock and Roll era; his status as a session artist was finally recognized in 1998 when he received the First Americans in the Arts with a Lifetime Musical Achievement Award and was inducted into the Oklahoma State Hall of Fame (June 19, 2002). Pete Townsend of The Who noted that Link Wray played a formative influence on him and his music. These are just a few of the connections readers will find in this fascinating Encyclopedia. So whether you are a musician or just a music lover, Brian Wright-McLeod's pages provide a journey not to be missed. — DEE HORNE



# Canadian Literature



A QUARTERLY  
OF CRITICISM  
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## What about Gabrielle Roy?

Jessica Langston

It was the end of winter so each morning there was a holding of breath, a hesitation before the day began faltering towards spring. I was nineteen. The year before I had graduated from high school and now I spent every afternoon selling badly-made clothing in a local shopping mall. I was on the brink, my life as undetermined as the weather. This was the year I read *The Tin Flute* for the first time. Having pulled it from my parent's bookshelf with a vague memory of my grandmother's recommendation, I curled up on the living room couch and was instantly lost to the five and dime, to Saint-Henri, to the words of Gabrielle Roy.

I have always believed it is simple to judge whether a work of art is good, whether it is effective and affective. Perhaps a bit anti-climactic and certainly lacking in drama, but I will not tell you that reading *The Tin Flute* changed my life. I suspect that regardless of that winter's reading selections I would have quit my hated job and returned to school. But, then, that is not the purpose of art. The key to its success, the fulfillment of its purpose is, rather, its ability to evoke a feeling of longing, or yearning—although not for a specific. Longing in the abstract. This was the sentiment clouding my nineteen-year-old heart and, almost ten years later, for me, the literature of Gabrielle Roy continues to evoke this ambiguous desire in a way that only good art can.

Such yearning somehow prompted the Colloquium that gave rise to many of the articles in this issue of *Canadian Literature*. Because Gabrielle Roy's writing has found its way inside us, has made us wonder, ask questions, and eventually made us writers ourselves. Still, despite our interest in Gabrielle Roy, despite her place in the Canadian canon, often her work falls by the wayside. For the English-speaking, the phrase "Canadian literature" is almost invariably met with the name Margaret Atwood or other English writers such as Margaret Laurence, Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen. But what of Gabrielle Roy, a forerunner to all these, and a writer whose work is certainly on par if not superior to those who are the preferred and prominent examples of Canadian writing? What about Gabrielle Roy?

In her autobiography, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, Roy reminisces about her years as a student in the public school board. While "the doors to English literature were wide open" and the students given "access to its greatest minds" (54), their education in French literature was severely limited. French poetry and prose was reduced to only a few writers, a few works, and so much of Roy's passion for literature found its outlet in her studies of Shakespeare, although, as she states, "If, at that age, I'd been able to read Rimbaud, Verlaine, Baudelaire, and Radiguet, I can only imagine what it would have done to me" (54).

I can only imagine how reading *Bonheur d'occasion* or *Rue Deschambault* would have changed my own educational experience;

however, for English-speaking Canadians the exposure to French literature is even more limited than it was in Roy's time and situation. My own introduction to French literature included *Le Petit Prince* and *Tin-tin*, no doubt celebrated classics, but perhaps not as horizon-expanding and simultaneously applicable to the Canadian everyday as Roy's plots and characters. It is only in recent years, reading Gabrielle Roy in both translation and in the original French, that I have come to appreciate and acquire a real interest in the literature of French Canada. Moreover, to a feminist, the work of Gabrielle Roy acquires even more significance. She is a precursor to the recent abundance of women's writing, both a testimonial to her forward thinking and a key contribution to the literary history of feminism in Canada. In an interview, Carol Shields once commented "It seemed to me . . . that I could never find novels about the kind of women I knew . . . where were the reflective women I knew . . . It was a joy to find a writer such as Gabrielle Roy, and the fact that she grew up in Manitoba [Canada] made her even more of a model; she gave me courage to trust the stories of ordinary people." I felt much the same.

Which leads to two more reasons for this special issue of *Canadian Literature* on Gabrielle Roy. First, in order to appreciate and explore Gabrielle Roy's voice as an important part of Canadian women's writing. But second, and perhaps more to the point, we are reading Gabrielle Roy as an essential part of Canadian literature in general. This is an examination quintessential to the *Groupe de Recherche sur Gabrielle Roy* and their various publications, research projects, and conferences. What has primarily been the subject matter of French-Canadian scholars, Gabrielle Roy and her literary legacy, also is explored and interpreted by their English-speaking colleagues. By working through this material together we encounter new perspectives, enjoy different opinions and establish an important network

of theorists, critics, and writers all pursuing a common goal of engaging with and encouraging others to engage with the work of Gabrielle Roy and other Montreal writers.

What better place to begin a renewed exchange of ideas between French and English scholars than with an author who stands at the threshold between the two. As François Ricard states in his biography *Gabrielle Roy, A Life*: "To this day, Gabrielle Roy is probably the only truly 'Canadian' writer in the federal sense of the word, meaning the only one whose work genuinely transcends the language barrier and is embraced unreservedly by the two communities as their own—and by the two literary establishments" (468). Gabrielle Roy is a writer who has always appealed to both French and English Canada, despite her lack of prominence among the English speakers of recent years. As such, she is an excellent point of departure and an excellent source of inspiration for academics and writers of the two languages. The work of Gabrielle Roy serves as a doorway: on either side of it there exist often divided literary worlds. The Colloquium opened the door and allowed participants to move freely through the writing of French and English Canada in a mutually enriching examination of Gabrielle Roy and the tin flutes she has led us to play.

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## Gabrielle Roy and the Question of Canada

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Paul G. Socken

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Nothing gives so just an idea of an age as genuine letters; nay, history waits for its last seal from them.

— Horace Walpole

It is no secret that Gabrielle Roy was a federalist. However, neither has it been much



noted or discussed. François Ricard does write that the election of the Parti québécois government in 1976 and the increasingly strong independence movement, especially among Quebec writers, “heurtenant de front ses convictions fédéralistes et son attachement au Canada” (490). Ricard states that Gabrielle Roy was emotional about the issue:

Lors de nos rencontres, nous avons souvent des discussions à ce sujet; elle connaissait mes opinions, qui n'étaient pas les siennes, et les respectait, mais elle ne cachait pas l'hostilité, voire l'angoisse que lui inspiraient le Parti québécois et les intellectuels nationalistes. (490)

Yet, she never publicly added her voice to those opposed to Quebec secession.<sup>1</sup>

Just as Gabrielle Roy was deeply moved by the plight of women of her time without writing explicitly about the issue, so, too, was she greatly concerned about the spectre of Quebec separatism without using her position for political purposes. The topic of women in society was, indeed, prominent throughout her works, but it was rarely the central theme of her stories or novels. The theme was developed in greater depth in her unpublished works,<sup>2</sup> and she communicated her concern about her country in her correspondence. I will examine those letters in this paper.

William Arthur Deacon was a major literary critic in English Canada, literary editor of the *Globe and Mail*, and confidant of Gabrielle Roy. He first wrote to her on 16 February 1946, saying that, although he did not speak French, he thought it was time “we tried to know each other across the language barrier.” That expression struck a chord with Roy as she responded quickly, writing that she was delighted to see “more and more signs of better understanding” between the two communities in Canada (27 February 1946). On March 11 of that year, she wrote to him saying that “I too love Canada dearly . . .

No, I don't think that I would care to live in any other country.”

Some have criticized Roy for not taking up other causes. In fact, Gabrielle Roy was taken to task by Cécile Lafontaine for revealing only posthumously how poorly French Canadians were treated during her childhood in Manitoba in spite of the Francophones thinking of her as their champion.

Gary Geddes, a teacher and critic, was compiling a collection of essays in an attempt to reach across that “language barrier” and create harmony and understanding between French and English Canada.<sup>3</sup> Gabrielle Roy wrote to him (13 April 1977) to sympathize with the cause but in the end she decided against the idea of contributing an essay: “If I had the least hope that by my words I might be helpful to my country, I certainly would be writing all day. In a sense, most of my books have tried just that: bring more understanding between the two sides of our country which I both [sic] love.”

At that same time (14 April 1977), she also refused an appeal from Peter C. Newman, then editor of *Maclean's* magazine, to write an article on the Referendum debate. She argued that a contribution from her to an English magazine would not be helpful as the problem was mainly one of persuading Quebecers themselves and most, she felt, would favour Canada. She wrote that the air in Quebec was “charged with electricity” and she feared that her words “would only add fuel to the fire.”

Gabrielle Roy's correspondence with writers was just as revealing. Hugh MacLennan was a major novelist and professor at McGill University. He was an English Canadian deeply concerned about the fate of Canada. She wrote a short note to him (21 November 1970) concerning an article he had published in the *Montreal Gazette*: “You are so right: murder of the truth, that's what we have done and suffered from for so long. Perhaps people like us have not said so loudly enough and early enough.” This is an intriguing

comment since Roy consistently declined invitations to write on the subject she felt so strongly about. This comment reveals either a regret that she did not take a more active role, or it is simply meant as encouragement to others.

MacLennan's article, titled "Murder of truth...murder of people," had appeared in the Saturday 21 November 1970 issue of the *Montreal Gazette*. It was a lengthy and important essay in which MacLennan took to task the news media and educators for fostering an atmosphere in which separatist rhetoric and actions were condoned: "The old nationalism rested solidly on territory (mainly rural); on the Church, which fostered it; on language. This new nationalism is also insistent on language, but it knows little or nothing of rural territory and hates the Church and all it stands for. This is why the generation gap in Quebec is now more agonizing than anywhere else I can think of."

Hugh MacLennan responded to Roy in a letter dated 3 December 1970 in which he stated that, for him, "what has happened in Quebec is only a little more painful than what is happening everywhere, and for the same reason." He asked her if she has read Julien Benda's *La Trahison des clercs*. Benda's book, published in Paris in 1927, was a scathing attack on the intellectuals of the day who, in Benda's view, had abdicated their moral responsibility. He accused Barrès, Lemaître, Péguy, Maurras and others of siding with other nationalists and anti-Semites against the best interests of French society. He considered this a "trahison," or betrayal, of the great Western philosophical tradition of universalism, humanity, and justice embodied in such thinkers as Socrates, Montaigne, Newton, Rousseau, and Goethe amongst others. In his book, much known and discussed in its time, he appealed to his contemporaries to transcend local or regional hatreds and reflect on their heritage of humanism. Clearly, MacLennan was linking what he considered a local, historical hatred

in the form of Quebec separatism to other movements in the world that divided peoples and nations, even though Quebec's nationalism was not as virulent as other forms.

In that same letter, he said authors are "always prescient" and stated that her Montreal novels, *Bonheur d'occasion* and *Alexandre Chenevert*, "tell more about our times in the province than all the journalism put together." He mentions a popular, young separatist and writer of the time, Pierre Vallières: "Pierre Vallières [sic] was seven years old in the year your great novel was published!" MacLennan is presumably suggesting that some young separatists were not sufficiently aware of the history of their province and of intellectual movements to come to what he considered to be the proper conclusions about secession.

A couple of days later (5 December 1970), MacLennan wrote to her again. He had clearly been preoccupied by the issue and wanted to share a personal observation with Gabrielle Roy: "It occurs to me that les jeunes Québécois<sup>4</sup> are much in the same position now as my own Highland Scotch ancestors who learned, 200 years ago, that they had given life and service and devotion to unworthy leaders. Nothing can be more confusing and traumatic. Our people, of course, were destroyed in their way of life, enclosed or transported to Canada and the plantations. The memory rests in their partial consciousness, and if I have had an instinctive sympathy and perhaps understanding of French Canada, that is the explanation." MacLennan is sympathetic to French Canadians, not in their desire to be independent of Canada, but in their betrayal by their leaders just as, in his previous letter, he referred to the French intellectuals' betrayal of their humanist traditions by allowing themselves to fall prey to sectarian hatred. MacLennan does not elaborate in the letters, but his allusions to Benda and to the Scots suggest that he considered French Canadian leaders to have

conspired with their oppressors (leaders of the past, like the Scots) or to have exploited their suffering compatriots' vulnerabilities (leaders of the present, like the contemporaries of Benda).

Like Hugh MacLennan, Margaret Laurence was an English-Canadian writer.<sup>5</sup> Roy and Laurence wrote a total of 32 letters to each other over a period of seven years (1976-1983). The correspondence was in English as Margaret Laurence could not read or write French (for which she castigated herself to Roy) whereas Roy was bilingual. The French Canadian's need to function in English in order to advance professionally in Quebec before the 1960s was a factor in the rise of separatist sentiment. Margaret Laurence was painfully conscious of this and wrote proudly that her own daughter did know French.

Gabrielle Roy's letters to Margaret Laurence reveal a profound attachment to Canada and real pain about the potential for a political crisis between Quebec and the rest of Canada. In a letter to Margaret Laurence, Gabrielle Roy wrote about their mutual love for the land, especially the West, and "the black loam . . . stretching to reach the perfectly blue sky" (28 September 1976). This memory struck her as "the real Prairie . . . the heart of Canada . . . something rich, mysterious, solid and yet so heavenly!" (qtd. Socken 23). Margaret Laurence wrote to Roy, on 17 February 1977, after the historic Quebec election of 16 November 1976 that brought the Parti québécois government to power and made Quebec sovereignty a major political issue. Laurence wrote that she wished more English Canadians "could have realized, really realized, long ago, the way in which many people in Quebec feel about their history, their language, their heritage, their identity" (qtd. Socken 32). She believed that translation of books "from English to French, and from French into English, is one area which can help" (qtd. Socken 32). Laurence had told Roy in her letters that Roy's writing and that of other

Quebec writers would have been inaccessible to her without translation and that translations had allowed her an entry into Quebec culture that would have otherwise been impossible.

Roy responded several months later (4 June 1977), mentioning, what is most painful to me at this point: the politics of Quebec. Yes, of course, some of it is good. We had to have a change. But I detect such arrogance, such tyranny already and, worst of all, the intolerance which often goes with a certain form of incorruptibility. I detect so much of the wrongs I have known all too well in my childhood and youth. I detect too much of this to live now in hope and fervent expectation as one should. Of course, the ship can still straighten itself. But words now, I'm afraid, are of no avail. Except, coming from you and the generous group you adhere to and from our English-speaking brothers and allies. There you see: "English" has come under my pen instead of, as it should be, "Canadian friends. Besides, just now, I can do no more than try to recuperate and meditate in silence." (qtd. Socken 40-41)

Later that month, Laurence responded (27 June 1977), informing Roy that she had contributed an essay<sup>6</sup> to Gary Geddes' volume but stating that "I can't believe it will do much good, actually, but one must keep on trying to communicate. . . . I found it very hard to write, and although I rewrote it about 10 times I am still not too happy with it. It is quite emotional, but how can one write about this subject without being emotional?" (qtd. Socken 43). There are 31 short essays in the collection by politicians, authors, critics, and academics. Margaret Laurence's contribution is an appeal for understanding and a sympathetic hearing: "We are, all of us, it seems to me, bound up in one another's history" (22). She adds, "We are faced with a turning point sharper than any in our history. If we can communicate well and truly,

if we can listen to and hear one another, at the grassroots, then the present situation could become our greatest opportunity yet, to right old wrongs and to learn about one another" (25).

In her letter to Roy, Laurence stated:

everyone is terribly concerned and indeed heartbroken, but it is so difficult to know what to do. I myself feel that the views of many Anglophone Canadians are not being adequately or even accurately presented to the Quebec people by the federal government. To express, as I and many of my friends do, the passionate hope that this country may remain one, does not imply a faith in the status quo, of course, and I wish this could be communicated. I am sure we need a new constitution and have needed one for a long time. The talk of "repatriating" the constitution seems to me to be an exercise in futility—all we really need to do is to announce that our constitution is our country's business and ours alone. I expect Britain would be quite glad to be rid of it, but in any event, what could Britain do even if some diehard imperialists there disapproved? Nothing obviously. (qtd. Socken 42-43)

The constitution was, in fact, "patriated" from Britain, or brought to Canada so that final approval for Canadian legislation rested in Canadian hands alone, on 17 April 1982. This "patriation" included a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and was done without the consent of the Quebec legislature whose government was separatist. The final arrangement was concluded and signed without the Premier of Quebec, René Lévesque. This omission—federalists argued that it was impossible to convince Lévesque to sign on—occasioned deep resentment, bitterness, and alienation in Quebec at the time. The Supreme Court of Canada did rule, however, that the Constitution was in force throughout Canada including Quebec.

Roy wrote to Laurence (4 July 1977) in a most intensely personal letter:

How are we to write about our country at this hour, if not with our sorrowful hearts, our pain and regrets, perhaps. I know I could only shed tears at this moment. But my task might be harder even than yours, for it is my side of our people that I would have to move, convince, and they too being in a most excited frame of mind, I could hardly get to them. So you are right . . . Just listen. It is a time, indeed, for silence, meditation, or, if words it must be, let them be of friendship and understanding. (qtd. Socken 45)

Roy's feeling of powerlessness expressed itself as sadness. Her reaction to the situation was powerful but she believed that she had no real ability to change the course of events. Her comment that Quebecers were in "a most excited frame of mind" suggested that she felt that part of the problem was an irrational reaction by Quebecers over which she had no control.

Gabrielle Roy's federalism appealed not only to English Canadians. Félix-Antoine Savard was a priest and writer whose 1937 novel, *Menaud maître-draveur*, was one of the most nationalist and patriotic novels ever produced in the province. In that most poetic novel, a "cri du coeur," Savard appealed to French Canadians to beware of their province being taken over by "les étrangers," foreigners, and cautioned them that their very heritage was endangered. If ever there were a writer who would take the separatist side, one would have expected it to be Savard. Quite the contrary, in fact. He was one of the few Quebec writers who took a very public and personal stand against secession. His letter to "Très chère Gabrielle" (19 June 1978) was very much to the point. They had spoken on the telephone and her call "m'est resté dans le Coeur." He told her that he had received a lot of letters, some of them "acerbes," and said that "certains milieux aveugles ou politisés" simply cannot understand that he didn't want "notre Québec" to become "un ghetto invivable et

oublieux de la grande oeuvre de nos Pères.” His fight, he stated, was against “fanatisme,” a word which he underlined in his letter:

Je suis prêtre et n’ai point oublié la divine Parole du Seigneur: Aimez-vous, les uns les autres. Ce qui nous restera à nous, les écrivains comme vous, c’est la confiance (au milieu des violences actuelles) d’avoir ouvert pour l’amour. C’est le grand mot, celui qui restera et qu’on retrouve dans vos œuvres.<sup>7</sup>

Under his signature are the underlined words “Canadien-tout-entier.” If Canadians today are bored with constitutional issues (and perhaps disillusioned with politics in general), it is clear from these observations that the possibility of Quebec leaving Confederation aroused great passion on both sides. The issue was new, gripping, and of the utmost importance for all concerned.

One is left with two questions. First, why was Gabrielle Roy almost alone amongst French-Canadian writers and artists to oppose secession and, secondly, why was she silent about it except in her correspondence?

Born and raised in Manitoba, Roy had a broader view of the French fact in Canada than her counterparts in Quebec. She understood what it meant to be a threatened minority in Manitoba and she presumably knew that an independent Quebec would, in effect, destroy Canada, and would have a devastating effect on struggling francophone communities in Manitoba, Ontario, the Maritimes, and elsewhere. On another level, she never felt part of the Quebec cultural scene, in part because of her own need for privacy, and in part because of her coming from a very different part of the country. Finally, Gabrielle Roy’s entire literary career was devoted to promoting the ideas of harmony, fraternity, and humanism. It should surprise no one that a movement dedicated to dividing a country would have no resonance with her. If Félix-Antoine Savard was opposed to Quebec secession on religious

grounds, Gabrielle Roy’s opposition was more a matter of personal issues and *weltanschauung*.

Why, then, did she remain silent? In her correspondence, she suggests that her voice would not be heard within the province because of the prevailing atmosphere and would be preaching to the converted outside the province. A charitable view, as well, could add that she had already said everything she wanted to say about harmony and fraternity in her published works and those spoke for her. A perhaps less charitable view might suggest that she was thinking of her reading public and that she might have been reticent about alienating them and undermining a carefully cultivated image amongst them. I, personally, believe that Gabrielle Roy must have felt completely overwhelmed by the political and historical circumstances: a minority Francophone in Manitoba, a Canadian in France and England, a Westerner in Quebec, she always felt out of place and never quite at home. A woman whose real home was that of the imagination and idealized space, she would let other forces decide what needed to take place and, as she wrote, stay silent and meditate.

These letters attest to the importance of writers’ correspondence in obtaining a broad picture of the writer and his or her times as well as a more intimate idea of the writer’s thoughts, which are not always revealed in the published works. As Horace Walpole so elegantly states the case, history waits for its last seal from them. These letters also show that, in spite of her public silence, Gabrielle Roy was a lightning rod for French and English writers and critics. They wrote to her, appealed to her, expressed themselves and shared ideas and concerns. Her role as correspondent was important, even if she did not take a public stand.

Finally, the issue of Quebec secession is revealed through the letters to have consumed writers no less, or perhaps more, than others because of their perceived responsibility to

their readers and their country and because of their perception of the world. For Savard, it was a matter of one's love for one's fellow; for Laurence, it evoked feelings of guilt for not having reached out to her compatriots; for MacLennan, it summoned forth atavistic emotions of betrayal. In any event, the letters are a privileged view into a world of personal opinion and thought of some of our most important writers on an issue that haunts us still.

## NOTES

- 1 She had written, especially in the posthumous autobiography *La Détresse et l'enchantement*, about her distress at being marginalized as a francophone: "Quand donc ai-je pris conscience pour la première fois que j'étais, dans mon pays, d'une espèce destinée à être traitée en inférieure?" (11) but this did not influence her attitude toward Quebec's place in Canada.
- 2 Found in Lori Saint-Martin's *La Voyageuse et la prisonnière. Gabrielle Roy et la question des femmes*.
- 3 There is a long period between the Deacon and Geddes correspondence on this subject. The reason for the hiatus may be that the secessionist movement only became a dominant issue during the 1970s.
- 4 It is MacLennan who underlines the expression.
- 5 Author of *The Stone Angel* (1964) and *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) among others.
- 6 "Listen, Just Listen." *Divided We Stand*. Gary Geddes, ed. Toronto: Peter Martin, 1977. 20-25.
- 7 Underlining of the preceding words by Savard.

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## Le vieux romancier bavard et le jeune poète détraqué

Réjean Beaudoin

L'art vient toujours des problèmes d'un individu ou encore d'un pays. De la Grèce antique à aujourd'hui, on ne trouve pas un pays au monde qui ait produit de l'art à travers le bonheur.

Michel Tremblay (cité par plus d'une source)

Les livres dont il sera maintenant question n'ont superficiellement rien en commun. Sous la surface cependant, c'est moins sûr. Mais comment mesurer des rapports qu'on suppose étroits entre la nostalgie, la mélancolie, le déclin d'un monde décrépît et sa ruine?

Jacques Cardinal s'écarte hardiment des sentiers battus dans *La Paix des Braves. Une lecture politique des Anciens Canadiens de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé* (Montréal : XYZ éditeur, 2005). Solidement documentée, l'étude propose un ancrage idéologiquement explicite à ce texte de première importance, l'un des rares romans du dix-neuvième siècle québécois à s'être imposé par un succès de librairie dès sa parution, en 1863, et ayant bénéficié ensuite d'une tradition de lecture ininterrompue. L'analyse de Jacques Cardinal conteste un point qui fait généralement consensus parmi les spécialistes : l'intrigue dans ce roman historique serait moins assurée que la peinture des mœurs de l'Ancien Régime, reposant sur un recueil de légendes, de chansons et d'anecdotes convoquées au fil

d'innombrables digressions. En somme, le portrait social l'emporte sur la cohérence diégétique. S'il prend ses coudées franches avec les règles du genre, comme il le déclare en ouvrant son récit, le narrateur ne dilue toutefois pas son propos. *La Paix des Braves* montre que loin d'être un amas de matériaux hâtivement assemblés et cousus d'un fil lâche, *Les Anciens Canadiens* présente, au contraire, une intrigue fortement liée et mûrement réfléchie.

Plus encore, le romancier n'entreprend rien de moins qu'une réécriture de l'Histoire qui vise à imposer le mythe fondateur de la nation canadienne dont l'égalité morale des vainqueurs et des vaincus, un siècle après la conquête britannique du Canada, constitue la pierre d'angle. Proposer la lecture politique d'une oeuvre littéraire n'est jamais un projet de tout repos. Même sous l'empire (naguère incontournable) du « tout est politique », le texte d'un écrivain ne se plie pas toujours sans résistance à cette approche, mais la thèse défendue par Jacques Cardinal est convaincante. Le chercheur met en place une argumentation rigoureuse et bien menée, presque trop soucieuse, oserais-je dire, de sa force démonstrative.

Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, seigneur de Saint-Jean-Port-Joli et représentant impénitent de la noblesse canadienne-française, publie *Les Anciens Canadiens* à l'âge de soixante-seize ans. En scrutant un à un les dix-huit chapitres du livre, le critique souligne la présence constante de l'idée de réconciliation et de parité des deux grandes nations ennemies sur les champs de bataille des

Plaines d'Abraham et surtout de Sainte-Foy, la dernière victoire française en Amérique, exploite d'ailleurs sans effet sur l'issue finale de la Guerre de Sept Ans, résolue diplomatiquement trois ans plus tard par le Traité de Paris. L'idée centrale du roman, la voici: les soldats des deux nations autrefois opposées par ce conflit sanglant sont désormais unis, sans distinction de race, dans la mémoire du nouveau peuple composé de leurs descendants. C'est dans l'égalité contractuelle d'un Canada politiquement formé du respect mutuel des deux nations-souches que réside l'identité du pays à la veille de la Confédération. *Les Anciens Canadiens* se lit non pas comme un recueil de souvenirs personnels, mais comme le métarécit de cette construction symbolique dont il fournit en même temps la « défense et illustration ».

L'idéologie exhumée du romancier trouve sa contrepartie bien vivante dans la conjoncture qui définit la situation des premiers lecteurs. Cardinal cite les discours prononcés lors des grandes célébrations commémoratives auxquelles donne lieu l'érection de monuments aux Braves glorieusement tombés au combat en 1760. Ces discours de circonstances ne sont pas toujours des chefs-d'oeuvres d'éloquence, mais il reste qu'on y reconnaît sans peine les principaux éléments de la thèse attribuée au roman. Le même constat vaut pour la position du ministre Lafontaine-Baldwin. Le nouveau lien (constitutionnalisé) du pacte politique de 1867, plus tard qualifié de « bon-ententisme », se fonde sur une interprétation historique providentialiste qui transforme les ennemis d'hier en partenaires fraternels de la nouvelle confédération canadienne. *Les Anciens Canadiens* serait le récit fictif de ce mythe fondateur, catalyseur du principe politique noué en accord constitutionnel. Les deux héros du roman, Jules d'Haberville et Archibald Cameron of Locheill, amis d'enfance, puis ennemis sous les armes de leurs royaumes en guerre, finalement réconciliés après la fin des hostilités, incarnent

idéalement ce mythe qui scelle l'identité canadienne et sauve du même coup l'épopée des pionniers de la Nouvelle-France. Philippe Aubert de Gaspé refoule la défaite militaire des Français sur les Plainnes d'Abraham, soude la fraternité posthume des vainqueurs et des vaincus et corrige l'histoire en érigeant un monument fictif qui fonctionne à la manière des énoncés performatifs: dire « bonjour » à quelqu'un n'est pas l'informer du fait qu'on le salue, c'est accomplir l'acte de salutation.

Cette gigantesque opération fondatrice n'est pas exempte de difficultés qui ne sont pas toutes parfaitement résolues dans le roman. Jacques Cardinal les repère et les critique comme il se doit. Ces failles logiques tiennent à la visée harmonieuse, conciliatrice et pacificatrice du romancier. Le principal défaut du roman consiste à évacuer l'antagonisme politique au profit de la pure charité chrétienne: les soldats morts en s'affrontant deviennent les modèles sacrés de la collaboration indéfectible des frères jadis ennemis. Aussi simpliste en apparence que paraisse cette vision lénifiante, il faut bien constater qu'elle adhère tout à fait au dessein de la canadianité reformulée par la fable du roman. Si l'on tient compte du remords lancinant du vieux seigneur déchu qui tient la plume, on comprend que l'intention du romancier puisse être motivée par le besoin de laver la honte culpabilisante de la défaite française de 1760, sans parler des folies de jeunesse du vieux seigneur ruiné.

L'appareil d'érudition de *La Paix des Braves* se présente d'une façon tout aussi inattendue que le contenu de l'ouvrage. Les abondantes notes en fin de volume ne se bornent pas à donner de précieuses références bibliographiques, elles reproduisent de généreux extraits des ouvrages consultés, souvent rares et peu accessibles. En plus de servir de support à l'analyse, ce matériel est parfois intéressant, mais il a quand même pour effet d'alourdir la lecture d'une annotation massive et d'isoler celle-ci du propos critique



proprement dit. L'organisation du matériel documentaire aurait gagné à s'intégrer davantage au corps du texte. Quant au travail d'interprétation produit par Jacques Cardinal sur l'oeuvre majeure de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, sa recherche a le mérite de circonscrire très précisément la « thèse » du livre dans ses moindres nuances. Si celle-ci n'était pas entièrement inconnue des travaux qui ont été consacrés aux *Anciens Canadiens*, il ne fait aucun doute que la pensée politique du romancier n'avait jamais été décrite avec autant d'attention et d'une manière aussi complète. L'enquête livre ses résultats, mais elle se restreint au discours strictement politique, au risque de favoriser de la sorte une lecture amaigrie du roman dont la richesse déborde les convictions personnelles de l'auteur qui, n'en doutons pas, avait son idée en tête en prenant la plume. Mais l'important n'est peut-être pas tant ce que l'auteur croyait vouloir dire que l'oeuvre composite, hybride et merveilleusement mouvante qu'il a créée, beaucoup moins univoque, me semble-t-il, que la pensée politique de l'écrivain.

Émile J. Talbot consacre un bel essai à l'analyse critique des poésies d'Émile Nelligan. *Reading Nelligan* (Montreal & Kingston : McGill-Queen's UP, 2002) retrace et resserre les rapports intertextuels entre le poète montréalais et ses modèles européens de la fin du siècle, surtout français et francophones. Après Baudelaire et Rimbaud, les parnassiens, puis les décadents figurent évidemment parmi les voix privilégiées qui traversent celle du poète québécois. Rien d'absolument neuf en cela, puisque la critique nelliganienne a depuis longtemps fait le tour des sources repérables de l'oeuvre, mais la façon dont Émile J. Talbot revisite les sentiers battus débouche tout de même sur des pistes moins prévisibles. Tout n'a-t-il pas été dit sur le sujet? La recherche très minutieuse qui soutient cette lecture des poèmes nelliganiens exhume quelques hypotextes hypothétiques, ignorés jusqu'à présent, tout en réinterpré-

tant la somme de ceux mis au jour depuis un siècle. L'essayiste montre que les vers de Nelligan sont loin d'être servilement imités de leur inspiration livresque, comme la critique l'a parfois laissé entendre. L'analyse de Talbot souligne l'appropriation singulière, souvent dérogoire, à laquelle le jeune poète soumet les mots qu'il emprunte aux auteurs qu'il a lus: « While the syntagms and signifiers are similar, the context of interpretation is not. Nelligan uses the language of the Parnassians to overturn Parnassian aesthetics, to express what they abhorred, that is, what is most intimate and private. » (16)

Talbot met en relief le rôle important que joue la sensibilité religieuse de son époque, c'est-à-dire le rigorisme moral du catholicisme canadien-français, dans les poèmes spirituels de Nelligan, mais aussi dans ses poèmes sentimentaux. C'est surtout chez Nelligan amoureux que la culpabilité associée à la sexualité se fait éclatante et conduit à la névrose à la fois clinique et poétique qui traverse tant la vie que l'oeuvre de l'aliéné. La démonstration du lien intime entre la morale religieuse et la voix poétique constitue un apport remarquable de ce livre. La thèse peut relayer en partie certains travaux antérieurs sur la psychologie du poète adolescent, mais l'originalité de l'interprétation d'Émile Talbot se signale par son approche rigoureusement textuelle et par l'attention accordée au discours religieux dans lequel ont baigné l'enfance et la jeunesse du poète. L'ouvrage se distingue ainsi de la critique nelliganienne qui a peu insisté sur la catholicité du jeune homme, préférant faire ressortir la relative neutralité de sa poésie à cet égard, en comparaison de celle de ses prédécesseurs.

La méthode de cette lecture a le principal mérite d'être littérale, ce qui devient aussi, parfois, sa pierre d'achoppement, tant le critique prend soin de résumer, paraphraser, sinon traduire les poèmes dans leurs moindres nuances. L'interprétation des vers est amplement informée par une riche culture

poétique et une véritable connaissance des contextes historique et biographique, mais la force de l'analyse repose surtout sur ce que l'auteur appelle, après Harold Bloom, l'inter-lecture (*inter-reading*). Il s'agit, pour décrire très sommairement cette approche, de relier corrélativement deux horizons textuels—dans ce cas, l'enseignement du catholicisme et le discours des poètes décadents—recentrés et intériorisés dans la poésie de Nelligan. La démarche d'Émile J. Talbot est féconde et s'avère d'un rendement certain en débouchant sur le lien entre la névrose juvénile et l'interdiction religieuse de la sexualité. Ce rapport, plutôt controuvé, ne doit rien à la psychanalyse, la libido entravée du poète s'exposant comme naturellement à l'intérieur du texte nelliganien. Quant à la rencontre du catéchisme catholique et des écrivains décadents dans la pensée de l'adolescent, loin de s'exclure et de s'opposer, les deux messages paraissent même se compléter et se renforcer dans l'âme dépressive qui passe sans rupture du tabou religieux malmené à l'épuisement moral d'une mort élégiaquement désirée et bientôt accompagnée de visions infernales et de pulsions suicidaires. S'il existait un manuel pratique du genre *Comment devenir fou en trois ans sans renier ses maîtres?*, je dirais que l'explication de Talbot vaut un pareil traité de la démence précoce.

Comment ne pas rappeler à ce sujet les analyses prudentes de Pascal Brissette (*Nelligan dans tous ses états. Un mythe national*. Montréal : Fides, 1998) sur le mythe de Nelligan? La perspective d'Émile Talbot n'est pas la même et elle n'est pas moins pertinente, mais écrite dans une autre langue, elle s'adresse à un autre public. La puissante aura mythique qui pénètre tout ce qui entoure la vie et l'œuvre de Nelligan, le mode fusionnel instauré par l'écrasement de la mort de l'homme sur l'œuvre vivante, la « mort-vivance » inaugurée par la fameuse préface de Dantin (« Émile Nelligan est mort. »), tout cela ne peut fonctionner que

dans le prolongement direct d'un autre mythe, celui de la nation sacrifiée ou plutôt de l'érection sacrificielle de la nation, comme Brissette l'a brillamment démontré. Mais ce mythe (déjà illustré dans *Les Anciens Canadiens* relu par Jacques Cardinal) ne concerne et n'intéresse qu'un lectorat pur laine, j'entends: qui soit partie prenante à la folie du sujet (canadien/nelliganien). Écrivant en anglais pour des lecteurs nord-américains, Nelligan peut bien ne pas être le prophète martyr du tourment de ne pas être assez haut érigé dans l'âme meurtrie de son peuple enfant. Il peut très bien n'exister que comme poète, ce qui suffit au projet critique d'Émile Talbot.

Le romantisme politique des *Anciens Canadiens* glissait-il déjà, en quelque point inaperçu de notre dix-neuvième siècle, sur la pente fatale qui mène au délire nérophilique des « soirs de névrose » chers au poète maudit? Comment se négocie le virage du patriotisme confiant, presque bon enfant de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, à l'esthétique de la mélancolie et au naufrage de la raison? La question n'est pas posée dans ces deux ouvrages, mais elle vient à l'esprit de qui les lit parallèlement (selon le principe de l'« inter-lecture »). Aussi antithétiques que puissent paraître la verve truculente du vieillard assagi et la prosodie morbide du jeune éphèbe fou—l'un terrorisé par la « Luxure », l'autre humilié par l'Histoire—, les deux écrivains n'en partagent pas moins le même recours à une foi aussi indéfectible qu'héréditaire. N'est-ce pas toucher du doigt « la racine du rêve » (*lapsus calami* ou tardif éclair de génie)? Philippe Aubert de Gaspé enseigne la leçon sublime de la fraternité des guerriers, appliquée aux perdants comme aux gagnants du jeu politico-social, les uns et les autres ramenés sur le pied d'égalité d'un code de l'honneur militaire sanctionné par la charité chrétienne. Pareil optimisme, qui confine au révisionnisme éclairé par la foi, évacue complètement le rapport de force politique, engagé depuis un siècle au moment

où le vieillard nostalgique écrivait son roman. Un tel discours de réparation de la faute n'est-il pas très proche, au fond, du désespoir de la chute irréparable, culpabilité qui déborde des vers de Nelligan? Quel troublant miroir reproduit les traits de l'enfant génial à la place du regard halluciné du vieux scribe! Si les deux écrivains puisent une égale puissance symbolique dans une pensée logiquement et pratiquement aberrante—la négation de l'Histoire et le refus de la puberté —, n'est-ce pas parce que la culture ambiante les assurait secrètement d'une réception favorable de la part des premiers lecteurs et même de la postérité entrevue dans la continuité de la culture perpétuée?

Évoquer l'horizon d'attente ne va pas de soi pour une époque où la littérature naissante s'écrit dans un silence relatif de la critique, mais l'écrivain peut connaître son public par d'autres moyens que le discours critique (c'est le chercheur qui a besoin du relais de la critique comme médiatrice du champ littéraire). Il suffit sans doute à l'écrivain canadien-français que cet horizon d'attente local se signale à lui d'une façon toute privative, dans un écart supposé par rapport au milieu littéraire parisien; que cette distance soit envisagée vers 1860—et nous savons qu'elle l'était dans la correspondance de Crémazie avec Casgrain et dans la formule narrative des *Anciens Canadiens*—suffit pour que les écrivains canadiens cherchent à rencontrer des lecteurs de leur pays, lecteurs en quelque sorte devinés, imaginés, attendus comme de possibles destinataires de leurs textes. La logique du pari supplée à la conjoncture du vide. La notion d'horizon d'attente se renverse alors en passant de la demande à l'offre, elle investit une postulation du texte, telle cette canadienité accommodée à la bonne franquette dans le style convivial du vieux seigneur devisant, telle encore la décadence de Nelligan, qui n'est pas la duplication de Rodenbach et de Rollinat, mais leur ajustement aux

préceptes du catholicisme québécois (beaucoup moins évanescents chez les lecteurs de Montréal que de Paris).

Émile Talbot prend à rebours un vieux topos du commentaire critique sur Nelligan, celui de sa nullité philosophique et de son savoir trop mince. L'idée remonte encore à Dantin qui concédait le génie de la forme (musicale) à son protégé, en lui déniait le moindre fond (intellectuel) de culture. L'ouvrage du professeur de l'Université de l'Illinois établit, au contraire, l'appropriation de ses sources par Nelligan, à qui il faut bien accorder une certaine forme de pensée. Mais c'est une pensée trouble, au sens fort, une « pensée mercenaire », pour reprendre le raccourci éclairant de Pascal Brissette, qui définit ainsi l'ambivalence et la puissance du mythe. Je ne résiste pas à la tentation de citer ici un autre aperçu saisissant d'un mythe qui n'a rien perdu de son actualité:

L'attraction de la mort est un effet des époques messianiques traversées par l'Humanité depuis qu'elle crée et s'autodétruit. Si la vieillesse venue, on accepte la mort avec résignation . . . , en revanche le jeune âge, pris dans le conflit entre des espérances même confuses et l'injustice ou la cruauté du monde, contemple la mort comme le seul remède à une situation intolérable, avec ou sans la moindre espérance d'un paradis. Dans cet état, la mort est considérée comme un spectacle, une rédemption offerte aux pécheurs.

(Michel Déon. *Guerres et roman*. Paris: Flammarion, 2005. 32-33.)

Puisqu'il faut achever sur une note salutaire, je conclus par ce qui se terre dans l'ombre de toute culpabilité. Voici la prostitution expliquée aux adultes par une enfant: *Putain* de Nelly Arcan (Paris, Seuil [Collection "Points"], 2001) n'est pas une lecture de tout repos. C'est plutôt un lancinant cauchemar. L'écriture est sans défaut. Le sujet relève de l'anthropologie familiale et

de la gynécologie, si seulement cette spécialité médicale pouvait embrasser dans son champ (clinique) la location d'organes (à très court terme).

Plus la mère sera lourde et affaissée de sa masse corporelle, plus la nymphette à tarif fixe sera filiforme et anorexique. Plus la première sera souffrante et déprimée, plus la seconde donnera dans le volontarisme suicidaire de s'immoler contre l'argent de poche qui lui permet de vivre en sursis et à rabais. Les deux figures font couple à distance d'une génération, résumant la chaîne complète de toutes les lignées engendrées depuis Adam. La fillette à bicyclette exhibe et offre ses rondeurs naissantes. Le mari, le père, l'homme pressé de performer avec son tour ventripotent et sa barbiche grisonnante, incarnent le chef d'entreprise et la tête de l'espèce. Même défaillant, même pitoyable, même embondieux jusqu'aux entrailles, il reste le titulaire inaliénable du commerce charnel. Je résume seulement. La narratrice, elle, ne manque pas de bagoût dans la révolte, ni de brillo dans la charge.

Plus la mère sera passive et isolée dans son gynécée, plus la fille sera répandue dans la cité, se faisant étudiante à l'université, désirable dans la rue, parfaite et disciplinée à la tâche, partout appréciée de tous. Survalorisée? Elle le croit volontiers. Elle culpabilise. Pour s'en punir elle se ravale au souvenir larvaire de la ponte maternelle, réclamant plutôt le viol que l'esclavage de son sexe, appelant la mort sordide à la place de cette vie de poupée repompée à coups de billets de banque et, enfin, l'inceste, la fellation du père ou du psychanalyste, du professeur, qu'importe, c'est la figure patriarcale dans toute sa surpuissance armée qui fait s'animer la nymphette replète.

Une autre question sans fond creuse la matière rare de ce récit : comment en arrive-t-on là? Pourquoi se fait-on un tel sort? Le tracé qui conduit la fille de bonne famille à l'hôtel de passe n'est pas semé

d'embûches. Héloïse, dans *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, cheminait doucement du couvent au bordel. La dérive coule de source en toute gracilité. Pas d'éclats de voix ni de scènes à faire peur. Une petite fille décédée en bas âge est-elle une raison pour que sa soeur survivante se vende sous le nom d'emprunt de la morte, afin que la défunte vive encore dans le cri râlé des clients qui jouissent? Mais où se trouve l'erreur, à qui la faute, où pourchasser le coupable et à qui demander pardon? Les pratiques sexuelles décrites par Nelly Arcan sont mécaniques. La fille et le client ne se touchent jamais qu'à la faveur de l'argent échangé, déboursé—empoché—sortie et rentrée de fonds perdus—, pure dépense somptuaire qui commande la circulation d'une énergie prodigue. Le sexe à la chaîne est sans surprise. L'étonnant est qu'il ne soit pas tout à fait sans jouissance—j'en crois le témoignage donné—et que, si inachevable qu'il paraisse en ces lieux, le plaisir n'en soit pas absolument exclu. L'illumination ne se produit que par hasard et ne s'obtient pas à tout coup par le truchement des travailleurs du sexe.

Faut-il souligner la teneur dénotative d'un tableau qui présente la qualité graphique du diagramme et l'exactitude des planches anatomiques? Tant d'application descriptive n'épuise pourtant pas la prévisibilité des figurations qui refusent d'échapper à la détresse d'où les protagonistes ne sauraient s'évader. Les contes de fée et d'horreur relus par la psychanalyse occupent beaucoup l'imagination de la narratrice. La place qu'elle n'occupe pas dans la vie des familles, le choix qu'elle fait de se mettre au mauvais endroit—entre pères et filles, entre maris et femmes—condamnent la narratrice à assister sans fin au jeu de substitution des rôles mal distribués. La putain n'est que cela: un succédané infiniment offert au lieu de tout ce qui ne l'est pas. Là où la petite mort embrasse la grande à n'en plus finir, Nelly Arcan paraît tirer son nom d'un acronyme de Nelligan.

### Articles

Lee **Brotherson** teaches French at the University of New England, Australia, where his specialized subjects are French Canadian literature and the nineteenth century novel. He has published extensively on Gabrielle Roy and Stendhal.

Nathalie **Cooke** is Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, in McGill's Faculty of Arts, and Series Editor of the Arts Insights Series (McGill-Queen's UP).

Jane **Everett** is an Associate Professor in the Département de langue et littérature françaises at McGill University, where she teaches Quebec literature and translation. With her colleague François Ricard, she co-founded in 1995 the Groupe de recherche sur Gabrielle Roy. She is the editor of *In Translation: The Gabrielle Roy-Joyce Marshall Correspondence*, published in 2005 (U of Toronto P), and the author of a number of articles and papers on the subject.

Jessica **Langston** is a SSHRC-holding doctoral candidate at the University of Ottawa. Her previous publications include a book review in *Australasian Canadian Studies* and the article "Woman in a Word: Anne Claire Poirier's Subversive Subjectivity" in *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies*. Jessica is currently working on her dissertation, which looks at the use of historical documents in postcolonial Canadian fiction.

Jean **Morency** est professeur titulaire au département d'études françaises de l'Université de Moncton et titulaire de la Chaire de recherche du Canada en analyse littéraire interculturelle, dont l'objectif consiste à étudier les multiples emprunts qui ont été faits, par les écrivains du Québec, de l'Acadie et du Canada français en général, à des cultures étrangères, notamment la culture littéraire américaine.

Lianne **Moyes** specializes in the fields of Canadian and Québécois literature with a particular focus on writing in English in Quebec. She is editor of *Gail Scott: Essays on Her Works* (2002) and co-editor of *Adjacencies: Minority Writing in Canada* (2004), both published by Guernica. As co-editor of the feminist journal *Tessera* from 1993 to 2003, she looked after three special issues: "Les femmes et la culture urbaine," "Baroque féministe contemporaine," and "Les sens." Her work on Montreal women's writing appeared recently in *Études canadiennes* and in *Voix et images*. An essay on

citizenship in the poetry of Erin Mouré is forthcoming in *Trans.Can.Lit*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki.

Roxanne **Rimstead** has published internationally on cultural studies, feminist criticism, textual resistance, working-class culture, poverty and literature, oral histories, and Canadian literature(s). Her book *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women* appeared in 2001 (U of Toronto P). Her current research project is about the importance of cultural memory in the construction of counter-cultural identities. As associate professor at Université de Sherbrooke, Québec, she teaches Comparative Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne comparée and Intercultural Studies.

Lori **Saint-Martin** est professeure titulaire au Département d'études littéraires de l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Elle a publié plusieurs essais sur la littérature québécoise au féminin, dont *La voyageuse et la prisonnière. Gabrielle Roy et la question des femmes*.

Paul **Socken** has been on the faculty of the University of Waterloo since 1973 and is a former Chair of the Department of French Studies. He is the author of seven books, including *Myth and Morality in Alexandre Chenevert by Gabrielle Roy*, *The Myth of the Lost Paradise in the Novels of Jacques Poulin*, *The French They Never Taught You* and *Intimate Strangers: The Letters of Margaret Laurence and Gabrielle Roy*. He has published numerous scholarly articles on French-Canadian literature in journals in Canada, the United States, and Europe.

Professor of translation at York University, Agnes **Whitfield** is the author of over fifty articles on Québec literature and translation. Most recently, she has edited two books on literary translators in Canada: *Writing between the Lines* and *Le Métier du double*.

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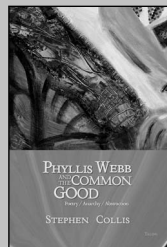
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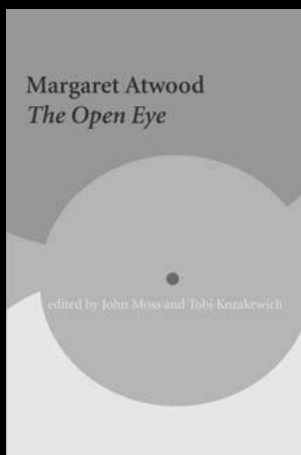
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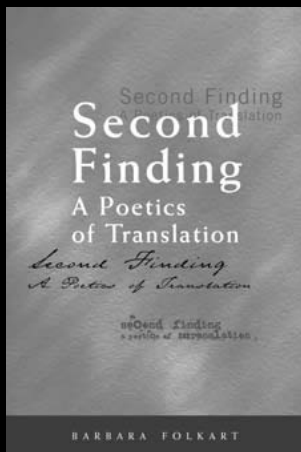
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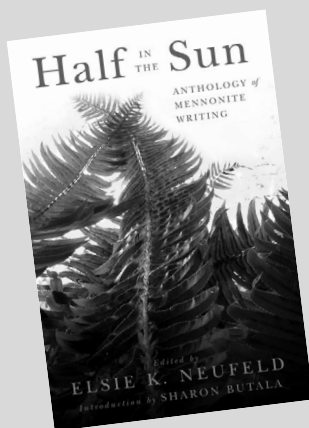
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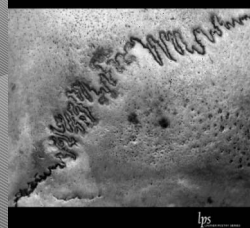
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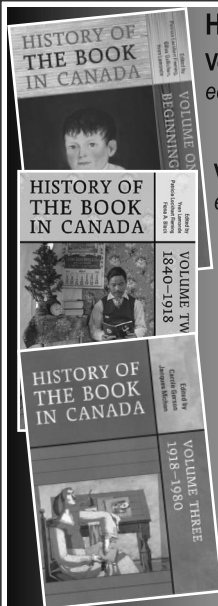
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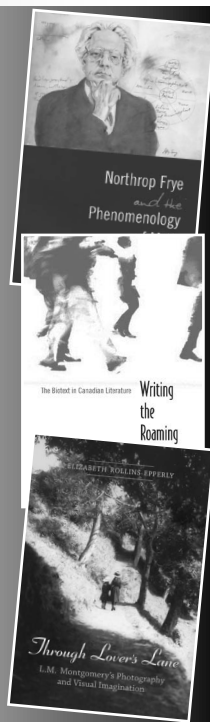
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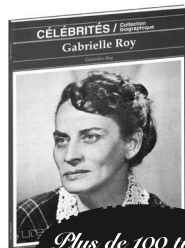
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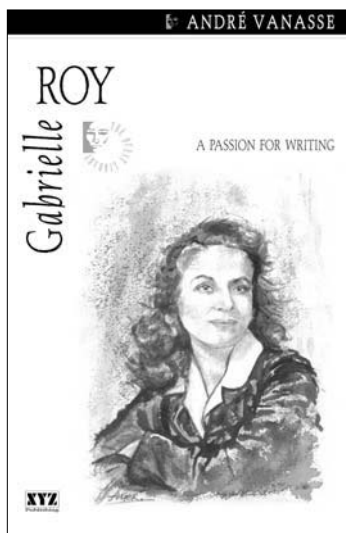
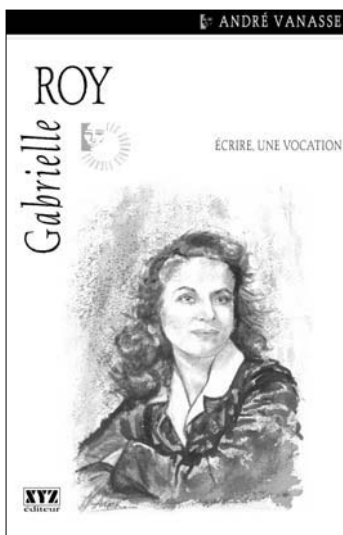


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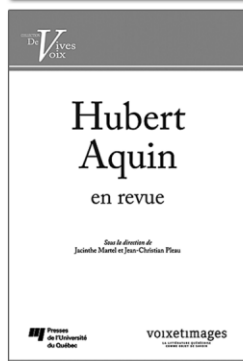
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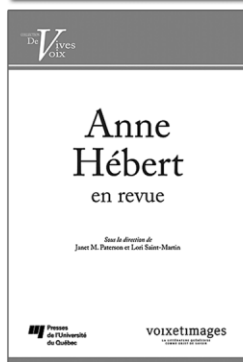
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