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FALL 2007 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

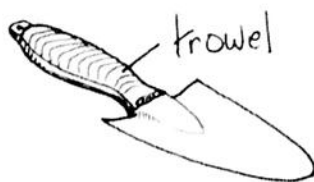
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10TH
ANNIVERSARY
CONTEST
SEE PAGE 8

Bohemian Rhapsody

Louis Rastell's *A Fine Finding* revisits
Montreal's pre-millennial underground

INSIDE: | FICTION NEWCOMERS | MARTINE DESJARDINS' *A COVENANT OF SALT* | QWF SHORTLIST

Mulch for the mind.



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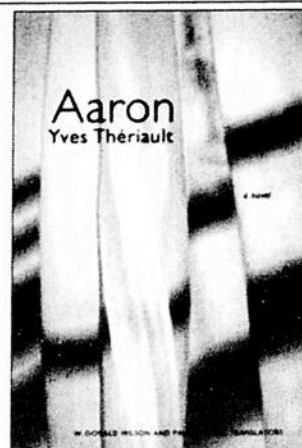
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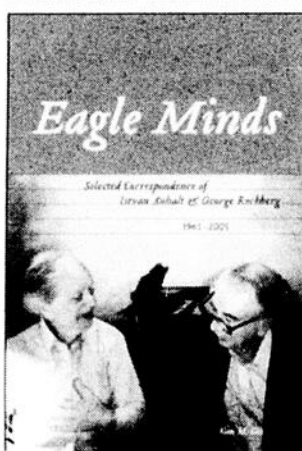
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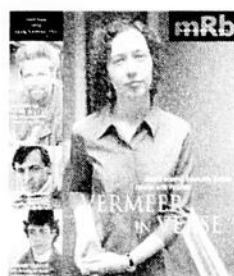
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Cover photo and inside photo of Louis Rastelli by T.P. Byrnes

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10 years



The first **Montreal Review of Books** hit the streets in October 1997. In the decade since, the **mRb** has given visibility to many of Quebec's best and most intriguing English-language writers. Thanks to our faithful advertisers over the years, our reviewers, writers, translators, and illustrators, our English-language publishers, Terry Byrnes for his photographs and David LeBlanc who gives the **mRb** its unique style. And a big thank you to the Canada Council of the Arts, Department of Canadian Heritage and to SODEC – your support is crucial and appreciated.

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By Ian McGillis

Cheap Rents, Rich Life

Indie culture stalwart Louis Rastelli's full-length fiction debut renders a local scene universal

Every good bohemia needs its chroniclers, people who are of the scene but in crucial ways a little outside it too. People who, among the chaos and the excess and the occasional lassitude and the living for the moment, keep enough perspective to get it all down. Louis Rastelli was very much a part of the Montreal Plateau scene in the '90s, that recessionary era that encompassed the Referendum and the Ice Storm and culminated (fizzled out?) with Y2K. And he was definitely taking notes. The result, part elegy, part celebration, part parallel-universe *Friends*, is *A Fine Ending*. It's an episodically structured novel whose charms may take some time to make themselves felt but whose parts eventually coalesce into a vivid, funny and touching record of a unique time and place. If you weren't there, don't worry. Rastelli was.

It shouldn't be surprising that the author is a dyed-in-the-wool Montrealer. "I was adopted," says the 40-year-old over a beer in the back patio of Casa del Popolo on Boulevard St-Laurent. "My real mother as well as adopted mother are French Canadian. Both my parents were born in Montreal, pretty much the entire family on both sides still live in Montreal and has done since WWI or before, and everyone has always spoken both English and French."

Looking over his largely unsung but crucial role in Montreal's indie culture of the past 15 years it's clear that Rastelli is one of those people who, once baptized into the do-it-yourself ethos of punk rock, never looked back. A tireless self-starter, he's been a cottage-industry publisher of both chapbooks and zines (his long-running *Fish Piss* has given many Montreal writers their first exposure), a grassroots entrepreneur (his Distroboto chain sells small artworks and books out of reclaimed cigarette machines), and organizer of the ever-expanding Expozine, the annual Montreal fair for independent publishers. Through all this he has remained an inveterate archivist and pack rat, a tendency that came in very handy when it was suggested he write a novel.

"I went through literally over a thousand different files – text files, emails, journal entries, stuff from notepads – to make sure I didn't miss anything interesting, whether it was an episode or just a good line," he says. "Anything to make that era come alive. Even though what I kept barely amounted to 10% of what a novel needs to be, it was great to have that source material, written fresh in the voice that I had back then."

The scenesters of *A Fine Ending*, like those of bohemias through the ages, show a mix of political awareness and social aloofness. The '95 Referendum, a crucial event in the era described, hardly seems to impinge on the consciousness of these partiers. I ask Rastelli if this was a conscious choice.

"That was a decision influenced by the desire to make the story universal. I felt the Referendum would have stuck out a bit too much. I do mention the (post-) Referendum riot, which hardly anyone knows about. I think it was kept out of the media at the time to keep our dollar from plunging. The Ice Storm, on the other hand, tied in very well. At the time it was taken almost as a preview of how the millennium might play out. It was fascinating to see nature take over like that, to be in

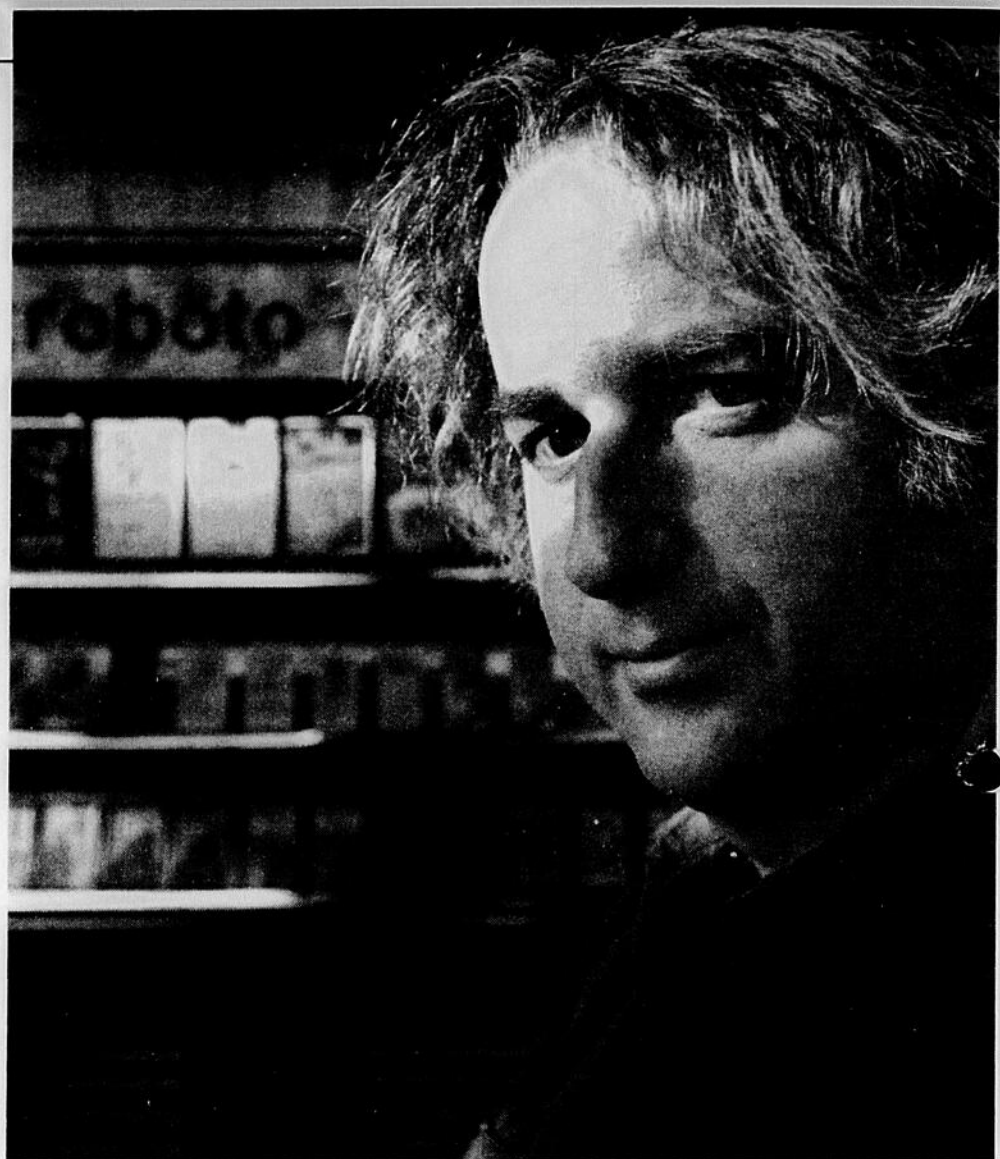
this modern urban space but back at an 1850s stage in terms of infrastructure."

I suggest that, especially given Rastelli's pedigree, some non-Montreal readers may be surprised at how little francophone presence there is in *A Fine Ending*.

"There were parts, that I kind of regret having had to cut, that did deal more with francophone Montreal. But the fact is that our circle was overwhelmingly anglophone. I used to joke that it was impossible to meet anyone who was actually from Montreal. It was at the time when the Plateau started becoming a melting pot of other Canadians. I can hardly count the number of people I know here from Halifax, Winnipeg, Victoria. In a way that serves the story well, because it keeps it more universal. It's obviously very strongly tied to Montreal, but other cities and artists' scenes aren't terribly different – cheap rents, fairly typical cliques of people."

While people who were there will have hours of fun trying to spot themselves and others among the fictionalized characters, Rastelli stresses that they are just that – characters.

"From the get-go it seemed obvious that if I was going to (fictionalize) some people, I'd have to do it with everyone. For me, during the process, it became seductive to mix up some real stuff with made-up stuff, or things that were hearsay at the time, to have the license to make things flow and have a consistent set of characters. Inasmuch as there are characters closely based on real people, including me (the narrator's name is Louis), it was fun boiling things together, streamlining, culling. The few times where I let friends read certain passages based on incidents that they might have remembered, I was happy to see that the reaction was generally, 'Wow...I'd almost totally forgotten about that, but that's really how it was.' Nobody seemed to have any problem with possibly being recognized. And if anybody does have any issues, the thing I would probably tell them is, 'Well, then, it's up to you not to say anything about possibly being one of those characters.'"



"The Ice Storm was taken almost as a preview of how the millennium might play out."

A striking feature of the lifestyle shown in *A Fine Ending* is how these people treat their urban environment as, essentially, one big source of reclaimable life necessities. In '90s Montreal, it seems, it took only a little creativity and determination to live on next to nothing. Rastelli agrees, and points out how the notion is far from dead.

"I was excited to read, in the months since I finished the book, about the term that's been coined for people who do precisely that: the freegans. People who never pay for anything, including food. They go to restaurants and get table scraps, they raid bins, go to garage sales and sidewalk stalls. There's organizations of these people, especially in New York. They have swap meets, weekly dinners where everybody brings food that they've found for free. In a way that's how we all lived back then and to some extent still do. I hardly know anyone who buys chairs or tables or couches. We have moving day still. Nobody wanted to spend their hard-earned money on anything other than beer or music equipment or in my case publishing my little books. Part of it is just fun, like exploring abandoned buildings and seeing what people have left behind on moving day. It's a whole discovery thing. It was one of the ways that many of us had of living on...what was welfare at the time? \$346 a month? A hell of a lot of people lived on that and maybe a bit of busking or some other sundry activity."

One of the most impressive qualities of *A Fine Ending* is its gradually growing undertow of melancholy. How much of this is a function of the historical setting as opposed to just generally knowing that all parties must eventually pack up?

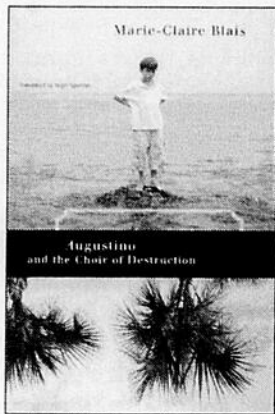
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fiction

Difficult questions

AUGUSTINO AND THE CHOIR OF DESTRUCTION

By Marie-Claire Blais
Translated by Nigel Spencer
House of Anansi
\$21.95, paper, 221pp
ISBN 978-0-88784-752-3



In her new novel, the last in a trilogy set on an island in the Gulf of Mexico, Marie-Claire Blais poses a difficult question – What constitutes a successful life? – in a retro stream-of-consciousness style that may raise eyebrows today.

Friends and family gather to celebrate matriarch Mère's 80th birthday. The party is "a triumph," with free-flowing champagne and inter-generational dancing. But conversation veers, in typical Blais fashion, to darker topics, such as the plight of AIDS-infected orphans in impoverished regions of Africa.

"I really don't think I deserve all this when you consider the world as it is," says a chastened Mère, who suddenly wonders how she could have made it to such an advanced age without having lifted a finger to help a single orphan. Her host, an interior designer who is often jetting off to Paris, shushes her

with, "Oh why think about it all the time."

The story ostensibly runs the course of this all-night party, but the narration flits in and out of the minds of the different characters, a cultured bunch with ties to many different countries, whose thoughts often turn to names and events from world history: Van Gogh's "compassionate" yellow and Rosa Parks's determination stand in contrast to the Holocaust, the killing fields, and Hiroshima.

When Mère, a family woman and patron of the arts, reflects back on her own life, she doesn't measure herself against her immediate peers but against the ultimate career woman, Marie Curie, who famously fell into a depression shortly after accepting her second Nobel Prize. "Marie Curie was a woman of renown, the Mozart of science [...] but still [...] she might not have thought her life a success, it is possible she left this world with doubts."

Mère goes so far as to take details from her own life and apply them to Curie's, giving her own daughter's name to Curie's two children. This makes it difficult for readers to distinguish between the two women's stories, an effect that does not appear to have been accidental. Blais's style, both in this book and in the others that precede it in the trilogy, is unapologetically

Modernist, with echoes of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner.

The punctuation, or lack thereof, is a case in point. There are no chapter or paragraph breaks and very few sentences. Instead Blais moves from thought to thought, from person to person, with nothing more than a comma to mark transitions:

... did Olivier have the right to punish and hate when he had a wife and son who adored him, what is the point to our love and our tolerance and our pity, what point, for every day hate kills, hate kills, and Ari looked at his daughter as she slept with her toys.

The author seems fully aware of the rigours of her art, making tongue-in-cheek references to characters whose artistic work is intentionally difficult, including one "inflexible" choreographer whose shows are deemed "oppressive."

Fortunately, Blais can pull off this complicated style. A writer with a long history – she published her first novel in 1959 at age 20 and has won three Governor General's Literary Awards for French-language fiction – she has the skill to guide the readers to the book's gently optimistic conclusion with or without the help of conventional punctuation.

The English version of *Augustino* comes courtesy of Nigel Spencer, who was a finalist for a Governor General's award for his translation of the second instalment in this trilogy, *Thunder and Light*. (Sheila

Fischman translated the first as *These Festive Nights*.) Spencer's translation is true to the original, with all of the characters – all of humanity – as guests at the same party, united by thought, history, and art. **B**

By Anne Chudobiak, a Montreal writer.

The author seems fully aware of the rigours of her art.

Evoking panic and apathy

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SKY

By Peter Dubé
Livres DC Books
\$18.95, paper, 158pp
ISBN 987-1-89719-019-7

In Peter Dubé's collection of "fictions," the reader enters into a strange world of the author's creation, one outside the world of the everyday. Most of the action occurs in dark places: basements, storm sewers, darkened cruising areas. Each of the 11 pieces is named for a figure from Greek mythology. Most are readily recognizable, others less so. Some background knowledge on the reader's part would be helpful, otherwise the symbolism might be missed.

"Cerberus" is named for the three-headed dog which guards Hades. Its

characters find themselves trapped without light in a sewer they had been exploring. A sense of panic is skilfully evoked.

While "At the Bottom of the Sky" is a portrayal of lives on the margins, it is also a meditation on relationships, with poignant observations made in the conversations between characters. In "Paris," the idea of falling out of love is discussed. A man named Thom says of love that we handle it, obsess over it, and it becomes so smooth we can't hold on to it, but ultimately, it's still there, as substantial as it ever was. It is touching observations such as this that make Dubé's stories compelling. At the same time, these fictions are not straightforward narratives and the reader is often left wondering

what is real. But that may be what Dubé intends.

A FINELY TUNED APATHY MACHINE

By Mark Paterson
Exile Editions
\$19.95, paper, 158pp
ISBN 978-1-55096-087-3

The book's title may be worrisome for some: is this going to be a collection of "slacker" stories? The answer is no; in addition, Mark Paterson is a great storyteller. His stories are set in a reality most readers can relate to: growing up suburban in Canada, in this case, Montreal. The time is the 1980s and '90s and most of the stories are coming of age tales of young men experiencing life, love, and friendship. Suburbia and suburban life are given

honest treatment, not approached ironically or disdainfully. Paterson uses pop culture and place references to flesh out the setting of the stories without shouting that "this is Montreal in the 1990s."

Two stories stand out. "The IGA Kissing Bandit" is worth the price of admission alone. Men friends dress up one of their group as a woman to try and trap one of the

workers at the local IGA, a clerk known to kiss female customers after helping them with their groceries. Issues of sexual identity and homophobia are dealt with by the young men. "Lost Dog" tells of a young man who comes to see his "cool" friends as they really are and ultimately sides with an outsider.

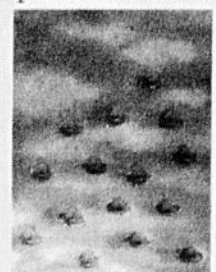
Many of these stories are quirky, some are harder edged, and all of

them work except for "Her Plastic Daisy and the Canadian Water to Grow It," where the political points seem awkward and cliché-ridden. Overall, though, *A Finely Tuned Apathy Machine* is a very strong collection. **B**

By Jeffrey Mackie, a Montreal poet and radio host who can be heard weekly on CKUT's "Friday Morning After."

QUOTIDIAN FEVER

quotidian fever



J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
PUBLISHING INC.

Quotidian Fever • New and Selected Poems 1974-2007
Endre Farkas

The evolution of Farkas's poetry since he began writing illuminates one of Montreal's key literary figures, first, as one of the Vehicule poets of the 1970s, an experimental group of writers bent on celebrating life and pushing the boundaries of their craft and, later, as one profoundly aware of his role as a poet engaged with the world, one with a social conscience and a moral obligation to speak about it.

"One of the reasons for my liking of Endre Farkas's poems is that he writes a new book each time. Another reason is that he takes important subjects for these books. So if you were not lucky enough to be here from the start, this book is what they used to call a godsend. Here is a guy who worked diligently for several decades and suddenly became a star in the pantheon of Montreal poets. He's easy to read—like the look in a wolf's eye."
—George Bowering

1-897289-21-9 • \$22.95



A hole in one

THE HOLE SHOW

By Maya Merrick

conundrum press

\$17, paper, 360pp

ISBN 978-1-894994-25-5

The *Hole Show* is Maya Merrick's second novel and is a toothsome trawl through Montreal vérité. There are freaks, deformities, and what used to be called clubfoots, all in a Henry Darger-esque jamboree. It is the world of *Sextant*, Merrick's first book, plus a little of the historical sweep of Michel Tremblay complete with silverfish crawling up from the drains. Characters navigate the hazards of this universe under various monikers of convenience and for the reader, at times, this can be a bumpy ride. The storytelling bends and distorts like a bleary bottle bottom until not even a closing conflagration can untwizzle the ends of this complex and ambitious novel.

Merrick's style treads a very fine line between creating and preventing the novel. The description of high art-turned-skinshow *Giselle* in chapter four, for in-



stance, is weighed down by lines like "weeping edges of willows drape the wings." With its Roy Orbison soundtrack it comes off as just *outré*, a little too much like *White Jazz* James Ellroy in bed with David Lynch and a sack of razor blades. There are other parts, however, where *The Hole Show* establishes a genuinely creepy sense of something nasty underfoot. The description of Billy/Beau's hermaphrodite self (more of this below) in the following chapter really makes the language work for its

money and the result is good.

Merrick's novel is set in the emergent Montreal of the early 1960s and '70s. Society is unravelling a little and in the interstices we find Hicklin, Billy, Dolly, and all the rest. This world of interlocked lives is related through multiple points of view as if we were looking at the story through one of those Sputnik security cameras. Interesting effects with space and time definitely happen, but if you've ever lost patience with *The Sound and the Fury*, this is not the book for you. Little perspectival illusions happen at other levels too. The hole of the title is severally a reference to sexual identity, a place where young Hicklin hides, and the "wholeness" sought by Billy in the transformation to Beau.

That's another thing about *The Hole Show*: Merrick's theme is in part metamorphosis. The novel describes not only literal kinds of changes, as in the case of Billy, but also the changes caused by the ways in which we see the world, hence the games with point of view. Depending on who is looking, Hicklin (a made up name of course) is "The Stranger" and, if you are the teenage runaway Luce, "The Fox." The broken-down albino ballerina Dahlia is also "The Ghost" and the icy

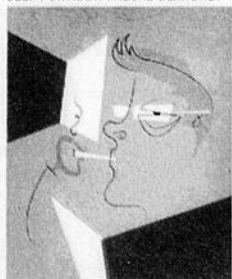
"Dolly." We also see the transformations that occur when one character leans too hard on another. In the parts where Hicklin is bullied by the inevitably named "Thad" and his sidekicks Bikky and Dink, I was reminded of the climate of dread described by Margaret Atwood's narrator Elaine in *Cat's Eye*. I am sure this is not a comparison Merrick would welcome.

Aside from occasional freakshow, been-there-done-that banalities, *The Hole Show* really crackles across its 360 pages. The best parts occur sometimes at a bit of a tangent. Patience, Dahlia/Dolly's tatty doll with the broken mechanical voice, has the same chilling appeal as Ramone, the papier mâché head in *Sextant*. There is a film loop of rotting chickens playing at a party and a wonderful "pot of homemade (though not by her mother) marmalade" through which Dahlia regards the world. These ideas tend to grapple with an at times less than helpful style and narrative aesthetic, but it is a fight which I think in the end is won by Merrick. **mRb**

By Neil Scotten, a writer and photographer who has lived in the UK, Edmonton, and the Yukon.



SELF PORTRAIT, PASCAL BLANCHET



WHITE RAPIDS

By Pascal Blanchet

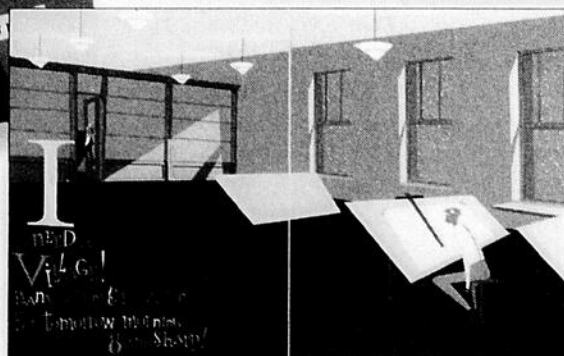
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\$29.95, paper

ISBN 9781897299241

White Rapids isn't the first graphic novel to combine stunning images with minimal text, but it's probably the first to do so in a deluxe, Art Deco travel poster style. One word: gorgeous.

White Rapids is the English-language release of Quebec cartoonist Pascal Blanchet's historically based story about the rise and fall of



Rapide Blanc, a village purpose-built in fine style in 1928 by the Shawinigan Water and Power Company. The company constructed high-quality brick houses and other amenities to entice working families to move up north to service its remote Rapide Blanc hydroelectric power station. *White Rapids* offers us a stunning view into the villagers' seemingly idyllic lives in this remarkable setting.

Hydro ghosts

But what policy creates, policy can also destroy. With the nationalization of Quebec's power industry in 1963, together with the increasing automation of hydroelectric installations, Rapide Blanc becomes an anachronism, and Hydro Québec moves to shut down the town.

While the book does capture the villagers' profound disappointment at having to vacate their homes, no

one puts up any real fight when the decision to close the town and relocate the workers comes down. The village newspaper faithfully reports Hydro Québec's claims that the workers will be consulted and given new jobs. How could this apparent *fait accompli* have been pulled off so smoothly? Did these blue collar families really

just pack up their cars, leave their lovely homes, and drive away forever from their delightful little town, as they do in this book?

Then again, the absence of such political struggles does underline the relative powerlessness of ordinary people against the grand scale of economic policy decisions. But the workers of Rapide Blanc didn't live on such a scale. We glimpse their rich, hope-filled individual lives while the village thrives, but we see very little of them as the community closes.

Critics could fault *White Rapids* for being more about style than substance, and they would be partially correct – but that may be Blanchet's point. His phenomenal streamlined style relocates *White Rapids* from the realm of history to that of myth.

Canada's history – and to a great extent Quebec's – is a colonial story of resource extraction on a massive scale. Pre-planned, prefabricated ghost towns litter the North American landscape, not just in the Old West but wherever some mine, dam, or reactor once stood. In that sense, *White Rapids* represents a potent Canadian myth. Blanchet's treatment aptly reminds us how the decisions handed down by government and big business can make tourists out of all of us – here today, gone tomorrow.

Indeed, only two things in this book can rightly bear the label "indigenous." The first is Wemotaci Indian Reserve, which is featured but once, as a dot on a map. The second is "The General," a great blind pike of such power that he's said to shake the town's bridge whenever he collides with it. Both, we may presume, are still there. **mRb**

By Ed Janzen, a Montreal writer and editor.

Abiding artistry

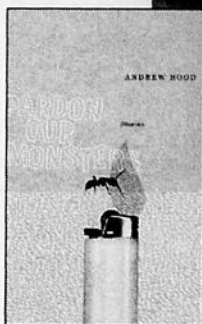
PARDON OUR MONSTERS

By Andrew Hood

Véhicule Press

\$17.95, paper, 160pp

ISBN 978-1-55-65-232-1



Among the literary genres, the modern short story is one of the trickiest to write. Ironically, it is also the form with which many new writers hone their skills, a shallow pool to practice in before taking on the grand depths of a novel. After all, the brevity of the short story – with a roughly designated but very palpable length – ought to make it more approachable than a longer work, at least in theory. Actually crafting a good short story is another matter altogether, since the best examples of the genre thrum with as much muscle as the best novels, only within a more confined and exacting space. It's little wonder that few writers make their mark with short stories alone.

"That Ghost We Had," one of the 12 stories in Andrew Hood's debut collection, shows off that muscle in less than four pages. To amuse herself, a new bride invents a "ghost" for her house by writing spectral messages to her husband on the steamed-up washroom mirror. The story, unlike the ruse, flows with nary a snag from its original premise to its sombre and ultimately poignant end. Considering the length and subject matter, it's a remarkable feat of narrative dexterity and restraint.

Other stories in the collection display similar sleights of hand. The title story, for instance, follows a town in mourning over a boy killed in an accident. The catch? It appears that everyone but the narrator has forgotten the boy was a cruel bully. As the boy's remaining brothers – tormentors themselves – become increasingly barbarous under the seemingly compassionate eye of the town, it becomes obvious to the narrator that the place he once knew as home would be no more. Hood's take on the false virtues of remembrance is at turns scathing and defiant, an anti-elegy that shows its hand at the end with harrowing decisiveness.

The stories in *Pardon Our Monsters*

cover an extensive range, each underpinned by an incisive eye for characters in the midst of awkward transitions. From a child's quiet

lament for a brother's love in "A Sound Like Dolphins" to the perceived scrutiny felt by a recently divorced father in "Thirty-Six in the Cellar," Hood's prose convinces with an old storyteller's ease, be it lyrical or downright venomous. Take "Make It a Better Place," the final story. An estranged stepmother and stepson undertake a bleary-eyed, round-the-clock road trip from southern Ontario to California for the singular purpose of being among Michael Jackson's supporters at his trial. It's the longest of the stories and filled with well-nigh surreal elements, but Hood's writing keeps it firmly grounded, as in this passage when Jackson first appears:

What a mess this man has become. A sal-low, hollowed out, pallid face, destroyed by so much tinkering [...] On the other side of the fence are his prime, his excellence, his youth. His image has remained unsullied, unaged, while he himself has absorbed all the hideousness of his excess. He is Dorian Gray's portrait.

A short story collection like this is a rarity from a new writer. One is reminded of Lorrie Moore's debut, *Self-Help*. Andrew Hood's *Pardon Our Monsters*, simply put, is a powerhouse of artistry and reveals to us a writer in whom enormous talent deeply abides. ■

By Faustus Salvador, a Montreal writer whose articles and fiction have been published in England, Japan, and across Canada.

Mental double takes

THE SKIN BENEATH

By Nairne Holtz

Insomniac Press

\$21.95, paper, 263pp

ISBN 978-1-897178-39-3

Categories are often demeaning, especially when it comes to art and artists, yet how would readers find or choose a book if it didn't have a label on it? Nonetheless, the polarization between literary and genre fiction is breaking down fast. Stephen King publishes in *The New Yorker*, it's once again fashionable to serialize mysteries in "serious" journals, and the term "literary thriller" is no longer an oxymoron.

All this is good news, especially for writers. How welcome it is to discover Nairne Holtz's stylish debut, a novel characterized by taut, sinewy prose, a suspenseful story, and deeply imagined characters readers can actually care about.

The tale begins with a literal and proverbial bang. Sam O'Connor receives an anonymous postcard insinuating that her older sister Chloe was killed by a gunshot wound, not an accidental drug overdose, at New York's fabled Chelsea Hotel. "Your sister died while investigating a political conspiracy," the postcard reads. "Coincidence? How often do women kill themselves with a gun?"

Now, five years after Chloe's death, Sam has the chance to find out what really happened. While Sam once followed Chloe everywhere, "dogged her, tagged along," now she retraces Chloe's steps, imagining herself inside her sister's skin as she tracks her final days in Montreal, Toronto, Detroit, and New York.

Though Chloe called Sam "shadow" when they were little, Sam only felt truly alive when she was with her older sister. The girls were abandoned by their mother and raised by a remote father, a bow-tie-wearing art history professor never comfortable with feelings, who kept his daughters' emotions in a "chokehold."

Holtz deftly interweaves Sam and

Chloe's shared past so that readers experience the depth of their bond. Flashbacks are notorious pitfalls for novelists, but Holtz manages them gracefully through associative links. The classic hide-and-seek the sisters play as girls, where Chloe doesn't bother finding her little sister and Sam cries out, "I thought you left me," is echoed in the present: now Sam needs to "find" Chloe. The effect adds dimension to the story without slowing its momentum.

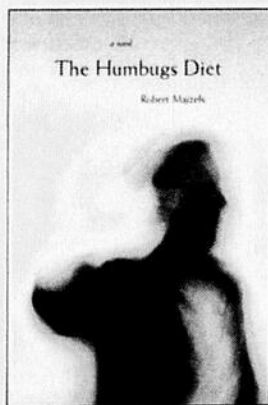
Montreal is vividly evoked, with all of its charms and contradictions. The city is "an odd amalgam of the sacred and profane," with strip clubs rubbing up against cathedrals. "You can pray, as well as buy brand-name clothing ... and lap dances within a one-block radius."

Holtz also excels at the kind of pithy asides that make the reader do mental double takes. While sleuthing out one of her sister's ex-boyfriends, now the owner of an escort service, Sam muses; that "He seems to want her to like him, which isn't the same as him liking her." Indeed, Holtz jacks this scene up a notch by having the lesbian Sam apply for a job as an escort. The narrative develops an erotic charge when Sam meets up with Chloe's final roommate and experiences the ultimate *coup de foudre* with this unconventional beauty who seems to know more than she will cop to. An enticing mesh of fact and fiction emerges that both Sam and readers need to tease apart to reveal the truth. Who was Chloe? And who is Sam herself?

At times in *The Skin Beneath*, a cliché jars or Holtz over-explains. These things grate simply because she is too good for these noisome tics. Perhaps she needs to give her readers more credit. We'll figure it out without the telegraphing. This is a minor quibble in an otherwise smart, edgy debut. ■

By Ami Sands Brodoff, whose new novel, *The White Space Between*, appears in fall 2008. She is also the author of *Bloodknots* and *Can You See Me?*

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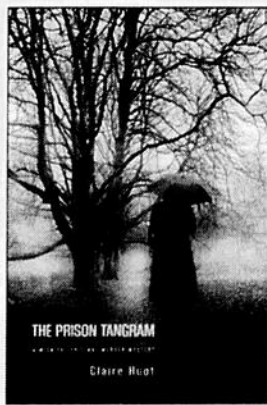


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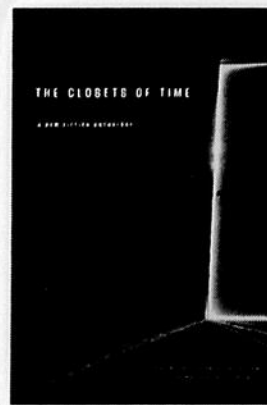
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An absolved exile

TO THE FAR SHORE

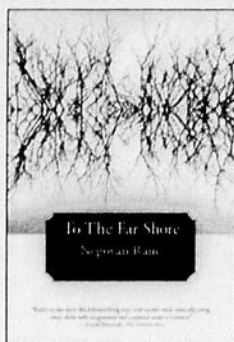
By Négoan Rajic

Translated by Nora Alleyn

Cormorant Books

\$22.95, paper, 298pp

ISBN 978-1-896951



To the Far Shore is as much a requiem to a country as it is a memoir of a man's youthful adventures. A telling insight into the recent travails of the Balkans, Rajic's novel opens up the reader to a complicated history that can only be retold as the equally complicated story of an old man seeking exile from a country he loves.

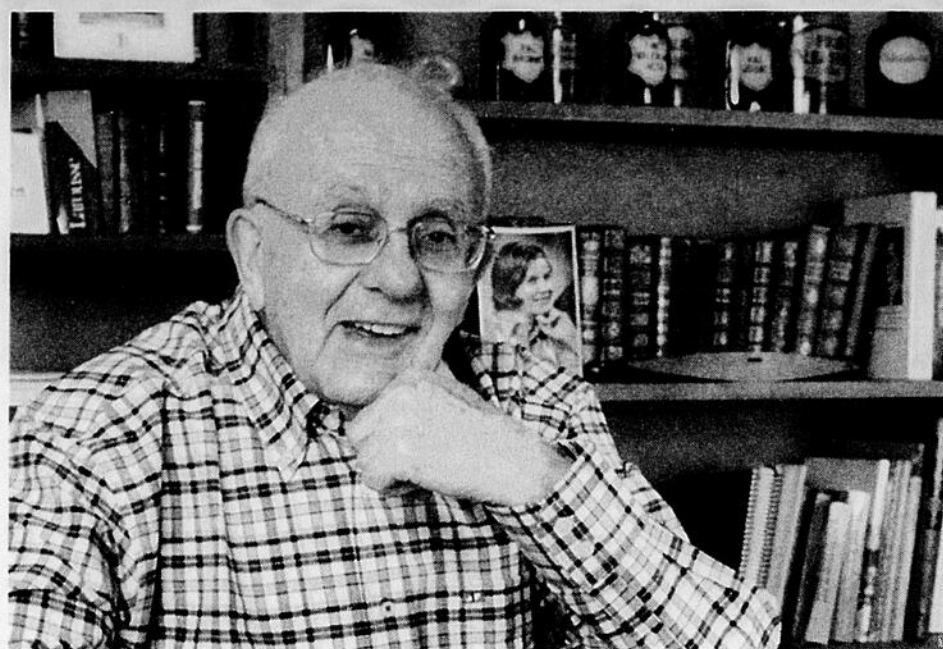
Laden with meditations on the soul's suffering, Rajic's work is heavy. With a narrator who can serve as a poster child for post-World War II alienation and a landscape as bleak as Dostoevsky's Russia, *To the Far Shore* reveals a universe of doubt. As Rajic recounts the last years' fighting in WWII Yugoslavia he reveals the ideological uncertainty in having chosen the side of the Allied Partisans over the Nationalist forces of

the Croatian Ustase and Serbian Cetniks. When Germany is defeated, the Allies thank the Partisans by rewarding them, and the budding socialist movement, with a country.

The young narrator, eager to put the war behind him, enrolls in the faculty of engineering at the University of Belgrade. Drenched with the kind of irony that comes with a man bitterly at

odds with what it means to be human, the narrator bitingly recounts how his education was compromised, and the social landscape of his country irrevocably altered, by the very leader he helped put into place – Tito.

The narrator and his old friend Milenko, possessed by the prospect of freedom, plot their exile to Austria. Rajic's internal struggle over his decision to leave – his simultaneous desire for absolution and irrevocable strength of principle – reveals precisely what is so intriguing about this part of the world. In what novelist Ivo Andric once described as "a place where love and hate exist simultaneously in their puri-



ty," Rajic exemplifies the very dualism of the Balkan soul, one at war with itself, desperate for buoyancy in the small area it occupies. As the young narrator walks us through his memories, his soul emerging and descending from the depths of the dark and murky history of Serbia, the reader realizes that the bloody history of the Ottoman Empire and a communist past continue to contextualize the modern-day former Yugoslavia as much as they did the country of Rajic's youth.

Rajic's ruminations on the misgivings

of the psyche can read a little too much like an old man looking back on a time long passed. His narrative is at times simplistic and cautious, his cynicism somewhat trying. *To the Far Shore* succeeds best when we are compelled to feel truly the absolution he seeks from the reader in having written this book from exile. **BB**

By Marina Malidzanovic, a former Montrealer who works with immigrants in Kitchener-Waterloo.

WILLIAM E. LOGAN'S 1845 SURVEY OF THE UPPER OTTAWA VALLEY

Edited and Introduced by Charles H. Smith and Ian Dyck
Canadian Museum of Civilization

\$35.95, paper, 238pp

ISBN 978-0-660-19662-6

William Logan was a self-motivated learner, one of Canada's great scientists when geology was in its infancy. Among his many accomplishments was laying the foundation for the modern Geological Survey of Canada. Logan is allowed here to speak in his own voice, and a very entertaining one it is. His field journal, written as his party explored and mapped the Ottawa River from Lachine to Lake Timiskaming, and from the Mattawa River to Lake Nipissing, covers the months from the end of June, when Logan set out from Lachine, to the middle of November, when he returned to Bytown. This admirable addition to the Mercury Series History Papers gives much supplementary information, including annotations to the field journal, appendices with Logan's biography, a potted history of the Ottawa Valley, and Logan's mineral finds. There is a note at the beginning of the book explaining that "in the interest of making information available, normal production procedures have been abbreviated. As a result, grammatical and typographical errors may occur." This caveat is unnecessary, as there don't seem to be any obvious mistakes in this little treasure of a volume. A must for geologists, lovers of Canadian history, and genealogists with families in the Ottawa Valley area. **MG**

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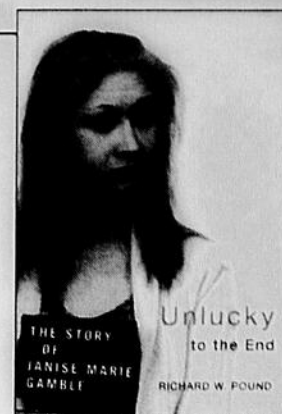
Justice on trial

UNLUCKY TO THE END:
THE STORY OF JANISE MARIE GAMBLE
By Richard W. Pound
McGill-Queen's University Press
\$34.95, paper, 240pp
ISBN 978-0-7735-3300-4

Although Dick Pound is best known as chairman of the World Anti-Doping Agency and IOC vice-president, Janise Gamble's story has nothing to do with sports. And yet, to read the life of this average kid from Peterborough is akin to being caught in a safe spot on the side of a mountain, helpless, watching an avalanche roar down on an unsuspecting group of skiers. In both cases the end is inevitable. Pound chooses to use a gentler metaphor. "A few small events or a couple of wrong choices – the sort of thing that could happen to anyone – may be enough to steer someone off the path of a normal, happy existence. In the same way, a butterfly stirring

Pound is a skilful craftsman, a man on a mission.

the air in Southeast Asia may affect whole storm systems a month later in North America." Janise Gamble was caught in a storm of her own making. A happy kid from a small town in Ontario, Janise was fatally attracted to a charmer, John Gamble, whose darker side included alcoholism, drug addiction, spousal abuse, and a life of petty crime. During their brief and tragic marriage, the mesmerized Janise continued to forgive her husband. Even after the most violent beatings she always took him back when he wept and cried that she was all he had to live for. He didn't live long. He and a buddy decided to rob a Credit Union in Calgary. The buddy shot a police officer, the pair took hostages, and the duo decided to commit suicide via a drug overdose rather than face arrest and prison. Gamble died, the friend didn't, and he and Janise were tried and convicted for murder – a crime Janise didn't commit. She was sentenced to 25 years in Kingston's women's prison where lifers were given no training for re-entry to the real world. Six years later, follow-



ing a piece on CBC's *The Fifth Estate*, a Montreal lawyer made Janise his cause, working towards her early release. The rest of the story is the final thundering roar of the avalanche.

This is not an easy read. It's not a pleasant story. But Pound, who became interested in Janise's story when he met the Montreal lawyer, has created a compelling story with very real characters. It's a bleak picture of an abusive relationship and a striking exposure of a Canadian miscarriage of justice that is as powerful as the stories of Steven Truscott, Donald Marshall, and David Milgaard. Pound is a skilful craftsman who uses photos and phone and trial transcripts which add to the drama. But the main reason that *Unlucky to the End* rises far above cheap sensationalism or detective fiction-type action is that Pound, once he heard the story from Colin Irving, was a man on a mission "to see what had happened and, to some extent, how and why." For Canadians, the "how and the why" of this tragic miscarriage of justice is undoubtedly as important as the "what," the grim unfolding of events which began when an uncomplicated small town girl fell in love with a sociopath. **MB**

By Joan Eyolfson Cadham, a journalist living in Foam Lake, Saskatchewan.

Verbs nOUNed, nouns verbed

CAN I HAVE A WORD WITH YOU?
By Howard Richler
Ronsdale Press
\$21.95, paper, 200pp
ISBN 978-55380-049-1
Reviewed from galleys

Howard Richler has made a career out of etymology, and his fifth book is further testimony to his love affair with the English language and its evolution.

Richler has plenty to work with: with only 26 letters in its alphabet, English today has 988,969 words and counting. Given that range, Richler here is fairly economical, using 69 words from A to Z as a launching pad for a fascinating look at the English language and its peculiarities. (Not to disappoint his Canadian readers, he does deal with that zee versus zed issue.)

Though many of these essays are culled from Richler's *Gazette* column "Speaking of Language," he hastens to add in his introduction that *Can I Have a Word with You?* is not subject to the normal space constraints of a newspaper. With that out of the way, Richler sets out with his trusty and surely well-worn *Oxford English Dictionary*, guiding us through the maze of word origins and their ever-evolving, and sometimes politically charged, usages.

Take "abortionist," the lead word in Richler's journey through the alphabet. Depending on who is using it, this word's connotations are loaded. A pro-choice advocate is more likely to use the word "abortion provider" than "abortionist," the latter a term more likely to be used by the right-to-life crowd. Or take "blowback," coined



by the CIA. Once meaning a gun, the word is now used to describe what happens when foreign policies come back to haunt, the prime example being the CIA's backing of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan when the former Soviet Union occupied that country in the 1980s.

The English language, influenced as it is by so many others, has some "colourful" words, and Richler takes us through the emotions associated with such simple words as blue, green, black, and white. In another essay, "Tabernacle," likely to appeal to his Québécois readers, he delves into the religious origins of Quebec's more colourful curse words – exploring the permutations and combinations of seven words

best not uttered irreverently in a Catholic church.

To the chagrin of language purists, English is in a constant state of flux: "Verbs are 'nouned' and nouns are 'verbed,'" writes Richler in his "Yada-Yada-Yada" essay. *Seinfeld* writers turned the noun "guile" into a verb, as in "He's never guiled." We can also thank *Seinfeld* for a host of "Seinfeldisms": "yada-yada-yada" (replacing "blah blah blah"), "below the equator" (the genital area), "changing teams" (a gay person who turns heterosexual), and many others.

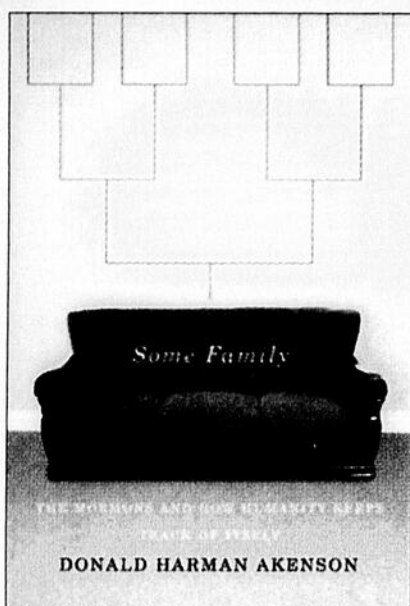
Can I Have a Word With You? is written without pretension or presumption, though it is not beneath the author to launch into the occasional grammar lesson. This is a book digestible in small bites, one that is sure to please teachers, students of language, and those who just like to pull a little dinner table amateur wordsmith one-upmanship. **MB**

By Ian Howarth, a Montreal writer.

THE WRONG MOVE
By Sheila Kindellan-Sheehan
Redlader
\$11.95, paper, 368pp
ISBN 978-1897336144

Kindellan-Sheehan's thrillers featuring Caitlin Donovan and her friend Carmen have previously been set in Miami and Montreal, but now the action moves to Toronto and focuses on ex-Montrealer John Ternahan and his wife, an upwardly mobile couple on the corporate fast track. When Ternahan drives his babysitter home and she doesn't arrive there, Ternahan comes under suspicion. John's wife asks her friends Caitlin and Carmen to come and stay as support. The lives of the other families that the babysitter worked for come under police scrutiny, and Ternahan's workaholic ways mirror the homicide detective's unravelling family life. Kindellan-Sheehan introduces her trademark comic relief with the unlikely antics of a toy boy who just doesn't get it. This is a good solid detective fiction read, with lively characters and plot twists galore. **MG**





SOME FAMILY: THE MORMONS AND HOW HUMANITY KEEPS TRACK OF ITSELF
By Donald Harman Akenson
McGill-Queen's University Press
\$34.95, cloth, 360pp
ISBN 978-0-7735-3295-3

The Mormon Genealogical Project (once called the International Genealogical Index) started in 1894, and has grown to be the world's largest collection of genealogical data. Most genealogists, it is safe to say, use the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints' material with unquestioning gratitude. Akenson's evaluation of the material – how it has been collected, and how it is to be used – should give them pause. One of the central themes of this book is that there are four main genealogical forms whereas the LDS material uses only one. There are other cautionary tales to be found in the appendices, including the statistical likelihood of false paternity, wrongly attributed maternity, and incest blurring the nice, neat family tree. Akenson's insistence on the family as narrative is an evocative one, the "kernel" of each tale leading to the kernel of the

next. His scholarly insistence on referring to "Yeshua of Nazareth" and "Miriam" can grate, but he is an equal-opportunity offender: Catholics, Jews, Mormons, genealogists, and historians can all find something to be annoyed about. They can also find much to chuckle about, as Akenson is a witty and charming writer. This book should be required reading not only for all genealogists, but also for all those bureaucrats who mistakenly believe that the microfiche copies the LDS members provided of the original books of record are the real deal. **MG**

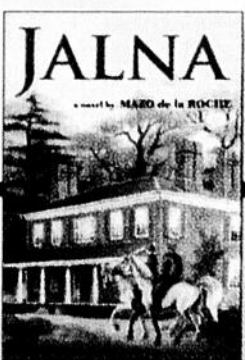
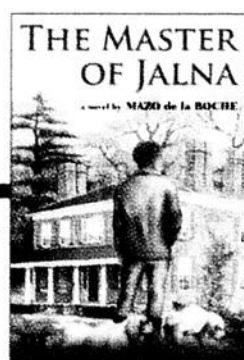


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SUNDAY OCTOBER 28th 10 A.M. at the OMNI HOTEL (1050 Sherbrooke St. West)

DAVID GILMOUR <i>The Film Club : A True Story of a Father and Son</i> (Thomas Allen) ANNA PORTER <i>Kasztner's Train</i> (Douglas & McIntyre)	JANICE GROSS STEIN & EUGENE LANG <i>Unexpected War : Canada in Afghanistan</i> (Penguin Books) WILL FERGUSON <i>Spanish Fly</i> (Penguin Books)
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SUNDAY NOVEMBER 11th 10 A.M. at the OMNI HOTEL (1050 Sherbrooke St. West)

BRUCE W. POWE <i>Mystic Trudeau : The Fire and the Rose</i> (Thomas Allen) JAN WONG <i>Beijing Confidential : A Tale of Comrades Lost and Found in the New Forbidden City</i> (Doubleday)	ELEANOR WACHTEL <i>Random Illuminations : Conversations with Carol Shields</i> (Goose Lane) RICHARD B. WRIGHT <i>October</i> (Harper Collins)
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SUNDAY NOVEMBER 18th 10 A.M. at the OMNI HOTEL (1050 Sherbrooke St. West)

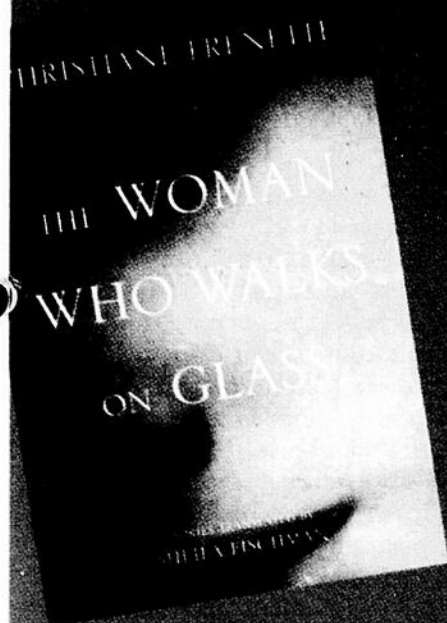
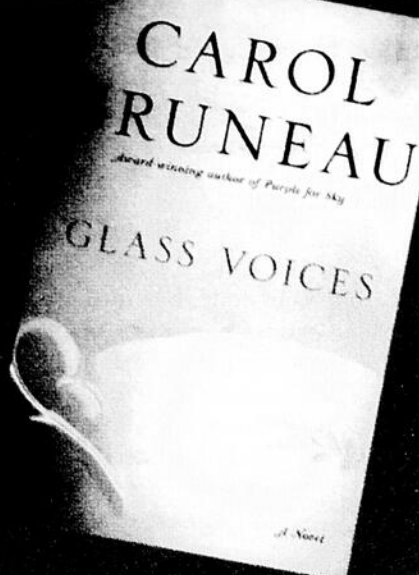
MICHAEL ADAMS <i>Unlikely Utopia : The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism</i> (Penguin Books) JACK WHYTE <i>Standard of Honour</i> (Penguin Books)	TIM COOK <i>At the Sharp End : Canadians Fighting the Great War Volume 1 1914-1916</i> (Penguin Books) VIKKI STARK <i>My Sister My Self</i> (McGraw-Hill Ryerson)
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SUNDAY NOVEMBER 25th 10 A.M. at the OMNI HOTEL (1050 Sherbrooke St. West)

GUY GAVRIEL KAY <i>Ysabel</i> (Penguin Books) JEFFREY SIMPSON <i>Hot Air : Meeting Canada's Climate Change</i> (McClelland & Stewart)	LOUISE PENNEY <i>Cruellest Month</i> (McArthur & Co) WILLIAM MARSDEN <i>Stupid to the Last Drop : How Alberta is Bringing Environmental Armageddon to Canada</i> (Random House)
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**CHRISTIANE FRENETTE
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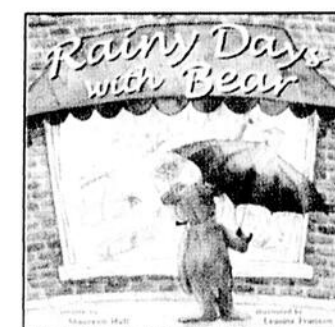
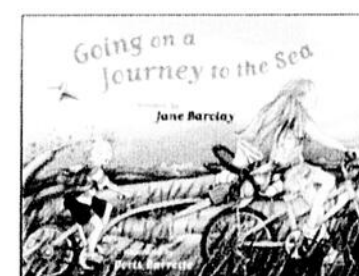
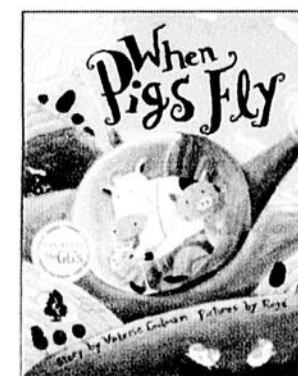
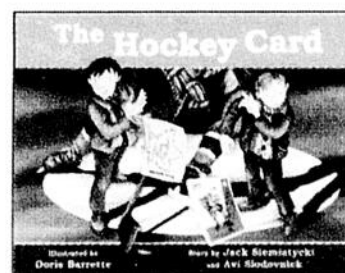
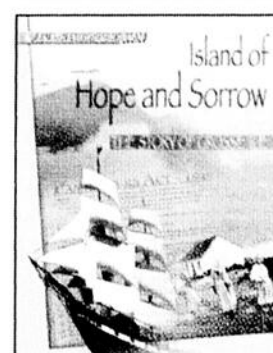
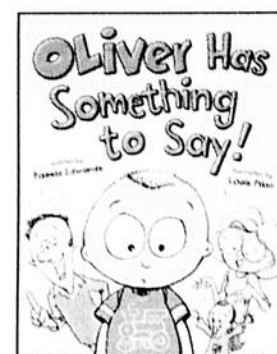
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Conversational criticism

LITTLE EUREKAS:
A DECADE'S THOUGHTS ON POETRY
By Robyn Sarah
Biblioasis
\$24.95, paper, 270pp
ISBN 978-1-897231-2906

"If anybody had told me, years ago, that I would one day publish a book of literary criticism, I think I would have laughed out loud," a rather astounded Robyn Sarah writes in her introduction to *Little Eureka's*. Yet here it is, a tidy collection of diverse writings gleaned from essays, columns, reviews, and collaborations, and arranged in a volume that is certainly substantial evidence of a literary life, among other things. Indeed, the volume "reflects personally upon a life in poetry" by one who has written, edited, taught, reviewed, published, and even typeset it manually. Rooted in the personal, *Little Eureka's* is unencumbered by any of the potentially daunting theory that typically characterizes the genre, and in this

sense, one hesitates to categorize it as LitCrit proper. If *Little Eureka's* is literary criticism, then it is, as Sarah points out, certainly an unconventional contribution to the genre.

Organized into five parts, *Little Eureka's* is a friendly, even hospitable collection, and the conversational but sophisticated prose makes it all the more so. Part I offers a handful of essays ranging from Sarah's account of how, as a young girl, she "Fell for Poetry," to a frank discussion of poetics in "Poetry's Bottom Line," to a thought-provoking trio on teaching, publishing, and editing poetry. In "I To my Perils: How I fell For Poetry," Sarah describes poetry's insidious creep upon her: "No primal 'Eureka moment.' Many little Eureka's – some of them unconscious, smiting me after the fact." She goes on to say that "it is an addiction to the little Eureka's, those moments of electric response to a particular poem that makes one a reader of poetry." While the reader might not be smitten with the

title of the collection, the sentiment behind it – the exuberance, the joy, the electricity that poetry can yield – is certainly true enough.

Throughout the collection, Sarah shows herself to be a writer who, in the fullness of time, has developed particular ideas about things. She

does not shirk from asking and answering thorny questions that probably should be asked by more writers but too often are not. Consider: "If poetry is a good thing, can there be too much of it?", or "What makes a poem a poem?" Nor does she

hesitate to share her various gripes. For Sarah, all that ails poetry – the current cultural program, the overproduction of poetry that nobody reads or reviews, the poet as celebrity, creative writing training, less than stringent editing – seems to boil down to an abiding concern that quality over quantity be poetry's mantra. Whether or not one agrees with her opinions, Sarah demonstrates no small courage in laying her views out clearly and plainly like so many knickers on the laundry line.

Perhaps the best way to describe

Little Eureka's is to say that it "Dances with Poems," for the collection is, by and large, comprised of Sarah's essays on, and reviews of, poetry. In the chapter of that name Sarah is clear: "Appreciation of poetry begins with poems." And true to her word, she is generous with quotation. Like a good dance partner, Sarah's engagement with poetry is attentive, considered, and at its best downright inspiring. Her collaborations (with Dennis Lee and Eric Ormsby among others), taken from interviews, symposia, and most interestingly letter exchanges, add yet another dimension to the dance.

Not myself a poet, I think Sarah would be heartened to know that *Little Eureka's* made me want to read more poetry; it made me pick up a dusty collection from my bookshelf; it made me send a poem to a friend who seemed to require just those particular words; and it made me want to seek out some of the poems Sarah reviews. And is it not just these kinds of small joys, these little moments of electric response, these – dare I say it? – little Eureka's, that make one a reader of poetry? ■

By Brenda Cockfield, a Montreal writer.

Little Eureka's is substantial evidence of a literary life.

Shoreline



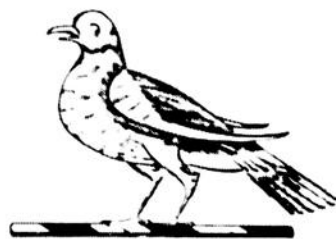
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By Kim Bourgeois

The Divine Power of Salt

Martine
Desjardins'
new novel takes a
savoury approach
to history

It's an unusually muggy September afternoon when I set out to meet with Martine Desjardins. In downtown Montreal the air is heavy and stale, as though summer were bottoming out in one last big huff. Yet as my cab winds its way into the author's native Town of Mount Royal, something already feels fresher. Old trees shading Desjardins' street seem to filter the smog, and here in the author's quiet home, built by her grandfather in the 1930s, even the decor is cooling. Impeccably creamy with the occasional lavender accent or bouquet of white roses, Desjardins' apartment is an antidote to the city's nearby clutter and congestion. A breeze waltzes in through wide-open windows, inspiring discussion.

I've come to talk with Desjardins about her third novel, just translated from the original French *L'Évocation*. It's a book whose central theme – salt – also evokes coolness. Yet, due to the author's penchant for the macabre, wintry white images are exquisitely framed in slick, gothic darkness. It comes as no surprise that Desjardins cites Edgar Allan Poe as a major influence.

Set in the 18th century, *A Covenant of Salt* draws on the conquest of Quebec and on Irish legend, depicting the chilling landscape of Lily McEvoy, an eccentric recluse who lives in a County Armagh manor house with an enslaved childhood companion and two maidservants. Lily has commissioned a legendary stonemason to transform the estate's abandoned salt mine into a funerary monument for her deceased parents: Rear Admiral Magnus McEvoy, hero of the capture of Quebec, and Laurence, a rumoured river nymph with webbed feet. The McEvoy family embody the violence that erupts when family secrets are suppressed. As characters they are archetypal – or shadowy in a Jungian sense. Yet Desjardins says she doesn't work on the psychology of the characters per se.

"I don't start with character. I start with matter," she explains. "In *The Fairy Ring* I start with quartz and crystal. In my second book [*All that Glitters*], with gold, and in this one with salt. I read this description of a salt mine in Poland where the workers in the beginning of the 19th century almost lived in the mines. They started carving statues out of salt and they carved a little chapel in the mine and eventually they carved a whole ballroom with a floor made out of salt. There was a salt crystal chandelier, apparently, and the nobility came and visited, and they had concerts there and balls, and this image to me was so very interesting."

Desjardins, who is clearly drawn to the romantic, has fictionalized this scene beautifully. Much like the black and white drawings she creates in her spare time, her descriptions are detailed, precise, and dreamy. Mythical creatures stemming from Irish legend and her imagination blend with religious images, providing an ornate backdrop for the McEvoy family drama. And salt, as Desjardins points out, figures prominently in the Bible, providing "heavy symbolic baggage."

PHOTO: LOUIS DESJARDINS



Desjardins skilfully draws from the Roman Catholic Church's doctrines, sculpting and polishing religious symbols until they glitter like gems. "I think, for we who do not really have a mythology, [religious symbolism] is our mythology," she explains. When she began to explore the theme of salt in particular, it was Lot's wife who came to mind.

"I thought about this story in which she is turned into a pillar of salt because she looks back on Sodom and Gomorrah, and to me it was a perfect metaphor for how you can become petrified when you keep looking in the past. If you're always looking behind you and not where you are, or forward, you get caught in the past."

Which is precisely what happens to Lily. Attributing near-divine powers to salt, Lily believes it capable of capturing "all that, in life, is doomed to vanish in a cloud of smoke." She sniffs, eats, drinks, and talks of nothing but this magic powder, obsessively forming a private cult around it. Meanwhile, the only thing that grows in her life is resentment: Lily herself remains immature, both physically and psychologically, dried up and victimized by her own fetish.

With all three of Desjardins' novels set in the past, I wonder about the author's own attraction to olden times, a penchant she claims has more to do with poetic license than any particular interest in history.

"The things that take place in my novels are possible, but highly unlikely. That's why if I set them in the past it's easier. I don't think that if I set them in the present, the reader could have this suspension of disbelief ... Although it does permit me to say certain things about the present," Desjardins continues, confirming a suspicion that Lily's resentment is a metaphor for Quebec politics.

"To me [*A Covenant*] was really an

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see page 18

Rivers of history

SCENES OF CHILDHOOD

By Bernadette Griffin

Shoreline Press

\$18.95, paper, 78pp

ISBN 978-1-896754-43-7

THE RAFTSMEN OF THE OTTAWA AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVERS

By Léon A. Robidoux

Shoreline Press

\$22.95, paper, 200pp

ISBN 978-1-896754-38-3

(Reviewed from galleys)

Living in Montreal, it is sometimes easy to forget that less than three hours away lies Quebec City, a place possessing every bit as rich a cultural and economic history as our own. Two new books give very different perspectives on that history, one intensely personal, the other mostly archival.

Scenes of Childhood is musician

Bernadette Griffin's fictionalized memoir of growing up on rue Saint-Joachim in Quebec City in the 1940s and '50s. (The title is a riff on Robert Schumann's "Scenes from Childhood," a suite of short piano pieces Griffin would know well.) This slim set of linked tales follows the fates of a bilingual family headed by Johnny McGrath and his wife Marie-Ange Laprise, and their neighbours. In quick succession, Johnny and Marie-Ange bring six children into the world, and cram them into a series of small apartments. Johnny's sister Francie comes to live with them for a few years. A "colourful character," single at a time when that was more than faintly scandalous even without her dalliances with the occasional sailor, Francie seems to exist primarily as an historical foil. She provides the author with an opportunity to mention the Château Frontenac – where she works – and one of its prominent diners, Premier Maurice Duplessis. Among other scenes are those describing the Catholic Church's tremendous hold on daily life, a gifted but ill-fated McGrath son named Anthony, and the narrator's life-altering piano lessons.

Griffin possesses a lively facility for storytelling, and a keen ear that's not surprising given her resumé. However, her approach tends to verge on the anecdotal, and frequently lapses into cliché when simple description would suffice. One gets the strong impression that this book was intended as a family record to pass on to grandchildren. The stories do have the authentic ring of a memoir, full of the extraordinary trivia that makes up most family histories. As a window into Quebec City life at that time it is small, but the author's warmth and compassion are never in doubt. *Scenes of Childhood* is a cozy read.

One wouldn't expect a history of rafting to be a cozy read. Léon A. Robidoux's book is both scrupulously researched and affectionately, even joyfully, related. It could be argued that there's no point in writing about a rather obscure segment of history – particularly Canadian history, which is reputed to be boring – unless you are passionate about the subject. Robidoux does not disappoint in that regard. His passion may be explained by a familial connection: One of the St. Lawrence

River's great raftsmen was Aimé Guérin, the author's great-grandfather.

For centuries before the last raft went under the Victoria Bridge in 1905, vast assemblages of cleverly bound logs shared the waterways with canoes, boats, and barges as modes of transport in Quebec and Ontario. Songs and sagas were written about them. Jean Talon (1625–1694) was the first builder of the timber rafts used to transport merchandise between Montreal, Quebec City, and Trois-Rivières. Philemon Wright, an American, saw the benefits of the industry after initially intending to clear his land for agriculture. The raft-making and rafting industries could not have existed without a robust timber trade, which in turn grew out of the need to open land to cultivation, then quickly outpaced agriculture as an economic force in the colonies. As roads improved, engines were invented, and timber became scarcer, rafts disappeared.

Robidoux's book is a fine insight into a bygone era. ■

By Louise Fabiani, a writer living in Outremont.

Wake-up call

ONE CHILD AT A TIME

By Julian Sher

Random House Canada

\$22, paper, 336pp

ISBN 978-067-9313922

In many ways, the internet is to the youth of today what television was to previous generations in North America. It is the entry point to a wider world, delivering information in a neat package of images and sound. But for all their similarities, what makes the web so much more powerful than television is that while the wired world inspires the exchange of information, it also provides the means for the audience to immediately – and anonymously –

share that information, whether it be through words, images, or video.

The consequences of such an accessible environment are elaborated in *One Child at a Time*, Julian Sher's heart-rending look at how child abusers are using the web to feed their obsession, and how dedicated individuals are using that same technology to stem this online epidemic.

Sher, an acclaimed investigative reporter, shows how the web has helped make child abuse terrifyingly common: "Child abusers and the images they produced were around long before the advent of the internet, [but] what was once a hidden scourge restricted to the dark corners of society is now widely available using any search engine."

This thoroughly researched and well-documented book examines – step by step, clue by

clue – how the concentrated efforts of specialists, technical experts, and law officials are resulting in daring rescues of helpless victims, the seizure of millions of misbegotten dollars, and the arrest of numerous child abusers and porn merchants the world over. It also unmasks the men – and yes, women – behind this terrible crime, revealing among their ranks lawyers, teachers, doctors, and other seemingly upstanding citizens.

Considering the sensitive nature of the material, this book may not appear appealing to many readers at first glance. However, for parents and those who work with youth on a regular basis, Sher's work may hold some important revelations about how to protect children from online predators. Rest assured, the writing style is detached in tone and entirely suitable to the subject matter. Out

of respect for the victims, Sher purposefully stays away from graphic, sensationalistic language. Also, thankfully, the book does not contain photos.

When Sher focuses on the fight against online predators, readers will be riveted. The victims he introduces elicit immediate sympathy, and although their situations are horrifying, it's difficult to rest until their fates have been discovered.

When Sher dips into far more complex and controversial topics – such as the effectiveness of rehabilitation for child abusers or the "causes" of paedophilia – the book becomes more frustrating. These are far too complex to be treated in a few paragraphs, and Sher does not have the space here to treat them with the detail and analysis they require. If nothing else, his comments can be an impetus for further research.

Overall, *One Child at a Time* offers inspiring stories of the triumph of good over evil, but also serves to wake up parents who may still innocently believe that their children are safe from online predators. The book ends with a series of insightful and thought-provoking conclusions that once again prove Sher's ability to grasp complex issues with absolute clarity. Unlike the many who would deal with this situation by sticking their heads in the sand, Sher promotes a more vigilant approach for every member of society. As he writes, "We need better surveillance and awareness by parents and schools, but we also need more empowered and wary young people who know the limits and risks of life on the web." ■

By Adriana Palanca, a Montreal writer.

Fall 2007

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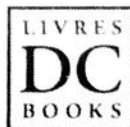
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This book is about, among other things, reaching that age, usually thirty to forty, when you suddenly see right through yourself. With Swift, this moment of unobstructed vision is accompanied by a fresh view of others. He casts away youthful "cool" and tenderly mourns his father. He recalls his courtship of his wife wherein he acted anything like the overwhelmingly irresistible Marlon Brando in *A Street Car Named Desire*. Painfully and wonderfully, he identifies with the nondescript suburban commuter he once insolently heckled in his head.... These are poems of yearning, elegy, realization, romance and enchantment.

WINTER TENNIS
BY TODD SWIFT

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Will Aitken said of Dube's *Hovering World*, that it was "queer in all the best senses of the word – non-conformist, eccentric, dissenting, crazed, aberrant, and, of course, invaluable." So with Dube's second major work. Again, the reader finds himself in a Big City world of late night neon, narrow streets, lurid bohemian warrens. Roaming and dwelling here are strange, almost gothic characters with memorable fixations and obsessions. This collection is about individuals whose zany imaginations have finally run away with them – somewhat like the bus Thom takes whose driver announces he's hijacking the vehicle and leaving the city.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SKY
BY PETER DUBE

— \$18.95 PAPER, \$29.95 BOUND



The lone gunman

THE BIG LIE:
ON TERROR, ANTISEMITISM,
AND IDENTITY

By David Solway
Lester, Mason & Begg
\$24.95, paper, 320pp
ISBN 978176502

David Solway is a brilliant writer. The power of his sentences, amplified by a rich and precisely honed vocabulary, places him in that rarefied category of essayists for whom, as with Christopher Hitchens, rhetoric is a genie that holds sway over the reader's mind. He is also, like Hitchens, a former leftist who now supports the Bush doctrine.

The first part of the book, entitled "Platform," uses Michel Houellebecq's novel of that title and the French author's notorious Islam-bashing as reference points for a 90-page tirade against Islam in which, pointing out the joy expressed by Moslems over the decimations of the terrorists (as in 9/11), he concludes that "they (Moslems) can scarcely be considered, in the vocabulary of Western humanism, as 'ethical subjects' but remain in the service of an exclusionary universal and as such are inaccessible to us."

In the second part of the book, entitled "On Being a Jew," Solway lays about with his broadsword like Achilles with his heel still intact, striking at a prejudiced Western media and Europe's "relativist approach to multiculturalism," which is undermining its own Enlightenment values.

Solway believes 2003 is a repeat of 1938, when the first aggressions of a delinquent nation were met with a soft European response. Doubting that any negotiation is possible with the Palestinian Authority, Solway unleashes one of his many fireballs:

As for the 'peaceful' advocacy of such people – the journalists, the broadcasters, the bien pensants, the instapundits, the weathervane commentators, the talking heads and Teledontosauri, the frequently consulted Arab plenipotentiaries – this amounts to nothing more than a subtle technique of persuasion intended to promote the bloody agenda of Arab leaders like the late Yasser Arafat and Hizbullah fanatic Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

The socio-historical origins of terrorism do not concern Solway. He vehemently rejects any and all reasons for occidental guilt and, strangely for a poet and former leftist, is baffled by the apparent "death wish" in Western culture, the knell for which has been sounded by poets and philosophers from William Blake to *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Solway rejects the postmodern

critique of the Enlightenment, and the entire discourse surrounding the tyranny of reason with its concomitant social backlash of alienated youth, dysfunctional families, and countercultural movements. His bold attack on the ideological constructs of academia appears to derive from some embattled front where Solway has been witness to imminent doom. Mocking Derrida's ghastly stutter in response to 9/11 (it was a "telegram of metonymy"), appalled by the "we had it coming to us" views of Edward Said and Noam Chomsky – he dismisses the latter's work as "ideological blather" – Solway believes that the intellectual Left is incapable of recognizing reality, that it wants to feed the planet on Coleridge's "honey-dew." He describes the climate of Western academic dementia as follows:

... Hatred of one's own, a proneness to delusion, and the seductive reverie of antirealism, moral evasiveness and the habit of rejigging the past seem hardwired into the mindset of this strange human colony, so glibly eloquent and yet so morally inarticulate.

He is equally troubled by the kind of internationalism that seeks a feel-good, Kantian brotherhood of man at the very moment when the "barbarians are at the door":

Under the rubric of "social justice," the Left is busy trying to dismantle the imperfect but still effective political and economic structure of the world's greatest democracy, the bulwark of what we know of as civilization, in order to pursue a universalist program of salvation on earth...

Solway believes 2003 is a repeat of 1938.

Profoundly informed, contentious, bellicose, masterfully composed, bracingly un-Canadian in its passionate opinions, *The Big Lie* rides roughshod over the problem of the creation of social wholes in which – whether they are God-centered cultures or capitalist ones – there will be glaring inadequacies. Neither Solway nor Hitchens appear to have any understanding of the contemplative richness of lives lived under a transcendent ideal, nor of the dangers of a time-bound society that manufactures commercialized identities. The Barbie dolls that strut about with the "I-am-an-object-to-be-desired" look on their faces may be remotely related to the terrorist. But Solway's polemic is a provocation to all left-leaning intellectuals who have withdrawn into a dream world of imagined togetherness, who have been lulled into a soporific reverie by the constant drone of conflict, or who have crawled snail-like into a rhetoric-encumbered postmodern liberal arts shell.

Bearer of a tremendously personalized world of learning, and thus never pedantic, David Solway is that rare species of lone gun intellectual who must be treated with cautious respect. □

By Mark Heffernan, a Montreal writer.

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\$16.95, paper, 81pp
ISBN 978-1-55245-181-6

David McGimpsey's witty collection shows some hazards of satirizing popular culture. The subject is a bit like the Tar Baby in the Bre'r Rabbit story: the harder you hit it, the more bemired you become, toiling in "pitch that defiles," as Shakespeare (a more substantial entertainer than, say, Tony Danza) said in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Danza, Mary Tyler Moore, and the cast of *Gilligan's Island* are just a few of the objects of McGimpsey's wit, and two poems are based on episodes of *Suddenly Susan*, a sitcom starring Brooke Shields that ran from 1996–2000. It's disturbing to imagine the research behind this book. Amusingly, one of McGimpsey's poems turns Sylvia Plath's life into a cheery sitcom with Valerie Harper playing her mother. Certainly our culture is preoccupied with bad television and celebrities who abuse substances but have no substance. McGimpsey's satiric master seems to be Juvenal, who made enduring poetry out of the fools of his age, but the Roman poet attacked generic fools, not trademarked ones, and his work has endured for close to 2,000 years. Will a Ted Turner superstition broadcast *Happy Days* a century from now so that future readers can understand McGimpsey's satires? Perhaps we might fear that it will. Alexander Pope, who supplies an epigraph to one section of the book, excoriated bad writers in *The Dunciad*, and perhaps the stars of bad sitcoms are our equivalent of the bad actor and playwright Colley Cibber, whom Pope made king of the dunces.

One problem with denouncing the ephemeral lies in the nature of the targets. Dozens of bad writers survive only in footnotes in *The Dunciad*. Pope's ele-

gant couplets make it worth the trouble to read about them. McGimpsey's roughly iambic lines do not have the same brilliant sheen, the same satiric bite. The typical McGimpsey poem is at least two pages in length, and compression – a little density – would have intensified their impact. A shaggy dog poem like "Manhattan" ("two dogs walk into a Manhattan bar") could have been compressed down to nothing. There are sonnets scattered among the long poems, and most of them are quite good. We should be grateful for "Fäilte," a sonnet in which McGimpsey declares that St. Patrick's Day is the only holiday completely ruined by the music of U2, which makes this holiday "an amazing legacy / of Bono's unofficial papacy." The metaphor of Bono as a pop pope is deliciously appropriate.

Naomi Guttman's *Wet Apples, White Blood* is her first book since 1991, when her debut, *Waiting for Winter*, won the A. M. Klein Award. The poems in the first and fourth sections are generally good. They are well-crafted (a term of faint but real praise), some on personal or family themes, some on historical ones. The *glosa*, a form that Canadian poets just have to try nowadays, is represented by "For Rent," which finds its base text in Rilke.

Guttman's book comes wonderfully alive in the two middle sections, both of which deal with lactation, the production of milk to nurture offspring. The poems in the title cycle consider lactation from the perspectives of myth, natural history, and folklore. The phrase "white blood" comes from none of these sources: the poet cites a woman who keeps a fruit stand and calls milk by that epithet. Wet apples are, of course, the breasts. Poems in the cycle deal with Hera's reluctant nursing of Herakles, with Mary and the Christ Child, with King Tut's wet nurse, with the primitive milk production of the female platypus, and with the curdled milk of maternal kindness in Medea (who revenged herself on her betraying husband by killing their children). Folklore about what nursing women should and should not do is treated in "Instructions for the Child in the Womb." The best poem in the section is "At the Tomb of King Tut's Wet Nurse." In a way it supplements Shelley's great poem "Ozymandias," in which the image of a vanished pharaoh suggests that the sculptor's work can outlast the vanity of kings. Guttman's poem tells us that a recently discovered carving of Tutankhamun with his wet nurse conveys a humanity not found in the depiction of the pharaoh's "counselors, generals and slaves." The nurse, Maia, was "the servant who fed

the body of a god," a phrase that seems to come from a video produced by *National Geographic*. She had her own lavish tomb, a rare example of a woman exalted for her domestic role. Guttman has created an Egyptian Madonna, and the figure of this Madonna is profoundly human. The following cycle, "Galactopoiesis," moves the book from myth and natural history to the personal. The title refers to the making ("poesis") of milk ("galacto"). The sequence tells the story of a sick child, hospitalized but still nursed by his mother. The poems are almost all in three-line stanzas that Guttman handles with flexibility and grace. The language is a poised mixture of the clinical and emotive. These fine poems are a complement to the impersonal poetry of the cycle in the previous section. After 16 years, Naomi Guttman is back, better than ever.

S.E. Venart's debut collection, *Woodshedding*, is good but shows a narrow range, with an emphasis on the confessional mode. The title of the book can refer, she tells us, to spontaneous singing, to "arduous and solitary rehearsal," or to a shed where parental thrashings were administered. The figurative thrashings in this collection are often self-administered, but the poems in the second section, which deals with family dysfunction, show the pain that a relationship with a difficult mother and a defeated father can create for children. The family poems impress by their restraint: painful feelings are all the more powerful here for being understated, forced into tight stanzas. The strongest poem is probably "Breathe," which uses both Buddhist and medical terms to describe the death of a parent. The ending is strong: "And when you've fallen from me, I'll think / it's phenomenal, / how the low sound in my walls / is still you, / that whistle call / bringing me home." Many of the poems in *Woodshedding* put the narrator in the desperate position of the swallow she describes with deep empathy in "Waiting for the T," a bird trapped under the glass ceiling of Harvard Square Station, flying up to collide with a barrier it cannot understand. But of course the poet understands. Two substantial poems in the first part of the book add to the growing list of works by Canadian poets who have resided at the retreat centre at Hawthornden Castle in Scotland. Perhaps it is time for an anthology.

Venart's debut is impressive: her singing is arduous but not, in spite of the opening quotation, spontaneous. In art, spontaneity can be overvalued, whatever Jack Kerouac thought.

Nicole Brossard is a national treasure, and we don't need the Molson Prize and her two Governor General's Literary Awards to remind us of that. Her new book does not include the French texts, but the two translators are experienced and the monolingual writer can trust them. The language moves confidently, flowing without obvious transitions over a range of themes: beauty, love, language, war. The rose is associated with nature and passion, civilization mostly with war and power. Three "Softlinks," prose poems dispersed through the book, offer the reader some ways into the meanings of the elusive lyrics that make up most of the work. Brossard is perhaps referring to the SoftLink library automation systems: libraries, repositories of the word, contain much of what is good in civilization. The outer world, the poems tell us, is not only a world of natural beauty but also the realm of men with "eyes of Kalashnikovs." The second "Softlink" decries the power of men in white shirts who traffic in weapons, and trade women and children. This is the dark side of civilization. Yet the urban, the core of civilization, can be associated with the erotic: the speaker remembers the '80s in Chez Madame Arthur, a famous Paris nightclub where "women wrapped their arms around / nights of ink and dawn." If there is any resolution of the dichotomies of the rose and civilization, it lies in the words, which are treated in "Softlink 3" not as mere signs but as real entities. Any word, any language. In a passage that calls to mind Rilke's "Ninth Duino Elegy," which says we are here to affirm being through words, Brossard summons up the sorts of words that drive and haunt us: names of places and people, of cherished objects, words of pleasure and pain, words that "shoot up before our very eyes like cloned shadows replete with light and great myths." The word is entangled with civilization and its discontents, but also preserves and exalts the realm of the rose. ■

By Bert Almon, whose new book *A Ghost in Waterloo Station* is published by Brindle & Glass.

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poetry

Of Zoloff and polar bears

THE EMILY
VALENTINE POEMS

By Zoe Whittall
Snare Books

\$10, paper, 70pp
ISBN 978-0-9739438-3-2

Ranging from haikus on porn to petulant fan mail addressed to Boy George, this collection's main strength is its brash unpredictability of form. While often puzzling, it cannot be called boring.

At her best, Whittall is able to compactly reveal the sadness, anxiety, madness, and desire of her poetic subjects, using potent imagery and dark humour. An old lover is recalled as "dangerous like a slow-grind on a last-call dance floor." In "827 Ossington," the narrator muses,

*I always end relationships on
Ossington street. It's long and
grey, book-ended by the men-
tal hospital and a gas station
that got bombed last week.*

Yet many of the poems strike the reader as a series of stark observations which lead nowhere. Stanza 5 of "Serenade

from the Porch of the Parkdale Gem" begins,

*5. I almost died in a freight
elevator on my way
to get laid
by someone twice my age I
couldn't even really
talk to.*

The next stanza transports us to a bank machine, where the narrator talks of receipts stuck to her boots. This formal disjointedness might mirror the subject's mental state, but it does not help us understand it.

Sprinkled with references to Zoloff, suicide, ageing, nothingness, marginalization, and panic attacks, these poems appear to be mainly about a deep, and possibly spiritually-based, anxiety: "We turned 30 and remembered about God." But the God motif is, like many of the poetic narratives, left undeveloped.

This avoidance of meaning might be deliberate, as the opening poem hints: "You have love and the word love, but the two will never meet." A poet can try, though, can't she?

THE MECHANICAL BIRD

By Asa Boxer
Véhicule Press
\$16, paper, 78pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-227-7

There is a panoramic quality to this book, which takes us into the heart of the natural and man-made worlds, offers insights on war and terror, and penetrates the lives of individuals and relationships. Despite the collection's scope, it possesses great integrity of voice and vision.

In one of the opening poems, entitled "The Traveller," the poet announces;

*The traveller's wish is to
touch the vanishing point,
to arrive at the crux, to stand
in the deepest place*

It is an apt introduction. We are led, like travellers, to ponder the polar bear, who "mills like a vacationer" but whose "fur / is a white fire blazing from his charred-black skin"; the restless mind of a sleeping cat; the turtle, who wishes to "come so near death as to learn / the secrets of eternity..."; and other beasts, insects, and plants, each of which is contemplated so intently that it becomes the incarnation of a mood.



People, in both their political and personal dimensions, are also fixed with Boxer's relentless gaze. The searing "In Hitler's Holy Land" declares that "Hitler is the unnamed father of the Holy Land," and bitterly advises;

*You must give your golden
teeth and clip your nails
and shear
your hair and keep your gaze
upon the ground while
suicides blow
their deadly flowers every-
where, and your children
pick bones.*

The same gaze commiserates

with the dishwasher "Amad," who "wouldn't murder," just "wants a girlfriend," but is constricted by "soldiers at the border."

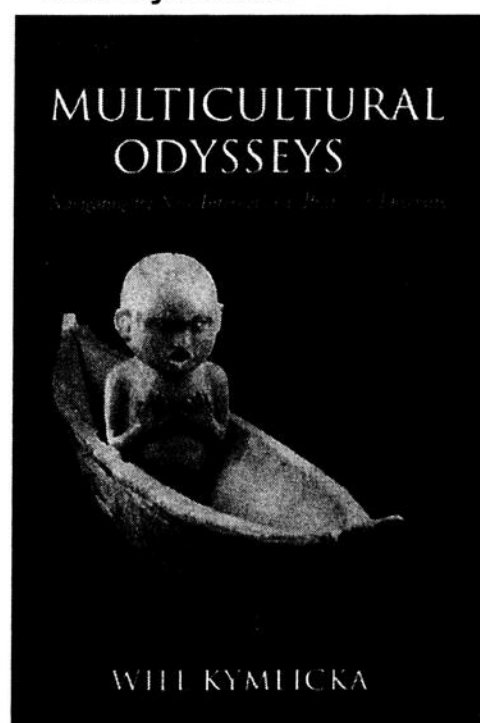
These poems often unveil warring drives or concepts at the very core of existence: "the sap that seals the score / and suckles a thousand stems will capture and kill a fly." If there is any criticism to be made of them, it is that some of this territory is too well-travelled. This poet's great artistry might be better exercised in remoter regions.

By Aparna Sanyal, a Montreal writer

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A COVENANT OF SALT

Martine Desjardins

translated by

Fred A. Reed and David Homel

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expression of my impatience when I hear certain Quebecers talk about the Conquest and the resentment they have against the English.

In the French community here, there are a lot of prejudices. There's not a lot of openness towards the English Canadian culture. You know, they'll say, 'there is no English Canadian culture; they're Americanized.'"

As a book reviewer at *L'Actualité*, Desjardins is familiar with local talent. "I think it's very sad because there is a lot going on in anglophone literature in Canada, and here in Quebec, wonderful authors whom the other solitude doesn't want to acknowledge."

With a bachelor's degree in Russian and Italian, and a master's in comparative literature, Desjardins has embraced several

Desjardins has embraced several literary traditions.

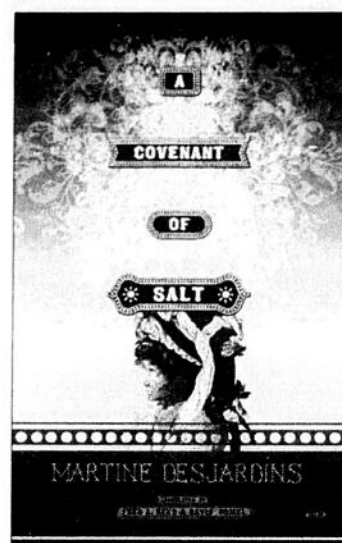
literary traditions, including those of the French and English.

"I write in French because I really discovered my love for literature with the 19th century French authors, and it's with them that I learned to write," recounts Desjardins, adding how, at 17 or 18, she "discovered the English Romantic poets and the English gothic novel," and drew particular inspiration from women writers such as Maria Edgeworth and Ann Radcliffe.

"And I read all the 1920s authors like Henry James and W.W. Jacobs. That's where my literary affinities are, with the British, the

Irish, the English Canadians."

Desjardins' cultural openness has yielded an enticing hybrid. Even in translation, *A Covenant* conserves the lavishness of the French language while borrowing from English genre styles. And Lily, whose very name suggests primness, evokes the theme of language purity. In a rather humorous scene, the Bishop (which Desjardins points out is "l'évêque" in French), turns Lily on to sniffing salt, but not before quizzing her on the purpose of adding it to holy water. Lily replies that this is done "to preserve our souls from corruption



and protect them against the Devil."

Wrapping up the interview, I'm not the least bit concerned for Desjardins' own integrity. For all her cultural flirtations, she seems

strikingly far from corruption. Mining from the past, Desjardins extracts treasures without "getting caught," and surfaces like a breath of fresh air. *A Covenant* marries literary traditions in a sleek gothic ceremony, silvery salt sprinkled like confetti and the Saint Lawrence coursing through. *Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.* ■

By Kimberly Bourgeois, a reviewer and writer who lives in Montreal.

A COVENANT OF SALT
By Martine Desjardins
Translated by David Homel and Fred A. Reed
Talonbooks
\$17.95, paper, 160pp
ISBN 978-0-88922-566-4

Rastelli (from page 4)

"It was probably an overhyped thing at the time – that *fin de siècle* ennui and also the Y2K fear. But there's no doubt that we had that sense that all this had to come to an end, that we couldn't go on living like this forever. One of the challenges of the book was to have the tone slowly change to reflect that. It was a mix of hope and resignation, I guess. And maybe a general feeling of being underwhelmed with the end of the 20th century. For people of my generation, 2000 was always the horizon, and now here it was, and where were the flying cars? Weren't we supposed to have figured out how to take care of the planet by now? There were a lot of reasons to be disappointed."

Every generation tends to tell the next one that theirs was the real scene. When I moved to Montreal at the beginning of 1998, a common refrain was that I had "just missed the real fun." Rastelli, both in person and in the novel, is careful to avoid that kind of trap.

"You'll hear that 'good old days' refrain every time a couple of clubs close," says Rastelli, "or whenever new ones open or get too popular or 'commercial.' Sure it's sad when something like the old loft scene fizzles out, but it wasn't for bad reasons. We took things to the next level, established legitimate spaces like this place we're in right now (Casa del Popolo), created jobs and hired friends. More and more people shackled up, got into long-term relationships, stopped going to the bars every night, got off welfare, got successful with their bands. I want to guard against getting too nostalgic about a time when everything was under the table and nobody was making any money. Sure there may be some romance to that, but the reality can be grim. Those weren't the good old days, those were *those days*."

Thankfully Rastelli has also resisted the kind of celebrity name-drops that could have reduced the whole setting and narrative to a staging ground for the ascension of a few stars. It's a pitfall of which he was very much aware.

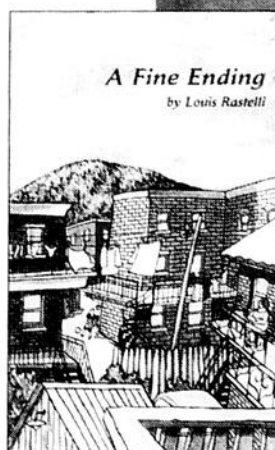
"It would have been easy to succumb to that, yes. You know, 'Oh, I remember when Rufus Wainwright was playing piano every Thursday at Café Sarajevo, and bursting into song at the patio of Miami Bar when he was working there.' I didn't name any actual names or performers because the real goal of the book was to capture the spirit of the time, not to exploit the fact that some people who are now famous were around."

An entirely unexpected strand of *A Fine Ending*'s narrative is provided by the cats of the Plateau, who form a sort of shadow society, sometimes beloved, sometimes treated horribly. One particular anecdote may make sensitive cat lovers queasy to say the least. Why the strong feline presence?

"The cats seemed like a way to address some things about the environment and what I see as our casual disregard for it. I found it interesting to highlight the neglect and taking for granted of things like cats and animals and the mountain among these people you'd assume would have been, if not members of Greenpeace, at least sympathetic to environmental movements. It was also a good way to provide some relief from the sheer urban-ness of it all, to have the story at one point reduced to the narrator staring face to face with a sick kitten." ■

A FINE ENDING
By Louis Rastelli
Insomniac Press
\$21.95 paper, 319pp
ISBN 978-1-89717-849-2

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"I want to guard against getting too nostalgic about a time when nobody was making any money."

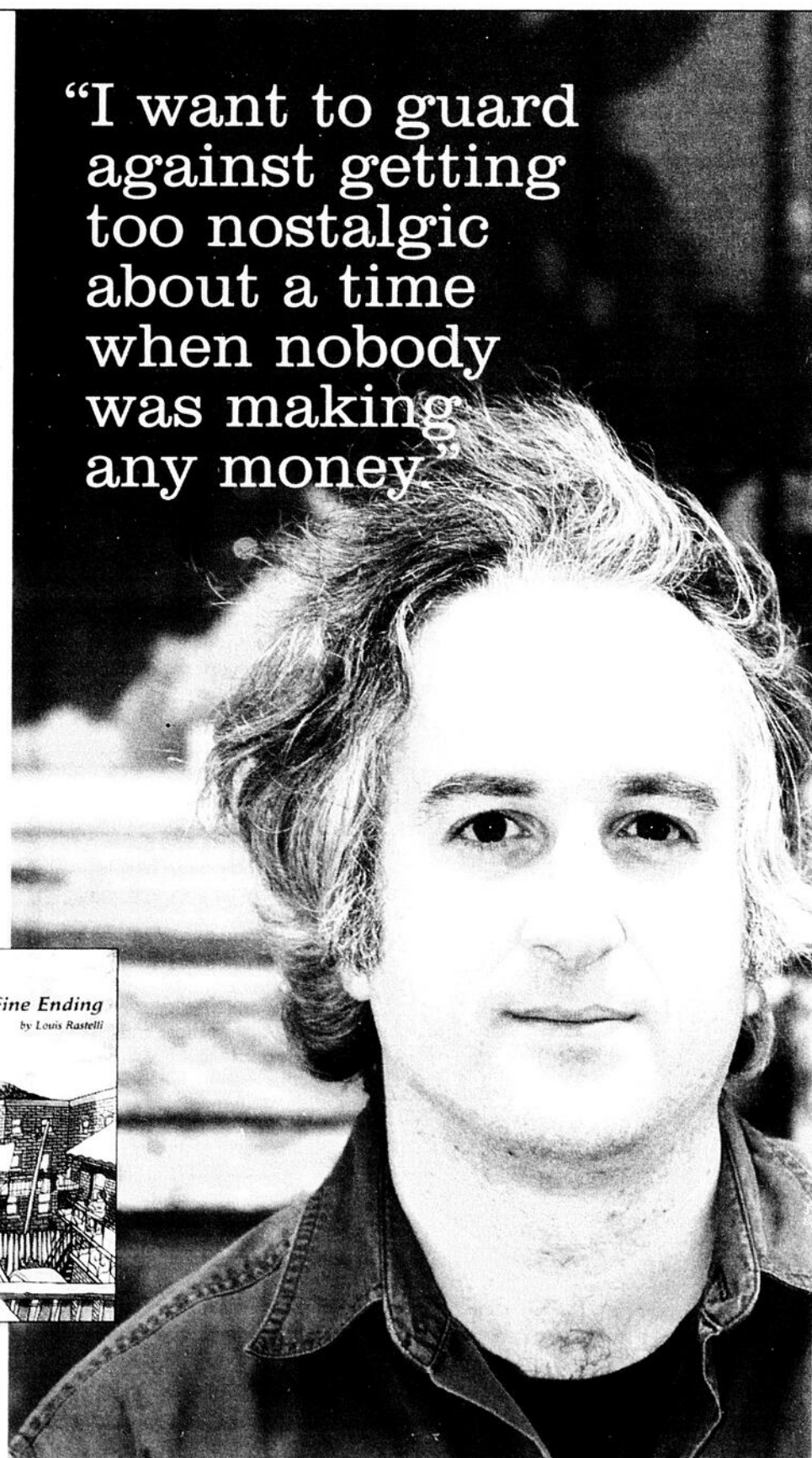


PHOTO: T.P. BYRNES

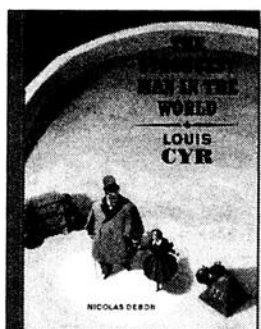
young readers

New for Fall

Traveling to Peru with his family, young Paul Gauguin (yes, *that* Paul Gauguin) keeps busy by drawing pictures and playing with his imaginary orange dog on the deck of the ship. When his father dies suddenly on board the ship, his mother explains that his father was "carried away" and that the cause was his heart. Confused, grieving, and with a child's capacity for simultaneous literal and imaginative thinking, Paul sees his father being swept away by his heart, which takes the form of a big balloon. Other passengers see merely the brilliant red sun on the ocean horizon. While his mother and sister cry in their rooms, Paul seeks out his father's heart on the sea. When they arrive in Peru an old man takes Paul to a park, shows him how to paint, and encourages him to make a painting of his own. Arsenault's illustrations vividly render both the real and the imaginative: the pale faces of the mourning family members, the orange dog who accompanies Paul, and the father's heart that rises and sets on the young artist's formative days. For ages 6-9.

MR. GAUGUIN'S HEART By Marie-Danielle Croteau, Illustrated by Isabelle Arsenault Translated by Susan Ouriou
Tundra Books, \$22.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-88776-842-8

Tin Angel by Shannon Cowan (Lobster Press) is a well-conceived and rewarding novel for teen readers. "I was fourteen years old when they arrested me for the murder of Louis Moss," begins the confession. Ronnie, the story's protagonist, suffers a series of losses. Her beloved father dies suddenly in an accident. Then, out of financial necessity, her mother sells the family's remote mountain lodge in the Coast Mountains and they move to the nearby town of Shelter Bay. Adjusting to this new life proves difficult for Ronnie, her sister, and their mother, who becomes depressed and develops a drinking problem. Cowan develops the characters in the story more fully than many writers for young adults, who tend to zero in on one issue or character. She evokes the isolation and beauty of the Coast Mountains, the rhythms of small-town life, and the events and mood of the late 1960s and early '70s to create a rich story about a mysterious and violent incident and an unlikely criminal.



Author and illustrator Nicolas Debon certainly chose an excellent subject for his picture book, *The Strongest Man in the World* (Groundwood Books). Louis Cyr, a real-life Quebec superhero, was famous in North America and Europe for his ability to lift extremely heavy objects. The story of his life is well suited to the graphic novel style employed here. On his final night as a star performer, the aging Cyr tells his daughter

Emiliana about his youth, the family members who inspired him, and how he eventually founded his own circus. Debon's text and images provide wonderful detail to convey Cyr's impressive strength and vitality: Cyr resists the pull of four horses each weighing over a ton, lifts fearsomely large boulders in weightlifting competitions, and gleefully eats what appears to be an entire roast pig. The drawings have a great old-time feel to them, recreating a time of small towns, travelling circuses, and astonishing feats. For ages 7-12.

Ridley Bluefox and the Flying Fish of Fortune Falls by Carrie Percy (Lobster Press) is a fast-paced and witty chapter book. Ridley, a famous fisherman at the young age of 12, seeks the ultimate challenge of catching a flying fish. Self-assured if not downright cocky, he is accustomed to traveling all over the world with his parents, adventurers whose combined résumés would put Indiana Jones to shame. On meeting a strange old man who gives him a box of caterpillars and urges him to try to catch a flying fish somewhere on a remote island in the South Pacific, Ridley sets out to further his fame, going first to England to meet a cantankerous old explorer who has been to the famed Fortuna Island, and then to



the island itself to catch the fish that is supposed to be uncatchable. A lively and fun adventure story for ages 7-10.

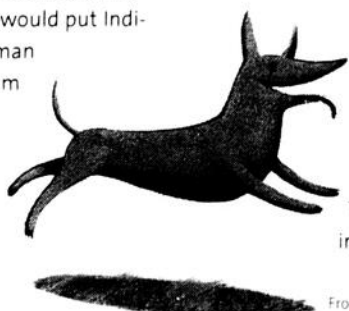
The first thing the YA reader finds in *David Thompson: A Trail by Stars* (XYZ Publishing) is the aged and penniless Thompson hawking the last of his surveying instruments to buy food during a bitterly cold Montreal winter. How could such a legendary surveyor, map maker, and explorer be reduced to this?

This clever hook makes the reader curious to learn more about Thompson's life and accomplishments. The ensuing chapters portray his youth in an English charity school where he learns math and astronomy. Upon graduation he is sent to Rupert's Land to apprentice in the fur trade. His years exploring and mapping vast territories in the service of first the Hudson's Bay Company and then the North West Company form the core of this well-researched biography. The narrative style brings the time of exploration and settlement to life, and David Thompson is given his due as a remarkable figure in history. This is an interesting stand-alone book that would also enrich and enliven history curricula.

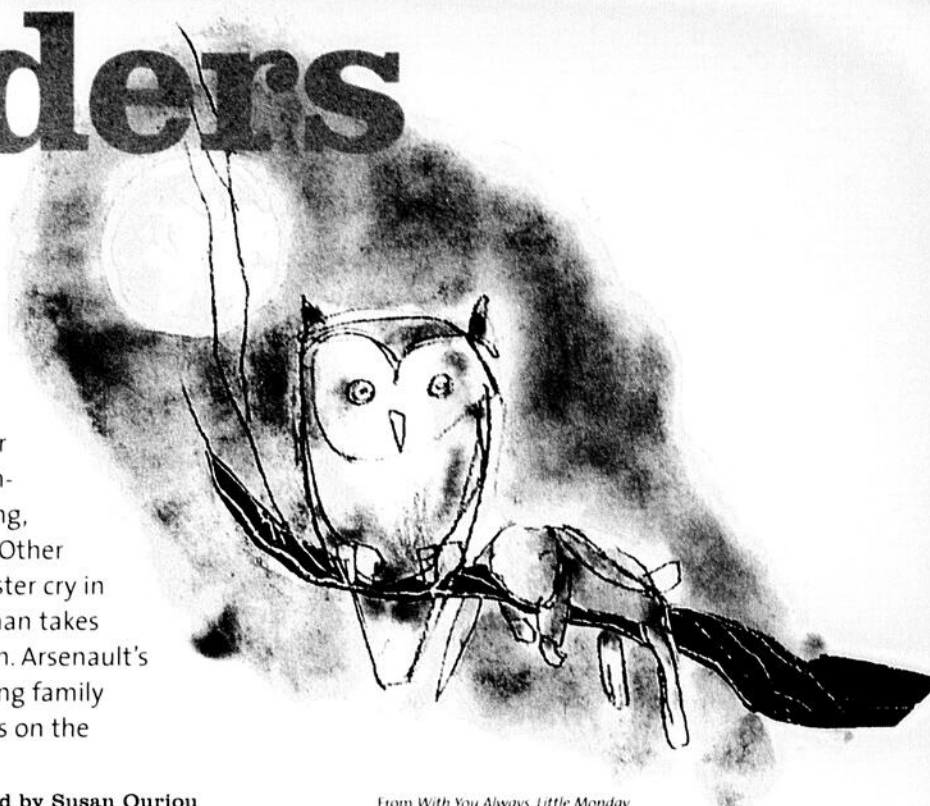
Orphan Ahwak (Orca Book Publishers) is the tale of Aneze, a First Nations girl who survives the brutal raid of her family's camp by an enemy tribe. Wounded and orphaned, Aneze is determined to become a hunter and take care of herself. Episodes in her life are compellingly described by Rivera, whose readings on the Dene, Chippewa, and Inuit make for an imaginative reconstruction of a girl's nomadic hunting life 300 years prior to natives' contact with European traders. This is a fine and often gripping story. While some of the early scenes may be uncomfortable for sensitive readers, most will be drawn in as Aneze struggles for survival, independence, and belonging. For ages 9-13.

When you look at the moon, what do you see? For some cultures it is a man, for others a rabbit. Geneviève Côté's tender and beautifully illustrated *With You Always, Little Monday* (Harcourt) is about a young orphaned rabbit that sets out to find his mother. He asks his neighbours Bear, Swan, Chipmunk, Frog, and even Skunk if they are his mommy; each explains why she is not. One night, curled asleep in the moonlight, he wakes to find his mother, a rabbit just like him, smiling at him from her moon-home. Watching over him and lighting his way, his mother has always been there. This sweet and moving picture book is destined to be read and reread at many bedtimes.

Dominique Jolin (Dominique & Friends) brings us the adventures of Toopy (a mouse) and Binoo (a kitten, who is much smaller than the mouse) in several titles and formats, including board books. They are sure to delight young children and the big people who read to them. The stories are short and funny, with accompanying bright and often hilarious illustrations. In



From *Mr. Gauguin's Heart*



From *With You Always, Little Monday*

Robinson Toopy, Little Red Toopy, and The Lost Sleep, Jolin gives a nod to, and uses, fairy tales and stories with fresh comic effect. In other scenarios, Toopy goes out of his way and over the top to help and entertain little Binoo, one of the cutest and most likeable little sidekicks around. These stories capture the joy and imagination of play and young friendship.

Part of the Not Just Proms & Parties series intended for reluctant young adult readers, *Belinda's Obsession* by Patricia C. Penny (Lobster Press) focuses on 16-year-old Belinda, a lesbian who has just bumped into her summer flame, Candice. Just as the two start dating again and things are clicking, Belinda realizes that her mother is having an affair. Shocked, Belinda sets out to catch her mom and figure out what is going on, not knowing whether to tell her unsuspecting father. Belinda begins to recognize the strength of her feelings for Candice and the eventual necessity of telling her family she is a lesbian. But how can she do this when her mom seems to be wrecking their family? Penny writes a solid, dialogue-driven story that will keep readers interested in the many affairs of the heart coursing through this novel.

By Annie Murray, a Montreal librarian transplanted from British Columbia.

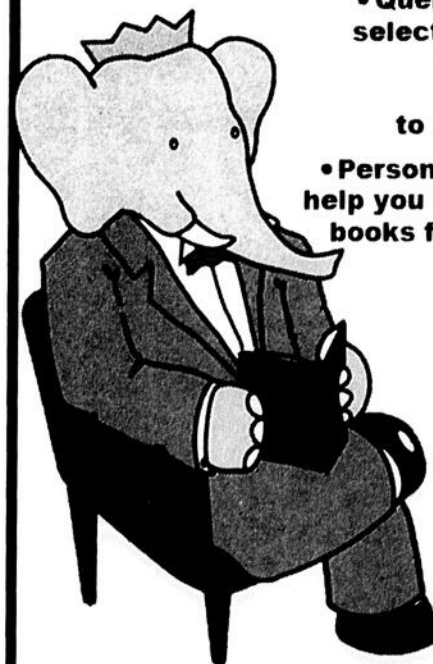
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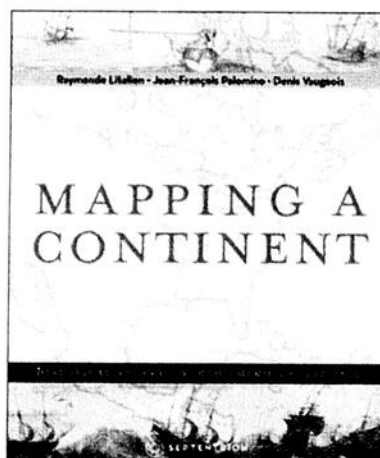
*Integrity
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 for the Right Reason*
 Barbara Killinger
 978-0-7735-3287-8 \$34.95 cloth

Richly illustrated with personal stories, *Integrity* offers a positive "how to" perspective on safeguarding personal and professional integrity and on encouraging our children to develop this vital character trait. Killinger concludes that integrity is not possible without compassion and makes it clear that doing the right thing includes doing it for the right reason.

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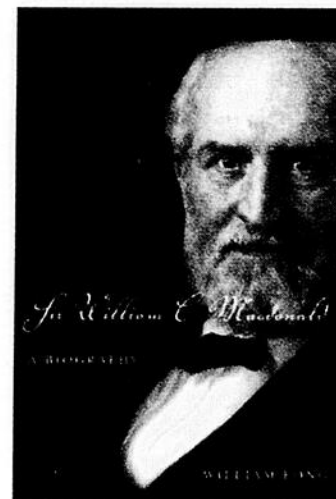
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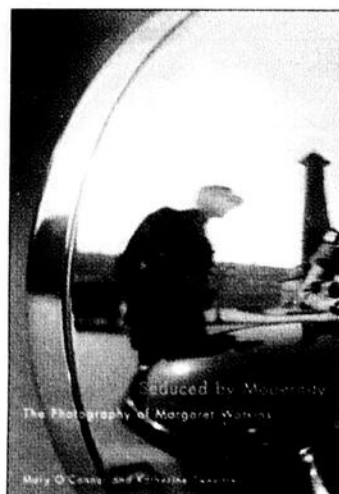
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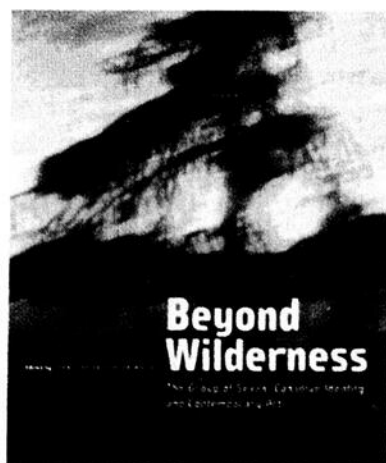


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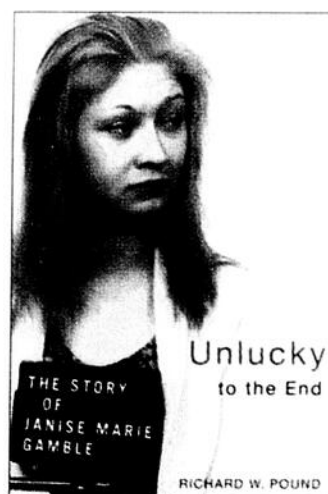
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