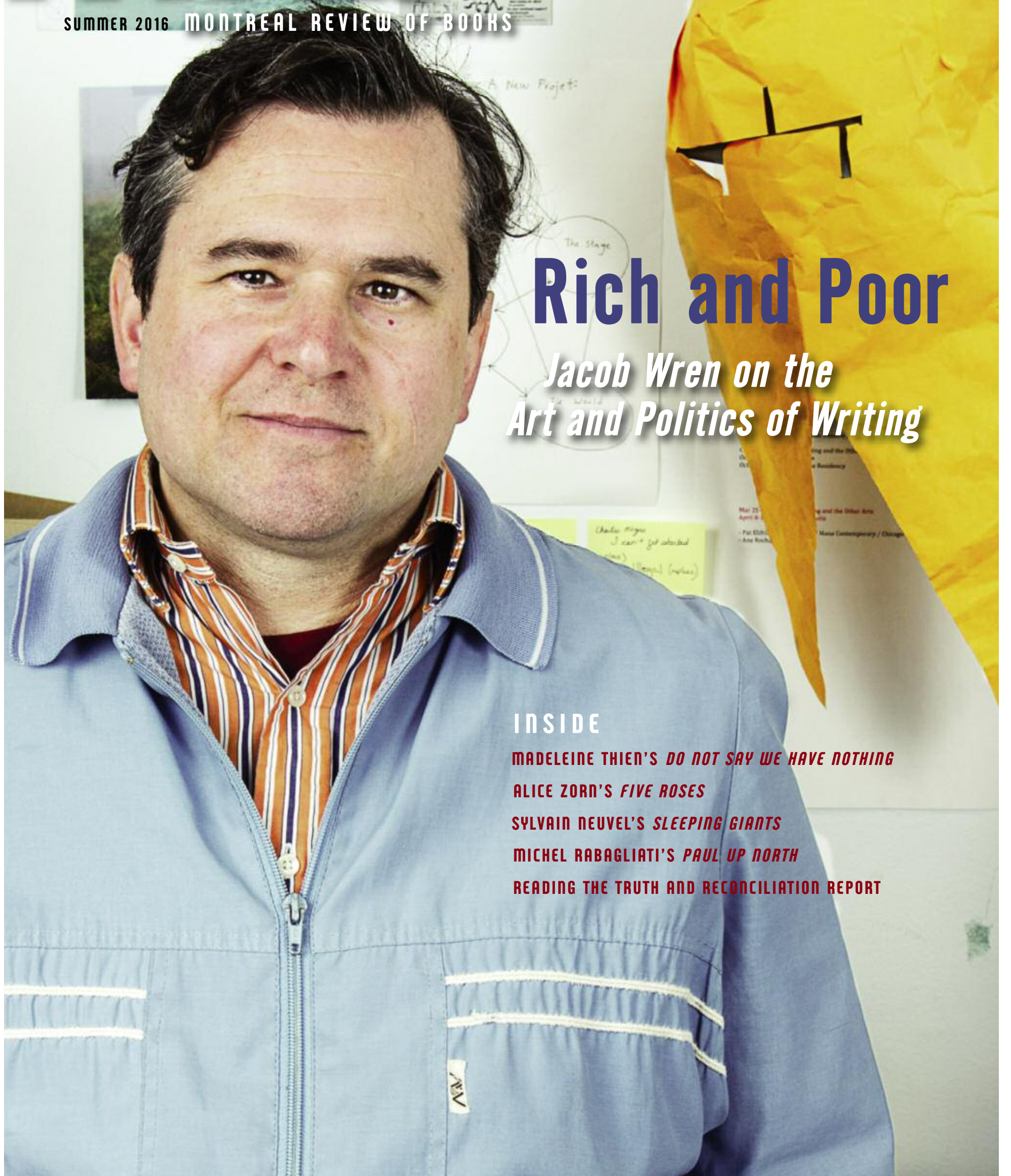


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SUMMER 2016 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS



Rich and Poor

*Jacob Wren on the
Art and Politics of Writing*

INSIDE

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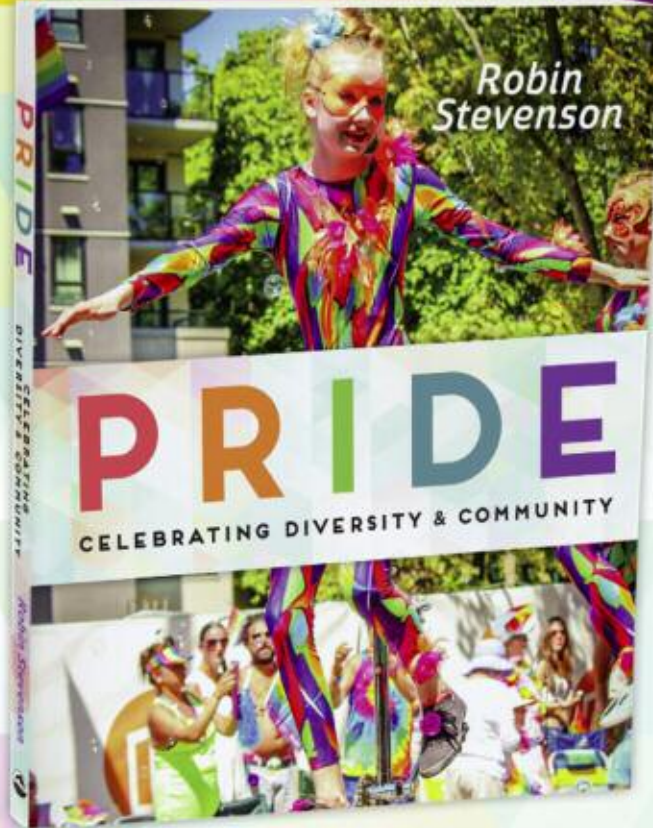
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READING THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION REPORT



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BY SIMON ROY
(TRANSLATED BY JACOB HOMEL)

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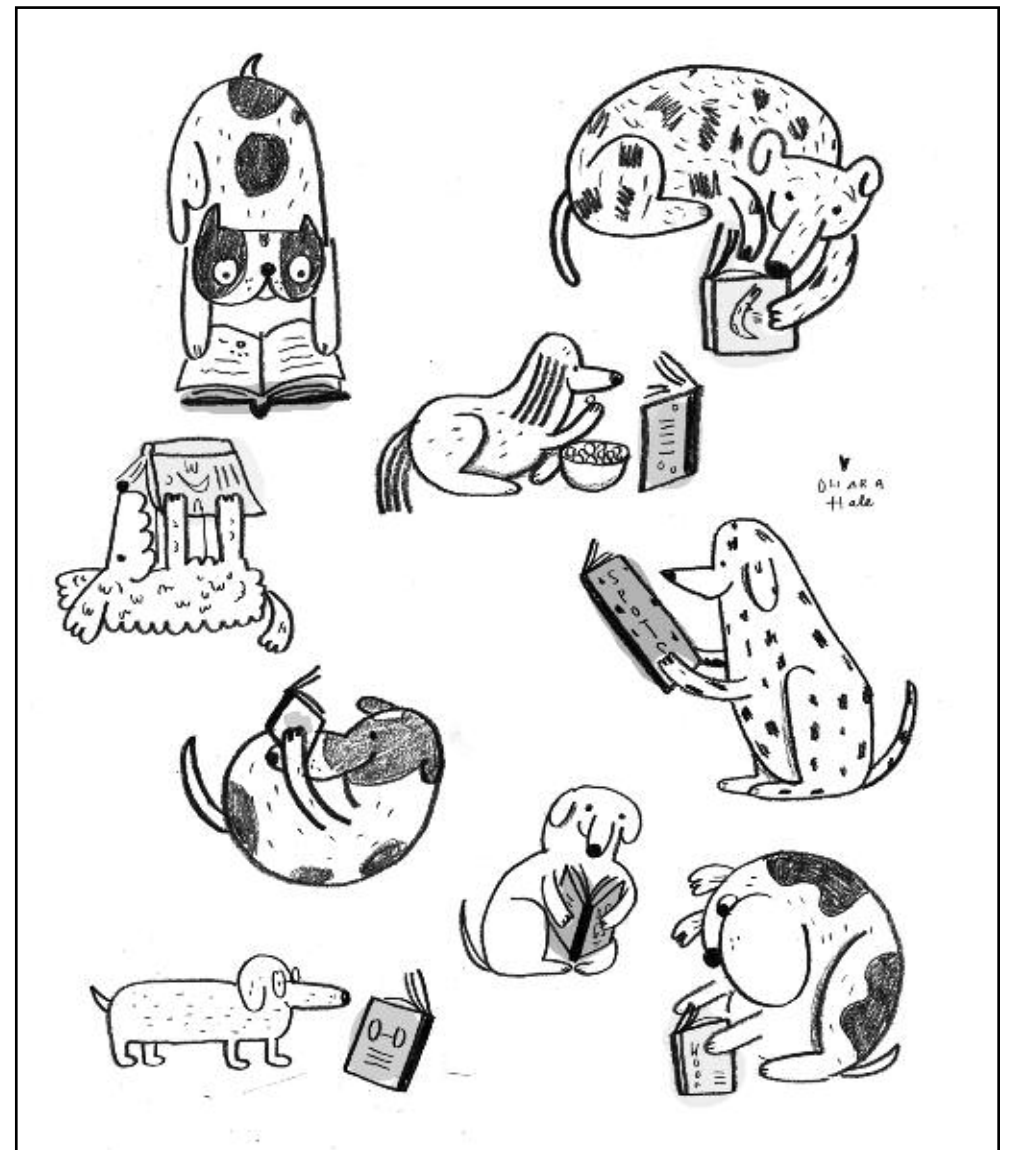
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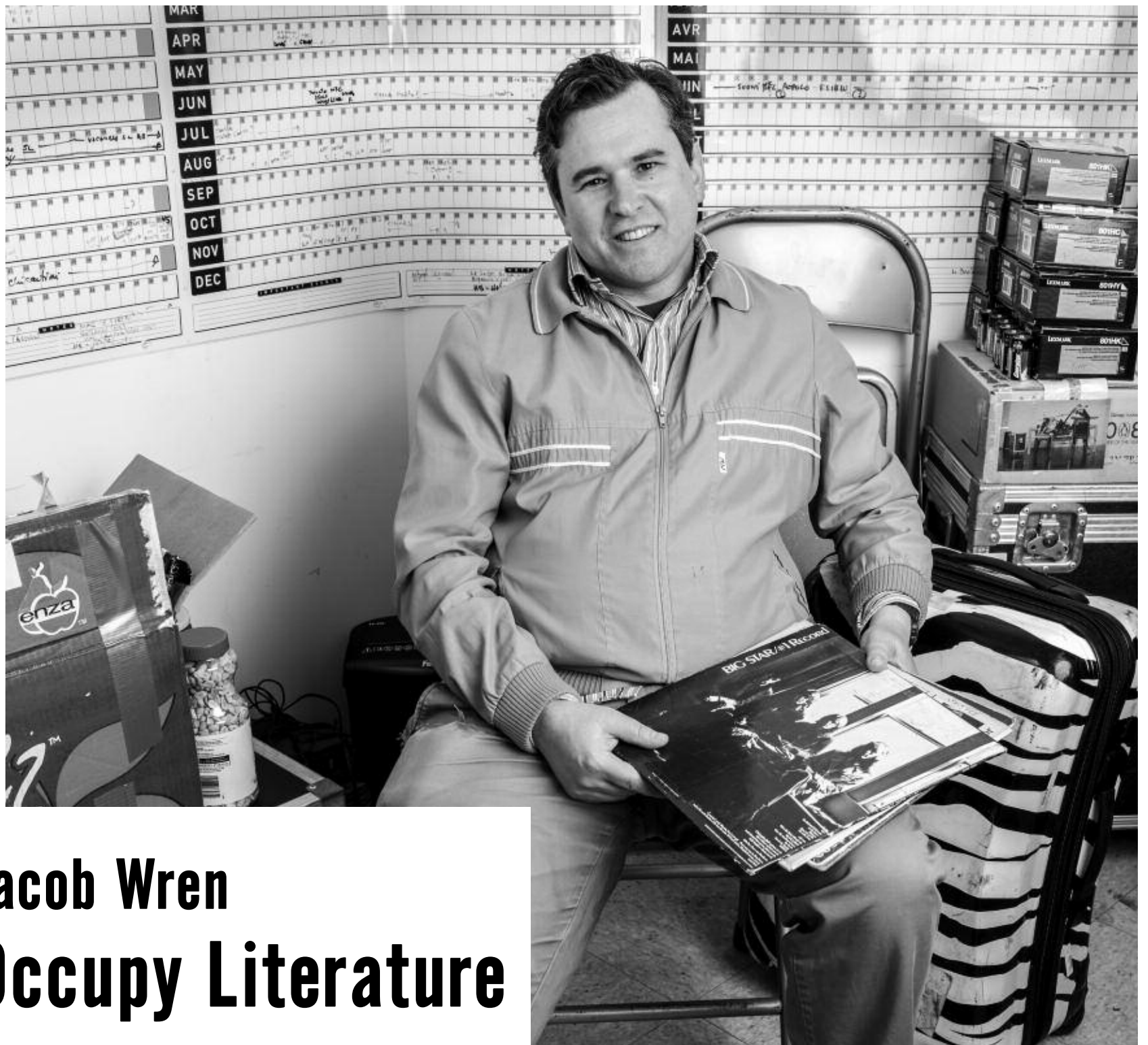


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Jacob Wren Occupy Literature

“I can’t do realism. I mean, it’s a lie,” Jacob Wren says with a laugh in his voice. Sitting across from me in a café in Mile-Ex, the prolific novelist and artist continues, “a book isn’t reality. Reality isn’t even reality.”

We’re well into our conversation about his new novel and this is the latest aphorism he has used to explain his creative process while writing *Rich and Poor*, a work that is both a meditation on economic inequality and a plot-driven tale of suspense. We’re discussing the challenge of writing a contemporary political novel when political fiction has for so long been dominated by dystopian allegory and didactic realism.

“Both those things interest me,” Wren tells me, and indeed *Rich and Poor* can be seen to draw on both traditions, but it’s also something else entirely. Just as he rejects realism, he also rejects

the gloom of dystopianism. “I’m basically hopeless,” he says, “but I don’t want to write hopeless books. A book is a fantasy, anything can happen. I’m looking for possibility.” His aim, he tells me, was to write a contemporary political novel “that’s not condescending to the reader, that’s fun to read, that’s a page turner, but is also experimental.”

Wren has more than achieved this goal. A political novel for our time, *Rich and Poor* thoughtfully examines the disparity between the world’s richest citizens and everyone else. Written in unadorned, clear prose, the book is a contemporary parable loaded with bril-

liant reflections on capitalism, inequality, and the transformative possibilities of social justice.

The novel follows two unnamed men, the billionaire CEO of a multinational corporation and the penniless dishwasher who plots to kill him. Alternating between these two first-person narrators in short sections, this unconventional narrative style allows Wren to imagine two very different views of our contemporary world.

The rich man is irreverent, delivering “real talk” about the corrupt business world and remorselessly admitting to the many underhanded techniques he has used to get ahead, violence and betrayal among them. The poor man is an undocumented immigrant and former concert pianist who has given up music. While the rich man’s opinions are grandiose, and delivered at a leisurely pace, the poor man’s thoughts are clipped and often dulled by the exhaustion of manual labour. His narration is honest and direct, connecting with the reader and serving as the emotional core of the novel.

Both narrators engage actively with political questions, and their aphoristic reflections on class, labour, monopoly, personal responsibility, and violence appear throughout the novel. *Rich and Poor* is full of cool-eyed observations about early twenty-first-century capitalism, but the novel is just as articulate on small-political issues, such as friendship, dignity, and the consolations of art. Interweaving the big issues with the small is central to the novel’s experimental project, which ultimately seeks to question the meaning of the political under late capitalism.

Tension builds as the poor man successfully embeds himself within the billionaire’s corporation, leading to the violent confrontation that changes both of their lives. The second part of the novel charts the aftermath of this encounter, in particular the poor man’s unexpected new role as a union organizer among farm labourers. Among Wren’s great achievements in *Rich and Poor* is his evocative depiction of the transformative power of building a movement for social justice, as opposed to the isolation that comes with the single-minded pursuit of vengeance. While his plot to murder the rich man kept him isolated and enraged, organizing the union connects the poor man with other people, new ideas, and eventually even to the music that he had abandoned. The shaping of individual workers into a political force with shared goals is movingly rendered during a union meeting when the workers are asked to speak about their hopes. “These words could be anything,” the poor man says, “but if we all listened to each other, we could later remember what others had said in moments we were losing faith or the will to go on.” The statements from the workers that follow call for dignity, respect, and show a desire for a more just world.

Weeks before *Rich and Poor* was published, a massive data leak from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca gave the world a glimpse of the immense fortunes sheltered in tax havens. As we talk, Wren tells me that his novel was inspired by another moment when the politics of inequality were in the headlines: “The weeks I started writing it were the weeks I started hearing about Occupy Wall Street and reading David Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. I was really thinking about what kind of novel would come out of that.”

Political questions have also been at the forefront of Wren’s three previous novels, *Families are Formed Through Copulation*, *Revenge Fantasies of the Politically Dispossessed*, and *Polyamorous Love Song*.

For Wren, part of the challenge of writing has always been to bring political themes to what he calls the “often apolitical avant-garde writing tradition” that he identifies with. Wren’s early influences included the interdisciplinary American publisher Semiotext(e) and the artist novels available at Art Metropole, Toronto’s book-centric artist-run gallery. He admits, “as a writer, I’ve often been more inspired by the writing that happens in and around visual art than I have by literature, which often seems a bit old-fashioned.”

Wren’s work spans these worlds; his writing is only one part of his broader art practice. He came to Montreal in 2000 to join multidisciplinary group PME-ART, whose work focuses on conceptual, ephemeral performance and frequently performs internationally. Although his work as a novelist and performer emerged separately, they overlap in interesting ways; elements such as narrative, storytelling, and transcription frequently appear in the performance work of PME-ART.

In *The DJ Who Gave Too Much Information*, one of the group’s regular performances, members take turns telling stories and playing records. The experience is a bit like visiting the house of a friend with good taste in music, overly eager to share their collection. The 2014 performance *Adventures can be found anywhere, même dans la mélancolie* explicitly questioned the lines between art and literature as the group “re-wrote” a book by Portuguese novelist Fernando Pessoa in the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery over the course of several days, transcribing the text and adding additional content as they went along.

Reflecting on the Pessoa project, Wren explains that it resulted from a search for a “playful, open, alive way” to give the writer a greater respect by treating him disrespectfully. “Which is what I try to do when I’m writing my own books,” he says, seamlessly segueing back to his work as a writer. He continues, “I try to write in a very playful, live, energizing way, where of course I’m serious about it, but at the same time I’m also trying to take it not so seriously and find out what’s alive in it.”

Searching for what’s alive. For possibilities. For hope. With a gripping plot and sharp political analysis, *Rich and Poor* searches for the possibilities that are alive in our world of inequality. Wren finds them in community building, solidarity, resistance, and art. As the novel ends, the success of the union is far from certain, but the poor man who once turned his back on music is again singing loudly. **ms**

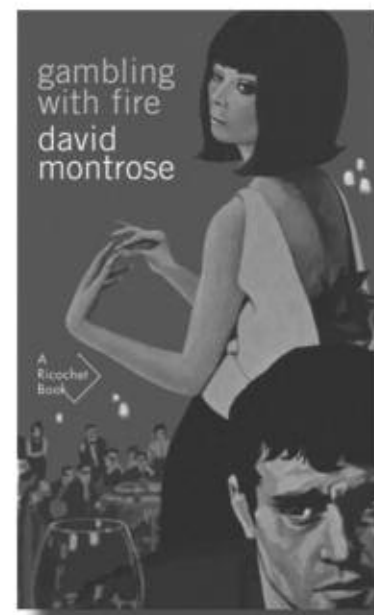
Jeff Miller is the author of the short story collection *Ghost Pine: All Stories True*.



RICH AND POOR
Jacob Wren
BookThug
\$20.00, paper, 181pp
9781771662833

Summer escapes.

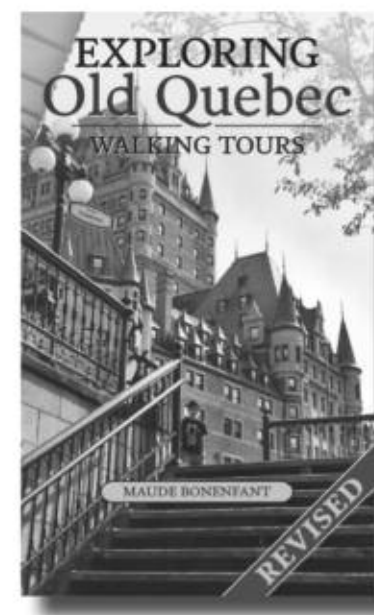
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GAMBLING WITH FIRE David Montrose

Austrian aristocrat Franz Loebek lands in post-war Canada penniless. Montreal is an open city and he is drawn into its violent underworld of illegal gambling as he moves amongst the city’s most privileged. Originally published in 1969, *Gambling with Fire* followed *The Crime on Cote des Neiges* (1951), *Murder Over Dorval* (1952) and *The Body on Mount Royal* (1953), as Montrose’s fourth and final novel.

208 pages | 4¼ x 7 | \$14.95



EXPLORING OLD QUEBEC —WALKING TOURS— Revised edition Maude Bonenfant

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fiction

Parisian Paramours

ALL THAT SANG
Lydia Perović
Esplanade Books
\$17.95, paper, 107pp
9781550654387



In just over a hundred pages, *All That Sang* is many things. It is a tale of two cities, opening with a subtle, cinematic description of the rooftops of Paris before leading the reader down into the streets, evoking a morning's gathering activity. The other city is Toronto, which appears from time to time, usually in counterpoint to the French capital. But, as the very first line suggests, the dawn that reveals the buildings and sidewalks is not merely the break of day; it is an emotional break that sets the tone for the novella as the city emerges from "the impenetrable fog of sorrow." Paris is not simply a history-laden assemblage of stones, but the site of a romantic obsession.

Our unnamed protagonist is an opera critic. The object of her desire is a conductor, one of few women to succeed in a field dominated by men. Having moved from Toronto to Paris to be nearer her lover, the protagonist finds herself still not near enough. While the conductor conducts her way around Europe, her little dog accompanying her in a carrier, the protagonist is left behind, consumed by memories, waiting "agonizing weeks" for a "taste"

of her lover. In anticipation of the conductor's return, she concocts a meal of creamy white substances (gnocchi in cheese sauce, clam chowder, champagne flutes of almond milk), an allusive menu for a woman dreaming of female arousal.


More than a love story, it is a tale of abjection, in both the conventional and theoretical senses. *All That Sang* also has other theoretical interests; the protagonist muses on time, on what it means to be seen (or to not want to be seen). Perović also indulges in a little postmodern self-reflexivity, claiming what she is telling is not a "proper story," that stories belong to happy, heterosexual love, to those who come from "proper" countries, with long histories and only one language – dubious claims subverted in the making.

The novella is also a tale of two languages, playful and lyrical. French terms are integrated into the English text, which bilingual readers may find nicely reflects their experience; this is one of the pleasures of the text. Another is the protagonist's musings on the two languages: "*Le pantalon* is better than either trousers or pants. Fact."

But even as the slippage between languages and other textual friskiness (puns, passages in Latin and in Cyrillic characters, sections in Q and A format, neologisms such as the excellent description of Parisian breakfast items as "butterthings") enrich what might otherwise be a fairly thin plot, grammatical quirks create awkwardness for the reader. While some of these quirks (such as a transitive verb used as if intransitive) may be intended to convey the



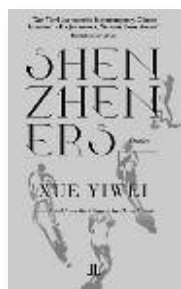
intrusions of other languages on the English of the narration, others seem more like mistakes (for example, lack of agreement in number or tense). Typographical and usage errors create further doubts. In such a playful and language-conscious text, one wants to know what idiosyncrasies the author intended, in order to consider their roles in the text. Of course, no book will be totally free of mistakes, but when so much of the value of a text lies in its hyperconsciousness of language(s) and clever language play, one must be a extremely, shall we say, *exigeant*.

Narrated as the protagonist boards the wrong train to catch her return flight to Toronto, *All That Sang* does offer some closure. The protagonist has loved and lost, but she has found a way to circumscribe her grief, fixing it in the details of the city and the time in which the story took place. As it ends, a friendly stranger helps her find the right train. She is on her way home. 

Elise Moser is a writer and editor. Her book for kids, *What Milly Did: The Remarkable Pioneer of Plastics Recycling*, appears from Groundwood Books this summer.

The Poetry of Awkwardness

SHENZHENERS
Xue Yiwei
Translated by Darryl Sterk
Linda Leith Publishing
\$18.95, paper, 210pp
9781988130033



"Tragedy can result from the most mundane detail in life," a dramatist remarks about his own tale, in one of the nine stories in Montreal-based Xue Yiwei's *Shenzheners*. One can easily imagine Xue making the same comment about his short fiction collection, originally written in Mandarin Chinese, and his first to be published in English. With a simple, elegant translation by Darryl Sterk, each story is titled after a character who lives a quiet, hidden suffering, an interior tragedy only barely visible to others. In "The Country Girl," the protagonist endures a difficult marriage and unexpectedly confides it all to a stranger on the train. She ends up falling in love with him – the first Asian

she has ever spoken to – only for this romance to fail as well. "The Dramatist" retires from writing, cursed by the ultimate theatrical tragedy, as he is torn between the two women he loves. And "The Prodigy," a piano wunderkind known to all in his city, cannot bear to tell his parents why he will not accept a prestigious prize, and so instead hides in the basement until the award ceremony is over.

Each of the nine characters has a connection to "the youngest city in China," Shenzhen, known as a wheeling, dealing, manufacturing town, a place one goes to seek fortune, or perhaps a factory job. But Xue's characters are not only going there to make money. They flee there, escaping their situations at home, or rest there, trying to make a stable life for themselves, like the big sister in "The Two Sisters," seeking a reliable man to marry and raise a child with. This casts Shenzhen in a light not often depicted – as a place of refuge, and of human discovery.


With this setting, a city of migrants from all over China, *Shenzheners* is rich in the metaphors common to migrant living. Xue's curious eye observes the many layers of belonging that characterize migrant identity, and lends itself to depictions of the complex, felt experience of a



range of identities – Chinese, Cantonese, Canadian, but also rural and urban, perhaps the strongest identity rift within China. His characters, having multiple identities, may spring from Xue's own experience as a Hunan-raised, Guangdong-educated transplant to Montreal. He deftly moves between the worlds described in *Shenzheners* – of women, men, children, of different social classes and Chinese regions. One gets the sense that Xue himself, belonging to many places, may feel an *appartenance* to several places at once, and in equal measure, no place at all – a reality for many migrants.

There is, too, a real attempt to capture

the interior life of the nine protagonists – an homage, possibly, to James Joyce, to whom the book is dedicated, and whose *Dubliners* inspired this collection's title. Xue's characters wrestle with difficult – and often bad – decisions, and then try to drag themselves out of the wreckage. In "The Physics Teacher," a young woman feels an affection for her student, an aspiring poet who elevates her out of a teaching slump. As her emotions veer towards romantic infatuation, havoc ensues, leading the poet to abandon his artistic dreams and to choose a life of "rationality" and "science" instead. The big sister in "The Two Sisters," who was so keen on finding a reliable husband, ends up avenging her husband's infidelity by sleeping with all kinds of men in his business network, only to contract a disease that destroys her.

Shenzheners is full of quietly devastating moments played out through the unsaid but deeply felt, not unlike the emotional landscapes portrayed in Ha Jin's novel *A Free Life*, or Wong Kar-Wai's film *In the Mood for Love*. Though oftentimes dark, Xue's world is truthful, and manages to capture the strange poetry of life's awkwardness. 

Bethany Or is a faculty member in the Department of Humanities at Champlain College in Saint-Lambert.

Constant Trouble

IT IS AN HONEST GHOST

John Goldbach

Coach House Books

\$18.95, paper, 144pp

9781552453339



John Goldbach's third book, *It Is an Honest Ghost*, in some ways continues the formal and thematic explorations of his earlier work. The stripped-down prose and philosophical semi-speculation that marked his first story collection and his satirical noir novel *The Devil and the Detective* are present here, too. That noted, *It Is an Honest Ghost* is no rehash; it provides new, and arguably more polished, takes on such concerns.

The book contains six short stories and a novella covering a range of subjects. The opening piece, "An Old Story: In Five Parts," for example, takes the familiar dissatisfied young manhood narrative and gives it psychological nuance by fracturing it into free-standing vignettes that oblige the reader to tease out the connections and their significance. The strategy is made more pointed by the story's declarative tone and unresolved ending.

The title story, on the other hand, uses a more conventional narrative approach in following a group of friends under the influence of hallucinogens. Unexpected dark windows in the workplace of one of the men prompts the group to check for possible problems in the building. Once inside, the absurdity of their fears is troubled by unexpected noises, thoughts of a ghost, and the ways in which their conversation veers off into ontological riffing: "You're having metempsychotic fantasies, James," said Allan. "Traits are passed on, obviously, through genetics and so on, but not actual souls. This idea of a soul is a byproduct of consciousness." The yoking together of intoxication, tension, and rationalization grows both funny and disturbing as the story draws to its close in an image of a monstrous, hybrid serpent-goose hissing in smoke.

The book's centrepiece, however, is the novella "Hic et Ubique," whose Latin title declares its principal interests. The story follows the narrator, named (in a moment of pomo metafictionality) John, a writer travelling to Kenya to cover a literary festival. While there, he encounters local authors and artists, reconnects with old friends, and has the beginnings of a holiday romance with MC Karen, a Kenyan musician. A vaguely sick feeling haunts John through all this and his discomfort builds to a paranoid break constituting the tale's climax. "Hic et Ubique" lays out the simultaneous euphoria and nervousness that mark so much travel – as it is mediated through the haze of alcohol, illness and/or medication, and sometimes through flashes of optimism by John's busy (self-)consciousness – with great effectiveness. This in turn underlines the ways in which, as the title suggests, there is no escaping one's life because it is always "here and everywhere." A truth conveyed even in the novella's details, like when John calls his girlfriend in Montreal: "It was loud where she was, at her aunt's house – she seemed harried and distant – and so we didn't talk long, only for a few minutes. I walked off [...] I told her I didn't even really know where I was, and I looked up at the night sky and tried to describe it to her. I felt myself becoming emotional, missing her terribly, trying to tell her that, but then she said she had to go ..."

In the end, it is this notion of the inescapable itself – of being constantly troubled by something that is all us – that knits together what could seem a collection of various unrelated pieces. This is fair enough; giving shape and meaning to elusive human experience is one of literature's most venerable functions and it is always welcome however ambiguous, however odd, any particular experience – or shape – may be. mb

Peter Dubé is the author, co-author, or editor of eleven books.



Sex and Candy

MOLLY O

Mark Foss

Cormorant Books

\$20.00, paper, 288pp

9781770864306

Shhh ... silence is golden, so they say. No one puts this to the test like Candy, the coquettish auctioneer's daughter in Mark Foss's second novel – a darkly humorous tale of sibling rivalry and devotion. Mysteriously mute since birth, the baby of the family needn't utter a word to seduce an audience. By the tender age of ten, she's already daddy's favourite assistant onstage, her come-hither body language and vintage costumes gaining glowing reviews from auction-goers while arousing envy within her family.

Her competitive elder brothers, LJ and Hoss, both dream of succeeding their father, "the best damn auctioneer in the country." But Joseph – a voice to be reckoned with – is a tough act to follow. Channeling "the Tone," he dazzles bidders like a televangelist, his honeyed verbalizations "tap[ping] into every crevice of craving." He and Candy are like opposite, yet complementary, sides of a lucky coin, her silent style sweetening his quasi-mystical marketing pitch. For years, they shine brighter than anything else in their small Ontario town – until Candy disappears, that is, and Joseph loses his silver tongue to throat cancer.

The story is narrated by LJ (Little Joseph), the self-effacing middle child, who, as an adult, studies film at university in Ottawa, later teaching it in Montreal. Grief, jealousy, and abandonment are running themes and, in LJ's eyes, Hoss deals by not dealing, escaping through pot and new-age platitudes. But LJ's own coping mechanisms are equally steeped in denial. His obsessive fantasies of finding Candy drive the narrative forward, her apparent indifference exacerbating his craving for approval.

For a while, we too expect Candy to make a comeback, but eventually sense that Foss, like Candy, might be leading us on. By then, we're so invested in understanding LJ's compulsion that we keep turning the pages. Undeterred by the passage of time – perhaps it's the thrill of the chase – the film professor dives deep into the hushed underworld of silent cinema, convinced his sister has become the star of an erotic experimental film series. Although he insists he has "no creepy sexual longings," his behaviour hints of voyeurism, causing the reader to squirm. By his own admission, he acts more like a



MICHKA SAAL

jilted lover than a brother, and his attempts to lure Candy home through a flattering blog devoted to her work are akin to a carefully coded courtship.

"Anyone so immersed in deconstructionist erotic cinema would not tell a story from front to back," says LJ of Candy,

mirroring his imagined sister through his own non-linear narration. Ottawa-born Foss, who, like his protagonist, studied film (at Carleton University) before moving to Montreal, cleverly rocks the reader between present, past, and future, leaving us tipsy. "When does the present become the past or does it sometimes go the other way around?" LJ asks.

Dialogue in the novel is sometimes elliptical, making it hard to decipher who's speaking, but Foss's prose flows smoothly otherwise, captivating the reader with cinematic sensibility. The author keeps us entertained with humorous wordplay and tinges of absurdity as LJ and Hoss butt heads over their father's funeral plans. Repressed family friction rises, begging to be healed, like the smoke from Hoss's sagebrush.

Reading *Molly O*, we're reminded that power struggles between romantic partners are often rooted in familial relationships. It is through his standoffish sister that LJ first learns the pains of being rejected by a woman and consequently struggles to establish intimacy with girlfriends. We wonder: is Candy traumatized, dead – or is her absenteeism simply a control tactic by which she hopes, paradoxically, to have the final word? Her general aloofness is unsettling to those closest to her, exposing the sometimes insidious nature of withdrawal. While silence may often be golden, like fool's gold it may not always be what it seems. mb

Kimberly Bourgeois is a Montreal-based writer and songstress. Her second EP is scheduled for release this fall (2016).



Foss's prose flows smoothly, captivating the reader with cinematic sensibility.

War Effort

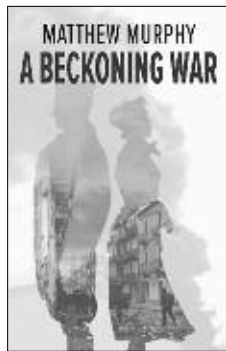
A BECKONING WAR

Matthew Murphy

Baraka Books

\$24.95, paper, 334pp

9781771860680



To beckon is to entice, to draw someone in. It may be an act of deception, but it is not an act of coercion. When someone is beckoned, he responds willingly. That is the difficult reality that lies at the heart of Matthew Murphy's debut novel, *A Beckoning War*.

Captain Jim McFarlane serves in the Canadian infantry and is stationed in Italy in 1944 as the Allied forces advance. While the novel painstakingly chronicles his experiences on the front lines, it spends nearly as much time reconstructing the period before the war in order to explore McFarlane's decision to enlist, and the consequences of that decision for his marriage. Through these flashbacks and recollections, readers learn that rather than creating security, his privileged background as the son of a physician and his comfortable living as a school-teacher left him dissatisfied. Despite the

objections of his wife Marianne, he enlists, and eventually finds himself overseas battling the Axis powers.

Confronted by the grotesque realities of war, McFarlane must reckon with that fateful decision and how it may determine not only whether he lives or dies, but also what kind of life he will return to if he does survive. The clearest encapsulation of this comes late in the novel, rendered in the lyric, stream of consciousness prose that dominates the final chapters as McFarlane struggles to maintain his sanity: "why oh why did you do it really why did you do it why did you leave what is the reason really?"

The question "what is the reason really?" haunts not only McFarlane's decision to volunteer for action, but also the entire representation of a war that increasingly seems meaningless to the men being ravaged by it. In one of the most chilling passages, McFarlane scratches his head, prompting a cascade of dandruff to fall to the ground, and transforms this mundane moment into a macabre omen: "The earth is content with shed hair and skin in the knowledge that after these dainty hors d'oeuvres, these appetizers, will indeed come the main course." That, under these circumstances, individuals can come to seem little more than meat to be consumed is a reality Murphy forces his readers to confront over and over with unsparing

and unflinching descriptions of battlefield carnage. At the same time, the tedium and restlessness of wartime is vividly evoked. As the scenes set in Italy alternate descriptions of waiting to die and actually dying, the retrospective narration of how and why McFarlane ended up there becomes all the more poignant.

Beckoning is also a term that tends to carry nuances of seduction and that makes it apt for a novel in which a shadowy love triangle is formed between Jim, Marianne, and the allure of the far-off conflict. Marianne repeatedly figures the war as a rival and a threat to their marriage, and McFarlane's torment is not the oft-represented longing for a stoically faithful beloved. Rather, as his recollections and Marianne's letters to him make clear, his marriage has been profoundly damaged and may prove to be another casualty.

It is this choice to frame the experience of war through the consequences it might have for one's connection to others – not just one's body and psyche – that distinguishes Murphy's novel, taking it beyond an adept representation of battlefield horrors. Even as



readers are gripped by the desire to know whether McFarlane lives or dies, they also know that the first losses took place before he ever entered the battlefield, when he found himself enticed by a war there was no way to understand without experiencing. The question of why he answered its siren call remains almost impossible to answer. **mb**

Danielle Barkley holds a PhD from the Department of English at McGill University and teaches topics including writing, rhetoric, and critical analysis.

A Colossal Mystery

SLEEPING GIANTS

Sylvain Neuvel

Del Rey

\$35.00, cloth, 320pp

9781101886694

The opening catalyst of Sylvain Neuvel's sci-fi thriller *Sleeping Giants* is a classic premise of the genre: something is where it shouldn't – or can't – be. A giant metal hand is accidentally found by an eleven-year-old girl in the Midwest. The hand appears to be a millennium older than the oldest known civilization in the Americas; the technology needed to create and move the hand barely exists now, let alone then. The best working hypothesis? "We didn't build this," says Dr. Rose Franklin, the now-grown eleven-year-old, who is also the head of a team of scientists researching the hand.

It's a juicy theory, one which Franklin (and Neuvel) explores with the help of a ragtag band

of assistants, handpicked for their unique professional skills, if not their interpersonal ones: a take-no-bullshit ex-military pilot with an injured eye, a brilliant and prickly linguist from Montreal, a geneticist with a mysterious background and methods verging on the amoral. As more giant metal body parts turn up, the team must contend with the philosophical and ethical implications of their discovery. Who made this metal colossus, and why did they disassemble and bury it? Why is it being discovered now in particular? What does it do? And why does it have to be so *big*? After all, no one creates such an outsize thing merely for decoration. As the team begins to realize the extent of the power they hold, and the implications of its origins, they must face their own individual weaknesses



and fears, as well as grapple with the desires of various international factions, all of which have an interest in an enormous potential weapon from outer space.

The story is told in a fragmented, eclectic style, composed of news reports, journal entries, transcripts, satellite feeds, and, primarily, interviews by an unnamed interlocutor, whose attitude toward his subjects ranges from sar-

donic to manipulative to outright hostile. This anonymous puppet master is almost as much of a mystery as the metal giant; he seems to know everything about everyone and to have access to levels of power beyond the reach of government and military, but his own background is a cypher. The exchanges between the novel's de facto narrator and the book's other characters are generally lively and well paced, and keep the story moving at a good clip. It's easy to see why plans are already underway for a film adaptation of *Sleeping Giants*; Neuvel's novel at its best reads like a snappy screenplay.

Neuvel also does well at technological imagining and writing: the metal giant itself is the clearly drawn centerpiece of the book, a beautiful and beguiling object you can hold in your mind's eye. Dr. Rose

Franklin's team assembles it with the same delight as a kid putting together a Kinder Surprise toy *sans* instructions, and the feeling of joyful discovery is every bit the reader's as well. While later parts of the book get somewhat bogged down in action sequences and developments of international intrigue that aren't easily carried by the book's narrative device, for the most part it keeps fast-paced plot turns, big techno-philosophical questions, and compelling character arcs suspended in a fine balance.

Sleeping Giants is the first book in the Themis Files series, and it leaves us with enough questions and loose ends to make the next book pretty enticing. Can immeasurable power bring about peace, or must it inevitably lead to the war to end all wars? I don't know if Neuvel's books will give us the answers, but they promise a good ride along the way. **mb**

Anna Leventhal's first book of short stories, *Sweet Affliction*, was published in 2014. She lives in Montreal.

By Derek Webster

Beasts in the Country

Q&A with Peter McCambridge

Life in the Court of Matane is a novel-as-memoir, the third book from Quebec novelist Eric Dupont. Published in 2008 as *Bestiaire* in French, it is an imaginative meditation on divorce and family life in 1970s Quebec. The boy Eric and his sister begin the story by shuttling back and forth between their parents' homes until their police officer father – an old-style despot in the vein of Henry VIII – and Anne Boleynesque step-mother take control of the children's lives, moving them around a series of provincial Quebec towns, never staying in the same place long enough to put down roots. *Life in the Court of Matane* captures the fear, precariousness, and performance that family life becomes for the siblings. Certain “hammer words” may not be uttered at home anymore, including the name of their mother – sardonically referred to as “Catherine of Aragon” and “Micheline Raymond, professional cook” – until, as high school comes to an end, the siblings choose to remake their lives free of their father's rule.

Translator Peter McCambridge is no ingénue to the art, having translated seven novels, all from Quebec. McCambridge, who grew up in Ireland and studied modern languages at Cambridge University, has lived in Quebec City since 2003. He directs the website Québec Reads and Baraka Book's new imprint of Quebec literature in translation, QC Fiction.

I recently spoke with McCambridge about his translation of *Life in the Court of Matane* and the work of French to English translation in Quebec more generally.

Derek Webster: You've called Dupont's novel *Bestiaire*, in translation, *Life in the Court of Matane*. What did you see as the advantages of this more “courtly” title? Was *Bestiary* taken, for example?

Peter McCambridge: It's strange but I didn't ever consider calling the novel *Bestiary* in English, not even for one second. To my ear, bestiary is a bit dry and doesn't evoke much in English. Somewhere along the line, you would end up having to explain what a bestiary is and I didn't want to get into all of that. For me, it was important to have a title that was larger than life, like Dupont's work, and I like the fact that the title we settled on mixes the personal and the parochial (Matane, a small

town in Quebec that international readers will likely never have heard of) with the grand and the political implied by life in the court and affairs of state. Both elements are important as our narrator grows up in the royal court ruled over by his father and his despotic second wife, all to mock-heroic effect.

QC Fiction is all about new voices: a new generation of authors and a new generation of translators.

DW: What were some of the particular challenges of translating this work?
PM: I distinctly remember reading *Bestiaire* for the very first time in the sunshine of California just after it was published by Marchand de feuilles in 2008. All I could think was, “This is what I want to do with my life ... I want to translate this book.” In other words, it's a translation I started a long time ago – in late 2008 – and that I've been thinking about ever since. So I've had a long time to think over how or whether to translate this or that. Most of all, the reason I wanted to translate this particular novel is because I feel such an affinity with the author's voice. I like to think that, if I sat down and wrote a novel of my own one day, I'd sound like Eric Dupont. I love the exaggeration, the way he never describes something in five words if he can do it (beautifully) in ten. Much is made of preci-

**LIFE IN THE COURT
OF MATANE**
Eric Dupont
Translated by
Peter McCambridge
QC Fiction
\$19.95, paper, 262pp
9781771860765

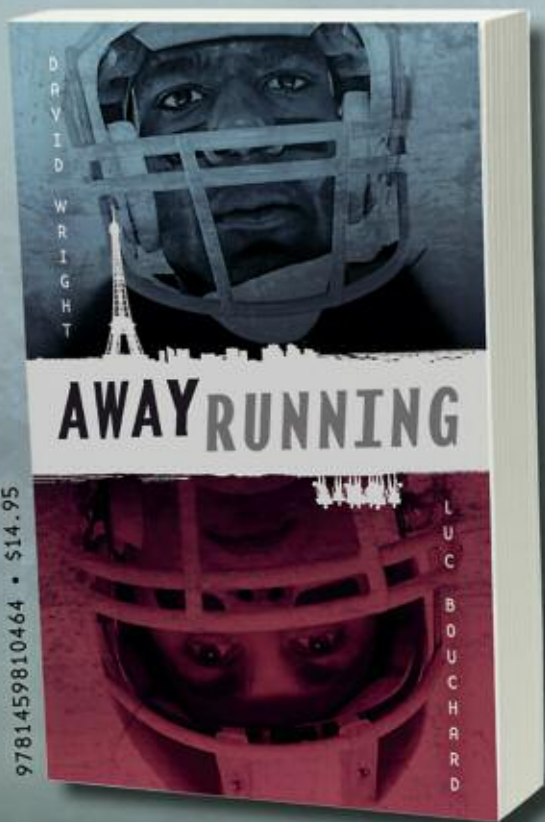


sion in writing, but I like my washing-machine manuals to be precise; I like my novels to be beautiful and magical and inspiring. And to me, Eric Dupont achieves this by spinning yarns and going off on tangents that feature lots of memorable, juicy details.

As with anything I translate, I set out to write what I think the author would have put had he been writing in English. I did not want readers to feel as though they were reading French or could hear the characters speaking with French accents. I tried to make the novel readable in English and faithful to Dupont's intentions without denying or papering over its Quebec roots. So there are references to Félix Leclerc and Harmonium in there, but there are also references to 7UP and Leonid Brezhnev. Like most books, it's both local and international.

In other words, there was nothing that didn't feel almost immediately, instinctively right. But translation is an art, not a science. It's a long

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McCambridge continued from page 9

series of decisions and lots of people might read my translation and not agree with all of them. But it is what it is. This is my take on how I wanted Eric Dupont's voice to sound in English. And I'm happy with how it turned out.

DW: *Life in the Court of Matane* is the first in an ambitious imprint called QC Fiction by Baraka Books, devoted to new Quebec fiction in translation. Has Quebec fiction been undervalued in English Canada and beyond our borders? Do you see a growing interest in Quebec literature on the North American and international stage?

PM: QC Fiction is all about new voices: a new generation of authors and a new generation of translators. If you ask me, there's little doubt that Quebec fiction hasn't lived up to its potential in English. We're aiming to bring out a different type of novel that we hope will appeal to readers all over the world. Idiomatic translations will, of course, be a big part of that, and we're keen to spend the time it takes reading and finding the right books and then making sure our translations don't read like translations.

As for a growing interest in Quebec literature on the world stage, it was nice to see *Arvida* make the Best Translated Book Award shortlist earlier this year. When we get to the point where writers like Nicolas Dickner and Catherine Leroux are regularly making these lists, that will be cause for optimism. But at

the minute too many fans of world fiction in translation aren't picking up books from Quebec. Hopefully that will change soon, and hopefully QC Fiction can help bring about that change.

DW: Last year in the *New Yorker*, novelist Pasha Malla quoted you as saying "Quebec finds itself too exotic to be easily digested by the Canadian and U.S. market, but not exotic enough to compete with the appeal of something new from Indonesia or Iceland." How does one go about changing such entrenched notions?

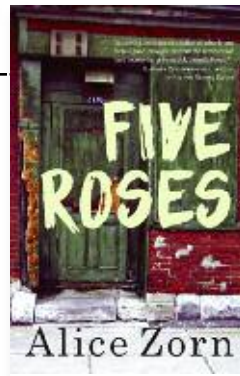
PM: I don't think the problem is too entrenched as to be irreversible. I don't think it's something people consciously do when they walk past a book from Quebec in their local bookstore. But I think that if you were to ask Canadians on the street to name a book from Quebec, more of them would name *The Tin Flute* than *Atavisms* or *Ru*, and that's a problem. QC Fiction is an international imprint and we're aiming to put readers in Australia and South Africa in touch with what we consider to be some of the best writing from Quebec at the moment. We'll see what happens. ■■

Derek Webster is a Montreal-based writer and editor. His first collection of poems, *Mockingbird* (Véhicule Press), was recently shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Award.

By Claire Holden Rothman

Alice Zorn

Making Her Pointe



FIVE ROSES
Alice Zorn
Dundurn Press
\$24.99, paper, 320pp
9781459734241



For nearly seventy years, the Farine Five Roses sign has stood on top of the old Ogilvie flour mill in Pointe-Saint-Charles, its gigantic red letters lighting up the skyline at night, blinking hypnotically. It's one of the first sights you see crossing the Champlain Bridge towards Montreal, or approaching Central Station on the train in from the west. It may not be pretty, but for many Montrealers, it signifies home.

Montreal writer Alice Zorn immortalizes this icon in her beautifully crafted second novel, *Five Roses*. Like the gigantic blue eyes of T. J. Eckleburg looking down on the Valley of Ashes, Zorn's sign is a landmark that does service as a literary device. In the book, it towers over the Lachine Canal, but it also gives a baby girl her name and provides the bedtime story that will save her in adult life.

In addition to the sign, Zorn also immortalizes Pointe-Saint-Charles, the neighbourhood where she has lived since 2001. The descriptive skill with which she does so is dazzling. Water is omnipresent. The "blue lizard-skin ripple" of the St. Lawrence River, with "frills of foam from the rapids in the distance," defines the neighbourhood's eastern border. The Lachine Canal, whose water has "a dark, oily flatness," delineates it to the west. Along the

canal, abandoned silos, occupied now by squatters, bear witness to the Pointe's glory days, when the district was considered the heart of Canada's manufacturing sector. Zorn brings us into this derelict territory, where "broken chunks of concrete and brick that must have fallen from higher up" lie near the footpath, and bits of rusted metal are "biscuit crumbly with decay." At one point, after describing a perilous climb up the side of a silo on a retractable nylon ladder, Zorn leads readers into a squatter's living space.

As Zorn began exploring her new neighbourhood in 2001, she wondered about its history – streets like Saint-Patrick and Place Dublin, named for the Irish immigrants who settled here, many of whom worked on the construction of the Lachine Canal; factories that were being gutted and sandblasted, converted

almost overnight into luxury condos; houses like her own being bought up and renovated.

"I wanted to write about what I was seeing before it was gone," she told me recently, over tea in her Pointe-Saint-Charles dining room. The renovation work she did added to her curiosity. As it progressed, Zorn kept unearthing evidence of past lives. "I became interested," she said, "in the idea of a house holding the memories of the people who lived there."

Although history plays a big role in *Five Roses*, the action is contemporary. The plot revolves around three women whose lives intersect in the Pointe in the summer of 2005. Fara, in her early forties, is a newcomer to the area. She has just bought a house for a ridiculously low price and embarked on renovations. Maddy, her next-door neighbour of roughly the same age, has

lived in the Pointe all her life. She works in a pastry shop, and the home she occupies, purchased with a modest inheritance, was once a hippie commune. Rose, the youngest member of the trio, has the most tenuous link to the neighbourhood, or so she thinks.

"There's Old Pointe and New Pointe," Zorn explained to me during the interview. The mix, apparently, isn't always easy. When Zorn moved here, long-time residents refused to acknowledge her in the street. "They were from here," Zorn observed. "Their mothers were from here. Their fathers were from here. I wasn't. I was an interloper."

In the novel, Fara forges a connection, if not an actual friendship, with her neighbour Maddy. She needs it in order to get information.

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PETER KIRBY
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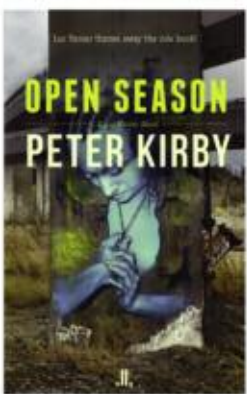
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By Katia Grubisic



DO NOT SAY WE HAVE NOTHING

Madeleine Thien

Knopf Canada

\$35.00, cloth, 480pp

9780345810427

Madeleine Thien

A Solidarity of Mourning

There is a moment in childhood that first marks our awareness of the wider world, the moment we recognize what takes place beyond our own sphere. Our young selves are drawn to the narrative, to the images played and replayed on the news, to the hushed thrall of the grown-ups.

In the spring of 1989, Madeleine Thien was fifteen years old. After six weeks of protests in Beijing, the public unrest culminated in the Tiananmen Square massacre. "It was," the novelist recalls now, "the first time that I'd seen a world event unfolding in real time."

Her new book, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, she says, was seeded long ago: "I was drawn to Tiananmen Square because I remembered it so vividly." Thien, who grew up in Vancouver, watched the imposition of martial law and the resulting civilian deaths at a cultural and generational remove. "These were my first images of what China looked like, what students looked like — people my age. I was a very idealistic young person, and I invested something emotionally in watching these images, thinking something dramatic was about to happen in China. And something did, but not what we would have hoped."

The circumstances around Tiananmen Square provide the apex of *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, but the book peels a much larger onion. Among Thien's achievements here is compelling time to unfold both forward and back. From the present we move backwards with Marie, who is grappling with family secrets. And from the past we struggle forward with Sparrow, Kai, and Zhuli, three young musi-



CHRISTY ANN CONLIN

cians studying at the Shanghai Conservatory at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution.

When Marie is still a girl, Ai-ming, a young woman fleeing the post-Tiananmen Square repression, comes to stay with Marie and her mother in Vancouver. Marie's father has recently died, and Marie is in dire need of a sister figure. As well as staunching her solitude, Ai-ming also provides the key to *The Book of Records*, an incomplete, hand-copied novel found among Marie's father's papers.

Part romance, part adventure, *The Book of Records* surfaces also half a century earlier, when a young dreamer named Wen uses it to woo his beloved. And, when Wen the Dreamer and Swirl, along with their daughter Zhuli, get swallowed by the violence of collectivization and re-education, the notebooks are recopied

again and again with minute encoded alterations and scattered across the country to make the family whole again.

Do Not Say We Have Nothing is Thien's most complex work narratively. "I was trying to connect with an unfolding Chinese history since the Revolution," Thien explains. "Because it's still one moment, in a way." There are more crackdowns today than ever. The Chinese, Thien notes, are even today forbidden from mourning the victims of the

continued on page 16

poetry



ASSI MANIFESTO

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine
Translated by Howard Scott
Mawenzi House
\$19.95, paper, 88pp
9781927494752

LATE VICTORIANS

Vincent Colistro
Signal Editions
\$17.95, paper, 88pp
9781550654400

MY DINOSAUR

François Turcot
Translated by Erin Moure
BookThug
\$18.00, paper, 160pp
9781771662307

REDRAFTING WINTER

Gillian Sze and Alison Strumberger
BuschekBooks
\$17.95, paper, 120pp
9781894543859

SMALL FIRES

Kelly Norah Drukker
McGill-Queen's University Press
\$16.95, paper, 128pp
9780773547704

The poems in *Assi Manifesto*, by Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, translated from their original French by Howard Scott, do not use tightly packed language. Rather, they convey a sense of spoken word and performance off the page.

The collection is a full-voiced call of identity using the image-bank of bark, tobacco, moon, moose, and eel, grounded in the ideals of a whole nature. The poems invoke melting ice caps and pollution. Political and ecological calls run through: “I am this black-blooded land / I have cancer in my left lung / I have cancer in my fourteen torrents.” There is also a sense of imminent triumph: “I am liberty leading the people / the red lights on the asphalt / your blockades roads I am your free / wandering resolute in its fate.” Bound freedom versus freedom-bound.

Fontaine learned her ancestral language at eighteen and, in an interview with *Indian Country Today*, she said, “speaking Innu means cultivating a deep relationship to oneself.” Spoken word poems are often a call to action, and these, scattered through with Innu words, are no exception. The poems are a call to the historical pre-invasion calm of North America, for respect as equals against the default culture that partitions her people into the past. The battles in the poems are mythical, symbolic, and large in this

manifesto for national and personal pride. “everything I’ll shout / every city rooftop / I’ll recite / ember memory / *nitei man utassi* / my dirty feet singing the beauty / the sand amidst the hourglasses of time.”

The poems in *Late Victorians*, by Vincent Colistro, have a compelling, nervous energy with a youthful feel of jazzy excitement and darkness pinging around the text. The collection seems to cross paths stylistically with *Animal Husbandry Today*, by Jamie Sharpe, with its profusion, confusion, and fusion of sense and nonsense meeting depression and asking it to dance. In poems such as “The Asterisks,” ideas bounce around in joyful chaos: “asterisks are on every leaf. Foreign, // mercantile tables and measurements / wind the veins and spines of the bracts. Oof, / say some asterisks, Ech, say others. Erp, a few. / The open fields seem uninhabited by asterisks until // one bothers using an electron microscope: Lucretia asterisks. / Epicurean asterisks. I feed my family black pepper asterisks.”

And so the collection reels forward at a quick tempo and in good temper, often with a stanza break just as a sentence starts, maintaining the momentum of being off-balance. The poems play against each other, with the reader, with and against conventional sense, tickling and tackling. A poem titled “From Your Chaise Lounge, You Poke Your Head Around Like ‘What Was That?’” is a list poem of non-sequitur leaps for three pages, running along with a merciful lack of punctuation because the purpose is already served by space and pace.

Other poems battle against the emotional weight of an Armageddon-bound world. In the West Coast poem-vision of “The Big One,” the natural order is upended. All the world as we know it is lost, but there is a comedy in the pathos: “theatres filled / with ducklings, the mall lost a decent amount / of money. Single origin coffee // brewed in the mighty tsunami, / staining the city’s supply of chinos.”

In *My Dinosaur*, by François Turcot, translated by Erin Moure, the dinosaur is the father and the bones of his life are explored at length. The poems are clipped, precise, sometimes telegraphic. Few could argue that this is predictable narrative prose, in part because of its density and pivots: “eviscerated by evenings / I’d shut the silence / between us // at table I’d decline / the soup / of Great Depressions.”

Turcot explores the distance between parent and child, the nostalgia, silences, and pain, and in particular the difficulties

of navigating the father-son gap. In these poems, Turcot takes the important step of asking his father, “who are you?” – an admirable effort that leads to seeing the parent as a person rather than a symbol: “Tensed in my boots of cold, lugging the salt of others, I stepped backward. // Mechanically, I turned around. The future of the dinosaur was pending.”

The poems have their own distinct music that becomes clearer the longer you sit with them. The book has lyric moments: “I walked / my entire being / until I’d returned / to myself,” when, at the end of the twelve-line poem, “at road’s end I headed straight / into the world.”

The essay by Moure is a fascinating discussion of her translation decisions – for spirit, for meaning, or for resonance or sound when the two languages don’t have a direct correspondence or when substituting rare word for rare word would connote the opposite.

Inspired by the collaborative rengas and correspondence of P. K. Page and Philip Stratford in their collection *And Once More Saw the Stars*, Gillian Sze and Alison Strumberger created *Redrafting Winter*. The book embraces figurative and foot journeys and takes its own path from there. The prose sections are more internal and interactional than about physical spaces; all is psychogeography of twenty-somethings sorting out their place and roles.

The daily act of being attentive to details, significances, and eureka yields insights and compass points towards what matters, such as in Strumberger’s note from Suji, South Korea, “you can’t remember seeing the moment it happened because no such single moment exists.” Earlier, writing from Montreal, Sze observed,

When I packed,
I found lost letters behind my bed,
books I never knew I owned.

Leaving is a process of
remembering,
a realization that to stay is to
lose parts of your mind.

These nijūin renga feel like a modified haibun when the links of the renga chain are paired with the writers’ correspondence. The letters are vivid and touching in fondness for one another as each travelled around the world, sometimes in opposite directions. Instead of the common posture of ironic distance, these poems dare to be intimate and vulnerable and to stretch language, making it play and cover what the writers want it to

when straightforward can’t get there. For example, Sze muses how making a book is a process with “Paper all over the floor. Poetry has become spatial.” Sze’s renga links are:

Mirrors:
enamel shines silver
glimmer in a mare’s mouth

I see you see I,
cut, snuffle, hint.

The authors espouse enthusiasm for life, love of place, and people. They are resilient and articulate.

There’s a keen observation in Kelly Norah Drukker’s collection *Small Fires* that sidewalk retirees were once farmers, which she reveals without saying so directly: “Men lean cheeks on hands grown soft.” There’s a recurrence of fists throughout the book, both literal and as metaphor. And there’s implicit violence below the surface, whether in the ocean bleeding into bruised clouds or the child’s understated desperation to save egg money to leave the direness of poverty.

Throughout the Ireland poems and the persona poems of immigration, there’s a welcome female perspective sympathetic with history. The poems are most alive and crisp when the narrator is interacting, taking the bodhrán in hand “until // rhythm is a small wild / creature in my hands, / stroking the dark / cheek of the world.”

Covering some of the same literal ground at David W. McFadden’s *An Innocent in Ireland*, Drukker’s approach is quite different. Each references the same Cromwellian battles, ancient grave markers (for Drukker: “a capstone on top. / A space you can crawl into, but don’t”), and the Irish landscape, but Drukker’s take is characterized by her solitude in a kind of exile from the people around her, for whom identity is closer to place. In “Roots” she details a pub conversation about what the locals think of the Americans coming to reclaim their Irish roots, “drawling *Abhham from Cowneee Dawunny-Gaal* like / he owns the bloody country.”

If one were to make a colour palette for *Small Fires*, it would be a water-colour of stones and derelict wood greys, dusky blues, a smear of rainy green through a window, the creosote of town, as rage by morning dies down to “murmur / through stovepipes.”

Pearl Pirie is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *the pet radish shrunken* (BookThug, 2015).

non-fiction

Polar Bearings

FINDING FRANKLIN

The Untold Story of
a 165-Year Search

Russell A. Potter

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$39.95, cloth, 280pp

9780773547841



Sir John Franklin, in case you haven't heard, searched for the Northwest Passage. When he, his ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror*, and all his men disappeared circa 1850 in what would become the Canadian Arctic, others set out to search for them. When the survival of the expedition's men became hopeless, that search morphed into yet another search – for the clues scattered in the landscape and preserved in Inuk recollections that might reveal how, why, when, and where these men had perished. New searchers then stumbled across evidence of old searchers, who became their own source of historical curiosity. And now Russell A. Potter has concluded a search for evidence

and meaning in these nested matryoshka dolls of arctic and armchair endeavour.

As Potter aptly describes, the desire to solve the mystery of the Franklin expedition's loss has infected investigators like a virus. Potter himself has been seized by this infection, but he is still able to record the patient histories of those swept up in a contagion that has produced outbreaks for more than a century and a half. The discovery of the *Erebus* wreck in September 2014 has further fuelled the pandemic, perhaps to its greatest heights. We are fortunate that Potter has compiled such fascinating case histories.

Potter promises to tell the “untold story” of 165 years of searching for Franklin. In such a slim volume, it is not possible to be anything like definitive, and at times I was left wanting for more biographical detail. We never learn, for example, what Franklin researcher David C. Woodman has done for a living, in all the years that the mystery has consumed his time and energy. And if a reader is expecting the inside story of the 2014 Parks Canada expedition that made headlines with its *Erebus* discovery, it is not here. Potter was not party to the actual discovery (covered by John Geiger and Alanna Mitchell in

Franklin's Lost Ship), and the controversies surrounding it are scarcely addressed. Jim Balsillie, co-founder of RIM, who has poured so much energy and money into the current search, merits only a sentence. But even without these elements, *Finding Franklin* remains a worthy addition to the Franklin literature.

Potter has planted his own boots in the Canadian north and is an experienced hand at arctic exploration history. He was a historical advisor to *Arctic Ghost Ship*, the 2015 PBS NOVA version of the documentary on the *Erebus* discovery. More importantly, as a professor of English and Media Studies at Rhode Island College, he understands the Franklin tragedy and the many, many searches from a cultural perspective. The searchers themselves (with sometimes unhappy endings, including poisoning and suicide) are as much of interest in this book as the object of their searches. Potter is prepared to wade into the evidence, which, to a non-Franklin enthusiast, may sometimes prove to be more than they are looking for, but otherwise he is engaging, interweaving his experience with solid research. It helps tremendously that he is a capable narrator, a skill he demonstrated in a well-received recent novel, *Pyg*.

The Franklin mystery will always be a mystery. As Potter shows so well, its meta-narrative will only continue to expand with every new theorist or searcher to appear and every new clue to be uncovered. **mb**

Douglas Hunter holds a PhD in history and is the author of *God's Mercies*, *Half Moon*, and *The Race to the New World*, on exploration history.

A Memoir in Pieces

FIELD NOTES

Prose Pieces 1969–2012

Michael Harris

Signal Editions

\$18.00, paper, 160pp

9781550653502

Michael Harris's *Field Notes: Prose Pieces 1969–2012* begins with the story of an ill-fated trip to the Hamptons where “a well-intentioned and fastidious cleaning-person” discarded ten years of his writing. Two books of poetry and over four hundred pages of prose by the Montreal writer, editor, and teacher were consigned “to the keening attention of the seagulls circling above the local Long Island landfill.” Harris blames this volume's tardiness on that loss; much of the work was recreated from memory and alternate drafts. And while *Field Notes* is filled with interesting and introspective moments from Harris's career in letters, it does feel as if something was lost to the gulls that fateful afternoon on Long Island.

The first section of *Field Notes* is made up of a collection of essays, prose, and an interview with Leonard Cohen. It is a compelling and thoughtful consideration of Harris's mortality, something the writer is keenly aware of. His subjects are mostly dead or dying. All hold some place of promi-

nence in the canon of their discipline, but there's a tangible absence in some these pieces – colleagues, friends, family, all are missing names and specificity. It's as if only Harris and the canonical (Irving Layton, Jorge Luis Borges, Ted Hughes, Leonard Cohen) exist, and the rest of the world is mere detail. In this we find a fascinating illustration of a writer trying to place himself within the history of his form. Harris masters the unique ability to be both conceited and humble, a quality that makes for the best of writers.

It is in the interview with Cohen that *Field Notes* finds its most vibrant and revealing passages. First published in 1969, the document is a conversation between two confident young men who simultaneously show each other respect and indifference, a fine balance between cool and honest, two cocks strutting the coop:

Harris: Do you have, or did you have, a magic age when this coming of age happens?

Cohen: I feel I'm on the edge of it.

Harris: Have you always been on the edge of it?

Cohen: Sometimes I've been in it, sometimes I've been past it.

Harris: When were you past it?

Cohen: Around the time the record was being made I had very unclear ideas of almost anything.

Harris: Do you call this despair?

Cohen: It's one of the things I call it.

The second section of *Field Notes*, which consists of four interviews with

the author, contains moments of interest and intrigue, though at times they feel repetitive. Harris was part of the Montreal writing community during Canada's most definitive hours. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the cultural and financial centre of the country shifted to Toronto under the weight of the separatist agenda. To be an Anglophone artist in Montreal at that time and in its aftermath would have been fascinating, watching as a country pulled away, pulled apart. It would have been nice to see the years between 1969 and 2012 reflected more in the collected texts here, but instead they mostly concentrate on the writer's process and publications and his work with Signal Editions (the publisher of this collection).

When asked in a 1997 interview by Carmine Starnino, included in the collection, about what is at the root of his work, Harris replies, “Mortality—and the quality of joy that comes from having to come to terms with mortality.” That consideration of mortality propels the collection's first half but is tangibly absent from its second. *Field Notes* are exactly that; an accumula-



tion of marginalia that provides a keen glimpse into the writer's process. Harris has provided a collection of texts that tease a compelling memoir about a half-century of writing in Canada's most diverse and dynamic city. **mb**

Mike Spry is the author of *JACK*, *Distillery Songs*, and *Bourbon & Eventide*, and was nominated for the A.M. Klein Prize, the ReLit Award, and the Journey Prize.

graphic

Né à Montréal d'une famille normale

PAUL UP NORTH

Michel Rabagliati

Translated by Helge Dascher

Conundrum Press

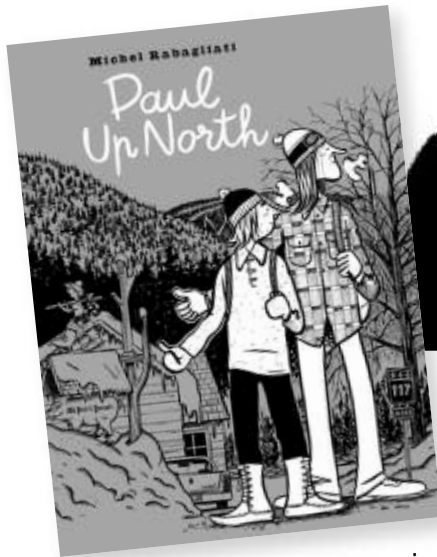
\$20.00, paper, 184pp

9781772620016

Last year, when François Bouvier's film adaptation of Michel Rabagliati's *Paul à Québec* was about to reach the theatres, more than one Rabagliati devotee of my acquaintance expressed severe apprehension about the project. Fans have a way of getting territorial about their heroes, but in this case you sensed a stronger than usual concern. Rabagliati is arguably Quebec's most beloved cartoonist, and Paul, the star of his autobiographical graphic novel series, has come to feel like the readers' friend; his world, their world. What if the movie – a live action movie, at that – messed it up? Well, they needn't have worried. The film was a delight, and I think I know why: the work, in a real sense, had already been done. Make a reasonably faithful representation of what Rabagliati has put on the page, as Bouvier did, and you can hardly go wrong.

Paul Up North is the eighth volume in the Paul series. Rabagliati says it might be the last, and if that turns out to be true, we're leaving at an odd juncture. The new book disdains straight chronology to take a nostalgic trip back to the Olympic summer of 1976; Paul is an awkward, frequently surly adolescent discovering love in the Laurentians when he isn't hiding out in his bedroom at home. Montreal's East Island suburbs come in for a tough ride, but the disdain Paul expresses for Saint-Léonard and Anjou is not reflected in Rabagliati's meticulous, attentive treatment of them. Investment like this can only come from a place of love, and the same applies to everything he sets his sights on.

I don't know whether Rabagliati does a lot of research or just has a phenomenal memory – I suspect it's mostly the latter, with a touch of the former just to confirm or to fill in the odd small gap. Practically every frame is packed with period minutiae that make you sit up and think, "My God, I'd forgotten all about that." At one point, behind Paul



on the wall of his bedroom, we see an official Montreal '76 Olympics poster featuring a stylized silhouette of a beaver. I had that same poster on my bedroom wall in 1976; it hadn't been in my consciousness for at least thirty-five years, but seeing it again took me back with all the intensity of Proust and his madeleine.

Perhaps surprisingly for a book set at the height of nationalist feeling in Quebec, politics get a direct nod only once, when a driver who picks up Paul and a friend hitchhiking rails "Anglos have been shittin' on us for centuries, tabarnac!" That the boys don't respond isn't surprising: they're self-absorbed in the eternal matter of male teens, and besides, Rabagliati prefers to present his social history more obliquely, through the details. Newcomers to Quebec rock culture, for example, will get a crash course in bands whose profile barely spread beyond the province's borders but were icons here: Beau Dommage, Offenbach, Octobre, Lougarou. Rabagliati knows nothing triggers memory quite like music, and he treats it suitably seriously.

If you were a teenager in the 1970s, *Paul Up North* will be the closest thing to time travel. If you weren't and want to know how it was, it will tell you as much as any novel, record, or movie – in fact, it will tell you more, being a perfect blend of the three forms. If this really is the last Paul book, it will be interesting to see what Rabagliati does if he gets around to looking back at our Quebec present in some other form. Because if he wants to be truly accurate, whatever he does will need to have at least one of his own books somewhere in it. msb

Ian McGillis is the weekly books columnist for the *Montreal Gazette*. His memoir *Higher Ground* is published this fall by Biblioasis.

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**On the ultimate rendezvous with death –
disturbing yet luminous.**

DATE WITH DESTINY: Hélène Rioux trans. Jonathan Kaplansky | Essential Translations Series | ISBN: 9781771831024 | \$20 | paperback | 128 pp | Sept. 2016



It turns out that the house she's just bought contains a secret, the details of which all of the long-time residents seem to know: the son of the previous owner killed himself here.

Fara isn't fazed by death. She works in a hospital where she confronts it daily. But as she learns more about the life and circumstances of the young man who took his life inside her home, difficult memories surface. Years ago, her own sister Claire committed suicide, and the trauma of that event is still raw and unprocessed. As Fara unearths the secrets of her new house and finds the courage to revive memories that have hitherto lain dormant, she unexpectedly enables Maddy to exhume secrets of her own.

Meanwhile, Rose, the trio's third member, is also in mourning. The mother who raised her in a cabin north of Montreal has died, and Rose has come to the city to start afresh. Rose is an intriguing character, solitary and shy. In Montreal, she wonders if she'll ever "learn the cat's cradle of words and gestures that seemed to link everyone but her." She finds a low-paying job in the hospital where Fara works as an administrator. Her passion, however, is working on a loom inherited from her mother, which she keeps near the canal.

Weaving is a motif in this novel: Rose's craft also serves as a metaphor for fiction-making. Zorn takes the strands of her characters' lives and intertwines them with wonderful dexterity, combining past and present in a richly textured narrative. Zorn owns a loom of her own. Decades ago, when she came to Montreal from Ontario, she decided to learn this artisanal practice. Like her character Rose, she is adroit at "sleying the reed, pulling threads

through the heddles, winding the warp."

And like another of her characters, Yushi, whose talents in the kitchen result in some of the book's most sumptuous scenes, Zorn is also a professional baker. She credits her Austrian-born mother for imparting this skill to her. "There weren't

many toys in my childhood," she admitted, when asked about the cakes in her novel. To keep her entertained, her mother gave her a German tome entitled *Wirtschaftskunde*

(*The Art of Keeping House*), which her own mother had given to her before she left for Canada. The book was full of advice for a young *Hausfrau* – how to set a table for breakfast, how to clean silverware. It also contained cake recipes.

"What I would do to play," Zorn continued, "was make a six-layer cake with butter cream." When company came, Zorn's mother would say, "Quick, go and make a mocha-hazelnut cake!" Years later, when Zorn was a struggling doctoral student in Toronto, she earned her rent as a pastry chef.

While details of kitchen and craft add credibility to Zorn's novel, the real sweetness of *Five Roses* lies beneath physical details, in the glimpses she offers of human hearts. Zorn's main interest is what we hide, not what we show. For this is where humanity resides: in the mistakes people make, in their failures and traumas, and in the crippling effects of shame. Articulating secrets, finding the courage to frame them as story and reveal them to others is, Zorn seems to be saying, the way through. ■

Claire Holden Rothman's latest novel is *My October*.

Zorn takes the strands of her characters' lives and intertwines them with wonderful dexterity, combining past and present in a richly textured narrative.

massacre, twenty-seven years on. Families are prevented from leaving their homes on the anniversary and on Qingming, the Chinese day of the dead. "The Chinese government has actually made it illegal to grieve. The right to publicly grieve the past, the right to grieve your children, your family, the right to grieve some of the tragedies of the Revolution, it's simply not allowed." Culturally, the imposed silence leads to a dispersal of clandestine thoughts, under an overwhelmingly utilitarian patina. As the novel's matriarch, Big Mother Knife, muses, "Revolutionary music hurts the ears after a while. There's no nostalgia in it, no place for people to share their sorrows."

One of the recurrent sorrows in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* is the piteous attempt to make amends, whether for transgressions real or perceived. As the state, its lackeys, and its ideological adherents stand gleefully as judge and executioner, the most heartbreaking atonements come by one's own hand: "In this country, rage had no place to exist except deep inside, turned against oneself."

To say Thien's characters come to life is an approximation: they are at once so whole and so open that a reader can step into the book seamlessly, watching, shifting as the pages turn. The affinity reaches so deeply that we celebrate their hopes and mourn their losses; a death leaves me crying in my kitchen. Paradoxically, one of the consequences of forbidden mourning in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* is hope: so constant is the characters' struggle that we refuse to believe separation, or even death, is permanent.

As ever, Thien's descriptions manage to have at once the lightness of the perfect, obvious observation, and the heft of time and place. Sunflower husks crack underfoot in a train car. As a wedding celebration gathers steam, Thien writes, "the party seemed to expand beyond its limits, twirling forward like a well-known song with extra verses." The passage of "so many feet," she writes, makes "a storm in the dust" My copy is dog-eared through with lines that ring and hold.

Thien writes terror well, too, distilling the enormity of the massacre into tiny terrifying chokes – the claustrophobia of the blockades, a colleague lost in the crowd, the stain of blood spreading over a young mother's hair, her clothes, the child she carries. The passages that take place in the work camps are also chilling, in their banal exactitude – the busy deprivation, "nothing in our stomachs but an echo."

But it is the music that most clearly marks this novel. Whether she is writing about Ravel, about silence or composition, the violin or the erhu, the fidelity is astounding – "a seam of notes that slowly widened," as when Marie first hears Sparrow's last composition for her father, his friend Kai.

Thien turned to music after writing her previous novel, *Dogs at the Perimeter*, which dealt with the whitewashed history of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. Writing the Cambodian novel was "devastating": delving into that genocide, she came up against the lack of possible words to express the enormity of inflicted suffering. "That's what I felt after writing that book: I had no words." Listening to music provided consolation, "a gate to another way of experience, without words."

What Mao did in thirty years – with as many as sixty million killed – Pol Pot did in three. *Dogs at the Perimeter* had a disconcerting proximity, an intimacy. There are more ghosts in the new novel, but there is also more space for them, Thien says, "the canvas is bigger."

And it is timely. Tiananmen, the ongoing repression in China, even the Khmer Rouge – they are not yet history, Thien points out; they took place in our lifetimes. The act of writing is political for Thien, insofar as writers end up pointing out the cyclical nature of history. "This repetition keeps happening. And we keep essentially moving backwards." In the novel, as the army holds the streets of Beijing, the students are upbeat: "Out of our sacrifice will be born a new China." Does Thien foresee a resolution, nearly three decades later? "Not in China. Especially after writing this book. Not one that makes me feel optimistic."

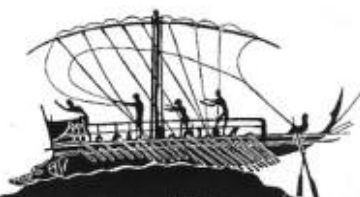
Though, as Swirl admonishes Wen in *Do Not Think We Have Nothing*, "it's foolhardy to think a story ends." The novel floats by like a dream of words, a piece of the story, in solidarity with its dreamers. ■

Katia Grubisic is a writer, editor, and translator.

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The Works

HOT DOG TASTE TEST

Lisa Hanawalt

Drawn & Quarterly

\$24.95, cloth, 176pp

9781770462373

“I wish more food writers would write about going to the bathroom,” declares Lisa Hanawalt in her new comic book, *Hot Dog Taste Test*, shortly after giving her thoughts on the sanitary installations of a restaurant, “because it’s funny and interesting and it’s the inevitable result of all of this.” This encapsulates Hanawalt’s approach in this book: irreverent, funny, silly, and insightful.

Lisa Hanawalt cut her teeth in Brooklyn as part of the now defunct legendary all-women’s comic studio Pizza Island with luminaries Kate Beaton and Julia Wertz, among others. Her illustrations and writing, published both in print and online, have included regular movie reviews for the website *The Hairpin*. Her output there became *My Dirty Dumb Eyes*, her first book published by Drawn & Quarterly. She is also the production designer of the Netflix animated series *BoJack Horseman*. More recently, Hanawalt has been the author of a food column in the culinary magazine *Lucky Peach* (a quarterly by McSweeney’s), for which she won a James Beard Journalism Award. That column forms the basis for her new book.

Hot Dog Taste Test is not a graphic novel per se. It is rather a smorgasbord of vignettes, sketches, one-page comics, full-page panels, lists, and longer pieces – travelogues and food adventures. Hanawalt’s idiosyncratic, absurdist, and scatological humour permeates everything. But her love for food and the affection and curiosity she has for her subjects and themes

quickly become clear. In “On the Trail with Wylie,” she spends a day with the star chef Wylie Dufresne, revealing the details of his hectic routine. Her witty and hilarious descriptions don’t follow the conventions of typical food writing (she describes one unidentified ingredient as “sex cheese”) and she has no regard for the tired class signifiers or occasional pomposity of the genre. Hanawalt processes the experience through her singular mind and what comes out is a distinctive, exciting narrative that is strange and deeply personal.

Despite its fragmented nature, *Hot Dog Taste Test* feels unified through Hanawalt’s use of her signature devices: the unexpectedly absurd (real or imaginary); constant references to physiological functions; random information that is logically irrelevant but that adds colour and punch; and, finally, the presence of Hanawalt herself as a goofy and charming character throughout the book.

The reader also discovers Hanawalt’s love of animals. They are everywhere, as anthropomorphic characters in surreal stories or as more realistic representations, such as in a piece about a visit to a sanctuary where she swims with otters, or in another about a trip to Argentina where she rides horses, her favourite animals. These stories reveal the other strong note in Hanawalt’s work, a sense of melancholy and lingering anxiety, a certain nostalgia and sadness that paradoxically make all the goofiness sharper



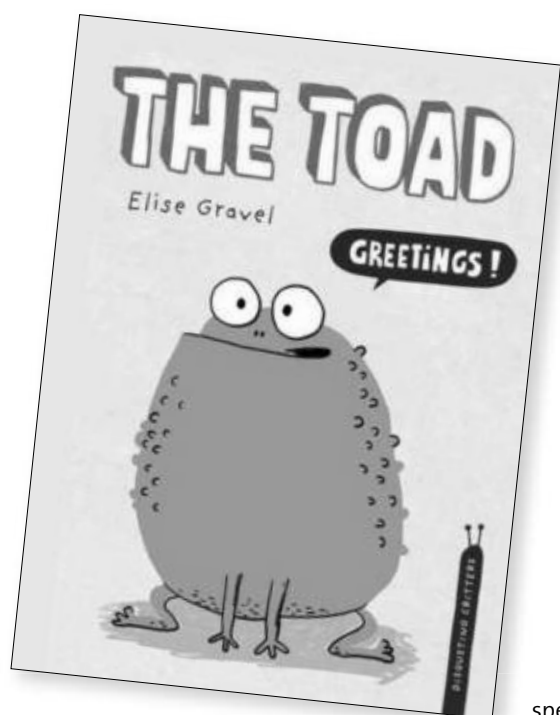
It feels like one big riotous trip.

and funnier. She talks about her fears (of flying, of riding, of someone opening the bathroom door when she is inside), her loves (food, her family and boyfriend, horses), and does not avoid heavier themes, like relationships, death, and her ancestors’ tragic history. Somehow, it all feels, text and images, harmonious and fitting.

The illustrations range from simple monochromatic sketches to delicate, elegantly coloured line drawings and vivid watercolours. Even in a single piece Hanawalt sometimes mixes

various styles with different purposes; she follows her intuition more than any particular rule, and her intuition works. The art is fluid, never stiff. The themes here help – food and animals tend to be eye-catching and the author is clearly delighted in drawing and colouring them, combining unusual details and more accurate representations with gorgeous results. Hanawalt has mastered the perfect blend of text and image and it feels like one big riotous trip. And for all its hilarity, *Hot Dog Taste Test* also gives us tender moments and a reflection on our own human absurdity. [more](#)

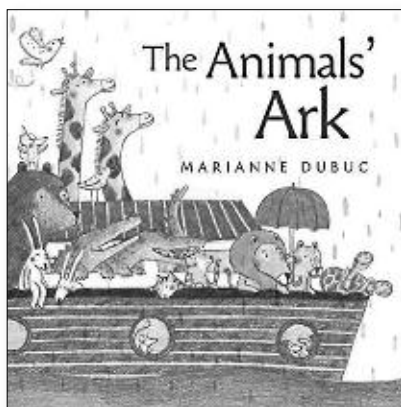
Eloisa Aquino is originally from Brazil, where she worked as a journalist and translator. She currently lives and works in Montreal running the micro press B&D Press and making the zine series *The Life & Times of Butch Dykes*.



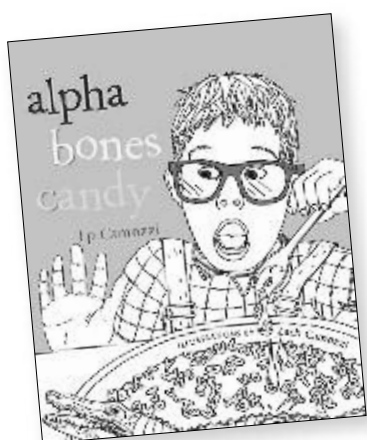
YOUNG READERS

Are you *toadally* ignorant? That will change when you read *The Toad*. Written and illustrated by Elise Gravel, the book's facts are accompanied by charming drawings of the *Bufo bufo* or common toad. Your guide is a large-eyed *she* toad, who has plenty of jokes for her readers. She may be impish and cute in this book, but little ones looking for an ick factor won't be disappointed – wait for the part about what the amphibian does with her old skin. Sadly, this isn't just a cheerful tale of discovery. In this millennium, a nature story necessarily refers to climate change. *The Toad* is no exception and prepares the groundwork for the next generation of environmentalists. It's part of Gravel's Disgusting Critters series, through which you can learn more about worms, slugs, rats, and even the dreaded head lice. (Next book idea: bed bugs.)

The *Animals' Ark* by Marianne Dubuc is a secular account of the classic tale. Readers meet all kinds of creatures, rendered in expertly faux-childish pencil crayon drawings. When a flood hits, animals make the most of their long boat ride. They play to while away the time, and the drawings reflect these imaginative interactions – ladybugs playing dominos and a chameleon hiding in a tiger's stripes. The starry night before they find land is especially evocative. Perhaps there are some lessons in here, too – how to make the most of inclement weather, that stormy days end – but they are overshadowed by the animals' joyful antics. Noah is mentioned at the very end of the story (referred to previously as a “kindly man”), should you want to segue into the biblical version.



The letter D is for “drizzle / rainy / puddle / jumping / best barefoot.” In *Alpha Bones Candy*, Lp Camozzi takes readers through the twenty-six letters, and each is a rich world full of activity. Before delving into the alphabet, readers learn the ABC book is written in Modern Tanka poetry form, a freer version than traditional Japanese Tanka, in which syllable count is



specific. The poems are cheeky, funny, a little sad, and maybe a touch adult (“help you / hold you / heal you / will that be / all?”). It's the kind of book grown-ups won't mind going through again and again, should it become a favourite of the young reader. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree with son Zach Camozzi, whose black-and-white illustrations are imaginative riffs on the poems. If kids learning the alphabet get a bit lost in the text, they'll be absorbed in finding the list of items that begin with the hero letter (and learning some news words, too: zodiac, wobbe-gong, ibex horn, for example). They can also colour in the rich, detailed, and playful drawings. Using the foundation of our language, the Camozzis create a world that will be engrossing to both kids and their mentors.

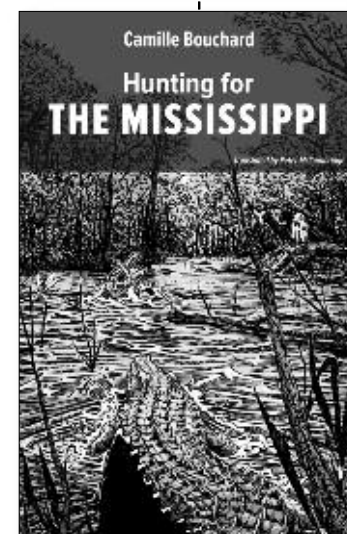
Away *Running* follows two very real and likeable seventeen-year-old boys on a trip to Paris. It's no ordinary backpacking adventure, however.



Mathieu Dumas from Montreal and Freeman Omonwole Behanzin from San Antonio, Texas, take turns telling the story of their pre-university experience playing *football américain* in the suburbs of Paris. The team they play for, the Diabes Rouges, represents the poor (barely fictional) Parisian suburb of Villeneuve-La-Grande, home to many immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. As the season pushes the team toward the national finals, Matt must confront his privileged background and Freeman, or Free as he's called, struggles to decide how a recent tragedy will define him. Racial tensions mount in a heartbreaking scene that is all too familiar and very relevant to current affairs. *Away Running* is highly readable and well written. The two authors, David Wright and Luc Bouchard, met playing football in France and have based the book on similar real-life events from 2005. It's evident they put a lot of thought and work into telling the

story. The two boys and their new friends switch between French and English from France, Quebec, and America. It could have been clunky, but it's deftly executed without being repetitive and adds another layer to their youthful banter. Each sorrow in the book – a casual racist act, an imperfect reaction to it, the sudden loss of a loved one, deep-rooted injustice – is so well-crafted it will bring a more sensitive reader, ahem, to tears. Yes, it's also football book. But the fast-paced games are told succinctly and there's plenty of interpersonal drama to keep things interesting for readers who aren't sports fans. In the end, football gives the two young men “structure ... discipline ... and help [to] make better decisions.” They need all this and more when Villeneuve-La-Grande falls apart.

Scrawny from being underfed, twelve-year-old Eustache Bréman tells the story of René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle's last voyage from France to the Americas. When *Hunting for the Mississippi* begins in France in 1864, La Salle has already been made governor of Louisiana by King Louis XIV. Bréman, his mother, and family friends the Talons are among three hundred people boarding one of four ships bound for the southern United States. That Bréman's widowed beggar mother is propositioned by a priest on the second page of the story bespeaks that this will not be a happy tale of discovery. The voyage across the Atlantic is long and rife with rats and filth and adults who are already at one another's throats. Boats in the fleet are lost, factions are created, a rapist preys. On a lighter note, author Camille Bouchard is evidently enthusiastic about the technical details of sailing, as is young Bréman, and interested young readers will learn quite a bit. This mostly true account of La Salle's final expedition, based on real characters, is recounted by Bréman in a punchy, conversational voice that flows better sometimes than others. Although the adults in Bréman's immediate world are loving, they aren't the ones in power, and Bouchard conveys everyone's vulnerability to those who are. If at times it reads like a bit of a history lesson, the lesson is an important one: that the so-called European founding of North America was a bloody, violent, and maybe even evil event. **mb**



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Ages 6–9

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Marianne Dubuc
Kids Can Press
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ALPHA BONES CANDY
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Vanessa Bonneau lives in Montreal.



Reading the Truth and Reconciliation Report

Librarian **Jessie Loyer** on the publication of the report by McGill-Queen's University Press and the role of Canadian libraries in reconciliation

"If you leave them in the family they may know how to read and write, but they will still remain savages, whereas by separating them in the way proposed, they acquire the habits and tastes – it is to be hoped only the good tastes – of civilized people." – Hector Langevin, Public Works Minister, 1883

"When one person would start crying, all the, all the little girls would start crying; all of us. We were different ages. And we would cry like little puppies or dogs, right into the night, until we go to sleep; longing for our families." – Betsy Annahatak, Kangirsuk (Payne Bay), residential school survivor

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Archives, Photograph, Quebec National Event, TRC, 2015.

Just over a year ago, I was on the Walk for Reconciliation with thousands, remembering the children who went to residential schools. This national Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) event marked the release of the first part of their lengthy final report. They hoped that their work would help Canada start to grapple with the systematic and sustained horrors it had inflicted on Indigenous children in the name of education. The stories of widespread and specific trauma created by the residential school system are collected in seven volumes, each a book-length report, published by McGill-Queen's University Press (MQUP): *The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939*; *The History, Part 2, 1939 to 2000*; *The Inuit and Northern Experience*; *The Métis Experience*; *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*; *The Legacy*; and *Reconciliation*.

As it exposes horrifying patterns of child abuse, it is important to ask: who is this final report in book form meant for? Survivors don't experience catharsis when they give testimony; they re-experience that trauma anew. Taking on the burden of sharing these experiences so survivors don't need to stand alone and shout their truth is now part of the responsibility that the TRC has passed to all Canadians.

There's already incredible work being done to mobilize these findings. Last year, Erica Lee (nehiyaw), Zoe S. Todd (Métis), and Joseph Murdoch-Flowers (Inuit) asked people to read and upload assigned sections of the TRC's Executive Summary to YouTube with the hashtag #ReadTheTRCReport. Todd said about the project, "I want to start this process of ensuring everyone in Canada has access to the report; to engage with it; to ensure its findings are mobilized." The project continues to reach out to new audiences: #ReadTheTRCReport was also included in an exhibit at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery in Montreal in November 2015.

Before reading my assigned section and uploading my own #ReadTheTRCReport video, I couldn't have explained the details of jurisdictional disputes, the way the federal and provincial or territorial governments try to shift responsibility to the other for Aboriginal child services. Without this project, I would be ignorant of Jordan's Principle, which is

intended to avoid departmental bickering about who has financial responsibility while children with complex health issues suffer. In Cindy Blackstock's recent victory, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the narrow implementation of Jordan's Principle is discriminatory and has literally killed Aboriginal children through inaction. So every effort to read the TRC report better prepares Canadians to understand our history's impact now. To this end, I cheer the publication. It connects our past to our present.

A published copy of the work of the TRC makes survivors' stories more accessible, but in a particular way, to a particular audience. As part of MQUP's Native and Northern Series, currently edited by Arthur J. Ray and Sarah Carter, the report brings Indigenous voices to the fore. Yet we should reflect on the way voices of Indigenous people are being edited by non-Indigenous historians. Ray and Carter amplify Indigenous voices, arguably the most important role of a settler ally, and affiliating the report with a university press will elevate it for some, but money from this publication does not go to survivors. MQUP's publication of the TRC final report is a savvy financial move in a time when reconciliation is a buzzword. There's great demand for a reasonably priced series on a part of Canadian history that has wide-ranging implications for educators across campuses.

From a simply procedural perspective, it's easier for me as an academic librarian to order from university presses when I'm building my collection. Publishing this series of books means more libraries will purchase them even though the reports are available online. It's also a good reminder of the simple accessibility of print books in a world that likes to pretend that the Internet made libraries irrelevant. Consider the dismal reliability of Internet access in the North. Opening a PDF online might take longer than walking to a local library and borrowing the report, particularly for the aging demographic of survivors. These books will be included in library collections across the country in large part because a Canadian university press has published the findings.


What librarians include in their collections is influenced deeply by their own biases and opinions, shaped by the places they are from and the people

who raised them. What we consider worthy of inclusion is never neutral but it is easy for libraries to claim ignorance and build distance. We are not schools nor churches; we did not do these horrifying things. Libraries could browse the ninety-four Calls to Action in the report and see no explicit mention of our core business. They could move on. Or they could pause. Libraries could look more closely and see the implicit connections to education and to research in this report. It's more challenging to take the words of the TRC commissioners to heart when they say that "virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered" in light of reconciliation. It's more challenging for librarians to look closely at the ways we are intimately connected to the systems that allowed residential schools to happen.

Libraries are spaces of learning, whether formally affiliated with an institution or not, and must grapple with inheriting the genocidal legacy of education in Canada. Our collections may unthinkingly replicate falsehoods about the benevolence of residential schools. This series gives us a chance to include Indigenous voices in our collections.

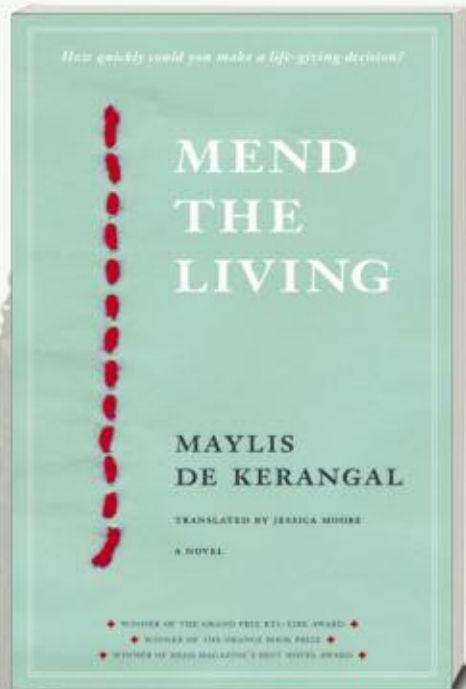
The report universalizes but does not trivialize horrific experiences; it shows us patterns.

Let us never forget that the work of the TRC was fundamentally about violence enacted against children. Residential schools ripped them from their families and communities, abused their minds and their bodies, and warped their sense of self. "Reconciliation" that merely prompts a flurry of think pieces is disgusting. True reconciliation faces the horror of the innocence of children destroyed and asks, as the TRC's Executive Summary does, "Now that we know about residential schools and their legacy, what do we do about it?"

Reconciliation will take time. There is time to read all two million words, in English and French, of the TRC's final report. Take the time. Read it all. These seven volumes offer the chance for Canadians to place ourselves in this history, and to listen to stories we have ignored for generations. 

Jessie Loyer is Cree-Métis and a member of Michel First Nation. She is a librarian at Mount Royal University in Calgary, a guest on Treaty 7 and Blackfoot territory.

Transfixed! Award Winning Fiction and A Dazzling Debut



Mend the Living

Maylis de Kerangal

Translated by Jessica Moore

Mend the Living is a novel centred around the physical and emotional intricacies of a heart transplant. The vibrant life of nineteen-year-old Simon Limbeau comes to a state of suspension, after a car accident, urging his family and friends to the thresholds of grief, ethics, and love, all in the span of twenty-four hours.

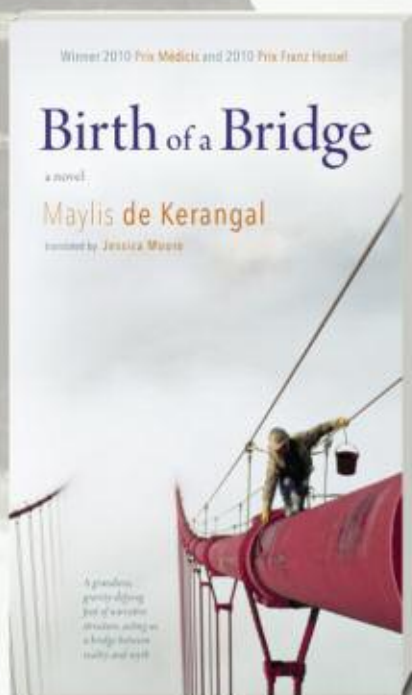
Weaving from hospital corridors to the wild waves of the Atlantic, from the narrow streets of Paris to the countryside in Algeria where goldfinches still sing, from the most intimate details of grief within a car in Le Havre to universal considerations of science, compassion, and humanity, *Mend the Living* is a powerful and vast-ranging book. In her trademark masterful use of language, playing with pacing and tension and a vibrant vocabulary, Maylis de Kerangal gives us a metaphysical adventure that is at once both collective and intimate.

Man Booker International Prize, 2016 (Longlisted)

"The story unfolds in an intricate lacework of precise detail. ... These characters feel less like fictional creations and more like ordinary people, briefly illuminated in rich language ... This novel is an exploration not only of death but of life, of humanity and fragility, 'because the heart is more than the heart.'"

—*New York Times*

\$19.95 CAN / 224 pages / Fiction: Literary / 978-0-88922-973-0 / ebook also available



Birth of a Bridge

Maylis de Kerangal

Translated by Jessica Moore

The consortium of workers who gather during construction of a mythical bridge – engineers, designers, divers, overseers, protesters – with their various nationalities and social classes present a microcosm of not just California but humanity as a whole. Through strong use of metaphor, the story of the bridge's construction becomes, in a sense, the story of construction of the novel.

Winner of the 2010 Médicis Prize

Winner of the 2010 Franz Hessel Prize

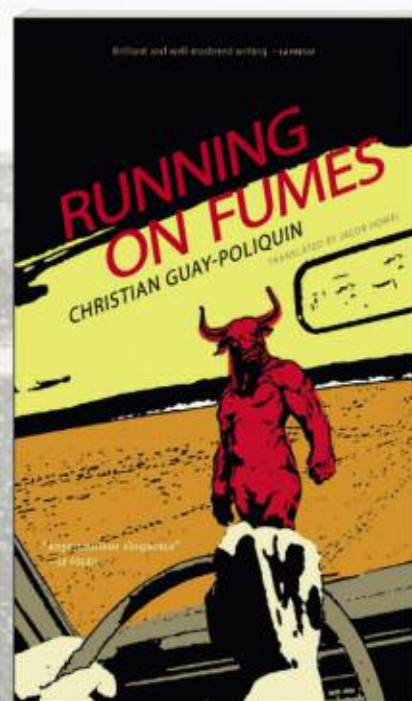
"Ms. de Kerangal's writing is always exuberant (and boisterously translated by Jessica Moore) ... This delightful book's unabashed idealism, combined with those playfully literary proper names, marks it as a kind of aspirational fairy tale. ... Ms. de Kerangal gives us a Tocquevillian picture of America from its most flattering angle: An enterprising, melting-pot democracy driven by dreams of progress and happy to get its hands dirty..."

—*Wall Street Journal*

"The whole narrative unfolds in a dreamlike manner, and Moore's translation is elegant and sensitively attuned to the author's wordplay and neologisms."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

\$16.95 CAN / 256 pp / Fiction: Literary / 978-0-88922-889-4 / ebook also available



Running on Fumes

Christian Guay-Poliquin

Translated by Jacob Homel

When the electricity inexplicably goes out nationwide, the mundanities of life gradually shift to the rigours of survival. In this post-apocalyptic setting, an unnamed mechanic jumps into his beat-up car and drives east, journeying 4,736 kilometres to reach his dying father.

With a dazzling cast of characters, award-winning author Maylis de Kerangal imagines Simon's body as a locus of relations: Simon's parents, Marianne a

"In June Christian Guay-Poliquin's much-praised debut novel, *Running on Fumes*, will be published by Talonbooks in Jacob Homel's translation. The consensus among reviewers is that it's a lyrical blend of the contemporary and the classico-mythical, with a generous helping of road movie. And that English-language cover is intriguing..."

—*Ambos*

"Writing by Christian Guay-Poliquin, fuelled by a balanced mix of poetry and realism, injects constant tension into this story marked by loss: loss of money, loss of memory, loss of place ... mythological references to the labyrinth and the Minotaur ... bring density and interest."

—*Christian Desmeules, Le Devoir*

\$16.95 CAN / 160 pages / Fiction: Literary / 978-0-88922-975-4 / ebook also available