

mRb

SUMMER 2017 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

Perforating the Screen of Language

Erín Moure's Selected Poetry

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SYLVAIN NEUVEL'S *WAKING GODS*

MARY SODERSTROM'S *ROAD THROUGH TIME*

JILLIAN TAMAKI'S *BOUNDLESS*

ANNE INNIS DAGG'S *SMITTEN BY GIRAFFE*

30 UNDER 30 POETRY ANTHOLOGY

LABORATION AV
-MONT-ROYAL



CUBA-U.S. RELATIONS

Obama and Beyond

by Arnold August; Foreword by Keith Ellis
Introduction by Ricardo Alarcón

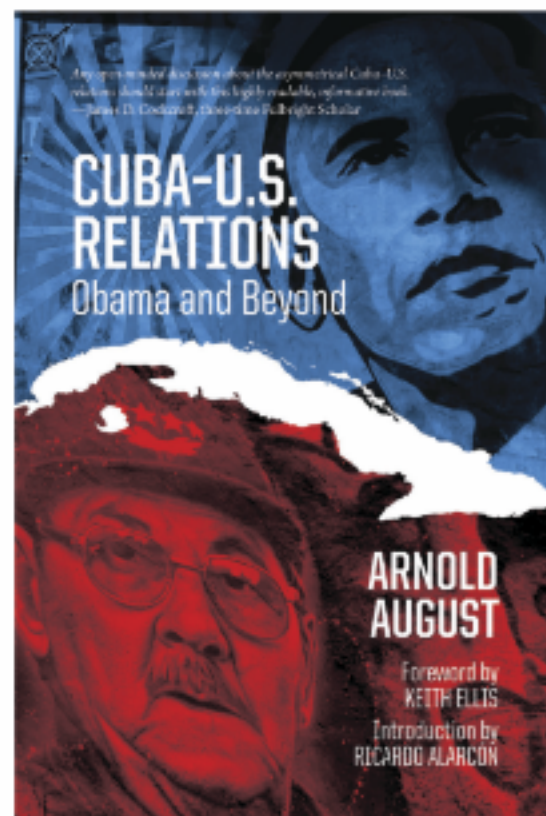
9781552669655 \$25.00 224pp

This book could not have been more timely. With Fidel Castro's death focusing outside attention on Cuba's future and with Trump's election throwing U.S.-Cuban "normalization" into question, Arnold August contests the common assumptions and public rhetoric about Cuban politics and about that "normalization."

— ANTONI KAPCIA, UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

Arnold August's new book on Cuba dispels the propaganda and myths perpetuated by both the U.S. corporate media and the Obama administration and provides valuable insights into what we might expect from a Trump government in the post-Fidel era.

— GARRY LEECH, INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST
AND TEACHER OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY



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Cryptic Crossword

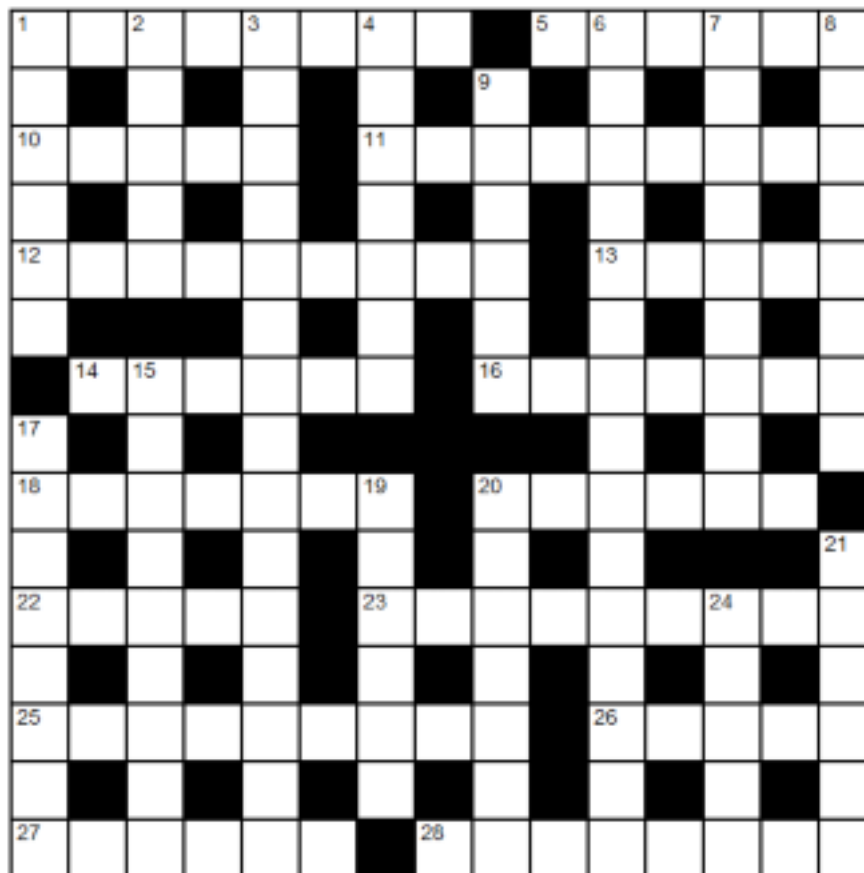
by Sarah Lolley

ACROSS

- 1 Outremont realtor offers Habs home (8)
- 5 We're confused about sixth inspection (6)
- 10 Schedules arrests (5)
- 11 In daze, bullfight spectator's cry: "Endurance!" (9)
- 12 "Punctuation faces reform" – Economist (9)
- 13 Chasten unbounded urgency (5)
- 14 Head of the European News Network is a spoilsport (6)
- 16 Once more, picked up her dear knitting (7)
- 18 National animal of Scotland starting to unionize Colorado nurse (7)
- 20 Cracked, got pea soup (6)
- 22 Pack animal arrived at start of lunch (5)
- 23 Foul relative left after an unhappy conclusion (9)
- 25 Actress Emily of "The Devil Wears Prada" by famous Loch Candor (9)
- 26 Get head of nursing into intensive care unit before start of resection (5)
- 27 Planted, left, reported. (6)
- 28 Handsome rogues go swimming (8)

DOWN

- 1 Surrounded bombed mobile (6)
- 2 Some Beatles fans may have wished for this midday doughnut (2, 3)
- 3 Irresolute aunts playing dangerous game of chance (7, 8)
- 4 Creates gold belonging to hammer-wielding Norse god (7)
- 6 That greenish art arrangement? Revolutionary! (15)
- 7 Author of "Smitten by Giraffe" singing ad jingles (5, 4)
- 8 Saturdays and Sundays, Ken weeds all over (8)
- 9 Successful salesman is warmer? (6)
- 15 Poet Cummings caught right in middle of shaming our cover poet (4, 5)
- 17 Cubs, grown, mauled beast (8)

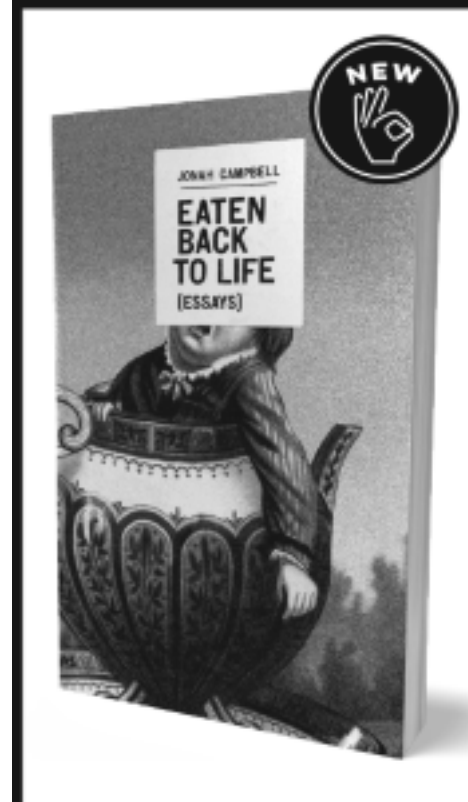


- 19 Author of "Waking Gods" finally won Japanese Haiku Improv Challenge medal (6)
- 20 Almost choose love after fool painter (7)
- 21 Country with syrup production (6)
- 24 Not your Southern-style tortilla chip (5)

You can find the answers to this special edition cryptic crossword puzzle at either the mRb website or Sarah Lolley's cryptic crossword blog: www.sarahlolley.com

Don't know how to solve cryptics? Don't fret! There is a tutorial on Sarah's website

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Our featured Montreal illustrator is **Matthew Forsythe**.
Matthew lives in Montreal, where he makes comics and picture books.
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Erín Moure Unravelling Words

BY KLARA DU PLESSIS • PHOTO BY TERENCE BYRNES

Definitions have always been a way of corseting language, of tucking the ambiguities of words out of sight, and of keeping verbal intention in line. Although poetry is most commonly structured according to the line, toeing the line will never define it. Language, when used passively, is a barrier to creativity, as Erín Moure elucidates: “I stood before the screen of my own language. There was no remedy. Either I stood before the original work in its incredible beauty or I stood before the screen of my language ... screen of my language that stood between me and the poem.” Moure aims to perforate that screen, to brush aside the mundane and definitive use of language, in order to access the wider gesture of its sensuality.

Openness, dissection, reconstruction, and the wringing out of language are key to the newly released *Planetary Noise: Selected Poetry of Erin Moure*. Celebrating one of North America's most prolific and groundbreaking poets – whose literary achievements span four decades of publishing, a Governor General's Award among other prizes, sixteen collections of poetry, and an equally impressive output of collaborative texts and translations – this anthology also honours Moure's ongoing project of embracing the fallibility of language and, by extension, of poetry itself. "When 'my language' fails, only then can we detect signals ... as in *planetary noise*," writes Moure, a passage that both provides the book's title and insists that a word's most obvious significance is also its least relevant.

As a poet, Moure intentionally looks beyond meaning to what she calls "noise," the reverberating implications of language that "interfere with a desired signal." I was fortunate to be able to ask both Moure and the anthology's editor, Shannon Maguire, a few questions, and each contrasted the typically negative or obfuscatory associations of "noise" with a more expansive and democratizing understanding of it. Moure tells me, "I am one of those whose research in poetry suggests ignoring the signals (the imposed version of any communication trajectory) and lending an ear to the noise, which is really a signal or signals that are not desired." Maguire offers a concrete example of the importance of transcribing this noise, suggesting, "noise is defined as ... that which is unwanted, and so the condition of being unwanted is one very familiar to queer subjects, for instance,"

as it is to other marginalized communities. Maguire articulates Moure's oeuvre as a critical distancing from dominant culture, and, through poetry, a political awareness of society's undertows that not only diversifies and voices, but also nurtures the inherent vibrancy that is humanity.

By default, reading any good compilation of poetry is an agreement to follow a curated tour through the eyes of the editor. In this case, Maguire – who is herself an accomplished poet – is an excellent guide, not only leading the way and pointing out the landmarks, but also supporting the reader in the process of making her own inferences. *Planetary Noise* is structured chronologically, in seven sections, which map thematic recurrences and propulsions through language and translation, feminism and queer sexuality, identity and citizenship, and poetry as a philosophical mode of thought. Indeed, it has been one of the utmost pleasures, reading through this selection of Moure's oeuvre, to detect a continuity of thinking, preoccupations that progress from gentler, younger iterations, to more rigorous insistences on similar concerns, articulated with the confidence of a career to back them up.

According to Maguire, the editing process was collaborative, but Moure gives Maguire all the credit. "It was Shannon who reread all the books and came up with the arc and the selections," she explains. "I lack the distance to see the work as a whole, and I found her insights brought new light to bear on the poems and work, and created a new book out of ... books!" In fact, Maguire has created more than a new book: she has assembled an essential reference that could serve not only as an introductory overview to Moure's poetry, but also as a scholarly base for a more critical engagement with her work. Maguire's opening essay is biographically informative, analytically whip-smart, and elicits a real curiosity in the reader to return to the poems and to delve deeper. The appended bibliography of further reading sets a critical tone, appealing to future research.

While Moure's erudite, and, at times, keenly philosophical writing welcomes scholarly engagement, her manipulation of language can also be very playful. Despite its complexity, her poetry is never elevated to an immaculate genre beyond reach. Rather, language is approached with

tactility, as a malleable substance that can unravel itself to reveal unexpected depths of interpretation, then veer off for a humorous jaunt. Words realign themselves. "The whoel" splinters, suggesting to "Huse some images" instead. Evocative neologisms force the reader to actively consider the intention behind unfamiliar organizations of language. "Solidaily," for example, could evoke quotidian solitude, solidarity, soldierly mundanity, and more. Similarly, "a-diction" foregrounds dependence on language, the script of living within a context of verbal communication, and the gap, that missing "d," which complicates exegesis, but also registers as illumination, a quick skip in the tread of reading. "(how can we exceed this with werdtsz)," Moure poses parenthetically, mischievously. While the referent of "this" remains uncertain, it is indisputable that "words" have been dismantled to an onomatopoeic wheeze, and that Words, in a grander, more abstract sense, have been mined, so that the rock-hard quartz of "werdtsz" breaks apart, and light seeps in through the cracks.

Once the act of writing in English has been destabilized, Moure – who also works in French and Galician, Spanish, and Portuguese – is able to push a step further to braid strands of different languages together, to "conduct a leakage out of ordinary language, out of the monolingualism in one's own language." One strategy Moure occasionally applies is to repeatedly switch codes between French and English, fluctuating back and forth from line to line. This approach shapes a structural ease of multilingualism, while keeping the reader alert as the tongue slips tardily between different expectations of pronunciation. Although *Planetary Noise* prioritizes Moure's original poetry over her translations, her incisive contribution to the latter domain is acknowledged in the final section of the book – Moure welcomes local writers such as Montreal's Oana Avasilichioaei and Nicole Brossard, as well as international figures

such as Fernando Pessoa, Chus Pato, and Wilson Bueno, among others, onto her pages. As multiple languages begin to cling together and merge, and every poem constructs its individual set of vocabularies, one might conclude, along with Moure: "At this point I ceased to understand any language."

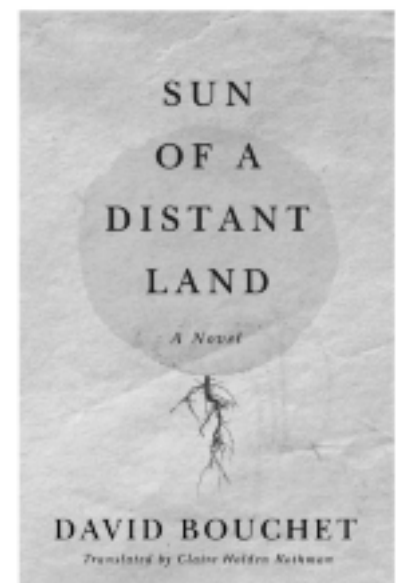
As a Montreal resident for over three decades, Moure embraces the Babylonian in life as in literature. "I speak and write French, Galician, and English here every day. I hear Arabic and Mandarin, Italian, Russian, Polish, Romanian every day in the streets, and others," she tells me. Montreal unfurls itself to geographically embody the linguistic hospitality, the interconnective, resonating sound wave of Moure's poetry: "Montreal is a place where fear of languages, and of the unknown of language and thought is nearly absent. I find it warm and amazing to live and think among others who also live and think with curiosity." mb

Klara du Plessis is a poet and critic in Montreal. She is the author of the chapbook *Wax Lyrical* (Anstruther Press, 2015) and curates the monthly Resonance Reading Series. Follow her on Twitter @ToMakePoesis.



PLANETARY NOISE
Selected Poetry of Erin Moure
Edited by Shannon Maguire
Wesleyan University Press
US\$19.95, paper, 208pp
9780819576958

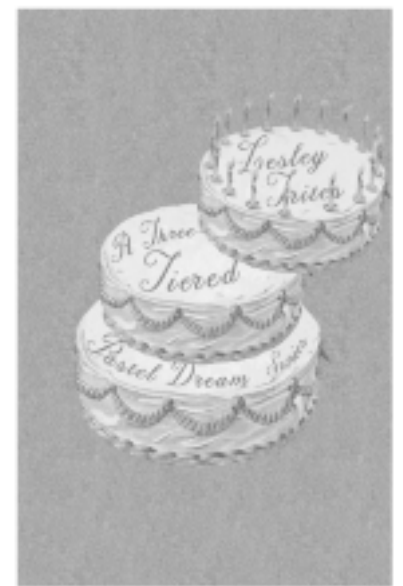
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David Bouchet
TRANSLATED BY
CLAIRE HOLDMAN ROTHMAN

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**A THREE-TIERED
PASTEL DREAM**
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Lesley Trites

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I NEVER TALK ABOUT IT

Véronique Côté
and Steve Gagnon
QC Fiction

\$19.95, paper, 220pp
9781771861090



In the beginning, secrets were solicited through Web ads and in public places around Québec City. These became a series of monologues performed in a park called *Chaque automne j'ai envie de mourir*. This project turned into a book of short stories of the same name by Véronique Côté and Steve Gagnon. The latest iteration, *I Never Talk About It*, is an experiment in translation that sets out to explore the marks translators leave on a text. The thirty-seven short stories from Côté and Gagnon's collection are rendered into English by thirty-seven translators, a motley group that includes award-winning and first-time translators, a few people who usually write in French, and even a few who can barely speak it. Their identities and approaches are only revealed at the end of each piece, introduced by an adverb whimsically summing up *how* they translated – “gingerly,” “ambidextrously,” and so forth.

The inclusion of these comments is a gamble that could potentially detract from the emotional impact of each story. But in fact, these stories are strong. Taken on their own, they are moving and thought-provoking;

the writing raw, direct, occasionally rambling. As short stories they might feel thin, but they are really unfiltered

accounts of each narrator's most profound preoccupation, and each is beautiful in its starkness. There are haunting stories with allusions to death: In “Ice,” a depressed woman imagines finding a body in a frozen river. The frenetic narrator of “Spasm” asserts he's glad he can't be quiet, “because being quiet is basically being dead.” There are requiems to the passage of time, such as the angst-ridden “Ants”: “Summer, love, home, ants; they've all got an end.” In “Couch,” the narrator recalls thinking, as a child, “I'm six years old. Soon, I'll never be able to say that again.” She reports being unable to enjoy seaside holidays because they remind her that she has “betrayed the best part” of herself by living so far away from the ocean.

There is humour throughout, sometimes broad, as in “Snot,” where the narrator confesses a penchant for snot-eating, or wry and buried in the details, such as in “Ice,” whose narrator, valiantly fighting her depression, makes coffee every morning not to drink, just to smell. “Tsunami” brilliantly captures the feeling of falling in love where the dizzying power, the essential naïveté, is spiced with a modern acknowledgement of love's ephemeral nature: “The point is that me and Simon Lepage made out and it was the beginning of time. Everything exploded, the water in his eyes, the room, the apartment, the city, all of Québec ... a huge wave burst out from inside our

bodies and rushed out into the world and washed away everything ... for the second time in my life, I'm in love. I love Simon Lepage and that's an understatement.”

I Never Talk About It allows for more variety than the original French collection. The narrator's gender is sometimes unclear, adding a dimension of ambiguity, whereas in French, a gendered adjective gives it away. There are different approaches to punctuation: some translators embrace the original stream-of-consciousness style, others rein in the run-on sentences to sound more English, and still others opt for compromise. Similarly, some stories retain all references to Québec while others are recast in America or Britain. A few suffer from literal translations that reveal an unfamiliarity with Québécois idioms. On the other hand, one story, “Wrestling,” challenges accepted wisdom about what constitutes a good translation: this story *sounds* French; you can almost hear an accent. The words on the page are English, but it is as if the French hasn't been washed out. This voice stayed with me. Surely that must be one criterion of a good translation. mb

Anita Anand is the author of *Swing in the House and Other Stories* (Véhicule Press). Her translation of *Nirliit* by Juliana Léveillé-Trudel will be out in 2018.

What Goes Unsaid

A THREE-TIERED PASTEL DREAM

Lesley Trites
Esplanade Books
\$19.95, paper, 207pp
9781550654646

The title of Lesley Trites's debut work serves as a useful metaphor for the relationship between the eleven short stories included in the collection. While the tiers of a cake may have different flavours, they also fit together, with unity often created by the decoration. Likewise, Trites's stories echo with distinct styles and voices. Some are narrated in the first person, others by an omniscient figure. The action might take place solely within the interior of a single home, generating a sense of the claustrophobia wrought by seemingly immutable choices, or follow the course of a meandering journey across continents to illustrate how a relationship has likewise lost its way. What all the stories share is an exploration of the ambiguities of contemporary femininity and a commitment to an aesthetic rooted in the use of subtle detail.

Several major themes resurface

throughout the collection: alcohol, mental illness, fertility, and the possibility or eventuality of loss underscoring all of them. The protagonist of each story is always a woman, grappling with either a history that threatens to unsettle the present or a choice that will redefine her trajectory. In the first story in the collection, “Pepto Bismol Pink,” a seemingly casual encounter leads first to an unexpected pregnancy and then to tentative steps towards a new form of connection. Conversely, in the titular story, a woman reflects retrospectively on her impulsive decision to abandon her daughter only after that daughter has grown into a successful adult. A reader is left with the feeling that these female protagonists could be sisters, or versions of each other; there is also the lingering sense that they could be versions of the reader. Trites highlights moments of crisis and emotional trauma without ever sensationalizing them. Grief, emotional breakdowns, and the dissolution of relationships are handled with a delicacy that underscores the way in which they can be simultaneously ubiquitous and earth shattering.

The stories are at their best when sparse detail is used to convey a great deal about a character while respecting



H. ROMERO



the narrative economy demanded by short fiction. When the protagonist of “Pepto Bismol Pink” takes a day off work to confirm her pregnancy, we tellingly learn that she has never taken a sick day before, and that “she worries about who will unlock the meeting rooms, whether anyone will need office supplies in her absence.” Occasionally, that deft subtlety is discarded in favour of metaphors that verge on heavy-handedness. One story opens with a woman anxiously substituting cranberries for pomegranate seeds as she prepares a salad for an uncomfortable dinner party; by the end of the story, she has unexpectedly met a romantic prospect. While the tentative

unfurling of their interaction is nuanced, the story ends with its central symbolism falling flat as the narrator muses, “Maybe the cranberries—aged, sweeter, less tart—were just what I needed.”

When nuanced renderings of intimacy, resilience, and self-awareness are presented in Trites's uncluttered prose, the collection excels. The longest story in the collection, “Rituals,” is also the strongest, allowing for a sustained meditation on how a seemingly romantic globetrotting journey serves to highlight the cracks in a failing relationship. The keen use of observational detail shines when applied to evoking a sense of place, and the disorientation induced by the exotic. The less sprawling stories use the same strategies to cast seemingly fragmented observations into a richly textured mosaic. Because of the unifying themes, the stories benefit from consecutive reading, and the collection functions remarkably well as a satisfying, cohesive whole. Characterized by delicacy in style and in form, Trites's writing leaves a reader better attuned to what, in stories and in life, often goes unsaid and unnoticed. mb

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

Sink or Swim

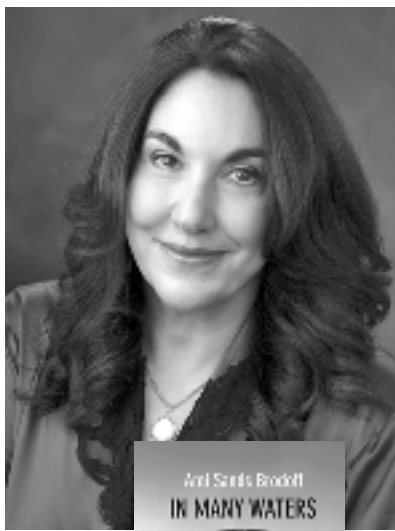
IN MANY WATERS

Ami Sands Brodoff

Inanna Publications

\$22.95, paper, 320pp

9781771333658



It's the middle of the night. Your vessel: a worn, wooden, overcrowded fishing boat. Even if you survive the Mediterranean's choppy waters and reach foreign land, your life as a refugee is destined for danger. Given the risks, just how desperate would you need to be to climb aboard?

This is the kind of question that floods your heart as you dip into Montreal author Ami Sands Brodoff's timely new novel, *In Many Waters*. The native New Yorker's prologue, "Lost at Sea," calls compassionate attention to the continuing refugee crisis: "After Baba disappeared, the terror grew. Menacing calls, death threats scrawled onto the front of their house," recalls 17-year-old Aziza, fleeing Libya. When her boat capsizes, she drifts alone on her back, wondering how long she can hold on. "Black night rolled into white-hot day folding into night and then again the stinging sun, fierce as a bright, hot mouth."

Aziza's destiny entwines with that of two orphaned siblings, Cal and Zoe, in Malta. Out for a late-night swim, Cal spots Aziza and pulls her to safety. Yet, having no papers or passport, the young woman's struggles are far from over. Zoe and her younger brother Cal have come to Malta from New York to investigate the untimely death of their parents, who drowned seven years prior while on assignment for a travel magazine. Zoe has landed a research grant for her doctoral thesis, but is stalled in her writing. Unravelling her family history eventually gets her pen flowing as she writes about "the nearly lost Jewish community and history of Malta," but she aches to know her Maltese mother posthumously: "In truth, she'd missed her Mom when Cassandra was in her very presence; how lonely and unreal it had felt to miss her when she was right there ... but there was always the glimmering possibility of more. And then she was gone for good."

Family secrets emerge thanks to Zoe's research, upping the intrigue. The missing and deceased swim like ghosts throughout, filling pages with their own desires. *In Many Waters* is saturated with a sense of longing, characters craving those who are gone. "Zoe had weathered so many losses, absence had become a kind of presence," observes the heroine, summing up an important theme.

Particularly poignant chapters, entitled "Memento Mortis," have characters address their loved ones directly in the first person. "Dad, remember you and me in the water, any water?" asks Cal. Rescuing Aziza summons boyhood memories of nocturnal swims with his father: "If I was already in bed, you'd lift and carry me down to the lake. When I opened my eyes, I saw the black water, the dark warm, like a person. You were the dark, you were the water. I rode your back as if you were a porpoise, smooth, sleek, faster than anything. ... I wasn't scared. Loved that grey-green-water-world. You were out there with me tonight, Dad. In the water, you know my name."

Cal, Zoe, and Aziza's alternating viewpoints, along with those of Cal and Zoe's mother and estranged aunt, Yael, are expressed in separate chapters. Given the size of the cast, which includes grandparents, a nanny, and others, and the number of locations covered – Tripoli, New York, Montreal, Valletta, Gozo, Marrakech, Mexico's Oaxaca Coast – things might have gotten messy in the hands of a less agile writer. Yet Brodoff slides easily between perspectives and places, as well as back and forth through the years.

The common landscape throughout the novel is water. It is a place where trauma is born, yet also where it comes to bathe and heal. Linking characters through their losses, this absorbing novel treads the deep end of human experience, mining stories of love and resilience that ripple through time. mb

Kimberly Bourgeois is a Montreal-based writer and singer-songwriter. Her second EP, *Heart Wave*, was released with Kimberly and the Dreamtime in November 2016.

The Running Woman

SARAH SCOTT

SUZANNE

Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette

Translated by Rhonda Mullins

Coach House Books

\$20.95, paper, 224pp

9781552453476



In *Suzanne*, first published in French as *La femme qui fuit* (the woman who flees), Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette's grandmother takes her place in a long roster of literary missing persons – from April Raintree to Amy, the *Gone Girl* – who form, through absence, the driving force of a novel. But rather than build her narrative around a grandmother-shaped hole, Barbeau-Lavalette has chosen to construct Suzanne Meloche in fiction. Working from accounts of friends and family, the reports of a private detective, and a writer's compulsion to imagine other lives, Barbeau-Lavalette draws a portrait of a complex woman who lived on the cutting edge of her era. Her prose is spare, direct, sometimes curt. The use of the second person for Suzanne's narrative voice is a bold move that a less skilled writer might not be able to pull off, but the strong, clipped sentences seem fitting for a woman who pushed boundaries and broke with expectations.

After a prologue where Barbeau-Lavalette sets up Suzanne's absence in her mother's and her own life, the story opens in 1930s Ottawa, where Suzanne is growing up in poverty, along with everyone else. She's an intense, independent girl – a girl with mud in her underwear; a girl who picks at her fingers until they bleed; a girl who, wanting to leave an impression during her first confession, licks the lattice between herself and the priest. Young Suzanne fixates on reports of Montreal sprinter Hilda Strike, and by the time she's nineteen is on her way to live in Quebec, "where the women run fast."

In postwar Montreal, Suzanne quickly falls in with a group of artists that includes Jean-Paul Riopelle, Claude Gauvreau, and Françoise Sullivan. These are the Automatistes, a crew of young radicals who paint, philosophize, write poetry, and perform in experimental plays that almost no one can sit through. The group's nominal leader and unofficial father figure is Paul-Émile Borduas, whose brooding shadow lies long over their artistic and political endeavours. Borduas is the author of *Le Refus global*, the collective manifesto signed and published by the Automatistes in 1948, which called for a total rejection of the church-centric values of Quebec society.

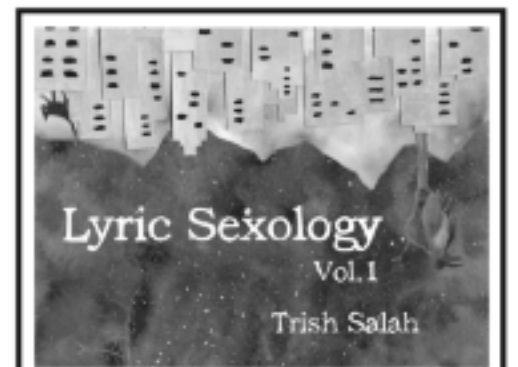
Although they were at best dismissed and at worst censured (*Le Refus global* cost Borduas his job), the Automatistes were the vanguard of a social movement that ushered in a new era for Quebec, and Barbeau-Lavalette's fictionalized account is fascinating to read, especially in the context of contemporary Quebec social move-

ments like the *printemps érable*. But though the Automatistes attempt to shake off the yokes of capitalism and religion to embrace "total freedom," there remain certain vestiges of patriarchy. For example, while her husband Marcel Barbeau takes

extended trips to show his paintings, Suzanne must stay home with their children. Her struggle to balance family life with her own artistic awakening leads her to a choice that is not unheard of in itself – but for a woman, and at the time, it's a shocking one. This novel is perhaps Barbeau-Lavalette's attempt to understand that choice, to explore the dynamics of family obligation, feminism, art, and individuality that shaped Suzanne's life, and thus the lives of her descendants.

I finished reading *Suzanne* on Mother's Day, the significance of which was not lost on me. On a holiday that celebrates motherhood but also flattens its complications into tulip emojis and sales on aprons, it seemed appropriate to read an unflinching portrait of a woman not especially doting or nurturing, who was unable or unwilling to meet the demands of both family and art. And to consider the context in which she chose to leave her family, and to wonder how much that context has changed. *Suzanne* is a moving story of a woman constrained by circumstance and freed by an act of will – whatever you make of it – and it captures an exhilarating period of Quebec history, and of a singular experience of that time. mb

Anna Leventhal is the author of the short story collection *Sweet Affliction* and the publisher of the *Montreal Review of Books*.



"Salah's poetry will unmake us, so we might begin again." – Michael V. Smith

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Dream Lives of the Disconnected

LISTENING FOR JUPITER

Pierre-Luc Landry

Translated by Arielle Aaronson

and Madeleine Stratford

QC Fiction

\$19.95, paper, 218pp

9781771860987

Hollywood, one of the protagonists in Pierre-Luc Landry's *Listening for Jupiter*, is heartless. Literally. Doctors removed the organ to cure his "weariness and gloom." The operation was a failure, but the patient lived.

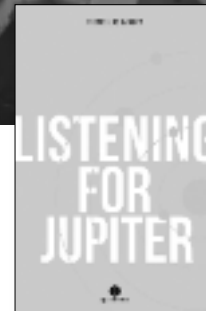
Hollywood's childhood friend Saké's parents have disappeared, so she moves in with his family. She's not too broken up about their absence, and when she receives an envelope of money from them, she takes Hollywood on a shopping spree, buying wigs, shoes, clothes, and nearly a dozen handbags in a second-hand store. Hollywood is a cemetery caretaker; in Montreal's endless summer, he stealthily plants green bean seeds on graves instead of shrubs or flowers. He likes to see the plants sprout.

Xavier is a globetrotting pharmaceutical rep. He wears a suit to high-powered business meetings, pitching new drugs, making the big bucks. He

indulges every whim that can be satisfied by room service (for example, a snack of tea and gummy bears). He takes sample pills for everything – to sleep, to calm his racing heart – but mostly in a vain attempt to fend off the anxiety that grows from the meaninglessness of his life. He walks in Hyde Park until he is too hungry, and then lies down in the snow of London's unending winter until he is – almost – too cold.

Hollywood and Xavier's lives are very different, but not entirely separate; in Landry's charmingly fantastic novel of existential drift, the most important connections are made in the dream life the two protagonists share.

For a book peopled with characters who feel life is empty of meaning, who rely on pilfered pills and large quantities of alcohol for fun, who spend money as fast as they can acquire it in a desperate search for some kind of satisfaction, *Listening for Jupiter* and its denizens are unexpectedly sweet and appealing. They live in a world of severely disrupted climate (it is always winter in Toronto and in Europe; always summer in Montreal) and strange social and familial disconnections, yet their anxieties on these scores manifest in disrupted sleep and erratic hunger – they do not turn their



in which Hollywood and Xavier feel most at home, together, draw them toward a gentle denouement, the slippery, playful narrative comes to both an end (or ends) and a beginning (or two).

It's tempting to order room service and, having finished, start again. **mb**

Elise Moser is a writer and editor who has published short stories and novels. Her most recent publication was the nonfiction book for kids, *What Milly Did: The Remarkable Pioneer of Plastics Recycling*.

Strength in Subtlety

IN A WIDE COUNTRY

Robert Everett-Green

Cormorant Books

\$22.95, paper, 256pp

9781770865006

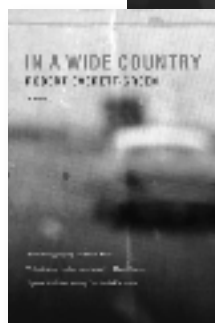
A first novel without a single misstep, *In a Wide Country* showcases Robert Everett-Green's unflinching ability to fashion resonant set pieces from the raw materials of human memory – a striking image, a telling object, a colour, a snippet of dialogue, and healthy doses of hope and humiliation.

The narrator Jasper is a grown man in the first and final chapters, but in the remaining forty-nine the perspective is that of his younger self, a boy on the cusp of manhood whose fiercely independent mother drags him along for a "fancy-free" summer on the road. The credible first-person narration doesn't just show the world through young Jasper's eyes, but subtly drops clues as to how older Jasper achieves this heightened recall. There is the "Drawer of Shame" where mother and son consign

swiped objects as mementos of their failure, and the drawings and lists young Jasper makes to pass time while shadowing his mother on modelling gigs. It's almost like he knew he'd want to write everything down one day.

It all begins in Winnipeg in 1961. Jasper's magnetic mother Corrine picks up a man at the skating rink. As per her *modus operandi*, Corrine's new beau, a successful builder named Dean, will be simultaneously led on and kept at a distance. In an attempt to convert Corrine to a more conventional middle-class life and "relationship with things," Dean buys her a brand-new Corvair. She drives it straight out of his life.

As mother and son head west, a series of short stays yields experiences that are formative but never comfortable. In one Alberta town, Jasper's play with a distant relative



turns disturbingly violent; in the next, he has a first sexual encounter, shortly before he and his

mother are driven out by small-town prejudice.

In Edmonton they flirt with stability: Corrine rents an apartment and patches together work while Jasper balances his hectic family life, volatile friendships, and the bittersweet thrill of first love. Left to his

own devices, he develops courage, street smarts, and an easy gift for storytelling; scrupulous honesty is a luxury he can ill afford.

Everett-Green is especially good at revealing the small-minded hate and violence just beneath the skin of the neighbourly post-war consensus. The upstanding citizens of this golden age constantly seek outsiders to persecute, a pattern dramatized repeatedly in harrowing, bloody scenes of children playing grown-up.

Jasper's childhood is difficult, unpredictable, and often disappointing, but also shot through with magic and triumphs snatched from the jaws of defeat.

The story may be interesting, but the telling is phenomenal. In sentences honed with journalistic concision and precision, Everett-Green finds poetry in calling things by their correct names: skaters career, men stride; farmland is divided

into quarter-sections, floor covered in broadloom. Dialogue and period details are time-stamped in a way that feels earned, never forced, convincingly evoking a bygone era with a realism whose fit and finish recalls masters like Alice Munro and Russell Banks.

As opportunity after opportunity implodes, Corinne and Jasper head further west, until they wash up in Vancouver, a city "for people who couldn't make up their mind what they were looking for."

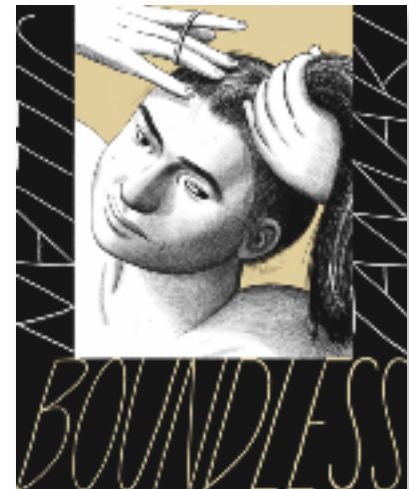
Some readers may be attentive and perceptive enough to see where this road trip will end. The rest of us will enjoy the surprise at the end of the road, and be humbled to re-read and discover the many clues we missed along the way, hiding in plain sight – one more cause to marvel at the understated cogency of the storytelling that makes *In a Wide Country* such an affecting, enjoyable trip. **mb**

Pablo Strauss is the translator most recently of Daniel Grenier's *The Longest Year* and Maxime Raymond Bock's *Baloney*. He lives in Quebec City.



graphic

The Illusion of Performance



BOUNDLESS
 Jillian Tamaki
 Drawn & Quarterly
 \$27.95, paper, 248pp
 9781770462878

When you open *Boundless*, a new comic book of short stories by Jillian Tamaki, you have to turn the book sideways to read its first story – *World Class City*. The sparse text, a couple of sentences per page, punctuates the large illustrations that take up the whole two-page spread and leak into the next page as one long continuous image, evoking the passage of time. It’s an unsettling effect, if only because of the subtle discomfort of turning the book. This story – more like a prose poem, really – is an ode to a city that may or may not exist. Is it real or Utopia? Is it memory or fantasy?

This uncertainty permeates the entire book as Tamaki (who has, among her accolades, two Ignatz Awards, an Eisner Award, and a Governor General’s Award) explores narrative devices that emphasize a certain ambivalence, a loss of control. The strategy is suitable for the themes that slowly take form in the stories: conscience, connection, identity, isolation.

For all the vagueness and heaviness of those themes, *Boundless*’s language is direct, its tone not devoid of humour and irony, and the characters are mostly even-tempered, even

when on edge. And those women – because the main characters are all women – seem to be often on edge, grasping for control.

For example, in “1.Jenny,” Jenny becomes obsessed with the “mirror Facebook,” an alternate social media site with parallel universe profiles. She checks her alternate self constantly and is troubled by her own unexpected reactions to her double’s life events. When the virtual Jenny has a romantic upset, the main Jenny “felt victorious. Also terrible – she was well aware that her delight equated 1.Jenny’s misery. That made her bad.”

In “Half-Life,” Helen starts to shrink until eventually she almost disappears. The illustrations, in tones of black and blue ink, have an intimate quality to them, a children’s book nostalgia. Even when microscopic, Helen has self-doubt: “I wonder if it’s my own mind playing tricks.”

Tamaki delves into these stories with remarkable generosity. The examination of the uncertainty of the psyche – so present that it invades bodies – and human desire for

continued on page 17



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By Katia Grubisic

Mary Soderstrom

The Roads We Build

Mary Soderstrom might just be my new favourite writer. She's been writing for years, and we've been reading her for years, but meeting her reveals an energy that is contagious, and a humility that should be. Soderstrom in person is as unassuming, open, and delightful as she is erudite and elegant on the page.

Perhaps there is a kind of quiet that comes from looking back on a life well written – even as the writing continues, fuller steam ahead than ever. Soderstrom is so focused on where she is going that she seems happy to blur the details of where she has been. “Is that in the book?” she asks as she relates an anecdote that might have been pertinent. “Did I put that in the book?” The book in question, her fifteenth, has been on shelves a little over a month, and already the author has moved on. Already, in fact, she is two books down the road.

This juncture could lead to a smooth segue about the figurative weight of *Road Through Time: The Story of Humanity on the Move*, but Soderstrom's latest non-fiction offering contains very little of the author. Personal road trip stories from Soderstrom's youth and from more recent travels are used as bookends, providing a sense of awe, but *Road Through Time*, while steeped in her fascinations, is no confessional journey. “I don't like having lots of stuff written in the first person,” she says. “I think that's egoistic, and I get annoyed.” Soderstrom has a strong literary voice – the prose is cut through with the ebb and flow of her trademark loveliness, as she gestures at, for instance, “the eons-long waltz of continents over the earth's surface” – but she is not her own character in these pages.

In a book that traces hominid paths to 3.6 million years ago, the predominance of a lone twenty-first-century voice might seem egoistic indeed. While *Road Through Time* is ostensibly about the paths humans have carved out, followed, and imposed, the temporal is a featured player: what narrative tension is etched in this exhaustively researched book tussles between the unabating forward movement of humanity marking time as it imprints on the landscape and the equally relentless reminders that our presence here is ephemeral, our time finite. “We're here,” Soderstrom says. “But the world has been around for such a long time. Obviously at some point we're going to disappear.”

Time accordions in and out in the book, from incomprehensibly deep time to more accelerated, compact contemporary movement. Soderstrom relates the history of roads from humans' exit from Africa across the Red Sea, examines the shift away from nomadism, and looks at trade, marine, and martial routes. Our ancestors' exploitative instincts are followed to modern times, with chapters on urbanization and industrialization, the ascendancy of the automobile, and international perspectives. Every chapter is thick with irresistible detail, from the history of Roman aqueducts in Portugal to land-division protocols in nineteenth-century America. The meticulous endnotes marry facts and source information with the sort of inherent poetry that so captivates writers (referencing an International Space Station video of the Red Sea, Soderstrom notes that “the clouds at the end obscure the opening of the sea at Bab al-Mandab, called the Gate of Grief because of its tricky, strong currents”).

Throughout, Soderstrom draws attention to the impact of the human presence, what she refers to in the book as “dirt packed down by people.” “The basic thing,” she tells me, “is that we – anatomically modern humans – took over the world.” With *Homo sapiens* comes, inevitably, destruction – climate change,

continued on page 17



ROAD THROUGH TIME

The Story of Humanity on the Move
Mary Soderstrom

University of Regina Press

\$26.95, paper, 256pp

9780889774773



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Intergenerational Constellations

WINTER CHILD

Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau
Translated by Susan Ouriou
and Christelle Morelli
Freehand Books
\$21.95, paper, 168pp
9781988298061



Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau's newest novel *Winter Child* draws embodied affect from the reader like poetry, and is so deeply personal that it almost reads like creative non-fiction.

Pésémapéo Bordeleau's words aren't obscured by smoke or mirrors; instead, she depicts a complex constellation of relations among three generations of a Cree-Métis family, and all its present love and strain. Susan Ouriou and Christelle Morelli's translation of the French original blends romantic turns of phrase with the transformative storytelling power of Pésémapéo Bordeleau's Cree and Métis ancestors. *Winter Child* is comprised of several short narratives, often no more than two or three pages in length. Each short narrative represents a single memory told from the perspective of the narrator, who we know only as "the mother." The narratives potently describe seemingly mundane everyday activities, finding love and teachings within the beautiful, and at times traumatic, present of our lives. As everything does, the book begins with the birth of a child – the mother's son.

An anxious nostalgia is present throughout the book, and the mother continually reminisces about painful memories and loved ones lost, including the passing of her son. The mother's reflections on her father become a central narrative throughout. She remembers her father's suffocating attempts to control her sexuality and make her his property, and how his menacing, sexualizing gaze shaped her as a woman and mother. The mother also frequently returns to thoughts of her sexually abusive brother, connecting the two narratives to trace a pattern of colonial masculinities and relational erosion resulting from intergenerational trauma like residential schooling. But this isn't just a song of trauma; it's a song of survivance as well. The mother reflects on her painful relationships with the men in her family in an attempt to forgive her father and brother, and to become a better person herself. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has said in *This Accident of Being Lost*, she learns to raise her children to be the person she could have been.

Several of the narratives in *Winter Child* follow the life and unexpected death of the mother's son. We are a fly on the wall as the mother remembers her son's youth. We witness his bafflement at the Euro-American gender binary, and a young Indigenous child's incomprehension of gendered rules of dress. We witness his awe at the beauty of feasting and the ceremony alive in the community around him, which is marred by alcoholism and colonial affect, and his first sip of liquor, given to him by his grandfather. The mother recalls, "That drink, the effect it had and its taste, would never leave him." A penchant for excess and a fire for life that his mother could not wane would cause his departure from this world.

Winter Child is a collection of narratives about complex relationality, death, loss, and moving through grief, despite it all. Though the mother has experienced unspeakable abuse and trauma, she continues, and with love to boot. Pésémapéo Bordeleau has woven together an exercise in sitting with and moving through pain, beautifully illustrating that – yes – there is beauty in the struggle. Because I cannot say it as poignantly as Pésémapéo Bordeleau, I will leave you with her words and a perfect summation of the mother's journey: "Cry with me, lean your sky against my forehead, gather the angels around us. Tell me that the earth is beautiful, that the horizon has a place for me. Your phantom fingers float over the strings of your soundless guitar; tell me I owe it to myself to live and that all music hasn't died with you." mb

Lindsay Nixon is a nehiyaw-saulteaux-Métis curator, editor, writer, and art history grad student.



A Reader's Fantasy

PASCAL LYSAGHT

READOPOLIS

Bertrand Laverdure
Translated by Oana Avasilichioaei
BookThug
\$20.00, paper, 220pp
9781771662987

No one ever suggested the literary life was easy. Whether you're a writer, editor, small-press publisher, or planner of literary events, the hours are long, and if there *is* any pay, it's often meagre. But we don't do it for the money. At least most of us don't. So what's driving the purveyors of literary culture if not material gain? Bertrand Laverdure anatomizes this question in his chaotic, ever-morphing novel *Readopolis*.

As a reader on the editorial board for an unnamed publisher, Ghislain, the novel's central character, sees himself on the front lines of a war for the very existence of Quebec literature. He takes an antagonistic attitude towards aspiring authors, seeing them as "smooth talkers" with "detestable pipe dreams." For Ghislain, reading is more than an occupation; it's a vocation and a spiritual calling. He props up his identity as a reader with self-constructed ideologies that include his analysis of types of readers and their temperaments (autodidacts, practicalists, and impressionists), as well as his theory of *the reading phase*, a mental state that transports the reader to the world of readopolis. Ghislain describes readopolis as "a complex state of concentration that enables us, by decoding a series of written or printed letters, to reproduce at will the sense of being detached from the world, the impression of doing precision work on a fragile object placed before us." His obsessive reading habits are not limited to the page. Railway plaques, discarded student essays, pamphlets handed out in the metro – anything adorned with the written word becomes a target for his analytical eye as he wanders the city. Like most people engaged in literary work, Ghislain has another job to make ends meet, at the Couche-Tard next to the Joliette metro station.

The novel is overflowing with ideas, forming a collage of mutating literary mediums: aphorism, e-mail, letter, screenplay, stage play, and straight-forward narrative, including a stand-alone dystopian sci-fi novella that envisions a world where writers can assassinate their critics. References to theorists, artists, writers (many Québécois), and filmmakers – far too



With *Readopolis*, Laverdure has created a beautiful, humorous jumble of a book.

many to list – sprout like rainforest mushrooms throughout the text. Musings on history, economics, ethics, ontology, social commentary, art, film, pop culture, architecture, and literature form the bounds of *Readopolis*, until the barrier between Ghislain's reality and readopolis itself becomes blurred. His friends respond to his increasingly neurotic world view with a mixture of amusement, concern, and disdain. And it must be said that the constant intellectualizing of absolutely everything can become tedious, which is the point. Ghislain's mind is an exhausting place to be. Maintaining the towering edifice of readopolis, which is ultimately delusional in a society that does not see the value of his obsession. As Ghislain laments: "We are all mirrors. We understand so little of what surrounds us that we start to conceive, invent games to soothe the spirit."

With *Readopolis*, Laverdure has created a beautiful, humorous jumble of a book. As fantastical as it is, it's very much a novel of place, immersed in the sights, sounds, and flavours of both Montreal and Chicago. Oana Avasilichioaei's translation is impeccable, retaining a distinctly Québécois essence. And though Ghislain's world view may ultimately fail at transcending the reality surrounding him, it is necessary. As cult filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky proclaims regarding the ultimate failure of his film in the documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune*: "Dune is in the world like a dream, but dreams change the world also." I think most champions of literature would agree that this same near-mystical outlook is necessary for both their sense of optimism, and their very sanity. mb

Dean Garlick is a fiction writer living in Montreal. His novella *Chloes* launched in the spring of 2014 and a French translation of his first novel, *The Fish*, was published by Les Allusifs in the fall of 2015.

non-fiction

Nevertheless, She Persisted

SMITTEN BY GIRAFFE

My Life as a Citizen Scientist
Anne Innis Dagg
McGill-Queen's University Press
\$34.95, cloth, 256pp
9780773547995

Here is why you'll want to buy three copies of *Smitten by Giraffe*, a memoir by Anne Innis Dagg.

You will destroy the first copy you buy. Even if you can stifle your shouts of disgust at the ferocious sexism Dagg describes, you will not be able to restrain yourself from occasionally flinging the book across the room in rage.

This will render it unfit for re-gifting.

You will want to give a second copy to any woman you know who studied science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) at a Canadian university any time before 1990.

"Is this true?" you will ask in disbelief.

You will point to the passage in which the University of Waterloo's dean of science, Bill Pearson, told a group of female PhD candidates, in the early 1970s, that "he did not hire women, no matter how talented; their place was in the family, raising children" or Dagg's account of how the 1983 Engineering Society's official parade at that university featured female strippers, or the 1990 article in which professor Gordon Freeman argued against women working at all because the "tendency to cheat correlates strongly with the absence of a full-time mother at home."

Give the third copy of this book to a young person

who is studying a STEM subject or who plans to. Direct their attention to chapter 9, "A Sexist University: How Bad Was It? Awful!" or chapter 12, "Women and Science at Canadian Universities." These young people should know how hard pioneering women like Dagg had to fight for every inch of feminist progress ... and how much of their fight yielded absolutely no progress at all.

Dagg is a "citizen scientist," which is to say a person who undertakes scientific research without the support of a university or government. This is not by choice: she wanted more than anything to be a professor. Dagg fell in love with giraffe when she was a girl and sought to learn everything she could about them. In 1956, after earning a bachelor's degree in zoology and a master's in genetics, she scrapped together some cash and convinced a ranch manager in South Africa to give her room and board for a year while she studied the behaviour of giraffe (he agreed only because she strategically signed her letter "A. Innis," leading him to assume she was male). She was twenty-three. When Dagg returned to Canada, she undertook her doctoral research by analyzing 16 mm film of giraffe at a card table in her apartment while simultaneously caring full-time for her three young children.

But despite having a doctorate, an impressive publishing record, and teaching experience, Dagg was

passed over for tenure-track positions. The hiring committee of the biology department at Wilfred Laurier University had "no interview process at all: the committee had simply chosen one of their friends whose publishing record was much inferior to mine," she writes.

But Dagg persisted. Again and again, in the face of discrimination, in the face of lack of funding, even, when stranded in the Mauritanian desert while researching camel gait, in the face of death, she persisted. She did research on her own dime. She self-published her results when traditional journals wouldn't. She joined local environmental groups and, later, became an activist for the equal treatment of women in academia.

Smitten by Giraffe is very readable, even for those who don't gravitate towards books about science. It can feel disjointed, jumping as it does from Dagg's research to her feminist activism and back again, but it is a memoir, after all: life doesn't move in a

straight line, especially for trailblazers. Some of the passages describing Dagg's research methodology and results are dry, but they are balanced by the sensational sexism she describes, often (but not often enough) naming those who instigated and perpetuated it.

Reading her life story begs the question: How many thousands

of Canadian women scientists couldn't persist as Dagg did? How many brilliant female scientists and engineers did we lose because they simply ran out of steam in the face of such dispiriting sexism? And how much poorer is our society, in terms of knowledge and innovation, because of it? **mb**

Sarah Lolley is the 2017 CBC/QWF Writer-in-Residence. She writes essays, crime fiction, and children's literature, and is an avid fan of cryptic crosswords.

How many thousands of Canadian women scientists couldn't persist as Dagg did? How many brilliant female scientists and engineers did we lose because they simply ran out of steam in the face of such dispiriting sexism?

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CATHARINE PARR TRAILL'S *THE FEMALE EMIGRANT'S GUIDE*

Cooking with a Canadian Classic
Edited by Nathalie Cooke and Fiona Lucas
McGill-Queen's University Press
\$39.95, paper, 608pp
9780773549302

For three days, as I made Mrs. Traill's favourite bread recipe using a hop-based barm she strongly recommended, my kitchen smelled like beer. On

the morning of the first day, I prepared the leavening agent, discovering in the process that the smell of beer comes from the hop plant's flowers (obvious, but I had never thought about it), and let it rise all day. In the afternoon of the second day, I prepared what bakers call a "sponge" with a mixture of flour and potatoes-turned-porridge and let that rise all night. On the morning of the third day, I kneaded the dough and

let it rise for four hours, then I shaped the bread loaves and let those rise for two hours before baking said loaves. The resulting bread is tasty, wholesome, dense, and doesn't taste like beer. I certainly don't get to feel warm dough between my hands or the same sense of accomplishment when I make bread in four hours by pressing a button on a machine, but being a pioneer woman sure takes patience and commitment.

This commitment and its related hardships were well known to Catharine Parr Traill (sister to Susanna Moodie, author of *Roughing it in the Bush*), which is why she decided to write *The Female Emigrant's Guide* (1855). More than a century and a half later, Nathalie Cooke, a professor of English at McGill who specializes in cookery literature, and Fiona Lucas, co-founder of the Culinary Historians of Canada, decided to re-edit the book in the hope of reviving "interest in some simple, nutritious, and forgotten nineteenth-century recipes and menus" at a time where mindful eating is increasingly a way of life.

In her *Guide*, Traill gives advice to families, especially the women who

were thinking of emigrating to Canada or who had recently arrived. It includes tips on the kind of constitution needed to immigrate to Canada, what to wear, what to bring from the old country, how to furnish your log house, and how to plant an orchard. A large section of the book includes recipes that the frugal immigrant can follow with ingredients that are common in Canada, but that they might not know very well, such as "Indian" (wild) rice, corn, squash, and maple sugar.

We no longer live in log cabins in the bush, but it is still interesting to see how the country is described to potential immigrants, especially when Traill explains typical weather patterns and activities for each month of the year: "[February] is indeed the coldest of the Canadian winter months and though the lengthening of the days gives you more sunshine it seems to add little to your warmth." Some of her descriptions of winter and Christmas are very rosy, as she is the first to admit: "Some will think my sketch too fair a one, because they will experience many changes and discomforts; and seasons are brightened or darkened by our individual feelings and domestic circumstances." A feeling that still holds true today.

But the book is much more than a simple reprinting of Traill's guide; it is a glimpse into nineteenth-century culinary history in Canada. As such, after the original guide, the authors added a 250-page "Guide to Traill's World," in which they explore what Traill typically fed her family, what three sample families of different financial means would normally eat, and the history of cooking measurements. They also modernized certain recipes (mostly breads, biscuits, and puddings), listed modern ingredients readers can use, and explained how to convert the other recipes. Though some recipes, such as roasted black squirrel and pigeon pie, might not need additional explanation.

Catharine Parr Traill's The Female Emigrant's Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic is a fascinating read for anybody interested in Canadian domestic history and cooking. Maybe, after the 100-Mile Diet and the Paleo Diet, the Pioneer Diet will become a thing. **mb**

Mélanie Grondin is the editor of the *Montreal Review of Books*. Her book *The Art and Passion of Guido Nincheri* is coming out in the fall of 2017.



poetry



#HASHTAGRELIEF

Blossom Thom
Gaspereau Press
\$4.95, paper, 32pp
9781554471720

RAG COSMOLOGY

Erin Robinsong
BookThug
\$18.00, paper, 104pp
9781771663144

TABLE MANNERS

Catriona Wright
Signal Poetry
\$17.95, paper, 88pp
9781550654677

TOO BIG TO FAIL

Georgia Faust
Metatron
\$15.00, paper, 104pp
9781988355054

BICYCLE THIEVES

Mary di Michele
ECW Press
\$18.95, paper, 96pp
9781770413702

In *#HashtagRelief*, Blossom Thom responds to news items on social media. Turning to much publicized violence towards people of colour in recent years, these poems are constructed around figures and events such as filmmaker and activist Bree Newsome and the massacre at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. *#HashtagRelief* calls for respite from the barrage of information on social platforms and, ultimately, an end to violence stemming from systemic racism and hate. In “No Justice No Peace,” Thom writes:

Again.
Another bloody body
another child dying
...
So tired of untruth.
So tired of vigilantes.
So tired of wrongful deaths.

The abecedarian form of the poem becomes the pattern of “wrongful deaths,” while illustrating a recurring process of grief and frustration. As the reader moves along the alphabet markers, we trace emotions of bafflement, anger, and weariness.

But the collection is not weighed down by despair. A native of Guyana, Thom projects herself into the future in “Love Letter to the Last Black Man,” and adopts a maternal voice. The poetic missive is instructional, the tone stirring and tenacious:

Your opinion
is worth something and
something more. Raise your voice
my Obsidian King!

#HashtagRelief considers the tweet in relation to grief, the brevity of life, and the limits of language in the face of brutality. At thirty-two pages, this slim chapbook offers a great deal of heft.

Erin Robinsong’s debut, *Rag Cosmology*, is a celebration of the natural world, the body, and language. Beginning with Heraclitus’ *Fragments* (“Souls take pleasure in becoming moist”), Robinsong invites us into a teeming, erotic, and communal world: “look at this brown day / hosted by beauty.”

Robinsong informs us that “we know the universe from its folds,” as she assumes the roles of both antenna and mouthpiece. Sensitive to the world around her (“My idea is to stay alert”), *Rag Cosmology* embraces the elements, borders, and pulses of her surroundings. The reader, too, is alerted to these “folds” in images such as: “Green extravagant mind wet and moving,” “night is falling from a singing bird’s bright anus,” and “the sun coming fullblast in beams / of wood, of light // like thighs.” The poet abandons the mastery of the gaze and becomes immanent to the world:

I’m a fold
of it, I’ve never left atmospheric
borders I engorge to the point of
enfolded, I’m a pleat, a pore, a breather,
a yellow
drape of it
runs through me violently

Similarly, in “Autobiography,” there is no escape from this condition of rapture. The speaker’s desire is conveyed through nature, punning with the line “pines, firs, yews.” Reminiscent of Susan Howe’s word images, Robinsong subverts the typographical line so the phrase “pine fir yew” is repeated and superimposed. Longing scatters across the paper and touches the division between sense and nonsense, landscape and soulscape:

wood
always
long fir
all
ways
bank in,
would always
pine fir
yew

Gratifying and bold, Robinsong’s poems vibrate as the reader is implicated in the lushness of the cosmos, nature, and the self.

“I’ve been binging / like a magpie, on every glint and texture,” Catriona Wright writes in her epicurean debut, *Table Manners*. Everything is meaningful as the poet explores the cultural, social, historical, and political facets of food. Ranging from the edible to the inedible,

guilty pleasures to all-natural health kicks, dinner parties to lonely meals, Wright uncovers the “glint and texture” of consumption. Her opening poem, “Gastronaut,” is a feast in itself as the speaker reveals the pleasure and intensity with which she hungers, devours, and rejoices in an array of real and imaginary dishes. Gastronomy is a source of joy. No longer mere sustenance, food is a way of being – creative, impossible, rare, and surprising:

My life is now
tuned to bone marrow donuts and chef
gossip, I’m useless
at any other frequency.

The speaker is candid, humorous, and self-aware as she measures out her life in spoonfuls: “My death row meal is a no-brainer: slow-roasted unicorn haunch / and deep-fried fairy wings with chipotle mayo dipping sauce.”

Wright reveals how food defines culture, lifestyle, and class difference. Dietary habits, judgement, and expectations are illustrated in poems such as “Groceries,” in which the speaker’s hidden cravings clash with her desire for the cashier’s approval of her health-conscious purchases. Even poems such as “Talking to my Father,” “Lineage,” and “Bridesmaids” show parent-child relationships and female bonds through food. Tightly woven and elaborate in its conceit, the poems in *Table Manners* linger both on the mind and palate.

Georgia Faust’s *Too Big to Fail* is set in American crisis, grit, and debris. Faust transfers the inane capitalist logic behind the phrase “too big to fail” to cultural structures that surround us. As she writes, “[A] sense of disappointment and defeat is the essential state of mind for creative work.” A quick glance at the list of contents reveals a state of demolition: among the titles are “Disaster Event,” “Destruction Architecture,” and “Later Debris.” Embedded in the urban landscape, we find ourselves on the subway, the bus, an elevator, a particular street. We peer through windows, doors, and crevices. But our surroundings are never stable. “Vocabulary controls violence,” she writes, and this sense of violence is both literary and architectural:

Eye contacts speech patterns or
when words form inside the threshold
do I step in new rules to the game.

Faust makes you work as she invents new rules to her game. In place of smooth facades, her words trip, overwhelm, repeat. Poetry becomes spatial, as in “Destruction Architecture,” in which the text is arranged in twin towers of broken and uneven columns: “Happy now that the twin tines gone ... Electric verb Electric disagreement Verb trauma.” Similarly, “Nomadic Interiors” is itself an infliction of trauma on her own work as she cuts,

pastes, and revises passages from earlier poems in the book. The passages are “nomadic” as they float across the white space.

In the concluding piece, Faust states, “I am in pursuit of absolute fluency in poetry.” The line recalls the “flow” of an earlier image of the river: “The Mississippi / for example / Goes where it’s supposed to go.” In writing about “the now,” Faust’s words – difficult, estranged, and defamiliarized – reflect a pervasive state of financial and political disaster.

Mary di Michele tells us that “she wants something / that’s gone.” *Bicycle Thieves*, her latest book, is about precisely this yearning. Imbued with loss and the wisdom of death, di Michele reflects on personal history, immigration, her late parents, and aging. Divided into three sections, she burrows through strata of memories, places, and languages, all the while drawing on literary and cinematic sources. One of the many successes of the collection is how di Michele entwines the personal and the public, exhibiting a private grief that pleads for a witness. Both mourning and reading, as she shows us, are communal acts.

The title poem, which makes reference to Vittorio De Sica’s 1948 film, is written in the hypothetical and urges the reader into a space of longing and lost time. The first line, “If I could go back to my birthplace, Lanciano,” sets the tone as the speaker repeats the conditional clause throughout:

...if I could see
into the darkness and find my father,
if he were still living
there in Lanciano.

...
If I call him
by his true name, Vincenzo, not Vincent,
will he recall then his life in Italian,
through eyes still clear,
through hopes undimmed?

Spanning a lifetime, we find consolation in the final image of the father who, in death, rises from his wheelchair in Toronto and finds himself younger, riding his childhood bicycle back in Lanciano.

Bicycle Thieves seeks out what is left after a life is gone. A memory is reduced to a brief sentence, as in the section “Life Sentences.” The dead return unseen, like a cold wind on New Year’s Day. The final section emphasizes this void: “life is a rose – then nothingness.” Di Michele’s voice is intimate and generous, even as her speaker foresees her own future: “The sun was low but I cast no shadow.” These poems contain an insistent beauty that is both sorrowful and exquisite. **msb**

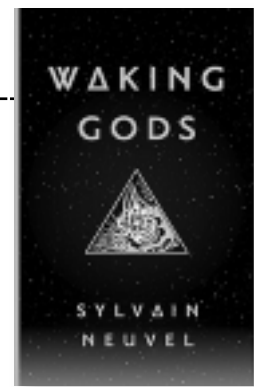
Gillian Sze is the author of eight collections of poetry. She has a PhD in Études anglaises from Université de Montréal. ECW Press will publish her book, *Panicle*, this fall.



By Jeff Miller

Sylvain Neuvel

Big Ideas



WAKING GODS
Sylvain Neuvel
Del Rey
\$37.00, cloth, 336pp
9781101886724

“I’m building the inside of a spaceship in our laundry room,” Sylvain Neuvel tells me as our conversation in a Pointe-Saint-Charles café is winding down. This fantastical statement serves as the perfect capstone to our discussion about the unexpected turns his life has taken since he wrote his debut novel *Sleeping Giants* (2016). Bursting with political intrigue, high-stakes action, and fully fleshed-out characters, it was the first volume in his smart and highly addictive series of science fiction thrillers, The Themis Files. *Waking Gods*, the second book in the series, was published by New York sci-fi powerhouse Del Rey this spring.

Sitting across from me for over an hour, Neuvel was an engaging subject. His enthusiasm in talking about his fictional world, and those of other authors, was infectious, especially when discussing the extensive research he conducted before writing each book. “Everything in there is pretty rock solid,” he tells me. “I put more research into *Sleeping Giants* than my PhD, probably by a power of ten.”

Neuvel, who trained as a linguist at the University of Chicago, had to learn about minerals, American military hierarchy, and the international locales where the book takes place, among other subjects, to give the story its authentic feel. For *Waking Gods* he went even further afield, reading British Parliamentary debates and investigating the genetic code, which plays a major part in the book’s crucial plot twist. “The only made-up thing is the giant robot,” he says with a laugh. “Giant robots are *not* realistic. They’re pretty much the least practical thing you can come up with.”

The world depicted in The Themis Files is our own present day, except for the recent discovery of a massive robot abandoned on Earth by an ancient alien civilization that buried it in sepa-

rate pieces all over the globe. *Sleeping Giants* gives a page-turning account of the top-secret search for the dismembered parts. Once the robot is assembled and named Themis, the challenge becomes keeping it secret. A major international incident is narrowly averted when Themis’s existence is accidentally revealed to the world at large.

“It started with my son,” Neuvel says, explaining the origin of his series. “I built him a toy robot and he started asking a ton of questions. ‘What does it do? Can it fly? Does it have missiles? Lasers? Pilots?’ So for a while I had this idea simmering as a backstory for a toy. One night we were watching *Goldorak* [*Grendizer* in English, a vintage Japanese giant robot TV series] and he was way into it. And I thought, ‘What if we found one of those? What if we found big giant robots from outer space, from another civiliza-

tion?’” The answers to these questions make for enthralling reading, made even more compelling by the unique format in which they’re told. The novel is made up of “files,” mostly transcripts of interviews conducted by the Themis program’s unnamed shadowy founder. An insider in the Ameri-

can military community, this mystery man interviews the small team – scientists, pilots, and even a linguist – he assembles to work on the top-secret project. Through these interviews, as well as personal diary entries, mission logs, and

other forms of documentation, readers are granted a front-row seat to the solving of one of the great mysteries of our time.

The rich cast of characters who come to life in the series include Dr. Rose Franklin, a top scientist tasked with studying all aspects of Themis, and Kara Resnick, an ace pilot who turns her aviation skills to learning

“Every excuse I’ve had to be remotely mature is now gone from my life.”

how to drive the alien vehicle. Another crucial member of the team is Vincent Couture, a brilliant Montreal-based linguist (Neuvel insists he is not autobiographical) who studies the mysterious runes inside the robot’s cockpit, but whose role soon becomes far more central to the project.

Readers learn about Themis as the team explores its capabilities and speak about it in frank, everyday language. Their discussions about the philosophical implications of using alien technology are peppered with black humour, written in an inherently readable, irreverent style. Think Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* meets the giant robots of *Pacific Rim*.

Taking place nine years after the events of *Sleeping Giants*, *Waking Gods* flips everything we learned in the first volume on its head. When an alien robot related to Themis arrives in downtown London, followed by a dozen others who take up residence in the most populous cities in the world, it’s no spoiler to say that the results are a little bit destructive. When I ask Neuvel if he enjoyed destroying large swathes of certain global capital cities, he replies with a mischievous grin: “It was so fun.”

In *Waking Gods*, Themis’s team find themselves in a white-knuckled race to save humanity from being entirely wiped out. The novel has major consequences for Neuvel’s fictional world. Two central characters perish during a deadly alien gas attack on New York City, and, like *Sleeping Giants*, *Waking Gods* ends on a major cliffhanger that will have readers salivating for the next instalment.

Currently writing the third volume in the series, Neuvel still sounds awed by the extraordinary chain of events that led to his first book being bought at auction by one of the world’s most

continued on next page

Neuvel

prestigious science fiction publishers. “I’ve written all my life but mostly for newspapers. I had *no* idea about the book business, but I read about it on the internet,” he tells me. “I queried fifty-six agents. Most never replied, which is apparently normal. So I figured what the hell, I’ll self-publish it.”

Hoping for a review that he could use as a blurb on the cover of the book, Neuvel sent an advance copy of *Sleeping Giants* to American publishing trade magazine *Kirkus Reviews*. He was surprised to receive a glowing review, and was immediately inundated with calls from Hollywood agents looking to buy the film rights. He eventually optioned the book to Sony Pictures and the screenplay is currently being written by *Jurassic Park* scriptwriter David Koepp. All this happened before he even had a literary agent, and well before the book was snapped up by Del Rey at auction.

“Most of this happened in one wild month in 2014,” he says, still not quite believing his luck. Since then, *Sleeping Giants* and *Waking Gods* have been published to critical acclaim, nominated for awards, and translated into over twenty-two languages. When each foreign edition is published, Neuvel celebrates by adding a bottle of whiskey distilled in that country to his liquor cabinet.

The success of *The Themis Files* has also led to invitations to work on other science fiction properties, most notably “TK-146275,” a short story published in *Star Wars Insider* magazine, and set within the mythological “canon” of the multi-billion-dollar *Star Wars* universe. And beyond that, there’s something new on the horizon, a project set in a very cool existing sci-fi property. In our interview Neuvel was adamant that he couldn’t talk about it publicly yet, despite clearly being thrilled about the prospect of playing around in another science-fiction world.

As our interview wraps up, Neuvel returns to the subject of his toys, the original inspiration for the books that have completely changed his life. Showing me photos of some of his favourites on his phone, he also tells me about the aforementioned spaceship in the laundry room. “One entire wall will be display cabinets for my toys. Every excuse I’ve had to be remotely mature is now gone from my life,” he says, looking up from his phone with an excited laugh. Neuvel’s deep love for science fiction is now on grand display in his basement – and it is also apparent on every page of *Sleeping Giants* and *Waking Gods*. mb

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

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water crises caused by deforestation. Soderstrom’s environmentalism is matter-of-fact: the road, she says, will take us to the end of days, yet we walk on. “If you think that there’s really no hope at all, then you’re paralyzed.”

One glimpse of hope among the shadows is the resilience of women. Discussing the migrations of early humans across the planet, Soderstrom writes, “bring your women and the stage is set for permanent, game-changing settlement.” Settlers lived longer and got healthier, resulting in “more help for young families from grandmothers and older aunts.” The so-called Grandmother Effect also allowed women of child-bearing age to have more babies closer together, increasing the collective survival rate. “One keeps having children,” Soderstrom says now, even in an uncertain age, which is itself “an act of hope.” Feminism seeps into *Road Through Time* in more subtle ways as well – a discussion of the genetic path of the “Eves” from whom all modern humans are descended, or a recollection of Soderstrom’s mother’s vigil over her young daughters as their Greyhound plowed through the northern-California night.

In a feminist light, too, Soderstrom is generous, sympathizing with young parents’ creative dry spells. “When my kids were small,” she says, “I didn’t do very much writing. I tell people that actually I’m ten years younger than I really am! Between my first novel in 1976 and the second one, there’s almost twenty years.” Even in those seemingly unproductive years, however, she says, “you’re absorbing all kinds of ideas and experiences.” Material for perpetual storage and possible use, along with heaps of clippings and notes.

She still goes back, for instance, to notes from a 2001 trip to Africa when she was writing the novel *Violets of Usambara*. There has always been a great deal of cross-pollination in Soderstrom’s work, with characters or even entire scenes sneaking from one book into another. “It seems synergistic to me,” she says, unconcerned; “things are interwoven.”

Now far from her fallow moments, Soderstrom always has both fiction and non-fiction projects on the go. Her next book, due out next year, is a geopolitical comparison that twins various states. And she is currently in the early stages of research about concrete, an outgrowth of the urban preoccupations that arose in writing *Road Through Time*. She is gleeful about her preliminary findings – the existence of a brotherhood of engineers founded in the wake of bridge-building tragedies, Bauhaus design influences, a long-forgotten scene in Faulkner. “Actually, concrete is terrific!”

That thematic seeding between books creates a sense of continuity, and speaks to a learned and curious mind. “For a long time, my default password was ‘curious,’” Soderstrom confides – unsurprisingly, given her tirelessness, and the breadth of her involvement and career. What will she do when she retires, I ask, as if writers ever retire. “Play the piano!” she laughs, before tossing off the most succinct description of writerly activity I’ve ever heard: “I’ve always said that I work never and always.”

“The roads we build determine our future,” Soderstrom reminds us in *Road Through Time*. As for what that future will look like for humanity... “I’d hoped to have a more definite end to the book, that I could tell people what they ought to do, but I don’t know what they ought to do. It’s just bearing witness to some extent. We don’t know where we’re going. It’s impossible to think of us going on forever. The question is how do we go out.” And what we leave behind. In Soderstrom’s case, that legacy is well lined, and still pushing forward. mb

Katia Grubisic is a Montreal writer, editor, and translator.

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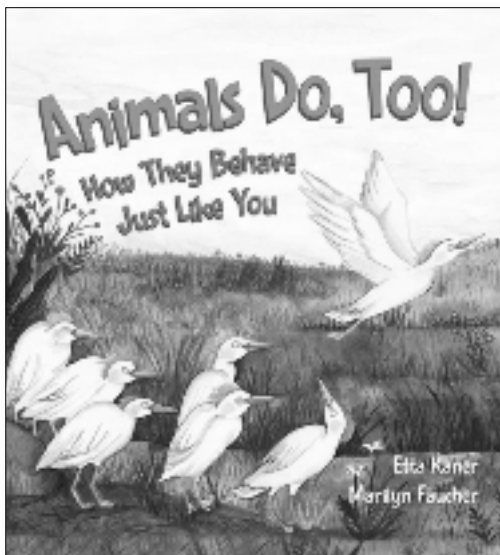
Tamaki continued from page 9



connection rings authentic in the book’s naturalistic tone and fantastical scenarios. This authenticity gives common thread to Tamaki’s wide experimentation with several genres and art styles. Going from magical realism to faux-memoir, from the quiet minimalism of “Bedbug” to the ambition of the sci-fi-ish “SexCoven,” Tamaki shows extraordinary versatility in her narrative and her art. She can use a sketchy style as convincingly as a finer and cleaner line, always keeping the strokes loose and spontaneous, and the facial and body expressions vivid and playful. The human figures, frequently in a state of metaphysical denial or deprivation, sometimes vanish, behind plants, in movement, in water. Her use of colour is minimal, austere, which is to the benefit of these often-sombre narratives.

Nothing is overly dramatic in these quiet, melancholic stories. Even queerness is depicted as simply existing, without being embroiled in dramatic homophobia or coming-out plots. Yet there is a constant tension, as if to say, “reality is fragile.” There is much doubting and questioning, and the characters keep affirming something just to deny it immediately after. Permanence is just an illusion. And, fittingly, there is never a conclusion, a definite outcome, not even a lesson learned. Only a slightly abrupt fade out. mb

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

Flamingo parents can discern their offspring's unique call in a crowd of thousands of chicks. That's the kind of awe-inspiring information readers learn in *Animals Do, Too!: How They Behave Just Like You*. Using a question and answer format, the book illustrates some of the activities humans have in common with the animal kingdom. Former teacher Etta Kaner successfully works in edifying and succinct details about leaf-cutter ants, gazelles, and others. Marilyn Faucher's vibrant watercolours show humans and animals doing their thing – cattle egrets snacking, a pregnant woman lolling on the beach, piggybacking marmosets, a babysitter subjected to tea time. Together the author and artist highlight the importance of play for both humans and animals.

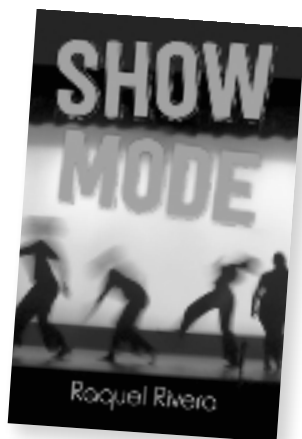
Elise Gravel, a prolific, award-winning artist, has a gift for the next generation of illustrators. Monsters, Italian-speaking octopuses, and worm slippers all grace the pages of *If Found... Please Return to Elise Gravel*. Gravel's creations jump off the page in this rendition of the black notebook she doodles in every night. The many different versions of her inventions show blossoming artists how exploring an idea can be fun and playful. Take the dozen or so different-coloured kiwi birds poking their beaks around a grid-lined page, or her so-called "floofs," which are "like bunnies, but they wear boots," who appear as a "happy floof," a burping "floof that's eaten too much" and a "floof on its way out" (literally walking off into the book's spine).

Gravel offers an important lesson about the diligence needed for creativity, twinned with the advice to avoid constantly judging your own art. Her illustrations are annotated with comments and background information, and many of her creatures have names or speech bubbles. Brief sections of concrete artistic guidance, paired with the fanciful inventions and depictions that reign supreme, make the book the right tool to encourage readers to get started on their own notebooks.

Princess Pistachio and Maurice the Magnificent is Marie-Louise Gay's third tale about a scheming little red-haired nutter named Pistachio Shoelace. An ode to children's devotion to their pets and their ensuing adventures, the book follows Pistachio's pet, Dog, and his trans-

formation from an extraordinarily lazy house dog to an equally lazy star of the stage. With striking details (Dog snores like a frog with a cold), Gay captures the best and worst of pets – including how disgusting they can be. Dog, for example, "sniffs Mr. Grumblebrain's apple and licks it. Then he swallows an eraser in one gulp." The tale also highlights pet owners' deep, if sometimes deluded, loyalty to their pets. Pistachio has to learn that Maurice the Magnificent – Dog's stage name – isn't the only topic of interest when his newfound fame causes a rift in her friendship with Madeleine.

Gay's charming pen, ink, and watercolour drawings are scattered throughout the text, and include especially adorable drawings of all kinds of dogs.



"Don't you hate having to rely on other people?" asks ninth-grader Adina, as she muddles her way through preparation for Fashion Show tryouts in Raquel Rivera's *Show Mode*. Part of the Orca Limelights series that highlights the performing arts, the book is inspired by the real-life annual fashion show at Montreal arts high school

FACE. Adina has been waiting to become a senior to participate in the event, which involves choosing music, designing dance routines, and making costumes. Well-meaning, if marred by perfectionist tendencies that her friends call "going turbo," Adina takes on the role of leader as she and her friends prepare to audition their act. Her group includes her crush, Seth, who seems like an ideal teenage boy (on top of being exceedingly diplomatic, he sews their outfits), Sandra, who is gifted with a powerful singing voice and personality, and dreamy flute-playing Willow, who doesn't seem cut out for the rigour of Fashion Show.

As the group works on their dance routine, there are plenty of bumps and clashes, including those caused by a rival group of three popular older girls dealing with eating issues. There are lessons for Adina that most adults, myself included, could benefit from – such as letting others figure out how they feel in a specific situation instead of telling

them. The book also touches on the challenge of having to work with others to achieve your vision, and the perils of forcing something to fit instead of trying another way. "Don't you love how sometimes when you step back, you can see so much better?" asks Adina, having learned the answer for herself.

Rivera succeeds in creating real tensions between the youngsters – readers will wonder throughout whether they'll be able to pull it off – and their final act comes together with a surprising twist. Kudos to Rivera, whose dance routine details, in addition to the shimmering gold costumes, make the acts come alive: "Sandra, Seth and I take turns doing a signature disco move, then freeze in position ... Seth slides, twists and moonwalks ... I throw my head back and my arms out."

Fifteen-year-old Declan, the main character of Karen Nesbitt's first book *Subject to Change*, has a lot on his plate – he's negotiating a difficult family situation while trying to graduate from high school (he would be the first O'Reilly to do so). Although he comes on strong, with plenty of swearing, twenty-one detentions to his name, and a nasty smoking habit, it's also evident that he's a good kid; he works at the local ice rink and he's nice to his mom. This makes his persistent negative self-talk all the more striking and depressing.

A series of events force Declan to discover new details surrounding his parents' separation and his dad's disappearance from his life five years earlier. "Heroes push on. Face things. I'm not sure pretending nothing happened, hiding it all, was heroic," thinks Declan in a heated conversation with his mom about his parents' bungled divorce. "We just pushed it away. But it was still there, working its magic."

Nesbitt makes adept use of her experience working with teens. Declan's convincing observations about the world around him are sharp, but he still comes off like a real teenage boy (cue the harmless and even charming comments about checking out girls and weed-smoking escapades). There are no easy solutions for Declan and his family.

How do you reconcile with the seriously flawed people in your life? To even broach this possibility, Declan must examine some of his own attitudes, including his prejudice against gay people. With the right guidance and the support of his budding love interest, Declan and his family may just get a second chance. **★★★★**

Vanessa Bonneau lives in Montreal.

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“I can imagine a better world”

In/Words Magazine's 30 Under 30 Poetry Anthology

By Guillaume Morissette

The word “millennial” doesn’t mean anything anymore. Although the new *30 Under 30* collection, published by In/Words Magazine and Press, describes itself as “an anthology of Canadian millennial poets,” it seems more interesting to me to think of it as a compilation of poems by digital natives living in cities all across Canada, whose birth years happen to range from 1987 to 1993. My goal with this essay isn’t to appraise each poem like a dog at a dog show or to question the editors’ decisions about which poets to include and which to leave out. Rather than write a review, I want to look at this anthology as a whole and simply highlight common threads, stylistic quirks, and shared concerns.

Since I am writing this for the *Montreal Review of Books*, I’ll focus primarily on the five authors in the anthology who currently live in Montreal, all of whom I know or have met, though who knows if they’ll all still live here by the time this essay is published. Montreal’s Anglophone literary community, of which I am part, rarely stands still for very long: new writers move here for school or seeking a new life, others move away because they can’t find a proper job or because they feel they’ve exhausted the city. Still, even if they decide to move away, Montreal’s lively spirit and DIY attitude is likely to permanently influence these writers’ works.

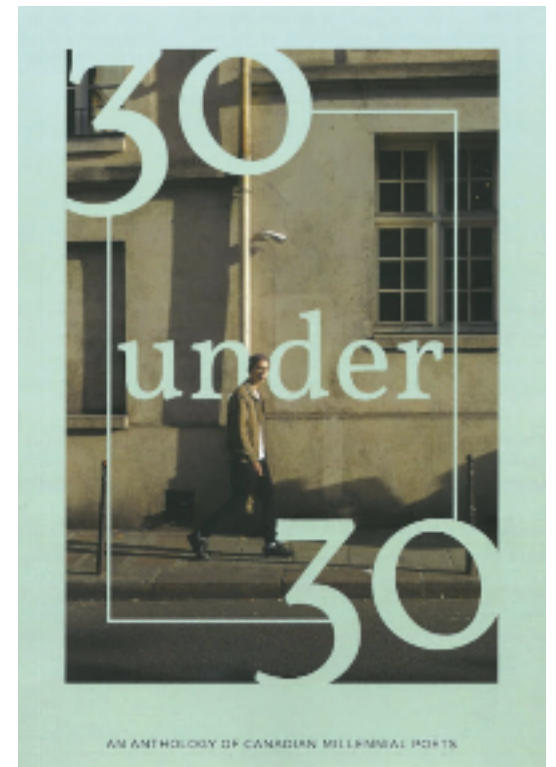
While the *30 Under 30* anthology frequently discusses the living nightmare that is dating and navigating personal relationships (from Cassidy McFadzean’s poem: “If all my father figures are trying to fuck me, do I still have daddy issues?” and from A. Zachary’s piece: “thank you for continuing to be attracted to me when my stomach isn’t flat”), Montreal-based poet Ashley Opheim’s poem, “Plastic Watermelon,” goes in a different direction, choosing instead to focus on two people sharing a moment of pure bliss. My favourite aspect of this piece is the way it constantly plays with scale: lovers hold one another in “the tiny rain,” flowers are compared to spaceships, and the “space between mountains” is made the same size as the space between two breaths. “I am gigantic for you,” Opheim writes. “I am a tiny spaceship.” If anything, I am tempted to compare this piece not to another poem, but to *Everything*, a recently released video game by artist David O’Reilly that also makes the small seem big and infinite and the large feel tiny and manageable. While the moments depicted in this poem may end up being just a few fleeting hours of happiness, Opheim expands them into an eternity.

Scale is also apparent in a poem by Montreal’s Jessica Bebenek, in which iron beams are “matchsticks” and a kiss is described as the “whole city rushing suddenly into a single sensation.” It appears as well in Vancouverite Kayla Czaga’s piece, in which the Milky Way becomes an ultrasound. This repeated pattern of playing with scale made me wonder if it was a by-product of poets living in large, sprawling cities and being constant-

ly surrounded by tall buildings and skyscrapers. Compared to Opheim’s piece, Bebenek’s vision of romance comes across as more level-headed and practical, a kind of self-preservation tactic that seeks to anticipate and prevent future disappointment. “You kiss with acceptable pacing,” she writes. “How wholly unremarkable to be in each others’ lives.” This cautious approach to love is probably not surprising and permeates other poems in this collection (Ben Ladouceur: “Some of us will remain unwed”; Dominique Bernier-Cormier: “Love switches on and off for no reason like a haunted television set”; Emily Chou: “I unstitch myself for you but I will not wear these clothes again and you cannot have me”).


Also common in this collection is anxiety about performance and performing, about vanity and physical beauty, about watching and being watched, even when you’re entirely alone. Montreal’s Klara du Plessis writes, “I struggle to understand those who spend 45 minutes attending to their face, when I stare at myself for hours it’s a subtraction of self, not an add-on,” which I am tempted to connect to a line in Julie Mannell’s piece, “A Poem Against Pretty Bodies,” in which she says, of cutting, that, “I do it like a little girl. I do it the wrong way on purpose.” This constant mental pressure to perform, to be simultaneously a passive audience and an active performer for others, is probably best summed up by a line in Joseph Ianni’s piece: “Dear body, I want to take the beating for you.”

While these poems, in true Canadian fashion, frequently anchor themselves in the natural world by referencing Canadian locations (Turtle Lake, Happy Valley, Nemeiben Road), water or the ocean (Selina Boan describes “watching water hesitate”), or astronomical objects (Jessie Jones: “to bleed in regular intervals with the moon”), they also let the noise of the internet and global capitalism in. Cassidy McFadzean notes that “The moment I’ve met each #squadgoal my mind turns to self-destruction” while Trevor Abes repurposes the language of shitty consumer plans when he describes a relationship as a “no-commitment free trial.” In his piece, which is centered around *The Veiled Virgin*, a meticulously crafted marble bust of the Virgin Mary displayed in Newfoundland,



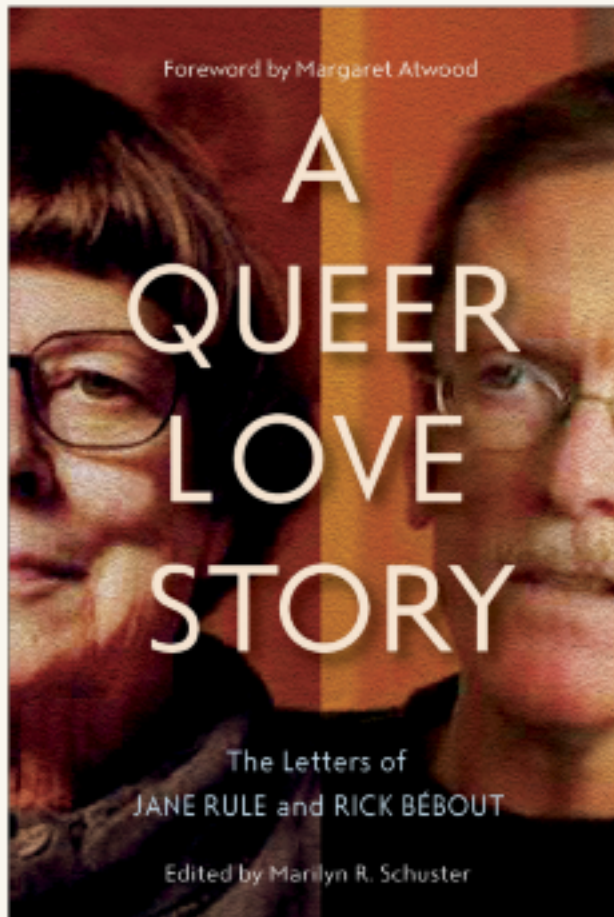
Montreal’s Patrick O’Reilly uses a carefully placed “ye” to give his poem a local flavour and a sense of place, which feels like a similar strategy to McFadzean’s #hashtag: it’s a way to let the outside world in. It’s also interesting to compare O’Reilly’s mention of God (“Cliché won’t revive what’s gone to stone, God knows”) with Ottawa’s Ian Martin (“god loves me so god is gay but if he loves you then he’s straight but if god is not a he or a she then we’re all gay”). If O’Reilly’s “God” exists in the context of religious institutions and traditional faith, Martin’s “God” feels more like a kind of LOL God that lives on Tumblr and reads queer and gender theory.

Montrealer Jay Ritchie’s poem, “Multi-Level Marketing,” is probably the purest example in this collection of letting the noise in. His poem frequently stops to copy-paste faux-profound aphorisms before undermining the quotation by adding, “I read that on Tumblr” or describing it as “advice from the Lululemon bag.” The poem’s style nails perfectly (at least for me) the feeling of going for a walk and losing myself in thoughts, thinking about my problems, random memories and one-liners I’ve read online while being surrounded by language imposed on me by corporations. For this reason, the most poignant parts of Ritchie’s poem, I feel, are the ones that repurpose capitalism to create beauty, such as when he describes himself as “exceeding everyone’s expectations like water in a Coca-Cola bottle” or when he simply remarks, “I buy plastic to feel normal.”

While I could use the points above to try and make some sort of grand argument about the next generation of Canadian poets, in the end, maybe the best thing I can say about In/Words’ *30 Under 30 Anthology* is that reading it gave me hope. I like how these pieces seem interested in pure communication and self-expression rather than getting bogged down by tradition or format, almost like they’re collectively trying to imagine a new path forward for Canadian poetry. To quote Jay Ritchie’s piece, with these poems, “I can imagine a better world.” 

Guillaume Morissette is the author of *New Tab* (Véhicule Press, 2014). If you can, adopt a senior dog from a rescue centre near you.

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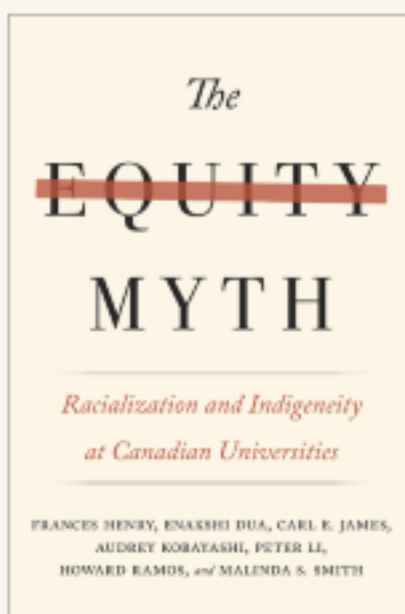
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