

mRb

SUMMER 2007 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS



Home Work

Marie-Louise Gay and David Homel's family project bears KidLit fruit

SPECIAL CHILDREN'S / YOUNG ADULT EDITION

INSIDE: JOYCE SCHARF, STARS OF YOUNG ADULT, THREE SUCCESS STORIES, AND MORE

The Montreal Review of Books is available at these bookstores and libraries:

MONTREAL

Argo Books
Arts Café
Atwater Library
Babar Books, Pointe-Clare
Babar Books, Greene Avenue
Beaconsfield Public Library
Baie d'Urfe Public Library
Bibliophile Bookstore
Borders Bookstore
Centaur Theatre
Centre canadien d'architecture Bookstore
Chapters, Downtown, Pointe-Clare
Clio, Pointe-Clare
Coles Stores in LaSalle, Cavendish Mall, Dorval, Place Vertu
Concordia University Bookstore
Dawson College Bookstore
Dollard-des-Ormeaux Public Library
Dorval Public Library
Eleanor London Library
Encore Books and Records
Ex Libris
Expression Inc.
Indigo Books & Music
Jewish Public Library
Kirkland Public Library
McGill University Bookstore
Mélange Magique
Nicholas Hoare, Greene Avenue
Paragraphe
Pierrefonds Public Library
Pointe-Clare Municipal Library
Le Point Vert
Reginald Dawson Library, TMR
Renaud-Bray, Parc
Saidye Bronfman Centre
Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Public Library
TMR Library
Vanier College Bookstore
Verdun Library on Barnantyne
Livres Welch
Westmount Public Library
The Word
The Yellow Door
Zeke's Gallery

ALBERTA

McNally Robinson Booksellers, Calgary
Pages, Calgary
Audrey's Books, Edmonton

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Simon Fraser University Bookstore, Burnaby
Misty River Book Store, Terrace
Munro's Bookstore, Victoria

MANITOBA

McNally-Robinson Booksellers, Winnipeg

NEW BRUNSWICK

Westminster Books, Fredericton
Fredericton Public Library
Tidewater Books, Sackville

NOVA SCOTIA

Box of Delights, Wolfville
The Book Room Limited, Halifax
Frog Hollow, Halifax

ONTARIO

The Miller's Tale, Almonte
The Bookshelf, Guelph
Campus Bookstore, Queen's University, Kingston
Novel Ideas, Kingston
Oxford Book Store, London
Books on Beechwood, Ottawa
Carleton University Bookstore, Ottawa
Collected Works Bookstore, Ottawa
Furby House Books, Port Hope
The Book Mark, Toronto
Pages Books, Toronto
University of Toronto Bookstore, Toronto
Wordsworth Books, Waterloo

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Bookmark Inc., Charlottetown

QUEBEC

Acorn Books, Hudson
Livres Archaibault in Anjou, Brossard, Laval, Sherbrooke
Librairie Lac Birome, Knowlton
Librairie livres d'or Sutton
La Maison Anglaise, Quebec City
Bibliothèque municipale de Saint-Lambert
Bishop's University Bookstore, Lennoxville
Biblio Wakefield Library, Wakefield

SASKATCHEWAN

Book & Brier Patch, Regina
McNally-Robinson Booksellers, Saskatoon
The White Cat Book Company, Saskatoon

mRb

SUMMER 2007
Volume 10 No. 3

Montreal Review of Books
is published three times a year by the
Association of English-language Publishers
of Quebec (AELAQ)
Circulation 40,000

Margaret Goldik Co-Editor
Ian McGillis Co-Editor
David LeBlanc Designer
Michael Wile Advertising Manager

For editorial inquires contact:
AELAQ 1200 Atwater Avenue, Suite #3
Montreal, QC H3Z 1X4
Telephone: 514-932-5633
Facsimile: 514-932-5456
E-Mail: aelaq@bellnet.ca

For advertising inquires contact:
Telephone: 416-531-1483
Facsimile: 416-531-1612

ISSN # 1480-2538
Copyright 2007, the authors and the AELAQ
Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
and the National Library of Canada,
third quarter, 2007

We wish to thank the Canada Council for
the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage
and SODEC for their generous support,
without which this publication would not exist.

Thanks to Andrea Belcham and Mary Mony
for copy-editing assistance.

One-year subscriptions available for \$12
Please send a cheque payable to the AELAQ.

Opinions expressed in reviews and articles
in the **Montreal Review of Books** do not
necessarily reflect the views of the editors
or the AELAQ.

Cover photo by T.P. Byrnes

PRINTED IN CANADA



We wish to thank the Canada Council for the Arts,
the Department of Canadian Heritage, and SODEC for
their generous support, without which this publication
would not exist.



vallum
contemporary poetry

POETRY, REVIEWS, ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, ART, VISUAL TEXTS

"One of the top poetry magazines in the country... a fabulous magazine!"
-Word

"A delicious and exciting... A beautiful artistic eye and feel!"
-New Pages

"Witty, scathing, satirical, obscene, often mischievous!"
-Library Magazine Review

"Essential, cerebral, nuanced and provocative!"
-Promotes Society

"Beautifully printed and not a little self-willed!"
-Library Magazine Review

Subscriptions: \$18.50 (US), \$17 (CAN)
P.O. Box 48003
Montreal, QC
H2V 4S8 CANADA

www.vallummag.com info@vallummag.com

contents



features

- 4 **Marie-Louise Gay & David Homel**
By Ian McGillis
- 7 **Joyce Scharf**
By Anne Chudobiak
- 8 **Read Before You Judge**
By Andrea Belcham
- 9 **We Try Harder**
By Adam Goldman

fiction

- 6 **Rise of the Golden Cobra**
By Henry T. Aubin
Reviewed by Kim Bourgeois
- Wombat Smith: Vol 2: Beijing Breakaway**
By Anne Sautel
- Zibby Paybe & the Drama Trauma**
By Alison Bell
Reviewed by Annie Murray
- 11 **The Secret of Grim Hill**
By Linda DeMeulemeester
- Dear Jo: The Story of Losing Leah...and Searching for Hope**
By Christina Kilbourne
Reviewed by Angela Carr


non-fiction

- 10 **Rather Laugh than Cry: Stories from a Hassidic Household**
By Malka Zipora
- Susanna Moodie: Pioneer Author**
By Anne Cimon
Reviewed by Margaret Goldik
- 3 **Gabrielle Roy: A Passion for Writing**
By André Vanasse
Reviewed by Margaret Goldik

special

- 3 **Hello, Me Pretty**
By Line Gamach
Reviewed by Ian McGillis





Thomas More Institute
3405 Atwater Avenue | Montreal, QC | H3H 1Y2
Tel: 514.935.9585 | Fax: 514.935.3982
www.thomasmore.qc.ca | info@thomasmore.qc.ca

Sample courses starting in September 2007:

- **Edith & Henry: Manners, morals & money through the eyes of Wharton & James**
- **Dreams and Possibilities: An exploration of Brazil and South America through their literature, films, music, political and economic choices**
- **War and the Iliad: Does The Iliad provide insight into all wars that followed?**
- **Passport to Crime: A crime fiction journey to murder around the world**
- **Spinning the Truth: The consequences of living in a world of spin & exaggerations**
- **Saturday Afternoon at the Opera**

Bachelor of Arts degree offered

Open House, Book Sale, Registration September 8, 2007
Fall Session begins September 17, 2007

My dinner with Gabrielle

GABRIELLE ROY:
A PASSION FOR WRITING
By André Vanasse
XYZ Publishing
\$17.95, paper, 158pp
ISBN 978-1-894852-25-8

In 1979, André Vanasse, then in his late thirties, was in charge of inviting Gabrielle Roy to a reception at the University of Saskatoon for a meeting of the Learned Societies. Roy had long been a heroine to the writer and teacher, who deeply admired her work. Roy was unable to attend the reception but sent a speech, which Vanasse nearly lost in misplaced luggage. He had a lithograph sent to her as a thank you for her contribution, but it never reached her.

Later that year Vanasse went to Roy's summer house in Petite-Rivière-Saint-François to apologize in person and to tell her that the loss would be made up. Roy tore a strip off her unexpected visitor, making it clear that she was annoyed that she had received neither any thanks from the Association, nor had the lithograph replaced. Vanasse, shaken, turned to go, when Roy asked him to stay longer. "I'm too upset," she said. "I need company. To tell you the truth, I don't feel too well."

And what happened that evening was to remain with Vanasse all his life: Roy spoke candidly about her writing and her

family, less candidly about her husband. The author was famed for her charm, and Vanasse was not immune. He cherished the evening of conversation, and felt obliged for many years to treat it as confidential. It wasn't until François Ricard published his *Gabrielle Roy: Une Vie* in 1996 (published by McClelland & Stewart as *Gabrielle Roy: A Life* in 1999) that he felt at ease writing about his meeting with Roy.

In this biography Vanasse recounts that

Gabrielle Roy was famed for her charm, and Vanasse was not immune.

conversation, and provides a commentary on Roy's life. Roy had an astounding success with *The Tin Flute* which was never repeated. She had a vocation to write though, and struggled on, although the struggle eventually ruined her health. She was feted in her public life and suffered distress and humiliation in her private life. She supported her family as best she could, but they wanted more. She and her husband Marcel Carbotte, a homosexual, had a stormy relationship filled with quarrels and



reconciliation. Some of this, too, she shared with Vanasse.

Part of the charm of this Quest biography is the sense that Vanasse is sharing that evening with readers. He worries about whether he will ever get anything to eat and drink as the storyteller keeps on, but doesn't wish to upset his hostess by mentioning such mundane matters. Luckily a neighbour brings in a tourtière which Roy and Vanasse share, washed down by a bottle

of wine. On his way home at the end of the evening, Vanasse, increasingly struck by the nervous exhaustion and unhappiness of the woman he had just met, and thinking of the shining star of literature he knew her to be, stopped his car at the roadside and wept. By the end of the book readers feel that they too have been touched by a fascinating woman and writer.

By Margaret Goldik, co-editor of the *Montreal Review of Books*.

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

HELLO, ME PRETTY
By Line Gamache
Translation by KerryAnn Cochrane
conundrum press
\$15, paper, 64pp
ISBN 978-1-894994-23-1

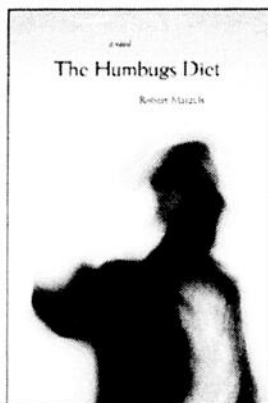
This translation of *Te malade, toi!* is a perfect example of the strengths of the graphic novel medium. It immerses the reader immediately in the emotional and physical world of its characters, in this case a working-class Montreal family whose youngest daughter, Josée, is born mentally handicapped and spends her life "in a kind of dream world. To her, life is beautiful." Visually, Gamache's flattened perspective and naive style are deceptively

simple; in fact each panel is packed with information that places the story firmly in its time and place. You can almost hear the period pop songs playing in the background. Politics are touched upon without being hammered: Josée's francophone family finds it impossible to find French-language care in the West Island, which leads to mention of the FLQ, though in the typically benign tone of the book as a whole Josée's sister says "I think they went a bit too far!"

Young readers will come away from *Hello, Me Pretty* with an unforced message of tolerance and the value of difference; all readers will come away charmed and moved. IAN MCGILLIS



New from The Mercury Press

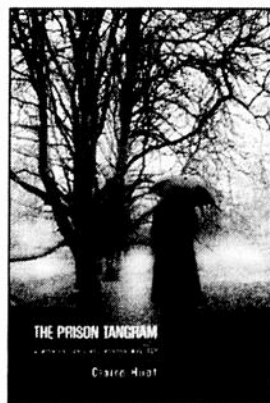


The Humbugs Diet
Robert Majzels

Why are old folks falling out of windows of the Keter Gardens Retirement Home?

A new novel by the author of *Apikoros Sleuth*.

1-55128-130-9 \$18.95
Fiction



The Prison Tangram
Claire Huot

Rey Pirelli is facing the first case of her career as a detective, and it's a deadly and difficult one. She has 14 days to solve the mysterious murders of two inmates at Montrose prison for women.

1-55128-131-7 \$17.95
Murder mystery



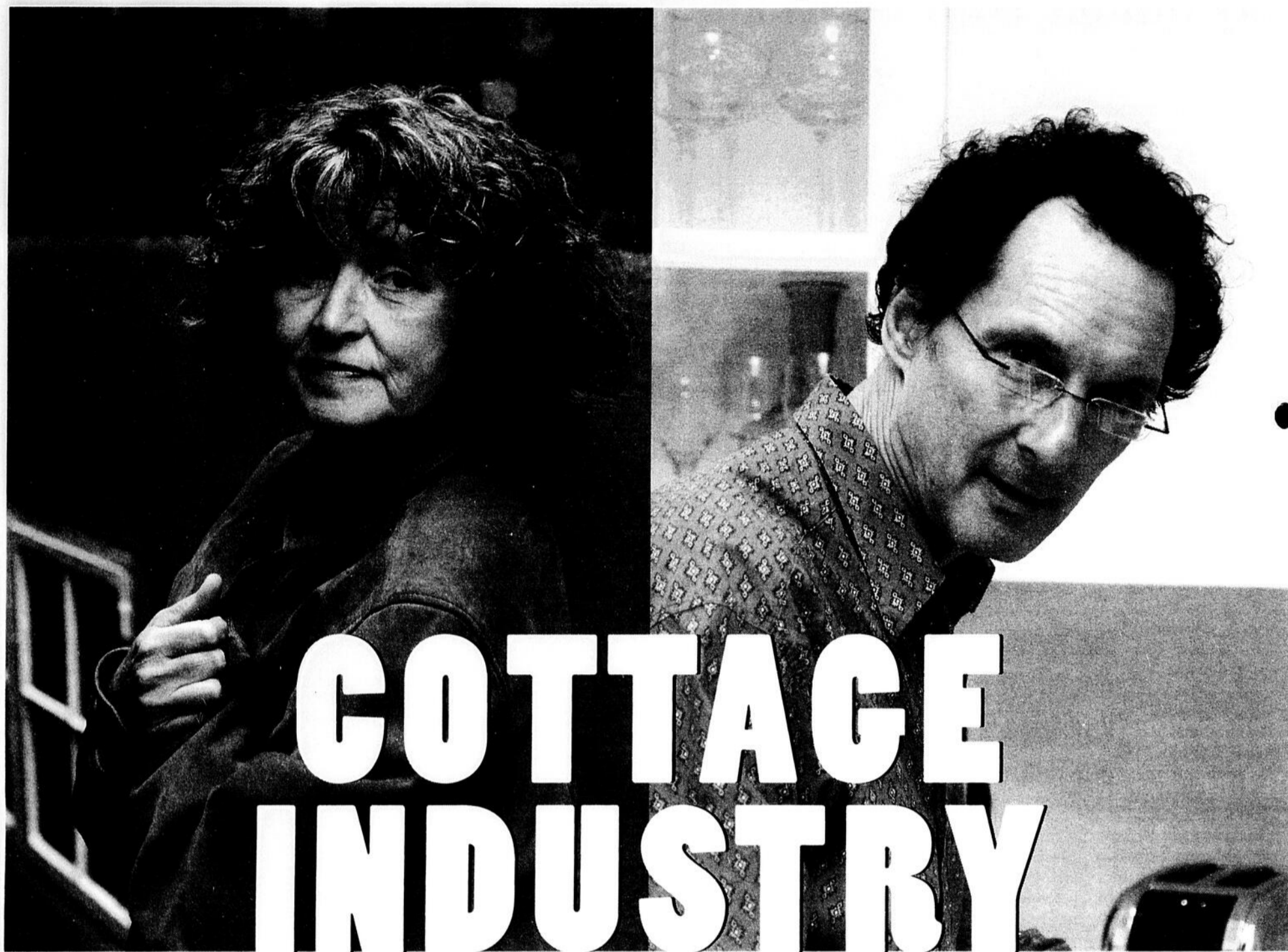
The Closets of Time

These are the closets of time, where memories become fictions and fictions become reality. Welcome, and please—close the door behind you.

Editors: Beverley Daurio and Richard Truhlar

1-55128-133-3 \$17.95
Fiction anthology

www.themercurypress.ca



Marie-Louise Gay and David Homel turned road trips with the kids into gold in *Travels with My Family*. And they've got some strong opinions on children's lit.

When you hear the word "vacation," what do you think of? Beaches and warm water, nice hotels with swimming pools? Giant water-slides and amusement parks and miniature golf? Maybe even Disneyland? Me, too.

But not my parents.

So begins *Travels With My Family*, a delightful, funny and deceptively deep book about a peripatetic clan whose two children prefer the beaten track to the many oddball destinations their parents keep insisting on.

The book combines the talents of two of Quebec's most well-regarded and award-laden authors. Marie-Louise Gay is best known for her ongoing, hugely successful *Stella* picture books for young readers (*Stella, Star of the Sea; Stella, Princess of the Sky*, etc.); David Homel is the author of five novels (the most recent, 2003's *The Speaking Cure*, won the QWF Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction) and a Gov-

ernor General's Award-winning translator. Oh, and another thing: they're married, with two sons now aged 23 and 19. *Travels* marks the first time the prolific pair has shared author credit, so it's hard not to wonder whether, with two writers in the same household, the idea of such a collaboration was always in the air.

"Absolutely not," says Gay as we chat in the couple's Outremont home. "We never thought of that at all. I'd been writing and illustrating children's books for over 30 years and David had never had anything to do with children's literature. It just happened."

"At one point," says Homel, "we tried to do a project together but were unable to. But it wouldn't have been for kids. It seemed natural that we would go on working in our own areas."

"Then," Gay picks up the thread, "about two years ago, the idea came to me to do a book about all the traveling we'd done with our kids. I wanted to make it a picture book, but it soon became obvious that it

would not be a picture book anymore. It was much too long. I would talk about it with David and at one point he said 'Gee, I'd really like to work on that with you.'"

"Once it became obvious that it was a work of longer fiction that was forming, something that I'm more used to doing, I saw that I could actually get involved in the project, which was full of personal emotions of different sorts," adds Homel.

For the novelist the timing was especially propitious.

"I was working on another project that was offering some effective resistance, so I was actually happy to say, 'Well, if this project isn't going too well, maybe I can do *this*.' It proved to be an excellent kind of time out, and it gave me a lot of confidence afterwards, because *Travels* was fun to do – not easy, because writing is writing – but it gave me a sense of enjoyment, which is what you're supposed to have but was lacking for me at the time. It was a lifesaver in some ways."

Division of labour on the project was never completely clear cut. "I would make a skeleton or outline and hand it to David," Gay says, adding that she herself created a lot of the dialogue "because I'm used to doing that with characters of those ages. When you're writing the voices of children it's so important to get it right, so that children identify. It's not so much a conscious thing, like 'This is a three year-old,' more than that you just know when it sounds right. I have an instinct in that sense."

How conscious of the age of potential readers were they while working on the book?

"You have to be very careful with that because it really depends on the level of the [individual] reader," says Gay. "With *Travels* we've had seven-year-olds, high level readers, come up to us and say 'This is great,' and 10-year-olds will say the same. It's a book where you could go from seven to 12. Publishers don't want to say that, though, because it's perceived as a big gap. But when you think of how kids read and what they like to read, it's not as big a gap as you might think."

In a perfect world one might hope that books would find their readers in a completely unforced way, but in the young readers' market the reality is otherwise, as Gay acknowledges. "The reason books are [labeled by age group] is that a lot of people just don't know what to buy. They'll go into a store and say 'I have a four-year-old' and they'll be directed to the two-to-four section. It's a very helpful thing when people are insecure."

Even so, to the neophyte shopper the children/young adult section of a bookstore can be bewildering to say the least.

"It is bewildering," Gay agrees. "The choice is so enormous. And there's a lot of junk out there, books with no conceivable emotional value. There are writers who seem to think writing for kids is easy. 'How hard can it be? I read to my children at night. I'll write down a story.'"

All this talk leads to another subject, one that ends up drawing emphatic responses from both writers: the practice of 'road testing.' With books targeted to specific age groups, and with public readings being such an integral part of the kid lit market, is it not tempting, even irresistible in some cases, to try something out in a public forum, to see if it's 'working.'?

"I've never done that," says Gay firmly. "I'm not interested in doing that at all."

"People seem to assume that about children's books," comments Homel. "But do we do that with adults' books? Would I read a section of a novel I'm working on to 'adults' to see if it would 'work'?" (He provides the inverted commas with gestures as he speaks.)

"Think of *The Speaking Cure*, which has to do with psychiatry and war and Serbia," Gay addresses Homel across the kitchen table. "Are you going to say, 'I'm going to find people who like war

and Serbia and psychiatry and I'm going to read to them?" No. You try to write for as universal a group as possible."

Not that it isn't fascinating to see the response when a finished work is read to an audience of kids. Homel cites a memorable reading in Toronto to a crowd of mostly Asian children. "It was quite obvious that these

were kids who were not allowed to make fun of their parents at home, and it was enormously fun and liberating for them to hear a story where the adults are figures of fun."

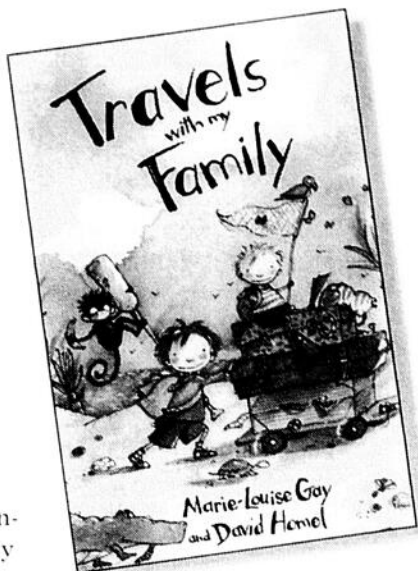
Another thing both have noticed is that when it comes time for questions from the audience, kids ask many of the same things adults do. The old 'Is this a true story?' chestnut will obviously never go away.

"We've told groups of kids 'Everything in here is true, but we're *writers*,'" says Gay. "You take the truth and you do something with it. You're not just transcribing. It's not a journal, it's fiction. But curiously enough it sure sounds like a story of two writers with two sons."

Travels cleverly and entertainingly flips the stereotype of the fuddy-duddy parents and the wild innocent children straining at the leash. Having one of the sons be the narrator was clearly a crucial decision.

"That's what makes the book so pleasurable for kids," notes Gay. "If it had been one of the adults [telling the story], it wouldn't have worked in the same way. It's a flip, sure, but I find that children have a very strong conservative streak. Yes, they go into fantasy and adventure, but in what pertains to their habits and domestic life, they like things a certain way. They like to be in *their* homes and in *their* beds. We had to find a way to make [that reversal] work logically. The main thing we wanted to stress is that the kid is taking over the story."

"The fun part was to be able to make fun of ourselves by letting somebody else make fun of us," Homel says. "We were able to look at ourselves as characters and enjoy our own weaknesses as parents and as human beings. It's comic but it's also dramatic. The parents are not the fearless leaders. They do the wrong thing, they slip



up, they get you into trouble."

"It's also a testament to our sons, who have always been quite open with us and critical of us," says Gay. "We could see our kids seeing us like that, so we said 'Let's just accept it and go with it.' It opens a door. And kids who are reading the book and have parents who aren't like the ones in

centre of the world."

"But I would stress," emphasizes Gay, "that we are not writing in order that kids would *learn* something. I don't want that to be said about what we do. Basically you write a story that you hope will engage, and you can write about any subject. There are different ways. So, how would kids see a revolution like that? Well, they see it in their way. After that it's up to the kids reading if they want to learn more about it."

Was there a view from the start to spinning *Travels* into a series? The concept certainly lends itself to that idea.

"Children have a very strong conservative streak."

the book can still relate to that sense of frustration, that you want to do one thing while your parents don't."

The real-life response to *Travels* by younger son Gabriel surprised his father.

"He said 'This is the best thing you've ever written,' which was kind of funny because I didn't know that he had ever read anything I'd written! In workshops I always say you have to figure out and understand your emotional attachment to your work, otherwise it's not going to work. For me, in this case it was really very clear. This was a way of going back to the family. I don't mean nostalgia in the negative sense, more like 'Let's for a moment transport ourselves back to this time when we did things for the moment and with a sense of play and discovery.'"

While there's no obvious overarching narrative thread in *Travels With My Family*, there is a certain ascending logic in the kind of adventures retold, from relatively innocuous (a beach encounter in South Carolina with the man-child Mr. Sandcastle) to more hair-raising, peaking with a chapter set in Mexico, where the family gets caught up in the peasant uprising in Chiapas.

"The culmination of knowledge the kids have attained earlier on makes it possible for them to understand certain things," Homel explains about the sequencing. "The further you go away from home and the stranger things get, the more demands the traveling makes on you, the more intelligence you need. So in terms of character development it makes sense to have [the Mexican adventure] at the end. There are other lives besides yours. You are not the

"No, not at all," says Homel.

"There's much less of that kind of planning than people generally suppose. We both wanted to avoid the clichés that often come with series, where you feel that the author is calculating several books in advance."

Planned or not, the success of *Travels* has occasioned a projected second book. Set in Europe, this one will forgo the on-the-road format for an account of an extended stay in one place: a remote and primitively equipped village in the south of France. The sons will have aged, resulting in an appropriate change in narrative tone.

Given Homel's earlier point that "writing is writing" and therefore an inherently challenging and serious activity, and Gay's comment on the way many writers underestimate the difficulty and responsibility involved in making first-rate books for children, I ask how they feel about the oft-repeated canard that somehow the creation of children's literature isn't quite a bona fide literary undertaking.

"I do get a lot of that," acknowledges Gay. "You know, 'Do you ever think you're going to write books for adults?' The implication being, 'Do you think you'll graduate one day?' I've never let that get to me and I never will. You just do the books you want to do." ■

TRAVELS WITH MY FAMILY

By Marie-Louise Gay and David Homel
Groundwood Books
\$15.95, cloth, 120pp
ISBN 978-0888996886

TRAVELS WITH MY FAMILY will be published in paperback on August 15, 2007.

What did you read as a child?

HOMEL: I hated reading because my parents wanted me to read. So I didn't read much until I read *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, which as I recall was sort of science fiction, which I *never* read and still don't. But something about that book allowed me to escape the present time, which was what I needed. Then I started to read more, but I'd do it in secret, so as not to give my parents the pleasure of knowing I was reading.

GAY: We moved around all the time when I was a child, and my best friends were books. I was a voracious reader, and at about age 12 I fell headlong into the French *bandes-dessinées*. People who aren't French don't always understand the importance of this genre [in Francophone culture], but it's a very innovative and creative form.

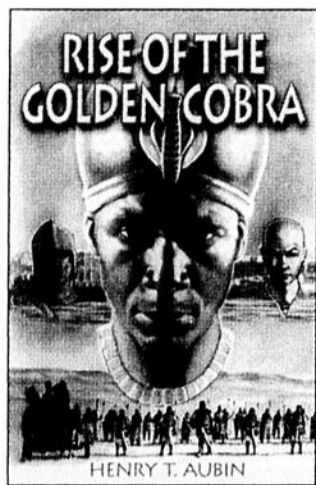
Life lessons from history

RISE OF THE GOLDEN COBRA
By Henry T. Aubin
Illustrated by Stephen M. Taylor
Annick Press
\$12.95, paper, 256pp
ISBN 1-55451-059-7

Imagine a time and place in which leaders based important military decisions on their dreams, considering these to be a form of divine guidance. This is the kind of world we're drawn into by Henry Aubin's new book for young readers. Set in the eighth century BCE, the novel is based on the true story of the African king of Kush, Piankhy, whose military campaign and honourable reign led to the unification of ancient Egypt.

Aubin's first book, *The Rescue of Jerusalem* (Doubleday Canada) is about the Kushites. A non-fiction work for adults, it undoubtedly helped pave the way for *Rise of the Golden Cobra*. Here, Aubin convincingly recreates the political climate of the day, transporting the readers back to a time when great leaders like the highly principled Piankhy were considered earthly incarnations of the gods.

Embodying the god Amon, Piankhy encourages his subjects – even in a state of war – to behave with *maat* (that is, with righteousness and honour). In so doing, he serves as a role model for the novel's hero, 14-year-old



Aubin invites readers to ponder the value of thinking for the long term.

Nebanon (Nebi), who comes of age during a war that invariably challenges his moral values. At the centre of Nebi's revenge fantasies is Count Nimlot, a villainous traitor who executes a ruthless attack which leaves Nebi as the sole bearer of a secret that must be delivered to the king.

At Piankhy's court Nebi befriends Sheb, the king's hot-headed nephew, whose impulsive behaviour and desire to inherit the throne further test Nebi's values. Sheb tempts Nebi to give in to his lower impulses and his thirst for vengeance, but through a series of adventures fraught with moral dilemmas the boys mature quickly, discovering the transformative powers of forgiveness along the way. "I too have reason to hate certain people," Piankhy tells Nebi. "But I've found that when I hate someone, he controls me – he dominates my thoughts. To find real freedom, you can't hate."

The novel introduces readers to some symbolism, detailing the nature of the cobra and suggesting parallels with the king's strong yet compassionate rule. Like the creature that adorns his crown, Piankhy is more of a defender than an attacker, using ruses to scare off aggressors. The king is no pushover, though. Push too far, and Piankhy, like the cobra, will use whatever measures necessary to protect.

Aubin's original motive for chronicling this episode in Black history was his desire to find stories of African heroes for his adopted son. The result is a page-turner that boys in



particular will surely love. Occasionally the action skips forward too quickly, as important events such as Nebi's first night in the desert are summarized in a couple of sentences. But overall, *Rise of the Golden Cobra* is a worthwhile read, packed with adventure, action, and timeless truths. Through Piankhy, who treats both his subjects and enemies with respect, Aubin invites readers to ponder the value of thinking for the long-term. "Generosity is the best thing not only for them but for us. If we give them cause to hate us, they will rebel someday. Peace requires *maat*," instructs the king. The implicit message is to imagine the collective prosperity that would ensue if more businesses adopted this concept toward their employees, clients, and even their competition.

Always seeking the highest good, Piankhy reconciles power with compassion, challenging the truism that absolute power corrupts absolutely, providing a welcome alternative to the cynical dualism exemplified by many modern political leaders. And, like Nebi, young readers are apt to find inspiration in the king, a character who enriches the imagination with fuller, more satisfying, three-dimensional possibilities. This inspiration is the first step in creating a better future. ■

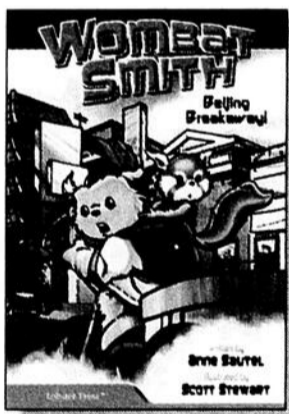
By **Kim Bourgeois**, a reviewer and writer who lives in Montreal.

Wombat soccer, confident tomboy

WOMBAT SMITH: VOL. 2: BEIJING BREAKAWAY!
By Anne Sautel, with illustrations by Scott Stewart
Lobster Press
\$8.95, paper, 94pp
ISBN 978-1-897073-48-3

For those who have not read the first book in the Wombat Smith series, an introduction to the hero is in order. Wombat is an earnest, sturdy, and likeable young marsupial who has been adopted by a human family. He rides the bus on his own, uses the public library, and has developed a fondness for chocolate cookies, particularly when washed down with a cool glass of powdered marsupial milk, imported from his native Australia.

In *Beijing Breakaway!* Wombat is invited by his friend Joshua to play in a soccer tournament in China. A soccer novice, he tries hard to play well despite the fact that this uniform is as long as a dress, and his short limbs do not make him a nimble or successful player. Wishing to fit in, Wombat becomes increasingly conscious of how different he is from the other boys. He is such a ... wombat.



Wombat Smith is human enough to relate to and wombat enough to provide surprises.

What Wombat needs is a little self-confidence. He believes that finding a lost red panda that has wandered away from the Beijing Zoo will bring his soccer team luck, and fortunately, he succeeds in finding little Hong Lu in time for the big game. Will the red panda really bring him luck, or will he humiliate himself on the field? In an inspired moment of pure, intuitive wombatness, timid and clumsy Wombat makes a decisive play using his strong rear end to score the winning goal. Take that, Zidane! Only a wombat could have done it.

Young readers will enjoy reading about Wombat's adventures in China. Along the way, they will learn interesting facts about the country, and even a few words in Mandarin. Wombat Smith is a good travelling companion for young readers: human enough to relate to and wombat enough to provide a few surprises.

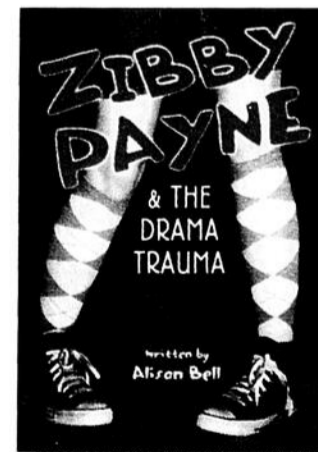
ZIBBY PAYNE & THE DRAMA TRAUMA
By Alison Bell
Lobster Press
\$8.95, paper, 95 pp
ISBN 978-1-897073-47-6

It's hard not to like Zibby Payne. She's a plucky girl and a talented athlete who does her own thing on her own terms. She enjoys hanging out with her loyal friend Sarah, but she'll nonetheless sprint away to play soccer with the boys when it's recess. Zibby ably navigates the increasingly complex social world of the sixth grade wearing a sneaker on one foot and a platform shoe on the other.

Though the tomboy protagonist is definitely a type we've met before in children's literature, Zibby is fresh and endearing with her confidence, savvy, and sense of humour.

She is also willing to take risks, which is certainly the case when she, a "jock," tries out for the school musical and lands the lead female role. Zibby seems a natural for the part of a new-to-town girl who wins the friendship of her new classmates through her soccer prowess. When Zibby gets to Page 83 of the script, however, she panics. Page 83 says that she will kiss the leading male in the play, her friend Matthew. Zibby's personal role as the class tomboy is challenged by the very idea of this kiss.

Zibby's discomfort with the idea of kissing Matthew is evoked with honesty and humour by Alison Bell, whose unforced writing style and choice of words have enough "street cred" to be believable for young and tween readers. Zibby stalls, makes excuses, and goes to great lengths to avoid the big scene with Matthew, but ultimately a comically misguided belief that multiple coats of Groovy Grapilicious lip gloss will create a second pair of lips over her own convinces her that she can go through with the disgusting act. Zibby Payne's adventures have the humour and momentum to become a well-loved series. ■



By **Annie Murray**, a BC transplant who is now a Montreal librarian.

from
small
things

Joyce Scharf's successful first novel began with bedtime stories and just kept growing

By Anne Chudobiak

Joyce Scharf used to make up bedtime stories for her now teenaged daughter, Grace. "Coming up with a new story every night was pretty taxing," she says. Scharf didn't know that those fairytales would one day form the basis of her first novel, *Grace and the Ice Prince*. If she had, she would

have taken some notes. "Some of them were real doozies," she says from the garden of her Montreal West home.

"There had to be some kind of animal involved, there had to be a monster or a bad person threatening the world, and Grace had to come up with the solution to save the day. Or, at least, I had to."

When Scharf finally did put pen to paper, it was in the spirit of fun. "I just wanted a creative exercise," says the first-time author, who runs a home-based advertising agency with her husband.

Compared to the restrictions of writing ad copy, writing fiction seemed "totally indulgent. I remember sitting at my keyboard thinking, 'Okay, what am I going to write?' And not knowing." Then Scharf remembered the fantasy world that she'd already created for her eldest daughter. For those stories, she'd drawn inspiration from two main sources: the fairytales that she'd enjoyed as a child (Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm); and the beauty and destruction of Quebec's 1998 ice storm. "I just kind of put the two together," she says.

The result was an improvised series of adventures revolving around a fictional Grace, an otherwise normal girl who is summoned away from her nice house on a busy boulevard to save the distant Ice World from impending peril.

"There are pieces of my Grace in this Grace," says Scharf, "but she is an individual character."

Scharf based the house and garden in the stories on her former home on West Broadway Street in Montreal West. The difficult part was creating the new world. "There's a lot of responsibility that goes along with that," says Scharf.

"It's almost anthropological." In the Ice World, there are no colours: "Black, white, clear, silver, that's it." Food is prepared without heat. Magic is rampant.

Scharf was surprised to realize what a wealth of material the bedtime stories presented in written form. "After about a hundred pages, I realized, 'This is not a creative exercise anymore.'" She invited friends and family to weigh in on her work in progress, which reprised the characters from the imaginary world that she'd created for her daughter: Ice Prince Owyn, Princess Farren and Percival the Dragon. "The response was overwhelmingly, 'Where's the rest?' And that's when I realized I was writing a book. And so then I just plunged into it."



After some initial interest and encouraging words from a New York publisher, the book received 25 rejections before being picked up by Saskatchewan's ThistleDown Press.

Editor R.P. MacIntyre worked with Scharf to "grow [the book] up" to appeal to nine- to 12-year-olds. "Because I'd written it for an eight-year-old market," says Scharf, "That's a very different kind of book."

I just had to really rack my brain and take the story that I'd originally conceived and just make it more rounded, add more culture to it, give it more meaning."

She also made some changes to the book's structure. "The double narrative where you have [Ice Princess] Farren telling the story of the diamond heart as Grace is travelling [its] trail, that was brought out of working with the editor." The whole process taught Scharf that when writing for children, "there have got to be highs and lows, and they have to happen fairly quickly. You want the right mix of tension and relief."

Scharf can rest assured that she got the mix right. The book, which came out last October, sold out its first printing by March. It's now in its second run and was recently released in the

United States as well. "It really has been a dream come true," says Scharf, who enjoys meeting with her readers at schools, libraries and book clubs. "They know the book better than I do."

And their parents like it, too. They appreciate the book's theme of self-esteem and the message that good deeds will be rewarded. When the character Grace is called upon to help the Ice World, she is initially reluctant. She doesn't realize that in helping others, she herself will grow. When she finally agrees to travel to the Ice World, she isn't motivated by concern for its residents, but for her parents, who have fallen into a deep, impenetrable sleep after magical interference from unknown forces.

Although Scharf infuses her stories with moral lessons, she is careful not to talk down to her readers. "There's some pretty sophisticated language in there," she says. More advanced readers who are already well-versed in "castle-speak" should enjoy vivid and precise descriptions like this: "Whistling gears announced the

rising portcullis and the lowering draw-bridge as Grace and her escort rode through the gatehouse and over the moat."

Not surprisingly, the book also reads

well as a bedtime story, which is a particularly good option for younger – or less

confident – readers, who aren't yet comfortable reading chapter books on their own. Scharf and her husband read the book aloud to their 10-year-old daughter, Lily, who missed the stories the first time around.

Scharf hopes that boy readers will not be deterred by the fact that the main character is a girl. "There's enough boy stuff in it," she says, citing some of the book's funnier characters, including an out-of-shape dragon, and an obsolete order of knights who are desperate for a damsel in distress to save.

A lot of the book's humour – and there is a lot of humour – arises from playing with fairytale conventions. For most of the book, the down-to-earth heroine, who is charged with

"There have got to be highs and lows, and they have to happen fairly quickly."



delivering an entire kingdom from danger, is wearing a puffy yellow parka with black snow pants that are too babyish for her 12 years. She looks slightly ridiculous, even in her own world. Scharf says that when she gives readings she's pleased to see just how much the kids relate to the funnier parts.

"One of the questions that I get always is, 'And when is the movie coming out?'" she says of her young readers. "Well, it's going to have to sell a whole lot of copies."

In the meantime, she is at work on book two of what will eventually be a trilogy. "There's a lot of back story that I've created that's not here, that will come to fruition in the second book and then be resolved in the third."

She warns, though, that the next book will be quite a bit darker. "You see a very pristine side of the Ice World in this book. [The next one] will continue with Grace and she'll be six months older. And instead of it being winter when she is summoned, it'll be summer. So there's a whole dynamic there."

As with the ice storm, where beauty went hand in hand with destruction, so Scharf "will bring in that other side, the dark side," into the sequel. "Now I've really said too much," she says with a grin. ☐

Anne Chudobiak is a Montreal translator and a participant in the QWF Mentorship Program.

GRACE AND THE ICE PRINCE

By J.L. Scharf

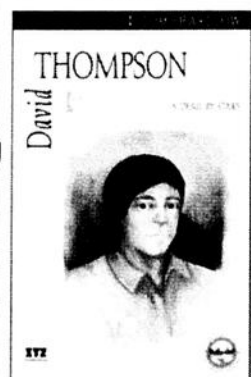
ThistleDown Press

\$16.95, paper, 224pp

ISBN 1-897235-09-7

Biographies of great Canadians

Just 4 of the 31 books now available in the Quest Library series – a lively way to read Canadian history!



David Thompson
A Trail by Stars

Tom Shardlow

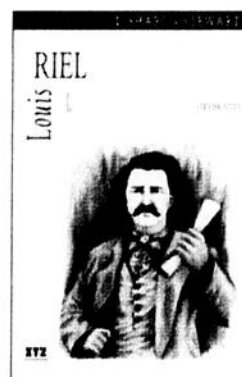
ISBN 978-1-894852-18-0
\$17.95



Gabrielle Roy
A Passion for Writing

André Vanasse
tr. by Darcy Dunton

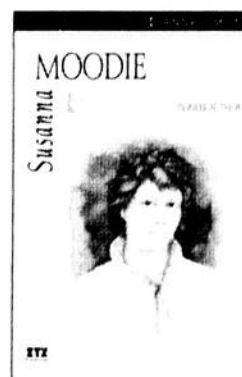
ISBN 978-1-894852-25-8
\$17.95



Louis Riel
Firebrand

Sharon Stewart

ISBN 1-894852-26-5
\$17.95



Susanna Moodie
Pioneer Writer

Anne Cimon

ISBN 978-1-894852-19-7
\$17.95

XYZ Publishing, Montréal • info@xyzedit.qc.ca • www.xyzedit.qc.ca



Read Before You Judge

For three leaders in the Young Adult field, writing hard-edged fiction for modern kids means disproving some stubborn misconceptions.

By Andrea Belcham

Why YA? It's a question many writers working in the genre of Young Adult literature have had to contend with. Thinking perhaps of the slew of "fashion-flirting-and-fun" series enjoying immense popularity among teen readers these days, skeptics tend to dismiss all YA lit as soft and fleeting. Lori Weber, a Montreal-based author of four novels for young adults, feels such a judgment denigrates the potential of the genre and its readers. "YA deals with a vast range of topics," she remarks. "But the target audience is young people and it is assumed that young people are intellectually inferior to adults and therefore the writing must be less interesting. Many adults haven't had a new idea in 50 years. Teens have new ones everyday."

Monique Polak, a journalist and CEGEP instructor who has also penned numerous titles for youth, adds that even fellow writers have confessed confusion regarding her choice in genre. "[They] sometimes ask when I'm going to get serious and write a book for adults," Polak says. "I tell them I am dead serious about what I do. And sometimes, when I'm feeling snippy, I tell them *my books are selling!*"

So they are: to teachers, librarians, and parents who realize that YA lit can be a useful stepping stone for reluctant readers, but also – and, in the novelists' eyes, more importantly – to preteens and teens themselves. Like any adult reader, a youth's motivations for picking up a book vary, from seeking entertainment or escape, to hoping to learn more about the issues that are relevant to their lives. The challenge for YA writers is to blend good storytelling with

topicality, applying a narrative voice that is neither condescending nor overwrought.

Brian Doyle, who has been writing fiction for youth since the late 1970s, often uses the past as a means of connecting with contemporary readers. His latest book, *Pure Spring*, sees its 15-year-old protagonist Martin O'Boy working as a delivery assistant in Korean War-era Ottawa and interacting with such real-life historical figures as Pure Spring soft drink company proprietor David Mirsky and Soviet defector Igor Gouzenko. That his novels take place in the Ottawa and Gatineau River Valley regions is "essential" to Doyle. "It's what I know," says the multiple award-winning author, who mines his life experience and the anecdotal accounts of "old folks" for material he transforms into stories like *Spud Sweetgrass*, *Uncle Ronald*, *Covered Bridge* and *Mary Ann Alice*. Grounded in yesterday though it may be, *Pure Spring* incorporates many subjects that today's youth can relate to – new love, divided loyalties, and family battles among them. Much of Doyle's success can be attributed to the respect he shows for adolescents: speaking of his narrators, he asserts, "My youths aren't naïve – they just lack experience."

Both Polak and Weber publish through James Lorimer & Company's SideStreets imprint, which, according to the publisher's website, offers "fast-paced young adult fiction with themes on topics teens want to read about." So how do the authors determine what their readers want? By, like Doyle, looking to their own youthful experiences and concerns. And by taking advantage of the opportunities for observation afforded by their careers as teachers.

"I didn't have a happy adolescence," reveals Polak, who says that reading helped her "make sense of the world and some of the people in it," including herself. Her SideStreets titles address such subjects as cutting (this year's *Scarred*), gambling (*All*

In), and prostitution (*On the Game*), all, of course, from a teenager's perspective. It may be tempting to classify her works as problem novels, a sub-genre of YA lit that has been criticized for putting too much emphasis on the negative aspects of "growing up." Polak insists, however, that she's "more interested in writing about young people than problems per se." As an instructor of English literature and humanities at Marianopolis College for over 20 years, she's been in a great position to study youths' current preoccupations and what she calls their "openness and courage" in action. The impetus for *Scarred*, for instance, came from her own interaction with students who struggled with self-cutting impulses.

For Weber too, the drive to "translate [her] world into words and images" that hold meaning for audiences overshadows any need to keep up with commercial trends or typologies in the genre. "Young readers deserve depth and complexity," she declares. Her most recent SideStreets book, following *Klepto*, *Split* and *Tattoo Heaven*, is 2006's *Strange Beauty*, which presents a bifold vision of beauty as a superficial standard of appearance and a less tangible way of behaving toward others. Weber describes herself as "stuck" in the "heady time" of adolescence – literally, as she works as an English teacher at John Abbott College, and in terms of her imaginings. As a writer, she's smitten by this time of "so many firsts, so many new things learned, new feelings felt."

Endavouring to explore some of these firsts has, in some cases, landed YA authors in trouble with youths' guardians. Doyle's publisher, Greenwood Books, categorizes his novels as suitable for the nine- to 14-year-old range; Doyle notes, however, that while his narrators are young, his readers "are of all ages." Polak believes that the writing of a crossover novel (a work that

engages younger and adult audiences alike) is an ambition of many a YA writer. Yet conflict may emerge, as Weber points out, when the writer tries to balance the younger reader's desire for authenticity with the older reader's expectation; that a tale retain a moralistic thrust.

Doyle does not see censorship as affecting either the composition or distribution of his works: "I write for myself," he states firmly. For Polak, the reality of censorship actually pushes her to take risks. "As a teacher, I try to discuss material and subjects that I wish my teachers had discussed in class when I was a teenager. I try to do the same in my writing," she explains. Weber experienced censorship first-hand when a school librarian refused to order *Klepto* because it contained the word "abortion." The author has no regrets. "Writing about the subject doesn't mean you are either endorsing or condemning the practice," she asserts. Ultimately, for her, loyalty to the story and its effectiveness – not loyalty to the moral majority – prevails.

Besides honesty, young readers also find these writers' novels attractive for their clear reverence for place. Just as his Ottawa and Gatineau roots inform Doyle's books, Polak and Weber prefer to set their stories in their own stomping ground of Montreal. Weber's *Strange Beauty*, for example, incorporates a setting – Park Extension – and major character (an ostracized gypsy nicknamed the Queen of Sheba) from the writer's own childhood. "This is such a unique place," she says of Montreal, though she concedes that she's "had to fight a bit" with her publisher to keep some of the city's distinctive elements in her books. Students have told her, she adds, that being able to recognize local landmarks in her novels helps them get into a story. Polak feels that exoticism can have as much appeal as familiarity: "Hopefully my books will give people who live outside of Montreal a feel for our city," she says. That Doyle's, Weber's, and Polak's audiences extend far beyond Ottawa and Montreal demonstrates that young readers, like any others, may use books to expand their universe as much as to better understand their own situations.

Ultimately, it's the three writers' books that will attest to the careful crafting, extensive research, and capacity for empathy that go into being a serious, and successful, YA writer. Consider these passages:

When I wake up, the fact of my grandmother's death is wrapped tightly around me, like the white cloth of a mummy. All day, every time I breathe, I take it in again. I think about our visit to the nursing home on Saturday, just five days ago. I remember the way my grandmother looked, sitting in her chair, waving goodbye slowly, sadly. We should have gone again on Sunday.
(*Strange Beauty*)

But no, I went ahead and bet on the Lakers, and now I've lost \$1,000. I try to make the thought go away, but it won't go. Somehow, it feels like all this is happening to someone else. Like I'm floating somewhere and looking down at this guy shivering on a couch. The guy's a loser. The guy's lost his touch. The guy's winning streak is oh so over.

The guy is me.
(*All In*)

I swallow so hard that I think my Adam's apple is going to come up into my mouth. I

Books by Monique Polak
SCARRED
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 168pp
ISBN 1-55028-964-0

ON THE GAME
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 184pp
ISBN 1-55028-876-8

ALL IN
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 168 pp
ISBN 1-55028-912-8

Books by Brian Doyle
PURE SPRING
Groundwood
\$18.95, cloth, 168pp
ISBN 0-88899-774-4

SPUD SWEETGRASS
Groundwood
\$7.95, paper, 140pp
ISBN 0-88899-756-6

UNCLE RONALD
Groundwood
\$7.95, paper, 138pp
ISBN 0-88899-621-7

COVERED BRIDGE
Groundwood
\$7.95, paper, 120pp
ISBN 0-88899-603-9

MARY ANN ALICE
Groundwood
\$5.95, paper, 168pp
ISBN 0-88899-551-2

Books by Lori Weber
STRANGE BEAUTY
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 144pp
ISBN 1-55028-941-1

KLEPTO
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 160pp
ISBN 1-55028-836-9

SPLIT
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 152pp
ISBN 1-55028-878-4

TATTOO HEAVEN
James Lorimer & Company
\$9.95, paper, 168pp
ISBN 1-55028-902-0

*see my eyes in hers. Is that possible?
Can a person say a million things in the
blink of an eye and not say one word?
Is it magic to talk just with your eyes? Can
everybody do that? Can everybody understand
eye talk?
(*Pure Spring*)*

Without sacrificing their uniqueness, each writer displays a capacity for directness and an economy of style that sits well with their readers.

Curiously, both Weber and Doyle stumbled into YA lit. Doyle wrote originally for his own children. "To my surprise, it spread!" he recalls. An editor wanted to publish Weber's first novel, written with adult readers in mind, as a YA book, and Weber admits that she knew very little of the genre at that time. Polak, on the other hand, remembers that it took her years of perseverance before she could break into the YA market and finally secure a contract with Orca Book Publishers in 2004 (besides her Lorimer titles, she's also released three books with Orca). They're all committed to continuing to write for youth. Doyle reports that he's presently working on "more of the same," while Polak is excited about having just finished a story inspired by her mother's internment in a Nazi concentration camp. Weber is simultaneously developing a crossed-lovers story set in Newfoundland and "a book about a girl who has a burning crush on an older man." For their efforts, and despite the naysayers, they're earning legions of fans. ■

Andrea Belcham is a writer and editor living in Pointe-Claire.

English-language children's publishers in Montreal are like palm trees in South Carolina: small and scarce. Overshadowed by their conglomerate counterparts to the south and west, local youth publishers need to work a little harder and scream a little louder to make noise in an industry with no shortage of quality competition and a limited local consumer base.

That's what makes persevering companies like Lobster Press so special. Founder, president, and publisher Alison Fripp started the children's press in 1997 after careers in law and legal publishing. "I loved the publishing part," she says, "but hated the legal part. I thought success would come sooner," she concedes. "It's been a struggle, but we just celebrated our tenth anniversary."

The company has published 139 English titles – some of which have been translated into French under the press's subsidiary, Les Éditions Homard – for readers 18 and under. The company's market is truly global, with books being sold all over North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore.

Fripp is steadfast in her publishing ideals, and this in turn is what makes Lobster an appealing press for readers and retailers. "We do board books, picture books, fiction for nine and up, 12 and up, 14 and up, 17 and up, because we shouldn't pigeonhole kids. What a 14-year-old is reading is not what a nine-year-old reads."

Fripp's Montreal contemporaries, by contrast, focus more on specific chunks of the market.

The Secret Mountain press produces books for children between the ages of three and eight – a highly specialized segment of the market. Roland Stringer, Secret Mountain's publisher since the company started in 2000, has navigated his press into a neat little niche, combining words and pictures with songs. Every Secret Mountain book, whether French or English, is accompanied by a CD of Euro-influenced music. "The music angle is extremely important to us in a manuscript," Stringer says. "That's what we look for. We look for the teaching of an instrument or the teaching of music from around the world."

It's crucial that small presses find such niches. It allows them to offer a specialized product that may have competition in the market but is unmatched in terms of quality.

Rhonda Bailey, editor of XYZ Publishing's Quest series since its inception in 1999, also targets a more specific slice of the segment.

"By the age of 13," she says, "kids are already starting to read at an adult level." With that in mind the Quest series targets readers 13 and older with biographies of Canadian historical personalities like Louis Riel, Tommy Douglas, and Emily Carr. Thus far there are 31 titles in the series. Some are translations between English and French, and all are written by Canadian authors.

"Biographies have always been appealing to young readers," says Bailey. "At that age, you're always looking for role models who have done great things in our country." But Bailey also acknowledges that history can be boring. Kids are unlikely to shake with excitement while flipping through their Canadian history textbooks, so the Quest books need to seamlessly intertwine history and entertainment. That's a tough feat to say the least, and something Bailey keeps firmly in mind while leafing through manuscripts. "We make sure that the author is a good storyteller. Otherwise, kids aren't interested. We wouldn't accept a manuscript otherwise."

Broad guidelines, indeed, but difficult nonetheless. Engaging young adults in the exploits of Louis Riel can be a tough sell, but Bailey gets the job done. Quest books are huge sellers with Canadian library wholesalers.

Like Bailey and Stringer, Fripp also has criteria her authors must heed if they hope to be published under the Lobster banner, particularly in non-fiction. "I look for gems – that little extra something that no one would know about. Really, anything different. That's what we tell our authors."

The publishing industry is forever evolving, and publishers have to be on their toes. Everyone wants to score big and claim responsibility for the next big trend. "We look for novelty – the next Harry Potter or Franklin," Fripp stresses. "We look for something with staying power that will appeal to kids now and appeal to kids down the road."

Bailey believes that the Quest historical series, while not a trendsetting genre in its own right, capitalizes on a larger general Canadian movement. "In 1998, there

was not much interest in Canadian historical figures. Then the CBC did a series on great Canadians, and we became much more interested. Canadian history can be exciting."

Maybe that's the secret: spotting trends from other aspects of culture and entertainment and spinning them into the publishing milieu. Secret Mountain's Stringer is intrigued by such a notion. "I don't know if it's a trend," he says of his storybook/musical hybrids. "But, in general, children today are more multimedia than in previous years, what with video games and the internet. I do think it's something we're going to see a lot more of."

The most lucrative possibilities lie in the increasingly diverse makeup of North America's populace. With the Spanish-speaking boom in the US, the market for Spanish literature is growing accordingly. In turn, parents and schools in the US want their kids to pick up on the language at an early age. Though the language is less prevalent in Canada, opportunities exist for publishers with a strong base in the American marketplace. And Canadian publishers are also looking in their own backyards. "I would love to explore Mandarin," says Stringer. "And it's not just about China and Asia opening up. We do have a Chinese population here that we could build off."

Perseverance, market savvy and an eye to the future spell success for Lobster, Secret Mountain, and XYZ

By Adam Goldman

TRY

HARDER

From afar a children's book might seem easy to publish, particularly when compared to a 450-page non-fiction work. But Fripp vehemently labels such a notion as misconceived.

"Editing a picture book is harder," she says. "There are so few words that they all have to count. Our job as publishers is to match text and art, and design is incredibly time-consuming."

The progression is complex. Children's publishers are faced with a multi-pronged set of issues. Editors, in addition to their regular energy-sapping duties, must act as go-betweens and representatives for authors and artists. Marrying text and artistry is a delicate process that can make or break an entire three-year production.

The process is even more complex at Secret Mountain, where Stringer must coordinate writing, drawing and singing.

"It's more like being a film producer than a conventional book publisher," he says. "A lot of projects take up to three years. We have to produce the whole CD. But the beauty of technology is that we can record in places like Paris (see next page)

Hassidism: the whys and hows

RATHER LAUGH THAN CRY: STORIES FROM A HASSIDIC HOUSEHOLD
By Malka Zipora
Véhicule Press
\$19.95, paper, 186pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-220-8

Malka Zipora is the *nom de plume* of a Hassidic mother of 12 who has been writing for her own community for years. The reception of the stories received encouraged her to write *Rather Laugh Than Cry*, which was first published in French as *Lekhaim*, translated by Pierre Anctil.

The success of *Lekhaim* led to the publication of the original English version. Zipora's original manuscript, written for readers who understood all the cultural references, was heavily edited by Nancy Marrelli. Marrelli kept asking for explanations of the many traditions and habits which might

mean little to the non-Hassidic reader. The result is an open window into a community that has been as misunderstood as any of the others (Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish) that try to keep themselves apart from modern life.

The short stories are based on inflexible moral principles, but at the same time are gentle and often funny. "In the Ways of our Fathers" documents Zipora's attempts to improve herself in the days leading up to Rosh Hashona: first she tries to emulate Reb Nachum, whose motto was "This also is for benefit" as he accepted both the good and bad in life as God's will. Zipora's "This also is for benefit" was eventually muttered through clenched teeth as she dealt with yet another of her children's problems. She then tried to model herself on Reb Shammai, a less tolerant spiritual giant. That lasted for a day. Her efforts to be a better person, wife, mother, will resonate with anyone who has opened a self-improvement book.

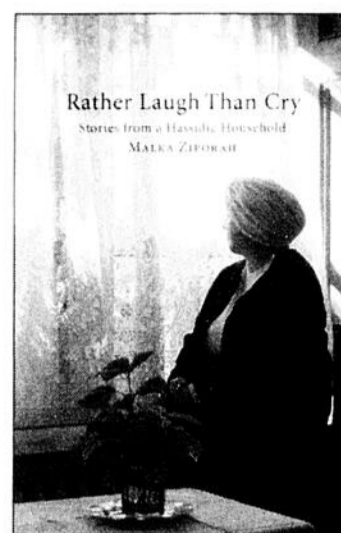
Zipora's children range in age from nine to 30 and it is a tribute to her discipline and creative instincts that she has found any time at all to write. The children pro-

vide some of the fodder for the stories, but she also finds the light side of such diverse topics as Canadian winters, colour-coded calendars, telephones, and world peace. Not all the stories are humorous: "Memories, Memorials and Shavuot" is a sober reminder of what the Hungarian Jews were subjected to 60 years ago. Some are bitter-sweet, others gentle reflections on listening – really listening – to a child.

Rather Laugh Than Cry is a great introduction to Hassidic life, not only why but

***Rather Laugh Than Cry* is an open window into the Hassidic community.**

how they live apart from the world. It is charmingly written for adults, and feels very much like sitting down at the kitchen table



with a good friend, having a cup of tea and enjoying a natter. Young adult readers will learn a good deal from it as well, finding it like talking to a friend's warm and sympathetic mum. ☐

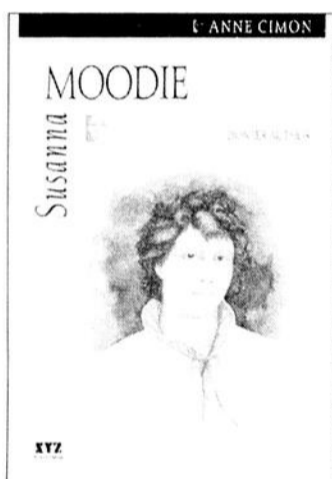
By Margaret Goldik, co-editor of the *Montreal Review of Books*.

Breaking the trail

SUSANNA MOODIE: PIONEER AUTHOR
By Anne Cimon
XYZ Publishing
\$17.95, paper, 156pp
ISBN 978-1-894852-19-7

One of the Quest series' strengths lies in its writers, and this new volume is no exception. Anne Cimon is a Montreal journalist and poet, whose interest in 19th century literature inspired a series of poems in her book about Henry David Thoreau, *No Country for Women*.

Cimon's poet's sensitivity stands her in good stead in re-telling the life of Susannah Moodie, author of *Roughing It in the Bush*. Moodie's life has been covered extensively, from the poems of Margaret Atwood to the recent biography by Charlotte Gray, *Sisters in the Wilderness*. Cimon focuses on Moodie's life as an author, which had its genesis in the genteel poverty of the Strickland family. When Moodie's father died and left his family badly off, there were very few options open to well-bred young ladies. Writing, for the talented, was one. Several of the Strickland daughters wrote, Agnes most successfully. Agnes stayed in England and documented the lives of the aristocracy, and made enough to send monetary support to the two sisters, Catharine Parr Traill and Moodie, who emigrated to Upper Canada, following their brother Samuel.



Traill embraced her new country and wrote extensively about the flora and fauna. Moodie wanted to provide an antidote to the emigration agents' depictions of Upper Canada as an earthly paradise, and so wrote *Roughing It in the Bush* to tell her story, which was one of privation, struggle, sharp-dealing "Yankees," and forest fires which twice took her home. Moodie also wrote for *The Garland* magazine, published by Montreal's John Lovell. She made enemies with *Roughing it*, and constantly struggled to make money by her writing.

Cimon details the rather sad facts of Moodie's life, from the constant poverty, to family quarrels, to the loss of two of her sons. As time went on Moodie learned to love the landscape of her adopted country, and to take solace in the companionship of her beloved sister Catharine. Her legacy, *Roughing It in the Bush*, remains a monument to pioneer women and what they had to face. ☐

By Margaret Goldik, co-editor of the *Montreal Review of Books*.

ANNE CIMON



PUBLISHING (from page 9)

and the US and mix in Montreal."

For these and other reasons, writers and illustrators do not generally work together. Writers may be shown early drawings of their characters to be kept in the loop, but the two are otherwise autonomous. Even though this creative aspect can enormously complicate publishing procedures, it remains the reason why many are so passionate about an expensive market segment with a difficult-to-gauge readership. It's why Stringer found himself publishing children's literature. "It just kind of happened that way. It allows for more creative freedom. There's a lot of room to create within the sector."

Children's publishers, like all others, face problems in

a global economy. Adult novels are simple prints by comparison, little more than straight text run off on a few hundred pages. Many children's books, however, contain elaborate, costly colour sketches. There is pressure from the other end, too. Retailers are always looking to squeeze publishers in order to compete with all-encompassing merchants like Wal-Mart. "Costs are everything," Fripp says. "It's a struggle."

— Alison Fripp

Many presses are turning to Asia for their colour-printing jobs. Though turnaround times are much longer, the deflated prices make it well worth a publisher's wait. Companies can engage with Asian printers for colour copy, according to Fripp, and still count on government subsidies, which is not the case with black-and-white printing jobs.

For Bailey's Quest series, additional costs go to com-

piling resource material. "The best non-fiction books have indexes and chronologies," she says. "They're interesting tools for research."

But despite government financing, says Stringer, it's up to the publishers to deal with their own problems. "Each type of publisher has problems. You try to be creative, bundle two reprints together, and so on. So that way you get a contract with more prints and it's less money."

Will the day come when small independent publishers have to band and print together to lower costs to meet retail demands? "Maybe in the future," Stringer says hesitantly.

That's precisely what makes the industry so exciting – what the future will bring is anyone's guess. But for now companies operate on a simple maxim: enriching children's lives, one book at a time. "We call it Quest for a reason," Bailey says. "We hope that someday it might help them decide what to do with their lives." ☐

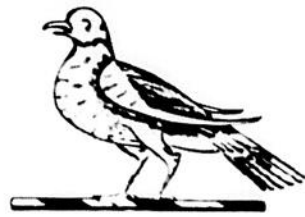
Adam Goldman is a Montreal writer and publishing intern.

Membership
Workshops
Mentorship
Awards
Readings
and more...



(514) 933-0878
qspell@total.net
www.qwf.org

Quebec Writers' Federation



The Word
469 Milton Street
Montreal
Tel: 845-5640

Purveyors of the finest
Second-hand Books
Specializing in Literature

Welcome

Readings * Workshops
Directory * Newsletter
Representing literary
translators in Montreal
and throughout
Canada

Bienvenue

Lectures * Ateliers
Repertoire * Bulletin
Représentant les
traducteurs et
traductrices littéraires
à Montréal et partout
au Canada

Literary
Translators'
Association
of Canada

Association des
traducteurs et
traductrices
littéraires du
Canada

www.artlc-kac.org



514.848.2424 x8702

Shoreline



STORIES
FROM
OUR
ANCESTORS

MEMOIRS BIOGRAPHIES HISTORY

What we learn from the past
can give us strength for today
and hope for the future

514-457-5733
www.shorelinepress.ca
shoreline@sympatico.ca

NEED AN EDITOR?

Call our Montreal hotline:
(514) 990-0972

EDITORS'

ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES

RÉVISEURS

Or consult our
ONLINE DIRECTORY

at www.editors.ca

E-mail: rqa-qac@editors.ca

Bibliophile
an
English
Bookshop

5519 Queen Mary Road
Montreal, Quebec
H3X 1V4

514-486-7369
bibliophilemontreal@yahoo.ca

**CHINESE
EASY
TO LEARN**

1st Book titled: "Chinese Easy to Learn" has won "Finalist" Award in Education/Academic Category from National Indie Excellence 2007 Book Awards in USA.

2nd Book titled: "Travel to China with my pocket book: speak Mandarin right away."

Award-winning writer, Ms Wang-Ching LIU, is teaching CHINESE (Mandarin & Cantonese) at Montreal.

Students will learn to read/to write/to speak Chinese in just 2 months.

Excellent books for tourists, students and businesspersons to learn Chinese (Mandarin) and to understand Chinese culture at the same time.

Advanced practical manual for teachers. Workshops for teachers to know how to use these books are available upon request.

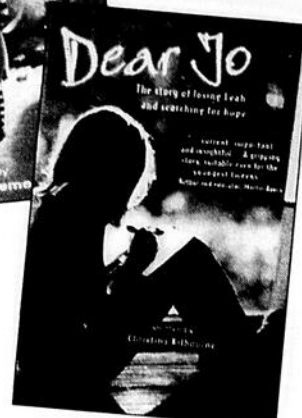
Please contact: (514) 969.2368
e-mail: liuw@videotron.ca (prefer)
To buy these books: www.nan-pat-vic-publishing.com

Travel to China with my pocket book.

speak Mandarin right away



**Diaries, ghosts
and chat rooms**



THE SECRET OF GRIM HILL
By Linda DeMeulemeester
Lobster Press
\$12.95, paper, 192pp
ISBN 978-1897073537

DEAR JO: THE STORY OF LOSING
LEAH...AND SEARCHING FOR HOPE
By Christina Kilbourne
Lobster Press
\$10.95, paper, 192pp
ISBN 978-1897073513

The years of early adolescence are a time when kids may need a little nudge to make reading and literature seem cool. Both of these new novels, which pivot on the protagonists' love of those things, do the trick. Diary writing helps one 12-year-old girl tell her traumatic story and heal, while reading and researching in the library and on the internet helps another adolescent girl rescue her sister from a fairy enchantment. What's more, these young people are reading and writing in an utterly contemporary world of corporate logos, pop culture references and internet shorthand.

LINDA DEMEULEMEESTER



In the spooky fantasy novel *The Secret of Grim Hill*, sarcastic Cat Peters is the new girl in town at Darkmount High. She has no friends among the students, and even the teachers are mean. Try as Cat may to maintain a positive attitude, she just doesn't like the school and would rather go to Grimoire High, a private school nearby. Her single mom can't afford the tuition, so Cat gets involved in a soccer competition, hoping for a scholarship. She quickly finds out that being on the soccer team comes with the perk of popularity among her peers. As Cat enjoys her new-found status, she notices weird things start to happen to all the girls on the team.

Both of these novels pivot on the love of reading and literature.

Cat's mom works more and more overtime, leaving Cat with the responsibility of looking after Sookie, her younger sister. Sookie is young enough not to be fooled by magic's glamour, but Cat doesn't listen to her warnings — until the day the Sookie goes missing. Cat is frantic. Her mother doesn't even remember who Sookie is. No one does. Luckily, Cat's geeky, glasses-wearing friend Jasper and the mysterious Alice Greystone are willing to help her unravel the mystery. They discover that every girl who has ever played in the Grimoire soccer matches has disappeared, leaving not even a memory behind. By poking around in the library and doing research about Celtic myth and the history of Halloween, Cat finds a real "grimoire," a magic book. She finds out that she is protected from the spell, but still can't find her sister. *The Secret of Grim Hill* is about Cat trying to make friends, but in the end, when she can't find her sister, she realizes that popularity isn't what's most important to her. But don't be mistaken, this is not a moralizing novel. It's a light and adventurous summer read.

CHRISTINA KILBOURNE

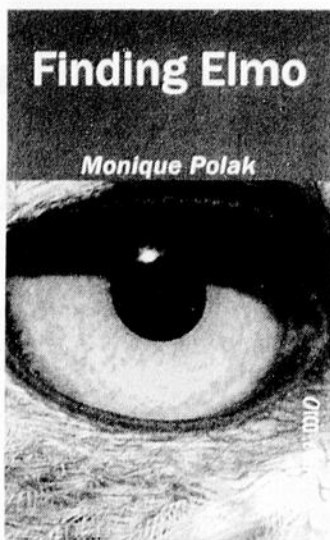


It is hard to make friends when you move to a new town, but devastating when one of your best friends is kidnapped. *Dear Jo* (short for Journal) is a book of journal entries written by 12-year-old Maxine detailing her emotional turmoil after the loss of her best friend, Leah.

Maxine and Leah have discovered internet chat rooms, and begin to spend a lot of time in them under assumed names. At first simply fun, their exploits take a turn when both girls are swept off their feet by internet boyfriends. Then Leah disappears, and Maxine is devastated. After six excruciating months of waiting, Leah's body is found in the woods. Maxine is even more distraught; to her mother's despair, the funeral does not seem to provide Maxine with closure. That's something she can find only by participating in the police investigation (worrying her mother even more).

Police detective Lucas becomes Maxine's good friend and comforter. She gets to participate in the investigation by going online to lure the internet predator back. In the end, Maxine's participation is crucial to the investigation and empowers her. Kilbourne tenderly explores a difficult subject in a novel that culminates in healing. ☐

By Angela Carr, a Montreal writer.



Feathers fly when a black cockatoo goes missing from a black-tie do.

"Recommended."—CM Magazine

Finding Elmo

Monique Polak

978-1-55143-686-9 • \$9.95 CDN PB
978-1-55143-688-3 • \$16.95 CDN HC

A grueling odyssey of survival after Ahwak's village is destroyed in a bloodbath in pre-contact northern territory.

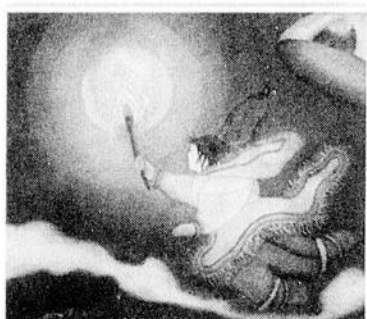


ORPHAN AHWAK

Orphan Ahwak

Raquel Rivera

978-1-55143-653-1 PB
\$8.95 CDN



ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS 800.210.5277 www.orcabook.com

**Bibliothèque de jeunes de Montréal
Montreal Children's Library**

Bringing children and books together since 1929



STORYTIMES, SPECIAL PROGRAMS,
CHESS & SCIENCE CLUBS, REFERENCE SERVICES,
COMPUTER ACCESS, CLASS AND DAYCARE VISITS
www.mcl-bjm.ca

LIBRARY MEMBERSHIP IS FREE

ATWATER
1200 av Atwater
514-931-2304

JEAN RIVARD
4121 42ième rue
514-276-7309

RICHMOND SQUARE
870 Richmond Square
514-931-6265



ACADIE PRESSE

www.acadiepresse.com
1.866.802.7777

Carleton Place, NB 506.727.7793 • Dieppe, NB 506.384.4482 • Fredericton, NB 506.455.7797



Librairie Clio

A wide selection of English language books and an expert staff who will be delighted to help track down elusive titles.

We will be pleased to welcome you in the new extension to Pointe Claire Plaza, next to the St-Jean Junction on Highway 20

Formerly Librairie
au bord du lac

245N boul St-Jean, Pointe-Claire, Quebec H9R 3J1
Tel: (514) 695-5557 Fax: (514) 695-5124 Email: books@librairieclio.ca

**PARAGRAPHE HAS SERVED
MONTREAL READERS
FOR OVER 25 YEARS.**

Come and discover our refined selection of both academic and trade titles, our outstanding service and our wide range of author events throughout the year, including our renowned Books & Breakfast series.



OPENING HOURS

MONDAY to FRIDAY 7AM to 11PM
SATURDAY and SUNDAY 9AM to 11PM

2220 McGill College Avenue, Montreal
Phone: 514.845.5811



**Paragraphe
Librairie / Bookstore**

QUEBECOR MEDIA