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Editorial

Frontières queers

Hétérotopies, lieux/non-lieux et espaces frontaliers

Jorge Calderón et Domenic A. Beneventi

En 1967, Michel Foucault a présenté une communication intitulée « Espaces autres » au Cercle d'études architecturales. Dans cette communication, Foucault développe le concept d'hétérotopies. Ce concept répond aux problèmes d'emplacements et de relations qu'il identifie dans la culture contemporaine. Les réponses qu'il apporte à ces questions de position et de prise de position des individus dans certains endroits précis par rapport à d'autres possibilités offertes par l'espace concret et social qui leur est accessible mettent en évidence l'existence de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux.

Les hétérotopies répondent au fait que la vie des individus est « encore commandée par un certain nombre d'oppositions auxquelles on ne peut pas toucher, auxquelles l'institution et la pratique n'ont pas encore osé porter atteinte : des oppositions que nous admettons comme toutes données : par exemple, entre l'espace privé et l'espace public, entre l'espace de la famille et l'espace social, entre l'espace culturel et l'espace utile, entre l'espace de loisirs et l'espace de travail; toutes sont animées encore par une sourde sacralisation » (1573). Par sacralisation de l'opposition entre, par exemple, espace privé et espace public, nous pouvons comprendre que la vie des individus est irrévocablement fondée sur une acceptation de ce qui est défini sociopolitiquement comme étant de l'ordre du privé et de l'ordre du public. Toute transgression de cette norme a des conséquences sociales, politiques et même légales. Est donc vu comme transgressif le fait de poser un geste réservé à la sphère privée dans le cadre de la sphère publique.

À la prétention d'homogénéité collective, Foucault oppose plutôt l'hétérogénéité de l'expérience individuelle. Ce qui est mis ainsi en évidence est « un ensemble de relations qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables » (1574). Parce que nous

sommes des êtres de relation, des êtres toujours en relation les uns avec les autres, nos actions, nos expériences, nos existences génèrent une multitude de possibilités pour nous construire, pour construire les relations avec les autres et également pour construire les lieux que nous habitons.

Ces lieux, ces espaces, que Foucault préfère appeler des « emplacements », sont définis, d'une part, comme des utopies : « Les utopies, ce sont les emplacements sans lieu réel. Ce sont les emplacements qui entretiennent avec l'espace réel de la société un rapport général d'analogie directe ou inversée. C'est la société elle-même perfectionnée ou c'est l'envers de la société, mais, de toute façon, ces utopies sont des espaces qui sont fondamentalement essentiellement irréels » (1574). Et d'autre part, ces emplacements sont définis comme des hétérotopies :

> Il y a également, et ceci probablement dans toute culture, dans toute civilisation, des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui sont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles les emplacements réels, tous les autres emplacements réels que l'on peut trouver à l'intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés, des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localisables. Ces lieux, parce qu'ils sont absolument autres que tous les emplacements qu'ils reflètent et dont ils parlent, je les appellerai, par opposition aux utopies, les hétérotopies [. . .] (1574-75)

Les hétérotopies sont donc des lieux, des emplacements, qui permettent, entre autres, à des individus de se rencontrer, de se connaître et de se reconnaître, de vivre ensemble contre, tout contre ou d'une certaine manière, même à l'extérieur des normes dominantes et oppressives de la société à laquelle ils appartiennent. S'il y a un rapport d'opposition entre les utopies et les hétérotopies, il y a aussi une relation de complémentarité, de contiguïté et de continuité. Parfois, une utopie est à la source d'une hétérotopie, cette dernière devenant ainsi la réalisation de la première. L'hétérotopie peut ainsi être considérée comme une utopie devenue réalité. De plus, une nouvelle utopie peut naître des possibilités qu'ouvre une hétérotopie déjà existante.

L'hétérotopie peut d'un certain point de vue être aussi considérée comme un lieu queer, car elle peut être le résultat d'une déviation de la norme. Des individus qui rejettent et attaquent la norme mettront en place une hétérotopie à partir de leur engagement subversif. Leur déviation de la norme produira une hétérotopie qui leur offrira enfin ce lieu où ils peuvent se rencontrer, échanger entre eux et vivre ensemble, même si c'est de manière, éphémère et risquée. Nous pouvons considérer que des bars, des clubs, des saunas sont le résultat de cette quête de lieux queers.

Nous pouvons aussi considérer que des plages, des parcs, des toilettes publiques, des gares d'autobus et de trains, etc., peuvent devenir à des moments précis des hétérotopies. Foucault a bien expliqué que « [l]'hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles » (1577). Cette juxtaposition joue sur l'invisibilité pour les uns et la visibilité pour les autres d'une hétérotopie. Des hommes et des femmes queers, parce qu'ils ont développé les connaissances nécessaires pour les percevoir et les reconnaître, verront que dans tel endroit public se rencontrent d'autres queers comme eux. Cet endroit devenant pour eux et seulement pour eux visiblement une hétérotopie. Les autres usagers de la gare, qui n'ont pas appris à discerner et distinguer ces hétérotopies, passeront à côté d'elles, les traverseront comme des aveugles, incapables de deviner ces lieux queers.

Dans cet ordre d'idées, Foucault précise que « [l]es hétérotopies supposent toujours un système d'ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, les isole et les rend pénétrables. En général, on n'accède pas à un emplacement hétérotopique comme dans un moulin. Ou bien on y est contraint, c'est le cas de la caserne, le cas de la prison, ou bien il faut se soumettre à des rites et à des purifications. On ne peut y entrer qu'avec une certaine permission et une fois qu'on a accompli un certain nombre de gestes » (1579). Par ces remarques, nous revenons au fait qu'on ne naît pas queer, on le devient — pour reprendre une idée existentialiste de Simone de Beauvoir en la déplaçant quelque peu. En d'autres mots, les hétérotopies queers sont bien sûr générées par des pratiques, des projets, des manières de vivre propres à des hommes et des femmes qui rejettent, renversent, subvertissent et transforment les règles et les normes hétéronormatives de la société dominante dans laquelle ils évoluent. Ne trouvant pas de place pour eux dans un espace sociopolitique homogénéisant, discriminatoire et homophobe, ils construisent des hétérotopies où ils peuvent survivre, peut-être vivre et parfois s'épanouir. Dans ces lieux queers se développe une culture particulière. Cette culture, comme toute culture, n'est pas naturelle. Pour la connaître et surtout la comprendre, il faut en avoir appris les caractéristiques et le fonctionnement. C'est ce rite de passage, lequel est en fait un processus d'apprentissage culturel, qui est demandé à ceux qui veulent entrer dans l'espace occupé par ces hétérotopies queers.

Nous pouvons nous demander, à la suite de certains anthropologues, si ces hétérotopies queers sont des lieux ou des non-lieux. Au sujet de la définition d'un lieu anthropologique, Marc Augé écrit :

> Nous réservons le terme de « lieu anthropologique » à cette construction concrète et symbolique de l'espace qui ne saurait à elle seule rendre compte des vicissitudes et des contradictions de la vie sociale mais à laquelle se réfèrent tous ceux à qui elle assigne une place, si humble ou modeste soit-elle. C'est bien parce que toute anthropologie est anthropologie de l'anthropologie des autres, en outre, que le lieu, le lieu anthropologique, est simultanément principe de sens pour ceux qui l'habitent et principe d'intelligibilité pour celui qui l'observe. (68)

Il n'est pas évident que l'hétérotopie queer soit un lieu dans le sens où l'entend Augé parce que, même si cette dernière est une « construction concrète et symbolique », on n'y assigne pas nécessairement une place à des individus. En entrant dans une hétérotopie queer, un individu peut peut-être s'assigner une place; par contre une place ne lui est pas assignée comme telle. S'il est possible que l'hétérotopie en tant que telle soit un « principe de sens » pour les individus qui y pénètrent, il n'est pas du tout certain qu'elle puisse être un « principe d'intelligibilité » pour toute autre personne qui n'en faisant pas partie voudrait l'observer de l'extérieur, car comme nous l'avons remarqué auparavant, certaines hétérotopies ne peuvent pas être perçues par des non-initiés. Là où un initié voit clairement une hétérotopie, un non-initié ne voit rien de différent de l'espace social en général. Si l'hétérotopie est sans aucun doute localisée dans le temps et l'espace, elle n'est pas facilement localisable par tous.

Si les hétérotopies queers ne sont pas des lieux, sont-elles pour autant des non-lieux? À ce sujet, Augé avance ce qui suit : « Si un lieu peut se définir comme identitaire, relationnel et historique, un espace qui ne peut se définir ni comme identitaire, ni comme relationnel, ni comme historique définira un non-lieu » (100). Étant donné que les hétérotopies sont des lieux, ou dans le vocabulaire de Foucault plutôt des « emplacements », où des relations entre des individus prennent place, et sans oublier que dans les faits les hétérotopies émergent de ces relations elles-mêmes; étant donné en outre qu'elles sont le produit et qu'elles produisent des identités particulières; et enfin étant donné qu'elles s'inscrivent dans un espace et un moment historique précis, alors les hétérotopies ne sont pas tout à fait des non-lieux. Augé lui-même admet que « [d]ans la réalité concrète du monde d'aujourd'hui, les lieux et les espaces, les lieux et les non-lieux s'enchevêtrent, s'interpénètrent. La possibilité du non-lieu n'est jamais absente de quelque lieu que ce soit » (134). Les hétérotopies queers sont donc à la frontière entre des lieux et des non-lieux. S'opposent ainsi une vision hétéronormative de l'espace sociopolitique et une vision subversive et transgressive qui conteste l'imposition oppressive de cette hétéronormativité.

"Publics are queer creatures," argues Michael Warner in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), not only because they are ambiguous and ever-shifting in their individual constituents, but their only requirement *as* publics is that a set of strangers pay some form of attention, even passive attention, to a message or discourse—to particular ways of reading, understanding, interpreting, and being interpellated by that discourse. "To address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public," Warner writes, "is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one's disposal certain media and genres, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology" (10). While the mainstream public is an almost invisible aspect of the social landscape in its hegemonic ubiquity, it also elides certain activities and forms of address that remain at its peripheries. Warner suggests that it is in the appropriation of material, social, and symbolic landscapes that queers constitute a counterpublic, itself defined by "their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and this context of domination inevitably entails distortion. Mass publics and counterpublics, in other words, are both damaged forms of publicness, just as gender and sexuality are, in this culture, damaged forms of privacy" (63).

Warner argues that conceptions of public and private have varied greatly throughout history and have invariably been tied to spatial constructs. For instance, the *res publica* of the Roman Empire envisioned the public as defined by the space outside of the home, while distinctions between public and private shifted in the nineteenth century, as these were expressed not only architecturally—for instance, in the creation of public spaces within the home itself, and the spatial and symbolic separation of the private sphere to bedrooms away from common areas—but also in the development of notions of a public and private *self*, where the spatial quality of public and private are ascribed to both the body and the psyche, to public acts and private thoughts and desires. As such, public and private are not spatially bounded but rather forms of recognition, which come to describe "social contexts, kinds of feeling, and genres of language" (27). Public and private are not mutually exclusive spatial, social, or psychological categories, but rather two modes of being that are constantly interacting with and modifying one another. This is especially relevant in terms of queer identities, subjectivities, and geographies.

If the modern era has enabled a more complex intermingling of public and private through various acts of disclosure and spatial practices of

appropriation, these are largely defined and regimented by a bourgeois public sphere that assumes an unproblematic correspondence between public and private identities and the social spaces, roles, and acts ascribed to each. If the public sphere is defined against a form of privacy hinging on domesticity and the traditional family structure, counterpublics, according to Warner, both make public and politicize that which the bourgeois public sphere seeks to hide away in private space: the bonds of affect, desire, and the gendered, desiring body. Counterpublics are therefore, by definition, "at tension with a larger public . . . their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying . . . it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate class" (56). Counterpublics are in effect forms of public engagement—speech acts by disenfranchised and self-organized individuals and communities that have been excluded from the public sphere and from public space, lingering at the margins or frontiers of "normalized" social space.

Les problématiques du rapport entre des emplacements utopiques et hétérotopiques, des lieux qui sont des non-lieux ainsi que des non-lieux qui sont des lieux, des frontières et surtout des espaces frontaliers qu'elles génèrent peuvent être mieux explorées à l'aide de la réflexion que Gloria Anzaldúa a proposée dans *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa commence son livre en écrivant que :

> The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (19)

Si, d'une part, il y a des frontières qui nous séparent, d'autre part, ces frontières génèrent des zones limitrophes ou en d'autres mots des espaces frontaliers où des queers entre autres se réfugient, vivent ou survivent, se rencontrent et ensemble créent d'autres formes d'existence.

Anzaldúa rappelle qu'elle vit entre les cultures. Elle est d'origine amérindienne et mexicaine. Elle est une anglophone des États-Unis, mais elle parle et écrit également en espagnol. Son écriture est de plus influencée par des mythes, la religion, l'histoire et les langues amérindiennes. En d'autres

mots, elle est une femme de la frontière et des espaces limitrophes, qui sont séparés malgré leur proximité. « It's not a comfortable territory to live in», écrit-elle, « this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape » (19).

Son expérience du métissage lui ouvre la possibilité d'explorer de multiples identités, ce qui est pour elle une chance unique, même s'il n'est pas toujours facile de vivre entre les frontières, de vivre dans les espaces limitrophes des frontières. La frontière entre les États-Unis et le Mexique peut être envisagée comme une blessure qui divise un pays industrialisé riche d'un pays du tiers-monde. De ce rapport inégal entre les deux pays naît un espace problématique marqué par une culture de la frontière. Une culture difficile à définir et à saisir. Une culture métissée qui semble impossible à justifier ou à légitimer. S'identifier avec cette culture de la frontière, être identifié à cette culture est perçu et vécu comme une forme de condamnation sociale. Il n'y a aucune fierté à faire partie de cette culture qui émerge de la rencontre inégale des États-Unis et du Mexique parce que « [b]orders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition » (Anzaldúa 25).

Espace de la transition, du déséquilibre, du bouleversement constant, qui peut bien y habiter ? Pour Anzaldúa, toute une faune surprenante, stigmatisée et marginale fait partie des espaces frontaliers : « The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here : the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal" » (25). Dans cette énumération de la population des zones limitrophes, il n'y a aucun éloge apparent du métissage, de la créolisation, de l'hybridité engendrés par la proximité de langues, de cultures, de communautés diverses. Peut-être parce qu'il n'y a aucune raison d'en faire l'éloge. Anzaldúa constate plutôt la dure réalité, la douleur de la division, la souffrance de ne pas appartenir au monde d'un côté de la frontière ou de l'autre côté. À toujours être situé dans l'entre-deux, toute tentative d'identification avec l'autre, avec tout autre, devient plutôt une épreuve identitaire qui se solde en une impasse.

Aux questions ethniques, raciales, culturelles, nationales, Anzaldúa ajoute la question sexuelle :

> For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behaviour. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I *made the choice to be queer* (for some it is genetically inherent). It's an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for *loquería*, the crazies. (41)

Le lesbianisme complexifie encore plus les problèmes liés à la situation sociale, à l'appartenance, à la communauté, à l'identification et aux lieux qu'elle tente d'habiter.

Est-ce qu'être une lesbienne c'est trahir les traditions et l'histoire, les luttes et les aspirations, la famille et la culture, l'honneur et la communauté des Chicanos pour Anzaldúa? C'est du moins reconnaître qu'il y a une peur de ne pas pouvoir retourner un jour à la maison, parmi les siens, parce qu'elle est devenue une autre, une étrangère, en étant une femme lesbienne. Au sujet de cette peur, Anzaldúa écrit :

> We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. Which leaves only one fear—that we will be found out and that the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage. (42)

L'autre choix qui s'est offert à elle, comme il s'offre pour toute femme dans la même situation qu'elle, c'est de ne plus avoir peur de trahir et de se trahir en traversant la frontière, une autre frontière, une fois de plus. En confrontant sa différence, elle a aussi réussi à s'épanouir plus profondément. En osant vivre et explorer sa sexualité, ses désirs sexuels, elle a pris conscience que de l'autre côté de la frontière elle n'avait rien à craindre : « on the face of the Shadow-Beast we have seen not lust but tenderness; on its face we have uncovered the lie » (42). Cette traversée des frontières queers se traduit finalement par la découverte d'un lieu nouveau, d'une hétérotopie pourrions-nous dire, où Anzaldúa trouve ou retrouve un autre fragment d'identité, un autre fragment de qui elle est dans ses multiples différences : une *mestiza,* toujours un peu plus une *mestiza.*

C'est donc par le contexte théorique ouvert par Foucault dans « Espaces autres », par les réfléxions de Warner sur la constitution des publics et des counter-publics, et par celles d'Anzaldúa sur les espaces frontaliers et le métissage que nous aimerions encadrer ce numéro spécial de *Canadian Literature* qui porte sur les « Frontières queers dans la littérature québécoise et canadienne ».

OUVRAGES CITÉS

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera. The New Mestiza.* San Francisco : Spinsters/ Aunt Lute, 1987. Imprimé.

Augé, Marc. *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité.* Paris : Seuil, 1992. Imprimé.

Foucault, Michel. « Espaces autres » *Dits et Écrits, II.* (1967). Paris : Gallimard, 2001 : 1571-81. Imprimé.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics.* New York : Zone, 2005. Imprimé.

Please note that Tina Northrup's article is not part of Queer Frontiers.

New Editor of *Canadian Literature*, Laura Moss

We are proud to welcome Laura Moss as the new editor of *Canadian Literature* as of September 2015. Moss succeeds Margery Fee, who has served as editor of *Canadian Literature* for eight wonderful years. Fee welcomes our new editor. Dr. Moss is an associate professor of Canadian and postcolonial literatures at the University of British Columbia. She has had a long history of involvement with *Canadian Literature* and its related projects. Since 2004, she has worked as an associate editor at the journal and, since 2012, she has played a pivotal role as one of the contributing editors for the online teaching resource *CanLit Guides.* She also served as acting editor in 2009 and 2013-2014, overseeing a number of special and regular issues while contributing editorials and book reviews along the way.

In 2009, she and Cynthia Sugars co-edited the two-volume teaching anthology, *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts.* It set the standard for annotations and the inclusion of contextual material. Her edited collection, *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, foregrounded new questions about and new approaches to Canadian literature. Her postcolonial teaching and research will continue the high standards maintained by *Canadian Literature* as it moves into the era of transnational literary studies.

Moss's other publications include a scholarly edition of *The History of Emily Montague* and *Leaving the Shade of the Middle Ground: The Poetry of F. R. Scott,* as well as articles on subjects such as literary pedagogy, magic realism, Canadian broadcasting, narrative medicine, and public memorials in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. She is currently working on

a monograph entitled *July 2nd: Tracking Public Policy, Contesting Cultural Nationalism, and Defending the Arts*, which studies the intersections of public policy and the history of arts culture in Canada.

In addition to her research and work with the journal, Moss has had an active presence in numerous university communities. She served as chair of the UBC Canadian Studies Program (2008-2011), director of the International Canadian Studies Centre (2008-2011), and leader of the UBC GRSJ-CWILA Research Network (2013-2014). She was also on the CWILA board of directors from 2012-2014. In 2013, she was awarded a Killam Teaching Prize.

Moss says:

> I am honoured to be following in the footsteps of Margery Fee, Laurie Ricou, Eva-Marie Kröller, W. H. New, and George Woodcock. *Canadian Literature* has a long history of excellence and innovation in criticism. My goal is to have it also be the go-to place for discussions of issues that are vital to the study of literature and the humanities in Canada. Particularly in the age of neoliberalism, I think that the journal should have a loud voice on the arts and culture in this country. Whether we are publishing articles on issues of social justice or formal experimentation, I want to see the journal truly reflect the dynamic state of contemporary criticism in the field.

Moss brings a wealth of experience and a clear vision to *Canadian Literature*. We look forward to the new directions the journal will be taking under her guidance, and congratulate her once more on the appointment. Welcome to our new editor, Laura Moss!

—Margery Fee

Michael V. Smith

I Dream of Fraternity

I'm in a motel room with my brother.

We're soldiers in the American Civil War
and we're young men. He invites me
to his side of the twilit room
to colour.

I use a dry felt pen on the trousers
of a fat, Eighteenth-Century
English lord. I colour them aquamarine,
the colour of innocence.

My brother touches my back with his hand.
I can't believe my luck. My back feels
alive, revived. He kisses me. I feel how
tragic it is we will die young, although
I'm aware all lives are short.

Libe García Zarranz

Necropolitical Assemblages and Cross-Border Ethics in Hiromi Goto's *Darkest Light*

The assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a "sympathy." It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.
—Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*

As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency.
—Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

As time, as space, seemed to stretch, elastic and ungoverned, uncertainty gnawed inside Gee's chest. . . . A shift . . . perception slipping, between physical and emotional . . .
—Hiromi Goto, *Darkest Light*

The so-called war on terror, which has become one of the many perverse outcomes of 9/11, has not only reified geopolitical frontiers in the form of intensified border security worldwide, but has also generated new biopolitical borders in the form of a tightened governance of migrant populations and their bodies (Kuntsman and Miyake). Racialized populations, more pervasively after September 11, are systematically delayed and sometimes detained by border patrols that subject their bodies to various surveillance mechanisms under the name of security and protection. As social anthropologist and gender theorist Henrietta L. Moore aptly puts it, "Technologies of security and surveillance record bodily affects, and deploy neural imaging, iris recognition and a host of other techniques designed to distinguish those who are acceptable from those who are not—a biopolitics of racism that goes well beneath the skin" (173). These *necropolitical assemblages*, as I call them, have shattered our ethical approximation to the

world, particularly in this climate of global crisis. The term "necropolitics," as Achille Mbembe contends, signals how the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in the power to dictate *who* may live and who must die (11). Recent interventions in the contested field of queer studies, however, stress that today's social fabric is characterized not only by who might live or die, but also by *the conditions* in which populations live or die (Puar). Within the necropolitical realm, I would add that death is often capitalized as a productive source of capitalist intervention. In an attempt to interrogate and counteract these new forms of necropower, many contemporary voices in the humanities and social sciences are opening up spaces of socio-political critique that gesture instead towards designing new ontologies and new affective routes to reshape self-other relations by finding novel commonalities and shared materialities (Braidotti; Moore).

Within the field of contemporary TransCanLit, feminist and queer writers such as Dionne Brand, Hiromi Goto, and Larissa Lai, among others, are assembling an alternative literary archive where material and symbolic borders are problematized with ethical repercussions (Brydon; Kamboureli and Miki). Borrowing Sneja Gunew's words, these authors are charting "a course through the minefields of our transnational existence, illustrating new and flexible subjectivities that are surely our best chance for ethical and proximate survival amidst unequal global mobilities" (43). For the last two decades, Hiromi Goto's oeuvre has shared the preoccupation expressed by contemporary cultural and political theorists about how systems of power operate on the bodies of certain vulnerable populations through violence, torture, and other necropolitical assemblages, particularly in their current manifestations as processes of uneven globalization, incarceration, institutional racism, and surveillance technologies.[1] Goto's speculative worlds, however, not only invite readers to think critically about the ethical implications behind those necropolitical impulses described above, but also to creatively envision alternative forms of relationality and affect. Drawing on Deleuzian-inflected theories of assemblage, together with recent interventions in the field of affect studies, this article examines Goto's novel *Darkest Light* (2012) in terms of what I refer to as a multitude of *necropolitical assemblages*. Depicted as deviant and monstrous, the human and non-human beings portrayed in the novel are often deprived of political rights and thus forced to live and die in the social, economic, and cultural borderlands of our public world. The dispersion of temporal, spatial, and other material borders in *Darkest Light*, however, signals how these vulnerable populations, despite being stripped of

biopolitical currency, are capable of activating change. In this essay, I argue that Goto's novel proposes a *cross-border ethic* as a strategy to counteract those necropolitical assemblages that govern contemporary societies, while simultaneously advocating for alternative logics of embodiment, affect, and ethical intervention.

Marketed as a young adult novel, *Darkest Light* sets off with a similar premise to that posed in its companion piece, *Half World* (2010). For a long time, there were three Realms that functioned in equilibrium, sustaining balance for all living beings: the Realm of Flesh, the Realm of Half World, and the Realm of Spirit. After death, creatures would awake in Half World only to relive their greatest trauma. Once fear and pain were transcended, beings would be ready to momentarily become spirit, untroubled by material cares, until once again, they had to return to the Realm of Flesh. Without a clear reason, this time of wholeness was interrupted and the three Realms were severed from each other. As a result of being endlessly forced to experience extreme forms of physical and emotional suffering, the creatures that were trapped in Half World became monstrous figures. The Realm of Half World is therefore an affective space where the boundaries between life and death blur, giving way to deviant bodies that are intriguingly capable of both philanthropic actions and ethically questionable acts, such as cannibalism and mutilation. Terror, fear, and pain circulate in this necropolitical space, shaping the public and personal relations between its inhabitants. When the three Realms were united, the wholeness was sustained by the interconnections between the different parts of the system. As such, the three Realms worked as an ethico-affective assemblage. In his new approach to social ontology, philosopher Manuel De Landa explains how the main theoretical alternative to organic totalities is what Gilles Deleuze calls assemblages, which are understood as historically specific "wholes characterized by *relations of exteriority*" (10). These assemblages have material and expressive components, together with territorializing and deterritorializing axes. De Landa insists that assemblages are characterized by a mixed heterogeneity that allows the parts that contain them to be autonomous: "Relations of exteriority also imply that the properties of the component parts can never explain the relations which constitute a whole" (11). And yet, the autonomy of the parts does not exclude the multiple interactions or "intra-actions" with the whole. In other words, wholes are more than the sum of their parts. Significantly, when the three separate Realms in the novel became radically independent, they immediately lost

connection with the whole. It is in this moment of broken connectivity that the assemblage of Half World collapses. De Landa explains how

> the postulation of a world as a seamless web of reciprocal action, or as an integrated totality of functional interdependencies, or as a block of unlimited universal interconnections, has traditionally been made in opposition to linear causality as the glue holding together a mechanical world. (19)

And in this world characterized by assemblages of reciprocity, chance and risk play a crucial role. *Darkest Light* cogently illustrates how Goto engages with the need to explore the unpredictability of today's unevenly globalized world, particularly in the characterization of the main (anti)-hero and the portrayal of non-normative bodies, affects, and temporalities.

Goto's earlier novel, *Half World*, portrays a teenage girl called Melanie who goes through a series of tribulations to save her mother's life and reunite the three Realms. Melanie fights the despotic tyrant Mr. Glueskin, a monstrous creature who rules Half World, and who, unexpectedly, has a body that is able to reproduce. Taking Mr. Glueskin's baby with her, "a Half World infant born to Life" (4), Melanie succeeds in her task and returns to the Realm of Flesh alive. *Darkest Light* is set some years later. The baby is now a problematic sixteen-year old called Gee, who lives with old Ms. Wei, the lesbian librarian who has a crucial role in Goto's *Half World*. Reserved and odd, Gee was unofficially adopted by Melanie and Ms. Wei, now referred to as Big Sister and popo/grandmother respectively. Echoing the character of Miranda in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002),[2] Gee's body repulses people as if it gave off "a kind of smell" (19) that keeps him isolated from the community, thus crippling his identity and initially preventing him from establishing any sustainable affective relationship: "With his irises as dark as his pupils, almost everyone's reaction to them lingered somewhere between fear and disgust. What with his pale, pale skin and his dark eyes, he knew he repelled people somehow. And this knowledge had formed him, too" (18). Not only does his body become a source of abjection, but also his very existence seems to be saturated by the circulation of negative affect: "A wave of guilt lapped at Gee's consciousness. Was it his fault that they were so isolated? Was it his fault that his popo didn't have a girlfriend? That Older Sister never came home?" (31). These "darker feelings," as he calls them, are located at the core of his subjective and bodily experience, while simultaneously affecting his encounters with others. Gee develops a relationship with Cracker, a troublesome self-identified queer Neo-Goth teenage girl who suffers from a heart problem, which

brings the representation of disability into the narrative. Cracker's potential vulnerability thus further associates her with Gee in that their bodies are depicted as non-normative in related ways. A defender of queer justice, as she explains, Cracker feels some familiarity with Gee that prompts her to help and accompany him in his quest back to the necropolitical space of Half World. In his journey, Gee also encounters an enormous cat that has loyally been popo's guardian and life companion. The cat's task is now to aid Gee in his search by leading him into the truth of his origins in Half World: "The past will always try to catch up with you, no matter how far you flee. You cannot run away from yourself. . . . The past is inside you already" (105). Gee will then need to come to terms with the fact that trauma, pain, and suffering are not only feelings that reside inside him, but also forms of affect that circulate and shape the spaces he occupies.

The portrayal of Half World as a wasteland of death and destruction brings the concept of necropolitical assemblage to the forefront of the analysis. As Deleuze and Guttari claim:

> On a first, horizontal axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, and intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand, it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then, on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away. (88)

Constantly immersed in the sound of bombing, the space depicted in *Darkest Light* is constantly deterritorialized and reterritorialized by the reiteration of death and the repetition of negative affects such as suffering and trauma: "Sometimes explosions shook the air. . . . The air was heavy with the reek of raw sewage, decaying meat and smoky fires, a distant droning and roaring like an enormous factory. . . . As time, as space, seemed to stretch, elastic and ungoverned, uncertainty gnawed inside Gee's chest" (214-15). The portrayal of Half World as a space of death evokes images of current war zones across the globe, where chaos prevails and humanity is scarce. Significantly, matter, space, and time become elastic parts of this assemblage of necropolitical flows that lack government, resulting in multiple forms of disorientation in the novel: maps are useless in this "illogical" and "irrational" space, as Gee calls it, given that none of them offer the same directions. Each creature has designed its own map according to its own experiences and, as a result, all maps are different. Consequently, this unknown territorial assemblage cannot be mapped, since it is constantly

subjected to processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. One of the first things that Gee and Cracker notice when they enter this new world is that normative spatial structures are systematically resisted: "He took one more step down to join her, yet when the ball of his foot touched the rock surface, he had the oddest sensation that he'd just climbed upward. He wobbled with confusion" (139). Echoing M. C. Escher's graphic work *Relativity* (1953), normal laws of gravity do not seem to apply in this landscape, thus exacerbating Gee's and Cracker's bodily and spatial disorientation. Known for his depiction of impossible objects such as the Penrose triangle, Escher's work offers some intriguing connections with Goto's portrayal of impossible subjects and impossible materialities. Beyond mathematics and scientific interpretations, what an impossible object creates, at a basic level, are feelings of ambiguity and incredulity in the beholder. When the impossible becomes visible then a feeling of disorientation follows, affecting systems of knowledge and values. Cracker and Gee are systematically perplexed at the population inhabiting Half World; impossible creatures with monstrous bodies and yet, human behaviours.

Following De Landa's insights, assemblages have an expressive segment impregnated by bodies, actions, and affects that are intertwined, always in constant relation and reaction to one another. Arguably, Goto addresses the ethical implications of this porosity and malleability of corporeal and affective boundaries in the novel, particularly in the depiction of human and non-human bodies as complex cross-border assemblages. After an initial prologue, *Darkest Light* introduces two inhabitants of Half World: Ilanna, half human female and half eel, and Karu, half human male and half bird. Hungry, these monstrous characters wander the dark streets of this destroyed territory, searching for food and engaging in conversation about the troubles of their times: "The edges of her Half World *wavered*. A flicker between solid and immaterial. Ilanna shuddered. Clenched her will, seized it, and her world held solid once more. Her cycle was calling her back" (7). Feeling desperate without her mentor and lover, the gruesome Mr. Glueskin, Ilanna senses change in the horizon; she feels the arrival of her beloved messiah. This kind of intuitive knowledge subtly associates her with Gee, which complicates the classification of Goto's novel in Manichean terms, thus blurring the boundaries between good and evil. Interestingly, the complex embodiment of these creatures also problematizes the borders of corporeality with a number of ethical repercussions. In the collection of essays *Thinking through the Skin* (2001), contributors from different

disciplinary backgrounds look at how skin is lived both as a boundary and a point of connection. As editors Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey claim in the introductory chapter,

> These diverse approaches to thinking about the skin as a boundary-object, and as the site of exposure or connectedness, invite the reader to consider how the borders between bodies are unstable and how such borders are already crossed by differences that refuse to be contained on the "inside" or the "outside" of bodies. (2)

Reading the skin as *bodyscape* certainly resonates in Goto's *Darkest Light*, particularly in the portrayal of Ilanna's body as a body that leaks: "The wet fabric of her dress clung to her icy flesh, seawater streaming down her body, leaving a wet trail behind her. Perpetually" (7). Note how the materiality of the clothes fuses with her half-animal half-human skin, systematically dissolving body boundaries. As a result, Karu seems to be hesitant about Ilanna's physical body and behaviour; he remains close to her and yet, his body reacts to the stickiness of the eels: "Karu shuddered. Ilanna could see the human skin on his arms pimpling with revulsion and longing" (9). In line with Ahmed and Stacey's insights, Karu's simultaneous abjection and desire points to the paradoxical ways in which affect circulates between human and non-human subjects. By stressing the porosity of the boundaries of corporeality and affect, *Darkest Light* begins to formulate a cross-border ethic that interrogates how bodies shape and are shaped by other bodies, while simultaneously being involved, and at times complicit, in the circulation of affective economies of oppression and dominance. The eels in Ilanna's body, for instance, are a threatening presence not only to Karu but to Ilanna herself; if they do not get fed regularly, she risks being consumed by them. At the same time, Ilanna engages in cannibalism, to Karu's disgust, not just to satiate her needs but to feed her eels and, more importantly, because she was told by Mr. Glueskin that eating other Half World creatures extended your own cycle: "What does it matter anyway, bird, beast or human. Once eaten, they all return to the start of their Half World trauma once more" (14). Her justification is based on the fact that these beings are already dead so, in a way, she is not actually killing them. I would argue that the narrative is here indirectly asking readers to think carefully about the ethical implications of our actions while avoiding an anthropocentric view of the affective relations between human and non-human populations. Moreover, the novel resists offering a simplistic moral lesson by further complicating Ilanna's characterization: she is not just a perpetrator but also a victim, in this case, of the actions of a man. In a horrific act of betrayal, her

lover had murdered her by throwing her into the sea, where other creatures feasted on her body:

> The eels reached her first, to tear the flesh from her arms, to eat her tongue. . . . She had woken in the Half World sea, even the stripped bones of her arms gone, and in their place two large eels attached to her shoulders. Where she once had a tongue, a small eel was fixed on the root. She had still been tied to the anchor. There Ilanna remained, eaten half alive, eternally, by flounders, skates, eels and octopi. . . . She cycled through betrayal and death, betrayal and death, until she knew nothing else. (8)

The brutal dismemberment of Ilanna's body, and her subsequent suffering, place her in a position of vulnerability and precariousness, which further prompts readers to consider the porosity of bodily and affective borders, together with the socio-political and ethical implications of this permeability for human and non-human populations.

Ilanna's ethical ambivalence is subtly shared by Gee. Initially depicted as a reserved teenager who loves and helps his grandmother in their little store, he nonetheless hides an unidentified emotion that breeds inside him:

> When he was very little he didn't know what the feeling was called, but he always knew it was there, and sometimes it would flare up with the darkest light, so much so that he'd be filled with trembling. He never knew if this trembling was fear or excitement. He did not want to look at it so very closely. (17)

Note that trembling seems to be a physical reaction to the affective response of both fear and excitement. And yet, the boundaries between the bodily and the affective reactions are blurred with regards to the impossible causality between them, as affect theorists claim. Brian Massumi, for instance, explains how "Fear is the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future. It is the felt reality of the nonexistent, loomingly present as the *affective fact* of the matter" (54). Significantly, Gee's body anticipates a future threat that does not come from elsewhere but from within. Gee's narrative journey then, in similar ways to Sayuri's in Hiromi Goto's *The Water of Possibility* (2002), not only involves the crossing of a series of geographical boundaries, but also the interrogation of several corporeal, ethical, and affective borders. Gee's body challenges normative conceptualizations of embodiment in that it is composed of both organic and other kinds of materialities. Craving to be normal, he initially resists the unknown possibilities that his own body seems to offer. In an early episode in the novel, Gee's body begins to act with an extreme form of agency that is stronger than his will. Instead of avoiding trouble, as his grandmother had raised him, Gee's body takes over: "Minute cracks, spreading outward, finally

weakening, a howling rage bursting through the seams. Roiling, swelling with sickening stench, sour, mildewed and noxious" (68). Notice how his bodily response is also an affective one, where rage materializes through the very porosity of his corporeality. Suddenly, his body radically transforms:

> The skin from Gee's palm had spread, webbed, stretching thin between his fingers, white and elastic. Fingers, palm, elongated and pliant, his hand covered the boy's entire face, wrapping around half his skull to tenderly cover both ears. Gee could feel the loose skin flap in and out of the boy's open mouth as he desperately sucked for air. (69)

With grotesque spectacularity, the materiality of Gee's body acquires an extreme form of power that can potentially kill him. As described earlier with regards to Ilanna's body, Goto depicts certain forms of corporeality that threaten to destroy their own material bodies.

The monstrous bodies depicted in *Darkest Light* spread, expand, and contort in unexpected ways and as such, they cannot be contained, controlled, or managed. In this way, I claim, they become assemblages of queer trans-corporeality.[3] Intriguingly, when Ilanna crosses the gate into the Realm of Flesh searching for Gee, one of her eels betrays the other one by offering it as a toll. The eel's mutilated body still functions despite having removed one of its pseudo prosthetic-organic limbs. Trying to escape, Gee and Cracker then have to pay the toll as well, in this case, to enter Half World. To their surprise, Gee does not hesitate and bites off his own finger:

> His teeth should have met the resistance of bone. But they did not. They cut through his finger as if it were made of Plasticine. His mouth dropped open. The digit fell to his feet. Gee stared at his hand. No blood. No pain. His flesh was white all the way through—as though his matter was not flesh, was not human. (126-27)

Seconds later, his skin begins to stretch, replacing the missing finger with a new pinkie. Gee's body not only cuts across the human vs. non-human divide, but it also crosses material and affective borders. Feeling no pain or other forms of physical suffering grants his body a power beyond the human. This uncontrollable force may lead to social good, but it can also potentially destroy the socio-material fabric of the world. In one instance, Gee uses the flexibility of his skin to save Cracker's life. And yet, the flexibility of his flesh is later used in a more suspicious way when Gee decides to attach the eel that used to be part of Ilanna's body into his own arm. This transfer of bodily parts is only possible because of their individual agency. In other words, as an assemblage, the whole does not determine the nature of the parts. The eel, however, cannot be trusted, so this new part of

the assemblage introduces a variable of risk. Since its previous owner is Gee's enemy, the motives of the eel remain unclear. There is the possibility that the eel might have reattached itself to Gee's body as a "surveillance assemblage" (Hier 400), keeping their bodies under control and thus potentially jeopardizing their safety.

Gee's body further challenges normative conceptualizations of corporeality and embodiment in that it is composed of both organic and other kinds of materialities. In a scene that unavoidably echoes Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic *Blade Runner* (1982), Gee is terrified when he realizes that it is beads of wax that drip down his face instead of "normal" tears, as he puts it. In Foucauldian fashion, Gee is reminded by figures like Cracker or the White Cat of the intricate relationship between power and knowledge, and the central position of the body in this intra-active nexus. Acquiring knowledge about his own body will help Gee choose between alternative ethical possibilities. Initially, Gee shows a utilitarian approach to friendship: "He needed people who would help him, not hold him back. What was the point of having a friend if she served no purpose?" (134). His loyalty towards Cracker, for instance, oscillates throughout the narrative. At times, she is perceived by Gee as a friend but as his body and desires change, she begins to be perceived as an object of consumption. Part of the transformation that Gee undergoes in his journey involves not only changes in his personality and ethical dilemmas, which are common traits in these kinds of rites of passage, but also an extreme alteration of his affective responses, relationality, and temporal frameworks.

In similar ways to bodies, chronological temporality is also dismantled in Half World: "[Gee] glanced at the walls for a clock. He had no idea how much time had passed. . . . Time seemed odd, stretching and contracting" (168-69). Time is here perceived as elastic, malleable, and porous, in contrast to the way it works in the Realm of Flesh. A preliminary idea of the past begins to vanish only to be substituted by a new memory of an alternative past time yet to know. The unknown becomes the familiar when Gee slowly begins to remember a different life, a former body, and a past identity as Mr. Glueskin. Tempted by the possibility of ownership, Gee now feels the need to search for the past in the hope of achieving social status and material gain. When they reach the Mirages Hotel, Gee is received as the prodigal son returning to his homeland. Served with reverence and fear by the members of the staff, Gee now feels a renewed sense of authority that he wants to savour. Interestingly, this new appetite for power is accompanied by a growth

in desire and a craving for pleasure. Ilanna celebrates Gee's new identity as Mr. Glueskin, so she addresses him as a saviour and a liberator:

> *You* were the one who first woke from your Half World trance. When everyone else was still stuck in their stupor of suffering, you tore free from yours. You discovered that eating other sufferers extended your Half Life. . . . You set me free from *my* suffering. And that's why I'll love you forever. (162)

Ilanna's affection for Gee is highly sexualized and tied to the idea of eating other bodies. The boundaries between consumption and sex are thus here blurred; it is in fact through this affective economy that these characters are drawn together. Ilanna's queer trans-corporeality both attracts and repels Gee: "Something sharp stabbed through his jeans, abrading his skin. Gee glanced down. Ilanna's toenails were covered with barnacles. Was that a small oyster? He shuddered with revulsion. Longing" (164). Once again in the narrative, her medusa-like body not only stands as a source of abjection but also as a supply of pleasure and desire.[4]

Gee's very human materiality is questioned and transformed until he ultimately metamorphoses into a new corporeal being. What he describes as sick feelings begin to saturate his body from the moment he enters Half World. Oppressed by a combination of fear, anxiety, impatience, and anger, Gee struggles with his own subject position, with the kind of alliances he should make, and with the corporeal and affective materiality of his body. Entering the space of impossibility that is Half World also provokes dramatic changes in Gee's sensorial system, suddenly being overwhelmed by an insatiable appetite: an urge to eat other beings. In vampire-like fashion, Gee is drawn first to Cracker's blood. Though ultimately resisting his craving for human flesh, he succumbs to eating live rats as a source of strength: "A surge of energy rippled from his belly outward to all his extremities. Delicious shivers of power shot through his nerves, faster than electrons, finer than light. His very cells vibrated with the sensation, a harmonics beyond sound" (241). This ethically questionable act grants Gee satisfaction that is only ephemeral, leading to utter guilt and shame, and the self-questioning of his humanity. Echoing the moral dilemmas posed by post-apocalyptic narratives such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Gee/Mr. Glueskin is torn between restraining himself from engaging in cannibalism, or instead, succumbing to this predatory drive that would enhance his power. Cracker explains that to be conflicted is at the core of "the human *condition*" (213), so I would contend that Gee's moment of hesitancy is paradoxically what makes him human. What is most interesting, from the perspective of an

analysis of corporeality and embodiment in the novel, is the fact that Gee finds a strategy to help other creatures survive that involves a different kind of cannibalism. By feeding one of the creatures in Half World with parts of his own body, Gee subverts the idea of consumption, pointing to alternative ways of sustainability: "White chunks on the floor. His flesh. His glueflesh. . . . He snatched up a small chunk. It felt like firm tofu. . . . His skin crawled. Yet Gee held the flesh in front of Lila's mouth, and prayed that she would eat" (237). The narrative thus suggests that one person's waste can mean another person's possibility of life, so it is in our own hands to decide how to shape the world we inhabit.

The conclusion of *Darkest Light* supports my analysis of the novel in terms of assemblage theory in that, as previously argued, each part needs to have sufficient independence to precisely secure the equilibrium of the whole. Towards the end of the novel, we learn that Ilanna aims to dissolve the barriers between the Realms in order to secure the power of the creatures in Half World. This approach to territorial borderlessness is contested in the narrative in that Gee ultimately has the capacity to secure the stability of the three Realms precisely by ensuring that the boundaries between them are clearly delineated. As the cynic White Cat, who also accompanies Gee in his journey, puts it in the novel, "The universe does not place value upon the workings of individual components. The universe only seeks balance" (198). Ilanna's idea, however, consists in letting Half World flood the boundaries to the other Realms so that all becomes subject to its dominance and power. In this sense, the novel offers a creative alternative to the glamour of easy globality and its fantasies of a borderless world by engaging instead with the imperative to be attentive to the ethical and the affective contingencies of border crossing. Goto is in a way fighting old struggles by using fantasy as a vehicle to ethically rethink the unequal distribution of resources under processes of late-capitalism, which jeopardizes the sustenance of egalitarian social and political realms. And yet, *Darkest Light* tackles these familiar wars with new strategies, such as the dismantling and rearticulation of a variety of literal and symbolic boundaries that cut across corporeal, biopolitical, and affective structures. By doing so, Goto is assembling a new cross-border ethic that suggests new forms of relationality and creates unexpected alliances, to borrow Deleuze's term in the first epigraph to this essay, between material bodies, often reshaping the cultural and the sociopolitical fabric of our contemporary world. The ethical, as explained by Moore, must remain distinguishable from mere obedience and transgression, and this

is a lesson that the (anti-)hero learns in his journey: "In the cycling of the Realms, where everyone passed through Half World, there was no reward for being a good person. Mr. Glueskin had seen the truth of that in his passage through this Realm. There was no angelic chorus for behaving well. No reward for not inflicting hurt upon others" (271). Challenging religious value systems and indoctrination, the novel thus insists on avoiding a moralistic purpose. At the end of the narrative, Gee realizes that he needs to remain in Half World so as to ensure that the equilibrium between the Realms is maintained. Through Gee's ethical actions, *Darkest Light* thus manages to challenge received conceptualizations of home and belonging in that these past sites of comfort are sacrificed for the possibility of change in an uncertain future yet to come.

In the lecture delivered at the 2013 Edward Said Memorial Conference, philosopher Étienne Balibar refers to the "institution of the border" in terms of uncertainty. I find this specification relevant to my conclusion in that Goto's work problematizes borders not only as sites of artistic possibility, but also as contested and often institutionalized entities. Borders do share the uncertain quality that seems to characterize the first decade of the twenty-first century as articulated by a variety of critics and commentators. It seems, on the one hand, that the term "uncertain" has been co-opted by a variety of voices in the neoliberal financial and economic sectors as a strategic way to intensify regulatory measures, systems of control, and surveillance mechanisms that often involve the reification of hegemonic boundaries (Klein). In turn, the concepts of uncertainty and unpredictability have also been employed in the humanities and the social sciences as spaces of artistic creativity and ethical possibility (Moore). It is therefore of uttermost priority for the cultural and the literary critic today to think again about the border as a contested site where the corporeal, the biopolitical, and the affective realms of everyday life assemble. In the influential *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2012), political theorist Wendy Brown contends that we live in a time that features "capacities for destruction historically unparalleled in their combined potency, miniaturization, and mobility, from bodies wired for explosion to nearly invisible biochemical toxins" (20). These necropolitical impulses, nonetheless, as Goto's work illustrates, can be questioned, and arguably dismantled, through poetic, aesthetic, and cultural practice. *Darkest Light* relocates materiality within and across corporeal and affective borders, thus raising intricate questions about the interconnections between fantasy, power, and ethics. In this process, the narrative reorients the readers'

attention away from normative temporal frameworks, hegemonic systems of value, and uneven circuits of economic exchange, gesturing instead towards alternative logics of embodiment, affect, and the ethical imagination.

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NOTES

1 Through the integration of queer and race politics that so often characterizes her literary corpus, Hiromi Goto has certainly found a place within the contemporary Canadian literary scene, especially from the publication of her first award-winning novel *A Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994). While further addressing these concerns, I would argue that Goto's twenty-first century work focuses more directly on the intersection between the ethical and the biopolitical realms, particularly in the portrayal of the porosity of borders between bodies and spatio-temporal frameworks.

2 For an intriguing analysis of the role of smell in Larissa Lai's work, see Stephanie Oliver's article "Diffuse Connections: Smell and Diasporic Subjectivity in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*." *Canadian Literature* 208 (2011): 85-107. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this reference.

3 In her discussion on trans-corporeality, material feminist critic Stacy Alaimo stresses the need for a theoretical rearticulation of the contact zones between human corporeality and the more-than-human worlds so as to situate materiality at the centre of feminist analysis. As such, trans-corporeality becomes a theoretical site where corporeal approaches meet environmental methodologies in productive ways. See Alaimo's essay "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature" (2008) for further reference.

4 See Almeida (2009) and Latimer (2006) for a Kristevan approach to Hiromi Goto's portrayal of monstrosity and abjection in her work.

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Jon Flieger

Wolfville

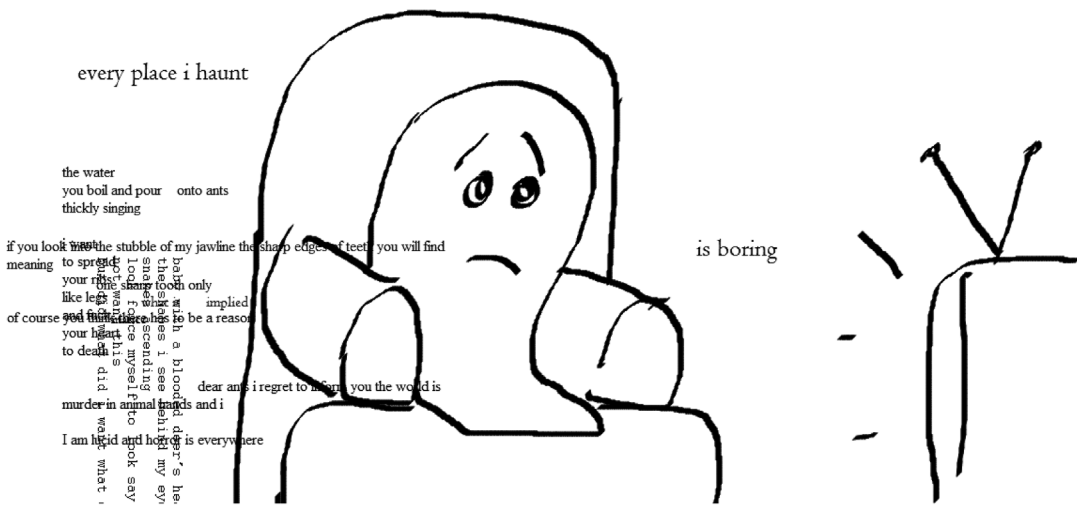
There are fewer surprises buried on this road

brown dying of trees
grey lives of monsters

scales andthe space that pausing occupies
caterpillar bites in leaves like slate
violenced free with dynamite
this etching
a stripping
of feathers

Isn't this near where your father grew up?
No.
Every time I think about it I just want to die.
Well.

and maybe now a carhorn
bark of footstep shout from radio
Fewer but



Nicole Côté

Nathanaël, ou l'étrange art du déplacement

Le *Carnet de somme* et son apatride traversée de frontières

Introduction : frontières tous azimuts franchies

L'auteure Nathanaël, naguère appelée Nathalie Stephens (1970), termine avec *Carnet de somme* (2012) une trilogie qu'avaient instaurée *Carnet de désaccords* (2009) et *Carnet de délibérations* (2011). Le genre du carnet y est inauguré avec *Carnet de désaccords* en 2009, et constitue un constat de l'échec du récit. Nathanaël y remplace la remémoration par la concentration dans le fugace, substitue le continu au fragmenté. On y trouve déjà l'éthique-esthétique qu'elle poursuit jusqu'à la limite de la déconstruction des catégories au cours de ces carnets, « une méthodologie de l'évidement, . . . non pas l'accumulation et l'archivage, . . . mais le drainage » (*Désaccords* 30).

Carnet de somme élargit encore les frontières de cet évidement, amenuisant, déconstruisant jusqu'aux structures présentes sous le foisonnement du réel. Il renvoie le sens de *queer* à sa première définition, de type *Neither Fish nor Fowl*. En effet, les fragments qui constituent *Carnet de somme* témoignent tant d'une traversée des espaces sexuels que de traversées des frontières soi-autre, langues-cultures, et génériques. La voix de la narratrice ou de l'essayiste ne semble plus vivre que dans l'entre-deux, dans un devenir nécessairement ouvert parce que les choix demeurent temporaires.

Nous savons, depuis le travail des chercheurs sur l'intersubjectivité (Benjamin, *Like Subjects*; *Shadow of the Other*), que bien que l'identité, et *a fortiori* l'identité sexuelle, soit une « pratique d'improvisation dans un contexte de contrainte »,[1] selon les mots de Butler, cette pratique est improvisée par le soi dans l'espoir d'être socialement reconnu. En effet, la question de la reconnaissance de l'autre, qu'il soit groupe ou individu, est nécessaire à la constitution du soi comme socialement viable. Ainsi dit Butler :

> La tradition hégélienne lie le désir à la reconnaissance et affirme que le désir est toujours désir de reconnaissance, et que ce n'est qu'au travers de l'expérience de la reconnaissance que chacun d'entre nous est constitué en tant qu'être socialement viable. (*Défaire* 14)

Cependant, les termes selon lesquels nous sommes reconnus comme humains sont infiniment changeants parce qu'ils tirent leur origine de valeurs qu'une société confère tant à des attributs physiques qu'à des comportements, à un certain style, une certaine façon d'incorporer ou d'assumer ces attributs (Goffman). Et parce que la reconnaissance de l'autre est fondée sur une norme temporaire établie par un extérieur constitutif (Butler, Laclau), « parfois les termes qui confèrent un caractère "humain" à quelques individus sont ceux-là mêmes qui privent d'autres personnes de la possibilité de bénéficier de ce statut », affirme Butler (*Défaire* 14). Tout individu chérit tant cette reconnaissance d'être humain à part entière que son autonomie, mais il compte sur les institutions sociales pour reconnaître son autodétermination quant au corps sexué qu'il ou elle présentera aux autres. Travaillant à l'affranchissement des catégorisations sexuées pour des êtres qui ne s'y reconnaissent pas ou qui n'y sont pas reconnus, la théorie queer, comme le dit encore Butler, « s'oppose par définition à toute revendication identitaire, y compris les assignations à un sexe stable » (*Défaire* 20).

C'est selon cet horizon queer que je discuterai la posture volontairement floue de Nathanaël telle qu'on la discerne dans le dernier ouvrage de sa trilogie de Carnets, *Carnet de somme.* Je tiendrai compte des préceptes constructivistes et intersubjectifs mentionnés et postulerai que la périlleuse posture de la narratrice la maintient sur le qui-vive, toujours à l'orée de choix, parce que ces choix permettent des naissances répétées, une liberté en marche qui se réclame d'une identité queer. Je me pencherai brièvement sur cette œuvre aux quatre frontières symboliques suivantes : I) soi-autre; II) des sexes; III) langues-cultures; IV) génériques J'espère montrer que ces quatre types de frontières sont imbriqués dans *Carnet de somme* et créent une représentation cohérente d'une identité volontairement à la dérive, projet d'écriture qui propose de repousser les frontières de la liberté du sujet tout en maintenant la fascinante relation à l'autre.

Frontières soi-autre

Carnet de somme se présente comme une réflexion intersubjective nourrie de rencontres avec des écrivains morts et vivants par le biais de leurs lettres, de leurs essais, de leur poésie ou de leurs œuvres narratives. Elle prend la forme

de conversations, de lettres (envoyées ou non), de réflexions sur des écrits ou paroles, mais qui seraient décryptées par la voix narratrice avec l'urgence de la lecture d'un manuel de survie.

Mentionnons d'entrée de jeu que le flou genré et générique qu'exhibe *Carnet de somme* semble sous-tendu par la représentation d'une porosité ontologique où le sujet met en scène un éclatement, une fragmentation, une dissémination du soi qui frôle l'absence. En effet, c'est un soi qui s'atténue jusqu'à ne plus sentir, voire ne plus être, et qui a pour leitmotivs symboliques la maladie, la mort, la réification. Ainsi, « Je suis devenue la guerre et la maladie, la face de la mort d'une personne. . . . Je suis le résidu du moi, l'absence de la relation : chose et chose » (*CS* 11). Ici, la formule frappée de Nathanaël touche au cœur de la reconnaissance : sans attachement intersubjectif, il n'y a pas de reconnaissance (et vice-versa), mais l'attachement, dans le cas de la voix narrative, implique un brouillage des frontières du soi ballotté entre un attachement à l'autre qui implique que l'on adopte son point de vue, et une différenciation de soi, qui implique l'érection de barrières comme différences. Comme le note Butler :

> As much as attachment is a precondition for development . . . so differentiation is a task that engages us throughout life, and which makes for the persistent structure of a certain ethical quandary : how do I remain attached and remain boundaried or separated as a self? And how do I live this boundary that both closes me off to others and opens me to them? (« Taking » 106)

Dans ces circonstances, la rencontre avec l'autre, si nécessaire soit-elle, est perçue chez la voix narrative comme accélérant l'anéantissement du soi déjà fragilisé, puisque, excentré de lui-même, il peine à vivre seul : « je me rapproche du suicide en me disant que cela aussi est une façon de vivre » (*CS* 67). Sa liberté se construit dans ce mouvement de va-et-vient dont parle Butler, la tentation de s'oublier en allant vers l'autre constituant l'autre versant de ce travail sur le moi : « Je fais sauter les murs, j'enjambe les balustrades, je vais au plus-que-toi pour quitter le lieu désavoué » (*CS* 64). Notons ici que l'usage de la deuxième personne du singulier, outre qu'il met en scène un espace intersubjectif, permet le plus souvent de contourner le genre grammatical, et donc sexuel.

La disparition entrevue du soi — par l'autre, peut-être devenu alibi — l'est comme une délivrance (ponctuelle, car une réification totale du soi implique l'aliénation et la mort) puisqu'aucun ancrage ne semble possible, cependant que cette connaissance vertigineuse doit rester tue. Dans cet extrait moins aphoristique, à la facture intimiste, se révèle l'indécence perçue du vertige

de l'être sans fond face à une certaine reconnaissance de la situation par l'être aimé : « A me dit que je suis au fond du gouffre. Mais ce n'est pas du tout ça. Un gouffre, ce serait déjà bien. Un fond, ça aussi serait très agréable . . . je n'ai pas su lui dire que non, il n'y avait ni fond, ni gouffre, ni noirceur, ni rien des rêves nihilistes des vivants. C'est plutôt de l'ordre d'un blanc » (*CS* 18).

Nous venons de voir que malgré ce que la rencontre avec l'autre recèle de promesses quant à l'oubli ou à la libération du moi, elle se décline souvent selon le leitmotiv de la perte de soi qu'augure cette rencontre : ainsi, l'annulation du nom est entérinée, vraisemblablement accélérée, par la rencontre avec l'autre. Cette perte pourrait être perçue comme positive, étant donné l'enfermement ressenti par un moi obligatoirement catégorisé, entre autres par le sexe, le genre, et que corrobore le nom : « Tu dis : N. Tu débarrasses mes noms de leur pesanteur, de leur fatalité. N., ce reste de moi, cette scorie » (*CS* 15). Mais elle ne peut rester positive, car le soi doit maintenir sa position de sujet pour garder sa liberté, éloigner le spectre de la réification qui vient avec l'acceptation d'une seule position d'objet dans le regard de l'autre. Dans ce cas précis, n'est pas mentionnée la désexualisation du nom lorsqu'il n'en reste plus que l'initiale, mais elle est signifiée tout autant que la disparition des autres entraves : la plus grande liberté que promet la réduction du nom à une initiale, N, se conjugue avec la crainte d'une perte de sa substance. Cette ambivalence normale chez le sujet se décline dans l'écriture de Nathanaël sur le mode de l'urgence, ce qui à la fois montre l'équilibre précaire des assises identitaires traditionnelles chez elle, et constitue une micro-analyse du fonctionnement des mouvements d'attraction-répulsion qui fondent les relations intersubjectives, comme dans l'œuvre de Nathalie Sarraute.

L'autre, ici marqué comme masculin — sans qu'on sache si ce masculin est astucieusement utilisé comme générique ou s'il possède un référent stable — paradoxalement à la fois consume cette absence à un soi sexué et le marque au fer de la féminité : « Tu tires mon corps sous ton poids. . . . Tu es mon passeur, couché sur ma disparition » (*CS* 15). Car la position comme le poids plus lourd de l'autre signalent chez la voix narrative l'adoption d'une posture dite féminine. Le paradoxe de la rencontre sexuelle avec l'autre singulier, c'est que cette rencontre définit les contours du genre de N, donc de son appartenance à une catégorie sexuée, tout en l'annulant comme subjectivité. La reconnaissance du féminin passe donc par l'annulation de son incarnation subjectivée, ce qui est fréquent dans les représentations littéraires traditionnelles masculines des femmes,[2] mais étonne ici, étant donné la posture originale

adoptée. Le segment « Tu es mon passeur » indique toutefois un passage, mais ce passage ne pointe pas vers une libération puisque tout se passe comme si N allait annuler sa féminité pour s'associer au masculin gagnant.

Frontières des sexes : genré–dégenré, générique

Cette catégorie des frontières des sexes découle bien entendu de la question centrale soi-autre. Comme Butler l'a déjà dit dans *Bodies That Matter* — je résume ici la citation qui suit —, il n'y a pas d'humanité qui ne soit déjà représentable comme sexuée :

> Once "sex" itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is, it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility. (2)

C'est dire la difficulté traditionnelle d'entrevoir une humanité chez un être qui se situerait hors de ces normes. Dans ce contexte, les frontières des catégories soi-autre et sexuées, dans *Carnet de somme*, en demeurant floues, travaillent à élargir les frontières de ce que signifie être humain. Il est évident que l'auteure Nathanaël reste en tout temps consciente des enjeux inscrits dans la forme même de son texte. Quelques passages en font foi : « Hermaphro*dite* est une parole désirée dans un corps inintelligible, dit-elle » (*CS* 70). Plus bas, même page, une drôle de réflexion qui arrive à réunir hésitations genrées et génériques, tant la pensée de N, sans en avoir l'air, touche au bobo : « L'hermaphrodisme serait cela, *une plongée dans le corps désirant, loin des préoccupations nominales.* Masculin et féminin, ou aucun, c'est-à-dire ailleurs, ce qui pour moi est acte de présence : là. Loin des formes décidées, d'un discours politique arrêté mais : *en face* » (*CS* 70).[3] Ainsi, le référent genré, le nominal, c'est-à-dire ici le substantif, le nommé, le défini, le cerné, le catégoriel, parfois un masculin à valeur purement générique, parfois un féminin, fait vraisemblablement référence à la même voix narratrice-essayiste, aux mêmes interlocuteurs, comme un pied de nez à la grammaire française, qui demande une nette division binaire des sexes, un référent genré/sexué fixe.

Mais aussi, d'un point de vue ontologique, cette position queer facilite le passage au point de vue de l'autre, au *visage de l'autre*, dirait Lévinas, quels que soient son sexe ou sa position assumés. « *[L]oin des préoccupations nominales* » signifie loin de l'enfermement des catégories, des nomenclatures, un nom étant substance congelée (substantif), une prise de position ou une présentation de soi sous un certain angle, alors que le refus d'enfermer le

soi et l'autre dans des catégories opposées établit un tiers-espace, un espace intersubjectif entre le soi et l'autre qui définit l'un et l'autre comme des êtres-en-relation, et donc des êtres en flux.[4]

On voit donc que chez N la revendication d'un genre-sexe foncièrement ambigu, qui se décline au féminin ou au masculin générique, est liée à une revendication plus générale, celle d'une sortie de l'autoroute de l'identité, vers des chemins de traverse, puisque décliner son identité, c'est traditionnellement faire des choix, nommer, donc cerner, et ainsi laisser de côté tout un pan de l'être : « "On périt toujours par le moi qu'on assume : porter un nom, c'est revendiquer un mode exact d'effondrement" (Cioran). Ainsi tout nom est une forme de suicide qui arrache le nom du moi afin de permettre d'autres moi, d'un autre (que) moi » (*CS* 58).

On sait que la superposition du genre sur le sexe implique l'assentiment à des relations de pouvoir entre les sexes si anciennes qu'elles en paraissent naturalisées. Par ailleurs, le parti-pris de nommer deux êtres par des termes définis, qui s'excluent mutuellement, et qui en excluent forcément d'autres (un homme et une femme, par exemple, ne sont pas autre chose), amorcent traditionnellement un récit, ce que la narratrice veut à tout prix éviter parce que la nominalisation et la mise en récit excluent d'autres aspects de soi qui pourraient être, naître, à tout moment, déséquilibrant le récit linéaire, traditionnellement hétérosexuel. En outre, une identité est aussi toujours intersubjective, et le moi poreux, fragilisé de la narratrice N, à la fois revendique l'autre comme un versant de soi actualisé, mais encore méconnu, à la fois le craint en raison de la place qu'elle lui laissera occuper chez un soi menacé de l'intérieur.

Frontières langues-cultures

Outre l'autre singulier, l'autre collectif offre l'attrait de sa langue, qui ouvre, comme l'aurait dit Aldous Huxley, *les portes de la perception* (je cite la narratrice) : « Saarbrücken — suis dans une langue autre, comme dans une eau qui me submerge sans pour cela m'atteindre » (*CS* 18). Tout comme plus haut on avait un moi féminin qui, voulant se libérer de ses entraves vraisemblablement s'annule dans la rencontre avec le masculin, la promesse entrevue de l'autre collectif comme libérateur du moi ne tient pas, le moi semblant trop préoccupé par la préservation de son intégrité face à cette altérité. Se présente, avec cette rencontre anticipée, le leitmotiv du soi dépassé par l'autre, ici « submergé » par une langue-culture. Cette langue-culture toutefois n'atteint pas la voix narratrice, ne la rejoint pas, parce que

le soi doit se protéger contre une dissolution dans l'autre. D'ailleurs, l'autre collectif, le groupe, la nation, se caractérise dans le prochain passage par une mêmeté connotée négativement, malgré la différence culture-langue au départ attirante par sa capacité à sortir le soi de son marasme :

> En traversant la place, j'éprouve un violent dégoût pour tous ces humains, je me dis que c'est partout les mêmes personnes, que ce n'est pas étonnant qu'on perpétue les mêmes violences, on n'a qu'à se regarder. Ce n'est pas que nous ne nous aimions pas assez, je pense que peut-être on ne se hait pas suffisamment. (*CS* 19)

Bref, la rencontre avec l'autre langue-culture, si elle augure une reconnaissance, une co-naissance, est aussi angoissante en raison du possible anéantissement du soi féminin fragilisé. La question de la traduction, qui est désir de rencontre sur un terrain commun, est abordée dans la même ambivalence : « La traduction est une forme de séduction, et se recevoir tout en étant reçue dans la langue d'une autre — une langue autre — introduit dans le corps une abondance de fluctuations qui disent à la fois l'attente et l'inattendu » (*CS* 81). Il n'est pas surprenant que N choisisse d'écrire dans un français qui possède toujours-déjà un quotient d'étrangeté, et qui charrie les mots étrangers comme un fleuve des alluvions, avec quelques blocs granitiques ici et là : Ces blocs, l'impossibilité de les traduire, ce sont particulièrement les villes — (*Saarbrücken*, *Wien*, mais aussi les pays, par exemple, *Deutschland* [*CS* 21]). On voit que l'Allemagne occupe une grande part dans cet effet d'étrangeté, avec son exigeante poésie; Paul Celan, Rainer Maria Rilke, sont convoqués. Ce sont souvent de très courtes strophes où la tension entre des opposés reste une constante : « *Denn Bleiben ist nirgends* » (*CS* 64) : *demeurer* (*bleiben)* s'opposant ici à *nulle part* (*nirgends*) pour créer un paradoxe qui incarne la déstabilisation.

Par ailleurs, on peut se demander ce que la mobilité du sujet féminin N — ses déplacements de Chicago à Vienne, par exemple — apporte d'agentivité. Si Andrea Ganser peut affirmer, à l'instar d'autres chercheurs : « Stories of women's travel writing and theories of female subjectivity have started to raise important questions about the complexity of both fixity and mobility as gendered — and gendering — cultural and social conditions » (*CS* 17), l'immobilité étant traditionnellement associée au féminin enfermé dans une maison, un couvent, etc., pour sa protection, il n'en reste pas moins que N est une femme éminemment mobile, qui connaît comme ports d'attache de grandes villes du monde européen et nord-américain, lesquelles comptent beaucoup dans l'idée qu'elle se fait d'elle-même. Témoin ce, « Es-tu la somme de tes villes? Quelles sont tes villes? » (*CS* 23).

Bien qu'il soit tentant d'affirmer que cette mobilité internationale est indice d'agentivité, les déplacements de N se vivent sur le mode de l'ambivalence, et la font osciller entre un sentiment de grande liberté, qui promet la redéfinition du soi dans un nouveau contexte, et la fatigue existentielle qui s'ensuit face à une collectivité qui ne semble pas si différente de celles qu'elle connaît. Ainsi, alors que ne cesse de s'exercer la fascination de la différence d'une langue-culture, la promesse d'un renouveau pour soi, la lucidité de N montre les limites de cette possible métamorphose pour le soi fragmenté : « Je continue à m'éparpiller à tous vents, je suis en lambeaux dans ces lieux qui semblent se déchirer au fur et à mesure que je m'avance en eux, comme si ma seule présence leur conférait leur désintégration » (*CS* 19). Aussi même l'arrêt de N dans une grande ville suscite-t-il une oscillation sans fin qui revêt les apparences de l'immobilisme; ainsi, de Vienne (écrit dans la graphie allemande, *Wien*) : « *Je ne m'imagine pas rentrer, mais rester est tout aussi inenvisageable* » (*CS* 20).

Frontières génériques : le carnet comme genre éclaté ou virtuel

Le carnet, selon le Petit Robert, est un « petit cahier de poche, destiné à recevoir des notes, des renseignements »; le carnet, dans sa définition même, suscite l'idée de pensées éparses, de mémento. D'ailleurs la syntaxe souvent incomplète, hachée, cryptique, qui suggère des traversées fugitives plutôt que d'asséner des vérités, reflète cette *somme* volontairement inachevée, marquée par le flou du référent générique *carnet*. C'est dire que les phrases, même complètes, évitent l'enfermement. N évoque la généalogie du recours à cette forme en affirmant qu'après un certain livre écrit :

> objet insupportablement laid . . . livre terriblement destructif. . . . *Je*, comme tu le sais illisible. Comme si en l'écrivant j'avais arrêté le français net, tué le mot qui me massacrait. Depuis, j'écris ces Carnets, qui sont des tentatives d'écriture, des essais, des petits échecs qui tâchent impossiblement de raccommoder le temps et son sens. (*CS* 43)

D'où le choix du carnet comme forme liminaire, eu égard à l'échec des autres genres littéraires à rendre l'incomplet, l'hypothétique, la pensée floue, entre essai et épistolaire. La poésie n'est pas mentionnée comme tentative de genre, mais suffisamment de poètes sont convoqués pour qu'elle surgisse comme un espoir d'écriture en filigrane.

Une pensée d'André Gorz, sans références, comme si elle était tirée soit du néant, soit d'un seul ouvrage, vient arrêter le mouvement du balancier vers l'indéterminé, l'informe : « Il faut accepter d'être fini : d'être ici et nulle

part ailleurs, de faire ça, et pas autre chose, maintenant, et non jamais ou toujours . . . d'avoir cette vie seulement » (*CS* 18). On s'aperçoit que cette pensée de Gorz est érigée en garde-fou comme une frontière factice, car la voix narrative-essayiste évoque ailleurs la tentation contraire : celle de tout embrasser. Plus loin, on trouve, comme en porte-à-faux, une justification de cette incapacité de narrer ou une indifférence à l'égard du récit dans une citation de Christophe Donner : « Des textes qui forment enfin un objet. On les croit tangibles. Une œuvre endure. *L'écrivain n'est pas un artiste à cause de ça. La matière n'est pas de son ressort. Il la poursuit. C'est risible. Il doit s'y faire* » (*CS* 63 : les italiques sont de moi). Donc, ici, l'idée de se reposer sur l'architecture du récit pourrait relever d'une sorte de paresse séculaire, puisqu'on se repose sur des formes qui appartiennent à la tradition pour dire du nouveau, qu'il ne faut pas même tenter de faire de ses textes des histoires tangibles, qui mènent quelque part.

Des images récurrentes parlent de cette difficulté — ou du refus, c'est selon — de la mise en récit. Ainsi un morcellement extrême se retrouve dans les activités quotidiennes, qui, de par leur ordonnancement, leur but ultime, devraient pouvoir structurer un récit de soi au quotidien, le suffixe — ée de journée indiquant un temps envisagé dans sa totalité, dans sa somme : « Impossible de faire de ces tâches une journée, la journée étant obstinément hors de portée » (*CS* 27). Il en résulte une incapacité de donner forme au cours du temps, métaphore du récit. Plus loin, on lit ces justifications explicites sur l'impossibilité ou le refus de donner forme au récit : « Il est possible que le problème de la narration aille de pair avec le problème de la nomination. C'est trop facile de prendre appui sur cette armature » (*CS* 79) et « c'est moi maintenant qui suis transformée, et qui choisis de refuser certains récits qui font de moi une chose dont je ne veux pas » (*CS* 26).

Poursuivons nos remarques génériques en revenant au titre *Carnet de somme* : il s'agit d'un oxymore puisque son premier substantif évoque le provisoire, le fragmenté, alors que le second, bien que polysémique, évoque au féminin une totalité ou un ouvrage qui se présente comme tel. On pense à la *Somme théologique* de Thomas d'Aquin. Le titre nous renseigne déjà sur cet entre-deux qui fait la singularité comme la prévisibilité des écrits de Nathanaël. Cependant, si on reprend le mot « somme » du titre, délesté de tout déterminant, et donc d'un genre grammatical qui puisse fixer son sens contextuel, force est de noter qu'il se prête à nombre de spéculations. Nathanaël en évoque quelques-unes, dont : « être sommé, c'est être attentif au ressac qui fonde et effondre l'être » (*CS* 22). Dans ce seul court paradoxe

s'opposent les sens de *somme*, du court sommeil à celui du « *sommer* » de l'interpellation, un état d'intense éveil, ainsi que ceux de *fonde/effondre*, qui ont à voir avec la structuration depuis les assises, puis la déstructuration totale, le passage de l'érection (d'une personne, d'un édifice), verticale, à la destruction, qui vise l'horizontal, comme le « somme » de l'état de sommeil.

Quant à l'aspect épistolaire de ce carnet, on sait que nombre des fragments sont adressés à un *tu* mouvant, l'un mort, l'autre (les autres?) absent(s). La narratrice affirme même à un moment : « J'écris des lettres que je n'envoie plus » (*CS* 63). La catégorisation générique reste floue, car bien qu'on ne puisse exclure l'épistolaire, postulé par la présence du *tu*, cet épistolaire devient liminal, genre-seuil du fait que l'autre est disparu ou que le moi garde ses missives. La catégorisation genrée du destinataire est tout aussi neutre : celui/celle à qui les missives sont écrites semble masculin ou neutre.

Dans cette forme générique appelée *carnet*, l'adresse étant souvent à la deuxième personne du singulier, la syntaxe même alloue des phrases qui commencent ou finissent à mi-chemin, comme si bien des choses s'étaient passées hors scène; ainsi une phrase dont la syntaxe mime l'incomplétude du propos, « Tu as raison qu'il ne s'agit pas d'un commencement mais d'une fin qui n'en finit » (*CS* 96) ou encore une proposition subordonnée sans principale, qui commence d'ailleurs par une virgule, ponctuation faible, « comme s'il subsistait quelque chose qui était toujours vital, et familier et étranger, *sur le point d'arriver* » (*CS* 97).

Curieusement, il en résulte une écriture d'autant plus anatomique que ce genre fourre-tout ne donne pas prise au récit, ne permet pas de s'accrocher à une intrigue. La syntaxe du récit devient impossible par manque d'ancrage temporel, par manque d'embrayeurs de tout acabit :

> On est vendredi, je prépare ta mort. Ta mort qui m'arrive. J'étouffe sur les pavés de cette ville où tu n'es pas. . . . Un vendredi J. se fait tabasser dans l'escalier. Un samedi tu hurles toute la nuit. Un dimanche je vais au marché. Après c'est lundi. Après. Octobre, mars (*CS* 69).[5]

Cette citation fait l'économie d'une trame temporelle minimale : la narratrice revit-elle la mort de son ami, ou la prévoit-elle? Les événements nommés sont-ils réels, et de ce fait, passés? Ou les imagine-t-elle? Tout se passe comme si l'œuvre nécessitait qu'on demeure à l'orée du récit, pour exprimer la singularité de son genre au carrefour d'autres genres, mais aussi pour prolonger et multiplier les incipits.

L'obsession de Nathanaël pour les incursions dans des entre-lieux symboliques ou dans des territoires inconnus afin de prolonger les débuts prometteurs se

conjugue aussi en d'autres langues, dont l'anglais et l'allemand. Des mots étrangers hachurent la syntaxe déjà malmenée : corps étrangers, toujours déstabilisants. Ils nous renvoient comme une série de miroirs à la métaphore de l'autre, à la nécessaire traduction du soi qu'impose toute traversée vers l'autre, traversée périlleuse en ce qu'elle menace toujours sinon d'anéantir le soi, du moins d'en rendre poreuses les frontières. Voici un passage où les limites des villes, langues, soi et autre se mêlent, se rejoignent pour former un chemin vers la nouveauté, l'encore inentamé :

> Je songe à sortir, à entamer cette ville sombre et à marcher jusqu'à ce qu'elle soit expulsée de mon corps, jusqu'à ce que les rues se transforment en champs et que les lampadaires cèdent la place aux étoiles, jusqu'à ce que le lieu se soit épuisé et qu'il ne reste plus que les limites d'autres lieux, d'autres langues, d'autres formes d'appel. (*CS* 48)

En vertu du maintien des tensions entre des pôles qu'on pourrait appeler thèse et antithèse si la narration-essai n'évitait pas soigneusement d'en tirer une synthèse, de même que de la dérive du sens des mots, le genre de *Carnet de somme*, essayistique, aphoristique, au seuil du récit, s'inscrit dans la lignée des écrits poststructuralistes.

On peut dire de *Carnet de somme* qu'il est décousu en apparence, mais égal à lui-même dans ses thèmes. Il y a chez Nathanaël à la fois une sorte d'incapacité ontologique à donner forme au récit que le *je* assume et affiche sous la forme d'un parti pris de l'entre-deux, de refus des catégorisations qui va jusqu'à oser une déstructuration de l'armature que le genre littéraire donne à l'écriture. Puisque ce carnet participe aussi de l'autofiction, on peut étendre cette réflexion au soi narrateur, qui à la fois souffre de son éclatement, à la fois le défend comme une posture esthétique qui se plaît dans le singulier, se défaisant de toutes les structures traditionnelles de la représentation du soi et de l'autre, tant dans les corps que dans ses productions culturelles. Cette position hautement éthique en ce qu'elle est toujours déjà intersubjective, si attentive à l'autre qu'elle va jusqu'à en assumer la position, dont le sexe. Cette intersubjectivité, voire cette adoption de l'autre, de son sexe, ouvre les possibles et adopte pour seul territoire stable l'entre-deux, le liminaire.

Conclusion

Il faut donc entrevoir que les possibilités créatrices de l'être apatride chez Nathanaël, de même que leur anéantissement, qu'il s'agisse du *je*, de la patrie, du genre, du sexe, de la langue, du lieu réel, surgissent du magma informe d'un soi sans balises : « Je continue à m'éparpiller à tout vents, je

suis en lambeaux dans ces lieux qui semblent se déchirer au fur et à mesure que je m'avance en eux, comme si ma seule présence leur conférait leur désintégration » (*CS* 19).

La pratique liminaire qui se donne à voir dans *Carnet de somme* imagine le soi délesté d'assises traditionnelles nettement délimitées : genre, sexe, nominalisation, récit, donc trame narrative. Cette pratique tient par la même occasion l'autre à distance parce qu'il pourrait, en fixant le soi, sa posture genrée, en limiter la liberté. Il s'agit d'une esthétique qui trace les contours mouvants de l'identité dite queer, faisant de ce fait allusion aux catégories genrées et génériques héritées de la tradition qui ont limité la conceptualisation du genre, qu'il soit littéraire ou sexuel, et suggérant des ouvertures, des chemins de traverse qui ont à voir avec le refus viscéral de la fixité identitaire traditionnellement imposée, particulièrement délétère pour le féminin traditionnellement dévalué.

Ce qui fait l'originalité de la posture de N, donc, c'est l'élargissement de sa situation d'entre-deux à une prise de position qui à la fois englobe et déstabilise, comme on l'a vu, diverses frontières, afin de remettre en question rien de moins que les fondements de la représentation de l'être : sont atteintes les représentations du soi et de l'autre, et donc, nécessairement, des frontières des sexes, des assises de la langue (pronoms), des frontières des langues, du singulier et du collectif, et par là, de l'entrechoquement des langues-cultures.

NOTES

1 Ma traduction de *Undoing Gender* (2004) de Butler (1). La traduction de ce passage par Maxime Cervulle se lit ainsi : « une activité incessante performée, en partie, sans en avoir conscience et sans le vouloir » (13).

2 J'entends ici le fait que les représentations masculines des femmes en littérature et dans les arts en général ont traditionnellement eu tendance à se concentrer sur des caractéristiques du sexe liées à des grandes catégories (vierge, mère, putain, femme fatale, etc.) qui évacuent la singularité du sujet féminin représenté, appauvrissant ainsi la diversité des représentations des êtres de sexe féminin, contrairement aux représentations des hommes, comme on peut aussi encore le voir au cinéma.

3 Elle ajoute : « Glissant ne l'admettrait sans doute pas, mais c'est aussi cela, l'inintelligible. Être pris au dépourvu, c'est quand même se donner à l'instant. L'instant dans sa durée. »

4 Voir à ce sujet les ouvrages de Jessica Benjamin : *Shadow of the Other* : *Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, et *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference.*

5 Mais il s'agit ici d'une forme de continu, donc de désir de narration, sous la forme de l'interpellation : Il s'agirait peut-être d'un récit si minimal qu'il en est imperceptible : la causalité qui démarre le récit est aussi minimalement justifiée : celle d'un désir de continuité, la

nécessité de la présence de l'autre chaque jour nommé, parce qu'on craint de le perdre lui aussi, comme le souvenir des amis perdus revient chaque jour. De là la nécessité de perpétuer cette mémoire par un récit minimal, une amorce de récit.

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Taryn Hubbard

Pls Be Honest

m: i love you less than break slash greater than
y: dont know what to say about your command
m: i love you less than break slash greater than
y: sorry, im not rich $_$ clearly ill try someday
m: i love you less than break slash greater than
y: don't repeat won't be able to know your face
m: i love you less than break slash greater than
y: repeating is not a matter of simply repeating
m: i love you less than break slash greater than
y: i want a hilarious lil' bot for my tad troubles
m: i love you less than break slash greater than
y: i stopped repeating here's 5 free things to try

Shannon Maguire

Parasite Poetics
Noise and Queer Hospitality in Erín Moure's *O Cidadán*

Introduction: Being-In-Question[1]

Subjectivity, noise, and hospitality are key themes spanning Erín Moure's oeuvre. There has been much critical attention paid to Moure's theories of citizenship and subjectivity (Carrière, Dowling, Fitzpatrick, MacDonald, Moyes, Rudy, Skibsrud), as well as recent articles drawing connections between Moure's poetics and queer affect theory (Moore, Williams and Marinkova). However, the only critical writing (other than Moure's own) that addresses her theories of noise in depth is Heather Fitzgerald's MA thesis, *Finesse into Mess: Entropy as Metaphor in the Queer Poetics of Erin Mouré* (1997). Published five years before *O Cidadán*, Fitzgerald's study focuses on what she calls "entropic grammar" and explores the connection between asthma and sexual difference in Moure's earlier work through "a theory of asthma as entropic writing practice" (95). While my argument is conversant with Fitzgerald's theory of entropic grammar, it also diverges from hers. It is my purpose to show how processes of encounter such as hospitality, estrangement, and translation are thrown into relief by a reader's careful attunement to Moure's use of noise as both poetic medium and tool in *O Cidadán*. In her exploration of vibrant relationships among the poet, translator, reader, and text, Moure crosses over and draws attention to the insufficiencies of the old paradigm of Western hospitality—with its host-guest-stranger-barbarian-hostage dispute over property and threshold—by setting the framework of recognition off-kilter.

In *O Cidadán*, Moure offers an innovative staging of the question of estrangement: "What if we listen to the noise and not the signal?" (102).

This question forms the backbone of Moure's political and poetic inquiry, placing her poetry in dialogue with Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality. The question of hospitality is, for Derrida, focalized by what he calls "the question of the foreigner" (*Of Hospitality* 3). Derrida suggests that ethical responsibility—or the hospitable relation—is initiated by the stranger's unbearable proximity to the host, an intimacy that draws us towards limits of recognition and the limits of the law. It is, he suggests, "As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the very question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question. But also the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question" (*Of Hospitality* 3). In *O Cidadán*, Moure casts the lesbian subject as a being-in-question, that is, as a basis for hospitality. To do so, she uses noise—that which is unwanted and unrecognized in any transmission (Kosko xviii)—as both a poetic medium and a crucible of hospitality.

Moure's formulation of the question of the stranger as a matter of noise over signal draws a parallel between queer subjectivity and noise as the process by which someone or something is rendered unintelligible and out-of-place. "What is noise? Noise is a nuisance . . . [i]t is a signal that does not belong there," explains Bart Kosko (3). For Moure, far from being a nuisance to be managed (cancelled, banished), noise has the potential to activate new senses of words and new orientations to the world because it marks the threshold of relation (*Wager* 110, 210-11). Roland Barthes glosses the hearth as "centre, guardian, refuge, light of truth" (7). Unsettling this central trope of Western thought, Moure substitutes the threshold of noise as decentralizing principle of hospitality. Moure engages with queer theory's turn toward negative affect when she asks her readers to be receptive to what is annoying, unwanted, and normally disregarded or actively suppressed in communication: noise. As Heather Love says, "Same-sex desire is marked by a long history of association with failure, impossibility, and loss . . . a historical reality . . . that has profound effects for contemporary queer subjects" (21). Moure demonstrates in *O Cidadán* how desire, "our inner mode for the future tense" (*Wager* 36), when registered as an out-of-place signal, is inflected by the main themes of hospitality that Derrida identifies: "burial, the name, the madness that inhabits language, exile, and the threshold" (Dufourmantelle, "Invitation" 16). Moure works the limits of these themes by situating the process of reading within economies of social and linguistic exclusion. Using the re-placement of attention as a means of instigating literary and political reorientations—themselves entangled within

the "discourse of privilege [that] is infinitely absorptive" (*Wager* 34)—Moure destabilizes the conventional roles of hospitality and textuality.

The page, for Moure, acts as a threshold, an external and liminal space where reader and poet negotiate the roles of host and guest in the event of thinking. For Anne Dufourmantelle, "Hospitality describes a figure, a space that allows a gesture of invitation to take place. That is . . . the space of thinking itself. To think is to invite, to offer a shelter to the other within ourselves, the other as the possibility to be(come) ourselves" ("Under Compassion" 13-14). In this sense, hospitality occurs at the most intimate interstice between inside and outside—that libidinal band that organizes page, body, and geography into feedback loops of sensory perception and experience—that same crux that Moure foregrounds throughout her body of work. However, Moure refuses Dufourmantelle's formulation of hospitality as "the experience of an encounter and a recognition" (14). Instead, Moure unbinds the encounter itself from the expectation of recognition by making noise—that shifting, threshold of relation—the subject of attention.

In Moure's poetics of hospitality, noise is the precondition for poetry. Discussing her method, Moure insists that poetry is "an object that is first a noise, then a resonance of words that alters noise over and over in the head, breaking through the pallor of the image and the self" (*Wager* 17). Here, the construct of the self takes on the role of the host—a role that is very soon re-appropriated by noise. In his introduction to Michel Serres' *The Parasite*, Cary Wolfe reminds us "that 'noise' (for the English reader) forms the third and unsuspected meaning of the French word *parasite:* 1. biological parasite; 2. social parasite; 3. static or interference" (xiii). In Moure's work, all of these meanings, but especially the second and third, become contiguous shaping mechanisms for a queer orientation to the world based on interference of the dominant signal. In *The Parasite*, Serres adds a character to the *dramatis personae* of the hospitality scene. Significantly, this character—the parasite—(figured as many things from rats to gusting wind) invites the non-human to the host's table in a central role. The parasite "intervenes, enters the system as an element of fluctuation. It excites or it incites it; it puts it into motion, or it paralyzes it. It changes its energetic state, its displacements and condensations" (Serres 191). Ultimately, however, Serres' account of the parasite is limited by his valorization of information and the robustness of the hierarchical arrangement of systems that shores up the law and the status quo: "The parasitic series is an irreversible chain, going down the slope like the river. . . . We know the law of the series, of the chain. . . . We know the end of the

process—disorder, noise, chaos, the sea" (169). The old hierarchical binaries rear their heads in this description: Man/woman, Reason/chaos, Information/noise, River/sea. As discussed below, Moure appropriates some of Serres' insights about the parasite and applies them to her poetics but does so from a very different angle, and toward a different end. For Moure:

> Engaging poetry or poetic structure as enactment can help us defy the second law of thermodynamics, that is, disturb the organism and apply stress to the cells (for it is the tendency to the centre, to stasis or anæsthesia, that destroys the organism) even to those cells called feminism or feminist writing. (*Wager* 34).

For Moure, noise is a medium of desire, and is that which opens any system veering towards closure to the unforeseeable.

In an essay published in 1997 for the Toronto Photography Workshop exhibition of the work of Shonagh Adelman, Moure says: "For me, writing is an incorporated act. It is not signs for what goes on in the head but comes out of the hand, is mediated by the hand. The hand meeting / marking such a surface. I want to say, too, the hand is also a sex organ" (*Wager* 92). From the outset of her career, Moure's focus has been on what Gilles Deleuze calls "the haptic gaze . . . the gaze that touches, rather than the optic gaze" (qtd. in *Wager* 92). In Moure's poetics, noise is a queer object, an object of the haptic gaze. Noise is the shifting threshold between environment and system. It also represents the perceptual limit of any given person in any given context. As Fitzgerald points out, Moure "writes to expose the failure of signification" (*Finesse* 67). Moure's use of failure as a generative poetic principal, combined with her eroticization of sound's touch, produces a queer method of textual fabrication that resists the dominant modes of socio-cultural inheritance by joyfully reproducing the failure of communication itself within the frame of dominant discourse:

> When "my language" fails, only then can we detect signals that harken to a porosity of borders or lability of zones . . . (across the entire electromagnetic spectrum, not just the visual, as in *planetary noise*)
>
> But first we have to suspend our need to see "identity" itself as a saturate signal (obliterating all "noise"), following Lispector
>
> into a "not-yet"— (*Cidadán* 79)

In other words, when a reader is an active participant in turning towards, rather than away from noise, she is made aware of the ethical and political effects of the act of paying attention as such. For Moure, "poetry is not about creativity or uplifting people but about risk, great risk, hurtling oneself at the boundaries of language, ears pressed to the borders of the structure

and hearing its constraints, which also indicate openings" (*Wager* 148). By focusing her "haptic gaze" (Deleuze qtd. in *Wager* 92)—which includes sonic awareness—on the dynamics of welcoming that which is unwelcome in normative relations within the nation-state, Moure strikes at the very foundations of the act of welcoming, the foundational act of hospitality, and adds a critical queer perspective to the discourse of being-in-question.

The Name and the Queer Barbarian

Derrida concludes *Of Hospitality* by exposing the violence that allows hospitality as such to reproduce itself in law and philosophy. By doing so, he challenges the basis for liberal human rights discourse, which is, after all, a discourse of hospitality, by analyzing the failure of ethics that makes possible the substitution of men's bodies for women's when it comes to "harm's way" in two biblical stories often cited by the philosophical tradition of hospitality: that of Lot and his daughters, and the scene on Mount Ephraim in Judges (*Of Hospitality* 151-55). Importantly, Derrida recalls these stories in order to problematize the Kantian ideal of the constitution of (homo-)social bonds as well as the traditional paradigm of hospitality as universal regulator of rights (149). As Derrida underlines: "All the examples we have chosen up till now bring out the same *predominance* in the structure of the right to hospitality and of the relationship with the foreigner, be he or she guest or enemy. This is a conjugal model, paternal and phallogocentric" (149). It is in the context of this impasse that Moure responds by posing the question of the lesbian as noise in the system.

Moure's preface to *O Cidadán* has multiple resonances with Derrida's opening to *Of Hospitality* but when she centers the "troubling" lesbian (invisible and inaudible even in Derrida's account), who arrives speaking in "tongues," she also takes up and redeploys the strategies of the parasite as articulated by Serres: "The new meaning spread everywhere starting from wind and noise. Not a single language translated in several languages, but several spoken and several heard at the same time" (Serres 41). Here is Moure's opening gamble:

> To intersect a word: citizen. To find out what could intend/distend it, today. *O cidadán.* A word we recognize though we know not its language. It can't be found in French, Spanish, Portuguese dictionaries. It seems inflected "masculine." And, as such, it has a feminine supplement. Yet if I said "a cidadá" I would only be speaking of 52% of the world. . . . How can a woman then inhabit the general (visibly and semantically skewing it)? How can she speak from the generic at all, without vanishing behind its screen of transcendent value? As if 'citizen' in our

> time can only be dislodged when spoken from a 'minor' tongue, one historically persistent despite external and internal pressures, and by a woman who bears—as lesbian in a civic frame—*a policed sexuality.*" (*Cidadán* n. pag.)

From the outset, sexuality is central in Moure's reframing of citizenship and the "minor-tongue" that she refers to is doubled, being lesbian (thus in the third position) as well as spoken in the space between dominant languages and from a "minor literature" (Galician literature) in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of "blurred words" (*Minor Literature* 21). By casting the lesbian question in terms of noise, Moure invokes not only Derrida's analysis of the link between "proper" relation and relation to property, the dynamic at the very threshold of the hospitality paradigm, but she shifts the paradigm itself by insisting on a structural link between noise, lesbian discourse, and "the citizen as enactment" (*Wager* 160), as bound together in a process of deterritorialization. We can hear the hints of this work in Moure's questions: "can the name be reinvested or infested, fenestrated . . . set in motion again? Unmoored? Her semblance? Upsetting the structure/stricture even momentarily. *To en(in)dure, perdure*" (*Cidadán* n. pag.).

Playfully disturbing her patrilineal affiliation by pointing to her father's surname "Mouré" but altering it to a verb, "unmoored," Moure casts her altered identity as one of the questions that the lesbian-in-question poses in her role as stranger. It is with a variation of this unmoored, queered name, "Moure," that she signs her book on the cover for the first time, changing the placement of the accent from surname to first name in all subsequent authorial signatures (at least to the present). Under this new name, she is able to demand a new term for, and new relations of citizenship; she is also able to "seek an ancestral cadence. A cadence of being and thought and harmony with trees" (*Insecession* 44) even while disrupting patriarchal structures. Her father's grandfather emigrated from Spanish Galicia in 1846, and Moure claims that "No one had spoken Galician in my family since the emigration, until I learned" (*Insecession* 68). Both Moure's paternal grandfather and her father changed their own names:

> My father's second name was Benito, after his father Juan Benito's second name . . . during WWII he changed Benito to Benedict because he didn't want a name shared with Mussolini . . . Juan Benito Moure in Canada had become John B. Mouré. To appear more English or more French was an immigrant's necessity. (*Insecession* 68)

Moure's gesture of intersecting patrilineal inheritance with a demand for an altered concept of citizenship is what is at stake in *O Cidadán.* Insisting that

the "interiority (subject-relation) of the citizen is a disturbance/turn, rather than a strict identity"(*Cidadán* 61), Moure posits her lesbian stranger "'At the edge of ~~that~~ / impetuous crossing'" (*Cidadán* 60). As Ryan Fitzpatrick and Susan Rudy point out, "In fact, this proliferation of authorial identities began even earlier [than in *O Cidadán*], in 2001, when the name 'Erin Mouré' appeared on the cover of *Sheep's Vigil By A Fervent Person (2001)*" (61). Although she signs the book on the cover with accent shifted, the copyright page bears her father's surname, complicating the economic and symbolic registers of her gesture. Interestingly, this is the last time that "Mouré" appears on any of her copyright pages: from *Little Theatres* (2005*)* onward, both cover and copyright are signed Moure.

Moreover, Moure seems to be making a pun by freighting "perdure" with its double, "perjure," in her opening questions, which I quote again, "can the name be reinvested or infested, fenestrated . . . set in motion again? Unmoored? Her semblance? Upsetting the structure/stricture even momentarily. *To en(in)dure, perdure*" (*Cidadán* n. pag.). This pun becomes possible to hear only in the context of the preceding wordplay and Moure's change of her name and the name of citizen itself. It also recalls the translator-traitor dynamic as well as the "trait or mark [that] must work with the haptic, which means provoking sensation in more than the eyes" (*Wager* 92). The gesture of endurance is cast as a renaming, but a renaming that provokes touch—textual and otherwise. "*To en(in)dure, perdure*" has an insert, a hand inside it, provoking change, disrupting the word "endure." There is a haptic interiority being suggested, and the poet's hand caught in the word. This precarious pun links Moure's politics of noise-as-queer-signal-infestations to her politics of translation through the interrupting, unruly third and her parasitic appropriations of "the proper" and of property. The gesture of redeploying the (haptic) gaze leads Moure towards the structure of absolute hospitality in Derrida's sense:

> The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it, and it can on the contrary set and maintain it in a perpetual progressive movement; but it is as strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law to which it is yet so close, from which in truth it is indissociable. (*Of Hospitality* 25, 27)

Derrida contrasts the figure of the foreigner, the subject of "hospitality by right" (law), with that of the barbarian, the subject of justice. For Derrida, the barbarian is "someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor

social status" (25) and this is also true for Moure's "deterritorialized" queer subject, o cidadán. Noise, in Moure's poetics, becomes the catalyst for an oscillation between a discourse of lesbian rights as human rights (caught up in exclusionary practice) and a discourse of the queer barbarian as an absolute other. The lesbian subject of hospitality in *O Cidadán* cannot be separated from her "strangely heterogenous" queer barbarian alter ego (*Of Hospitality* 27). One figure represents the contingency of hospitality and the other fails to represent at all, and in so doing, embodies absolute hospitality in the guise of absolute noise. To perdure (continue, exist) as a being-in-question, that is as a lesbian, requires a radical translation of the civic frame, one that goes beyond mere recognition as a rights-bearing subject under phallogocentric law, but rather interrupts law itself to start anew with a different intensity and differently placed attention. This mark puts a nick in the law, allowing absolute hospitality, "the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor" (*Of Hospitality* 83), to parasite the law, becoming the point where the question of a radical outside (momentarily) breaks through. Noise, then, becomes Moure's medium for "intersecting" the word citizen with lesbian porosity.

"Labiality" (Thresholds and the "Madness" of Language)

Who is listening and what is heard is as much a matter of social space as it is generosity and respectful curiosity or willful ignorance and hostility: listening is a matter of hospitality. In *O Cidadán*, the reader is cast as the "*host*/guest" (105) and called upon to accommodate the stranger by making cultural and cognitive space for an open-ended encounter. The radical position taken up by Moure in every aspect of *O Cidadán*, from its typography to its thematics, demands that the dominant Western discourse through which the book is transmitted must be recognized as noise by the reader so that other, less pervasive signals might be heard. Because bodies themselves are produced through networks of biological and symbolic exchange, Moure reads them as "a kind of weak signal communication" (79) in order to develop a way of thinking through and addressing the problems and possibilities of citizenship and queer hospitality.

O Cidadán is heterogeneous in structure, consisting of "Georgettes" or lesbian love-poems; "documents"; "catalogues of harms"; as well as other "aleatory" poems—including a diversity of forms such as banners, calculations, film scripts, and photos—that are listed in the table of contents using lighter font, implying that they operate on a different frequency from the other poems. All of the poems are arranged into sections of "papers"

that are often grouped under the name of a location such as Yorkshire or Montréal, or statuses, such as "fugitive," or directives, such as "no paraíso do sono" (in the paradise of sleep, in Galician). In *O Cidadán*, Moure uses every method at her disposal, including grey font, charts, graphics, and non-conventional spacing to mix discursive and linguistic codes, enacting the "lability of meaning" (83) as a mode of excessive *caritas* that stretches beyond the love of the neighbour, in Augustine's formulation, to open outward toward strangers. At the same time, Moure refuses Augustine's separation of sexuality from the "public relation" (63). In so doing, Moure queers Augustine's act "tolle lege" (take up and read).

In "document41 (tidal)" Moure asks "Who plays out the complexity of the *hôte.* Where host/guest's configural. . . . How to live this citizen, without transcendent pleas or Augustinian originary thinking, with Nancy's present 'sense of the world'—and, all this, out of a 'melancholy ego,' too, from the side of féminité constructed in another fashion" (105). On this page alone, Augustine, Serres (mentioned by name at the bottom of the page), Nancy, and Judith Butler (also mentioned by name), are folded into Moure's wave patterns to form a wet and slippery libidinal textuality that develops her queer theory of noise. The centrality of noise to the kind of hospitality (and citizen) that Moure is theorizing is stated explicitly in "document19 (abrigar). "Abrigar" is the Galician word for the verb "to shelter." In this poem, Moure argues,

> Signal's clamour cannot impede noise's *aproximação*. Citizenship's acts are rather acts of unrecognizable "fullness," cathected under weak signal conditions
>
> The face or ear that is also a terrain, the harbouring of
> "l'autre homme"
> without insiting he "make sense" according to *my* strctures
> Perhap it's the structure itself that is empty and can't bear such fullness? (51)

Moure turns structuralist thought on its head by proposing that the signifier is full—literally is the body (51)—while at the same time refusing Augustine's version of the voice: "Can a report such as Augustine's lead to totalities? And thus harms? For Augustine totalizes the voice: it is God. Authority and origin" (97). Throughout the book, "signal" stands in for a socio-political "dominant signal" that demands the impossible: to be cleansed of noise. Against this totalizing structure of communication, Moure posits noise. Noise is the structure of possibility (and futurity) and brings a message of hope. Noise tweaks the capacity of the human voice and of the human ear to admit fullness without reducing it to origins, as Augustine does, and is the threshold of recognition, beyond which shimmers the unrecognizable face of the queer citizen.

Moure makes use of intralingual as well as interlingual infections (linguistic parasites), creating new words by joining morphemes across languages and by code switching at the level of the line and even the word. These are only some of the linguistic strategies Moure employs to trouble the rules of linguistic morphology and the paradigm of the citizen as a stable identity composed of requisite documents signed in the "language of the republic" (*Cidadán* 78). Lianne Moyes aptly calls *O Cidadán* "a field of conceptual inquiry into the epistemological limits of discourses and practices of citizenships" that "work with what might be called 'a prosthesis of citizenship'" (113), flagging the word Cidadán as such an object. A prosthesis can be a "foreign" part that "allows a subject (or nation, text, or border) to function" (Moyes 113). Indeed, for Elizabeth Grosz, there are

> two types of prosthesis: one which accommodates existing needs, which fits into the body's current and recognized needs and desires; and another which introduces new aesthetic and practical possibilities not yet available, still awaiting prosthetic incorporation, yet to be incorporated into human need—the first in accordance with the actual and the already existing and the second welcoming and making space for that which cannot yet be imagined or lived. (152)

It is the second type of prosthesis that Moure's poetry resembles. Johanna Skibsrud notes that it "is along the border, within the 'becoming space' of language, that Mouré's [sic] *O Cidadán* is constructed, emphasizing the continuous, active relation between one language and another, between thought and speech, speech and writing, and ultimately, self and other" (16). In this way, the allure of grand unifying theories breaks down with the signal and we are called "to suspend our need to see 'identity' itself as saturate signal / (obliterating all 'noise')" (*Cidadán* 79). In the channel of the poem, a "contact zone" as Mary Pratt calls it (qtd. in Skibsrud 16), is created, challenging the very structures of power. In this way the poems themselves can be seen as prosthetic devices composed of code-mixing (rather than language-mixing and/or code-switching) of multiple "natural" and "artificial" languages, as well as multiple discourses.

When Moure confirms that "integral to [her] search is a droll query that echoes a *kind* of queer laughter: *What if O Cidadán were a girl*" (*Wager* 155), she proposes a cross-coding of lexemes to form unheard-of-words that will carry us beyond the known (received) world. This reorientation depends upon the use of prosthesis in Grosz's second sense of "welcoming and making space for that which cannot yet be imagined or lived" (152). The limit between artificial or cultural enhancement and so-called "natural" bodily

function, the border between "inside" and "outside," is neither stable nor clear-cut, and this point is thematized in *O Cidadán* through Moure's use of noise as an epistemological horizon and libidinal band. Moure insists upon a queer hospitality, saying that "[b]oth citizenship and reading, like weak-signal communication, rise scarcely above the noise floor produced by the system itself and do not disjoin from that system. Rather, they enact a porosity, a differential and different relation of desire as it touches reality" (*Wager* 165).

The reader's agency is based on the relations between signal and interruption. A reader works by and through interruption. As Moyes puts it, *O Cidadán* is a lyric address to the reader-citizen "yet a song that is arguably looking for . . . interruptions in the interest of fostering the unruly public relation that is citizenship" (128). What this suggests is that in order for the work to operate as it sets out to do, that is, in order to act as a discursive site where citizenship with a difference is produced and where citizen-readers are challenged to exceed their limits and engage in an ongoing process of becoming-cidadán, the reader must work as noise, as the third party that alters the relation. For Serres, the third person is noise itself. In his reading,

> [t]he parasite has placed itself in the most profitable positions, at the intersection of relations. The elementary link of his individual activity was to relate to a relation; its performances are far better in spots where several relations cross or meet. It is at the knots of regulation, and suddenly it relates to the collective. (43)

Restraint and confinement are prevalent themes in Moure's work, operating in linguistic, socio-political and sexual registers alike. While Serres searches for a network "without constraint of crossroads, interchanges, intersections with parasites" (44), Moure does the opposite and embraces the crossroads and parasites as the place beside the dominant signal where queer relations stand a chance of flourishing. Her poetics embrace the citation that is not a repetition but a reply; the page itself is where social justice and desire can be reconfigured. In one sense, the way that Moure as a writer re-inscribes the dominant signifying systems of the Western tradition is by taking up the parasite's position in order to have her readers listen to the static in the line. In keeping with Derrida's foreigner who calls the host into question, both poet and reader are cast as strangers to themselves and to each other.

It is not a coincidence that the first poem of *O Cidadán* happens to be a "Georgette," one of a set of apostrophes to a female lover that the reader intercepts or interrupts. Georgette fabric is sheer with a crinkly surface that is made from S and Z shaped torqued thread (Kadolph 268).[2] Besides acting as a metonym for the desired as a relation to language, the title also

reminds the reader of the structural aspects of the text(ile) and links lesbian lovers' discourse to the cidadán.

The extent to which the reader hears (receives) the content of the Georgettes as noise depends upon the expectations that the reader successfully overcomes. Here the poem acts as a channel for a haptic gaze (Deleuze qtd. in *Wager* 92). The conventions of a love poem (the supposedly intimate relation that is made public) are recast, as the reader must labour to intercept the transmission. The conceit of distance that forces the bodies to face/hear each other in a way that might become visible/audible to others, exposing them to risk, is furthered by the demand to "*tender l'oreille*—literally to stretch the ear—an expression that evokes a singular mobility . . . an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety" (Nancy, *Listening* 5). Unlike traditional love poetry that assumes that any reader would be interested and receptive to the speaker's declarations of love, Moure's poem leaves the reader to grapple with choice. While the reader struggles with her curiosity or anxiety as she decides whether to listen to the noise of lesbian love, the speaker of the "Georgettes" positions the beloved as noise that has ceased to be noise. The poem begins: "Georgette thou burstest my deafness" (3). This move displaces the Aristotelian hierarchy of senses, which prioritizes vision, as sound is repositioned as the primary sense. Smell, taste, and touch follow in turn but vision comes last of all in Moure's poem.

Besides foregrounding the dangers and possibilities of social space, Moure's use of crossings and knots go beyond what Serres imagines for them and also signal queer sexuality, emblematizing the disruption of dominant power relations as well as the risks, limits and pleasures that the pursuit of non-hegemonic desires and sexual practices yield. Discipline and constraint are linked with creative production, pleasure and a process of epistemological and ontological opening out. Jean-Luc Nancy tells us that "[e]xistence tans its own hide" (*Sense* 58) and that "[t]he fragment, or 'art,' is the symbolic itself in the place and instant of its interruption. It is the secret—pleasure and/or pain—that interrupts the symbolization of the symbolic and thereby delivers the (n)evermore-of-sense [*plus-de-sens*], the infinitely-(n)evermore-of-sense by means of which existence is related and exposed to itself" (*Sense* 137). The relation of noise to a network is turned into an explicitly sexual metaphor that circulates along with social and political meanings. In this way, the poetic economy of noise is a creative force that operates at the level of the personal as well as the public. The borders so often addressed by critics of Moure's work include those of sex as

a "relation: to 'extend' the 'boundaries' of such interiority," as Moure puts it in "document30 (viable risk)" (77). This sets us on a chain of language that flips bits and switches throughout the book, positioning queer hospitality and poetics in the overlap between the fields of kinky sex and Foucauldian sexual disciplinearity. The stakes here are the reorientation of object relations (queer phenomenology) and the alteration of the economy of inheritance and belonging (queer hospitality).

Consider these lines from "~~soverign body39~~ (vis-à-vis)" (102): "visi (vis-à-vis) = a relation, also: isi- a certain symmetry of i's around a/ curved channel./ v = the hand" (102). Besides evoking lesbian sexuality, the hand in the channel also acts as a prosthesis in the sense of "an opening up of possibilities that may not have been possible before" (Grosz 147). In "visi (vis-à-vis)" we might hear face-to-life instead of face-to-face, if listening half in French. The "v" is a letter palindromically folded over itself. It is the first letter in the word visible. The politics of visibility and readability are evident in the erotic possibilities of the hand in the channel as it relates to the "one leg open in admission of caress" (101) of the preceding "Georgette." But what of the "symmetry of i's around a / curved channel"? They refer to Intersymbol Interference (ISI) in telecommunication, which is a form of noise. They also refer to the relation of first persons to second and third persons in communication. Finally "curved channel" is an "s" and the "s" marks the plural, at least in English. The v is the relation birthed in the channel, the "*vie*" or life that the titular sovereign body under erasure is bidding for and remaking in "fugitive papers."

Intersymbol Interference in Moure's hands becomes the basic strategy of her poetry of resistance. Intersymbol Interference might be described as a blurring of a set of symbols (message) by another set. One of the causes of Intersymbol Interference is multipath propagation or the noisiness of non-linear "frequency response" of the channel itself, making symbols smudge each other. A wireless signal might reach a receiver multiple times through various paths, for instance, by reflection, refraction and so forth. Different translations of the message might well have different temporalities. This polyvocality or "vocais multiplicadas" (*Cidadán* 103) has potential to open new possibilities but it might also be grievously misread. In "document38 (empobrecido)," for example, the dangers of "stabilizing *the other*" (*Cidadán* 100) are related to a misinterpretation of both message and source:

> In some sense, Augustine's first hearing 'tolle lege' is reception under weak signal conditions, ambient production within the system itself, which he tears

> from this ambience and constructs as a command from God: a kind of lateral concomitant speaking (t.l.) is thus invested by A both as binding authority and as "origin" (*Cidadán* 100)

"Tolle lege," as noted, means to take up and read. In *Confessions*, Augustine reports that he was:

> weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or girl I know not which—coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, "Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it". . . . So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. (8:12.29)

The passage that Augustine opens to is Romans 13:13, a passage that extols chastity and the refusal of the flesh. But Moure questions Augustine's interpretive leap from neighbourhood children and aleatory reading practice to divine command. What Augustine interpreted as God's voice calling him to take up the bible was much more simply the voices of neighbourhood children, Moure reminds us. In troubling Augustine's interpretive practice, Moure also underscores the gender ambiguity of the children, noted by Augustine. Therefore, what Augustine read as the Great Outside, or Almighty Stranger, was in reality inside the channel, it was the "ambient production within the system itself" (*Cidadán* 100), as the poem suggests. In other words, Augustine ascribed a divine source to what in effect was Intersymbol Interference, which introduces "errors" or distortions, in this case, the error of origins. Moure contrasts this to the acts of

> de Sousa Mendes, Portuguese consul in 1940 Bordeaux, [for him] the voice is *enacted* . . . the signature on a visa then put into the hands of another . . . 50 years later we have a "report" from his children of the voice he'd heard that made him act against his country's express orders not to issue visas to Jews or others expelled from other countries. But their report is not *his*, as Augustine's report of the voice *is* his. (*Cidadán* 97)

By siding with de Sousa Mendes, and insisting on human interrelations and terrestrial cascades of meaning production rather than extra-terrestrial (divine) sources, Moure takes a stand "against Augustine's caritas, for it stabilizes zone disequilibriums: in embracing the neighbour, difference is ghosted over" (78). For Moure, the love of the stranger presents the foreclosure that the love of the neighbour reinforces.

Moure's queer hospitality hinges on the substitution of a "voice of noise" in place of Augustine's "voice of truth." This instantiates what may be thought of as "deviational" morphology, where affixes create new meanings across

languages, and new lexical entries within each, rather than traditional derivational morphology wherein an affix creates a new word (lexical entry) in a particular language. It also opens the possibility of the exchange of non-linguistic "codes" between local participants that fail the test of "language" and thus detection. This complements her entropic grammar (as Fitzgerald calls it) to create a parasite pragmatics that interrupts grammar, lexicon, and context long enough for the reader to question the structures of relation. Moure's text enacts an economy of folds (she calls this "the jewel," *Wager* 22-24): signals overlap at the level of the clitic, morpheme, phoneme, lexical unit, line, text and intertext. The principle of "Carpe addendum" (*Cidadán* 29), or seize the addition/supplement, is instrumental in understanding how the multilingual morphology works within and through noise to produce a break from normative political, philosophical, and sexual acts, and to release bodies from pre-given sets of behaviours. If noise is "the system of detection in itself" (*Cidadán* 103), then the word is a prosthetic device that troubles the distinction between "inside" and "outside" and produces visibility and a site of action for those who have been traditionally *sans papiers* to varying degrees, such as those who have born the brunt of colonialism, racism, sexism, compulsory heterosexuality and other forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Conclusion

For Moure, "A citizen uncorks uncertainty's mien" (*Cidadán* 4) and the touch of the lover is intimately bound in the play of noise and language. She defines poetry as "speech with high [semantic] ambiguity" (Moure, *Insecession* 104) and unhinges it from more readily commodified forms of language. If the work of the poet is "*to be* all ears . . . to exist according to listening, for it and through it" as Nancy suggests is the work of the listener (*Listening* 5), then so too is this processual form of listening the work of the reader. For Moure, "We are all histories stopped in time. At every moment we have to *establish* ourselves: not *re*-establish ourselves, but establish anew" (*Wager* 122). This is the sound threshold (in both senses) of queer hospitality that Moure tests as the limit of radical subjectivity in *O Cidadán*. Her emphasis on transformation rather than transcendence is critical to her desire to queer hospitality and structures of kinship. Instead of the host-stranger/guest-hostage dynamic, which resolves into hierarchies based on the dispute over private property, at least according to Serres (13), Moure proposes a reader-listener-translator/traitor-poet dynamic as a new

paradigm, one that refuses private property as the basis of hospitality and instead posits the threshold between language and noise as a movable "table" and the focal point of social and sexual relation.

NOTES

1 Papers are the written trace of a wider conversation that nurtures a research practice. While the people involved in the wider conversation are too numerous to name, I would like to thank Dr. Smaro Kamboureli and Marcelle Kosman for reading and commenting on a very early draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Dr. Eleanor Ty and Dr. Jenny Kerber for providing valuable feedback on a much more recent draft. The anonymous readers, as well as Dr. Margery Fee and other editors of *Canadian Literature,* were most generous and astute with their critical midwifery, and I thank them warmly. Erín Moure graciously answered some questions I asked about her literary genealogy. The errors that remain herein are mine alone.

2 Regretfully, there is not enough space in this paper to explain the various ways that Moure intervenes in Barthes' narrative theory as he sets it out in *S/Z*. I do want to mention that Moure has a long intertextual argument with Barthes' theory from her feminist rewriting of "The Acts" in *Furious*, to *O Cidadán*. It is therefore tempting to interpret this subtle detail as a structural pun, a hint that the love poems are connected to the fabric of narrative fissure and discursive opening.

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Michael V. Smith

Prayer for a Family Friend

These years later I imagine
frozen spermatozoa

wriggling life in the belly
of the doctor's plunger

as your other mother's egg
descends into the crowd.

Imagine your future
simple as blades

of grass to the yard, as
various, necessary.

That you should waddle
from your mothers'

arms, speaking
my name in my absence.

First, incantations.
We live this distance

sieving a love
from vanity

wishing you would not learn
the world without me.

Kevin Shaw

Ekphrastic Drag

Temporal Transgressions in John Barton's *West of Darkness: Emily Carr: A Self-Portrait*

> Be careful that you do not write or paint anything that is not your own, that you don't know in your own soul. [D]on't take what someone else has made sure of and pretend it's you yourself that have made sure of it till it's yours absolutely by conviction.
> —Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr*

Emily Carr's 1935 painting *Edge of the Forest* bisects the canvas in a jagged line. On one side the sky rises in a swirl of greys, whites, and unexpected streaks of orange. On the other side, the forest's rich greens deepen to pitch black. In the painting's foreground, a thin arrangement of stumps and pathetic firs marks the liminal space between the interior and exterior of the forest, between the dark and the light. In his ekphrastic poem of the same title, John Barton writes: "Salal and oregon grape / fall back to thickening / trunks. / Centuries pass. // It is mid-morning" (*West of Darkness* 53). For Barton, the blurred edge is simultaneously temporal and spatial. Both painter and viewer are on the outside of the forest looking in, yet Carr's depiction of the persistent growth on the outside of the forest suggests that there can be no clean division. Appropriately, a section of *Edge of the Forest* provides the cover illustration for both the first (1987) and second (1999) editions of Barton's *West of Darkness: Emily Carr: A Self-Portrait*, a collection of biographical poems written in the first person that offers a fragmented narrative of Carr's life and work.[1] The painting, showing the ragged desolation that comes just before the lusher—if darker—forest, provides the ideal Carrian image for this borderland text on the edges of ekphrastic and documentary modes. By assuming Carr's voice, one already well established in her own prolific and popular autobiographical texts, Barton transgresses

the boundaries of not only gender and era, but the settler-colonial city of Victoria and the Indigenous communities Carr visited and represented in her visual art and writing.

Yet another transgression is rendered in the collection's second edition, where readers have access to both the poet's original afterword (1987) and a new essay entitled "My Emily Carr" (1999). In the first afterword, Barton writes that his version of Emily Carr "is representational rather than purely documentary, impressionistic rather than exact. [Carr] despised art that betrayed nothing of the artist" (128). In the later essay, Barton reveals what his poems "betray" when he writes that he was not yet out as a gay man when first composing his Carr poems. He notes, "It is only in the last ten years [between editions] that I have come to see Emily as my drag persona" (136). As this essay will discuss further, temporality—especially its gaps and delays—is an important component of both Barton's ekphrasis and his iconoclastic choice of persona. Yet without the inclusion of the poet's paratextual comments, arguably nothing would differentiate Barton's poems as "drag" from any other example of a male writer—gay or otherwise—who takes on a female character's voice.[2] Gerard Genette refers to paratexts as the "threshold" of interpretation (261) and certainly in Barton's case, the afterword and essay are essential to recognizing Barton's performance as specifically queer, by marking the boundary—as slippery as it may be—between John Barton and "his" Emily Carr. In the same essay, Barton also notes a change in the text's subtitle between editions: the poet's "portrait" of the artist has become a "self-portrait." Barton explains that the change stems from an early book review that questioned why, if the text was written in Carr's voice, the collection was not called a "self-portrait" instead of "a portrait" (Barton 135). Although Barton's is an impersonated "self-portrait" of Emily Carr, it is also, arguably, an authentic "self-portrait" of the poet. Yet only after his coming out does Barton look back upon his text and interpret Carr as his drag persona. The change in the subtitle might suggest a greater degree of comfort with the collection's queer subtext—a declaration of "self" even from within the intact persona. Barton's (auto)biography of Carr allows him to emphasize Emily's awareness of patriarchal constrictions on her expression as a woman, a Canadian, and an artist and allows Barton to express a similar sense of displacement and repression. Following the shifting "I" of his poems, the concluding essay serves, in terms of theatrical drag conventions, as the equivalent of removing a wig at the end of a song to emphasize that the illusion of "realness" was just an act all along.

In addition to the textual drag performance of narrating Carr's life in the first person, Barton's "self-portrait" includes numerous ekphrases of Carr's paintings written in her voice. Ekphrasis, which, in its most basic definition, provides a textual representation of a work of visual art, is a wide-ranging genre that includes descriptive works by an observer as well as attempts at allowing the painting's subject (or the artist, in Barton's case) to speak back to the viewer. As Emily, Barton's speaker expresses a contemporary, if closeted, queer subjectivity that takes pleasure in her representations of an idealized and isolated western frontier. Robert G. May contends that Barton, in his Carr poems, focuses on Carr's landscapes "as a place of rejuvenation and renewal, of personal illumination and new growth" (250) before he was able to write more explicit or confessional expressions of queer experience. May goes on to write that "although Barton is not yet prepared to articulate his own sense of otherness nearly so explicitly, his strong identification with Carr and her work points to his analogous desire to assert his own reality, to speak with his own voice" (251). In this essay, I demonstrate how ekphrasis, in concert with drag, functions as a queer form of Canadian (auto)biography. As the narrative of Carr as both a Canadian and feminist icon intimately seams her nationality and gender, Barton's reframing of his poems as an exercise in performativity suggests the implications of drag for nationalist discourse, particularly in the reiterative presence of iconic figures. By inhabiting Carr's paintings and her voice to tell the story of her struggle for expression as a social and artistic outsider, Barton transforms Carr's landscapes into a representation of, and respite from, the confines of an interiorized sexual closet.

As Carr's paintings provide Barton with liberatory points of departure, he explores both the spatial dimension of her canvases as well as her life history. Recent scholarship on temporality in queer theory suggests the manifold ways the queer subject engages with the past (and future). As Heather Love notes in her discussion of "affective history," scholars are becoming less interested in proving or disproving authentically queer subjects of the past, but are rather "exploring the vagaries of cross-historical desire and the queer impulse to forge communities between the living and the dead" (31). Similarly, Paula Rabinowitz notes that while there is no evidence that Carr was a lesbian, "Part of the labor of modernist thinking back through our mothers entails discovering their latent feminism (and, even better, lesbianism). Even if the evidence is missing, it becomes a willed desire of the feminist critic" (201). In Carr, Barton finds a historical correspondent in the struggle for self-expression within a hetero-patriarchal culture.

The cross-historical connection in Barton's poems is achieved through what I term "ekphrastic drag." The latter includes the performative sense (in that Barton assumes the voice of a female artist), yet it is perhaps more indebted to Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "temporal drag" which Freeman associates with "retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present" (62). For Freeman, temporal drag allows for an embodied interrogation of queer progress. Her examples from contemporary experimental film—in which the "pastness" of feminist and queer history becomes, for example, worn as anachronistic items of clothing or held as supposedly out-of-date protest slogans in the present—not only indexes prior moments that we have apparently transcended, but rather allows for "a kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind" (63). Instead, these artists and writers "[mine] the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions" (16). Barton's Carr poems are similarly infused with the anachronisms and backward temporal shifts that Freeman, Love and others identify as being central to a queer affect.

Reflecting upon the "backwardness" of his persona, even Barton notes his choice of Emily Carr is "iconoclastic": considering that most drag performers borrow from contemporary pop culture, it is iconoclastic by being anachronistic (136). Yet in Barton's ekphrases, Carr's landscapes are not merely historical images widely reproduced for popular national consumption, but are rather sites of contestation and desire, and also the very stage on which he constructs a contemporary mode of queer expression. As Richard Brock argues, "ekphrasis represents both the frame and its other: it occupies the site of conflict between the spatial and the temporal, while resisting and countering the exclusionary, spatializing act of *framing*" ("Framing" 133-34). While May has detailed how Barton's use of natural imagery across his body of work "explor[es] the ways in which Canadian national ambivalence, particularly toward the landscape, can be expressive of an equally pervasive Canadian sexual dissidence" (246), the exploration of nature, bound in colonial narratives and representation, is also temporal, and especially so in *West of Darkness*. Through his literary performance, Barton demonstrates that neither Carr's struggle for critical acceptance, nor her controversial legacy, can be safely consigned to the past.

Carr's life and work have frequently been the subject of such reconsiderations. Stephanie Kirkwood Walker writes of how, with the many iterations of Carr's life in production, she becomes a subject of "repetitious re-evaluation" by biographers who "using the lens of their own preoccupations, [have]

explored the dimensions of her nature, her time and her place" (115). Of Barton's project, Kirkwood Walker writes, "Self-aware, he recognizes that his portrait is idiosyncratic and multiple: it both is and is not Emily Carr" (119). Similarly, Eva-Marie Kröller considers how each literary representation of Carr has been "significantly shaped by the occasion for which it was produced and by the tradition informing its author's work" (88). This multiplicity of Carrian subjects has two sources: Carr's own construction of her public personae in popular autobiographical texts and the way she has been taken up as a nationalist-feminist icon.

In her study of Carr as a biographical subject, Kirkwood Walker contends that Carr-as-icon, and thus Carr as a figure open to biographical interpretation and artistic appropriation, emerged in the mid-to-late 1970s, a product of second-wave feminist historical recovery (xxii). Rabinowitz, discussing the transnational marketing of feminist icons such as Carr (from biographies to tote bags and coffee mugs) writes, "Feminism, which in its (so-called) second wave organized under the banner of international solidarity among women against capitalist exploitation and male chauvinism, has, paradoxically, been central to this modernist structure and has as such aided the recent rise of [Georgia] O'Keeffe, [Frida] Kahlo, and Carr beyond celebrity to iconicity" (194). The biographical fascination with Carr, "a figure embedded in Canada's colonial past" (Kirkwood Walker 99), intervenes in the dominant narrative of Canadian history. In fact, for Kirkwood Walker and Rabinowitz, Carr's later fame is directly related to a merger of feminism and nationalism. This ideological connection began with Carr's relationship to the Group of Seven, and especially to Lawren Harris, painters Carr met during her trip east for the 1927 exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art at the National Gallery. Carr and the Group of Seven all "drew upon sentiments of nationalism linked to the northern mystique of the Canadian landscape" (Kirkwood Walker 11). As May has pointed out, Barton composed his early poetry, including the poems for *West of Darkness*, within the context of 1970s literary nationalism (246), an ideology that developed alongside, but did not always converge with, the burgeoning feminist and gay and lesbian liberation movements (cf. Dickinson 4).

While Carr's nationalist-feminist iconicity is inflected by her unmarried status and demand for solitude, it is also marked by the insistent pursuit of what she saw as a disappearing past, not only in the form of Aboriginal villages and cultural life, but the rainforests themselves. Similarly, if Barton interprets Carr's landscapes as a figurative closet, then the sense of always-

imminent decay in many of the poems (the forest threatened by logging, the destruction of Aboriginal villages through resettlement, as well as Emily's aging body) suggests an urgency hurtling the speaker toward a future transformation that is sometimes celebrated and sometimes stop-gapped by the act of painting and writing poems, respectively. In his ekphrasis of "*Red Cedar*," for example, Barton writes:

> How I wish the years
> could be like this
>
> reaching upward
> unwavered
> by notions of sky
>
> I need such days
>
> all limbs at ease
> in the wind's sway
>
> like wings (46)

The poem suggests envy for the tree's ability to stand "unwavered" by the passage of time, especially as it is captured within a painting. The shift to Emily's own "limbs" indicates the merger of the artist with the painted landscape, subverting the body's desires (Emily's and Barton's) by projecting them onto the ancient trees instead.

Carr's painting, *Red Cedar*,[3] (as well as *Edge of the Forest*, discussed at the outset of the essay) continues a trope that Brock, following the art critic Jonathan Bordo, identifies in paintings by the Group of Seven: "the anthropomorphic form of a foregrounded solitary tree" ("Envoicing" 57). In works by the Group of Seven, the "symbolic deposit" of the solitary tree represents a desire to document the human presence of the artist while simultaneously affirming the notion of the seemingly uninhabited landscape (Bordo qtd. in Brock, "Envoicing" 57). In Carr's *Red Cedar*, this narrative is somewhat countered by her depiction of a sweeping whorl of foliage and the trunk's yonic imagery, emblematic of what Rabinowitz identifies as a desire, shared with O'Keeffe and Kahlo, to "enter history and reshape the vision of the land as eternally feminized" (200). Barton's ekphrasis then not only makes explicit the female artist's presence in the landscape, he also expands upon Carr's problematizing of the landscape's gendering. If, as Brock points out, landscape painting, particularly in the mode shared by the Group of Seven, participates in erasures of "the bodily traces of all other presences in the landscape, including traces of both Aboriginality and femininity, whose essentialized

characteristics are taken on by the wilderness itself" ("Body" n.pag.), then Carr's bold presentation of female desire (and Barton's subsequent ekphrasis) offer a queer rebuttal to this discourse. Yet in Barton's ekphrases, such liberating gestures are future-oriented, even if they participate in a Romantic nostalgia for a solitude found in the wilderness. In "*Vanquished*," for example, Emily seeks a way through "the darkness of who I am" (19) and asks, "How many centuries must I sleep?" (19). The imagined future in both "*Red Cedar*" and "*Vanquished*" is created through the temporal expansion ekphrasis allows. By writing most of his disjointed historical narrative in the present tense, Barton lends currency to Carr's lingering presence as a historical feminist, and potentially queer, figure in the national imaginary.

Ekphrasis, while sometimes complicit in this national mythologizing, also offers poets a form of response. As Brock points out, the genre "has not . . . traditionally been discussed in terms of its radical critical potential" ("Envoicing" 52) and yet he rightly argues that we may identify in its literature an "ekphrastic engagement with imperialist visual artworks, locating in their temporalizing impetus a counter-discourse to colonial spatiality" ("Body" n. pag.). While a relatively recent addition to queer theory, the "temporalizing impetus" has long been central to the poetics of ekphrasis. Although the famous Horatian dictum, *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting so is poetry), exemplifies the mimetic relationship between visual art and literature, in his eighteenth-century text, *Laocoön*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing contends that since painting and poetry are spatial and temporal arts respectively, they are necessarily different modes of representation and cannot be easily conflated (Hollander 6). In other words, painting and poetry may be sister arts, but they are not twins. Despite, or perhaps because of, Lessing's dictates, poets and critics have continued to wrestle with ekphrasis and explore, or irrupt, its space-time boundaries. While Barton's ekphrastic poems perform what might be the basic duty of the genre as it is generally understood—as he attempts to imitate or represent the visual image in language—the poems offer less a "confrontation," in John Hollander's terms (4), between representational modes than an attempt at personal merger between the poet and the painter. For Murray Krieger, ekphrasis has always provided poets with the ability to "interrupt the temporality of discourse, to freeze it during its indulgence in spatial exploration" of a work of visual art (7). Barton's speaker, his Emily, takes this process one step further when she tells us as much about what is unseen or wholly imagined in or around the painting's composition as what is explicitly present within the frame; thus,

Barton's ekphrasis offers not only a textual representation of the image but also the inspiration behind the painting as he re-conceives it.

In his discussion of temporal duration in ekphrasis, Hollander's language borders on the erotic: "The viewer's gaze which embraces a particular work can long for further consummation—to possess a represented object, whether person or thing, to enter into an interior scene or a landscape" (6-7). Similarly, James A. W. Heffernan genders the "duel" between word and picture as that of "the voice of male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening" (1). He traces this binary of the passive feminine painting and the active masculine poem to Lessing "who decreed that the duty of pictures was to be silent and beautiful (like a woman), leaving expression to poetry" (7). Heffernan contends that ekphrasis, giving speech to the silent image as well as the possibility of speaking back to the viewer, has the power to "challenge at once the controlling authority of the male gaze and the power of the male world" (7). While I would argue that the genre may equally risk the replication of the male gaze or appropriation of the subject and voice, the ability "to speak [out]"—as an early entry for "ecphrasis" is parsed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*—suggests at least the possibility of such challenges to the status quo and the genre's potential as a mode of queer expression. In Barton's collection, Carr speaks out in a time and space that often excludes, silences, or misinterprets her. Kate Braid suggests that Barton allows Carr to express certain private thoughts and feelings in a public form that she did not allow herself in her own life, but which appear in her diaries and notebooks (4).

The struggle for self-expression is frequently tied to issues of gender and sexuality throughout *West of Darkness*, but particularly in the sequence of narrative prose poems entitled "Life Class," where Barton explores how Carr's gender and nationality become conflated. Informed by Barton's reading of Maria Tippett's 1979 study *Emily Carr, A Biography* (Barton 128), the "Life Class" poems cover the years between 1899 and 1904 when Carr studied art in England. While in his free verse poems Barton uses enjambment and varied stanza forms to mimic the visual lines of Carr's landscapes, he employs the prose poem to signal the conservative social pressures Carr experienced while abroad. The prose poems also indicate Barton's motivation in taking on Carr as a drag persona as they frequently emphasize her status as a social, artistic, and colonial outsider.

In "Life Class (I)," for example, Mrs. Redden—an older Canadian-born friend who was close to Carr while she studied in England—says, "*The way*

you dress! (how she'd swoon at the sight of these loose smocks I girth myself in now), *your lovely pale neck lost in a fuss of stiff lace. And the dreadful twill skirts that crossed the Atlantic with you, crikey, make me think Canada the dowager and England the precocious young miss*" (13). In Mrs. Redden's speech, Barton's young Emily functions synecdochally as a representation of a widowed Canada, suggesting the young country, like Carr, is aged—and has removed herself from the world of sexual interplay—before her time. In the poem Emily responds, "I didn't come to London to find myself a husband. I came hoping to paint" (13) so that marriage and painting are set into exclusive opposition. When the artist faces her first female nude model she is "taken aback" in Barton's "Life Class (III)" (24). She reminisces how "the girl on my left twittered, *You lot from the Colonies should draw only cows*" (24). Again, sexual repression is taken as a marker of colonial identity. Yet in the poem's next paragraph, Barton writes how Emily takes pleasure in drawing the model. The dairy imagery continues, ironically, in the next line: "The model's skin was clear, shone like milk in the sun" (24), offering a quiet subversion of her apparent naïveté. Throughout the "Life Class" sequence Barton calls attention to how Carr's unorthodox manners apparently echo her colonial status.

The "Life Class" sequence demonstrates that while Emily gains experience and skill through the opportunity to study and practice art outside of Canada, these trips lack the transformative power of her journeys into the forests of British Columbia upon her return home. In his ekphrasis of an early Carr painting, "*Autumn in France*," for example, Barton shifts the chronology from Emily painting in France and her "attempt at light" (14), to the "next summer" (15) in British Columbia, where she sees totem poles: "Where I would have seen darkness / a year earlier, seen only / time's talismanic decay, / I [now] felt the wind-shined poles / stand apart from the forest" (16). Emily describes herself as the totems' "midwife," quickly sketching them as she is "afraid / they would vanish forever" (16). For Barton's Emily, in "Life Class (V)", the trees "*that can root deep in a child's heart*" are Canada's authentic heritage whereas she "*despise[s] London, its history muddled, one building snuggled up to the next like pigs in a sty. Even your parks are glutted with people. They never admire the trees, just the statues*" (31). The poem concludes with Emily muttering about what she sees in the British Museum: "Nothing new in art for hundreds of years" (31). This comparison between Canada's natural history and Britain's built heritage points to Carr's long interest in the West Coast totem poles and what may be for her a merger between the forest's natural beauty and "new" artistic creation. As Doris Shadbolt observes, Carr

embraced modernist forms beyond her French post-impressionist style not as aesthetic ends in themselves but as the most useful mode of representing her Indigenous subjects (40).

While Carr appropriated her own version of Indigeneity in order to express a position of otherness within a conservative, patriarchal society, Barton takes on Carr's voice and imagery early in his career in order to redefine the western frontier as a space of self-reflection and sexual self-fashioning. In comparing Barton and Carr, I do not mean to imply that both acts of appropriation are equal, given the differences in subject, motivation, and historical occasion. Rather, I am interested in the way both artists—gender and sexual outsiders in different, highly specific contexts—develop transgressive personae paradoxically in the pursuit of *self*-expression. In his second edition essay "My Emily Carr," Barton notes that just after the collection's first publication in 1987 "the rhetoric of cultural appropriation was being voiced for the first time in mainstream literary circles" (132). The currents of critical and political discourse then become another temporal border between the text's two editions. While ignoring Carr's relationship to the Indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest would be problematic and disingenuous, Barton writes that he "[attempts] to theorize the creative nexus of a white female artist preoccupied with what she feared to be the decline of the original inhabitants of her own country . . ." (133). Yet Barton is also aware of how taking on Carr specifically as a "drag persona" further complicates the politics of cultural appropriation.[4]

In "My Emily Carr," Barton notes that during the original composition of the poems, "Feminism was . . . omnipresent . . . and I was very aware that I was a man writing in a woman's voice." He goes on to question whether his work is "parasitic" (134). Some feminist critics have accused drag performers of appropriating women's voices, demeaning women through misogynistic representations that exaggerate and replicate outmoded stereotypes, or reproducing racialized tropes (Butler, "Gender Is Burning" 385). Yet in Judith Butler's conclusion to *Gender Trouble*, she contends that such theatricality does not parody an "original" woman but rather has the potential to reveal that such a figure could never exist (138).[5] Thus, Barton-as-Emily-Carr may demonstrate how all iterative representations of gender are performative; yet, by speaking in the voice of a cultural icon whose reception is mediated through nationalist, feminist, regionalist, and postcolonialist discourses, Barton's "self-portrait" demonstrates how national iconicity has always been a reiterative performance as well: there is not one Emily Carr, but multitudes.

By invoking a version of Emily as he enters the paintings, the speaker is able to allow both the artist and the closeted poet to speak anew. In "Fresh Seeing," one of Carr's few public lectures on aesthetics, she says, "We may copy something as faithfully as the camera, but unless we bring to our picture something additional—something creative—something of ourselves—our picture does not live. It is but a poor copy of unfelt nature." Later she figures the artist's struggle as the attempt to "grasp the spirit of the thing itself . . . the 'I am' of the thing" (11). Carr's emphasis on the first person pronoun recalls Barton's shifting between his lyric speaker and his drag persona. For Carr, it is the repetition *without* difference that is problematic and uncreative. Barton's representation of the seemingly unsettled frontiers of Carr's landscapes does not replicate journeys of mythic progress in which the male settler penetrates virginal land but rather turns away from viewing that myth—necessarily bound up in a heternormative model of kinship—as compulsory.

The discomfort of social, political, and familial bonds placed on the queer subject recurs in poems throughout Barton's career. In his long poem "Hidden Structure" for example, Barton's speaker wrestles with the distinction between discrete genders and desire. Barton writes, "Tell me why / as a child I often wished / I was born in female / flesh" (28-29). Later, the speaker, addressing his father, says, "I hated you / then and grew up hating / the destiny I thought my sex / prisoned me in" (30-31). Same-sex desire can only be understood as an error of gender for Barton's young speaker; thus, in this logic, queerness can be resolved by becoming the gender that 'should' be desired, recalling an outmoded understanding of homosexuality Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the trope of inversion" (87). Yet toward the conclusion of the poem, the now-adult speaker considers, "Rewriting the history of pain, // for once I know / what I am trying to say. / Those who love shall love / no matter how bodies join" (34). The process of "rewriting the history of pain," of going backward in time but with new metaphors for understanding, allows the speaker to grasp the hidden structure of desire just as in the Carr poems, drag allows Barton to "[*reveal*] *the imitative structure of gender itself*" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 137).

Queer theorists of temporality have begun to index these recursive manoeuvres. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love writes that while gender or sexual outsiders of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often viewed today as "isolated and longing for a future community," she also locates queer artists and writers of that era who "choose isolation, turn toward the past, or choose to live

in a present disconnected from any larger historical continuum" (8). Writing the early poems for *West of Darkness* at the advent of Canada's gay and lesbian liberation movement, Barton also turns back by taking on a modernist persona—herself a gender outsider—who is preoccupied with themes of isolation, the past, and a skepticism of progress. Yet it is through this backward turn, and attempts to freeze time in his ekphrases of Carr's paintings, that Barton begins to envision a different future.

Barton's ekphrastic drag suggests several correspondences between Carr's persona, her unique vision of the British Columbia landscape, and contemporary spatial and temporal metaphors of the queer closet. As Sedgwick claims, "The closet is the defining structure of gay oppression [in the twentieth] century" (71). If Barton's ekphrases of Carr's landscapes provide an escape from the contemporary closet, then they necessarily create a different one. The total absence of people in Carr's later landscapes suggests both solitude and loneliness, and perhaps mistrust of the dominant community. Shadbolt notes that Carr's art and writing are imbued with a sense of her self-awareness of being an outsider:

> A reflection of the difference [Carr] felt was the large number of *they's* who loomed in her life: those who in one way or another formed the opposition. *They* included do-gooders, society ladies, clergymen with empty rhetoric, fussers, analysts, statistic-minded curators, critics, and the affected. (13)

One sees from this brief description how queer writers and artists might take up Carr as a powerful, if certainly controversial, icon later in the twentieth century.

Barton replicates Carr's iconoclasm in his ekphrastic poems, often casting her as an avenging figure. In "*Vanquished*," for example, Barton writes, "No one is left to stand / the totems erect" (18), suggesting that Emily sees herself as the sole inheritor of what she believes to be a culture in the process of being destroyed. In "*Blunden Harbour*," Emily is similarly alone, awaiting her guide's return to the abandoned Aboriginal village where she sits sketching. The spatial isolation creates a temporal dislocation as well when she says, "I have been on this island for an age / I cannot remember where I was born" (36). The journey from home has produced a break with the normative time of personal and familial history. This solitude is contrasted with domestic life and the economic obligations that frequently threaten to disrupt her work: "If I string a few minutes / together and paint / some ass taps on my door" ("*Autumn in France*" 16). Even productive retreats from the social world have their price. In "*The Clearing*," an older Emily ruminates, "I cannot say //

this solace of trees // . . . has left me unscarred. I am tired" (123-24). There is power, even pleasure, in solitude, but the isolation exhausts the painter in the solitary struggle for self-expression.

Carr's paintings are famously the product of her excursions to remote locations along the British Columbia coast and interior. Similarly, migration and mobility are often central in queer narratives of coming out, since the metaphor of the closet suggests both spatial and temporal indeterminacy—one is going in or coming out, a closeted past gives way to a liberated future. Carr's dynamic landscapes represent the forest as a place of change and movement, even as they attempt to preserve the past. In his ekphrasis of "*Nirvana*," Barton writes,

> How I wish time
>
> would stop,
> the forest fall back.
>
> I would carve all hearts
> free of their prisons of rot,
> hold them high in the sun (39)

Only by stopping time can the metaphorical "heart" and what it desires be carved from its "prisons of rot" and held to the light of day. In these descriptions of what the forest conceals, Barton points to a "sublimated erotic energy" that Shadbolt identifies in Carr's work which was a result of the artist's adamant commitment to painting and writing, even if by claiming the role of artist, she risked maintaining a position of social difference to the end of her life (Shadbolt 13).

Barton remains fascinated with Carr's later years and images of Emily's aging body recur throughout *West of Darkness*. In "*Forsaken*," for example, Emily asks, "How many more years must I / watch fall, / . . . so helpless am I in this, / the diminishing shift of my flesh?" (107). The emphasis on Emily's deteriorating body mirrors the desire to maintain the totem poles that are represented in Barton's ekphrases as aged bodies, such as in "*Blunden Harbour*" where Emily in her sketching "preserve[s] the moss / nesting in [the totems'] cracking joints" (34). In "*Queen Charlotte Islands Totem*," Emily asserts that "the weathered poles" should not "be this / slow collapse into ungodliness" (17). The body under duress is a frequent trope for Barton. May has noted that throughout the poems included in *Great Men*, for example, Barton "repeatedly invokes the image of the 'groin' under various uncomfortable conditions . . . to symbolize his feelings of sexual anxiety

. . . and to foreshadow his sexual reawakening to come" (266). Barton's representation of Emily's failing body suggests impatience with the passage of time that correlates to a body's frustrated and unexpressed desire. For example, in the ekphrasis of "*Old Tree at Dusk*," Emily coyly considers,

> What secrets do I feel
>
> fall open
>
> inside my clumsy lungs?
> Something tingles like dawn.
> An old tree can only
> just sense the slow pulse
>
> of sap draining (50-51)

Barton's stanzaic form (four quatrains each separated by a single line) suggests the stuttered disclosure of breath and secrets toward the end of life that Emily offers in the poem. Time cannot be stopped and "secrets" (Emily's and, presumably, Barton's) are coming to the surface.

While embodiment is frequently discussed in Barton's ekphrases, eroticism is less coded than almost entirely withheld; however, perhaps the most explicitly queer moment arrives in "*Jack-in-the-Pulpit* Remembered," in which Emily describes meeting Georgia O'Keeffe at a New York exhibition in an account of one of O'Keeffe's paintings. Even this moment of sensuality occurs through the retrospective lens of memory as the speaker recalls:

> I nearly drowned, the calm within
> suddenly uncentred, giddy, turning
> me away from the edge; years later,
> trees parting toward this focusing
> coast, I ache to wash myself through
> one endless conduit of essence (60)

The floral abstracts of O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* series suggest the erotic image "of petals, promises swiftly opening / around me [in] concentric circles of wake" (60). Here, Emily communes with O'Keeffe through a shared vision that moves from the artist gazing upon O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* to her own "focusing / coast" (60). Viewing O'Keeffe's natural imagery provides Emily with the same liberatory, erotic vision that Barton receives from viewing Carr's paintings.

When Barton-as-Emily conceives of the future, however, the vision is never explicitly political but rather more suggestive of an embodied union with the natural world and a transcendence of the material "modern"

world with its attendant limits on gender, sexual, and artistic expression. Yet the distinction between the transcendent and the material is frequently collapsed. In Barton's ekphrasis of "*Swirl*," for example, a gust of wind in the forest is interpreted as breath on a body, traveling "through bark / into concentric / circles of my / heart" (23-26), "sucking" pine trees "into the forest's lungs" (32-33) as it travels. Barton deploys an eccentric enjambment, spreading letters of words across several lines, to imitate the movement of Carr's brushstrokes:

Emerald
sa
ffron

o
l
i
v
e

r u s t (84)

"*Swirl*" is the only new poem in the second edition, culled from an earlier manuscript of the first (*West of Darkness* 135). In its unusual syntax and calligramatic form, the poem is the most innovative of Barton's ekphrases and also the most contemporary in tone, even as it comes closest to representing Carr's visual art on the page. The ekphrastic gesture finally becomes, in Carr's terms, a "fresh seeing."

Barton's paratextual comments in the collection's second edition may then be read as a kind of frame that offer his readers a "fresh seeing" of his own poems as well. The poet's ekphrastic drag performance not only offers a different vision of Carr's life and paintings, but also opens up the possibility of locating and inscribing the queer in a nationalizing historical discourse from which such desire is largely excluded. In a journal entry from August 1934, Carr writes, "For the second time a soul has kissed my hand because of a picture of mine—once a man, once a woman. It makes one feel queer, half ashamed and very happy, that some thought you have expressed in paint has touched somebody" (*Hundreds and Thousands* 177). While Carr uses "queer" in the sense of "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" (*OED*), there is something otherwise queer in the cross-historical "touch" between Barton and Carr. Yet while the poet knows that Carr "despised art that betrayed nothing of the artist" (128), he is still anxious about what the historical Carr might think of his Emily. The poet recalls another antecedent figure when he describes

himself as "a Dorian Gray uncertain what his portrait betrays about his soul" (136). The allusion to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is apt because Dorian, like Barton, similarly desires a fixed temporality that paradoxically turns him backward. In his collection's titular poem, Barton writes, "Somewhere there is a place west of darkness / I visit in dreams, a beach I wake from each time I ever / plan to remain" (31-33). While Wilde's Dorian Gray seeks an eternal revolution of youthful beauty, for Barton's speaker, the desire is rather for a perennial, if impossible, frontier.

NOTES

1 Throughout the essay, I use "Carr" when referring to the historical figure and "Emily" when referring to Barton's persona.

2 Indeed, in a 1989 review of the first edition of *West of Darkness*, M. Travis Lane writes, "Most of our contemporary verse biographies, usually written as fictional autobiographies . . . describe their ostensible subjects less than their poet authors. . . . But there is nothing visible to us behind the mask through which Barton speaks but the 'Emily Carr' with which we are already familiar through Carr's own writings and paintings. When Barton's 'Carr' speaks of one of her own paintings, we feel we are hearing how Carr would speak, to herself, about it, and we recognize the painting" (105).

3 Interestingly, *Red Cedar* was presented alongside works by the Group of Seven at a 1931 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Shadbolt 213).

4 While a detailed discussion of the discourse of cultural appropriation, gender, and Emily Carr is beyond the scope of this essay, see Janice Stewart's essay "Cultural Appropriations and Identificatory Practices in Emily Carr's 'Indian Stories'" on how Carr's self-conception of Indigeneity "allowed her to paint and write beyond the gendered boundaries of contemporary conventional aesthetics" (63). Gerta Moray's 2006 study *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* provides a contemporary discussion of Carr's visual representation of Indigenous cultural life.

5 As Butler focuses on the forward progression of drag—the repetitions with a difference—Elizabeth Freeman suggests that Butler "disregards citations of pasts that actually signal the presence of life lived otherwise than in the present" (63).

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Samantha Carey

the ever-imposing tendency towards occupation

by the hour values one by one
play with wages daylight savings
springs forward domestic service labours
(o Spring)
time occupying longer days
productive production capacities
the competitive spirit of abundance
flowering the will to spread the seed
of extra bucks or twos
the currency of spring bulbs
the attention span of a narcissus
(3.35 including tax)
following light to light
serving solar management daintily
without expectation of compensation
only life, the ability to eat well,
breathe, transpire, have roots,
enjoy a drink and a suntan
on days off
seeking the musts and the mosts
of the day
while considering mean wages

and how many more hours til work?

Tina Northrup

Aesthetics of the Sublime and Don McKay's Poetics of Deep Time

Known as a bird poet par excellence, Don McKay's ornithological fascination has received more scholarly attention to date than his writing on geological themes. One consequence of this relative lack of attention is that a significant development in McKay's ongoing critique of Romanticism has not yet been discussed in depth: namely, the shifting terms of his engagement with aesthetics of the sublime.[1]

As this essay argues, McKay's poetic engagement with deep time can be interpreted fruitfully in the context of traditional and contemporary understandings of the mathematical sublime. However, McKay's characteristic contradistinction between phenomenological nature poetry and Romantic nature poetry has tended to devalue the contributions that aesthetics of the sublime can make to ecological poetics, and perhaps even to ecological ethics. As such, criticisms that McKay has made of "inadequate notions of the sublime" ("Great Flint Singing" 12) risk diminishing the value of *all* notions of the sublime, including those that appear in his own poetry and prose.

As Travis V. Mason notes in his illuminating study *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* (2013), McKay's geological interests are not recent developments, and his publications since *Deactivated West 100* (2005) simply confirm that he has "finally found a way to articulate geopoetry, something he has been thinking and writing about since his first collection" (219). However, McKay's writing from the past decade certainly places new emphasis on geopoetry and its significance as a plumb line into the wellsprings of deep time. As Nicholas Bradley remarks in a review of McKay's most recent essay collection, *The Shell of the Tortoise: Four Essays and an Assemblage* (2011), the book evinces its author's "shifting topical

preferences" (536). In much the same way, McKay's engagement with the sublime is not entirely new, and scholars have noted it in works that predate his turn toward geological themes. For example, in *The Picturesque and the Sublime: A Poetics of the Canadian Landscape* (1998), Susan Glickman names McKay among a number of poets whose writing seems to demonstrate "a compulsion towards the sublime" (153). Likewise, Ross Leckie suggests in an essay on the poem "Twinflower," from McKay's *Apparatus* (1997), that the poet's characteristic use of metaphor engenders "contemporary moments of the sublime" (142). Significantly, both Glickman and Leckie perceive elements of the sublime in McKay's distinctive definitions of "wilderness" and "poetic attention," and so McKay's more recent writing presents opportunities to not only revisit and extend those familiar concepts, but also to gain a more textured understanding of his phenomenological poetics.

Naming the Sublime in Canadian Nature Poetry

Given its spatial constraints, this essay looks primarily at the four essays and "assemblage" that appear in *The Shell of the Tortoise*, and at select poems from *Strike/Slip* (2006) that are especially germane to this discussion. However, as all of the essays in *The Shell of the Tortoise* had former lives elsewhere as lectures, introductions, or afterwords, it is worth considering their literary and cultural significance more expansively. Among other things, this provides an opportunity to consider how McKay's engagement with aesthetics of the sublime stands in relation to the Canadian nature poetry tradition that he has helped to frame. For example, one of the essays that appear in *The Shell of the Tortoise* is "Great Flint Singing," a minimally revised version of McKay's introductory essay to the anthology *Open Wide a Wilderness: Canadian Nature Poems* (2009). Although it would be difficult to quantify McKay's influence in contemporary Canadian nature poetry and its concomitant scholarship, Nancy Holmes' editorial Preface to the anthology offers an illustrative example. Holmes writes that "Great Flint Singing" was one of the influences that informed her selection of the anthology's contents, and that McKay's words made her "search out and appreciate certain kinds of poems, poems that refer in some way to what is 'inappellable'" (xvi).

Significantly, McKay's discussion of the inappellable in "Great Flint Singing" stems from his reading of Duncan Campbell Scott's "The Height of Land," a greater Romantic lyric in which McKay perceives a poetic recognition of an "inappellable Something as a pristine other that addresses a companion 'inarticulate part' in our species" (4).[2] McKay's discussion of the poem is

complex, and any summary of it here could only be reductive. What is clear, however, is that McKay's words on the "inappellable" in "Great Flint Singing" resonate with a near-contemporary reflection on "wilderness" that appears in his chapbook *The Muskwa Assemblage* (2008). In the chapbook, McKay ventures tentatively that the experience of "wilderness" is one in which "something speaks inside us, something we feel called upon to name, to say sublime, or wilderness or mystery. Some resonance reaches inside us to an uninhabited place."[3] Compare this to McKay's conclusion in "Great Flint Singing" that for Scott's lyric speaker in "The Height of Land," "deep speaks unto deep, the outer inappellable to its inarticulate equivalent within" (4).

The musings on "wilderness" that appear in *The Muskwa Assemblage*, which subsequently became the titular "assemblage" in *The Shell of the Tortoise*, represent a considerable extension of McKay's well-known definition of "wilderness" as "the capacity of all things to elude the mind's appropriations" (*Vis* 21). The earlier, now iconic definition appears in the essay "Baler Twine: Thoughts on Ravens, Home, & Nature Poetry," but in neither the original essay of 1993 nor the revised version that appears in *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness* (2001) does McKay postulate a companionably elusive part of the self—some "inarticulate" or "uninhabited" place in which "wilderness" might resonate—as he does in *The Muskwa Assemblage*, *The Shell of the Tortoise*, and *Open Wide a Wilderness*.

Why is this significant? In *Open Wide a Wilderness*, McKay discusses a number of differences between Romantic and phenomenological approaches to nature and nature poetry, and compares aesthetics of the sublime unfavourably to phenomenological attention to things themselves. "Although we may be moved by the sublime to revere spectacular elements in the natural world," he writes, "one reasonably suspects that we are in part revering our own emotion" ("Great Flint Singing" 15). Conversely, he argues, "acts of close attention . . . foster intimacy" (15). Long-time readers of McKay may find that the nominal phrase "acts of close attention" resembles the phrase "poetic attention," another of the foundational concepts that McKay develops in "Baler Twine." Intimately related to "wilderness," "poetic attention" is, for McKay, "a sort of readiness, a species of longing which is without the desire to possess" (*Vis* 26). As a simultaneously aesthetic and epistemological mode, it is "a form of knowing" that "celebrates the wilderness of the other" (26).

"Wilderness" and "poetic attention" are the conceptual cornerstones of McKay's phenomenological poetics, and yet they also inspired Glickman's and Leckie's perceptions of sublimity in McKay's work. In Glickman's view,

McKay's poetry demonstrates an imaginative engagement with "wonder" that produces "a new sense of connectedness," which "comes about not in spite of but *because of* the ungraspability of the natural world" (152-53). She also suggests that "something of the sublime" is at work in the definition of "wilderness" that McKay develops in "Baler Twine" (196). Likewise, Leckie's discussion of "contemporary moments of the sublime" in McKay's poetry draws explicit connections between sublimity, "wilderness," and metaphor (142). Although McKay tends to contrast his "poetic attention" with the egotism of Romantic aesthetics, his phenomenological poetics is rooted in a conception of "wilderness" that bears at least some relation to historical conceptions of the sublime, so much so that McKay's own *Muskwa Assemblage* gestures to possible connections. With this in view, McKay's discussions of phenomenology and Romanticism in *Open Wide a Wilderness* suggest an opposition that is not as fundamental as it might appear.

In the anthology, McKay offers manifold criticisms of Romantic aesthetics of the sublime. On the one hand, they are self-aggrandizing: there is "a tendency in all Romantic writing to convert natural observations into rocket fuel for the spirit and lose a sense of their inherent value" (14). On the other, they are dilettantish. A lengthy discussion of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) illuminates this point: McKay writes that "there is a wisdom to Wordsworth's handling of raw wilderness. In carefully controlled doses it produces the experience of the sublime, with its delicious call note of terror" (10-11). Notably, McKay's reading of *The Prelude*'s "stolen boat episode" collapses a distinction that philosopher Guy Sircello has made between "*experiences of the sublime*" (what young William undergoes as he passes a cliff while rowing on a lake at night) and "*sublime discourse*" (the adult poet's attempt to communicate his experience in "language that is or purports to be more or less immediately descriptive or expressive of sublime experience") (Sircello 541; see also Brady 11).[4] McKay's reading of the poem suggests that the poet's childhood experience was not *itself* sublime, but simply terrifying, whereas his literary "handling" of it is what produces "the experience of the sublime." That is to say, in McKay's reading, Wordsworth's sublime is an inalienable artefact of authorship, an aesthetic product of the "domesticating function of the mind" (11).

McKay's definition of "wilderness" names an ungraspable excess and "autonomy" (*Vis* 21, 97)—a "rawness" or "alien being" that seems akin to concepts such as *duende*, *phusis*, *Tao*, and *mysterium tremendum*, among others (21; see also *Open Wide* 18). Whereas in *The Muskwa Assemblage* he seems to concede that conceptions of the sublime may gesture in these

directions as well, his writings typically suggest that Romantic poetry tends not to respect "wilderness" for what it is. In "Great Flint Singing," McKay compares Wordsworth's "handling of raw wilderness" to *failed* attempts to do so, using Earle Birney's "Bushed" as a prime example. McKay suggests that "Bushed" may be read in one of two ways: either as "a sort of cautionary tale for those who would live alone in wilderness armed with inadequate notions of the sublime," or as a poetic representation of a visionary disintegration of the self (12-13). In both readings, Romantic aesthetics of the sublime are revealed to be insufficient, and so McKay's commentary on "Bushed" adds to his manifold criticisms. In the first instance, Romantic "notions of the sublime" are "inadequate," and even irresponsible: they leave adherents unprepared for nature's dangerous realities. In the second instance, they are impediments to authentic visionary experience: by sublimating "wilderness" rather than letting it destabilize the self, adherents rob themselves of opportunities for ecstatic engagement with the world.

That the title "Great Flint Singing" is lifted from the final line of Birney's poem suggests the degree to which McKay's thoughts on the Romantic sublime shape not only the essay, but also his perception of Canadian nature poetry more generally. However, McKay's comments on Romanticism throughout the essay tend not to discriminate between various forms of Romantic engagement with the sublime, and they leave unexplained the phenomenological, ontological, and ethical significance of the "inappellable," whether as an external force or as an "inarticulate" or "uninhabited" part of the poet himself. As such, McKay's critique of "inadequate notions of the sublime" is so general that it risks dismissing as inadequate all notions of the sublime, including those that appear in his own poetry and prose.

Despite the legacy of what Keats with some annoyance called the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" (Weiskel 49), McKay's own excursions into geopoetry indicate that attending to the experiences of a human mind at work is not so solipsistic an exercise as it might at first appear. Indeed, it may be very useful for an environmental poetics that seeks not simply to point to nature or "wilderness" as such, but also to expose the imaginative failures that make environmental degradation and injustice part of the status quo.

Things and Consciousness in McKay's Phenomenological Poetics

In his Introduction to the poetry anthology *The New Canadian Poets: 1970-1985* (1985), Dennis Lee suggests some ways of determining a poem's "phenomenological" stance. In his usage, a phenomenological "impulse" is

one that provokes the poet "to make the poem recreate a two-way process, in which the world is known by consciousness and consciousness knows the world" (xliii). This definition is clarified later when Lee discusses a poem by McKay, and argues that it "contrives to give us both the world and consciousness knowing the world" (xlv). "Consciousness adheres as faithfully as it can to the specificity of the world," he adds later, and, in this regard, phenomenological poems both "enact the phenomenological texture of conscious experience" and are invested with "the intricate cross-pressure of observer and observed—a consort which apparently wants to be celebrated as an imperfect marriage, a willing yet perpetually incomplete union" (xlvi). The McKay poem that Lee offers as an example is "I Scream You Scream," from *Birding, or Desire* (1983). The poem begins:

> Waking JESUS sudden riding a scream like a
> train braking metal on metal on
> metal teeth receiving signals from a dying star sparking
> off involuntarily in terror in all directions in the
> abstract incognito in my
> maidenform bra in an expanding universe in a where's
> my syntax thrashing
> loose like a grab that like a
> look out like a
> live wire in a hurricane . . . (50)

The poem performs the bewilderment of a sleeper who is woken in the night by some incomprehensible, at-first-unidentifiable sound, which he finally recognizes as a pig scream from a neighbouring farm. As the sleeper's thoughts jostle one another, the poem's interrupted syntax and series of associative similes create a jumble of images that range from the industrial to the cosmic to the domestic to the atmospheric, depicting a consciousness struggling to understand a scream that comes lancing through the night. In these lines, Lee hears the "churning" of the speaker's consciousness "as it passes from deep sleep to wide-awake in half a second, riffling through a series of preposterous associations in an attempt to place the sound" (xliv). For him, the poem's phenomenological project brings "consciousness and the world . . . into sync" (xliv).

Despite the consonance of "I Scream You Scream" with Lee's perception of phenomenological impulses in poetry, McKay's poems frequently take a very different phenomenological stance. Rather than foregrounding interactions between human consciousness and things in the world, many attempt to focus instead on the beings of things themselves. *Apparatus*

contains a number of compositions that McKay has called "thing" poems, each one intended to "perceive the wilderness of a thing" ("Apparati" 18), and, arguably, to provoke readers to see that "wilderness" as well. As McKay states plainly in *Vis à Vis*, the experience of "wilderness," through defamiliarization, is "often arranged by art" (21).

Notably, McKay's iconic definition of "wilderness" in *Vis à Vis* (in which a significant section of *Apparatus* reappears) owes much to the Levinasian concept of the "Face." The Face, as McKay describes it, conveys "the other encountered in a relationship of address and discovered to be quite untranslatable into systems of sameness and linguistic organization: it is foreign-ness that remains foreign, always exceeding our categories of knowing" (97).[5] For McKay, perceiving "the wilderness of a thing" often means recognizing its Face as well. Here we might reflect again that in "Great Flint Singing," McKay suggests that the value of empirical observation is its implicit acknowledgment that nature is composed of "beings as fully individuated as the poet" (16).

The section of *Apparatus* that reappears in *Vis à Vis* is "Matériel," a suite of poems that range from reflections on the Old Testament Cain and the Homeric Achilles to modern-day clear-cuts and bomb sites. McKay discusses the title "Matériel" in a 1998 interview with Karl Jirgens, where he explains that his adoption of the military term reflects a category of appropriation in which "we not only take the life of something, such as the life of a tool which you might use for a whole lifetime, but we also own it in death" (16). In military terms, the word "matériel" refers to whatever is not personnel; however, McKay states,

> We've all heard those stories about army personnel who go out and get sunburnt and get penalized because they've damaged army property. . . . That idea of ownership in its manic phase, right down to the body. You don't just own the guy's life, but after death, and your [*sic*] going to mill his bones, or you're going to hang them on a cross, or you're going to make an example of them where they're going to be part of some semiotic system they can never ever leave. (19)

McKay's concern for the ways in which human beings appropriate the lives and deaths of others is inextricably related to his views on both language-use and aesthetic representation. In this regard, his phenomenological preoccupations mark a crucial difference between his ecological ethics and poststructuralist linguistic theory as he understands it. In his interview with Jirgens, he observes: "I know that language is powerful and that in some ways the mind is controlled by it or inhabited by it. I realize that, but in some

ways it is healthy for us to remember that it [language] is a tool. To think of it that way, give language back its humility, especially in the current times, when everything threatens to become language. You know, the whole post-structural thing" ("Apparati" 16). Similar to his apprehension that things can be forced into semiotic systems that they "can never ever leave" is McKay's concern that poststructuralist theories of language turn the elements and creatures of the world into lifeless semiotic signs. For precisely this reason, Levinas's insistence that the Face of the Other is "quite untranslatable," as McKay puts it, is crucial to his definition of "wilderness" and to his phenomenological poetics more broadly. With this in mind, it is possible to see how, insofar as McKay considers the Romantic sublime to be a mode of "handling raw wilderness," the aesthetic would seem to appropriate "wilderness" as a tool for building poems that prove the power of the poet rather than the world.

Although McKay's thing poems may downplay the role of the consciousness that observes and "comes to know," his recent engagements with geopoetry cannot do the same. Intriguingly, Lee's description of phenomenological poems as "enact[ing] the phenomenological texture of conscious experience" (xlvi) applies more suitably to McKay's geopoetic engagement with aesthetics of the sublime than it does to the thing poems that McKay himself would call phenomenological.

Reviewing Some Conceptions of the Sublime

From its classical origins as a rhetorical mode that orators used to move their listeners, over the course of hundreds of years the sublime underwent a conceptual shift, becoming less a practical method than a complex cognitive, affective, and aesthetic experience (Monk 10-12). Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) and Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* (1790) were particularly formative for popular conceptions of sublimity that developed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, and both can illuminate McKay's poetic and critical engagement with aesthetics of the sublime.

Burke's *Enquiry* has been said to have presented "a more troubled, violent sublime" than had previously been considered, in which "a cluster of negative, heart-stopping emotions—fear, terror, astonishment—are involved" (Brady 23-24). Notably, both the "stolen boat episode" in Wordsworth's *Prelude* and McKay's interpretation of it in "Great Flint Singing" owe something to Burke's conception of the sublime. By contrast, Kant's *Critique of Judgement*

has been said to constitute "a synthesis, a reinterpretation, and a deepening of the kaleidoscopic aesthetic of the eighteenth century" (Monk 5). McKay's own sublime discourse in his discussions of deep time shares a number of correspondences with what Kant called the mathematical sublime.

Before turning to Kant, it is worth noting that philosopher Sandra Shapshay has made a distinction between "thin" and "thick" sublimes that can help to nuance the relationship between McKay's own poetry and his critical estimation of Romantic aesthetics of the sublime. Shapshay characterizes the "thin sublime" as "a largely *non-cognitive, affective arousal*" that is "roughly equivalent" to the Burkean sublime (181). This seems to be what McKay has in mind in "Great Flint Singing" when he critiques "the experience of the sublime, with its delicious call note of terror" (10-11). On the other hand, Shapshay's "thick sublime" includes, "*in addition* to this affective arousal, an *intellectual play with ideas* involving especially ideas regarding the place of human beings within the environment" (181). "Aesthetic-cognitive play," Shapshay argues, may be the source of insight into relationships between human beings and the environment (189-90) —a position that is not only consonant with McKay's own geopoetry, but also suggests further that sublime experience need not be a wholly "domesticating" activity.

Thinkers before Kant had described forms of sublime experience that share similarities with Kant's conception of the mathematical sublime, and some had even developed theories of the "temporal sublime," in which conceptions of "eternity" and "things remote in time" could be experienced as sublime (Brady 36-37). Although Kant's own writings on the mathematical sublime do not consider the far reaches of deep time as possible causes of sublime feeling, subsequent theorists have explored correspondences. Unlike the dynamical sublime, which Kant associates with might, his mathematical sublime is associated with magnitude, and is reflective of the limitations of the human imagination. For Kant, experiences of the mathematical sublime are characterized by "a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason" (106). Kant's theory suggests that overwhelmingly large or vast entities give rise to reflections on totality and infinity. In essence, experiences of the mathematical sublime consist in feeling one's imagination fail spectacularly (for Kant, the imagination is

limited to sensible knowledge), while at the same time realizing that human reason has *supersensible* powers: "where imagination fails to take in the sensible particulars of such vast magnitudes, we are made aware of reason's capacity to provide an *idea* of the infinite" (Brady 59-60).

Kant was not the first to conceive of sublime experience "as an aesthetic response involving an exploration of the experiencing subject" (Brady 46), but his emphatic focus on cognitive experience did represent a significant shift. As Thomas Weiskel details in *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976), in Kant's mathematical sublime as well as in his dynamical sublime, "sublimity is properly predicated of the subject and its supersensible destiny (*Bestimmung*) and not of any object. A natural object seems sublime only by virtue of a certain 'subreption' whereby we substitute 'a respect (*Achtung*) for the Object in place of one for the idea of humanity in our own self—the Subject'" (38). In *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (2013), philosopher Emily Brady concedes that Kant's "emphasis on the human mind and freedom as sublime . . . seems to leave much less room for attributing the sublime to the external world" (6); however, she resists this reading and insists that, for Kant:

> Sublime feeling is not at nature's expense, for appreciation of starry skies, raging seas, and vast deserts is at the very heart of the experience: *they* enliven and expand imagination. Such appreciation has a moral inflection, and our admiration for nature is thus analogous to respect for the moral law. In these ways, then, Kant presents a theory of the sublime that reaches across nature, humanity, and the connections between them. (88)

Brady's reading of Kant goes against the grain of common approaches, as does her reading of the "Wordsworthian or egotistical" sublime in later sections of her study (100-107). Weiskel's analyses in *The Romantic Sublime* provide useful points of contrast. Weiskel characterizes the Kantian sublime as "negative," which is to say "dialectical": in it, "[t]he imagination's inability to comprehend or represent the object comes to signify the imagination's relation to the ideas of reason (23; see also 28-31). By contrast, the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" is a "positive" one "that in the end would subsume all otherness, all possibility of negation" (49). To put this in Levinasian terms, it might be said that the Kantian and Wordsworthian sublimes, in Weiskel's explication, aspire to totality rather than to recognitions of infinity.

Brady accepts Weiskel's analyses up to a point, but makes the case that the humanism and apparent egotism of the Kantian and Wordsworthian

sublimes can nevertheless accommodate ecological ethics. Connecting Kant's primary interest in the supersensible power of human reason back to his broader concern to discover the grounds of human freedom and morality, Brady argues that contemporary readings of Kant "might propose that in becoming aware of our moral disposition, we are gaining an awareness of having the capacity to act in moral ways toward natural things, that is, to act toward them on a basis of morality and not mere self-interest. So, the sublime could actually prepare us *in particular* for acting morally toward natural things or treating them with moral consideration" (86).

With these contrasting interpretations in mind, the necessity of pursuing further more nuanced thinking about the role of sublimity in McKay's poetry and criticism is clear. In "Baler Twine," McKay writes that "Romanticism, which begins in the contemplation of nature, ends in the celebration of the creative imagination in and for itself" (*Vis* 28). The sequence he describes seems closely akin to the one that Weiskel identifies in the "Wordsworthian or egotistical" sublime, which "in the end would subsume all otherness, all possibility of negation" (49). Even by comparison, the mathematical sublime might not seem like a strong alternative, if as in Weiskel's reading it can only end in respect for "the idea of humanity in our own self" (38). However, Brady's reading of Kant suggests that discovering and appreciating the self's supersensible faculty bears some relation to learning moral treatment of others. By becoming aware "of reason's capacity to provide an *idea* of the infinite" (Brady 59-60), are we better equipped to recognize what both Levinas and McKay would call the "infinity" of the Other? It would take a longer essay than this one to answer that question, but it is worth reflecting again on that "inarticulate," "uninhabitable" part of the self that McKay speaks of at various points throughout *The Shell of the Tortoise*. What allows the "wilderness" or the "infinity" of others to resonate, or to be recognized at all?

"Sublime Discourse" in *The Shell of the Tortoise* and *Strike/Slip*

In the essay "Ediacaran and Anthropocene: Poetry as a Reader of Deep Time," McKay reflects on the work of Harry Hess, the twentieth-century geologist who coined the term "geopoetry," and whose speculations led to confirmed knowledge of plate tectonics (*The Shell* 10). As McKay explains, Hess needed "to induce his readers (mostly other geologists) to suspend their disbelief long enough for his observations about seafloor spreading, driven by magma rising continuously from the mantle, to catch on. He needed

his audience, in the absence of much hard data, to speculate imaginatively, as if reading poetry" (10). McKay goes on to argue that this "practice of geopoetry," comprising as it does a suspension of scientific disbelief and the play of imaginative speculation, remains relevant today, as it "promotes astonishment as part of the acceptable perceptual frame" (10). In the essay, McKay considers what it feels like to consider the lives of creatures who lived millions of years ago, and writes, "one can't help feeling one's thinking stretch as it takes on these remote possibilities" (14)—a description that resonates with traditional conceptions of the mathematical sublime. As it appears in *The Shell of the Tortoise*, "Ediacaran and Anthropocene" concludes with the following manifesto: "Inhabiting deep time imaginatively, we give up mastery and gain mutuality, at least for that brief—but let us hope, expandable—period of astonishment" (24).

McKay's own sublime discourse tends to disassociate the feelings of awe and terror that the Burkean sublime conjoins. Leaving terror by the wayside, McKay focuses more often on awe and its correlatives: astonishment, wonder, and "gawking" in particular. *Strike/Slip* opens with a poetic diptych comprised of the poems "Astonished –" and "Petrified –," and "Astonished –" begins as follows:

> astounded, astonied, astunned, stopped short
> and turned toward stone, the moment
> filling with its slow
> stratified time. Standing there, your face
> cratered by its gawk,
> you might be the symbol signifying eon. (3)

The poem begins in the throes of sublime experience. The subject of the poem is "astonied" and "turned toward stone," gawking in contemplation of the earth's more-than-ancient age:

> . . . Somewhere
> sediments accumulate on seabeds, seabeds
> rear up into mountains, ammonites
> fossilize into gems. (3)

"Someone / inside you," the poem concludes, "steps from the forest and across the beach / toward the nameless all-dissolving ocean" (3). Notably, this version of sublimity relies upon scientific knowledge: the subject's awareness of deep time occasions the mathematical sublime. Moreover, in this experience some aspect of subjectivity seems to move towards disintegration in the "all-dissolving ocean."

In "Literature and Geology: An Experiment in Interdisciplinary, Comparative Ecocriticism" (2013), Mason reads "Astonished –" as the dramatization of an attempt to "domesticate" and "control" overwhelming experience (484). By contrast, he reads "Petrified –" as a performance of "vertiginous response" to experience that cannot be domesticated or controlled by art (485). Whereas I understand both poems to be engaging, at base, with the mathematical sublime, Mason makes the compelling suggestion that McKay's geopoetry aligns astonishment with "eternity" and petrification with "infinity" (484). In McKay's writing, eternity is "thinkable infinity"—that is, infinity that has been scaled down and made cognitively manageable through its containment within "a narrative shape" (*The Shell* 133). Significantly, McKay sets the two concepts in opposition in precisely the same way that he juxtaposes Romantic aesthetics of the sublime and the experience of going "bushed" in "Great Flint Singing." Thus, Mason's readings provide us with another opportunity to consider how sublime experience, visionary experience, and artistic representation relate to one another in McKay's poetry and prose.

Consider too the poem "Devonian," which appears in both *Strike/Slip* and *The Shell of the Tortoise.* This lyric, which Lee might easily classify as a phenomenological poem, dramatizes a mathematically sublime experience in which the poetic imagination is faced with something too huge to be taken in whole:

> Then someone says "four hundred million years" and the words
> tap dance with their canes and boaters through
> the spotlight right across the stage unspooling out the
> stage door down the alley through the dark
> depopulated avenues (for everyone is at the theatre) toward
> the outskirts where our backyards bleed off into
> motel
> rentall
> stripmall . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> —four
> hundred *million* years, yes, that's a long
> long time ago. (14)

In the essay "From Here to Infinity (Or So)", McKay explains that "Devonian" was an attempt "to catch something of the disorientation of deep time" through "the loss of narrative structure" (*The Shell* 125). In the middle section of the poem, which is omitted here, the tap-dancing words "four

hundred million years" continue to move out into the outskirts, where they eventually "slur" into a flurry of sand or snow that is viewed as if through headlights on a highway (*Strike/Slip* 14). In this light, the words appear as "the dried-up / memories of water how the waves were how / the light that fell so softly through the depths was," and although they call up images of the Devonian period, the poem's audience members are "still staring at the empty stage" when the poem ends, having achieved little more than a kindergartener's sense of deep time as being "a long / long time ago."[6]

The conscious activity being dramatized in these poems stops short of a final phase in which the subject of Kant's mathematical sublime would move from the unpleasant feeling that his imagination has failed to the much more exciting realization that his reason can cover his losses (Weiskel 23-24). McKay's sublime discourse refuses a moment of sublimation or synthesis: instead, it rests content in an imaginative failure that seems to insist upon rational failure as well.

Thinking the Sublime Forward in Time

In "From Here to Infinity (Or So)," McKay argues that metaphor "renders the infinite tangible, but it also infinitizes the here and now" (*The Shell* 129). Connecting this thought to Levinas' writings on infinity, McKay goes on to argue that metaphor has "a paradoxical power to alter the nature of understanding" (129-30). In the spirit of such geopoetry, I will conclude this essay with a speculative imagining of my own. Whereas McKay's geopoetry explores temporal extensions that move backwards into deep time, many current environmental crises can only be imagined through temporal extensions *forward*, as Rob Nixon demonstrates persuasively in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). Sublime discourse and "talk about the sublime" may prove useful for those who would work to make visible the complex and sometimes imperceptible consequences of climate change and environmental degradation and injustice. As Kant argues in *The Critique of Judgement*, "*[t]he sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense*" (98). Recognizing and cultivating this faculty may seem overly humanistic if one's goal is to appreciate nature or "wilderness" as such, but aesthetics of the sublime may be effective tools for making "slow" and invisible violences available to thought.

As Jennifer Peeples argues in an essay on the "toxic sublime," "individuals often attend to environmental problems not because they are the most

dire, pressing, or dangerous, but because they are the most evocatively articulated" (374). Somewhat similarly, Nixon argues in *Slow Violence* that a major difficulty in communicating the effects of climate change and environmental degradation "is representational: how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (3). Thus, Nixon argues, environmental violence "needs to be seen—and deeply considered—as a contest not only over space, or bodies, or labor, or resources, but also over time" (8).

As McKay's own engagements with geopoetry and deep time demonstrate, aesthetics of the sublime need not be egotistical, and foregrounding the activities of an aesthetic imagination at work need not be solipsistic. Contemporary debates about environmental degradation and injustice are being waged in the realm of the imagination as much as in the realms of the scientific and sociological. Through artistic grappling with tensions between incomprehensible and yet *conceivable* forms and data, the cognitive "dissonance" (Peeples 377) that characterizes sublime experience, and that sublime discourse aims to communicate, may be a powerful way of articulating the conditions that enable slow violence and its accretively overwhelming effects.

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NOTES

1 Jesse Patrick Ferguson has written the only scholarly article to date that focuses exclusively on McKay's geopoetics, and it does not consider McKay's engagement with aesthetics of the sublime. In *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* (2013), Travis V. Mason briefly suggests a relation between "astonishment" and the sublime in McKay's work, but the suggestion is not developed in depth (249). In comparison, Mason's discussion of sublimity in "Literature and Geology: An Experiment in Interdisciplinary, Comparative Ecocriticism" (2013) is more fully developed (see 482-83); however, the topic is not the primary focus of the essay, nor does the essay focus exclusively on McKay's geopoetic work.

2 My citations refer to the original in *Open Wide a Wilderness.*

3 *The Muskwa Assemblage*'s pages are unnumbered. See also *The Shell of the Tortoise* (91).

4 Sircello also identifies a third category, "*talk about the sublime*," which is "reflective or

analytic discourse that takes as its subject matter primarily sublime experience or sublime discourse, but also itself or other talk about the sublime" (541). In this paradigm, many passages in *The Shell of the Tortoise* are "talk about the sublime."

5 In *Vis à Vis*, McKay refers primarily to Levinas' work in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other* (1998).

6 One might compare this to McKay's comments on the revised 1850 *Prelude* in "Great Flint Singing," where he suggests that Wordsworth's addition of the phrase "a huge peak, black and huge" "dramatically humbl[es] his own finely cadenced medium to the status of a kid saying 'it was big, really really big'" (11).

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Tom Wayman

Thanatosine

—A black gossamer found
in the brain's neural pathways,
secreted in minuscule amounts by every cell.
Below the surface of the cortical folds
and deep within the cerebellum
even of infants

filaments of darkness
float between ganglia, drift between the hemispheres
along the corpus callosum: black wisps that pool and eddy,
forming eventually a filmy, toxic cirrus
suspended throughout each lobe, tendrils
that can coagulate to a thicker mist
in response to certain illnesses or traumas,
then with time
dissipate again,
wafting away down passages, around
corners

—Barely detectable, asymptomatic,
yet always capable of being produced
in copious amounts in a millisecond:
hair-triggered like an automobile's air bag,
poised to fill all available space
if a bullet tears through, say, or
if a conduit suddenly occludes, preventing blood
from reaching the cerebrum.

—Normally, though, the cloud
densifies as the body ages, expunging various muscle memories
and interfering with the release of healing enzymes
until eventually what has become a cumulonimbus
hovering in each corridor and room
transmutes to a black smoke
that blankets the cerebral cortex,
an unstemmable presence
obliterating the light

From a Distance

Angie Abdou
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Lori Lansens
The Mountain Story. Knopf Canada $32.00

Doretta Lau
How does a single blade of grass thank the sun? Nightwood $19.95

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

We most often think of geography when we hear the word *distance*. We think of kilometres, cities, provinces, Canada itself, all seven thousand-plus kilometres coast to coast. But there are many other ways, more intimate and more difficult, that we can measure distance: distance from our cultures, our families, our lovers, our pasts, our shared histories. It's these kinds of distances that resonate with us in a profound way; distance is universal.

In *Between,* Angie Abdou explores the distance that Vero Nanton feels from the life she once knew. Vero and her husband, Shane, have moved fully into adulthood as homeowners, parents, and participants in careers. Vero says, early on, that her life has been hijacked, and it's this hijacking that amplifies the distance Vero feels from herself and her marriage, and that ultimately propels the Nantons to hire a nanny. Ligaya arrives from the Philippines, and Vero hopes that this will be the answer she needs to right her world; however, Ligaya's presence only tilts their unrecognizable lives into a new and ever-more precarious position.

Abdou excels at revealing the depths of Vero's unhappiness, making her flawed but deeply, satisfyingly human. Overwhelmed by her daily life, Vero stages a faux-suicide attempt, hiding in the pantry with scrawled verses she's titled *A is for Asylum: A Mommy's Alphabet*. It's wrenching to read, but pinpoints Vero's need for her husband to understand the depth of her depression, of her floundering in her own life:

> *B is for the breakdowns*
> *Mommies sometimes have to fake.*
> *Sadly it's the only way*
> *They'll ever get a break.*

The novel follows Vero and Ligaya in alternating chapters, their experiences and pasts acting as foils to one another. The alternating perspectives work well, and the first third of the novel sings with tension. The novel takes a sharp turn, however, when Vero and Shane impulsively decide to take a vacation at a swingers resort; this experience affects the rest of the novel, both in terms of the Nantons' relationship, and their relationship with Ligaya. The trip seems to come out of nowhere, and does not seem to reflect the characters we have come to know by this point. Here, distance between Vero and Shane is amplified, and many of the scenes are awkward and unbearable. This section, however, did not feel warranted by the previous narrative, but rather felt more like a necessary plot point to achieve the ultimate end to their stories. Regardless of this, though, Abdou's writing remains strong and captures the experiences of two very different women. Vero and Ligaya are not always likeable, but they are believable;

Abdou fearlessly tackles privilege and Vero's very apparent discomfort with her own.

Doretta Lau also uses the concept of distance as a thematic element in her collection, *How does a single blade of grass thank the sun?* In these stories, we see most frequently a distancing from culture and family, but also distance from careers, from love, from the realities of contemporary life. Lau's stories are contemporary in both tone and style; she pairs speculative fiction with pop culture, often setting her work in and about Vancouver. Lau's protagonists are often Asian-Canadians, mostly female, and mostly detached from their surroundings. She tempers this detachment with the use of the first-person perspective, forcing some level of intimacy and connection with the main characters. This choice is effective in many of the stories, but at times creates protagonists with homogenous voices.

Lau is controlled and precise in her use of language, offering shimmering insights into her characters' lives. In "Little Miss International Goodwill," eight-year-old Clementine struggles with her identity, depicting herself as Rapunzel or Smurfette in drawings despite her Chinese heritage. She fails at pronouncing words in Cantonese; she is unable to use chopsticks in a way her sister deems correct. At one point, Clementine tries to bleach her own hair, and in a moment of epiphany wonders why "trying to be blonde hurt so much." Lau's collection is inventive, with moments of real brilliance throughout; yet the endings often feel forced—sometimes too easy, sometimes too incomplete—rather than revealing the new distances the characters have travelled within the stories.

Distance is more explicitly explored in Lori Lansens' new novel *The Mountain Story.* This novel is in many ways a traditional survival/coming of age/loss of innocence story, concerned with Wolf Truly as he ventures up the mountains in Palm Springs, intending to end his life. Wolf is distanced, both literally and figuratively, from his own life, and it is only once he encounters three women on another journey up the mountain, that he sees a future for himself outside of "Tin Town," the squalid trailer park forever in the shadows of luxurious Palm Springs.

The novel is a departure for Lansens, as her previous work has been more intimate, unravelling personal stories, rather than utilizing the survival trope; however, she uses Wolf's tragic back story to add emotional depth, and this is where the story becomes vibrant. I was engaged with what brought Wolf to this moment in his life, rather than with the (somewhat repetitive) physical journey up the mountain. The novel uses an epistolary framework, which is mostly unnecessary as the narrative is strong enough to propel the novel forward. Lansens ultimately ties the multiple storylines up perhaps too neatly, but she succeeds in revealing the ways in which we can overcome and reimagine distances, self-imposed and otherwise: at the end of his journey, Wolf says, "Nature's mirror is sharply reflective and I missed the clarity the mountain had brought me, even the way our plight had defined our purpose."

Constructing Métis Identity in Canada

Christopher Adams, Gregg Dahl, Ian Peach, eds.
Métis in Canada: History, Identity, Law and Politics. U of Alberta P $65.00

Chris Andersen
"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood.
U of British Columbia P $95.00

Reviewed by Sarah MacKenzie

Deriving from a 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference in Ottawa, Christopher Adams, Gregg Dahl, and Ian Peach's collection, *Métis in Canada:*

History, Identity, Law and Politics, brings together a vastly diverse collection of essays, reflective of the multifaceted nature of the debates relating to Métis identity in Canada. Published ten years after the landmark R. v. Powley case (2003), in which the Supreme Court ruled that Sault Ste. Marie Métis are entitled to Aboriginal hunting rights, the collection expressly endeavours to enhance and nuance Canadian perceptions of the case's relevance. Given the breadth of perspectives presented by the contributors, along with the text's overall contribution to discussions of Indigenous identity in Canada, it comes as no surprise that the editors are experts in Aboriginal policy.

Authored by a range of interdisciplinary contributors—both Métis and non-Indigenous—working in relevant fields of policy/law, political studies, and Indigenous studies, the essays are divided into four broad sections: "Identity," "History," "Law," and "Politics." The three essays included in the first section contend with the development of contemporary Métis identity, with Gloria Bell examining artistic/literary portrayals constructed in tandem with the emergence of nineteenth-century Great Lakes-area Métis communities, Laura Lee Kearns drawing upon narratives produced by Métis women so as to "reconstruct" feminine perceptions of identity, and Gregg Dahl discussing the terminological shift from "half breed" to "Métis" as it bears on identity. Section two—"History"—deals with the ethnogenesis of Métis identity as not merely "anthropological" or "social," but extremely "political." Darren O'Toole, basing his argument upon "revisionist" social history, counters Bell's earlier suggestion that Métis identity developed in the Great Lakes region before it did on the western plains, contending that institutional practices are the primary factors in identity construction and that any comprehensive understanding of Métis in Canada must thus draw extensively upon political history. Liam J. Haggarty, engaging with commonplace fur trade narratives, which he deems oversimplifications of Métis economic history, advocates an alternative conception of economic evolution initiated previous to the fur trade era, while Tom Flanagan and Glen Campbell unpack newly found writings of Louis Riel. The first two sections together offer a comprehensive evaluation of the historical trajectory leading to contemporary understandings of Métis ethnicity.

Indicative of the conflicting interpretations of R. v. Powley's social relevance present in Canada, section three, "Law," contains only two essays, each concerning Métis (and Aboriginal) rights. Examining the topic through opposing lenses, the articles consider the way in which Métis identity has been constructed from the outside by judicial/legal systems reliant upon categorical classification. Ian Peach, reconsidering Canadian jurisprudence as it bears directly upon ethnicity-based Métis resource rights, portrays the outcome of R. v. Powley in a positive light, as it was the earliest case to define Métis peoples as culturally distinctive (rights-worthy) people. Past rulings had merely established Métis rights via Aboriginal/First Nations blood quantum or lifeways. To the contrary, in his review of R. v. Powley, Jeremy Patzer argues that the case rendered Métis rights based upon a notion of "authentic" Indigeneity: the perception of Métis populations as culturally static anachronisms.

The book's final section, "Politics," offers four essays, dealing with the history of Métis political organization, the forging of Métis-specific structures of governance in Saskatchewan, and the employment of "interest group" theoretical strategies. Drawing upon the work of Joe Sawchuk, Kelly Saunders suggests that Métis populations have always perceived their nations as sovereign, self-governing institutions, and Siomonn P. Pulla—also drawing upon Sawchuk— examines Métis organizational

developments within the contexts of Métis struggles for self-determination and Canadian representations of Aboriginality. Janique Dubois, diversifying the section, elaborates upon the manner in which Saskatchewan Métis have reached a stage of manifest self-governance. Co-editor Christopher Adams, in his closing chapter, examines the methods used by contemporary Métis nations to deal with provincial leaders. Basing his analysis upon interviews with heads of Métis nations and Métis organizations across Canada, Adams uses an "interest group" theoretical approach to undertake his exploration of Métis political/governing structures. While making apparent his recognition that the Métis populations seek to achieve self-governance, Adams comes to the contentious conclusion that they remain—at this stage—interest groups, ultimately implying that, while real, the intricacy of Métis identity in Canada makes it difficult to define.

Winner of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA)'s Best Subsequent Book Prize, Chris Andersen's 2014 book, *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, explores—in a similar vein to the essays included in Adams, Dahl, and Peach's salient collection—the pertinent issues relating to the politics of Métis identity in Canada. While the Canadian constitution defines Métis as an Aboriginal people along with First Nations and Inuit peoples, according to Andersen the term has been misrecognized and, consequently, misused. Adeptly tracing the history of the word's sociopolitical employment, Andersen argues that "Métis" has evolved to become a synonym for "mixed," and thereby used as a tool of racialization, marginalization, and dismissal. Genetic blending is inherent to all peoples—including First Nations and Inuit populations—and other Indigenous peoples certainly emerged concurrently with the Métis populations. Reducing Métis peoples to "hybrids," Andersen asserts, is therefore a disservice to all Indigenous Canadians. Conceptualizations of "Métis" founded upon discourses of hybridity, the author suggests, necessarily rely upon racist notions of Indigeneity entrenched in the Indian Act—understandings which have served to devalue and displace Aboriginal peoples. To his credit, Andersen supports his argument by evaluating the legal sites that have instrumentally operated in the service of misrepresentation, including the Supreme Court of Canada and National Household Survey (previously referred to as the Canadian Census).

Andersen—like the contributors to *Métis in Canada*—is attentive to the effect of R. v. Powley on societal understandings of what it actually means to be Métis. Asserting that "the category 'Métis" should not be reserved for mixed-lineage individuals displaced by unjust legal frameworks, Andersen suggests that Indigeneity must necessarily be reconceived "in terms of peoplehood"—a historically rooted, distinctive, and relational "political community." Although many Métis people yet identify on the basis of being "mixed," Andersen is adamant in his well-founded argument. The book, although polemical, works to refute marginalizing stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples and to present proactive revaluations of historic legal failures. Taken together, the texts under review shed new light on the intricacies surrounding not only intracommunity conceptions of Métis identity in Canada, but also longstanding, often problematic constructions of mixed-lineage and, by extension, Indigenous identities in alterity.

Generational Tides

David Arnason
There Can Never Be Enough. Turnstone $21.00

Greg Bechtel
Boundary Problems. Freehand Books $19.95

Shawn Syms
Nothing Looks Familiar. Arsenal Pulp $15.95

Reviewed by Tina Trigg

As glimpses into the Canadian short story market, these three collections span a formidable range. Viewed alongside David Arnason's "best-of" work, the debut collections by Greg Bechtel and Shawn Syms provide evidence of strong talent in the next generation with differing emphases.

There Can Never Be Enough is an apt title for David Arnason's newest compilation which opens with three new stories followed by selections dating to 1982. The volume is well-crafted in sequencing; themes or images often resonate from one story to the next, creating a fluid yet varied reading experience. As the first *Selected Stories* of a prolific, well-established prairie writer, however, it seems bereft of accompanying materials; a brief preface, forward, or introduction would particularly benefit readers first wading into Arnason's waters.

Containing thirty-three stories (or eighty-three if itemizing "Fifty Stories and a Piece of Advice"), the collection packs a staggering range and demonstrates Arnason's trademark style. Over half of the titles create an illusion of anonymity, undercutting flat labels by developing well-defined characters who remain nameless: "The Figure Skater," "The Girl of Milk and Blood," "The Cowboy: A Tale of the Old West." With rare exception, the diverse stories are beautifully crafted with skilful conclusions. Arnason blends history, fantasy, fable, Canadiana, culture, and geography in admirably compressed space. In lively metafictive or textual interplay, readers are directly addressed, Dostoevsky's characters emerge in "The Circus Performers' Bar," and contemporary retellings of folk or fairy tales boldly question cultural values and obsessions. Dipping into small towns, global travels, friendships, and (male dominated) gender politics, this is a volume equally amenable to leafing through or perusing cover-to-cover.

While speculative fiction pops up in Arnason's collection—"In the Garden of the Medicis" is the best of this mode—it firmly occupies Greg Bechtel's *Boundary Problems*. The volume includes six stories previously published (at least in part) and four new entries. Narrated from a male perspective, Bechtel's stories offer a broad demographic representation—unemployed former jocks, relocated cabbies, occult-dabbling computer programmers, troubled youth, and well-meaning camp counsellors—and an intriguing sense of the unexpected. One disturbing feature of the collection is the predominance of incest or past sexual violation in female characters, a recurring trauma that forestalls developing relationships. At any moment, the narratives bend just outside normative boundaries, unveiling worlds of parallel existence and questioning perceptions of reality.

Creating some dislocation and emphasizing uncertainty, Bechtel's stories play with form, often employing tailored subtitles: tarot cards in "Blackbird Shuffle," post-secondary chronology in "The Concept of a Photon," parts of a letter in "Junk Mail." Perhaps designed to offset the experimental content, the visible structural markers can be intrusive. This is largely the case in "The Smut Story" with its contradictory versions, extensive "scholarly" footnotes, and three-part presentation. Although conclusions can be unsatisfying, Bechtel's talent as a writer is clear; these are stories with an original voice and promising experimentation.

As is announced by its cover image of underpants and as Syms affirms in a recent interview, *Nothing Looks Familiar* focuses on sexuality and identity. The eleven

stories (eight previously published) have an impressive range of urban characters and sociodemographics—from meat-packing line workers to meth-addicted mothers, and from bullied elementary kids to lonely widows. Driven explicitly by fantasy and sex(uality), the stories assume an oddly homogenizing tendency; gritty in language and content, they can be didactic—"Charla didn't really see gays or bisexuals as especially different from straight men. She figured that they all had the capacity to be goofy or decent"—yet flippant—"I don't care about AIDS anymore, you know? I just don't care. I could get hit by a truck tomorrow anyway." To an extent, the volume's diversity is compromised by its overwhelmingly Freudian premise.

Nonetheless, Syms' skill is evident in deftly-drawn descriptions and ambiguous titles, including "On the Line," "Family Circus," and "The Exchange." Although protagonists are usually powerless, a variety of friendships counter strained or superficial sexual relationships. Syms' willingness to include figures with physical, developmental, and psychological disabilities is also notable. The insertion of tech-talk acronyms, Twitter feeds, and Craigslist ads will date some stories, but also allows for some textual experimentation and aligns with the volume's overall contemporary urban focus.

If Arnason's compilation exudes quiet confidence, the debut collections of Bechtel and Syms take willing risks; together, these stories will appeal to a wide array of readers and affirm a well-established genre in Canada.

Anxious Words under Scrutiny

Ken Babstock
On Malice. Coach House $17.95

Gary Barwin
moon baboon canoe. Mansfield $17.00

Reviewed by Philip Miletic

Gary Barwin's and Ken Babstock's latest books of poetry share a similar anxiety towards (the lack of/threat to) imagination in poetry, about its limits and its potential (within those limits). In each book, there is an exploration of this struggle to rejuvenate imagination within the current social milieu, although each poet takes a vastly different approach and subject.

A "follow-up" to *Porcupinity of the Stars*, *moon baboon canoe* pays a greater attention to writing than *Porcupinity*, and writing itself is more central to Barwin's book than Babstock's. Poems like "postcard," "parade," and especially "sonnet" express a self-conscious—and anxious—awareness of words as representations: "a postcard from my mother / is placed under the lens. . . . wish you were easier to see . . . you weren't really there . . . you are coloured dots / fields of inky texture . . . I'll never love anything / as much as I love / this poem" ("Postcard"). But what appears to be a dead end flowers into a love of poetry and its limitations. Whereas *Porcupinity* seeks a comfort in the struggle and confusion of textual expression, *moon baboon canoe* is more about that very struggle and the coming to terms with the inability to fully capture what is being represented, that these limitations open unto a new world. Barwin uses the image of the hummingbird, whose wings are "on the luminous verge / of the beginning and the end" ("two hummingbirds"), to continue similar tensions between opposites. This blurring of opposites brings about illuminations in "a constellation of lines" ("seapod microfiche"). *moon baboon canoe* is both a

solemn acknowledgement of the limitations of language and a celebration of poetry's ability to create something new out of these seeming dead ends.

Ken Babstock's *On Malice* is a tremendous collection grappling with surveillance culture that is troubled by anxiety, paranoia, frustration, and anger, all of which passionately shapes the poetic forms of the book. *On Malice* is divided into four sections, the first three dealing with particular modes of surveillance: listening in, looking in, and play. The last section, mining vocabulary from John Donne's theological defence of suicide, is a defence of disconnecting from networks—a metaphorical suicide. It's a conclusion that accretes over the course of the entire book, Babstock criticizing not only the surveillers but those of us who are willingly surveilled. Babstock retorts, "We can claim indifference but that only makes us into / a bargain." Our indifference blinds us to the fact that we allow ourselves to become "a correction in the architecture," that we willingly accept the categorization of social network profiles. The result creates an architecture that privileges anticipation over imagination: "it would seem the most extremely / heightened anticipation appears / to diminish the capacity to imagine." *On Malice*, however, is not a lamentation that gives up and turns away; it is a dialogic excavation of ghosts, noise, interrupted messages in search of the restoration of imagination within surveillance culture, a text that pushes readers to think critically and imaginatively about their place within the social media milieu.

This Transitive Age

Doug Beardsley
Swimming with Turtles: Travel Narratives, Spirit of Place. Thistledown $17.95

Christopher Levenson
Night Vision. Quattro $18.00

David W. McFadden
Shouting Your Name Down the Well: Tankas and Haiku. Mansfield $20.00

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

These collections address the gifts and stresses of aging and dislocation. "This is an old man's poem," Levenson intones with Yeatsian brusqueness in "Maps, Revisited." His voice mixes prosaic reminiscence with flashes of lyric disturbance, as if trying at each descriptive juncture to jolt his loose lines out of habitually cataloguing detachment—one of his favourite devices here is the unsorted list, often of place names that "freight . . . our common history"—toward a vital engagement with a world that increasingly seems to leave him out. The first poem, "Static," positions him as "a kid before transistors or plastic," setting up his persistent sense of being a bewildered witness to glib media depictions of atrocity, consigned to "watching disasters" rather than managing any real affective connection: "If you're not already dead, you're an observer." Our ears, he writes, "cannot take it in, this swelter / of information." He wants to find poetic means to activate those encounters, somehow to "elucidate"—to draw light from—those noisy flows of word and image, to "re-enter the real contagious world" by composing "a steady buildup of small attentiveness," winnowing sense from estrangement, rendering "a pulsing anagram of the places I lived through / that strobe my body with memories." The poems tend to articulate that want rather than overcome it; as observances, little rituals, they thematize instead of enacting visionary incisiveness, the "night vision" Levenson

craves: "I say the names over like a black rosary," he writes in "Geography Lesson," offering an incantatory list, a "sad inventory" of sites of "disasters, massacres," in order to overcome their bleak darkness with some "gift of light," but which leaves us only to "savour," as a fraught, vestigial music, what Levenson names "the weight of collected absences," shared loss.

Shouting Your Name Down the Well compiles about five hundred haikus and tankas composed by McFadden over the course of his long career. The book's shoddy sans-serif font coupled with a clamorous presentation—three or four poems per page—echoes the loose flippancy of McFadden's style. Cued by Zen tradition, the poems frequently subvert pretenses of high seriousness: "What an idiot!" he happily berates himself. The book begins by slyly repurposing Bashō—"Another frog of / Five or seven syllables / Plops into the sylvan pool." I'm drawn to his transpositions of Bashō and others into this compact form; his versions of Sappho's fragments are particularly provocative, a cross-fertilization of cultural histories. (He hears "the booming / And beating" of drums "[i]n tenth-century Japan," though he never confronts the appropriations inherent in translated genres like haiku.) Most of the poems, in keeping with McFadden's wry and plain-spoken aesthetic, fall a bit short for me, a failure McFadden acknowledges and even wants to own: "Your life has been one mistake / After another." There might be pathos here, but such resignation—"I am seventy— / The wound I've been suffering / Since birth is healing"—also feels a bit overindulgent. Complaining that poems like his are "Ridiculed and vilified" in Canada sounds bathetically overstated—he has a wide readership—and all-too-deliberate.

Doug Beardsley aggregates a travelogue from sojourns in Mexico, the Caribbean and the Pacific, aspiring to be more than a "towel-toting tourist . . . snorkeling without getting wet" and aiming toward a poetry of immersive encounter, "determined to become" the resistant diversities of culture and of place through which he passes, to recover "spirit." "In the morning," the opening lyric begins, "we don't know where we are." The poems want to work through that uncertainty, not necessarily to overcome it so much as to accommodate human plurality, a change Beardsley sees as necessary if, as a species, "we're going to survive." Each of these lyrics is "seeking more than we can experience," an openness to diversity. Robert Louis Stevenson figures in this accepting immersion, managing (Beardsley imagines) to acquire "uncommon words from his mysterious world" late in life in Samoa. Beardsley sometimes leaves a conjunction or ampersand hanging at the end of a line, as if to signal this acquisitive openness. He tends to fetishize the Indigenous—witnessing "sacred dances . . . becoming the thing itself," for instance—but also acknowledges, a little like McFadden, the inevitable shortfall of late colonial English (counterpointing his name to the "inventive, ringing, singing" names of Latin American poets). Despite yearning for release, his work remains shackled by romanticizing an uninterrogated "authenticity" he attributes to his others.

L'éblouissement de l'écriture

Étienne Beaulieu
Trop de lumière pour Samuel Gaska.
Lévesque éditeur 20,00 $

Compte rendu par Daniel Laforest

Trop de lumière pour Samuel Gaska est le premier récit de fiction d'un écrivain déjà accompli. C'est l'impression indéniable que le lecteur en retire. Il faut savoir que Étienne Beaulieu a connu jusqu'ici un parcours riche dans le monde des lettres québécoises et francophones. Il a été professeur de

littérature à l'Université du Manitoba avant de revenir œuvrer dans l'enseignement collégial au Québec. Il est spécialiste du roman français et de la pensée de la prose. Il a publié une étude érudite sur un écrivain méconnu, Joseph Joubert (*La Fatigue romanesque de Joseph Joubert*), ainsi qu'une monographie cruciale sur le cinéma au Québec (*Sang et lumière: La Communauté du sacré dans le cinéma québécois*). Il y a un peu plus de dix ans, il s'est illustré comme cofondateur des Cahiers littéraires *Contre-jour*, une revue devenue essentielle dans le paysage québécois et dont il demeure l'un des animateurs infatigables.

Voilà pour le tableau dans lequel vient s'inscrire ce court récit à l'écriture magnifique et à la densité intellectuelle impressionnante. Mais qui est ce Samuel Gaska? Et depuis quand un surcroît de lumière peut-il s'avérer intolérable? Samuel Gaska est un artiste, immigré polonais au Québec. Il est avant tout musicien compositeur; il partage sa vie avec une femme suicidaire, Pascale, qui bientôt se découvrira lesbienne. Il a une amante, Catherine, qui fait du théâtre. Il passe un tiers du récit à Montréal, un autre isolé sur une île au Nouveau-Brunswick, et un autre à Winnipeg. Partout il est livré à ce qu'on a coutume d'appeler les affres de la création. Mais là n'est pas exactement le problème. Là n'est pas exactement le nœud qui en fait un personnage assez unique, un être convexe dont les dépressions sont creusées par l'accumulation des paraphrases de son monologue intérieur, et qui au final s'impose comme l'incarnation d'une déchirure ancienne résumée par cette question : pourquoi faire de l'art en Amérique?

> J'avais compris . . . que les êtres du Nouveau Monde m'étaient donnés sans langage, dans leur fragilité toute silencieuse et qu'ils ne perduraient que grâce à ce silence qui les isolait de tout langage, de tout artifice humain et forcément de tout art.

Le personnage est conceptuel. Dans Samuel Gaska il y a le prophète hébreu de l'Ancien Testament, « l'invocateur des dieux », et le mot polonais pour désigner l'oie blanche. Cette dernière figure, et plus généralement celle de l'oiseau sauvage et migrateur, héron, huard et consorts, traverse le récit de part en part pour illustrer un principe profond que Beaulieu semble faire sourdre de l'idée même du continent américain. Tout est mouvement, fluctuations, chaos; toute forme est engagée dans son propre effacement. La pensée humaine est plus ou moins impuissante et l'art, à plus forte raison le récit, ne sont que des « ordres » factices, à tout prendre désespérés, que l'on tente d'imposer sur le monde. La sauvagerie que le personnage voit ressurgir partout autour de lui amplifie cette impression d'un réel irréductible que les arts mimétiques commencent par trahir pour ensuite s'effondrer au bout de leur propre effort. Et cet effondrement, c'est l'œuvre, la difficulté d'écrire faite mausolée à même le langage. *Trop de lumière pour Samuel Gaska* et un très beau livre. Beaulieu y renouvèle les thèmes qui l'obsèdent depuis le début de sa carrière d'intellectuel : la lumière, l'image et le mouvement — le cinéma donc —, mais d'autre part la subsistance du sacré comme lien social, en-dehors des institutions, et finalement le rôle central, jamais entièrement résolu, du récit en prose dans tout cela. J'aimerais dire qu'Étienne Beaulieu est un écrivain avec lequel il nous faudra compter désormais au Québec. Mais la vérité est que c'est déjà le cas depuis un moment. Ça ne peut donc que se bonifier.

Diasporic Discontent

Sadhu Binning
Fauji Banta Singh and Other Stories. TSAR $20.95

Padma Viswanathan
The Ever After of Ashwin Rao. Random House $39.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

Both of these works are moving testimonials to what Ranjanna Khann terms "coloniality's affective dissonance" and "the work of melancholia"—stories of loss, economic and ethnic discrimination, and resilience. The characters created by both authors are compelling snapshots of faces in the illusion of multiculturalism, bringing closer a grasp of the perpetual dislocation and relocation underlying the political fabrication of inclusivity. The primary narrator of Padma Viswanathan's superb second novel, *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao*, is a psychologist who takes on the project of interviewing survivors of the 1985 Air India disaster in the context of prolonged investigations and ignorance among mainstream Canadians and officials. Rao, himself a casualty of the bombing, represses his own pain in order to listen to the stories of relatives in a variety of locations and perspectives; the overall result is profoundly haunting. It transgresses generic boundaries, recounting factual information along with these evocative fictional stories. That interweaving is echoed in Viswanathan's blog responding to the election of Narendra Modi, in which she alludes to one character in her novel who becomes a Hindu nationalist after the bombing; she writes that Westerners "ignore or allow ourselves to be befuddled by the complications of civil conflicts elsewhere."

Comparably, the narrative therapy practiced by Rao in the novel reflects his bitterness regarding Canada's convenient labeling of the event as an act of terrorism rooted in India, rather than as an attack on Canadians by Canadians. For many of the individuals, the retaliation against Sikhs following both Indira Gandhi's assassination and the bombing is another marker of persisting trauma in Canada, even while the mainstream does not recognize distinctions of religion, class, or ethnicity. Ultimately, then, the reader is reminded of the dangers of "globalism" and of the liminal space inhabited by the South Asian diaspora. While substantial in its scope and length, Viswanathan's novel remarkably brings us into the private spaces of diasporic homes and families. The image of the phoenix—of death and rebirth—emphasizes the way these nesting stories reflect nesting lives, relationships, families, and communities. Moreover, the emphasis not on recovery from such tragedies, but on erosion or shape-shifting is profoundly noted by the narrator: "Statistics are well and good, but names, faces, stories make us understand, pay attention." This book, in its rare synthesis of intimacy and critical reflection, is truly one of the most powerful, intricate, and timely Canadian novels published this year.

Similarly, Sadhu Binning's collection, *Fauji Banta Singh and Other Stories*, presents the reader with a kaleidoscope of characters drawn from the Sikh community in British Columbia. Written first in Punjabi and translated into English—as are many works by this multilingual author—most stories touch on dilemmas of the South Asian diaspora, although through a narrower lens. Binning's inclusion of a glossary of untranslated terms at the back of the collection reminds the mainstream reader that she or he is a voyeur, only marginally admitted into these lives and homes. In the stories, the economic hardship and multiple challenges of both young and old reflects a tug-of-war between "home" and "away." From the elderly soldier Banta Singh, who recalls that he began as the only Punjabi mailman in his assigned neighbourhood, to the high-school student Sito, who is used and betrayed by Kelly, a Punjabi boy, Binning gives us multiple perspectives and responses to the

dislocation and relocation of diaspora. Some stories are almost disappointing in their brevity, leaving little impact on the reader; some, such as "Off Track" and "The Accident," relate disturbing stories of domestic and racially-motivated violence that resound beyond the book's covers.

What stands out in this collection, however, as in Viswanathan's novel, is the resilience of these characters and the connections they forge both within and outside their homes and neighbourhoods. In Binning's "Father and Son," the link (ironically) is economic exploitation and homelessness, as on the street Indigenous, mainstream, and immigrant develop an intense loyalty and mutual respect. Similarly, in "Eyes in the Dark," we encounter Punjabi men working in northern BC who marry Indigenous women in order to gain official status. In many of these narratives, the leveler is socio-economic class and the racist views of the mainstream; while divisions exist between older and more recent Punjabi immigrants, inter-ethnic connections are made in the logging communities. Again, the stories are not as compelling or intricate as Viswanathan's novel, but both works are significant glimpses of the complex and intangible character of the South Asian diaspora. Both demonstrate the power of narrative as vital and powerful therapy, not only for the casualties, but also for the often-complacent cultural mainstream in Canada.

Looking Back

George Bowering
Mirror on the Floor. Anvil $18.00

Rudy Wiebe
Come Back. Knopf Canada $26.95

Claire Holden Rothman
My October. Penguin Canada $22.00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

George Bowering's first novel, *Mirror on the Floor*, has been reissued by Anvil Press as part of their "Lost BC Literature" series. Originally published in 1967, the novel vividly evokes a quasi-bohemian student culture that will be recognizable to anyone over the age of thirty. Released from the drunk tank after a night of drinking, fighting, and philosophizing in a seedy bar, the protagonist, grad student Bobby Small, becomes entranced by Andrea, a disturbed but strangely compelling young woman. The novel alternates between Bobby's narration of their complicated interactions, flashbacks to Andrea's troubled childhood, and transcripts of audio tapes about herself that Andrea may be making for Bobby. As their relationship unfolds, Bobby seeks understanding, while Andrea's Oedipal family drama works towards its inevitable violent conclusion.

Much of Bobby's narration, conversational and detailed, is the voice of someone who thinks he already knows everything, as in this description of the rundown bar at the novel's opening:

> Mickey Chang's is the last place; you come there when you're eighteen years old and in Vancouver for the first time and you probably get away, or you come there when you're an old man forty-five years and no chance of dying more than four blocks away from the place with the dirty red neon rooster hanging crooked over the door, waiting to fall on a head and kill someone, anyone.

By the novel's end, though, his inability to explain away Andrea's actions renders him silent: "I couldn't think of anything that wasn't stupid, so I stopped thinking." While the female characters are stereotypical, the novel's keen details and dead-on representation of twenty-something angst makes it enjoyable.

Rudy Wiebe's most recent novel, *Come Back*, returns to his first one, picking up the character Hal from *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and positioning him as a retired professor who has recently lost his wife. Traumatized by his son Gabriel's suicide twenty-five years earlier, and also grieving

for his wife, Hal thinks he sees his long-dead son on the street and runs after him into traffic, precipitating accidents of all kinds. Hal freezes at the thought of Gabriel's death, just as his house remains exactly as it was when his wife died. The novel traces his transition from paralysis to engagement, as he finally opens the boxes that contain mementoes from his son's life and funeral.

A significant portion of the novel is a transcription of Gabriel's journal, tracing his erotic obsession with Ailsa, a thirteen-year-old girl who is the daughter of family friends. Hal reads the journal as an extended suicide note, seeking to make sense of Gabriel's death at the same time as he searches for a living son in the ravines of Edmonton. The novel hints at the selfishness of Hal's grief: his self-protective repression has effectively prevented him from connecting with or comforting his remaining family. Some of this self-centredness remains, however, as Hal refuses to confront the consequences of his dash into traffic, which may have caused serious injury to a stranger. The accident also functions to focus his underlying guilt and fear that he may be in some way responsible for his son's death, as he tries to finish reading the journals before the police arrive at his door.

The novel does not always hang together—there are loose ends in the narrative, and the characters are not developed enough for their relationships to seem nuanced. The portrayal of Ailsa as a seductive child is problematic at points. Hal may want to blame her for Gabriel's deterioration, but readers may wonder if the novel as a whole suggests that as well. Gabriel's journal makes for difficult reading—as a record of his obsessions, it loops back and forth through the same materials. The questions Hal has about Gabriel's death are unanswerable, and the novel leaves him waiting both for Gabriel and for consolation.

My October by Claire Holden Rothman takes the 1968 kidnapping of James Cross as a frame to explore the dynamics of present-day Quebec. The marriage between Luc Levesque, a novelist, and Hannah, his English translator, is an unlikely one: Luc is an outspoken separatist and francophone, while Hannah's father served as a special prosecutor following the October Crisis. Now Hugo, their teenage son, has been discovered at school with a gun. This is a lot of weight for the characters to carry, and the novel does not quite succeed in giving them depth or nuance. The marriage frays, as does the relationship between parents and child, but most things are resolved in the end.

Time's Wild Ghosts

Tim Bowling
Selected Poems. Nightwood $22.95

Patrick Lane
Washita. Harbour $18.95

Reviewed by Catherine Owen

Stanley Kunitz, enduring American poet, once wrote, "at the center of every poetic imagination is a cluster of key images that go back to the poet's childhood and that are usually associated with pivotal experiences, not necessarily traumatic." Tim Bowling and Patrick Lane's oeuvres are both fiercely ghosted by such image clusters from the past. Bowling's poems carry gentler recollections of salty sufferings on the river and Lane's collection traces the aestheticized harshnesses of familial loss, violence, and poverty.

Bowling's *Selected Poems,* an elegant hardcover offering of an array of the BC-based writer's work from his auspicious debut in 1995, *Low Water Slack*, to the award-winning *Tenderman* from 2011, illustrates the tenacity of obsession and its potent veins of song. Bowling has always been unafraid of the romantic "punctum" ("a candle slowly removes her wedding dress), the potential sentimentality of tone ("Sometimes I wish . . . the earth a woman's

cheek, we're being cried"), and the repetition of core words like "time," "memory," "dream," "blood," "dead," "bones" and of course, the "river." Although he states in the preface that his shifts in life experience have produced a "dramatic change" in his work, the tremors seem subtler, a rippling out from their initial stone. Although, from *The Witness Ghost* (2003) on, the allusiveness enlarges in poems like "Singing Frank" and "A Christmas Card to Strangers" and ecstatic exclamations attain greater risk such as "adult happiness! / adult sorrow!" in a piece about Nick the barber ("How to Live the Examined Life"). Throughout his growth from the figure of the son to father to middle-aged man, Bowling reassesses the impact those nascent landscapes and their characters have had on him. While he occasionally extends his narrative purview to Tennyson or Hardy, he mainly adheres to the locales and personages of his youth. Such intense focus offers a satisfying accretion, an ever-vivifying milieu, and, at times, a readerly ennui at the eternal return to one essential memoried realm. A sharper attention to form might assist those touchstone moments to assume more powerful shapes. As the triumph of *Tenderman* makes evident, the poet's evocation of the titular word drawn, as it were, from the deep, serves as locutionary Virgil to our desire to plunge once again into Bowling's alluvial witnessings.

A writer even more possessed by the past than Bowling is Patrick Lane. He manages, throughout a surprising range of poems in *Washita*, to renew a reader's ache to hear once more the stories of father, brother, teenage wife, mother, and a tragic menagerie of threatened entities (doe, kitten, whales, mouse, and even tombstones devoured by lichen). Most potently, with the always-phoenix tendencies of the artist, Lane effects such continued engagement by altering his compositional practices to address a frozen right shoulder, an injury that required him to utilize his left hand to type instead, thereby slowing his cadences and imbuing them with a Zen-inflected sparseness. All the lyrics in *Washita* squat in their singular stanzas like compressed herons on one determined leg. Though still resonant with Bly-era mythic pronouncements (the god waiting to eat us, the cicada desiring its imago, and the vague mysticism of "there is no music sweeter than dark mothers in the night"), these new poems not only channel "sabi" intonations, crisply delineating the melancholic pursuit of recollection, but also evoke the detached yet stirred postures of the inhumanist poet Robinson Jeffers. This is particularly so in poems like "Byn Jhator" where the mostly monosyllabic clangs in, "[t]he volt hulks on the bare branches of the dead fir. / It is one place, rock, not stone" to put human angst in stark perspective. Especially moving are the poems honest about this challenging and brave compositional process like "Solstice Coming" where words emerge so slowly that they are salamanders "peering from beneath a stone" and the acknowledgement "[i]t is rare to feel anything deeply" is made with the purity of feeling's depths. Perhaps Lane's current stance towards existence and his art is most eloquently expressed by the line from "Soft and Moist, Hard and Dry," a line that torques the demands of age, time and the persistence of creation, "I hang in this dark by a thread, listening."

Effortlessness

Anne Carson
Short Talks. Brick Books Classics. Brick $20.00

Don Coles
A Serious Call. Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Jim Johnstone
Dog Ear. Signal $16.00

Reviewed by Jason Rotstein

All the poets under discussion tangle with effortlessness. The poets set the virtue of effortlessness before the work and what we get is the manifest expressive interpretation. Two things are noteworthy: the choice of the pursuit; and secondly, the age in which this pursuit is carried through. *Short Talks* is Anne Carson's first book from 1992; *A Serious Call* presents Don Coles, writing late in his career at considerable vintage; *Dog Ear* is Jim Johnstone, a younger poet—but one now established in his craft—writing about what is for him a well-hewn process to effortlessness. As these titles suggest all three poets are concerned with what it means to have the calling and to be a serious poet. Anne Carson and Coles will undercut the convention and myth, Johnstone will run with it.

Johnstone takes us on a "Drive" at a frenetic pace. The lyrics are smart, funny, original but the poetry is sometimes unnatural, overcopped with anxiety, fillings,

> . . . Tell me you're good. Tell me we'll
> lend our touch to the nearest MG, drive
> south on a
> sucker bet until we run dry in the desert.
> There are
> others who've come uninvited, who've
> come to free
>
> themselves from their skin, lose their grip
> and trace in a mess of coins. Here's my
> loss—fist
> lodged in the maw of the first guest to
> speak, our
> honour run aground. To stay we'll need to
> slap down
>
> the pin that adorns your jacket, bet
> against a snail being
> able to survive the edge of a straight
> razor. I've been
> told that nothing can live to know such a
> lean blade.
> When we drive land rises and we rise
> with it.

Undoubtedly, there are verbal hijinks aplenty but every third word stops me up short. The smoothness—the very thing Johnstone is talking about—is compromised because the very words themselves are heavy. Tonally there are many colours, but no baseline (hopefully light) to anchor the music. It sounds, it sounds—is it anxiety or attentive receptiveness?—while humble and dignified in aesthetic.

A young Anne Carson is at the opposite extreme. As if foreshadowing nothing—nothing but a desire to write and observe, Carson skirts mastery. Do many of her "talks" fail? Yes, but the experiment as a whole is always kept afloat. In a "Short Talk on My Task" we read "My task is to carry secret burdens for the / world. . . . I also carry untimely ideas and sins / in general or any faulty action that has been lowered together with you into this hour." It is hard not to notice the adventurousness of syntax.

I find her work bold, sexy, interesting. It leaves me curious: "When I look at the city of Paris I long to wrap my / legs around it." ("Short Talk on Hedonism"). Some of my favorite "poems" are family portraits: "Short Talk on Reading," "Short Talk on Sunday Dinner with Father," "Short Talk on Walking Backwards," etc. There are also apologetic or unapologetic marvels as "Short Talk on Where to Travel," and "Short Talk on Housing." But any clues for the sleuth as to why she became a poet are absent. Influences as diverse as Kafka and Dickinson are in the foreground but the charm and novel discipline is what shines through:

> Some fathers hate to read but love to take the family on trips. Some children hate trips but love to read. Funny how often these find

themselves passengers in the same automobile. I glimpsed the stupendous clear-cut shoulders of the Rockies from between paragraphs of *Madame Bovary*. Cloud shadows rowed languidly across her huge rock throat, traced her fir flanks. Since those days I do not look at hair on female flesh without thinking, Deciduous?

A Serious Call is the most accomplished and assured collection I have read by Don Coles. Coles' subject matter and style have always been something of an anomaly, especially to poetry audiences in Canada, and Coles seemed always to be self-conscious of this. In *A Serious Call*, the book and poems are remarkably pared down, yet the voice is very full and rich, very varied; and the music is quite good. The long poem "A Serious Call" is readable, thrilling and very much Don Coles—unabashedly full of foreign references. One of the best poems is about John A. McDonald, "A Tender Tale":

. . . Years later a second wife will find in the attic
what she describes to the by-then Sir John as
'A box of odd wooden objects' and asks, 'What might these be?'
The knight's eyes fill with tears as he explains that they are
'John A's toys'. 'John A' was the agreed-upon manner
in which he and his first wife had always spoken of a son who
lived for just a year, one August to the next, but for whom
these 'odd wooden objects' were meant to be toys.
In my mind I pick them up, these objects which can hardly
have been played with but which have been in this attic
a very long while, and turn them about for not long at all
in my cautious, undeserving hands. A tear or two
habitually arrives/arrive; a private matter. Is there
more to say? There is, possibly, this—
young John A
returns in a September his life never reached, saying,
'These were my toys. I watched them from my crib.'

Obligatory, yes, for a Canadian, but a true test of a poet should be their facility at writing a good Canadian poem. Coles' powers are very much at their summit in this book. I am in awe of this book. I cannot recommend it enough, unselfconscious and very endearing.

Artistic Unravellings

Richard Cavell
Marinetti Dines with the High Command. Guernica $20.00

Chris Hutchinson
Jonas in Frames. Goose Lane $19.95

Alexandra Legat
The Incomparables. Anvil $20.00

Reviewed by Maude Lapierre

Cavell's *Marinetti Dines with the High Command*, Hutchinson's *Jonas in Frames*, and Legat's *The Incomparables* differ greatly in style, but all contain protagonists whose individuality and perception of reality is shaped by artistic modes of expression. Legat's novel achieves this in a forceful manner, as her protagonist Lydia, a costume designer in a theatre company, can only understand the world around her through the fabrics she touches. As Lydia explains, "I revere textiles because of the textures, the weaves, it speaks to me, lets me feel." This reliance on fabric in order to express herself entails Lydia to manifest her feelings of betrayal towards her cheating husband by sabotaging the costumes of the play in which he is acting. By the beginning of the novel, Lydia has as a result lost both her husband and her job, and must determine who she can be now that she has vowed never to sew again. After returning to her mother's home, now a bed and breakfast, she meets a group called the Counsellors

who compel her to confront her past and to sew again. It is in the introduction of this mysterious group of characters that the novel becomes muddled, as their eclectic combination of Eastern philosophies, cryptic proverbs, and prohibitions from knowing are neither explained nor well-integrated in the narrative. Yet the ending of the novel, which questions the reliability of the entire narrative, does manage to undercut Lydia's overreliance on "words of wisdom" and successfully troubles the possibility of healing that the text had previously advanced.

If artistic expression is primarily a way of deciphering the world for Legat's Lydia, it allows Hutchinson in *Jonas in Frames* to convey Jonas' unstable state of mind effectively. Unlike Lydia's mental illness, which is hinted at but not clearly defined in *The Incomparables*, Hutchinson uses his experimental style to render in print his protagonist's experiences, detailing his hallucinations, blackouts, and ability to slip in time and from place to place. Since the account of Jonas' life is interrupted by "Lab notes," wherein researchers share their findings and theories as they experiment on their subject, the text reinforces the legitimacy of Jonas' paranoid conviction that his experiences lack authenticity as the notes imply that his reality is indeed fabricated. For Jonas, nothing in the present is ever "real" enough, while the past is always somehow more "authentic." It is this obsession with authenticity that makes him imagine, in his second person voice, the state of always being "a tourist, wherever you are, but especially here, no matter how long you stick around." The text, however, questions Jonas' fascination with the past, as its stylistic innovation breaks with tradition by interweaving pop culture and media with literary references, in a way that entails a playful lack of reverence for the past.

The tension between past and future also haunts Cavell's Marinetti performance play, as Marinetti's desire to break with all traditions competes with Cavell's revisionist account of his controversial subject in the essay that concludes this work. With Futurism, Marinetti aimed to break away from tradition, from an elite that worships the classics but neglects its contemporary artists. His desire for something new is best encapsulated in his Aeropoems, a form inspired by air travel he invented in order to discard the "outdated syntax we had inherited from Homer," which could "walk, run a bit . . . *but it couldn't fly*." Marinetti's passion for the new is contrasted to Cavell's revisionist project, which inevitably looks backwards in its appeal for a reconsideration of Futurism. Cavell uses the play's climax, in which Marinetti performs an Aeropoem for the Nazi High Command and smashes their dining table in the process, to argue that Futurism is much more than the aesthetics of fascism it is now assumed to be. For Cavell, Marinetti "understood the need to defend art in the face of fascism because art represented for him the freedom to think." In Cavell's account of Marinetti, politics and aesthetics are always entangled, and Marinetti himself is aware of this complex relation. Neither the play nor the essay downplays the darker aspects of Futurism or Marinetti's politics. Instead, because the play constructs parallels between the "utopian and dystopian elements" of Futurism, Cavell's work successfully manages to acknowledge Futurism's fascist connections while emphasizing that Marinetti's art resisted some aspects of fascism. As with the novels of Legat and Hutchinson, Cavell's text focuses on the power of art to unravel what is considered "real" and then to reshape it in a new way.

Responsibility for the Other

Kate Cayley
How You Were Born. Pedlar $22.00

Brenda Hasiuk
Boy Lost in Wild. Turnstone $19.00

Reviewed by Beverley Haun

Brenda Hasiuk's short story collection *Boy Lost in Wild* is set in Winnipeg. Kate Cayley's *How You Were Born* is set mostly in Toronto. Each book brackets its narratives with antiphonal stories and each takes its title from one of those echoing tales. Both sets of stories also explore the consequences of taking responsibility for others or of not taking such responsibility.

In *Boy Lost in Wild*, every story is from the point of view of a teen narrator, although some of the "teens" are looking back on their youthful experience from adulthood. This allows the narratives to span generations and historical experiences in Winnipeg and not just reflect the contemporary place even though all the stories are set at the same time. While all the stories are self-contained, characters in one sometimes refer to characters in another and a large black dog wends its way through several, helping to bind the whole. The collection is very deliberate. The teen protagonists each represent a different ethnic element of the Winnipeg mosaic: Aboriginal, Ukrainian, Icelandic, Métis, Indian, British, Muslim Iranian and a visiting Chinese student. The encompassing narrative comes full circle when the final elderly protagonist wanders into the alley behind her building to comfort a small boy lost in the opening story. Back in her room she lives inside the daydream of her past, coming as a teen from rural Manitoba to work in the city at the time of the 1919 general strike.

A decision to begin each story with a series of numbered facts makes the collection read like a textbook. Perhaps that is the intent. For the adult reader, these fact-lists jar, suggesting a lack of trust in our ability to decode the text, and detracting from the reading.

As with Hasiuk's collection, about half the stories in Cayley's *How You Were Born* unfold in real time while the other half look back, often to childhood incidents, as adults acquire insight into pivotal, character-shaping moments from their past. "The Fetch" is the most delightful of these real time stories. It stands out for the inability of its protagonist, a retired philosophy professor, to know himself or learn from his experiences. With wonderful irony, his life work was on the teachings of Levinas whose central tenet is that others cannot be made an object of the self, but must be encountered ethically as themselves. As the professor recounts his past and remembers his six wives, we wince at his own lack of self-recognition. Seeing his new neighbour, for the first time he sees himself in the other, but is mistaken. He sees the man as his fetch: a double who appears as a harbinger of death. What follows is a comic attempt to claim power from the fetch during which the professor inevitably plants the seeds of his own demise.

The stories of Hasiuk and Cayley evoke our evolving social contract, exploring the need for increased acceptance across a variety of diversities—cultural, temporal, gendered, physical, and mental.

Le roman sans aventure?

Isabelle Daunais
Le Roman sans aventure. Boréal 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Anne Caumartin

Cet essai d'Isabelle Daunais peut être reçu comme un cadeau puisqu'il offre une lecture nouvelle du roman québécois, du milieu du dix-neuvième siècle jusqu'aux années 1980. Forme de savoir, de connaissance, le roman nous éclairerait sur nous-mêmes, et la singularité du roman québécois serait de loger — tel que l'annonce déjà le titre de l'ouvrage — à l'enseigne du manque. Ouvrages « sans aventure », les classiques de la littérature québécoise (Daunais en

aborde une quarantaine) seraient soumis au « régime de l'idylle », à l'abri du monde et des tumultes de l'Histoire, et n'auraient pas réussi en conséquence à marquer durablement l'histoire littéraire hors Québec.

L'introduction permet de dégager la perspective critique d'Isabelle Daunais tout en exposant la prémisse pour le moins originale qui a suscité la relecture du grand récit de l'histoire littéraire québécoise. Suivant une conception du roman qu'elle hérite de Kundera (*L'Art du roman*, *Les Testaments trahis* et *Le Rideau*) et de son principal critique, François Ricard, Isabelle Daunais pose qu'au sein de la production artistique québécoise « les œuvres des arts majeurs ne sont pratiquement d'aucune incidence », incapables qu'elles sont d'intégrer le « grand contexte », c'est-à-dire « un monde conflictuel, ironique ou paradoxal » qui offrirait au héros l'occasion de s'en saisir, de le modeler tout en se transformant lui-même. Les grands romans québécois feraient plutôt de notre littérature le lieu par excellence du repos et du suspens, de l'oubli et du retrait. Ainsi s'expliquerait le fait que nos œuvres phares ne sauraient parler qu'à nous-mêmes et que le roman québécois serait si peu lu et reconnu à l'étranger.

Constitué de trois parties, l'essai montre bien comment le roman québécois au fil du temps révèle cette « expérience infiniment rare [qu']est la nôtre », cette disposition à considérer qu'il n'y a « rien à réparer, rien de perdu à retrouver ou à remplacer ». La première partie, « La découverte de l'idylle », aborde les œuvres d'Antoine Gérin-Lajoie et de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, de Patrice Lacombe comme de Louis Hémon pour voir, au-delà des péripéties, comment « le théâtre de l'Histoire reste curieusement absent », ne s'avérant qu'une abstraction ou un événement (tels les épisodes de la Conquête dans *Les Anciens Canadiens*) dont il faut vite se remettre. La seconde partie, « La cause perdue de l'aventure », situe bien les romans du milieu du vingtième siècle (ceux de Gabrielle Roy, de Robert Élie) dans un monde en mutation, mais souligne en fait à quel point les personnages réussissent à se désarrimer du monde, à s'en protéger, ou comment ils finissent par s'effacer du récit lorsqu'ils affichent une force de caractère susceptible d'opérer quelque changement autour d'eux. La troisième partie, « La tranquillité en héritage », traite du roman des années 1960 et de l'entreprise de modernisation socioculturelle qu'il a accompagnée. Si les classiques de Marie-Claire Blais et de Réjean Ducharme, entre autres, ont pu être lus traditionnellement comme la marque d'une — autre — entrée dans la modernité, comme des œuvres de la transformation (par la diversité des formes, l'expérience du langage et surtout par la force des monologues intérieurs), Daunais indique que leurs héros adoptent une nouvelle quête qui est celle, paradoxale, d'abandonner toute recherche d'aventure et de lâcher prise pour s'adonner, dans l'idylle, au repli, à la désillusion, au refus.

Au fil de cette relecture kundérienne, donc, pas de véritables ruptures dans l'histoire du roman québécois. S'y trouve plutôt l'inlassable réitération de l'impossible aventure qui défierait presque les fondements du genre. S'il est vrai que le roman québécois est peu lu hors de son habitat naturel, s'il a le défaut de ne pouvoir être abordé qu'en connaissance du « petit contexte », de ne pas présenter de quêtes universelles parce qu'il refuserait l'adversité, une question demeure : pourrait-il néanmoins être « éclairan[t] pour la compréhension de l'aventure humaine » lorsque l'adversité qu'il rencontre est une atmosphère, un climat social? Car s'il est une adversité qu'il embrasse, c'est bien celle-ci. Le roman québécois ne peut pas être ce qu'il est et se présenter au monde par sa singularité lorsqu'on le veut autre. Bref, si le roman québécois n'intéresse pas les non-Québécois (et il est permis d'en douter), c'est qu'il est coupable de ne pas être balzacien.

Disruptive Alterity and the Uncanny

Margaret Duley
Cold Pastoral. Coles $19.95

Katherine Fawcett
The Little Washer of Sorrows. Thistledown $18.95

Reviewed by Gillian Dunks

In its simplest iteration, the uncanny, as defined by Freud, is the familiar made strange. That which is uncanny is disruptive, troubling the stable divide between the mind and the object it perceives. Margaret Duley's *Cold Pastoral* and Katherine Fawcett's *The Little Washer of Sorrows* link the uncanny to the inner lives of female-identified characters, many of whom are marginalized within the patriarchal power structures they inhabit. In Duley's novel and Fawcett's stories, the uncanny becomes a site of resistance, a space in which the irreducible alterity of female lives intrudes upon the heteronormative, classist, and sexist fantasies of femininity that are byproducts of inequitable power structures.

Cold Pastoral was originally published in 1939. Duley's protagonist is Mary Immaculate, a working-class girl from rural Newfoundland whose early life is dominated by her mother Josephine's blend of Celtic folklore and Catholic mysticism. After an accident in the woods that nearly results in her death, Mary Immaculate recovers at a hospital in town. In a disturbing turn, Mary Immaculate's young doctor, Philip Fitz Henry, becomes so entranced by her that he adopts her. The remainder of the novel charts Mary's growth within the cocoon of Fitz Henry's privilege, culminating in her begrudging acceptance of Philip as a husband.

Although Duley's novel borrows its title from Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," it is anything but pastoral—Duley's Newfoundland is a harsh country governed by capricious, brutal nature. Instead, *Cold Pastoral* is a gothic novel, attuned to genre tropes such as the female "angel in the house" and "monster" figures identified by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Mary Immaculate's name alerts the reader to her status as angel—it references a Catholic doctrinal principle that asserts that the Virgin Mary was born without original sin. Yet Mary is more than this: she unites the feminized world of folklore with the rational, empirical, masculinized world of Western medical knowledge represented by Philip; she also troubles the divide between angel and monster figures, taking up the mantle of witch at the novel's end. Mary insists upon the existence of the "Little People," the fairy folk of Celtic lore, citing their protection as the reason for her early survival. Mary also maintains a peculiar connection to the natural world, which often manifests as a preternatural comfort with death. In one scene Mary communes with a bird that has a broken wing prior to snapping its neck—an act of mercy. In many others she claims she can hear the voices of her dead friend and her relatives. At the end of the novel, she curses an enemy to hell and succeeds in raising funds for a friend's abortion, actions historically associated with witchy women. Duley's conclusion emphasizes the importance of an acceptance of all parts of the self—country ways and town ways, mysticism and rationalism, and the familiar and the strange. Mary is irreducibly other, possessed of excesses that Philip must abide, though they trouble his fantasy of ideal femininity.

The Little Washer of Sorrows, Katherine Fawcett's debut collection, is situated within the genre of modern magic realism practiced by Jonathan Lethem and Haruki Murakami, among others. Unfortunately, Fawcett frequently struggles with both the magic and realism of her stories. Fawcett's fantastical elements are either genre tropes, such as housewives who are sexbots, or are unconvincing, such as children who actually die from eating broccoli. Fawcett's realism is

often shallow; many of her characters read like humorous sketches rather than individuals possessed of psychological nuance.

Despite their unevenness, Fawcett's stories featuring female subjects successfully deploy the uncanny in countering male privilege. For example, "Captcha," the first piece in the collection, is the tale of Margo, a housewife who, upon discovering her origin, takes five new lovers in a single evening in a bid to achieve emotional independence from her husband. Margo begins to dream after sleeping with other men and women, a sign that she has become fully human. Margo's dream life, described as an illogical version of her real life, exposes the absurdity of the limited world her husband has given her to occupy. At the end of the story, Margo leaves the confines of the domestic world and gets a job.

The uncanny in Duley's and Fawcett's works is potent, for it exposes a core of disruptive alterity in female-identified characters that threatens patriarchal power structures.

Écrire pour vivre, écrire pour survivre

Louise Dupré
L'Album multicolore. Héliotrope 24,95 $

David Turgeon
La Revanche de l'écrivaine fantôme.
Le Quartanier 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Liza Bolen

À première vue, les romans *L'Album multicolore*, de Louise Dupré, et *La revanche de l'écrivaine fantôme*, de David Turgeon ne manifestent pas vraiment de points communs. En effet, bien que ces deux textes aient été publiés la même année (2014), on sent dès les premières pages qu'il s'agit ici non seulement de styles extrêmement différents, mais que l'on se trouve aussi plongé dans deux espaces-temps complètement à part.

On entre dans *L'Album multicolore* comme on entre dans un temple ou dans une église. Le poids de chacun des mots que choisit Louise Dupré (avec une éloquence émouvante, il faut le mentionner) signale d'emblée que l'on se trouve exposé à une intimité si précieuse et à des souvenirs si sacrés que le lecteur ne peut faire autrement que de tourner les pages le plus doucement possible, et d'écouter. Avec cette écoute, on arrive à saisir les pensées d'une femme qui vient de perdre sa mère, et qui tente, par l'entremise de ses souvenirs, de comprendre non seulement son propre processus de deuil, mais aussi sa relation avec une mère qui était à la fois si près et si loin d'elle. À cœur dénudé, mais sans jamais perdre le cap de la raison, elle explore ses souvenirs de famille et fait ressortir non seulement les joies et les moments heureux, mais aussi les tabous familiaux et les difficultés du rôle de fille par rapport à une mère qui a connu une autre époque, une autre réalité.

Diamétralement opposé à cet univers de souvenirs et d'intimité se trouve donc *La revanche de l'écrivaine fantôme*. Dans ce roman, la fluidité de la pensée telle qu'on aurait pu la croiser dans *L'Album multicolore* est mise de côté pour faire place à une histoire plutôt loufoque où s'emboîtent, entre autres, les péripéties de l'écrivaine fantôme Johanne Delambre et de l'éditeur Raymond Loquès. Entre les ambitions de la première (Delambre) de faire évoluer sa carrière de romancière au-delà de celle d'écrivaine fantôme et les projets du second (Loquès) d'écrire son prochain livre, le lecteur de *La revanche de l'écrivaine fantôme* se verra projeté dans un univers flou où l'écriture se mêle à la réalité. Les aventures des personnages pointeront ainsi du doigt non seulement le comique de l'arrière-scène du monde de l'édition, mais aussi le style immanquable de Turgeon, qui se trouve véritablement au cœur de toute cette histoire.

Étrangement, malgré les nombreuses différences qui séparent *L'Album multicolore* et *La revanche de l'écrivaine fantôme*, ces deux romans sont unis sur un point en

particulier : l'écriture. Chez Louise Dupré, c'est ce geste de l'écriture qui permettra à sa narratrice de faire le vide de ses souvenirs et de ses pensées les plus intimes, et éventuellement de retrouver la paix face au deuil de sa mère. L'importance du geste d'écrire (qui deviendra ici un geste hautement personnel, voire thérapeutique) permettra au calme de réapparaître peu à peu au fil des mots. Chez Turgeon, même s'il ne s'agit pas du tout du même style, l'importance de l'écriture est aussi mise de l'avant. Dans *La revanche de l'écrivaine fantôme*, tout tourne autour du thème de l'écriture et de la place centrale que ce geste occupe dans la vie des personnages. Ces constats sur l'importance de l'écriture dans ces deux romans mènent ultimement à une dernière observation : pour la narratrice du récit de Dupré, aussi bien que pour Johanne Delambre dans le roman de Turgeon, l'écriture provient non pas d'un quelconque besoin de lectorat, mais plutôt d'un désir d'explorer et de s'explorer — ce qui ne signifie pas, toutefois, que le lecteur ne prendra pas un immense plaisir à les lire.

Parce que bien sûr Bologne

Alain Farah

Pourquoi Bologne. Le Quartanier 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Daniel Laforest

Ce livre fort remarqué de l'écrivain montréalais Alain Farah contient en quelque sorte les précédents. Mais si ce n'était que ça, il n'y aurait pas de quoi fouetter un chat, puisque nous serions encore dans les jeux autoréférentiels qu'on appelait il y a vingt ans « l'écriture postmoderne ». Quelle injure y aurait-il à ranger le roman de Farah sous cette appellation? Une énorme injure. Ce serait celle de méconnaître la qualité rare et fondamentale de *Pourquoi Bologne* : l'invention d'une forme qui force les lecteurs et critiques à inventer eux aussi leurs critères de réception. Nous sommes donc avec *Pourquoi Bologne* dans la nouveauté au sens fort, c'est-à-dire l'effort en vue d'une adéquation la plus étroite possible entre la vie de l'écrivain et la vie insufflée dans son récit. Cet effort n'est pas fou au sens clinique (n'en déplaise à Farah qui semble parfois le souhaiter), mais il est follement original pour la raison très simple que nul ne possède la même vie, et que sa symbiose avec l'écriture, si elle réussit et si elle ne s'éloigne pas de la franchise inhérente au geste, ne pourra être autrement que singulière. On doit insister sur la franchise, car l'effet déroutant que communique *Pourquoi Bologne* n'est pas dû à sa trop grande exigence, mais au contraire à sa transparence assumée. « La littérature n'arrive pas à la cheville de la vie », dit le narrateur du roman. Et il est vain de chercher à résumer l'histoire de *Pourquoi Bologne*. Le personnage écrivain est professeur à McGill en 2012; son bureau a vue sur l'ancien réservoir McTavish. Sauf qu'il est aussi en 1962, époque où l'institution qui l'emploi, par le truchement de l'Institut Allan Memorial, entretenait des relations occultes avec la CIA et ses essais de « déprogrammation » du cerveau et de drogues expérimentales. Le narrateur, lui-même dépendant du Midazolam, un sédatif aux propriétés anxiolytiques qu'il prend pour traiter une maladie intestinale chronique, en vient à confondre ses sauts temporels avec la paranoïa et surtout avec sa propre activité d'écrivain. Il se voit tantôt comme un « fou fonctionnel », tantôt comme un fabulateur au bout du rouleau. Son rapport trouble avec un médecin, le docteur Cameron, et les points aveugles dans son histoire familiale (un oncle disparu, sa mère décédée) viendront s'agréger à ces dispositions et l'entraîneront vers une espèce de dénouement frénétique au cœur du réservoir abandonné. Cette intrigue — on maintiendra le mot — est tout à fait divertissante. Elle est de surcroît nourrie par ce que la critique a peu observé bien qu'il s'agisse de la plus grande qualité du roman :

une recherche documentaire pointilleuse et pour tout dire époustouflante tant elle reconstitue des pans ignorés et fascinants de la culture urbaine montréalaise.

On dira superflu l'agaçant personnage public de noceur des cocktails littéraires montréalais que s'est créé l'auteur comme un autre lancerait un site internet pour rendre plus visible chacun de ses livres. C'est un dispositif qui annule l'effet désiré (la folie excentrique) en produisant son contraire (le calcul vain). À l'arrivée, cela nuit à l'écriture qui n'en a pas besoin. En effet le lecteur, quel que soit son degré d'intérêt, risque fort d'être happé par le roman, car l'écriture de Farah est une machine à inspirer la curiosité en son sens le plus noble. Il s'agit d'une écriture intelligente, et *Pourquoi Bologne* est un des romans québécois les plus originaux et captivants des dernières années.

Poetry, Textures of Loss

Jason Guriel
Satisfying Clicking Sound. Véhicule $16.00

Michael Lista
The Scarborough. Véhicule $18.00

Arleen Paré
Lake of Two Mountains. Brick $20.00

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

Arleen Paré won the 2014 Governor General's Award for *Lake of Two Mountains*—meditations centred on a fraught return (imagined and actual) to a childhood summer house on the Lac des Deux Montagnes, where the Ottawa meets the St. Lawrence near the towns of Oka and Hudson, Québec. Paré both maps and enacts her poetic *nostos* across this geography of abandonment: "All things fall away, sink / into brokenness." She drifts over the "monastic lake," articulating a latter-day, piecemeal liturgy, aspiring to recover connections to place—inscribed as ownership and immediacy ("Mark the place: 'You are here.'")—but inevitably undoing the surety of such land claims: "This is a map, not real life." "Who lives here now," she writes, "means nothing to you." The poems both acknowledge and refuse stultifying alienation, thickening descriptive texture to build resonance in absence. Paré imagines the bees at the Oka Trappist monastery cared for by a monk: "They sing / into your ears. Untutored, / you cannot decipher what's meant." Meaning, marked in the poems as reflection (in the surface of the lake) and inversion (the negation of expectations), gives way to verbal music, work that isn't deciphered so much as heard and touched: "The lake you are left with: / algae, neon-lime silk, skeins of it, spun / out of nowhere, untroubled cumulus blooms." Surface of page and lake, connecting depth and sky, blur into a music that, risking sentimentality, settles into stirrings of rapt acceptance.

The Scarborough finds Michael Lista concocting hellish anti-liturgies for dissolute masculinity, poems circling the murder of Kristin French by Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka during Easter weekend, 1992. More *katabasis* than *nostos*, each text circumlocutes the crime, displacing hints of French's violent death ("She is prepared to dissociate mind / from body . . .") in Lista's recollections of his eight-year-old self, who watches TV, visits relatives, looks out the window. The final poem, "Tenebrae," dedicated "for KF," sublimates her horrific death in a blown-out birthday (or Easter) candle; like Paré, Lista declares poetry's failure at the moment when meaning is most craved: "Words escaped me when it was time to wish." But instead of melopoeic panacea (which occurs in passing in the same poem, for instance, when he blows "flickering / Flames to smoke scintillas"), Lista tends toward a brutal and frustrated formalism: "You tell the poem: do what I fucking say / Or I'm really going to have to hurt you." He harrows memory, unknitting Frygian narratives of rebirth to produce poetry of refusal, without redemption: "What the poem

refuses, the poet takes." His is a writing that, given its atrocities, declines to romanticize, preferring clear-eyed excoriating harshness: "Here, art itself is inappropriate, / As am I, with my rattle bag of puns." Typical Lista poems assemble highbrow and pop culture ranging from the *Aeneid* to *Terminator 2*—"rattle bag" refers to a Ted Hughes/Seamus Heaney anthology and a hunter's deer lure—but retain a cool, dissociative distance, as the poet "takes his place among the nothing new." There are some brilliant, Eliot-like lines here, as when he remarks on "that dead hour of desire and Swiss Chalet." The chill these poems voice, as they withdraw into conflicted enervation, stays with you, like a fierce and brittle ghost.

Jason Guriel's *Satisfying Clicking Sound* also circulates through networks of cultural reference, ranging from Shakespearean echoes to personal obscurities, but unlike Lista—whom he name-checks in "Becoming a Unicorn" (and who thanks him in the acknowledgements to *The Scarborough*)—he tends to distance himself from what, in two poems, he calls "the mob," the mass public sphere in which those intertexts travel; there is a preoccupation with procrustean hygiene in many of the poems, as the poet's narrowing community of like-minded readers tries "to wash our hands / of ourselves." The clipped lines suggest a voice formally at odds with itself, honing and self-castigating, cutting back to bare-bones essentials, getting rid of what Guriel calls any "wiggle room." A few of the poems focus on what feel like personal beefs, and should probably have been cut; others, like "Knuckleball" and "John Hancock's John Hancock," take up his fractured formalism and work through a keen micrology of puns and cross-purposed semantics to produce compact masterpieces, tightly robust encounters with the "lines, / wobbly ones, / of thought." Writing "blooms around / the stunted stamens" of his epigonic, reflexive poetry. Guriel's craft at its best catches the momentary drift of that verbal wobble, a hiatus in which a fraught self finds its brief purchase, and clicks.

The End of Presence

Michael Harris
The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We've Lost in a World of Constant Connection.
HarperCollins Canada $29.99

Reviewed by Andre Furlani

Michael Harris belongs to the digital "straddle generation," one foot on the dry land of pre-internet reality, one foot in the internet ocean of virtuality, separated only by a Wi-Fi Starbucks. His will have been the last generation, he notes, with cherished formative memories from before the web. Privacy was then the inalienable safeguard of liberal freedoms rather than an irritant to the growth of commerce, understanding was held in no less esteem than knowledge, fellowship was largely by chancy personal encounter rather than digital profile, memory was a kinetic forum of cognitive synapses rather than a circuit-board silo of binaries.

One learned to read maps, books, faces. One did not commit suicide on the 4chan message board, ventilate libels on snapchat, or surrender one's powers of discrimination to an algorithm. One developed a personality rather than projected a flattering simulacrum of oneself on Facebook; one flirted rather than scheduled Grindr assignations, wrote long missives rather than tweets, struggled to find the choice word rather than the cutest emoticon, slowly earned credentials rather than accumulated "hits" by paying to "wag the crowd" (i.e., rig crowd-based online voting systems); one participated in university class discussions instead of downloading lectures; "going Walden" meant modelling an environmentally responsible, politically activist, non-consumerist ecology rather than a brief

idyll from connective technologies in some resort for harassed techies.

For Harris, however, what particularly dignified that antediluvian life was absence, for now "the daydreaming silences of our lives are filled" with cybernetic clarions. "Absence" to him is what those older than the straddle generation still think of rather as presence: enrapt phases of seclusion in a nook or a book, engrossment in alien or familiar surroundings, tangible proximity to living things, physical plenitude and mental release. So ceaselessly solicited for his attention, his preferences, his dime, and so stuffed with digitized facts and appeals and seductions is he that Harris longs for lack. One would have thought that virtuality, not reality, was predicated on absence. It was immersion in virtual experience that was regarded as involving an evacuation of presence.

Douglas Coupland reveals to him that his favourite activity is not online explorations of digital tomorrows but beachcombing with a nonagenarian painter. Harris is amazed, but others less wired will recognize and cherish the pleasures of idly reading a landscape with one's foot-soles, open pores, and roused senses rather than with an app or URL or QR code.

The End of Absence is the revealing testimonial of a self-divided digital straddler, hesitant, as much as he adores them, to wear permanently those Oz-like Google lenses that lend an emerald cast to Silicon Valley and its products. He worries about the fate of reading, overlooking the more alarming fact that computers have long since surpassed their users as readers. For years Harris has been unable to read more than a few early chapters of a literary classic before being fatally distracted by the bells and chimes emanating from his digital devices. Computers meanwhile have been reading *him* like a book, cover to cover, every time he answers those bells.

This kind of pervasive electronic reading does not detain Harris, but reading books proves a revelatory nostrum. He finds inspiration in John Milton's decade-long retreat to the study, and in the pedagogy of an old high-school teacher who inculcated memorization of the opening of *Paradise Lost*. Though he diligently goes offline for a month to discover what such privation might instil, what alters his attitude and reforms his practice is the initially laborious but soon exhilarating two weeks required to finally read through *War and Peace*.

Harris conjures certain "green hills" of reverie beyond his suburb where as a youth he tramped and dawdled, a refuge that, after a month without "connection" and two weeks with Tolstoy, is reawakened for him as what the California poet Robert Duncan, an enthusiast for Baum's Oz series, once called "a place of first permission, everlasting portent of what is." It's an Eden you can reach on foot in a matter of hours. You might bring along a book.

Harris's stated antidotes to the spread of digital surrogates are, by contrast, anodyne. He prescribes a laborious regimen of hourly vigilance over one's technological preferences, wearisome interjections of sober agency, willing this digital connection, not willing that one. "Every technology will alienate you from some part of your life. That is its job. *Your* job is to notice. First notice the difference. And then, every time, choose." Despite the evidence presented in his own pages, Harris treats "constant connection" as a lifestyle choice rather than an element in a totalizing scheme of social organization. He imagines that there are yet isles of meaningful personal choice in this universal technological imperative. Of course, it is a function of the technology to generate mirages of free choice, one monopoly at a time.

Employees of many companies are already getting incentives to "choose" to receive subcutaneous implants of silicon chips that monitor labour efficiency—and soon

enough, monitor most everything else . . . And most everybody else. "There's gonna be a meter in your bed that will disclose / what everybody knows," Leonard Cohen intoned twenty years ago, and already that meter is being inserted into still more intimate folds.

LGBTQ, Without the Q

Hubert; Marie Caillou, illus.; David Homel, trans.
Adrian and the Tree of Secrets.
Arsenal Pulp $18.95

Raziel Reid
When Everything Feels Like the Movies.
Arsenal Pulp $15.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

As an instructor of children's literature, and in particular, queer-themed works, I draw my students' attention to the shift in YA novels from anxiety-ridden texts such as Annie Garden's *Annie on My Mind* (1982) to works like David Levithan's confidently assertive *Boy Meets Boy* (2003). And like Levithan's protagonist, the teenagers profiled in the novels reviewed here express no doubts about their sexual orientation. But what has become an increasingly poignant focus for LGBTQ-themed works such as these is a depiction of violent reactions to living as an openly queer teenager.

Adrian and the Tree of Secrets, a graphic novel with an unfortunately juvenile-sounding title in its English translation, opens quite innocuously: Adrian wakes up, showers, fusses over his appearance, and is sent off to school by an overly-protective mother. The plot advances as the protagonist, a rather stereotypically geeky teenager with a penchant for philosophy, unexpectedly develops an intense relationship with Jeremy, a popular student who appreciates his quirky intelligence. Several romantic encounters, a jealous girlfriend, a brutal bashing, a homophobic principal, and finally, an understanding aunt, round out the plot.

One striking feature of this graphic novel is the illustrator's strategic use of colour: in a style reminiscent of Japanese block art, Caillou uses a limited four-colour palate to brilliantly depict Adrian's shifting emotional state. A sameness is conveyed through the use of magenta shirts, blue trousers, and blue jackets for all the characters—except Adrian in the opening sections when his outsider status is conveyed through a two-tone brown argyle sweater. Colour is further emphasized in the novel's more emotional and introspective moments, when Hubert wisely leaves the story to the illustrations.

In contrast, *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* provides a more complex and provocative exploration of gay teenage experience. The assertive confidence of Jude, the novel's first-person narrator, almost overwhelms the reader in the opening chapters, and his explicitly sexual quips and descriptions of drug use, which may draw in and titillate young adults, will potentially disturb adult readers and conservative library staff. However, once we relinquish expectations and accept the narrator's self-dramatizing and often ironic banter, the novel gains momentum, leading to a conclusion both narratively convincing and highly disturbing. Reid takes the risk of closing with Jude's account of his murder and death at the hands of the object of his unrequited love. And ironically, the work avoids serious melodrama by embracing it through its movie-themed structure. *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* closes with a sentimental fantasy presented as a "Director's Cut:" we, like the narrator, are allowed to step back from the horror of his murder as Jude, apparently brain-dead in the hospital, directs the closing sequence of his life—"And then the credits rolled."

These two novels explore gay-bashing within a high-school context in a refreshingly authentic manner, addressing the psychological and social costs of living as

an openly queer teenager, and in the case of Reid's novel, with few illusions of a happy ending outside of the cinema.

Beyond the Mist

Kazuo Ishiguro
The Buried Giant. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Dee Horne

This is a world of ogres and dragons, where Britons and Saxons are shrouded in a "mist" of forgetfulness but destined never to forget or forgive past battles. In this mythical landscape, two Britons, Axl and his wife Beatrice, set out on a quest to reconnect with their son. Along the way they meet Wistan, a Saxon knight, and Edwin, a Saxon boy, who is in search of his lost mother. The four travel over the mountain, the longer and more arduous route, separated and reunited at various stages of the journey. They encounter Sir Gawain, a knight from King Arthur's court, who later leads them to Querig, the she-dragon. Even though the mist does not fully clear, there are moments when Axl begins to recall his past. Gawain's presence triggers Axl's recollection of a time when he was entrusted with "a law to bring all men closer to God." Wistan and Gawain have also previously met; however, each now cagily conceals his true intentions and attempts to gauge his opponent. No one is as he/she seems and alliances are often convenient and strategic deceptions whereby seeming allies conceal their true allegiances. The story suggests that the friendships forged between these particular Britons and Saxons, Beatrice, Axl, Wistan and Edwin, may enable each to remember their alliances in times of future conflict and question the need for revenge, even though they may not be able to stop the progression of events.

Kazuo Ishiguro, winner of the Man Booker Prize for fiction for *Remains of the Day* and author of numerous novels, screenplays and short fiction, blends fantasy, myth, history, allegory and parable in a memorable tale about amnesia. It is a beautifully crafted story about love and loss and the difficulties of breaking the cycles of violence and revenge that result from wars. The husband and wife's personal story mirrors the political and historical stage where battles may be momentarily forgotten, but the uneasy peace between Britons and Saxons is repeatedly tested and eventually breaks, revealing the ongoing quest for power and revenge.

Estranged at the beginning of their journey, Beatrice and Axl try to uncover the mist that clouds their memories. They are both unable and reluctant to remember. Each wants, but also fears, the truth. Still, each endeavours to uncover the past and, in so doing, Beatrice and Axl are drawn closer. Eventually, the love they have for one another enables them to face the last and hardest part of their journey. But before they reach this point, remember what really happened to their son, and confront the truth about their marriage, they must battle their own inner demons. The darkness of deception they have buried, like the uneasy peace between Britons and Saxons, is like a buried giant; it cannot remain underground indefinitely.

Ishiguro is a talented writer. As with many of his other works, he defies simplistic categories, plays with conventions and blends diverse genres. The characters are compelling, but the plot frequently drags and the pace nearly grinds to a halt at several points. While there is conflict and tension, the pacing could be improved so that the tension is more sustained throughout, not just in the key scenes. At times, symbolism and allegory weigh the story down. Overall, the book could have benefited from further editing. Despite these drawbacks, the book is well worth the read.

This is not just a story about personal amnesia, but about cultural and societal amnesia. It is an unforgettable story that invites readers to rethink human

relationships not only between individuals but also between communities. While the cycles of vengeance may not always be broken and peace may not last, building friendships between reluctant allies and lifting the mist of forgetfulness are necessary.

Defining Moments

Melissa Morelli Lacroix
A Most Beautiful Deception. U of Alberta P $19.95

Alex Leslie
The things I heard about you. Nightwood $18.95

Jan Zwicky; Robert Moody, illus.
Vittoria Colonna: Selections from the Rime Spirituali. Porcupine's Quill $16.95

Reviewed by Tina Trigg

Originating in Western Canada and spanning five centuries in content, these three contemporary poetry collections boast definable narrative arcs, roaming across oceans, biographies, and genres to create resonance rich in detail.

Vittoria Colonna: Selections is an artistic gem from its period cover to storied content. Partnering with mathematician and photographer Robert Moody, Jan Zwicky introduces the spiritual sonnets of mid-sixteenth-century poet, Vittoria Colonna. Ten of the 103 *Rime Spirituali* are reproduced in Italian with Zwicky's English open-form lyric on the facing page; these poetic pairs are interleaved with Moody's black-and-white photographs of Josep Maria Subirachs' "Passion Facade." Fluidly moving among languages, sculpture, photography, and poetic forms, the response-pieces evoke layers of meaning with lingering effect, emphasizing the onlooker's role.

Carefully identifying her own poems as "versions" and not translations, Zwicky redirects attention to the "remarkable character" of Colonna's verse rather than its formal style. A deft introduction unveils Colonna as the first established female poet in Renaissance Italy—known for her ardour, poetic gifting, and religious reformism—as well as "the last, and perhaps greatest, love of [Michelangelo's] life." These notable artists, Zwicky contends, shared an understanding of life as "a passionate endeavour to come to grips with spiritual truth." While praising Colonna's "personal vision" of spiritual matters as vivifying her writing, Zwicky bluntly distances her own interest as curiosity-driven. Nonetheless, her lyrics share the "directness and intensity" that Zwicky admires in Colonna's sonnets; these are beautiful pieces: "In silence— // the tears cut gutters in his [disciple John's] face;" "let the sweet nails be my quills / his blood my ink;" when looking on the Virgin, "it's certain that I am moved."

Striking in their simplicity, Moody's black-and-white photographs of the sculpted human figures culminate in "the final transcendence." Gracefully curved, "the view upwards into the light-filled central spire of the basilica" interrupts the volume's sharp lines before concluding with its only recurrent image: a stark robe-clutching, mournful, yet expectant figure. Through careful layering of complementary texts and photos, the structural interplay enhances the understated art of Colonna, Zwicky, and Moody.

Like Zwicky, Melissa Morelli Lacroix crafts poems responding to the complex negotiations of love. A three-part volume centering on Frederic Chopin, Robert and Clara Schumann, and Claude Debussy, *A Most Beautiful Deception* recounts death and suffering woven through with the irreplaceable moments of life and the sweet sting of memories. Reaching to the early nineteenth century, the poems weave lives of artists, mourners, and admirers while modelling the composers' musical scores in form. This demanding combination includes extensive accompanying materials—tables of musical and poetic forms, biographical details, sources—discreetly

appended. (Notably, the volume has been successfully adapted for stage performance.)

Although emphasizing degeneration and death—physical, social, psychological—the poems maintain vibrancy, often crystallizing sound, light, colour, and emotion. Memories are subtly evoked through objects: patio tomato plants smelling "like life," their fruit "still green when you left," styrofoam cups "to remember / the night I bumped into you," bedside bouquets, glowing refrigerator bulbs, and silence hanging between notes. Emphasizing place, the poems explore exteriority and interiority of person: the mourner, the bulimic, the dying, the lover. Taking inspiration from Robert Schumann's musings about motives for composition, the succinct middle section structurally follows Clara's piano variations of his "Opus 20" to create a mediation of the aspirations of public and private life in a tender musical dialogue. Despite its complexity and range, *Deception* is remarkably accessible, managing to humanize musical giants and to harmonize life's glory and brutality while avoiding sentimentalism.

Similarly inspired by a quotation, Alex Leslie's debut poetry collection, *The things I heard about you,* enacts John Thompson's line, "I know how small a poem can be." Thirteen title pages with black-and-white images—headphones, a child's desk, a fingerprint—help to situate readers in this wide-ranging work. Each sequence introduces a prose poem which is strategically minimized, following the textual prompt: "*smaller*." The shrinking poems challenge "normal" social boundaries, assumptions, and discards—both material and human.

Focused on human integrity, *The things* is a reclamation project enacted through loss. The title itself emphasizes ostracism and individual complicity: "Dumpster diver, scrounger, hoarder, fairy-tale / monster, the things I heard about you." Similarly, several pieces highlight class conflict, silenced populations, entrapment, risk, defensiveness, and vulnerability while seeking release. Ultimately, Leslie's poems reveal the ambiguities of language through its limitations, offering a razor's edge of thought sliced from an admirably broad landscape. In differing modes, Zwicky, Lacroix, and Leslie create slender but expansive volumes, emphasizing perspective, mutability, and the defining moments of suffering, loss, and love.

Against Disaster

J. B. MacKinnon
The Once and Future World: Nature As It Was, As It Is, As It Could Be. Vintage Canada $14.40

Maria Mutch
Know the Night: A Memoir of Survival in the Small Hours. Knopf Canada $28.00

Beth Powning
Home: Chronicles of a North Country Life. Goose Lane $24.95

Reviewed by McKinley Hellenes

Solitude is its own wilderness. The kind experienced by the narrator of *Know The Night* meditates on varietals very few experience, and even fewer spend time imagining: Arctic explorers alone beneath the indifferent Aurora. Jazz musicians caught up in a rictus of expression for which a conventional time signature will never be adequate. A mother whose child battens down the hatches of night with a litany of shrieks. "The shattered mind also tends to dwell in isolation. . . . Night is never really blank." Whether she is waiting out the night, sleepless, taking her son to a jazz club, or poring over inventory lists of long-ago Arctic expeditions, Maria Mutch deftly weaves the seemingly disparate. She draws us into the dark with her. "I wonder how many of us are in this darkness—" she ponders, "And who would take the census, rapping on our shadowy doors, to count us like coins or diseases?"

Drawing on the experiences of explorer Admiral Byrd and the music of Thelonious Monk, Mutch meditates with such power on the strange task of shoring oneself up against disaster within an environment so inhospitable that survival is only ever piecemeal. Drawing parallels to her son Gabriel, a baby born with autism and Down's syndrome, she struggles to provision him against a world not made with him in mind:

> Every story told is a story to him, and if it's told in jazz or in one if its iterations, he can find his way in. I think that is what I wish most for him, the item I would place at the top of the list of provisions. Effortlessness.

The lateral structure of the narrative and its subtly gothic sensibility haunts the reader long after the dénouement. It unsettles deeply, but there is light under the door:

> Tomorrow when midnight comes again, and the night opens, there'll be Byrd and Monk and all of the others, and silence, too. Possibly there is gratitude, also, for the small hours when we are all of us alive.

This book is beautiful and surprising. It draws the reader deep and exposes one to a vastness never suspected: that night is an Arctic tundra contained within the laugh of a child who understands jazz better than most people do their own mother tongue.

Beth Powning's newly renamed and reissued *Home: Chronicle of a North Country Life* is an entirely different sort of personal meditation. A beautifully bound and presented book of the author's photographs and episodic, seasonal prose-narratives, it focuses on the challenging task of finding one's place within displacement and the benevolent indifference of our chosen habitats. Through her poetic homages to country living, Powning stresses the spiritual necessity of making private covenants with our immediate environment so profound that they feel utterly symbiotic: "The heart of the wind eludes me. Yet I come close to it. It turns in my own heart, like a key."

Spending the seasons with Powning allows us to feel that smallness within a confined world doesn't feel limited or claustrophobic. This book is personal but accessible, pleasant and pastoral. A comforting read, like a bedtime story for an inveterate gardener, but nothing about it is twee. It reflects a conscious effort to live out a life in one recognized landscape, a chosen haven against uncontrollable change: "Every place, it seemed, had its pocket of darkness, its kernel of terror. . . . But the oak was the one place I could trust, one place of complete safety, one place I could hide. And I sensed, at the tree's heart, terror's opposite, the snap of life untouched by corruption."

The Once and Future World is a book of delicate terror, compelling beauty, and soundly comprehensive research. J. B. MacKinnon arms us with more than a compendium of eye-glazing statistics—but rather a lexicon of terms that define the very real ways in which we as individuals and as a society misremember the history of our natural inheritance: Environmental Amnesia. Change Blindness. Shifting Baseline Syndrome. Transgenerational Memory. These terms are just as ominous as they sound, but this book isn't another Doom Porn diatribe, nor is it a tender/brutal elegy to the inevitability of extinction and environmental loss. Rather it presents us with a very rational explanation for our shifting disconnect from the natural world and the ways in which denial replaces historical accuracy with false memory: "Denial is the last line of defence against memory. It helps us to forget what we'd rather not remember, and then to forget that we've forgotten it, and then to resist the temptation to remember."

The most compelling thing about this book isn't the ways in which it confirms the gloomiest scientific assertions regarding human impact on the natural world since proto-humans first crawled out of the sea. It entreats us to believe that the world is still

ours to envision. According to MacKinnon, we needn't wallow forever in our worst-case scenario nightmare:

> Counting up the ways we have wounded the earth quickly starts to feel like stacking skulls in a crypt, but the history of nature is not always and only a lament. It is also an invitation to envision another world.

Despite the exponential acceleration of environmental decline, MacKinnon believes that a new trajectory is still possible:

> To live in a wilder world, we'll have to find a way to weave nature into our identities, until guarding against harms to the natural world is as innate as watching out for ourselves, our families or our communities. . . . All it takes is a wilder way of being human.

All three books address the complexity of human experience against something vaster than we are as individuals, whether it be genetic, environmental, or emotional. The ways in which they trade sympathies make for a compelling triptych, each of them reminding us of why we ask the questions about ourselves and our world that we are most afraid to know and that we can least afford to ignore. What greater provisioning against disaster need any of us?

Fathoming First Visions

Susan Marshall and Emily Masty, eds.
Mind's Eye: Stories from Whapmagoostui.
U of Manitoba P $34.95

Mitiarjuk Attasie Nappaaluk; Bernard Saladin d'Anglure and Peter Frost, trans.
Sanaaq: An Inuit Novel. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Reviewed by Madelaine Jacobs

Language cannot exist in isolation. An Indigenous language embodies a context, as it does a culture, and it lives in a people. Susan Marshall and Emily Masty have chosen an apt title for *Mind's Eye* as the mind must be attuned to the life of a people in order to learn a language. Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk's novel is named for its protagonist, Sanaaq, a remarkable character who offers insight into Inuit culture. Both works prove to be thoughtful resources created to educate through the powerful medium of stories. They are tools for honing the mind's eye of the storytellers' own communities and of anyone who is fortunate enough to turn their entertaining and edifying pages. It should come as no surprise that Indigenous storytellers are adept at communicating wisdom in this manner. Storytelling is the mechanism of Indigenous education through the transmission of oral knowledge. Stories are key to survival. The great challenge met by these skillful works is the collision between well-honed oral tradition, situated in communities with systems for maintaining its life and integrity, and the mores of the printed page.

The need to preserve and pass on Indigenous knowledge motivated the writing of *Mind's Eye* and *Sanaaq*. Emily Masty opens *Mind's Eye* with a rationale that encourages receptivity. Masty postulates that Bible "stories must have seemed quite astounding" when first shared with the Îyiyiu Cree of Northern Quebec; however, astonishing actions were also taken in the stories of their own tradition. For Masty,

just as the Red Sea was parted for Moses by the power of God, the "same idea is at play when powerful Îyiyiu had spirit helpers through whom they worked their powers." Christian precepts were not necessarily at odds with the lifeways of many of the Cree in what became known as James Bay. Storyteller Agnes Kawapit explains that the land was her father's life. He taught her that an attitude of positive determination is key to survival and instructed, "when you have no strength to go on—to always look ahead and remember that your Father in heaven is watching over you, that he knows what you need even before you ask." Kawapit's father did not hate the "whiteman" even though he fought against the destructive development of hydro-electric power on the land. Masty began recording stories out of concern that vocabulary and expressions specific to life on the land were being lost to younger generations who had become more centred in village life and classroom education. The activism and agreements resulting from hydro development in James Bay and Northern Quebec impelled the development of culturally relevant curriculum in a Cree school board for whom Masty collected stories for educational purposes.

Most of the nineteen storytellers represented in *Mind's Eye* were deceased by the time their stories were published in the complete work of first-person narrative, cultural knowledge, and historical-geographical explanation. The first section of *Mind's Eye* explores the significance of supernatural power to survival on the land. The second expands this theme to dealing with potential enemies. European contact is included in this section. The stories contained in the third section are autobiographical. Spanning the latter nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, this section examines personal and community hardships experienced as game became scarce and Christianity spread amongst the Îyiyiu. Some of the stories contained in *Mind's Eye* are appalling. They are not straightforward prescriptions for the pristine life of a mythical noble savage. Rather, stories are a sophisticated means of social control in a complex cultural context that included conflicts as well as cooperation. While interactions between Inuit and Îyiyiu people are one of the cultural clashes recounted in *Mind's Eye,* they are part of a fuller body of resonant stories.

Nappaaluk's Inuit novel *Sanaaq* is a sympathetic pairing to *Mind's Eye*. Within Canada, cultural difference exists alongside shared experience as diverse Indigenous peoples have often been inappropriately treated as homogenous by settler governments. Although it employs fiction to convey cultural meaning, *Sanaaq* also came about through efforts to understand and preserve language. When Catholic missionaries sought Nappaaluk's help in formulating a dictionary and writing commonly used phrases, Nappaaluk was not content to just write sentences. Rather, the character of Sanaaq was imagined in order to tell stories that convey deeper Inuit cultural principles of everyday life. As a person of the "third sex" educated in traditional female and male roles, Nappaaluk occupied the position of a mediator between many facets of Inuit culture. It is, therefore, apposite that Nappaaluk's novel was written in the Inuit syllabics taught by missionaries in what has become known as Nunavik, translated into French, and then translated into English.

Nappaaluk's mediating force is as tender in its accounts of love between mother and child as it is brusque in its portrayal of the realities of interpersonal violence and hardship on the land. All of Nappaaluk's stories clearly teach a useful lesson even as they entertain and provoke. Surely, a wonderful education can be entered into and remembered because of its great stories. More tales of Sanaaq may be forthcoming as Nappaaluk provided Bernard Saladin d'Anglure with a thousand additional pages

of syllabics before passing away in 2007.

Neither *Sanaaq* nor *Mind's Eye* should be misconstrued as contributing to the death of Indigenous oral tradition. Rather, they communicate an important value: Indigenous peoples turn the tools and materials available to them to their own purposes in order to strengthen and perpetuate their communities. Innovation is part of Indigenous tradition. The publication of *Sanaaq* and *Mind's Eye* provides a constructive opening to those reliant on the written word into worlds of wisdom and wonder which would otherwise be much less accessible to people who, unlike the nomadic Îyiyiu who "carried their knowledge where it was most accessible—in their heads," are more familiar with storing knowledge in technologies that they can carry in their pockets.

Music and Words

Seymour Mayne; Sebastian Frye, illus.
Cusp: Word Sonnets. Ronald P. Frye $12.95

Jan Zwicky; Darren Bifford and Warren Heiti, eds.
Chamber Music: The Poetry of Jan Zwicky.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $18.99

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

Seymour Mayne's *Cusp: Word Sonnets* can be read quickly, but ought to be considered slowly. At fourteen words apiece, each sonnet is petite enough to repeat instantly, like a koan or haiku, and can be turned like a worry stone held in a hand. Most are accompanied by an illustration by Sebastian Frye—one of a series of windows, empty of screens and maybe even of glass, offering views of an arbour and rooftop that change with the weather and seasons. The book's design makes it both simple and pleasant to think on each sonnet while studying the sketch that sits below it on the page.

Unexpected similes startle and amuse, extending invitations for focused contemplation. A new morning is "dark / as / a / cat's / heart"; birds forage of an evening "with / more / joyful / freedom / than / brokers, / bookkeepers / or / barristers." Above a clear window that looks onto a sky of heavy clouds, the poem "Red Sea" exclaims:

> Hey,
> Miriam,
> even
> your
> brother
> Moses
> is
> clapping
> his
> hands
> to
> your
> high
> timbrels!

Here, as in many other pages throughout the collection, sonnet and illustration chime through the gracefulness of a half-suggested word—the faint susurrus of association that marries Miriam's timbrels to the clatter of *tambouriner* that is heralded by the clouds in the drawing.

Readers accustomed to savouring lines both alone and in their contexts will likewise find pleasure and provocation to thought in *Chamber Music: The Poetry of Jan Zwicky.* The adept introduction to the volume by Darren Bifford and Warren Heiti is attuned to some of the subtlest registers of Zwicky's writing, and offers insights for which even her long-time readers will be grateful. Among these is their discussion of the relationship between lyric and narrative in Zwicky's work, and their proposition that, in her poems, stories are conscripted into the service of metaphor—their sequential thoughts rendered polydimensional through integration into lyric wholes.

The inclusion of an abridged interview with Zwicky draws further attention to the polyphonic dynamics of the volume. Between Zwicky and her two editors, questions are posed and answered, propositions

are made and challenged, and a clear sense of Zwicky's poetic and philosophical investments emerges from the trio's conversation. Not incidentally, this format gestures to both the many-voiced structure of Zwicky's *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom & Metaphor*, as well as to the contrapuntal character of a number of her poems.

It could be said that *Chamber Music* presents Zwicky's poetry in its most serious moments—when, as its editors might say, it is most clearly making "a contribution to philosophy." Bifford and Heiti have evidently been strategic in their selections, but the volume is a just distillation of Zwicky's poetics, and will no doubt be an illuminating introduction for readers who are not yet familiar with her work.

Immigration Editions

Nellie L. McClung; Cecily Devereux, afterword
Painted Fires. Wilfrid Laurier UP $24.99

Susanna Moodie; Michael A. Peterman, ed.
Flora Lyndsay; or, Passages in an Eventful Life. U of Ottawa P $24.95

Reviewed by Alana Fletcher

Michael Peterman's 2014 critical edition of Susanna Moodie's *Flora Lyndsay; or, Passages in an Eventful Life* is an excellent example of its kind. Thorough bibliographical research, comprehensive commentary, and clear presentation make it an outstanding instalment within the generally high-quality Canadian Literature Collection (CLC) published by University of Ottawa Press under the editorship of Dean Irvine.

First published in two volumes by Richard Bentley in 1854, *Flora Lyndsay* is the prequel to *Roughing It in the Bush*. This lightly-fictionalized record of the immigration of the Moodies (renamed the Lyndsays) from Southwold to Upper Canada in 1832 recounts the small family's decision to emigrate, delays to their departure, their month-long stay in Edinburgh awaiting final passage, and the dreary passage itself. A cast of colourful characters includes Flora's "true friend" Mary Parnell and domineering neighbour Wilhelmina Carr in Southwold; Captain Williams of the brig *Anne* and its stowaways Mr. Lootie and Stephen Corrie; and Noah Cotton, the murderer whose story Moodie added to fill out volume two. As Peterman points out, this last is rather out of place; while he frowns on the contrast between the tale's melodrama and the lighter fare around it, however, I found its sensationalism entertaining and its inclusion consistent with the anthological style of the text, which presents vignettes by and about a wide range of persons encountered on Flora's journey.

This edition takes the 1854 Bentley publication as copy-text. Critical apparatus includes a multi-part introduction from Peterman explaining copy-text choice and other extant versions, the contexts of the novel's composition, and its scholarly importance; an "Explanatory Notes" section explicating cultural, historical, and autobiographical references; and a "Textual Notes" list indicating alterations to the 1855 American edition published by Dewitt and Davenport. Peterman's work is detailed without being overwhelming, and the result is a clean reading text with a wealth of available but unobtrusive critical material. The edition should do much to bring *Flora Lyndsay* back into use and into critical conversation.

The 2014 edition of Nellie McClung's *Painted Fires* published in the nascent Early Canadian Literature (ECL) Series at Wilfrid Laurier University Press provides a fruitful point of comparison. *Painted Fires* is more a reading edition than a critical one; it follows something of a facsimile model, reproducing the 1925 Thomas Allen (Toronto) publication with very little alteration. Like later New Canadian Library editions, the text of the novel appears before critical

commentary (save a brief preface from ECL Series Editor Benjamin Lefebvre) and is followed by an afterword.

Painted Fires follows Finnish immigrant Helmi Milander through the trials of immigration to Canada in the years leading up to World War I. The story is rife with betrayals, misunderstandings, and dramatic ironies that begin almost immediately, when the beloved aunt Helmi tries to join in Minnesota parcels her off alone to Winnipeg. Once there, Helmi's English teacher sends her on an ill-timed errand to pick up heroin from a Chinese restaurant during a police raid, and the girl is apprehended. Having broken out of prison, Helmi's reputation suffers further when she takes a job at another Chinese restaurant in a nearby mining community. Mistrust between Helmi and her gold-fevered husband Jack is only resolved when Jack is assured of his wife's fidelity by a fellow soldier in a German POW camp, and Helmi's name is finally cleared when Jack's sister, who turns out to be the fateful English teacher, reveals her part in the girl's troubles. Despite its happy ending, the novel's bleak view of immigrant life firmly debunks what McClung, in *The Stream Runs Fast*, called the "false flattery" with which European immigration agencies were promoting Canada in the early twentieth century.

While the preface provides little information beyond choice of copy-text, the afterword from Cecily Devereux—whose *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* testifies to her expertise—is more satisfying. As in *Growing a Race*, Devereux here notes the concerns with racial homogeneity, naturalization, and the role of women in racial nation-building that *Painted Fires* shares with McClung's Pearlie Watson books and some of her shorter fiction. Unlike Peterman's edition, this one does not offer an extensive critical apparatus—no explanatory notes are provided and no collation has been done—but like the CLC *Flora Lyndsay*, the ELC *Painted Fires* brings an important and sometimes neglected piece of early Canadian fiction back into view in an easily readable and teachable form. Both recommend themselves to scholars of early CanLit as well as to those interested in current trends in editing and republishing its works.

Achieving Lyric Failure

Don McKay

Angular Unconformity: Collected Poems, 1970-2014. Goose Lane $45.00

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

What do you know of the world? What do you know from books? What do you know from being an entity among other entities? Don McKay's *Angular Unconformity: Collected Poems 1970-2014* asks these questions. It might even provide some answers, though, really, you're on your own when it comes to answers, albeit with some companions. This book is as companionate as it is essential. Essential at the very least because it collects poetry that has been out of print and thus difficult to access for readers, teachers, and students. Now, many of McKay's out-of-print books have been made available as e-books via Penguin-Random House (current owners of McKay's long-time publisher, McClelland & Stewart). But his earlier books are not and, oddly enough, *Night Field* (M&S 1991) isn't either. Further, this book of collected poems is essential because McKay has been a significant voice in Canadian poetry for the past three decades.

Why come to McKay instead of (or in addition to) any other poet writing in English today? Negative capability dwells at the heart of McKay's poetry—a heart that is both rock/stone and human/avian. The indefatigable birder-poet puts it this way in "Finger Pointing at the Moon": "I think we come here so our words / can fail us . . ." Such failure might strike some as twee at

best, and irreconcilably paradoxical at worst. But McKay has spent much of his time as a poet identifying with a human tendency to privilege language (as signifier, as marker, as claim) while navigating the rocky descent toward linguistic (and hence epistemological and ontological) uncertainty. That he does so with metaphorical verve only strengthens the argument in support of his poetic success and influence, like it or not. The desire for accurate metaphor (think of how the speaker of "The bellies of breathing fallen sparrows" castigates whoever described breasts as "twin alabaster mounds," for example) rubs against the notion that a metaphor is "a lie in the interest of truth," as McKay puts it in his seminal essay "Baler Twine: Thoughts on Ravens, Home, and Nature Poetry." Whether writing about gestures of mourning residing in abstract art ("Night Field"), a fridge as an "old / armless weeping willow of the kitchen" ("Fridge Nocturne"), or feathers as "the birth of the caress" ("Feather"), McKay negotiates the leaps and bounds of metaphorical thinking. It is as if pointing out what something isn't might get us closer to what it is. To what, and who, we are as a species. And yes, despite the ethological studies that reveal more and more the intelligence and linguistic capabilities of species other than *Homo sapiens*, humans are very much a linguistic animal. But that doesn't make us inherently *better*.

The early work collected here anticipates McKay's more sustained ornithological and geological attention to poetry as a vehicle to help reach meaning (I'm thinking maybe a canoe we occasionally have to portage to another river or lake) and, at the same time, as a force that threatens the vehicle (stormy weather, material degradation, inexperienced paddlers). In *Long Sault*, for example, the eponymous rapids (not unlike Pratt's sleepy, lizard-like Laurentian Shield) responds to human interference with sardonic insouciance: "Fuck your Renaissance, get me a beer"; and in *Lependu*, the ghost of Cornelius Burley, the first man ever hanged in London, Ontario, haunts the landscape (and modern-day city) to remind us of our impermanence in light of hubristic violence, and to dance (why not?) "until the only writing is the writing of the glaciers on the rocks / the only thinking is the river slowly / knowing its valley" ("Here").

Throughout McKay's poetry, human accomplishments, in culture or infrastructure, invite both awe and trepidation. In focusing much more on how awe-inspiring the natural world is from *Birding, or Desire* (1983) on, McKay has been able to cultivate a sense of humour and of wonder; that he often does so using language aware of its own faults, for this reader, sets him apart from other ecologically minded writers. For his detractors, this is evidence of untrustworthiness and inauthenticity. I'm not sure I see anything wrong with those qualities in a poet who's been writing for nearly half a century.

Come to these poems fresh, or come to them once again. Place the book on your shelf between David McGimpsey and Anne Michaels; or next to *The Geography of Southern Vancouver Island* or *The Birds of Canada*. Poetry or field guide, these books, like *Angular Unconformity*, want to accompany you and tell you what you don't know.

Esquiver la profession

Robert Melançon
Pour une poésie impure. Boréal 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Thierry Bissonnette

Alors que Witold Gombrowicz, dans *Contre la poésie*, s'en prenait à une pratique poétique reniant ses liens avec la prose, Robert Melançon semble lui faire écho avec un titre à saveur de manifeste : *Pour une poésie impure*. Puisqu'il s'agit d'une collection d'articles, c'est surtout dans la brève préface et dans le « post-scriptum » qu'on

trouve une matière polémique. Quant au reste des textes, ils illustrent avec des cas particuliers la conception du poème favorisée par l'auteur, laquelle tend davantage vers la sobriété que les éclats lyriques. En lisant entre les lignes, on pourra cependant apercevoir nombre de ramifications à partir de l'idée du « désoeuvrement » évoquée ailleurs, le produit fini n'étant jamais qu'un reflet d'une intuition première : « Dans le travail de la matière verbale, d'approximations en approximations jamais tout à fait satisfaisantes, l'auteur cherche à s'approcher sans fin du saisissement qui a marqué en lui le passage de la poésie. »

Tout comme son confrère André Brochu, Melançon se montre assez distant, sinon dédaigneux, à l'égard de la poésie récente, trop occupée à s'autocélébrer, selon lui, et qu'il ne juge tout simplement pas à la hauteur des classiques qui la précèdent. Ce refus, qui interdit en grande partie au regard de se prolonger au-delà des années 1980, s'avère assez peu productif, contrairement à l'éthique de la poésie que développe l'auteur. Que ce soit chez Saint-Denys Garneau — auquel les cinq études initiales sont consacrées — chez Étienne Jodelle ou Emily Dickinson, Melançon admire cette résistance à faire de la poésie une activité professionnelle, en faveur d'une expérience de profonde solitude débouchant sur une fraternité de deuxième degré. « Et tant pis pour la poésie aux mains propres », comme l'écrivait Jacques Brault, auquel est également consacré un texte.

Si la poésie « pure », professionnelle, est ici décriée, c'est au profit d'une pureté d'un autre ordre, qui serait liée à une confrontation gratuite, profonde, avec une dimension poétique issue de l'existence et de la multiplicité des voix, fussent-elles issues de la rue ou encore de la lecture. Les œuvres examinées par Melançon sont valorisées en vertu d'une rigueur ouverte, où la précision extrême de l'écriture s'accompagne d'une exigence d'immédiateté qui court-circuite la visée « fiduciaire », la considération d'un effet ultérieur. Dépouillées, sans prétention excessive, elles ne s'ouvrent à la transaction que grâce à leur maintien devant l'inconnu, à travers « une vie intérieure menée en toute liberté, désencombrée des mesquineries dérisoires qui donnent couleur à une société . . . » (sur E. Dickinson). Et lorsqu'il écrit à propos de Michel Beaulieu, si impliqué dans toutes les facettes du métier d'écrire, il lui pardonne rapidement, rattachant cela à un impératif existentiel dont la force efface tous les compromis. De toute évidence, nous sommes en terre paradoxale, puisqu'il s'agit de rapprocher le poème de la conversation, tout en lui refusant une utilité trop évidente.

À travers ses partis-pris et ses repoussoirs, ce recueil d'essais s'avère un compagnon de lecture en général stimulant, dont le ton à la fois savant et fraternel se fait trop rare dans la production récente. On aurait pu souhaiter davantage d'information sur la provenance des textes, mais cela contribue sans doute à l'unité qui se dégage de cette poétique en fragments, en fenêtres.

Cartographie de l'entre-deux

William S. Messier
Townships. Récits d'origine.
Marchands de Feuilles 16,95 $

Compte rendu par Alex Bellemare

La récente réédition en format poche de *Townships* (recueil de nouvelles initialement paru en 2009 et dont il importe de souligner ici la réussite matérielle) est le premier ouvrage publié de William S. Messier, qui est également l'auteur de deux romans remarqués, *Épique* (2010) et *Dixie* (2013). Ce recueil consacre l'établissement d'une voix à la fois singulière et inscrite dans une tendance lourde du roman québécois contemporain. *Townships* participe en effet d'un courant fort que certains ont qualifié

de néo- ou post-terroir (Alexie Morin, Samuel Archibald), néo-régionalisme (Francis Langevin) ou encore *École de la tchén'ssâ* (Benoît Melançon). Ce courant se caractérise notamment par la mise en exergue du masculin, par le retour massif des régions ainsi que par un travail important sur la langue, surtout dans sa dimension orale, sans par contre pousser l'expérimentation jusqu'à la caricature langagière. *Townships*, s'il procède en effet de cet imaginaire bariolé, réactualise également certains mythes, thèmes et représentations traditionnellement associés à l'américanité (on fait volontiers l'éloge de la route ou encore du blues des années 1960).

La construction bigarrée de *Townships*, recueil de treize très courtes nouvelles, accorde le primat à la première personne et au masculin. On y présente des narrateurs originaux et colorés, mélangeant dans l'irrésolution réflexions intimistes et observations critiques. Que se passe-t-il, au fond, dans *Townships* ? Rien ou si peu, sinon le défilement halluciné et nostalgique de l'infra-ordinaire. Les nouvelles de Messier se situent toujours au ras du quotidien, dans un passé proche et en même temps fantomatique, tandis que les figures les plus insolites s'enchaînent à un rythme déferlant. Car si le nouvelliste explore les paysages estriens, verdoyants, mais parfois défigurés par l'urbanisme sauvage des banlieues, accueillant et hybridant la culture américaine dans des formes inventives, ce sont avant tout les personnages à la fois atypiques et iconoclastes, formant effectivement galerie, qui structurent l'imaginaire de *Townships*. Cette écriture du réel s'accompagne parfois d'un merveilleux qui tient du folklore, du conte ou de la légende. Des « waitress siamoises », unies à jamais par un même doigt, au carnavalesque Charles-Arthur Bouchard, un personnage cavalant avec le fœtus, toujours semi-vivant, de son frère jumeau fixé sur un bras, la dimension quasi fantastique de *Townships* engendre basculements et équivoques qui brouillent les rapports conventionnels entre fiction et réalité.

Messier vaporise dans ses nouvelles plusieurs motifs issus de la culture populaire (on y parle beaucoup de hockey, mais aussi de baseball, d'émissions radiophoniques, de musique folk et de blues, de fêtes foraines, etc.). Cependant, ce qui caractérise le mieux les personnages de *Townships* demeure sans doute leur constante mobilité : on traverse différents lieux de sociabilité à la fois répétitifs et pittoresques (la maison, le restaurant, la voiture), on pénètre dans des imaginaires culturels clivés et parfois disparates (dans *Folk*, par exemple, on croise religion, technologie et hockey), on circule entre différents âges de nouvelles en nouvelles (les narrateurs sont tour à tour enfants, adolescents ou adultes). Certaines nouvelles (*Cinq cents T-bones, mourir noyé, gagner le million*) travaillent à l'inverse la stagnation et le sur-place, en investissant un lieu-carrefour, une maison de chambres fantasque, qui s'échafaude, multiple et contrastée, à partir d'une figure d'homme ayant « arrêté de se déplacer ». C'est bien encore le mouvement et le métissage qui organisent la fabrication de *Townships*. En ce sens, le sous-titre du recueil, « Récits d'origine », trouve un écho emblématique et évocateur dans l'agencement de la ville de Pigeon Hill : « Ça [Pigeon Hill] s'assume essentiellement en tant que croisée de deux chemins, l'un d'est en ouest, l'autre du nord au sud ». La cartographie de l'entre-deux mise en place dans *Townships*, qui se situe à l'intersection de différentes cultures, de paysages partagés et de représentations continuellement phagocytées, est précisément le point d'origine et de rencontre où s'élaborent ces récits multiformes. La quête de l'origine tracée par *Townships*, et par extension celle de l'identité tant individuelle que collective, transite ainsi par l'expérience réifiée d'espaces intermédiaires et continuellement soumis au mélange.

Stories of the Soul

K. D. Miller
All Saints. Biblioasis $19.95

Kathleen Winter
The Freedom in American Songs. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Amanda Leslie-Spinks

Kathleen Winter offers thirteen stories in her new collection. Three are linked to introduce Marianne, a young woman who has decamped to a hamlet on the Newfoundland coast, planning to write. She is escaping "an apartment that reeked of methane—the window had looked out on a transformer tower." But the writing ambitions are unimportant. Instead Marianne acquires a deep understanding of the management of loss. Through her interactions with the residents she learns how to deal with what there is—fearlessly. First she meets Ezekiel who teaches her how to feed her wood stove. "The shavings curled long and white, and when you made seven or eight on both sides of a stick, then the split looked lovely, tendrils arching off it like a Japanese lantern." It is a simple story but through the patient detail in Winter's writing we too feel "the sun in the wood" and the glory of a chimney smoking white on a dark night.

In Part II of her collection, Winter gives us ten separate stories, which somehow combine into a gentle meditation on the power and fragility of dreams. In the haunting first story, Kerry, a balding and middle-aged man remembers the beauty his younger self found in music. "There was land in American songs, there were wildwood flowers and bright mornings. . . ." He remembers also a powerful current of freedom embodied in an exotic, cross-dressing youth, with whom he falls a little in love. Things go wrong, of course; the boy is forced to move away and Kerry's life returns to the well-trodden path. But we leave him, humming an Oscar Hammerstein song "right through to the end" and know that his early moment of grace remains the kernel of his later life. In another deeply surprising story a street person finds his feet by learning flamenco dance—performing with nails embedded in cheap Italian shoes for sound effects and a flat-brimmed black straw hat for looks. He is knocked back down by circumstance, but not before his unlikely joy has infiltrated the life of a passerby. Winter's readers also may feel a light benediction, an uptick in their own courage, openness, and humility from their immersion in these delicate stories.

K. D. Miller's *All Saints* is a novel-length book built from linked stories of ten people, tenuously connected over decades to each other and to a languishing Anglican parish in Vancouver. The book opens with Garth building a refuge in his basement for his army buddy, Barney. Since Barney has not been in touch for decades, a certain private craziness is introduced immediately. Next we meet Simon, the priest of All Saints, confessing to a woman's sweater draped over a chair back. He has withheld the garment from its owner, Kelly, to whom he is secretly attracted. Miller seems freed by the discrete story format to imagine wild and complexly interwoven stories for the individuals of the parish. We meet a child poisoner and the masochistic victim of a brutal rape. We meet a misfit who creates a *Lord-of-the-Flies*-calibre disaster for himself, involving dark forests, broken eyeglasses, feces, and blood-soaked suicide. Also present are characters threatened by serious illness and others whose suppressed homoerotic impulses have derailed their lives.

These are attention-grabbing scenarios but Miller has set herself some difficult tasks. Her characters are fundamentally trapped and alone. They interact mostly with their own minds and the author is often reduced to conveying complicated back stories through long first-person

flashbacks. Sometimes Miller makes it work. The story of Alice, confined for decades in a hospital for the criminally insane for poisoning her grade two class with digoxin-laced lemonade, is carried by Alice's cold, clever letters to Simon, the parish priest who has offered to be her pen pal. In another story Emily survives the indignities of aphasia as she recovers from a stroke by reliving her childhood interaction with a horse that understood and was faithful to her. But in the end Miller struggles with the structure she has chosen. The high drama of her scenarios sucks up all the oxygen so that we do not get what the best short stories can provide: the extraction of an essence, a disclosure of character by momentary circumstance. Miller also leaves herself little chance to develop the profound theme of a fragile and exhausted church confronting the deep miseries of private lives, which the title seems to promise. Perhaps the conventional novel format would have taken her there.

The Ethical Vanguard

Cecily Nicholson
From the Poplars. Talonbooks $16.95

Catriona Strang
Corked. Talonbooks $16.95

Rita Wong
undercurrent. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Michael Roberson

If, as Simon Critchley suggests, "ethics is the disturbance of the political status quo," then the newest books by Vancouver poets Catriona Strang, Cecily Nicholson, and Rita Wong enact an ethical poetics grounded in the belief that poetry can function as an alternative form of knowledge about our current sociopolitical moment.

Catriona Strang's *Corked* contains two sequences—"Unsetting" and "Corked." The first presents an excerpt from a "frizzily" homophonic rendition of Franz Schubert's song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*. Dedicated to the late Nancy Shaw, the sequence carries forward the lamenting "heart's ruffle" of the original sequence, but also opens the cage doors at the "Ear zoo." Take, as an example, the Germanic crunching and pooling in the following lines:

> Will's laugh zooms for lichen's
> jagged wool, out-ditched hiding
> and hugging

The title piece, by contrast, juxtaposes letters to Marcel Proust with "tempered fragments"—individual poems with jags and glitches that represent "shaky transitory moments external to capital's seemingly omnipotent pulse." While these poems inevitably engage the Proustian theme of memory's precariousness, they work hardest to advocate for the "unprofitable" and "unproductive" work of domestic life—the "weight women carry daily." In a poem called "Integral Information," she writes:

> [T]o explode in hordes
> of our own budding
>
> so mightily our
> labours linger
>
> tentative, and still I
> cannot bid or outsupply, I
>
> cannot consequent
> upon, or imagine

Changing "versus" into verses, Strang offers poetry, contaminated by overt tentativeness and "over-earnest[ness]," as a "gentle resistance" to the "current situation" in which "love and caring continue to suffer obliteration."

In *From the Poplars*, Cecily Nicholson uses poetry as "method" to investigate an archive of material about Poplar Island—an island in the Fraser River that now sits occupied by "wild cherry cottonwood English ivy / black willow empathy," but that also includes a deeply fraught colonial history with "patriarchal velocities." By

interweaving the "speech acts wrested" from official title documents with impressionistic "roving fragments," Nicholson interrogates how governments and businesses ("the Corporation of the City") collude, and manipulate language to define, entitle, occupy, and exploit spaces with little deference for history or ecology. To this reviewer, the poems themselves are pyritic—alluring, but deceptive, awkward, but poignant—as in the following favourite lines:

> [F]ree atoms split to render the egg yolk
> of autumn
> reaches an art to alchemy artist fashion
> the spine gilded paint syntax

Like Strang's *Corked*, Nicholson's book invests in poetry as "recursive," as "*imaginative militancy*" capable of confronting "officially spoken boundaries borders and property."

Rita Wong's *undercurrent* presents an accumulation, but not a culmination, of writing and activism pertaining to "water ethics"—what Wong calls "our obligations as earth dwellers" to the water that sustains all life. In a series of formally varied poems—vertical, horizontal, split, compressed, found, and generated—Wong strives to be thorough and expeditious, emphasizing that "underneath all the words, we are one troubled water." In fact, the subtext to all water is the series of lettered formulas for chemical pollutants—side effects of plastics production, petroleum processing, and resource extraction. While the poems are direct in their moral current, they inevitably serve as "alpha bets" that poetry can help increase our "fluid wisdom." Less impressive overall for innovations with language than their conviction, the poems, prose anecdotes, and polemics throughout the book contextualize Wong's personal investment and offer as much credibility as they provide examples of how others might also participate intellectually, socially, and politically in the "anthropocene."

"Hooked" on Canadian Women's Writing

Joseph Pivato, ed.
Sheila Watson: Essays on Her Works.
Guernica $20.00

Marie Carrière and Patricia Demers, eds.
Regenerations: Canadian Women's Writing.
U of Alberta P $39.95

Reviewed by Alicia Fahey

These two books present a variety of approaches to Canadian women's writing. The first concentrates on the life and work of Sheila Watson and the other on the connections and trajectories of women's writing and feminist criticism in Canada from the nineteenth century to the present.

Pivato's collection of essays contains literary criticism about all of Watson's works—including her seminal novel *The Double Hook*, for which she is most commonly known—as well as biographical contexts such as information about Watson's roles as editor and mentor. Drawing on both previously published material and material published in this collection, Pivato claims that his is the first book to bring these various facets of Sheila Watson's contributions to Canadian literature together in a single collection.

The book begins with an overview of scholarship on Watson, noting from the outset that Watson herself would have disapproved of the many essays that interpret her writing through a biographical lens. Indeed, just under half of the essays draw on Watson's personal history as a means of engaging with her creative and academic endeavours. Caterina Edwards offers an engaging portrait of Watson in the role of mentor and George Melnyk's informal essay includes several entertaining anecdotes of his personal relationship with the Watsons. Although these essays are valuable contributions, readers may not be fully satisfied due to their lack of attention paid

to Watson's contemporary relevance. Some of the widely successful Canadian writers who have credited Watson as their "literary touchstone" are briefly mentioned in Hamilton's biographical article; however, this aspect of her legacy merits further attention.

Other essays demonstrate the range and reach of Watson's writing by considering an array of topics including religion, language, modernism, feminism, regionalism, media and technology, and environmentalism. Sergiy Yakovenko's reading of Watson's "Rough Answer" is especially notable among the previously unpublished essays; Yakovenko performs an eco-critical reading of Watson's short story by examining the "social and ecological aspects of silence" that form a "special intimacy between nature and woman." Yakovenko's compelling reading exemplifies the possibilities of connecting Watson's work to contemporary literary contexts.

Another especially useful component of the book is Hamilton's bibliography of all of Watson's works (fiction, translations, nonfiction, interviews) and works about her (biographies, profiles, obituaries and tributes, critical articles and books, selected reviews and review articles, theses, selected websites). This comprehensive tool is especially useful for newcomers to Watson and can also be used to generate much-deserved future research from those who are already "hooked" on her work. In some ways, the ambitious scope of this book limits any coherent focus or straightforward organizational structure. Nonetheless, *Sheila Watson: Essays on Her Works* offers rich glimpses into the many facets of Sheila Watson's life and career.

An essay on Sheila Watson could definitely have been included in Carrière and Demers's book *Regenerations*. The bilingual collection of essays was compiled from revised papers from the Canadian Women Writers Conference/Colloque écritures des femmes au Canada held at the University of Alberta in 2010. The central focus of the collection is to provide essays that examine "Canadian women's writing in relation to literary history and digital scholarship, and with a multicultural and bilingual scope."

The collection is divided into four sections: (1) Au fil de la narration. . . (2) Back to the future. . . (3) Des contexts minoritaires. . . (4) Women in movement. . . . The use of ellipses indicates that the topics under consideration are fluid, evolving, and incomplete. They also represent the editors' intention that the chapters are designed to intersect and speak to one another. These connections are certainly apparent. In his essay, "A Modernist Commons in Canada," Dean Irvine, founder of the Editing Modernism in Canada project, defines the digital commons as "collectively produced by and distributed among the many different workers who contribute their labour to its creation." Irvine's description aptly summarizes the collaborative potential of the digital environment that is at the heart of *Regenerations*.

Echoes of Irvine's collaborative focus reverberate in Rosemary Sullivan's discussion of creative writing workshops and her work as a biographer of women writers. Sullivan argues that writing needs to be conceptualized through the paradigm of gift-giving (as opposed to commodification) and that social and financial support afforded by networks and communities are essential to a writer's success. Sullivan also reflects on the ways in which the sociocultural and political contexts of the writers whose lives she chronicles—Elizabeth Smart, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and Margaret Atwood—affected their literary careers. Lucie Hotte shares this latter consideration in her essay on Franco-Ontarian women writers working between 1970 and 1985. Drawing on data analysis, tables, and statistics, Hotte explores the prejudices that affect the publication, dissemination, and

reception of women writers. She calls for a redefinition of "minority literatures" in order to restore a more accurate picture and literary corpus of the place of women writers on the literary stage. The key to achieving this revaluation, according to Hotte, is accessibility and the development of scientific tools.

As can be seen by these three examples, *Regenerations* considers an extremely diverse range of media (other forms discussed in the book include blogs, e-books, social media, diaries, radio broadcasts, manuscripts, archives, poetry, and performance art) in order to interrogate the exclusivity of our understanding of authorship and readership. This innovative and inspiring collection provides sensitive readings of current issues facing women writers in the digital age, as well as an impetus: *À les constituer dans leurs spécificités multiples et leurs trames pluridimensionnelles*. *Regenerations* considers the digital environment not only as a mode of communication, but also as a regenerative tool for drawing attention to past works that have been excluded or marginalized from literary histories. Original and insightful, this book demonstrates the exciting future of humanities scholarship and artistic production.

"How to Be Whole?"

Vivek Shraya; Juliana Neufeld, illus.
God Loves Hair. Arsenal Pulp $18.95

Vivek Shraya; Raymond Biesinger, illus.
She of the Mountains. Arsenal Pulp $18.95

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

Acclaimed multi-media artist Vivek Shraya produced a self-published edition of *God Loves Hair* in 2010; four years later, a new edition was published by Arsenal Pulp Press. Its relatively short life has already seen it adopted by a host of Canadian college and university courses exploring masculinity, gender, sexuality, and literature for children and young adults, and, as Shraya's website notes, the Lambda-nominated book has also garnered recognition by a New York City program aiming to provide LGBTQ materials to libraries and classrooms.

With captivating illustrations by Juliana Neufeld and twenty-one impeccably-crafted stories by Shraya, *God Loves Hair* conveys a myriad of ways in which gender and sexual identities are read, misread, discovered, and claimed. Shraya has a gift for creating textured and multivalent representations of childhood and adolescent attempts to come to terms with expectations and norms in society at large. For the book's young narrator, who struggles to understand the labels "boy," "girl," "pervert," "sissy," "Gaylord," and "fag," self-recognition finally comes when,

> At a street-side vendor's stall in India, as I am flipping through the stack of familiar pictures of Hindu gods, I freeze at an image I have never seen. It is of a deity composed of Lord Shiva's left side and his female consort Parvati's right side. *Ardhanaraeeshwara.*

As Shraya writes: "All the lines that divide what men and women should be and should do begin to blur in the light of this explicit fusion of two gods and two sexes." This fusion is taken up again in Shraya's Lambda-nominated novel *She of*

the Mountains, in which the multi-aspect identities of Parvati, Shiva, and their son Ganesha appear as divine counterparts to the novel's human protagonists. Accompanied by riveting illustrations—by Raymond Biesinger—Shraya's succinct, poignant prose begins with a modern creation story:

> In the beginning, there is no he. There is no she.
>
> Two cells make up one cell. This is the mathematics behind creation. One plus one makes one.
>
> Life begets life. We are the period to a sentence, the effect to a cause, always belonging to someone. We are never our own.
>
> This is why we are so lonely.

Readers may recall Aristophanes' tale, in Plato's *Symposium*, of the round-bodied humans who are cut in half by the gods. Shraya's opening lines reflect and refract in multifaceted ways throughout the pages that follow. Whereas cellular division contributes, seemingly paradoxically, to the creation of an individual being, later divisions imposed by society—such as those that distinguish women from men, and gay men from straight men—diminish the narrator's ability to feel whole. Queer identification is, in this sense, a homecoming. So is love.

God Loves Hair and *She of the Mountains* are books to be grateful for. Let's pray that Shraya continues to make more.

The Presence of the Past

Winfried Siemerling
The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History, and the Presence of the Past. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Austin Clarke
In Your Crib. Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Paul Watkins

Winfried Siemerling's *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered* and Austin Clarke's *In Your Crib* prioritize transatlantic Black perspectives from within national paradigms to explore Black Canadian identity, belonging, and the presence of the past. The two works are quite different: Clarke's text is an introspective long poem that channels the radical spirits and rhythms of the civil rights movement, and Siemerling's text is a considerable historical undertaking that reconsiders Canada's place in the Black Atlantic. However, both texts deepen our understanding of Black writing and radical thinking within a Canadian space that belongs to a larger historic transatlantic nexus.

Winfried Siemerling's substantial *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*—which includes a useful companion site (www.blackatlantic.ca) and timeline in the appendix—demonstrates that Black writing in Canada is multilingual, transatlantic, and over two centuries old, with Black speech being even older. Responding to culpable omissions that leave Canada out of the Black Atlantic (such as Paul Gilroy's influential *The Black Atlantic*), Siemerling covers Black immigration, mobility, the abolitionist movement in Canada, jazz music and its influence on Montreal's French and English literary scene, and devotes considerable case-study space to African Canadian literary texts, which he weaves in the warp and weft of the Black Atlantic world. With encyclopedic scope, Siemerling travels back to slave testimony in New France, examines the 1783 "Book of Negroes" and Lawrence Hill's

novel of the same title, and moves through the nascent canon of contemporary Black Canadian writers including Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, George Elliott Clarke, Wayde Compton, Esi Edugyan, M. NourbeSe Philip, and others.

In *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered* the presence of the past is felt as a kind of haunting; however, Siemerling resists melancholia as an overarching theoretical concept, asking who "is served by the ascription of melancholia to others and to aggrieved communities in particular?" Rather than limit his study to the language of Black suffering, Siemerling focuses on the exceptional reader identification within Black Canadian writing and states that the "recognition of these works [with an emphasis here on spiritual autobiographies] requires canonical change, and highlights the transnational roots of this national literature." Siemerling draws from contemporary works of historical fiction that deal explicitly with polymorphous and transatlantic identity, and he includes the often-overlooked slave narratives that speak of Canada. Siemerling generatively refers to the wide range of material produced in the nineteenth century as a Black Canadian Renaissance, championing Mary Ann Shadd, who was the full-time editor of the radical paper *The Provincial Freeman* and the first woman publisher of a newspaper in Canada, as a transnational and transatlantic thinker and writer. Siemerling's many examples of Black writers who confound the metaphorical and physical borders of Canada testify to the fact that Canada belongs to a Black Atlantic that is a "porous, multiple, and non-linear" site of possibility.

While only fifty-three pages in length, Austin Clarke's *In Your Crib* is a fervid meditation on racial inequality and the violence that takes the lives of young Black men. Scored on rations of jazz and Black radical thinking, certainly drawn from Clarke's own experiences in 1960s Toronto and onwards, the book reads as a soloing monologue, where an older black man from Toronto addresses a disenfranchised and disaffected young Black man whose arrest is witnessed by the narrator. The speaker is a civil rights veteran who at first only sees the differences between himself and the young man: "cut-down pants . . . unrestrained by no belt or buckle"; "your lexicon is filled with new words: / your 'wheels', your 'piece,' / 'your crib.'" Clarke euphoniously employs antiphony and echo, repeating phrases such as "again" and "remember that" as mantras that sound the ongoing relation of the past to the present. There are a number of musical intertexts that score the speaker's polemical discourse: "sitting in the sound of jazz, playing Kings and Li'l Ones; / Coltrane and Miles and Aretha; the card table. / Miles and Aretha in moaning, tinny disdain, / the puzzling sheets of Coltrane." Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" is recalled throughout as a refrain, moving through a text that works its way through blood-soaked history in the hopes of finding redemption.

Also sampled are various civil rights figures: "I have talked with, and walked in line behind Malcolm X; / shared a microphone with Stokely Carmichael." The speaker recalls how "[w]e have lived to our own music, discordant," which he tries to reconcile with the young man who grooves to a "different beat / and drummer," a possible shout-out to William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer*. The narrator desires spaces where creative Black expression is possible, invoking Amiri Baraka's virulent "Black Arts": "'We want a black poem / And a / Black World.' / Let the world be a Black Poem / And let All Black People Speak / This poem / Silently / or LOUD." The speaker laments his generation's inability to adequately inspire the young man's disenfranchised state. And yet, the narrator realizes that every generation sings their own resistance: "You singing Rap, / them singing the Blues." Another theme in the book is the failed promises of

multicultural Canada ("this Canadian cold; / multicultural ice touching your heart"; "the lie of this multicultural land"), which is a theme Clarke has dealt with since his first novel, *The Survivors of the Crossing*. Canada is thus implicated in a transnational and transatlantic system of oppression and by fighting "old pirates, yes, / they rob I," *In Your Crib* recalls recent happenings in Ferguson and Baltimore, and bespeaks a poetry born out of social change, suffering, and Black agency. Although "violence has always been used in history, / and in songs, in jazz and the blues," the poem resolutely concerns Black liberation and racial equality.

Both Siemerling and Clarke—albeit through different mediums—invoke the spectres of past into the sounding mix of the present, providing rallying cries that allow us to imagine the kind of future we want for a multicultural Canada that can, and must, continue to be conceived within locally and globally imbricated spaces.

A Little and A Lot

Anne Wilkinson; Ingrid Ruthig, ed.
The Essential Anne Wilkinson.
Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Miriam Waddington; Ruth Panofsky, ed.
The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington Volume 1. U of Ottawa P $44.95

Miriam Waddington; Ruth Panofsky, ed.
The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington Volume 2. U of Ottawa P $44.95

Reviewed by Owen Percy

As it rumbles ever further into the twenty-first century, the academy continues to cling to its modernist giants in the field of Canadian poetry—its Birneys, Scotts, Purdys, and Laytons. But, thanks in no small part to Dean Irvine's EMiC project, it continues also to recognize (slowly) that Canada's finest and most daring modernist poets were equally, sometimes more so, its women—its Pages, Webbs, Wilkinsons, and Waddingtons. These two new collections—a bright, brief nugget of Wilkinson, and a comprehensive inventory of Waddington—will surely hasten this valuable recognition.

The Essential Anne Wilkinson is for lovers, of both poetry and books. In fact, like almost everything published by Porcupine's Quill, and especially their *Essential* series, it's the kind of book that makes people love books. Beautifully designed and printed, the aesthetic pleasures it offers as an object are aptly matched by the intellectual flourish of the poems selected by Ingrid Ruthig, reminding us of how and why the *experience* of the book has never been at risk of yielding to the limited dimensionality of the digital. Like the Laurier Poetry Series, the *Essential* books offer a contextual introduction, a short author bio, and a brief sampling from a poet's larger oeuvre (here, twenty-five poems) designed to showcase favourites and perhaps whet the appetite for more.

Using Wilkinson's journals, Ruthig convincingly presents her as a soul divided—as someone loyal to the traditional, colonial "Old Toronto" family into which she was born, while her own emerging sense of mid-century self flourished. The tension is clear in the poems as they range from elegiac to prickly, from formal to free, and from the unique to the universal. Wilkinson's familial privilege is never far from the surface of her poems. The collection is bookended by pieces about her summer property and opens with "Summer Acres:" "These acres breathe my family, / Holiday with seventy summers' history. / My blood lives here, / Sunned and veined three generations red / Before my bones were formed." However it usually manifests as a source of some anxiety, holding her back or binding her from becoming whatever else she might have been. As she writes in "Lens:"

> The poet's daily chore
> Is my long duty;
> To keep and cherish my good lens
> For love and war

And wasps about the lilies
And mutiny within.
My woman's eye is weak
And veiled with milk;
My working eye is muscled
With a curious tension

The nature poems included here are among her best; though, except for the Darwinian "Nature Be Damned," most are pastorally nostalgic and often devoid of self-consciousness. Nature is Wilkinson's escape from the apocalyptic, often environmental realities she sees in the so-called real world where she laments "We have mislaid ourselves, purposely / As a child mislays a burden . . . In the aisles between the graves we waste / The landed fish, our flesh." Overall, the variety of poems in this collection paints a just and enticing portrait of Wilkinson's diverse oeuvre, while highlighting the imagery (moons, witches, blood, the colour green) that defines her work as hers. It is an essential *Essential* for Canadian poetry.

While Wilkinson and Waddington share some affinity, *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington* is a somewhat different animal; important, incredibly thorough, and meticulously presented, it is unquestionably a triumph of a scholar's book, the kind you are unlikely to see on the beach or pulled from a backpack on the commute home. Split into two weighty volumes totalling 1,112 pages (with tight type and stretching margins straight from the University Press playbook), it is a testament to the scope of Waddington's contribution to Canadian letters, and to Panofsky's doggedness as an editor and researcher. Positioning the tome as a corrective to the comparative dearth of literary criticism on Waddington, Panofsky's exhaustive introduction covers the poet's upbringing and personal life, her constant literary persona and evolving poetic voice, and the conflicted body of criticism that continues to colour her position in and around Canadian canons. Panofsky's touchstone is Waddington's secular Jewish heritage, Yiddish cultural identity, and gendered mid-century Canadianness, most evident in poems like the punchy "Sad Winter in the Land of Can. Lit." and "Lately I've Been Feeling Very Jewish." Obviously a product of the apparent golden age of CanPo through the 1960s, Waddington's unsubtle public poems like "Canadians" ("We look / like a geography / but just scratch us / and we bleed like / history") are dwarfed by more nuanced and lyrical pieces like "A Landscape of John Sutherland," Waddington's one-time lover, which meets most CanLit requirements and still concludes, delicately:

That is
what I like
best to find
the quiet moment,
shadowless,
in the roar
of landscape;
to be the
landscape.

Tending towards Northrop Frye (who identified Waddington's chief poetic gifts as her spontaneous lyricism and precise observations), Panofsky accurately characterizes Waddington's writing as "deceptively accessible . . . personal but never private, emotional but not confessional, thoughtful but never cerebral." She is a poet of place (city and nature), plain-spokenness, and innovative, often challenging, form and enjambment. As a whole, the collection bears witness to her maturation and evolution of theme and style over six decades, but her chronologically presented published poems (followed by more than 120 pages of previously unpublished and uncollected poems and translations) show that Waddington never lost her fighting, public, social-working spirit in her late poems like "A Few Things:"

There are only a few things
the politicians of war
or the privateers of

free enterprise
haven't yet found out
how to do.
These are to have dreams
and raise children,
be kind and human,
let birds nest
and trees and rivers
live.

Like Wilkinson, Waddington comes across as a poetic soul divided, excluded, and provoked by her birthrights of gender and culture; also like Wilkinson, she is proven here to be a complex, serious, sometimes excellent, modernist poet worthy of exactly the kind of critical re-examination Panofsky calls for.

Dreaming of Home

Bill Wong and Joanne Poon
A Year in China: Bill Wong's Diaries in His Father's Home Village 1936-37. ISTRCCS University of British Columbia, np

Reviewed by Ziyan Yang

A Year in China offers an intriguing perspective on Chinese Canadian immigration history. The diary entries written in Chinese by the fourteen-year-old Bill Wong and his father during their visit to China on the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War are neatly accompanied with Joanne Poon's English translation as well as numerous photos recording the original handwriting of the Wongs and this very first trip for the young Bill on his ancestral land. Bill's family operates the hundred-year-old Modernize Tailors in Vancouver's Chinatown, a business started by his father Gung Lai Wong in 1913. Born and raised in Canada, Bill would later join his father's business as a tailor despite his degree in mechanical engineering, because in 1946 no one would hire a Chinese as an engineer due to prevailing racism. From 1936 to 1937, Gung Lai brought Bill and Bill's younger brother Jack back to his home village in Canton so that the children could study Chinese at the local school while he helped to build a new house for his mother. Both father and son recorded this "Grand return"—one of the most glorious moments for all successful "Gold Mountain Guests"—in their diaries, which form the main content of this book.

The transcribed diary entries are grouped into seven chapters, each detailing one stage of this journey which, according to Bill, would reshape his identity: departure, arrival, various visits, neighbourhood, local school life, house building, and return. Gung Lai's texts, mostly in the first two chapters, demonstrate the influence of classical Chinese, with a concise style but no punctuation, while Bill's pieces, written in vernacular Chinese, show the vivacity of a teenager eager to explore his unknown homeland. The occasional mistakes Bill made while writing Chinese characters have been kept respectfully in the transcription for the reader to understand Bill's journey in learning his ancestral language. Both father and son share a meticulous attention to details in their vivid descriptions, such as the visit to a pineapple factory in Honolulu, the sweet and juicy sugar canes, the constant battle against mosquitoes at night, and the local schools in Canton. This meticulousness, regretfully, also makes certain passages repetitive and monotonous, all the more so as the texts abound in names of the Wongs' entourage, rendering the reading sometimes tedious for outsiders.

Although the journey could be compared to the popular "China Summer Camps" for the present day Chinese diaspora, the Wongs' journey translates a much more intense desire to sustain a China-centred diaspora culture among the early Chinese migrants, who had to confront severe discrimination and injustice while living in the isolated Chinatowns. On one hand, the study of the Chinese language was key to keeping up with the transforming homeland: Bill and

his brother attended Chinese school in Vancouver before joining the local school in Canton. On the other hand, the diaries communicate strong Chinese nationalist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperial sentiments through the Wongs' grievances about their ancestral land being torn by Western and Japanese invaders. In one of the "Looking Back . . ." sections documenting his reflections on the past events from today's perspective, Bill Wong recounts his quest for identity as one echoing the efforts of Chinese in Canada fighting against racism:

> At that time, I definitely thought that I was Chinese. I did not feel that I was Canadian. . . . Only when Chinese in Canada got the right to vote, were allowed to participate in events, and could choose to go and live anywhere, did I gradually feel that I was Canadian.

Indeed, home, belonging and identity are at the heart of the Wongs' writing, as shown in the Chinese title, Si Gu Xiang (思故乡), the ending of the well-known nostalgic poem by Li Po, here translated by David Hinton, "Thoughts in Night Quiet":

> Seeing moonlight here at my bed,
> And thinking it's frost on the ground,
> I look up, gaze at the mountain moon,
> then back, dreaming of my old home.

A Portable Frontier: Two Gender-Divergent Navigations of Western Canada

Julian Gunn

I.
There would be a map here
Fold-line at Vancouver
And when the pages met
Whitehorse would kiss California
—Julian Gunn

Rae Spoon and Ivan Coyote are Canadian gender-retired and gender-divergent queer artists and performers and collaborators on the stage show and book *Gender Failure*. They are profoundly engaged with the landscapes, human communities, and perspectives of Western Canada—for Coyote the Yukon as a psychic home and for Spoon the prairies as a problematic origin. Both also experience Vancouver as a location of queer identity and community (also often problematic). As touring artists, both have spent a great deal of time traversing the landscape of Western Canada. As of this writing, both artists have adopted "they" as the singular pronoun they wish people to use for them. Trans* and gender-divergent people are often prohibited by social and even grammatical rules from "coming to rest" in collective space and in language. These artists have responded by repurposing and reinterpreting Western Canadian spaces, and especially the process of traversing these spaces, to express gender-divergent embodiments and narratives. In particular, they delineate the separation of bodily and social being enforced by the gendered prohibitions built into collective spaces, and the struggle to reconcile, or even to express, this division.

What is a frontier? It is not quite a border, but the territory alongside. It has an edge that can be crossed, but no precise dimensions. Structurally, a frontier is a mutually defining—yet unequally defined and enforced—boundary zone between two political entities. It is a zone of dispute and conflict. In Western Canada, *frontier* also has an inevitable colonial valence. It is the leading edge of an expansionist colonial enterprise. Rae Spoon's 2008 song "Come on Forest Fire, Burn the Disco Down" evokes this violent remapping: "ask the colonial ghosts what they took / and they'll tell you that / you're dancing on it." A strength of Spoon's work is its willingness to investigate ways they have inhabited not only abject or defiant positions in the frontier, but also complicit or oppressive ones. Though set out less explicitly than in this song, their consciousness of multiple, conflicting mappings carries over into their accounts of trans* experience. The works of Spoon and Coyote regularly engage a whole series of mutually defining boundaries: Canadian/American, rural/urban, small town/big city, country singer/indie singer, and woman/man.

Coyote was born in the Yukon, Spoon in Calgary. Me, I come from the Interior. I like this double entendre. First, there is the image of the Central Interior, a region in the

middle of British Columbia that is neither north nor south, not cold enough to be impressive or warm enough to be pleasant. Second, there is the idea of the inner world of psychological and somatic experience. I like being from the interior as opposed to being from the exterior. As a trans* person, I like thinking about the difference between what I can feel and what others can see. Interior/exterior: a mutually defining boundary unequally enforced.

I began this study with a conceit: I hoped to write a *geography* the way I might write a *genealogy*, to use the Foucauldian framing devices of lineage and emergence to examine the records made of an embodied subjectivity. These records amount to, simply, a memoir or a series of memoir-driven works of art. How does a given gender-divergent queer subject navigate the real and collectively imagined space and time called Western Canada? Could I apply the approach Michel Foucault advocates for the study of historical events to the study of geographical experiences? I wanted to use this examination "to diagnose the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength, its breakdown and resistances" (145).

What I ended up with is a more modest psychogeographical study, after Guy Debord, of two queer and gender-divergent artists' records—in print, in song, on film—of traversing Western Canada. In "Psychogeography and Feminist Methodology," Alexander John Bridger describes a Situationist *dérive* as "a particular way of walking for the purpose of exploring the impact of urbanization" (286). More broadly, a *dérive* might consider the impact of a space on the individual, and the impact of the individual's use or repurposing of that space. When a visibly gender-divergent person tries to use a gendered space—and as Bridger, with many others, has pointed out, all public spaces are gendered (289)—isn't it always an involuntary, vulnerable, often dangerous *dérive*? A gender-divergent subject has a particular way of using public space. It may not be as obviously divergent as, for example, queer men's sexual trade in bathrooms, but it is also bodily, somatic, and emotional. A particular embodiment engages a particular model of space—a spatialization—projected onto a physical reality that may or may not serve that embodiment well and that may or may not accord closely with that spatialization.

Readers of Ivan Coyote's *Xtra! West* columns over the years have witnessed how Coyote is continually forced into the role of what Bridger calls a "mobile ethnographer" (290). Coyote has effectively recorded a series of case studies: reactions in bathrooms, doctor's offices, gas stations, bars, and other public spaces. Probably the most continually recurrent trope in Coyote's writing over more than a decade is the experience of being misread or insufficiently accounted for in terms of gender in public spaces. In *Gender Failure*, the 2014 collaboration between Coyote and Spoon, Coyote says "I could write an entire book about bathroom incidents I have experienced. It would be a long and boring book where nearly every chapter ends the same, so I won't" (206).

Describing this conflict over visibility in public space is one way to talk about the gender-divergent and queer experience of such spaces. However, this discussion focuses on the exterior, the moment of being observed and evaluated as incoherent by a spectator. This focus is important, but is not the totality of queer or gender-divergent experiences of public spaces, or of (our experiences in/of) a collectively imagined regional geography. We have interiors, in the sense that we have somatic experiences of relating to space; conversely, we make use of space to externalize, symbolize, and live out our own psychological processes. It seems worth investigating, this interior to the

geographical-spatial experience. It is unobservable from the exterior; it is the part of embodied experience that can only ever be self-reported. These artists have used Western Canadian geographical space to extend and reconfigure the boundaries imposed by gendered subjectivity on somatic and emotional experience. In doing so, they have illuminated particular processes in a gender-divergent use of that space. It is a mobile rather than a static use.

Bridger calls for two key ideas to make psychogeography useful in feminist methodology: the embodied subject and heteronormativity (287). In "The Facilities," a chapter of *Gender Failure,* Coyote writes, "I can hold my pee for hours" (205), reporting the painful invisible body modifications imposed by gendered spaces. Heteronormativity—because Coyote experiences flirting from all sides—is also often on show, alternately amusing, uncomfortable, and dangerous. In Spoon's *First Spring Grass Fire* (2012), heteronormativity is an agonizing trap. Yet gender normativity also blocks their inclusion even in queer communities: a late chapter of *Gender Failure* is entitled "How to Be Gay When the Gays Won't Have You." As Coyote points out, there is a way in which public spaces are never possessed by gender-deviant people, no matter how familiar they are: "yesterday in the women's change room at the gym where I have been going for decades, I was referred to as a 'freak of nature'" (204). Given this prohibition against belonging to a given space, a prohibition cisgendered people feel empowered to enforce verbally, physically, and legally, it is unsurprising that these gender-divergent psychogeographies engage movement and its sensations as much as or more than a static sense of location. Remaining stationary is a problematic condition.

The accumulated works of Coyote and Spoon provide detailed public multimedia records of two queer gender-divergent psychogeographies of Western Canada. These writings and performances are deeply engaged with the idea of place. They invite geographical reading, citing Western Canadian locations as expressive of principles of identity. Both signal strong relationships—positive and negative—to specific regions of Western Canada. Coyote's loyalty to the people and the landscapes of the Yukon appears consistently throughout their stories. Compare Rae Spoon's estimate, in the autobiographical 2013 film *My Prairie Home*, that they have crossed Canada fifteen times. This constant motion becomes a key to reading these geographies: they are not always so attached to the specifics of a given landscape as even the texts themselves profess. For example, these stories repeat the familiar queer geographical trope of leaving the confining small town for the liberating big city. However, read within both artists' body of work, this is only one instance among many of an embodiment expressed as motion or relocation, rather than location.

Coyote: Yukon/Vancouver/California

In Ivan Coyote's 2002 collection *One Man's Trash*, there is a strongly marked regional divide between two kinds of stories. The Yukon is the site of childhood, Vancouver of adulthood. The Yukon stories often have to do with vivid bodily experience. This experience isn't idyllic: embodiment is often defined through painful or risky activities. In "It Doesn't Hurt," Coyote writes about "comb ball," an invented sport that results in an escalating series of injuries: welts, "carpet burn, bruised elbows and knees," a sprained wrist, and eventually a broken thumb (22-23).

In Vancouver, bodily experience is replaced by domestic experience, specifically the domestic pleasures of furnishing a home. Conventionally feminine-gendered, urban, and middle-classed activities are experienced as pleasurable by the bemused working-class rural butch. Household

objects become the focus of detailed attention: a vacuum (*One Man's Trash* 55), new drinking glasses (51), or a freezer (*The Slow Fix* 61). Further, when relating adult experiences, Coyote is more likely to write about external manifestations of gender rather than the experience of embodiment, pain, or pleasure. There could be many reasons for this change of focus, of course: privacy, discretion, audience awareness, ambivalence. However, the effect in terms of story is to situate *bodily* experience in childhood, the past, and the Yukon, and a *socially* gendered subjectivity in another region entirely, Vancouver.

Yet there is a return to embodied physicality in Coyote's writings. In "Many Moons," a chapter of *Gender Failure*, Coyote goes swimming six weeks post chest surgery. They describe this moment: "[I] felt one thousand remembered swims flood back into my body. A twelve-year-old body. An eight-year-old body. My five-year-old, flat-chested frame . . . all these swims in my before body" (185). The scene is moving—not so much because of the surgery, since there is no absolute identity being confirmed here—but because bodily experience has returned into the realm of the expressible. Yet this moment does not come about through a literal physical return to the Yukon. The swimming scene takes place on an unnamed campus in California, among a group of memoir writers. So Coyote goes north by going south and finds the Yukon in California.

Spoon vs. Calgary: Out in the Cold

> II.
> There would be a map here
> A digital crystal of snow
> Spinning over Calgary
> A page that can't load
>
> Secret feature: tap the edge
> And the map flips over
> The underside red
>
> As the raw country under skin
> The legend says: hellfire
> —Julian Gunn

This psychogeographical mapping onto landscape is even more marked in Rae Spoon's 2012 memoir *First Spring Grass Fire*. Despite signalling a prairie identity, Spoon ultimately takes refuge in the figurative landscape of a glacier. For Spoon, there is no equivalent of Coyote's Yukon. In *First Spring Grass Fire*, despite the title, the primary physical sensations of Calgary are cold, numbness, disembodiment, and weightlessness. Spoon affectingly describes the experience of panic attacks as a loss of bodily presence (90-91). In both *First Spring Grass Fire* and *Gender Failure*, anorexia is a mode of bodily control and resistance, but also a manifestation of a sense of disappearance in the face of the combined annihilating forces of a violent father and a homophobic, misogynist church (*Gender Failure* 116; *First Spring* 91). A memory of abuse triggers a vivid and traumatic somatic response, but it also prompts a ferocious determination: they are "willing to do anything to get [their] body back" (*First Spring* 94-95).

In *First Spring Grass Fire*, psychological responses are often spatialized and given both inertia and momentum. The defensive response of Spoon's narrator to situations of harassment and threat is either abrupt physical flight or, when this is not possible, a spatialized internal retreat, for example "ducking low" to evade accusations of gender deviance on the playground (23), as though the words were physical objects with trajectories that could be evaded. Bodily experience in Spoon's writing is strongly spatialized, but notably *un*geographical—dislocated, free-floating, abstracted.

There is no uplifting aquatic restoration of embodiment in Spoon's narratives. There is no safe storage place in geographical memory for bodily sensations, as Coyote has in the Yukon of childhood. Admitting

that they speak more often of the mountains than the prairies when describing where they come from, at the end of both *First Spring Grass Fire* and *My Prairie Home* Spoon proposes, as an alternate site of home, the Athabasca glacier, writing that "I was born in Calgary, but my heart lives in the blue glow under a frozen lake of water on top of a mountain in Alberta" (*First Spring* 137). If "home" is anything, it is the *sensation* conjured by that imagined interior space. This may indeed be true for many people, but these narrators are barred from the assumption that a given place itself will invariably yield the sensation. Home must be portable, because the gender-divergent person is prohibited—in both abstract and concrete ways—from fully inhabiting shared landscapes.

Coyote vs. Spoon: The Drumheller-Calgary Corridor

Clearly, western Canadian cities and landmarks have psychological weight in these narratives. Yet the physical character of these places is not as important as their capacity to store compartmentalized experiences, often separated into bodily vs. social being, and the ability of the narrators to move away from or towards these experiences, traverse them, escape from them or return to them. A case in point is the two artists' contrasting treatment of the Drumheller-Calgary corridor. The route between Drumheller and Calgary features in Spoon's autobiographical work—both *My Prairie Home* and *Gender Failure*—and in Coyote's 2006 novel, *Bow Grip.* In both cases, the journey serves as a psychological—and, in the case of *Bow Grip,* physical—liberation for the protagonist, but the journeys are inverse mirrors of one another.

Although Joey, the cismale protagonist of *Bow Grip*, is heterosexual, I would argue that the novel follows a queer geographical trajectory. Joey travels from a smaller community, Drumheller, to a larger one, Calgary, and finds sexual fulfillment, a chosen family, and a reconnection to his body. His restlessness reads like a transposition of queer restlessness, the small-town-to-big-city trajectory of so many queer memoirs. In Spoon's work, however, Calgary is a prison, "expansive and cold" (*First Spring* 93). Spaciousness is not liberation but an untraversable desolation. The tension between frozen stillness and desperate convulsive movement characterizes Spoon's narratives. Even after years away, visiting the suburbs where the narrator grew up evokes a protective bodily response: they become "sleepy" (*Bow Grip* 136). Conversely, while the small town is stifling for Joey, a brief trip to Drumheller is revelatory for the six-year-old narrator of "1988," the third chapter-essay of *First Spring Grass Fire.* After seeing the enormous skeletons of dinosaurs, the narrator becomes obsessed with finding fossils in the family's garden (17). The dinosaur, symbol of evolutionary theory, represents a covert rebellion against their parents' fervent evangelical Christianity and the family concealments and denials. If uncovered, it would also be the solid physical evidence of their dishonesty, but the narrator never finds any bones. They experience a similar struggle in trying to understand and express the injustice embedded in their family. In *Bow Grip*, dislocation and disorientation are necessary steps on the way to renewal and self-revelation. In *First Spring Grass Fire*, the sense of alienation is so overwhelmingly painful that it cannot be made useful. Physical flight—to a grandmother's house and then to Vancouver—is the only fruitful response. The narrator (like Spoon) goes on to pursue a career as a touring musician—a life of constant motion.

Portable Frontiers and Linguistic Space

In *First Spring Grass Fire*, Spoon writes "It was in movement that I could feel myself in my body. Biking, rollerblading, running,

climbing trees, and building forts were what my body felt good for" (115). In these queer and gender-divergent geographies, trajectory, the sensation of movement, and a mobile sensation of "home" are more important than absolute location or direction. New maps are laid over old ground as psychological processes require. This is a queer use, a *dérive*, of public spaces and of public spatializations. Maps. Geographies.

There are also provisional trans* and queer geographies of the western Canadian landscape, as when Coyote arranges for a queer youth from the north to attend "gay camp" in Edmonton (*Missed Her* 35). Or the young Spoon, protecting even younger siblings from a violent father, instead of running, declares, "I will be a wall," creating a safe territory for the younger children out of their own physical immobility—and, in the song of the same name, through music:

> Hide the children. Hide the children. A storm is coming.
> I will be a wall. I will be a wall.
>
> There are beautiful places that we can hide
> Between the notes and the rhymes.
> I sang for my sister on the darkest nights
> and I sang for my brothers too.
>
> (Spoon, "I Will Be a Wall")

Here, Spoon bodily becomes both boundary and frontier, the defining location between the violent exterior dominated by the father and an interior of respite and even beauty.

Though they are collaborators, Coyote and Spoon create very different psycho-geographical records. What they share is a subjectivity in motion, in traversal, in the overlay of places and times, the divergent use of collectively imagined space. In the film *My Prairie Home* (2014), Spoon describes a bus journey: "you can't be where you're going yet and you can't be where you've left, so you're kind of in this in-between space." After trying first to live as a woman and then as a trans* man, Spoon declared gender retirement. Refusing finally to reconstruct a personal history in order to fit an adopted category, Spoon marks a moment of emergence, an identity with lineage but without a definitive history. Refusing to allow a category to be determined for them, Coyote answers a silent public question quietly and firmly: "do I still call myself a butch?" reads a chapter heading. The chapter, in its entirety, reads: "yes, of course I still do" (*Gender Failure* 195).

As I discussed these ideas with friends and colleagues, I was surprised to find that the singular "they" used by Coyote and Spoon is still an active challenge for many. Far from comfortably accepting this relocation/repurposing of the pronoun, many people, including many queer and trans* people, resist the singular "they" on grammatical grounds. I should not have been surprised; I should have remembered that, despite being trans myself, I stumbled over "they" when friends of mine first adopted it. Indeed, my own "mistakes" amounted to resistance against their staking out a gendered territory different from my own, even though I supported them in principle. Spoon writes about their own struggle with the usage and its implications: "here I was again learning pronouns even though I was trans, and had been trans for a long time, and thought I knew so much about trans people. It was humbling" (*Gender Failure* 200-201).

In English, the singular "they" breaches the mutually defining frontier between "she" and "he"; it also changes the space of reference. If we refuse to use it, we refuse gender-divergent people who do not identify as "she" or "he" a place in language. If we use it, and expand its use to refer to any subject whose gender we do not wish or need to specify (and, as Coyote points out, such usage in English goes back at least to Chaucer [*Gender Failure* 221]), we change the linguistic map. Coyote writes:

"I like not gendering my friends when I talk about them . . . it . . . lets their gender become a background detail, and allows other, more personal and relevant details about them shine through . . . [it] skirt[s] around preconceived ideas of who they might be and what they might be capable of" (221-22).

A great many changes would be required to create a collectively imagined spatialization and a physical space that would be genuinely available for trans*, gender-divergent, and gender-retired people to inhabit. The singular "they" is a small linguistic change that brings these divergent experiences closer to the realm of the expressible and comprehensible within common English usage. Rae Spoon and Ivan Coyote have worked for years to make the unobservable perceptible to observers who have been by turns friendly, uncomprehending, skeptical, and hostile to these parallel projects. I come from the Interior, but I have more space out here in the exterior because of the work they have done. My thanks go to them.

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Lesbian Rangers on a Queer Frontier

Jennifer MacLatchy

Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's 1997 performance art piece Lesbian National Parks and Services both invents and explores the frontier of a queer wilderness. They parody the historic role of the park ranger, which was key in composing the dominant narratives of nature that shaped the formation of the Canadian nation (Sandilands 143) as the white European settler expanded west into a new, unknown territory. By embodying this persona, minus the machismo and with their own added lesbian spin, Dempsey and Millan set out to explore a queer wilderness. This is the wilderness as it has not before been explored—at least any such explorations have not been recorded in dominant narratives of Canada as a nation, a nation defined by its wilderness. Dempsey and Millan frame their project using the discourse of conservation, thus aligning queerness with the environmental movement and providing a critique of this movement's embedded focus on heterosexual reproduction (*Field Guide* 21). By interacting with their audience and inviting us to participate, Dempsey and Millan pull us all into the exploration of the "lesbian wilds." Following

their lead and moving our attention from normalized heterosexuality to queerness might allow us to move further into this landscape—away from the masculinist colonial construction of Canadian wilderness, toward a narrative of nature shaped by desire, including queer desire.

Lesbian National Parks and Services

The Lesbian National Parks and Services, first performed in Banff, Alberta, in 1997, uses parody to bring Dempsey and Millan's humorous queer vision of wilderness to life on the streets and trails of Banff National Park.[1] Their piece was a part of a group exhibition called "Private Investigators," curated by Kathryn Walter at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre for the Arts. The eight artists exhibited in "Private Investigators" worked with histories of colonialism, homophobia and sexism, capitalism, and the various identities that have been made invisible and erased from the landscape as a part of the colonial capitalist project of nation-building (Crowston x). Dempsey and Millan employ a feminist and subversive performance art strategy of using personae to create dialogue that questions established norms. They create a parody of the "real" park rangers by standing in as representatives of the Canadian state and mediators of the iconic Canadian "wilderness" (that is, the ideal of a vast landscape that is untouched by humans and therefore pure and wild).

For the three-week duration of the group exhibition, Dempsey and Millan dressed in uniforms similar to those worn by real rangers, complete with the Lesbian National Parks and Services crest sewn onto their shirts and hats. They interacted with the public in Banff National Park and in the town of Banff and successfully "passed" as park rangers, only occasionally causing confusion for those who suddenly realized that they weren't talking to real Parks Canada park rangers after all. The promotional brochure they distributed as part of the project directed people to visit such sites as the "Invisible Lesbian Heritage House and Gardens" and the "Invisible Plaque Dedicated to our Founding Foremothers," which pointed out that some identities (women and lesbians, specifically) and their accomplishments have been made invisible by a dominant narrative that excludes so many parts of history (Dempsey and Millan). They also provided visitors with brochures, presented in the style of informative pamphlets, to educate the public on the importance of respecting diversity in every ecosystem, including neglected lesbian species of all kinds. Dempsey and Millan kept up these activities for the duration of their three weeks in Banff, staying in character at all times such that their presence became more than a performance—their place in Banff and in the so-called "wilderness" of a national park started to seem normal to many who were there (Walter 45).

Their performance did not end after these weeks in Banff: in 2001 they created a small artists' book titled *Handbook of the Junior Lesbian Ranger*. This book includes instructions on how to maintain a proper ranger-like posture, attire, and behaviour, as well as providing a suggestive Junior Ranger motto and salute, and lyrics and music for a Junior Ranger song. The *Handbook* comes with a badge depicting the Junior Lesbian Ranger crest, which can be sewn onto a bag or jacket, so that others can join the performance. A year later, Dempsey and Millan published *The Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America: Flora, Fauna, and Survival Skills*. This book covers various types of lesbian species in the lesbian wilds, and features sections devoted to lesbian-centric survival skills, such as starting a fire, finding your orientation, and what and whom to eat.

In the introduction to their *Field Guide*, Dempsey and Millan explain what gave rise to their vision for *Lesbian National Parks*

and Services. They describe feeling frustrated with the lack of attention paid to the plight of lesbian flora and fauna by official wildlife authorities, and their resulting decision to form an organization to focus on protecting and proliferating this neglected ecosystem (*Field Guide* 20-23). Here, they set up the purpose of their project in the language of environmental conservation, thus countering the common homophobic argument that homosexuality is "against nature." By suggesting that lesbian species and ecosystems are being overlooked by conservation officials who are only concerned with heterosexual species and ecosystems, Dempsey and Millan highlight the heteronormativity of dominant ecological and national narratives.

Park Rangers and the Formation of Nation

Dempsey and Millan's choice to employ the persona of the park ranger for their parody is a strategic one, given certain stereotypes about rugged masculinity that are embedded in this role and what the park ranger represents in the context of Canadian national identity. Catriona Sandilands writes about the historical role of the park ranger in an article titled "Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Rangers: Gender, Nation, and Nature in the Rocky Mountain National Parks." Historically, she explains, the typically white and masculinized park ranger's role was to police the boundary between the European-settler "civilization" and the supposedly uninhabited "wilderness" of Canada—educating "citizens" (white European settlers) by providing patriarchal, heteronormative, and colonial interpretations of nature, while keeping both nature and the so-called "civilization" at a safe distance from each other (146). Of course, the dominant educational and cautionary story of ecology and history within national parks is a version that buttresses the interests of the Canadian state and reinforces the apparent naturalness of colonialism, heterosexuality, and patriarchal gender roles. It does this, for example, by representing First Nations peoples as backwards and uncivilized, in order to frame colonialism as a positive step in an inevitable chain of human evolutionary events (Mackey 126).

If, historically, this role of the park ranger has been to mediate between so-called "civilization" (white European settler) and "wilderness" (as ostensibly yet uncolonized lands), it has served largely to reinforce the idea of Canada as a vast and supposedly empty land, a wilderness conquered and civilized by hardy white European settlers. But in order to imagine Canada as a vast, uninhabited wilderness available for conquest, the original peoples who inhabited the land had to be pushed out and then erased from the social memory of the landscape. Even more to the point, the very designation of certain areas as national parks that were "protected" from the damaging influences of human activity also involves restricting First Nations peoples from their original uses of their own land. The park ranger's role was thus dual: on the one hand, to "protect" this wilderness by policing its boundaries and restricting First Nations access, and, on the other, to protect white settler civilization, with its feminized domestic spaces, from the incursions and dangers of the wild (Sandilands 146). Concepts of "nature" in the Canadian national narrative thus appear to be all about the naturalness and inevitability of heterosexuality and colonialism.

In the present day, park rangers, as employees of the federal agency, Parks Canada, claim a position of authority when they interact with the public, disseminating information that reflects the dominant national narrative. Thus, by initially passing as real park rangers while enacting a lesbian version of nature, Dempsey and Millan are able to reveal some fissures in the narrative of nature and Canadianness. Still, we must

ask: Why is it that they are able to so easily "pass," and so successfully gain access to the authority and credibility necessary to carry out their project of disrupting assumptions about nature? Who has authority over any given matter, and what is it that makes observers so willing to unquestioningly accept their version as fact?

This question is partially addressed by curator Kathryn Walter, in the exhibition catalogue for "Private Investigators." Walter gives an eyewitness account of how Dempsey and Millan interacted with and were received by the public. She explains that, as "out" as it may seem to be to wear the words "Lesbian National Parks and Services" emblazoned on every article of clothing, it was actually very "subtly inserted into public view," because it was presented "with such formality and apparent legitimacy" (45). Walter suggests that it is this formality and posturing, along with their charm and friendliness, which lends the Lesbian Rangers the credibility and authority necessary to go about their project without much trouble.

But, in an article titled "The Lesbian National Parks and Services: Reading Sex, Race, and the Nation in Artistic Performance," Margot Francis explains what is missing from this analysis. Historically, park rangers were white male representatives of the colonial Canadian state, managing the landscape to suit the interests of white European settler society. Dempsey and Millan's whiteness allows them to be recognized as what Eva Mackey calls "Canadian-Canadian": their whiteness means that they project an initial impression of belonging in this place, and the legitimacy of their Canadian citizenship is never contested (Mackey 19). Non-threatening to a mostly white tourist audience, their whiteness, in addition to their crisp uniforms and effective posturing, allows them to access an initial unquestioned authority. This permits spectators to be caught off guard by their lesbo-normative approach to ecology and geography (Francis 133).

But, through trickery and parody, the lesbian park rangers do invite their audience to question the authority of the "real" park rangers and its legitimacy. We might then also question this notion of an idyllic and wondrously beautiful Canada that is presented through Canada's national parks. Can we believe the stories on the placards and displays? Can we believe the stories from Parks Canada representatives, the "real" park rangers? What other stories, alongside those told by lesbian park rangers, are missing from the dominant narrative?

Eyewitness Kyo Maclear explains that, by scrambling and cross-wiring the identities of lesbians and park rangers, Dempsey and Millan confuse the expected social responses to both of these roles. Should the audience vilify and fear them or revere their knowledge and respect them for their protection? Should they be trusted or mistrusted? Should they be kept away from children, treated as social threats, or presented as inspiring role models? (Maclear 57). This scrambled social script, composed of their effective presentation of charming and endearing helpfulness alongside a parody of stereotypes with thinly veiled sexual innuendo, seemed to leave the audience confused, though amused and engaged. The audience, including those of us experiencing their project indirectly, might then wonder: Why are they claiming that there are lesbian species of wildlife? How and why is this "art?" With this sort of questioning comes the potential for identifying cracks in the dominant narrative that naturalizes heterosexuality. Why not lesbian park rangers and lesbian wildlife and heritage sites? How many other identities have also been excluded and forgotten in the dominant (colonial white settler) narratives?

Despite the potential the project had for raising these questions, *Lesbian National Parks and Services* does not provide an

obvious critique of colonialism. Perhaps the artists could have addressed colonialism more directly in their performance or written materials, using satire and parody to highlight the absurdity of some settler claims to land and national identity. Once they had slipped past the public's defences and garnered the attention of their audience, they were able to disrupt audience perceptions by announcing the locations of invisible monuments and lesbian species of plants. They might also have pointed out invisible monuments to First Nations peoples who were driven off their own land in order to create Canada's first national park, or invisible monuments to the thousands of Chinese labourers who died while working to build the railway that allowed white settlers to move into the West to form the town of Banff (Maclear 10). If they had, would it have had the same effect of subtle critique through satire as their descriptions of invisible monuments to lesbians?

When Dempsey and Millan perform their satirical ranger personas, they are not directly presenting their audience with any harsh truths about violence against queer folks, and if they had been, it might have required a different tone from that of their light-hearted satire. Such a shift to the negative by white performers might end up only reproducing colonialism; the violence of colonial history could not be treated with with the same lightness and humour that is central to their project. Can white performers taking on a persona that is riddled with a history of colonialism, the park ranger, unsettle heteronormative assumptions about the natural world, without also reproducing the effect of erasure on First Nations peoples? Would it be possible for white performers to critique the colonial role of the park ranger by poking fun at the absurdity of white settler claims to land and nation? How could it be ensured that this would read as parody and not as a repetition of colonial violence? Francis suggests that, in addition to performing queer subversions, they are also performing the seemingly benign whiteness of the park ranger role (133). She argues that, nonetheless, upon deeper reflection, the lesbian rangers do pose implicit questions about how power relations structure the landscape of national parks by using the benign park ranger persona to subvert and fragment categories and norms (135).

Heteronormativity in Environmental Narratives

As Rachel Loewen Walker explains in an article titled "Becoming Queer: Performance Art and Constructions of Identity," the Lesbian Park Rangers' "detailed re-telling of biology from the lesbian perspective . . . situates the queer—specifically lesbian—identity as the norm through which all else is read, effectively 'decentering the center'" (2). By "decentering the centre," or relocating the marginalized lesbian identity to the centre of their world view and treating it as the norm by which everything else is measured, the lesbian rangers end up performing a shift in what is considered normal. At first, Dempsey and Millan's lesbo-normative narratives about nature seem absurd to the point of hilarity. But, if one considers the reason for this absurdity—the fact that every plant and tree and animal and rock doesn't really embody lesbianism—it becomes clearer that, likewise, the plants and trees and animals and rocks don't adhere to or embody sexual identity at all, despite the way that humans have constructed it. Nevertheless, our dominant narratives suggest otherwise. By narrating a lesbian version of natural history, the lesbian rangers invite their audience to consider the roles of invisible (specifically lesbian) identities in shaping the current physical and social landscapes, and suggest that queerness is not something new, but rather, is rooted as deeply in history as any other identity.

How deeply embedded heteronormative assumptions are in narratives of nature is well-illustrated in David Quammen's 1998 essay "The Miracle of the Geese: A Bizarre Sexual Strategy among Steadfast Birds." Quammen describes heterosexual and monogamous mating habits of some geese, and characterizes these habits as somehow more virtuous than others for their efficiency, suggesting that any other flirtatious or sexual activity is a wasted effort: "They commit themselves to endurance, to each other, to the future—and not to maximizing their sexual options" (238). After extolling these virtues to be found in geese bahaviour, he says: "I was glad to find an ecological mandate for permanent partnership among animals so estimable as *Branta canadensis*" (Quammen 240). He uses his selective observations and selective research to make geese into a shining example of the supposedly pure and natural heterosexual monogamy.

This claim is countered by Alex Johnson in his article "How to Queer Ecology: One Goose at a Time" when he points out that there are plenty of other examples of all sorts of species, including geese, behaving in non-heteronormative ways. Johnson also points out how it is selective observation that allows Quammen to perceive geese as so noble and beautiful; he notes that geese may not always be perceived so positively when "they are shitting all over the lawn and terrorizing young children" (Johnson n. pag.). Quammen's account is just one example of how selective observation is required in order to perceive nature as a heteronormative example for moral order, and there are many more examples of heterosexual and homosexual interaction between animals, sexual and asexual reproduction amongst plants, as well as unruly displays of desire of all sorts between all kinds of creatures. These ecological examples of queerness, Johnson argues, aren't meant to be justification for the naturalness of queerness. Rather, he argues for a complication of the concept of nature. "What, then, is natural? All of it. None of it. Instead of using the more-than-human world as justification for or against certain behavior and characteristics, let's use the more-than-human world as a humbling indication of the capacity and diversity of all life on earth" (Johnson n. pag.).

Indeed, with their performance of *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, Dempsey and Millan take their critique beyond the specifics of sexual practices amongst various species. Their lesbo-centric spin on everything in their path points out the unruly complexity of nature. In asking the audience to imagine the possibilities of a queer-centric narrative of ecosystems and nature and a queer-centric narrative of settler-Canadian national identity, they invite their audience to come along on their imaginative and exploratory journey into the frontier of a queer-centric concept of wilderness that embraces the vast capacity for diversity amongst the more-than-human world.

A Queer Wilderness Frontier

Dempsey and Millan place their own lesbian feminist identities at the centre of Canadian national identity and ask us to imagine, and then understand, what kind of difference a shift in the norm can make to our understandings of nature. Their playful and humorous approach to the iconic park ranger persona thus helps us to ask questions about sexuality and gender in nature; and indirectly also about race and national identity. It seems, then, that perhaps instead of insisting upon a homonormative narrative of nature to override the heteronormative narrative, the homonormative narrative serves to uproot the heteronormative narrative by exposing its absurdity. A queer narrative of nature wouldn't necessitate that any form of sexuality or gender be natural or unnatural; rather, it would point to the complexities and fluidity of various facets of human identity. With the kind of

playful exploration that the lesbian park rangers invite their audience to participate in, we might find ourselves discovering seemingly uncharted territory. As lost as we may initially feel in a landscape that is no longer governed by predictable rules of heteronormativity, the welcoming of this unknown may be more crucial than any attempts at undoing tidy borders of settler-patriarchy-defined order in order to replace it with a new order.

So it seems that Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's original performance of *Lesbian National Parks and Services* has lived past the three-week duration of their original performance. Supported by their whiteness, their parody and critique was able to slip easily into the busy tourist spaces of a national park. It was thus able to do the work of confusing and unsettling assumptions about authority on national history, as well as the inherent heteronormativity and colonialism within narratives of national origins. By parodying the real park rangers, Dempsey and Millan use humour to point out some gaps in our histories and stories where certain identities are left out. Their performance counters dominant narratives about the naturalness and moral superiority of heterosexuality and makes use of the language of environmental conservation to emphasize the inherent value of specifically lesbian ecosystems. Most important, perhaps, is their invitation to join them and become complicit in this imaginative exploration of a queer-centric version of wilderness. They invite us all to become explorers, of a different kind—explorers who seek not to conquer or colonize or to write down any factual assumptions about the naturalness of any particular identity or desire or to define landscape within tidy borders on a map. Rather, they invite us to explore and question, and to find ourselves immersed in the complexity of an unruly wilderness that defies easy definitions.

Perhaps here, in embracing the unruliness of nature, and likewise, the unpredictability of human identities and desires, is where we might find ourselves at the frontier of a queer ecology: a different understanding of "wilderness," without the constrictions of assumed heterosexuality, as inherently queer in its unruliness, messiness and unpredictability.

NOTE

1 For more information on Dempsey and Millan's performances, see their website: www.fingerinthedyke.ca.

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Got Any Grapes?: Reading Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*

Robin Ridington

Prologue

The Back of the Turtle is about stories within stories. Like the storied lives of people in First Nations cultures, the characters in Thomas King's latest novel lead multiply storied lives. Some of the stories have Christian origins. Others are unique to First Nations. Some are from popular culture, like the joke about a duck that walks into a bar and asks, "Got any grapes?" This joke in turn links to a popular mind worm, "The Duck Song." For the characters themselves as well as for the author, these stories and others come together to form a whole. If Coyote were a storyteller, which he is, one of his names would be Thomas King.

The *Back of the Turtle* is not about ducks any more than it is just about resurrection or The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, although all these and other stories enter into it. Muskrat is a better candidate for diving down and bringing up the world. There are turtles in the story too. In some First Nations stories the turtle carries the world on its back. Here King brings all these stories together. From now on I'll just refer to him as Tom. Canadians know him as Tom from the CBC Radio program, "The Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour" that ran from 1997 to 2000. Each episode was actually only fifteen minutes, but hyperbole and inflation are to be expected on air; Tom doesn't stand on formalities.

Tom's *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* was first given orally, and later became a book. Each chapter began with another version of the turtle story. Like all of Tom's writing, *The Back of the Turtle* is as much about stories as it is about Indians or turtles, but as a novel the story has a narrative structure. I use the term Indian rather than the current First Nations as that's the word Tom uses. Within the narrative are stories of the destructive hubris of western civilization balanced by stories of creation. Indian stories came before books, and with any luck will be here as long as people tell stories. The Bible contains lots of stories, and most of these probably existed before books. For thousands of years though, they have existed within the containment of written words, despite generations of exegetes who made their livings performing them from the pulpit or, more recently, on radio and television. Indians' stories have a different life. Their stories are as ephemeral as vibrations in air and as enduring as the passage of one generation into another. They don't vanish with the supposedly vanishing Indian.

Tom begins this book with a medley of creation stories and lots of characters to choose from. There is The Woman Who Fell from the Sky. There is God, known here as Dad, whom Nietzsche (and the Dead Dog Cafe) proclaimed to be dead. There is Sonny, his son, who wields Thor's hammer but also collects salvage, and there is a dog named Soldier, who died in Tom's *Truth and Bright Water* but has returned now when he is needed. There is Nicholas Crisp, known in English history for manufacturing beads and probably trading slaves. Here he is pretty frisky, despite being even older than God. He has goat thighs like the god Pan. The human characters have mythic resonances in the same way that mythic

characters have human attributes. God the father and God the son, Dad and Sonny.

Gabriel Quinn is an Indian from Lethbridge, Alberta. His mother was from Smoke River on Samaritan Bay on the BC coast. His name suggests Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel and maybe Bob Dylan's "Quinn the Eskimo." Quinn took an engineering degree at Stanford and became chief scientist at the biotech company, Domidion. The name resonates with the Old Testament promise for man to have dominion over nature (*Genesis* 1:26). It certainly resonates with the names of biotech companies like Monsanto.

Quinn, as Domidion's Head of Biological Oversight, developed a version of the genetically modified bacterium *Klebsiella planticola* SDF 20 into a monster Domidion called Green Sweep. Green Sweep, it turned out, has the ability to kill any plant it contains. Tom didn't make this up, either. A mutant *Klebsiella planticola* called SDF 20 (Raine n.pag.) was really developed and nearly escaped. In a bizarre twist that only big pharma can explain, SDF 20 is also a proprietary code name for Sildenafil, also known as Viagra. Sounds like Coyote at work. Green Sweep caused "The Ruin" in which Indians and turtles living on Samaritan Bay disappeared (48). (Tom is certainly aware that a poem called *The Ruin* is probably the earliest piece of literature written in English).

The Story

Stories sometimes say as much about what is unsaid, but mutually understood by teller and listener, as they do about what is actually said. I once wrote:

> The discourse of Native people takes place within real time, but it is meaningful in relation to a time of mind, a mythic time. Performer and listener share both a common time frame and a complementary knowledge of that mythic world. They share a common responsibility to the names that are fabulous in their lands. Their relationship to the names and to one another is conversational. (Ridington 276)

Quinn disappears mysteriously from his office at Domidion, as does the turtle kept in a tank at the company's headquarters. He leaves enigmatic writing on the wall of his rented bungalow: Bhopal, Chernobyl, Pine Ridge, Grassy Narrows. The Book of Daniel tells a story about King Belshazzar, who used sacred vessels stolen from Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem for a feast. Suddenly, a disembodied hand appeared and wrote these words on the wall: *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting" (Daniel 5: 25-28). That night the king was killed and his city taken by the Persians. Quinn, like Daniel, has found Domidion wanting. As a balance to this destruction, he also wrote out the story of The Woman Who Fell from the Sky. Having destroyed turtles and Indians, Quinn now has an obligation to help create a new world from the one Domidion destroyed. Quinn is desperate to remove the guilt he feels for having created yet another environmental disaster, a left-handed creation.

The story begins with a Prologue. At first light, the shore of Samaritan Bay is in shadows. Crisp and Master Dog share an apple. "It's the stuff of creation," Crisp tells his companion (1). No prohibition here about eating forbidden fruit. The God who issued that decree hasn't been seen for a long time. Maybe he has transformed himself into the dog, Soldier. As we learn later, that would make Soldier and Crisp brothers. A figure emerges from the trees and begins his final descent to the beach. "There he be, as you predicted . . . but just remember, this be your idea," Crisp says to Master Dog (1-2). The figure that emerges is Quinn, who has left Domidion and traveled to Smoke River. This is where his mother, Rose, came from and returned to; it's where she, Quinn's sister Lilly, and Lilly's son Riel died.

Quinn has come here to walk into the sea at low tide and climb onto rocks known as the Apostles. Quinn has brought a drum with him and plans to sing as the tide rises. As he sings, the ocean will wash away his transgressions. "It was going to be a good day," he thinks, echoing "a good day to die," (5) a phrase attributed to Crazy Horse and repeated by Dustin Hoffman in *Little Big Man*. He slipped off his cloth-and-leather jacket with "Crow Fair—Powwow Capital of the World" written on it. He slipped off the rest of his clothes.

But then something unexpected happened. A hand reached out from the water. But this hand was not disembodied. It was the hand of a young girl. He found his jacket and wrapped it around her. He began to sing a fierce grass-dance song. On the Apostles he began to act like a good Samaritan. He made his way from there to the beach and emerged from the sea naked as the day he was born. He found the dog waiting for him. Above the beach is the Ocean Star Motel, whose motto, "Follow the Star," is a reference to the Magi in the Nativity story. Quinn emerged to receive the message of redemptive salvation. It's getting to sound a lot like a story from the Christian gospels, but maybe there's something worth saving from these stories too. Maybe, like The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, he is looking for a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Samaritan Bay without the Indians is a strange place. Crisp and Sonny live there. Dad lived there in motel room number one, Sonny in number two and Crisp in number three, but Dad's room seems to be empty. Dad and Crisp are brothers from primal stories of ancient times. Because Dad hasn't been seen lately Sonny tries to be the "beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). He is disappointed that Dad doesn't seem to be listening. Sonny likes to break things with his hammer, but he also collects salvage. He is from a different generation than Dad and Crisp. He is still new to putting broken pieces together, but he is learning. He really wants the turtles to return.

The cast of characters assembles as the story begins. Sonny is on the beach looking for salvage, for salvation, but there are no turtles and no Indians, except for Quinn. That is soon to change. A woman in jeans and a blue shirt wades in the surf toward where Quinn is lying, still naked. The woman is Mara Reid, a real live Indian who used to live on the Smoke River reserve. Her best friend was Lilly, Quinn's sister, but he doesn't know that yet. Mara begins a conversation:

> I've seen you out here several times.
> I'm trying to kill myself.
> You're not very good at it.

Mara recognizes Quinn's first name from the story about The Woman who Fell from the Sky. "Gabriel, like the left handed twin," she says (36).

The Back of The Turtle weaves together stories from different times and places. Gabriel surrounds himself with growing friendships. Sonny with his hammer becomes a friend. The dog, whose name he thinks is Soldier, becomes a friend. Crisp, who speaks in the language of the King James Bible, becomes a friend. Mara becomes a friend and maybe, as the story ends, more. After all, with only one more letter in her name she would be the mother of God, and he could be the first man as well as the annunciator, at least in that other story. Not a bad friend to have if you are a left-handed twin whose role is to put rocks and waterfalls in all the rivers that had always flowed easily downstream before. Not a bad friend if you had invented Green Sweep that eliminated both her family and your own, and turned the Smoke River reserve into an "authentic aboriginal ghost town" (99).

Creation and Destruction

Mara and Crisp tell the story that is central to this book. They tell it while luxuriating in

the watery world of the hot springs where Crisp likes to spend his time. Everyone there is naked as is appropriate for telling an elemental tale. The story they tell is "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky." It isn't really a fundamental creation story since it begins with an existing world and an existing woman and a digging stick and a woman's curiosity. There might have been a man in that world too, since it turns out the woman is pregnant although she's just ornery enough to have done it on her own. In that other creation story a woman doesn't get pregnant without at least some sort of divine intervention. What's creative about the story is that it is conversational, dialogic to use a more academic term. Unlike that other creation story which is a monologue, this one freely shares words and motivations and yes, desires. "It's a story," Crisp says, "that comes with the land, and the two are forever wedded" (222). A wedding, at least a good one, is the ultimate in conversational intimacy. The story and the land are in communication. Indians have always known about these things. Gabriel and Mara are waiting for this conversation to happen between them, despite Gabriel's big mistake. They are both Indians, after all. Their shared stories go back thousands of years.

In that other land in the sky, the woman digs for tubers under the roots of an old tree. Tom calls her Charm in *The Truth about Stories*, but she could also be named Mara in this story. The storyteller easily becomes a storied character as she tells the story. That world is "somewhere high above this plane, somewhere in the black realm of space" (223), but it can be connected to the world we live in, a world the woman helps bring into being. She falls toward a world that is only water, and her fall is broken by water birds, maybe even ducks. There is no land and the only place they can put her is the back of a turtle. They gently lower her down. So this part of the story is not really about creation either. Ducks and turtles and water and, it turns out, other water beings including Muskrat, already exist. But the story and the woman cannot rest where they are for long. If she can't go back to that other world, she needs to find a new one down below. Things get even more crowded on the turtle's back when she gives birth to twins, one left-handed and the other right-handed.

I know the next part of the story really well and have told it myself to lots of people. I heard it from Dane-zaa storytellers (Ridington and Ridington n.pag.) and have made it my own to share. As Crisp tells it, "So our woman calls all the creatures together and announces a contest . . . a diving contest and all are welcome to participate. The first to reach the bottom and bring up a ball of mud wins" (232). The one who succeeds in Crisp's story, as in the Dane-zaa one, is Muskrat. In the Dane-zaa version a being that lives in the sky has floated a raft on the water and that's where Muskrat places the tiny dot of earth found beneath his nails. It is a raft instead of a turtle, which makes sense since there are no turtles in Dane-zaa country. In Crisp and Mara's version, Muskrat places his mud on the back of the turtle: "Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (*Truth* 29)

Stories have a way of taking strange twists and turns, at least as Tom tells them. Dad and Crisp, a previous generation of twins, had their own moment of creation. As Crisp puts it, "In another time Dad and me were loose in the world, astride the universe with grand designs, him with his assurances and admonishments, me with my appetites and adventures. We believed we was elemental and everlasting" (*Turtle* 238-39). The right-handed twin made things straight and the left-handed brother made them twisted. Dad seems to have disappeared long ago, but Crisp is very much alive, being the fixer-upper.

In Tom's story it is up to Gabriel, a new left-handed twin, to become a fixer-upper

who wants to become right-handed, to realize his mistakes and try to make things right again. When Mara learns that Gabriel is responsible for killing her family and his own, she tells him to go drown himself, but in the end, she has a change of mind. When he tells her, "I don't want to save myself," she replies, "All right. . . . Then you can save me" (475). An element of Christian mythology floods in, sort of. Gabriel tries to kill himself for having created Green Sweep and causing The Ruin, but finds salvation in his conversation with the woman who tells the story about The Woman Who Fell from the Sky. His own salvation comes from saving the woman he is in conversation with, maybe even in love with, not himself. In the end it is not one twin who is bad and the other good. It is a cosmic union of the two that creates a balance. And on the human level, the lives of Gabriel and Mara promise to come together to create new life. They are likely to be better at it than Adam and Eve. They are in conversation and they are equally responsible for what happens next. There's no snake and no shame in this story.

The Question

On first go round I thought in terms of oppositions, right and left, creative and destructive, good and evil. In this reading of the story, the twins were rooted in their identities as right-handed and left-handed, Dad and Crisp, from a primal generation. Maybe I was thinking of that other story where they were Gabriel and Michael, Jehovah and Lucifer. Helen Hoy gave me some clues: "Right handed isn't good and left handed undesirable. Rather, the balance they create together is what is needed. It's not about driving out bad with good as in Christian mythology" (Hoy n. pag.). So maybe it's better to think about balance and complementarity rather than opposition. Dad is missing but Dog is very much alive. Rather than being dyslexic, he's ambidextrous. Gabriel doesn't really need to be redeemed for his transgressions. He just needs to relax into who he really is, just as earlier in the story he relaxed in Mara's embrace and felt good about it.

Sonny may help out here. He himself has twin natures. One side is Thor who wields a hammer of destruction. The other side is dedicated to salvage and, as the son of Dad, to salvation. It is Sonny's cobbled together beacon on the beach that brings the turtles back, first Domidion's missing turtle and then the rest: "Already there were signs of resurrection at the edges of desolation" (344). That's a pretty good clue that the Christian story has legs. We can't forget that lots of Indian people have heard that story and made it their own.

Indian stories are not supposed to provide all the answers. They are supposed to generate questions, as the listener makes the circle of stories his or her own. Indian stories provide clues for the listener to become the storyteller. Stories written in books often impose answers rather than generate questions. Tom is pretty good at putting Indian stories into a book without making them canonical. His book can be enjoyed on many levels. First of all, it's just a good story with lots of interesting dialogue and some telling criticism of the damage caused by industrial society. But then again, it's a densely layered and erudite composition of Indian and non-Indian stories. It even includes a nod to the Duck Song, although he may have only been thinking about a joke by his friend, the actor Graham Green (Hoy n. pag.). Folklore is like that. It gets around and sometimes turns up in unexpected places, like the back of the turtle.

The relationship between Gabriel and Mara is still evolving as the book ends, but as characters in Indian stories, they are in conversation. Crisp has a wait-and-see attitude about whether things will work out between them, but Soldier, being a dog, is "known to favour happy endings." The book

concludes as it began, with Crisp and Master Dog in conversation on the beach at Samaritan Bay. Despite his great antiquity, Crisp is happy to tell his companion, "I am well" (518). And echoing him, all is becoming better in the world. Indians and turtles and birds and otters have returned. Even ravens have "returned in force, forever unsympathetic" (517). Sonny is now the one who needs Soldier's protection and nurturing. As Crisp instructs Master Dog, "Look after the lad, for our Gabriel don't need ye anymore" (518).

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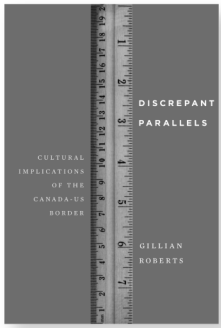

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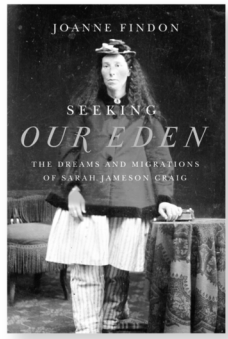

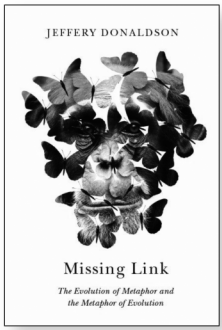

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