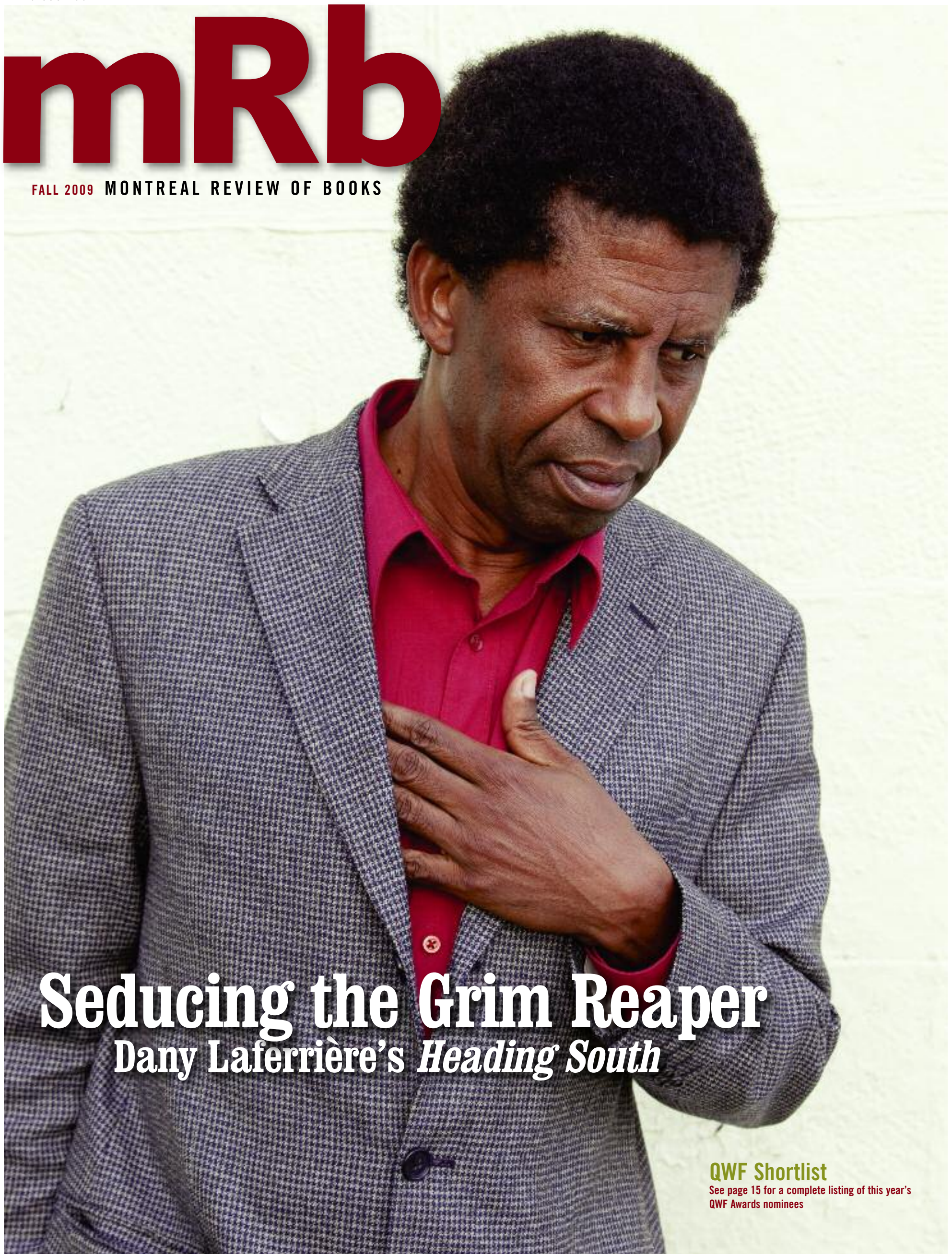


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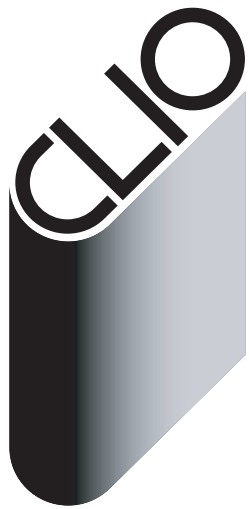
FALL 2009 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS



Seducing the Grim Reaper Dany Laferrière's *Heading South*

QWF Shortlist

See page 15 for a complete listing of this year's QWF Awards nominees



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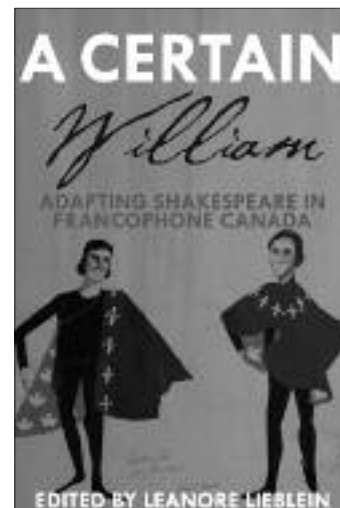
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Cover photo of Dany Laferrière

by T.P. Byrnes

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Reviewed by Andrea Belcham





Sleeping Beauty and the Kiss of Port-au-Prince

By Kim Bourgeois

It's 3 p.m. *sharp* when Dany Laferrière walks into La Bohême on St-Denis, the precise hour we'd agreed to meet and discuss his novel *Heading South*, just translated by Wayne Grady. Consistently prolific, he is keeping a tight schedule these days as he prepares to fly to Paris to launch yet another novel, *L'énigme du retour*. Yet, as glasses of red wine are poured, toasts are made, and conversation begins to flow, the contours of time soften, turn fluid and spill into *Heading South's* major themes: power, sex, and travel.

Borrowing from *La Chair du maître*, Laferrière's novel reworks and adds to this earlier collection of short stories. Once again, we witness a variety of heroines heading south, either permanently or for vacation, to Haiti, a place where time unfurls more casually than in the north: "Life in the fast lane, what could she say! At first she missed it all. Not so much, now," says Christina, a New

York intellectual who follows her husband to Port-au-Prince.

"Work is North America's new God," says Laferrière as we discuss northerners' relationship with time. "We spend the best part of the day at work; when we leave it's already dark...At least in the summer," he continues, "(people) have the impression that there is sun after 5 p.m., and that they have regained some

control over their personal time, procuring a sense of serenity."

"Time is terrifying," he adds. "When the silk workers in Lyon rebelled, they shot at the clock in the cathedral. They understood that it was the clock that was controlling their lives."

In *Heading South*, travel acts as a lubricant, permitting characters to slip past the usual boundaries of

time, race, and social class. Many chapters unfold at a beachfront 1970s hotel in Port-au-Prince, where "free" love rubs up against the very costly Duvalier regime. Well-to-do women, who by northern standards are considered past their prime, extend the span of their sex lives through erotic affairs with teenage Haitians more than willing to provide companionship in exchange for money and gifts. Brenda, for instance, whose husband hadn't "touched her more than a grand total of eight times" in 25 years, desperately thirsts for sensuality. She finds bittersweet relief through Legba, a teenager bearing the name of a

continued on page 18

fiction

A short novel of epic proportions

THE MOUNTAIN CLINIC

By Harold Hoefle

Oberon Press

\$18.95, paper, 111pp

ISBN 978-0-7780-1327-3

A seven-year-old boy who worships his father licks a freshly swept concrete floor to show how thoroughly he cleaned it. The boy becomes lost in a forest of questions when the father never comes home.

In August 1966, Franz Schwende goes to work and doesn't come back. His car is found on a street near Lake Ontario with his clothes neatly folded in the back seat. His widow claims he drowned, but soon large business debts come to light, and Franz's motive is questioned. Indeed, because of his German accent, Franz Schwende, an Austrian immigrant who came to Canada after the Second World War in hope of a better life, had difficulty finding clients. Realizing that he'll never fit in and find a better life in Canada – or at least in Scarborough – Franz runs, leaving behind him questions and chaos, despite his own love of order.

Years later, Walter, Franz's only son, hitchhikes from Scarborough to Vancouver. He wants to escape his mother who, on the few occasions she does

answer Walter's questions, only seems to lie. He also wants to find the place where he fits in. By living in a rooming house with Czech refugees, working in a northern mining town, and then picking coffee in Nicaragua during the Revolution, Walter tries to make order in his life and clear his mind of the ghost that haunts him. Only when he visits Austria to celebrate his grandfather's 100th birthday does Walter realize that some of the answers he needs can only come from family members.

Harold Hoefle's debut novel *The Mountain Clinic* is a strong piece. Like many post-war German authors who followed the *Kahlschlag* (i.e. clear-cutting) movement, Hoefle uses simple, sober language in an effort to strip away any misunderstanding Walter may have about his father's disappearance. Indeed, the aptly named Walter Schwende ("a clearing") tries to clear the forest of questions that surrounds him. Unable to stick to the very

In August 1966, Franz Schwende goes to work and doesn't come back. His car is found on a street near Lake Ontario with his clothes neatly folded in the back seat.

few facts he has managed to gather from his mother and from the police occurrence report on his father's disappearance, Walter often pictures his father's vanishing act, waxing poetic as he loses objectivity.

With *The Mountain Clinic*, Hoefle demonstrates his ability to draw readers in and make them feel for a lost man who appears to have very few feelings himself. Though the father disappears a mere seven pages into the novel, Hoefle is so successful in com-



municating Walter's admiration for his father that readers are just as devastated as the boy when the event occurs. Furthermore, Hoefle is excellent at conveying accents and voices, particularly in the Nicaraguan chapter where the narrative shifts from Walter's voice to the voice of an experienced Nicaraguan coffee-picker.

Devoid of unnecessary words and descriptions, *The Mountain Clinic* leaves no room for misunderstanding or artifice. Yet what is implied, what is hidden, is heavy on the reader's mind. Though this solid novel is just over 100 pages long, the book feels enormous; what is not said would take up twice as many pages. Hoefle's first novel begs to be re-read immediately. **mrb**

By Mélanie Grondin, a Montreal writer and translator.

Montreal in bold

A VERY BOLD LEAP

By Yves Beauchemin

Translated by Wayne Grady

McClelland & Stewart

\$21, paper, 330pp

ISBN 978-0-7710-1258-7

A Very Bold Leap, the third volume of Yves Beauchemin's *The Charles the Bold* series, is appropriately titled. Indeed, this rich, fast-paced, Montreal novel propels its intrepid protagonist through a series of adventures from start to finish.

At the opening of the novel, the hero, Charles Thibodeau, sets out to write the great Montreal novel. At the tender age of 18, in his three-room apartment on Rachel Street, he bangs away on his old typewriter with his dog Boff at his feet. What emerges from this labour of youthful love is a 217-page manuscript titled *A Dark Night*. After sending the manuscript off to *Les Éditions Courtelouges*, and hearing nothing for months, Charles barges into the office of the literary editor Jean-Philippe L'Archevêque to demand a verdict. The editor concedes that Charles has talent but tells him

that one has to live before creating the kind of novel that garners the acclaim that the young writer hungers for.

And live he does. After one final failed attempt at literary fame – Charles pays a vanity press to publish his novel – he seeks ways to earn a living by means other than his pen. He becomes a dog barker for the City of Verdun, canvassing the streets at night, enticing unlicensed dogs to answer his barking calls. This episode comes to an end when his supervisor catches him in the bed of a certain Aglaé Mayrand, the owner of a small, unlicensed, and cantankerous dog.

Perhaps, in the boldness stakes, Charles's apprenticeship with the Church of the Holy Apostles of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and his ensuing position as the personal assistant of the slimy Pastor Raphaël Grandbois takes the prize. This adventure culminates in an unexpected kidnapping – following an unwelcome invitation to embrace the redemptive power of orgiastic sex – and the young



PHOTO: MARTINE DOYON

hero's valiant escape from his captors.

Beauchemin's commentary, via Charles's adventures, on the corruption of the Church reflects a desire to enrich the narrative with snapshots of Quebec's social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. There are references to Félix Leclerc, Gaston Miron, and Denise Filiatrault; to Bourassa, Trudeau, Parizeau, and Lévesque; to Bill 101 and the language laws which so unsettled relations between the Quebec Anglophones and the *pure laine* Francophones in the '80s. The strong language in some of the political

passages – words like "oppression" and "domination" – might arouse a frown of discomfort from readers who don't share the separatist views expressed in the novel.

The author's attempt to weave the landscape of Quebec society into the narrative is sometimes clunky, lacking the dexterity of some of his previous work. Nonetheless, *A Very Bold Leap* is an exciting and satisfying read. The novel displays moments of intense humanity, as during the tragic death of Boff in the arms of his master, or in the emotional turmoil unleashed when Charles is betrayed by those closest to him. As the characters experience the highs and lows of life, the narrator shares with us wonderfully nuanced insights that only one who has lived boldly can formulate with such ease.

The novel ends on a high note – literally. Charles climbs to the top of the clock tower of UQAM to hang a banner, which proclaims: CHARLES WILL MAKE IT ... EVEN WITHOUT A DEGREE! Conceivably, the authentic living he has experienced will give him the insight necessary to write the novel that will honour his city in all of its glory. **mrb**

By Lorraine Ouimet, a Montreal educator and writer.

Rethink that steak

ANIMALS

By Don LePan

Véhicule Press

\$18.95, paper, 160pp

ISBN 978-1-55065-257-4

For his debut novel *Animals*, Broadview Press founder Don LePan has written a speculative fiction that looks into our not-so-bright future. LePan's vision is stark: all the farmable animals we know are dead, and so we've begun to eat our own. The civic and capitalist forces that have previously ground out livestock now work together to demote a sub-class of human into food. These "mongrels," incidentally, have either too many or too few chromosomes.

Animals is fearless and cynical that way, and reading it will make you think twice before pulling that steak out of the freezer for tonight's dinner. The premise alone is enough to make a compelling case for rethinking how our meat is raised and treated. But the narrative has multiple levels, and LePan is very keen to make his argument

irrefutable. Though he ultimately succeeds, he sometimes overshoots his mark along the way.

In *Animals*, there is the story, which involves a young mongrel named Sam Clark, and then there is the story of the story, in which his older brother Broderick Clark recounts the conditions that make Sam's odyssey so speculatively futuristic. Sam is the mongrel society wants to eat. He is the emotional heart of the story; he's our front line in this world of the future. His brother Broderick is the novel's head.

The novel is delivered as two manuscripts. The first is the autobiographical writing of writer Naomi Okun, who as a girl discovered the toddler Sam bundled up on her porch after his mother could no longer afford to keep him. The second features Broderick's extensive essay on the industry and legalities of mongrel farming, and the details of how the future world could have devolved to such a state. There are copious footnotes added to the second manuscript. Broderick obviously knows a lot about the mass-farming industry,



LePan's vision is stark: all the farmable animals we know are dead, and so we've begun to eat our own.

as does LePan, and the reader can't help but feel that the character is little more than a mouthpiece for the author.

It's not as if these industry specifics are strictly necessary for the enjoyment of the central story. Sam's life as Naomi's pet, and the divisions his presence exposes in the attitudes of her parents, carry manifest social implications about what it means to be human in an age when a definition can turn a human into food. Here, LePan's storytelling skills are on full display and the narrative brims with tension.

So it's with some reluctance that the reader continuously breaks away from this more successful half of the novel to read the university-style lecture delivered by Broderick. The driving purpose behind all speculative fiction is ultimate-

ly the blend of story and argumentation. In *Animals*, that blend is denied. LePan has charged Sam with providing the fiction, while his brother has been handed the responsibility of doing the speculation.

Despite its structural issues, *Animals* is a brave and frequently fascinating debut novel, wrought with painful choices, harrowing journeys, and a deep passion for its subject matter. LePan has proven admirably that he has the chops to write a successful novel, or a work of non-fiction on the future of meat. One hopes that next time he won't shoehorn them both into the same book. **mRb**

By Dimitri Nasrallah, a novelist and music journalist.

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A study in evil

FALL

By Colin McAdam

Hamish Hamilton

(Penguin Canada)

\$32, cloth, 358pp

ISBN 978-0-670-06720-6

PHOTO: SUZANNE HANCOCK



From *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to *Dead Poets Society*, with countless points between, private boarding schools have long provided a ready-made setting for coming-of-age narratives. As Colin McAdam has one of his new novel's characters say, "You can't house so many young guys together and not have fighting and weird things." It's a maxim that plays itself out in *Fall's* St. Ebury, an Ottawa establishment for the sons (and a few daughters) of the ruling class. In the case of Noel, *Fall's* alienated loner hero, "weird things" hardly begins to describe it.

Noel is actually one or two social-ladder rungs below most of his classmates. His father is a mid-level diplomat able to send his son to a private school only through the special favours his position allows. So when Noel is billeted for his senior year with Julius, son of the American ambassador to Canada, a degree of envy is to be expected. The situation is complicated by the fact that the titular female student who's the object of Noel's affections (her name is short for Fallon) is Julius's girlfriend. Given that Noel is a young man with a budding streak of sadism, and even more prone than most his age to the nursing of delusional hopes and resentments, trouble is all but guaranteed.

The novel's perspective alternates between that of Noel looking back on events from a decade-later adult vantage and Julius's in-the-moment, near stream-of-consciousness accounts, most involving his time with Fall. Noel therefore gets to exercise a degree of wisdom while Julius is locked into a world-view not yet fully formed. It's a gambit on McAdam's part, risking a skewing of reader sympathy one way or the other, but over the course of the novel the device takes on its own logic. Julius, we come to see, will remain marked by his St. Ebury experience in ways beyond his control. It helps that there are also a handful of short but crucial interludes from the perspective of a chauffeur who works for Julius's father. William provides a balancing working-class

take on the privileged world of the protagonists. McAdam is equally convincing in all three voices, something that won't surprise readers of his richly hued debut *Some Great Thing*.

If anything's missing it's the voice of Fall herself. For someone at the centre of so much turmoil she's something of a cipher. Fans of *Some Great Thing*, where the hard-drinking Kathleen Herlihy was so vividly drawn, may at first be disappointed in this regard, but the new novel's overwhelming maleness is no doubt part of McAdam's point. *Fall* is a novel about how young men process the world; in this case it's young men in a place whose outdated strictures make the already tangled thicket of late adolescence all the more fraught.

Some may find themselves wondering just how Noel's background explains the cruel extremes to which he eventually resorts: while hardly idyllic, his life is no more trying than that of countless others who have adjusted far better. In declining to offer any easy explanations – in leaving Noel essentially a mystery, to himself as much as to the reader – McAdam is again taking a chance. But it's that same sense of risk that makes *Fall* such a gripping read. Its evil is all the more chilling for its banality.

If there had been any doubt, Colin McAdam has now cemented his place on the list of Canadian novelists who are pushing the form ahead, while keeping it accessible. As a bonus, he has, in tandem with André Alexis, achieved what might once have seemed unthinkable: Canada's capital is now a setting of glamour and mystery. mb

Fall has been longlisted for the 2009 Scotiabank Giller Prize.

By Ian McGillis, author of *A Tourist's Guide to Glengarry*, who is working on his second novel.

Prose and Prozac

VALLEY OF FIRE

By Steven Manners

Dundurn Group

\$21.99, paper, 224pp

ISBN 978-1-55488-406-3

Reviewed from unedited manuscript

The Pharmaceutical-Industrial Complex and its handmaiden, psychiatry, garner decidedly mixed receptions in the general public these days. Ubiquitous prescription drugs save some lives, yet in other situations they threaten to edge out the talking cure as a means of dealing with anxiety and depression. Boon or bane, Prozac and its kin will be around as long as we have the need to adjust everything from our grasp of reality to our ability to focus. Critics abound, most of them in the realm of non-fiction; fiction is rarer. Steven Manners takes the psychiatric viewpoint in *Valley of Fire*.

John Munin provides that eye on the world. Sharp, humourless, preferring to speak analytically than to be socially accommodating, he questions and dissects everything – like Mr. Spock, but without the endearing quirks.

A resident of Montreal, Munin finds himself a fish out of water during a conference in Las Vegas, giving Manners more than enough opportunity to play with life-as-gambling imagery. Munin has been invited there to present his findings on a drug targeting Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Trouble is, his sample – that crucial experimental element – consists of one, and only one, trial participant: Penelope, a germ phobic woman who hoards newspapers. Yet the drug czars who manufacture the pill remain interested enough in his findings to pave his way with gold. Their only problem seems to be the limited market: OCD isn't common enough. Out there in the world, they imagine, lies "a plague of obsessions and compulsions waiting for a smart marketer to declare a pandemic."

The strongest scenes involve drug companies, and psychiatry itself. The scathing observations offered by the narrator, or Munin, or other characters are smart, witty, and bang-on. The conference, a spectacle of excess and smugness, feels especially authentic. The criteria for success are as reductionist as the science

behind the pills themselves – human lives be damned.

A love story told in flashback breaks up the central tale, but it is comparably anemic, and only serves to prove how stiff the main character is. Munin (his name means "memory," after one of the Norse god Odin's two ravens) is yet another in a long parade of phlegmatic protagonists in English literature on both sides of the pond. In addition, since he lacks a stand-out sidekick or love interest, there is little or no escape from his narrative bubble.

In addition to having a man-without-qualities as a main character (neither hero nor villain), Manners' plot could be stronger. Perhaps a "novel of ideas" (which this might be called) does not have to emphasize plot quite so much. Far more annoying is the diction: either rapid-fire short sentences, unwieldy longer ones with idiosyncratic comma use, or connected independent clauses, e.g., "Hughes coughs, it's hard to breathe." Here and there we find smoothly written passages, but most feel rushed. Perhaps Manners is trying, consciously or not, to reflect the pace of the professions he depicts, not to mention the surreal desert setting.

Munin is staring out at the Strip: tourists with cameras, gamblers with plastic cups mostly half-filled with coins, car jockeys and casino workers before their shifts. An endless parade of back-and-forth. Everyone in America was in a constant state of migration: they quit jobs, swapped spouses, got on the interstate. Everyone looking for a second chance and Vegas was there to give it to them.

Even if Manners intended this resonance, some variation would be fitting.

Caveats aside, Manners – who was a finalist for the Quebec Writers' Federation Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction for his story collection, *Wound Ballistics* in 2002 – is an insightful novelist. As the author of a non-fiction book on pharmacology, he is well equipped to critique our chemical-based *Zeitgeist*. Let's hope the prosody comes next time he chooses fiction. mb

By Louise Fabiani, a Montreal science writer, poet, and critic.

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—Ian Ferrier

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SHORT ACCOUNTS OF TRAGIC OCCURENCES

By Nick McArthur

DC Books

\$16.95, paper, 82pp

ISBN 978-1-897190-50-0

Dying is easy, comedy is hard. Nick McArthur seems to find both in equal quantities, jovially mixing dark humour and slapstick.

"I write five, ten obituaries a day, mostly for dead people," writes McArthur (in what could be an autobiographical excerpt) in "The Obituary Writer's Story," which is the 'pre-mortem' for a woman who continues living long after her family has resorted to pulling the plug.

A graduate of Concordia's creative writing program, McArthur anthologizes some material previously published in *Matrix* magazine (including the excerpt above), in *Short Accounts of Tragic Occurrences*, an eclectic and sometimes frighteningly bizarre series of stories. Take a look at one of his sharp left turns:

Mr. Bloomer boiled the eggs and mashed them in a large bowl. He added mayonnaise and chopped

onions, stirred the mix, buttered the bread, and died before lunchtime. The sandwich, uneaten, lay on the table. The mayonnaise was full of regret, and the eggs never said goodbye to their mother. The onions cried.

Though certainly not everyone in the book dies, those who do never seem quite prepared, nor are they particularly introspective in their final moments. In "Effective in Five Minutes," for example, a man who has just swallowed a cyanide tablet while watching *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Movie*, is more wrapped up in the experience of watching the film than in the experience of dying – and it doesn't even seem to be that good a film.

In "Sayreville," a man and a woman meet in a bar and instantly arrange to be married by a suicide cult. Giving themselves to the cult without reservation, they bypass the mandatory brainwashing period but wisely agree not to rush into parenthood as well.

In "Comments Heard Around the World in the Hours Before It Ended," a *Dr. Strangelove*-esque story, the governments of presumably evil countries – like the infamous members of the "axis of evil" – assemble in bunkers prior to the planet's demise. Baffled



observations are made by anonymous individuals around the world. The cause of this imminent human extinction is a seemingly irrelevant detail to McArthur; it is a MacGuffin to get to the hilarity that he assumes will ensue. Just so we don't get bored, McArthur throws in a time traveller who hits on women and has the best excuse ever for a quick getaway when things don't seem to be going well: he tells them that his future self has appeared expressly in order to forbid their courtship.

McArthur is richly imaginative and almost always macabre. He gleefully hops and bounds over the deeper questions concerning life and death, instead putting forward original queries such as: how soon following an apocalypse can another apocalypse occur?

When death isn't the be-all and end-all of his stories, *Short Accounts* explores the grossness of human anatomy. In a sequel of sorts to his apocalypse tale, McArthur conjures up a world inhabited by mutants produced by the fallout of a million atomic weapons. All natural laws are broken. Mother Nature is free to experiment with endless variations of soon-to-be extinct species, which – due to radiation – are no longer inhibited from crossbreeding. Centaurs and fauns appear and disappear quite early in the process, before giving way to more hideous mutations.

True to its name, *Short Accounts of Tragic Occurrences* is brief. For some, McArthur will come as a refreshing new literary voice, while those not expecting his dark wit and bizarre subject matter might be turned off instantly. Such readers should re-examine their first impression and dare themselves to dig deeper into what McArthur has to offer. mrb

By Christopher Olson, Literary Arts Editor of Concordia's *The Link*.

Woo-woo

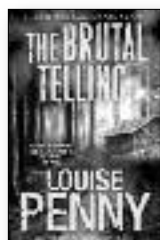
THE BRUTAL TELLING

By Louise Penny

Hodder Headline

\$24.95, paper, 374pp

ISBN 978-0-7553-4104-7



A scary tale told by firelight opens the fifth mystery in Louise Penny's Three Pines series. The scary tale comes up again and again, framing and underpinning the story; it is supposed to be "mythic" and powerful. It failed, however, to resonate at all with this reviewer, read-

ing rather as a meaningless mishmash of ersatz mythology.

On a more mundane plane, the story begins when the body of an unknown old man is found in Olivier and Gabri's Bistro, at the heart of the village of Three Pines. Chief Inspector Gamache and his team are called in and the narrative moves along briskly, with great characters and all of Penny's usual charm, wit, and ebullience – until about the halfway point. Then, just when you have been hoping it would never end...well, be careful what you wish for.

Several possible culprits are produced, each with tantalising but unconnected backstories. Numerous unlikely clues also appear, including a cabin full of priceless art treasures,

some of which are linked to the name Charlotte; a code called Caesar's Shift; and the word "WOO," which was the name of Emily Carr's monkey, as well as being a variant of "woo-woo," a British slang word which, according to Google, "refers to ideas considered irrational or based on extremely flimsy evidence or that appeal to mysterious occult forces or powers."

All this makes perfect sense to Chief Inspector Gamache, who hares off to the Queen Charlotte Islands to inspect Haida totem poles before returning to rural Quebec to make his arrest.

We could wish that Penny's team of editors and advisors had been a little more brutal as regards the plotting of this one. But as with all Penny's books, it remains an enjoyable read. mrb



By Elspeth Redmond, a Baie d'Urfe writer and reviewer.

Fall 2009

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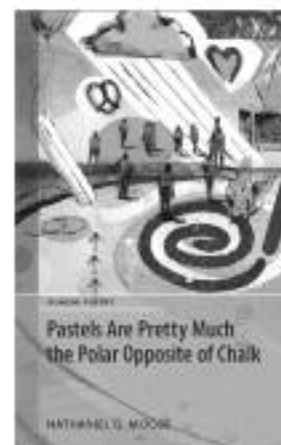
MESSAGE TO ERIN: AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE IRISH IN CANADA, 1745-2010 DOCUMENTS THE HIBERNIAN CONTRIBUTION TO CANADIAN LETTERS WITH REPRESENTATIVE SELECTIONS BOTH OF IRISH WRITING ABOUT CANADA AND IRISH-CANADIAN WRITING ABOUT THE IRISH. THE BOOK BRINGS TOGETHER A WIDE VARIETY OF UN-REPRINTED AND NEGLECTED EARLY WRITING FROM THE FULL SPECTRUM OF THE IRISH-CANADIAN COMMUNITY, DRAWING SELECTIONS FROM EARLY PERIODICALS AND NEWSPAPERS, RARE IMPRINTS AND EPHEMERAL LITERATURE, AND INCLUDING POETRY, FICTION, MEMOIRS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND HISTORICAL WRITING TO DOCUMENT THE SENTIMENTS, VALUES, AND PREOCCUPATIONS OF THE IRISH IN CANADA.

MESSAGE TO ERIN
EDITED BY DANIEL O'LEARY
— \$18.95 PAPER



PASTELS ARE PRETTY MUCH THE POLAR OPPOSITE OF CHALK IS ABOUT THE SYNTAX OF DISTINCTION, UNLIKELY COMPARISON, AND THE COLORFUL DRAMA THAT COMES WITH CHOOSING BETWEEN ACTIONS, PEOPLE, AND THINGS. NATHANIEL G. MOORE'S POETRY BEARS WITNESS TO STAGED ALTERCATIONS BETWEEN PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINED OPPOSITIONS, AND ASKS THE STRANGEST QUESTIONS: DO I LIKE PRETZELS? WHAT KIND OF PRETZELS DO I PREFER? HOW DO I FEEL? WOULD I RATHER WATCH A CAR CHASE OR BE IN ONE? WHAT IS GOLDEN FLINT? DO THEY SELL THAT AT THE GROCERY STORE? HAVE I TOLD YOU THE STORY OF WHEN I FELL IN LOVE WITH YOU? LIKE A SENSITIVE PSYCHO SURREALIST, MOORE PROVIDES ANSWERS TO ALL THE QUESTIONS IN HIS WONDERFULLY WROUGHT AND AFFECTING POETIC RIDDLES.

PASTELS ARE PRETTY MUCH THE POLAR OPPOSITE OF CHALK
BY NATHANIEL G. MOORE
— \$16.95 PAPER, \$31.95 BOUND



Death on the rocks

ICED UNDER

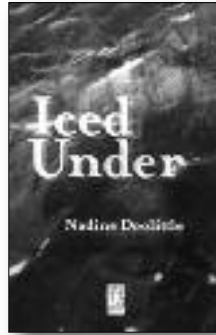
By Nadine Doolittle

Bayeux Arts

\$21.95, paper, 237pp

ISBN 978-1-897411-04-9

Nadine Doolittle's debut novel is a mixture of literature, mystery, and romance. The story soars thanks to Doolittle's elegant and poetic language, and in spite of an unsympathetic protagonist. This is Sara Wolesley, recently divorced with two young daughters. Sara's curiously self-destructive tendencies can be irritating, if not downright dangerous. Left by her upwardly mobile, emotionally dead husband, Sara seeks no alimony although she was a stay-at-home mum, brings little in the way of material goods with her from the marriage, eventually won't fight to keep her daughters, and doesn't seem to know how to ask the people she meets how to keep pipes from freezing, or how to start a fire. She buys wine, but can't afford bologna.



She comes to a ruined cottage by the shores of Hennessy Lake in West Quebec just after Christmas. Her poverty, isolation, the freezing pipes, and the chill of the cottage drive her to the point of desperation. She tries to chop a hole in the ice to get water, and sees a dead child amongst the frozen reeds.

Under the frozen water window, the grasses waved to her. She waved back. The lake groaned and the reeds parted:

A blink of something white. Something down there. Moving in the icy tide.

A hand.

Doubting, Sara cupped her hands like a scuba mask and pressed her face to the ice. At the bottom of the lake, bobbing gently, a small white hand curled in

among the reeds. Unmistakable. Hair-lifting, she heard herself whimper. Seconds passed, fully conscious now, her mouth drying –

The reeds flattened in an undertow and the face of a little girl stared up at her.

The reader can see the plot thickening long before Sara does. The tried-and-true elements of a romance novel – wounded hero, ruined house, unlikely villain – are used to great effect in *Iced Under*, adding to the Brontë-esque

sense of brooding landscape and looming tragedy. Recurring motifs are ice and alcohol: both are essential elements in the remote Quebec village's winter existence.

Doolittle's language is gorgeous, her descriptions of the Gatineau countryside a dream:

Not so much as a streetlight shone on the lonely stretch of road that bisected a steep hill. On one side, mailboxes marked driveways that lunged up to homes screened by mini-forests, and on the other was a frozen marsh that disappeared in a tangle of grey scrub. The road crested and then flattened as the trees gave way to fields. A clutch of poplars and Manitoba maples competed for space in a stream that wound through the valley where dried yellow grasses stood waist deep above the snow.

But the glaring editorial mistakes do the author and the reader an injustice. To have so many oddly hyphenated adjectives, uncorrected verbs, and some odd facts (the mailman chasing Sara down to say she had to use her maiden name when in fact that only applies to women married in Quebec after a certain date) turned what should have been a smooth read into a bumpy one. mb

By Margaret Goldik, Montreal Review of Books editor, and avid mystery reader.

FENCES IN BREATHING

By Nicole Brossard

Translated by

Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood

Coach House Books

\$18.95, paper, 114pp

ISBN 978-1-55245-213-4

A nebulous writer named Anne is at the centre of this experimental novel about language and meaning. Taking refuge in a Swiss chateau at the invitation of an equally mysterious retired publisher, Anne begins "slowly writing a novel in a language other than my own."

Anne's characters gradually take shape: Charles, a woodworker and sculptor in love with June, the owner of a video store; Kim, the sister with whom he lives, about to start a new life in a northern town; and Laure Ravin, a workaholic lawyer obsessed with both the Patriot Act and her dying mother. As these figures grow more real to their restless creator, they begin to haunt her enchanting exile.

The language with which their stories are built conceals as much as it betrays, not only about the characters but also about the writer-narrator. Full of tantalizing loose ends and teasing suggestions, this novel invites the reader into a psychological landscape as complex and remote as the chateau in which the action takes place. **AS**

Fences in Breathing has been shortlisted for the 2009 Writers' Trust Prize.

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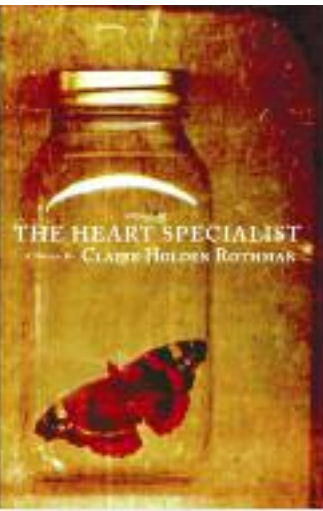
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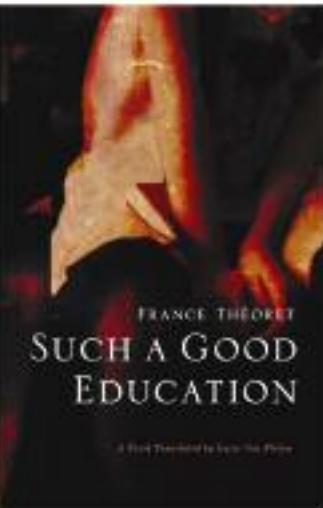
author of *THE SILENT RAGA*



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FRANCE THÉORET
translated by LOUISE VON FLOTOW

2006 FINALIST
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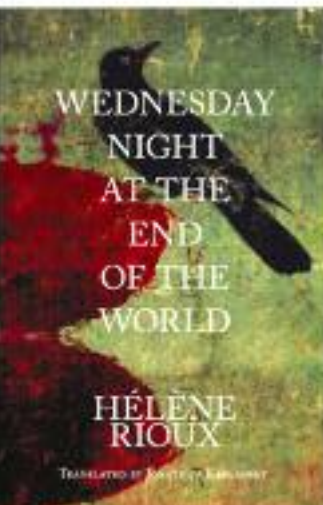
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HÉLÈNE RIOUX
translated by JONATHAN KAPLANSKY

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Atwater

A love exposed

PHOTO: CLAUDE LALUMIERE

Elise Moser's debut novel explores love, loss, and the secrets in between

BY FIONA O'CONNOR



St-Laurent Boulevard's Salon b is a second-story café which overlooks a funeral home. It is strangely fitting that I meet two-time CBC-QWF Short Story Competition winner and current QWF President Elise Moser here, to discuss themes related not only to our venue but to her debut novel: death, loss, mourning, life, love and what, for Moser, often ties them all together, literature.

The soft-spoken Moser says, "I feel like having started writing just completely opened this whole new world, and people are unbelievably generous about everything." The optimism and humility with which Moser discusses writing her first novel underline the inherent paradox of its subject matter. *Because I Have Loved and Hidden It*, to be published by Cormorant Books this fall, focuses on death and sadness and the revelations about life and happiness they spawn for the story's protagonist, middle-aged Julia Goodman.

Against the vivid backdrop of present-day Montreal, we meet Julia, the manager of an upscale garden store, at the moment of her estranged mother's funeral. Establishing the novel's

melancholy mood, the death of Julia's non-nurturing mother serves to underscore the emotional desperation and patterns of mismanaged love that come to define our protagonist's character. But before leading us into the psychological underpinnings of her conflict, Moser swiftly draws us into what is, at least initially, Julia's primary preoccupation and sorrow: the mysterious disappearance of her married lover, Nicholas.

Nicholas, a well-respected writer in the field of architectural history, goes missing while on a research trip in Morocco. Our impression of him forms out of the rhythmic unfolding of Julia's detailed memories, frequent daydreams, and obsessive speculations as to his possible whereabouts. While Nicholas's physical absence lends itself to his character's seductive mystique, the reader soon recognizes – seemingly before the protagonist – both the origins and inevitable outcome of her unrequited devotion to him.

As a consequence of her losses, Julia becomes unmoored. Her longing for her lover's inconstant attention intensifies even as she is forced to question the unhappiness **continued on page 17**

THE RIOT THAT NEVER WAS

The military shooting of three Montrealers in 1832 and the official cover-up

JAMES JACKSON



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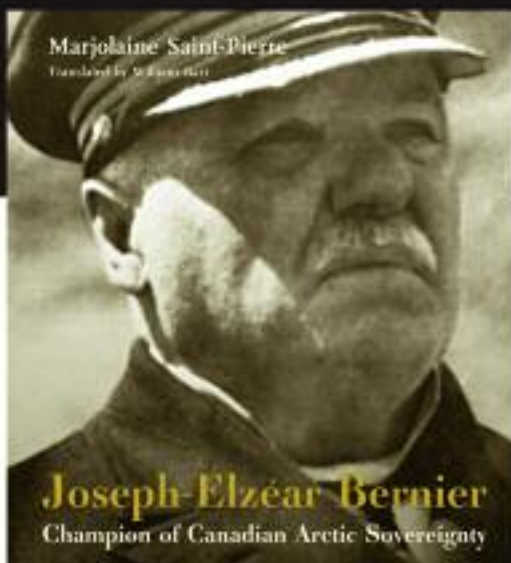
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AMERICA'S GIFT: WHAT THE WORLD OWES TO THE AMERICAS AND THEIR FIRST INHABITANTS

By Käthe Roth and Denis Vaugeois
Translated and adapted by Käthe Roth
Baraka Books
\$24.95, paper, 276pp
ISBN 978-0-9812405-2-7

Did you know that the word potato comes from the Taino word *batata*? Or that the word chipmunk comes from the Ojibway *atchitamon*? Authors Käthe Roth and Denis Vaugeois have put together a fascinating compendium of English words that owe their etymological origins to native languages of the Americas.

But *America's Gift* does more than this; working within the structure of an illustrated dictionary, Roth and Vaugeois also manage to demonstrate how the civilizations of pre-contact America affected the way the world lives, eats, and thinks today. In addition to specific words, broader thematic entries are incorporated, on topics such as nutrition, team sports, electrification, and slavery.

In his foreword, Vaugeois refers to the numerous reports that were brought back to Europe by early explorers and missionaries – reports that marveled at the egalitarian nature of many of the aboriginal societies. He points out that these widely read publications had an impact on writers such as Thomas

More, Montaigne, and Voltaire. The authors make good use of the foreword and introduction to place the book's material in a greater context, while offering readers some history of early contact and clashes between the cultures of Europe and the Americas.

Many of the words listed in *America's Gift* refer to native plants and animals. Tomato, for example (from the Nahuatl language *tomatl*) is the American-born fruit that would go on to transform Italian cuisine. Other words describe products, such as the original jerky made from llama meat (from the Quechuan language *ch'arki* or *charqui*).

There are admittedly few words that refer to abstract notions, although readers will find that the word mugwump (one who remains neutral, or is unable to make a decision) comes from the Massachusetts language's *mugquomp*. English may have incorporated fewer aboriginal words than other languages: under the entry Tupi-Guanari, it is shown that contributions by this group of aboriginal languages would make a Brazilian Portuguese edition of this book staggeringly heavy.

A couple of entries ought to be clarified. Why, for example, should the word caucus be attributed to

the Algonkian word for counsellor, *caucawasu*, and not the Latin *caucum* or the Greek *kâukos*? A brief explanation – or definitions of the contested words – is in order. Also, the linguistic root of the word tobacco is contradicted within the entry itself, with no reconciliation.

But looking at the bigger picture – and Roth and Vaugeois do an admirable job of painting big pictures within small entries – *America's Gift* is a thought-provoking read that will be a valuable resource for students and scholars alike. Perhaps the most striking testimonial of the authors' accomplishment lies in its own summary of words, the “Contents by Subject” section in the back. *America's*

Gift is best enjoyed by picking a word from this list and following one's nose through the entries and their cross-references. The gist of the authors' message grows clear: the Americas were far from being a “new” world that was discovered by the old. Rather, “the encounter of two old worlds gave rise to a truly

new world on both sides of the Atlantic.” On both sides of the Atlantic and well beyond, as Roth and Vaugeois demonstrate.

Published originally on the 500th anniversary of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus, the French language *L'Indien généreux : Ce que le monde doit aux Amériques*, has been reprinted consistently since. Now English-language readers may enjoy the bounty of *America's Gift*. mrb

By Raquel Rivera, writer, artist and co-founder of In My Hysterical Opinion (www.imho-reviews.com), a collection of book, movie, and music reviews. Her latest book for children is *Tuk and the Whale* (Groundwood Books, 2008).

Canada's (disgustingly) dirty laundry

THE BLACK BOOK OF CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

By Yves Engler
Fernwood Publishing
\$24.95, paper, 284pp
ISBN 978-1-55266-314-1

Want to buy a thick black book replete with salaciousness and skullduggery?

In *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy*, Montreal writer and activist Yves Engler compiles a long and disgustingly dirty laundry list of Canada's international transgressions. For those who would stand by Canada's status as a “peacekeeper” and “honest broker,” Engler presents an impressive cascade of evidence that Canada is not exactly a force for good in the world.

According to Engler, Canada has carefully maintained its “good guy” image as a convenient guise for its real foreign policy priorities: the aiding and abetting of empire (first British, now American), and protection and promotion of investments of our major corporations. Our country is

home to some of the world's largest mining, resource, and manufacturing firms; it comes as no surprise that these, along with our five banks, have made multimillion dollar investments in places like the Congo, Guatemala, Iraq, Chile, apartheid South Africa, China, Vietnam, and others. Our diplomatic efforts and foreign aid policies have not only directly supported these corporations, Engler demonstrates, but have also been used to rewrite labour and environmental codes for their benefit, leading to some of the worst industrial practices in the world.

Engler further argues that our international aid as well as weapons sales have helped prop up a rogue's gallery of brutal dictators: our forces have been involved in the deposition of democratically elected leaders such as Aristide in Haiti and Lumumba in the Congo. For all the positive spin on our refusal to join the US in invading Vietnam or Iraq, closer examination shows that we have provided extensive military and logistical support for both ventures. Even our peacekeeping and Pearson's role in the Middle East – which lead to his Nobel Peace Prize – are revealed by Engler to have had questionable aims and



results. With recent talk of “pulling our weight” in the world, it becomes clear that we are a willing, if underhanded, junior partner of the United States. As Engler informs us, Jean Chrétien in his memoir recounts telling

Bill Clinton, “Keeping some distance will be good for both of us. If we look as though we're the fifty-first state of the United States, there's nothing we can do for you internationally, just as the governor of a state can't do anything for you internationally. But if we look independent enough, we can do

things for you that even the CIA cannot do.”

While Engler's writing delivers plenty of punch, he mostly lets facts – meticulously researched and substantiated – speak for themselves. *The Black Book* is so full of detail it can make one's head swim: at times, it is a rather academic read. It will doubtless prove a significant resource for international solidarity activists and specialists in foreign policy. For the rest of us, it provides a valuable glimpse into shadowy machinations that all too often fall entirely under our radar.

Engler's is a high ideal: that Canadians, armed with the knowledge in his book, “debate and shape what is being done around the world in their name,” and ultimately “demand altruistic aid, real international cooperation, benevolent peacekeeping instead of militarism, and the rule of law instead of an empire's might.” Foreign policy, however, has almost never been high on our election agenda: our leaders, at first daunted by the world stage, soon find it an easy place to perform. Perhaps with further activism Engler and others will succeed in altering the tincture of our national discussion. mrb

By Brian Campbell, whose collection of prose poems *Passenger Flight*, was recently released by Signature Editions.

Creating literature

DONE WITH SLAVERY: THE BLACK FACT IN MONTREAL 1760-1840

By Frank Mackey

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$49.95, cloth, 632pp

ISBN 978-0-7735-3578-7

Reviewed from galleys

With the release of Frank Mackey's *Done with Slavery*, Black historians may be buoyed by a credible addition to the slowly growing body of historical literature on Blacks in Montreal. The struggle to re-create a national narrative that includes Blacks has been hampered by the dearth of contemporary scholars of African-Canadian studies and by the incremental pace of scholarly publishing. For the pace to accelerate, a literature must first be created, then disseminated, and ultimately debated. *Done with Slavery* is a great step in that direction.

Subsequent to the publication of my

book, *Blacks in Montreal 1628-1986*, Montreal's first comprehensive history on Blacks, monographs have focused on uncovering historical nuggets about the Black presence prior to the twentieth century. Mackey follows that trend, tracing Black Montreal history from the influx of Anglo-American slaves following the battle of the Plains of Abraham until the nineteenth century. This was

the period Mackey covered in 2004 in *Black Then: Blacks and Montreal, 1780s-1880s*. This was a highly readable and engaging collection of 30 distinct stories about Montreal's unknown Blacks, some upstanding citizens and others scoundrels. For the most part, the stories underscored the poignancy of lives made raw due to slavery and its legacy of racism within Montreal.

In *Done with Slavery*, Mackey revisits many characters from *Black Then* in order to contextualize and buttress his thesis that slavery's end in Montreal had actually occurred decades before the "mythic" end on August 1, 1834. In fact, Mackey strongly contends that the British Emancipation Act of 1833, still celebrated in Ontario and other places worldwide, had no effect on slavery in

Quebec because of the province's unique confluence of legal and social circumstances.

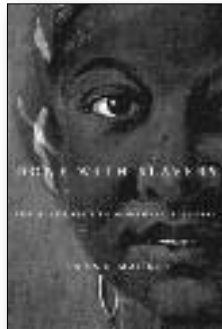
Mackey has pulled together an impressive array of archival sources and reinterprets them in light of his own dogged research. Nothing and no one is sacred; challenging existing facts is fair game. Like all serious writers of African-Canadian history, Mackey opens with a discussion of the difficulties of locating reliable Black sources and of the impossibility of establishing an unbroken chain of evidence. He asks: How can one determine the precise number of Blacks through records when there was no agreement on who was Black in Montreal? Moreover if a particular record referred to an individual as Black why assume he or she was a slave? The Introduction alone is worth a read, and along with Chapter 11 (in which the same subject is elaborated), should soon find its place on suggested reading lists in courses on Canadian and Quebec historiography, racism, settlement, and ethnicity.

Another thread Mackey weaves into the narrative is that "Christians and Jews, French- and English-speaking, male and female, high and low – once engaged in slavery in Quebec..." This point builds on pioneering Quebec his-

torian Marcel Trudel's earlier evidence of the widespread use of slaves in Quebec, among all classes and in all regions. Yet despite this acknowledgment, Mackey challenges the assertion that Quebecers of the day were racist and that the law was their handmaiden. He attempts to recast the city's landscape through class and language, not race, and even suggests that race be taken out of the equation in order to truly understand the unique circumstances of Montreal's Black past. Surely this point alone marks a radical break from the voluminous literature making the case that there has always been a relationship between race and the enslavement of non-white populations, as between racist ideas and the persistence of inequality.

Done with Slavery is not an easy read; it is replete with statistics, interwoven with dizzying genealogical and legal threads. The breadth of Mackey's research is remarkable, and the book's 400-plus pages (including appendices) are sure to keep history buffs busy for years. **MG**

By Dr. Dorothy Williams, author of *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal*, and program director at the Black Community Resource Centre.



Still anyone's game

CANADA'S GAME: HOCKEY AND IDENTITY

Edited by Andrew C. Holman

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$24.95, paper, 248pp

ISBN 978-0-7735-3598-5

These ten disparate essays by as many authors first appeared as papers at a scholarly conference entitled, "Canada's Game?" If the question mark has been dropped from the title, it's not because the problem has been solved. In fact, the most striking thing about this collection is the number of issues it raises.

There's also no answer to another problematic term, "Canadian identity," because the book focuses on how our identity continues to be proposed through hockey. In some ways this proves a narrow field, particularly in the section on sports fiction. It may be that the areas under discussion have only begun to be explored. Too late, in some cases: Russell Field's piece on early NHL fans is primarily a confession of what can no longer be known.

Just one essay deals with Quebec, but it more than carries its weight in provocation. Robert Dennis covers the Montreal Forum's closing ceremonies, when the Canadiens were moving to the (then) Molson Centre. It was 1996, the year after the last sovereignty referendum; the times' flavour is evoked by a film, *Le Fantôme du Forum*, produced by the PQ-led government for the occasion. It's enough to say that it

involves a culturally-insensitive Anglophone boss, and his Francophone employee: the latter has to beg for time off to see Maurice Richard score number 500 at the arena, and dies trying.

While the PQ obviously grasped the Forum's part in the Canadiens' cachet, Dennis indicates his reluctance to do so by trying to associate the building's importance with the religious and political rallies held there. He's far more confident about the Molsons, who were putting their own spin on the Forum legend. In Dennis's view, they "usurped" a "public urban space" for commercial interests. Molson's directors will be wondering what they paid for when they bought the Forum, and why the author lets the PQ off so easily. But Dennis is right, in a sense: a "usurped" Forum explains popular feelings about its post-Canadiens fate.

The theme of "usurping for commercial interest" points to this book's third problematic term: hockey. To most Canadians it's synonymous with the NHL, but that wasn't always so. Several essays cover the development of the professional league as part of the emerging North American entertainment industry, turning boys who once played on a village team into big city stars, more often than not across the border. The nearest thing to a recurring

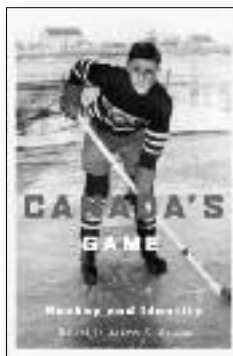
theme in *Canada's Game*, and the one that may finally define us as Canadians, is anti-Americanism. As Brian Kennedy notes, even the 1972 Canada-USSR series had its blame-the-Yanks side. But Craig Hyatt's and Julie Stevens' essay "Are Americans Really Hockey's Villains?" points out that the men who made the professional game what it is were Canadians, from ex-McGill defenseman James Norris to those

Winnipeg businessmen who let the Jets go to Phoenix.

The NHL business is thoroughly explored in Julian Ammirante's study of the 2004 lockout. Ammirante is stronger on the game's economics than on the number of Stanley Cups Gretzky won, but he does make a statement that should grab the thinking fan's attention: hockey as a commodity, and the wish for a repatriated sport, don't equate. Still, he doesn't explain why Canadians think they need a Hamilton franchise.

The only contributors to *Canada's Game* who research what fans are thinking – and almost the only ones who rely on unpublished material – are Hyatt and Stevens, whose discipline is sports management. This suggests that more primary research might help the other, more traditional academic disciplines represented to grasp hockey less partially. *Canada's Game* makes a good set of starting points. **MG**

By Ted Smith, Ottawa editor and writer.



GHOST TRACKS: SURPRISING STORIES OF THE SUPERNATURAL ON RAILS

By Jay Underwood

Railfare*DC Books

\$24.95, paper, 128pp

ISBN 978-1-897190-47-0

If you want ghost stories, you could be disappointed in *Ghost Tracks*. If you love trains, you'll love this book.

Jay Underwood, Maritime-born-and-bred journalist and train aficionado, is now in his fifth term as president of the Nova Scotia Railway Heritage Society, and has written four books on trains, focusing on topics "not previously covered by conventional history texts." *Ghost Tracks* is no exception. With a subtitle of "How death, disease, wrecks, bridge curses and even ghosts haunted Nova Scotia's railways," *Ghost Tracks* shows that Underwood knows very odd things about trains.

Unfortunately for the reader who wants supernatural chills, the real chills come from the conditions of the times – from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries, when train wrecks were a frighteningly common occurrence. Underwood does discuss the ghosts and "hoodoo" locomotives but he tries to discern the true stories behind the legends, and has used genealogists, railway records, and oral tradition to do so. The reader is left with an image of tough, hard-working, courageous men who met horrible deaths amid twisted metal and hissing steam. Even if – as it seems – the ghost stories cannot be tied to any specific time or event, the true stories of the Intercolonial Railway have dash and colour beyond any fairy tale.

Ghost Tales has a delightfully meandering quality as Underwood follows the byways of his research, and the mindful reader can be led down many different paths of Maritime history. Underwood himself admits to a ghostly encounter in his youth, and so it is to his credit that he brings logic and reason to bear on all the supposed Nova Scotia sightings, giving every rational explanation possible for the supposedly supernatural events. **MG**

Little squashes as big as your fist

WHAT'S TO EAT? ENTRÉES IN CANADIAN FOOD HISTORY

Edited by Nathalie Cooke

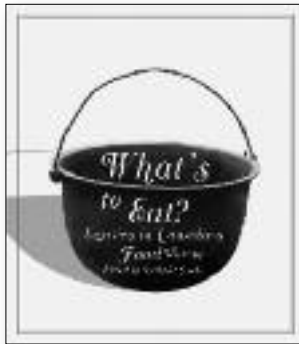
McGill-Queen's University Press

\$29.95, paper, 320pp

ISBN 978-0-7735-3571-8

It's fall. For weeks, the stalls at farmers' markets have spilled over with sensual abundance: zucchini (and more zucchini), tomatoes, and corn. There couldn't be a more evocative time of year in which to launch a book about food.

What's to Eat is an academic book with crossover appeal for readers from the "granola-meets-gourmet" foodie subculture (to borrow a term from contributor Sarah Musgrave, a Montreal journalist). Anyone who roasts their own coffee beans or smokes their own bacon, or who simply makes a point of buying raw milk cheese, arti-



sanal bread, or fair-trade chocolate will find practical inspiration – aboriginal recipes for heirloom vegetables, ideas for a traditional Thanksgiving menu – in this otherwise theoretical book.

In her chapter "A Cargo of Cocoa: Chocolate's Early History in Canada," Catherine MacPherson, a CBC radio food columnist and researcher at the McCord Museum, reveals that some of today's hottest trends in chocolate, including the pairing of it with "chili, lavender, pepper, cinnamon, and other exotics," harken back hundreds of years. At the Fortress of Louisbourg in Cape Breton, there are records from the eighteenth century showing that officers flavoured their chocolate with "anise, orange flower water, or ambergris." With the exception of ambergris, which is a waxlike secretion of the whale's intestine, an ingredient not currently enjoying a revival – perhaps because of the difficulties involved in obtaining a reliable quantity – these flavours would not be out of place at a Plateau chocolatier.

MacPherson quotes from the journals of French explorer Samuel de Champlain, whose detailed observations of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century New World food practices are as fascinating today as they must have been when they were first published. In "Curiosity into Edibility: The Taste of New

France," contributor Victoria Dickenson also refers to Champlain's journals and his instructions on how to serve pattypan squash, "little squashes as big as your fist, which we ate as a salad like cucumbers, and they were very good." This will be of particular interest to anyone dealing with a surplus of vegetables from their garden or organic food basket. One wonders if this historical account of squash being consumed raw could have the power to spark a mini food revolution. Could squash salad one day become as essential to the gourmet palate as orange-flower chocolate?

The "everything old is new again" theme is revisited in "Talking Turkey: Thanksgiving in Canada and the United States," a fun, informative piece from food editor Andrew Smith and McGill lecturer Shelley Boyd. Especially enjoyable

are the references to Canada's long, long history of turkey journalism: from the nineteenth-century article linking Canadian Thanksgiving to a British harvest festival, to the 1951 *Macleans* magazine piece, "How to Tackle that Turkey." The suggestion is that we've always been a little unsure about what to eat for this holiday and why.

Editor Nathalie Cooke also explores the power of traditions in her chapter debunking the myth of the family dinner. Her witty, reassuring, critical assessment of the enduring belief in a long-gone golden age of family life would equally be at home in *The Walrus* or *Chatelaine*, and should be required reading for harried modern parents.

In her introduction, Cooke advances the proposition that cookbooks are making their way from kitchen counters to bedside tables. If she is right, and cookbooks are becoming sources of entertainment rather than information, then one can easily envision *What's to Eat?* travelling from the ivory tower to private homes, especially those where a reverence for food and authenticity happily, creatively, co-habit. mrb

By Anne Chudobiak, Montreal writer, translator, editor, and reviewer – who has a fridge full of zucchini.

Revanche du berceau

BABIES FOR THE NATION: THE MEDICALIZATION OF MOTHERHOOD IN QUEBEC 1910–1970

By Denyse Baillargeon

Translated by W. Donald Wilson

Wilfrid Laurier University Press

\$38.95, paper, 360pp

ISBN 978-1-55458-058-3

In Quebec in 1910 women gave birth at home. They rarely had access to prenatal or postnatal care, relying instead on the help and advice of family and friends. By 1970, hospital births and the supervision of doctors had become the norm: traditional knowledge had been supplanted by a "scientific" approach to maternity. Infant care clinics, milk stations, pamphlets, and public lectures were among the tools employed to bring about this change. Denyse Baillargeon maps this dramatic transformation in practices and attitudes in her fascinating work of social history, *Babies for the Nation*.



The primary motivation behind the Quebec medical community's push to supervise maternity was the province's infant mortality rate, by far the highest in the country. This was hardly a new phenomenon, but by the early 1900s it was a source of increasing embarrassment. Physicians hoped to decrease the number of deaths by encouraging women to see a doctor throughout their pregnancy and to give birth in hospital.

The single largest cause of infant mortality was poverty. Most pregnant women could not afford to pay for a doctor's services or follow doctors' advice to eat well and avoid tiring work. Yet physicians – who stood to lose both profits and prestige if state-provided medical care were implemented – generally attributed infants' deaths to mothers' negligence. In the words of one physician in 1916, "It can be said that ignorance, the failure to consult a physician, inattention to the laws of hygiene, the often wilful disobedience of their prescriptions, and prejudice, are the principal factors in infant mortality." Baillargeon convincingly demonstrates how medical discourse was coloured not only by a desire to save lives but also by class interests and a patriarchal world view – doctors frequently come across as arrogant or indifferent.

There were many other reasons for Quebec's high infant mortality rate. Baillargeon draws on an impressive array of reports, medical journals, newspapers, and government publications to shed light on the issue in all its complexity. Among other things, she notes that French-speaking women preferred to wean their children early and switch to bottle-feeding, a risky practice at a time when pasteurization of milk was not yet consistently

enforced. Early weaning meant that women had their pregnancies close together. This resulted in large families and left women physically exhausted – and all the more inclined to bottle-feed their children.

The Catholic Church, Quebec nationalists, and even doctors continued to promote large families, despite the attendant problems. A doctor in the 1940s expressed

The primary motivation behind the Quebec medical community's push to supervise maternity was the province's infant mortality rate...

a commonly held fear that French-speakers would be "drowned in the flood of immigration," and that "our only hope of escaping this unenviable fate resides in a growing birth rate and a progressive, significant decrease in our infant mortality."

In the final chapter, Baillargeon deftly weaves oral history into the already rich tapestry of sources marshalled in her study. Drawing on interviews conducted with 66 women, she shows how women responded to the medicalization of maternity. Their words, which add a personal dimension to the book, reveal that women did not passively accept the new medical discourse. Although, over time, they did assimilate the new practices surrounding childbirth, they often followed advice for reasons other than those put forward by doctors.

Babies for the Nation, though an academic text, is rewarding, accessible, and far from dry (with the possible exception of a chapter cataloguing the agencies involved in maternal care). It also has particular relevance at a time when many women are turning to midwives and choosing to have their babies at home – a modern-day challenge to the now hegemonic status of medicalized childbirth. mrb

By Kate Forrest, Montreal writer, translator, and reviewer.

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graphic novels

THE HIPLESS BOY

By Sully

Conundrum Press

\$19.95, paper, 224pp

ISBN 978-1-894994-40-8

Reviewed from page proofs

The *Hipless Boy* is a charming and humorous collection of semi-autobiographical tales about Sully, an ostensibly "hipless" guy who lives in a hipster neighbourhood in Montreal. Sully is actually Sherwin Tjia, known for his *McGill Daily* column (also called "The Hipless Boy") on which these stories are closely based.

For a book written by a hipster who claims not to be a hipster, *The Hipless Boy* is remarkably free of the pretension and irony that plague much of hipster culture. Appearances are made by actual hipster hangouts, but there is no name-dropping, and no inside jokes. In this regard, Tjia's stories are a breath of fresh air, and surprisingly sweet and lovely. Sully is surely one of the most affable characters around, and it rubs off.

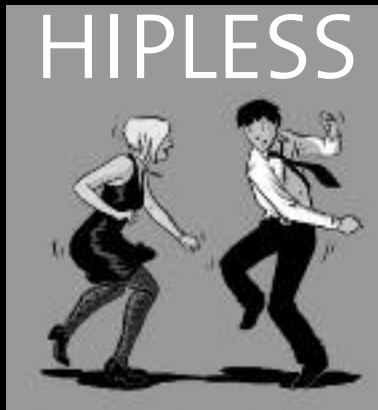
And yet something is lacking. Affable, benign, harmless...the book "channel surfs" through Sully's days. He befriends cats, he goes on coffee dates with girls, he rides the bus and takes art classes, he hangs out with his friends. In other words, nothing much happens – at least nothing of consequence. This light approach only carries the book so far, for soon we realize why *The Hipless Boy* is so easy to flip through: Sully has very little to say.

The harmless approach does allow Tjia to honestly treat subjects that a less judicious hand would have made crass, offensive, or just plain awkward. And yet he misses opportunities for more depth: the brief mention of a homeless man comes across as unsympathetic, and the one attempt to tackle a darker subject – teenage suicide – feels oddly placed.

Thankfully, the lack of narrative is countered with illustrations that are undeniably gorgeous. Sully draws with clean, confident lines, and with the consistency of an artist who has honed his style. No details clutter the images, which are rich in black and white, and shadow-blues.

Pleasant to read, wonderful to look at. Whether or not the reader leaves the book wanting something more, Sully's world is a friendly, inviting one.

THE LOST AND THE HIPLESS



CECIL AND JORDAN IN NEW YORK

By Gabrielle Bell

Drawn & Quarterly

\$19.95, cloth, 152pp

ISBN 978-1-897299-57-9

When a young girl is distraught after being taunted by the school bully, a strange but sympathetic student takes her hand and whispers earnestly, "Take this and don't tell anyone

who gave it to you. Even if your life depends on it." He sneaks away, and the girl opens her hand to find that she is holding an acorn. It is at once mysterious, goofy, and tender – a moment that sums up *Cecil and Jordan in New York*, the latest collection of stories from the accomplished Gabrielle Bell.

These are curious tales, with unassuming beginnings and odd endings. They gather the fleeting, everyday experiences whose gradual accumulation comes to define our lives. Dilemmas are rarely obvious, or simple: Bell crafts subtle, complex stories.

Bell tweaks her artistic style in keeping with the mood of each story, though she always draws with a light, understated touch, lending her stories an intimacy and sense of melancholy. The opening panels are rich in colour, elsewhere her lines grow thin and hesitant. In a story about teenage loneliness, we observe the characters from a distance.

The occasional absurdist touch lends a further playfulness to the book, especially in the opening story: we are encouraged to suspend our expectations when the main character quite matter-of-factly turns herself into a chair. In a later story Bell indulges in dream-like surrealism, though there it seems to lack intention.

Bell flirts dangerously with this tendency, mostly emerging unscathed. Many of the stories lack direction, or indeed resolution, but in the end they are strangely satisfying. We are moved, without knowing why. Bell's narratives may wander, but at least she is leading us.

By **Correy Baldwin**, writer, editor, publisher.

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poetry

Poets and other wild beasts



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By Carmine Starnino
Gaspereau Press
\$18.95, paper, 80pp
ISBN 978-1-55447-051-8

PURE PRODUCT

By Jason Guriel
Véhicule Press
\$16, paper, 50pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-254-3

PASSENGER FLIGHT

By Brian Campbell
Signature Editions
\$14.95, paper, 90pp
ISBN 1-897109-33-4

RUTTING SEASON

By Ariel Gordon, Michael Lithgow,
Linda Besner
Buffalo Runs Press
\$10, paper, 72pp
ISBN 978-0-9811434-1-5

PENNED: ZOO POEMS

Edited by Stephanie Bolster,
Katia Grubisic, Simon Reader
Véhicule Press
\$21.95, paper, 172pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-263-5

As his readers would expect, Carmine Starnino's new book is well crafted and imaginative. A few poems don't carry their weight, like the very long poem about squash racquets which uses as its template Christopher Smart's "For I Will Consider My Cat Jeoffrey." And the sonnet-letters from Italy to friends in Canada are not among Starnino's best. But the book has an armature of steel.

The opening poems about life in tough neighbourhoods in Montreal manage to celebrate settings that can be loved for all their grunginess: "It suits me down to the ground, this place / of sodium-lit nowhere between / Jean-Talon and St. Roch." After an interlude of poems set in Italy, a new section opens with "Lucky Me," a poem about a son's conflicted relationship with his father. The poem is long but makes every word count, from the rueful title (we all say "lucky me" with a shrug) to the final revelation, that love often leads fathers to rig the old "which hand has the treat" game in favour of the child. Fathers are supposed to be givers, after all.

The last section of the book, "The Strangest Things," shows this poet's capacity for change. Starnino has been a master of stanzas from the start of his career – elegant forms on the page. The new poems are written in centred lines, a

common enough method these days, one that gives poetry a sculptured look by grace of the word processing program. But these poems are not slapdash. The epigraph of the section is from William Carlos Williams' *Kora in Hell: Improvisation* – "One has emotions about the strangest things." Each of Starnino's eleven poems is obscurely related to an image that might seem inconsequential: "BALL FLOATING, LACHINE CANAL" or "CAR ALARM, ST. VIA-TEUR." The prose poems in Williams' brief work often took off from an image, opening it up with the imagination like a blue jay cracking open a sunflower seed, and Starnino follows the precedent. Part of the pleasure of such works arises from trying to trace or imagine a connection between image and poem, to explore the strangeness that erupts into life. Williams said in *Kora* that "the perfections revealed by a Rembrandt are equal whether it be question of a laughing Saskia or an old woman cleaning her nails." Starnino's muse in the centered poems is not the beautiful Saskia but the old woman cleaning her nails. Another kind of perfection.

Jason Guriel draws the title of his book from a celebrated poem by William Carlos Williams, who lamented the human wastage in American life in a poem beginning "The pure products of America / go crazy, a lament for a woman called 'some Elsie'." But perhaps there is a little too much nail cleaning and not enough of the old woman in Guriel's poems: he has a tendency toward whimsy. He writes inconsequential poems about abbreviations ("I.e.," "E.g.," "Etc."), and a short poem about "The Long Poem." Many of the poems are self-consciously about writing and style without quite achieving the epigrammatic brilliance of a Ben Jonson or J.V. Cunningham. The "Five Sonnets for Summer Storage in the High School Book Room" are mannered and perfunctory (rhyming "prick" and "anemic" in a final couplet is off-key).

But two poems are unforgettable. "For a Neighbour" commemorates an elderly ex-neighbour by describing what new owners have done to his decrepit house. It is a traditional trope to use house as a metaphor for its inhabitant, but the device doesn't seem trite here. "Upright in Bed" describes a father interlacing his good hand with the one disabled by a stroke. "Only half of him has a say in the matter." The blood clot has both severed and not severed the man's arm: Guriel creates a set of paradoxes to convey the frustration when a body is half-present and half-missing. The poem is clever but

clever for a purpose and the result is deeply moving.

Brian Campbell's inspiration is Charles Baudelaire: *Passenger Flight* begins with a quotation from the French writer's prose poetry (*Le Spleen de Paris*), lines in praise of the marvellous passage of clouds. Two of the poems, "Airports" and "Casements," are "palimpsests" of works by Baudelaire, modern versions figuratively "written over" the originals. "Airports" doesn't improve on the original, but "Casements" modernizes without vulgarizing, adding images of electric lights and computer screens to Baudelaire's urban atmosphere. The poem closest to the splenetic urban tone of the great French poet is "Edmonton," which summons up the mercantile texture of daily life in a contemporary city – all those chain stores – while reminding us that even a city laid out on a grid system can be afflicted with potholes.

The challenge with prose poetry is to find equivalents of the line breaks and rhythms of poetry. Some of Campbell's short poems use alliteration and internal rhyme, the Gertrude Stein solution. The longer ones are more conventional narratives and need the music of a complex and shapely syntax. The book is not a failure, but it has a few too many potholes of its own.


Rutting Season is essentially three chapbooks filled out with a conversation by the poets. The shop talk must have seemed a fine idea, but it seems too mutually congratulatory. This is not one of those anthologies that justifies itself with a new approach to writing, a common programme.

The poets are talented, especially Ariel Gordon, whose work is an image-driven sequence about the profound intimacy between a mother and a nursing child. Michael Lithgow's work is more leisurely and meditative. He has the lyric poet's eye for revealing details and a good sense of when to modulate away from grand statements, but at the same time is interested in narrative and character. His poems are reflective and don't offer easy gratification. No fast food there. Linda Besner writes about recognizable human experiences; a trip to the eye doctor or the butcher, but she defamiliarizes the language by writing words backward, or occasionally rhyming consecutive words ("om comb"). She doesn't go as far as Erin Mouré or Steven McCaffery in undermining discourse, but she creates momentary nodes of unexpected meaning when the mind pauses over phrases like "sag oven" or "such a long emit." When

we are told that a character wrote "YAG" on his forehead with eyeliner, we perceive the strangeness and arbitrary quality of the term "gay." The next step might be a more radical (as in "root") dismantling of language. On the other hand, there are advantages in stopping where she does: language retains some of its normal functions even as it is being mildly subverted. Gordon, Besner, and Lithgow are poets to watch.

Anyone fond of animals will want to read *Penned*, a remarkably wide-ranging collection of poems about zoos. And anyone fond of animals will be saddened by the book as well, something the editors themselves recognize. The predicament of animals confined for human entertainment can create melancholy. But humans crave the encounter with other beings, and poets understand the need for the enlargements of sympathy and imagination that contemplating animals provides. In Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, a doctor prescribes an emotionally damaged character "a course of the larger mammals." *Penned* has mammals of all sizes, and quite a few birds, especially flamingos, just the bird you would expect.

The selection in this anthology is international and brilliant: Canada, England, Scotland, and Ireland are represented by very fine work. The editors say that after "three years of scrounging, not every zoo poem in English found its way in," a statement that shows how committed they were. The poets most readers would expect to find are here: Marianne Moore, Ted Hughes, James Dickey, and Margaret Atwood, but there are surprises, like the online poet known only as Woodworm, someone the editors could not track. The single poem limit could have been broken for Marianne Moore, the pre-eminent zoo poet of all time.

The collection is intelligently divided into three sections: "The Ingenuity of Chain Link," which considers zoos as places to visit; "The One Who Looks Away," which explores the zoo experience from the point of view of the animals; and "Things All Shaped Like Tigers," which presents poems in which the zoo is a starting point for imaginative adventures. Each has its own interest, but it is the second part that is most affecting. The volume contains an early map of Regent's Park Zoo, the first scientific zoo in Europe, and some well-chosen illustrations. This menagerie is worth the price of the ticket. 

By Bert Almon, who is teaching a poetry master class at the University of Alberta with Derek Walcott.

she had once seemed resigned to. Desperate for clues and a meaningful human bond, Julia begins to peel back the layers of her life, from its rocky and forgotten foundations to its newly exposed mysteries.

Not the least of these is an unsettling document left by her mother in the hands of Paul Goodman, Julia's sympathetic uncle. On the same hot summer day of Carol's funeral, Uncle Paul – a character Moser admits is loosely based on her own uncle – presents Julia with an old birth certificate that causes her to embark on a quest for answers to long-silenced questions. This quest ultimately restores a connection to her extended family.

While this mystery alleviates some of the psychoanalytic predictability of Moser's intersecting plotlines

(Julia's dysfunctional romantic life replicating her dysfunctional family history), it is Moser's final twist that brings some real, if not fantastical tension to the story. In the chasm left by Nicholas's disappearance, Julia embarks on a passionate affair with his wife, the beautiful and accomplished Deepa O'Malley.

While the Brooklyn-born, Montreal-based writer affirms that the book is not autobiographical, she admits that the process of writing Julia's character was nevertheless intimate. "The whole book comes out of my...being inside her," she explains. "The connection between her physical life and her mental life – I think it's probably how I usually write – but in the case of Julia I think it's more intensely the case."

Unlike the more intuitive process of writing poetry or short stories, striking the balance between the novel's subject matter and the plot's development was a challenge for Moser. "The poetry and the short stories usually really start with the words. I write the first sentence without knowing what's going to come next and then the words just sort of generate the next words." With the novel, Moser was more conscious of the story's arc and the way in which the dual plotlines would cross it. Afternoon breaks to her morning writing schedule allowed the author "to think about what was going to come next every day," she says, adding that "I was always working towards something but I didn't know what the whole arc would be, or only in the very large sense."

Written in the third person, *Because I Have Loved and Hidden It* highlights Moser's penchant for illustrative prose, rich description, and meticulous detail. But while the author succeeds in bringing to life the sensuality of her characters' experiences – the taste of a sip of wine, the smell of a freshly cooked meal – it is the premise of Julia's emotional burden that eventually compromises the reader's ability to empathize with her. "She's really hungry," Moser says of her protagonist's insatiable and misdirected search for love, "and so that drives her to do things that somebody who wasn't so needy might be more cautious about... she just

goes for it, and is willing to live with the results."

While Julia's approach to improving her situation is, at times, questionable, it is the very fact that her circumstances *are* complex – and her response to them so instinctive – that underscores her authenticity. Without having to define her, Moser successfully frames the experiences of Julia as a childless, middle-aged woman with a non-discriminating love for both men and women as universal, thereby avoiding a construction of her as an overtly unconventional protagonist.

To be sure, the fluidity with which Julia moves in her romantic life between men and women is a sign of her keen sexual self-awareness. And while her affair with Deepa is marked by much greater physical and

emotional reciprocity than is her relationship with Nicholas, Moser says it has as much to do with the particular circumstances of each relationship as it does with Julia's sexual preferences. "One of the things that I tried to make in Julia was a character who doesn't feel the need to compare," says Moser. "She just loves who she loves."

The strong interconnectedness between Julia's emotional experience and her physical

states, whether real or imagined, situates the novel within the broader thematic context of Moser's work. It also highlights Julia's self-consciousness, something Moser was struck by upon recently reviewing the book's proofs: "I was shocked! I thought, my god, every third sentence is that Julia is embarrassed – she's embarrassed *all* the time..."

As a reflection of Julia's evolving realizations about love, the episodic structure of the novel makes sense. Shedding light on this approach to story-telling Moser says: "I didn't really choose it. I have never thought in terms of chapters...I just don't think that way." Though one wonders if the novel might have maintained a stronger dramatic thrust had its interweaving plotlines been structured differently, Moser's insights into the complexities of love both as a basic human need and as a learned behaviour remain poignant. Her honest portrayal of one woman's resolve to repair her fragmented life makes for an intimate and heartfelt debut. **mrb**

BECAUSE I HAVE LOVED AND HIDDEN IT

By **Elise Moser**

Cormorant Books

\$21, paper, 256pp

ISBN 978-1-897151-36-5

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Written in the third person, *Because I Have Loved and Hidden It* highlights Moser's penchant for illustrative prose, rich description, and meticulous detail.

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Laferrière (from page 4)

"Time is terrifying," he adds. "When the silk workers in Lyon rebelled, they shot at the clock in the cathedral. They understood that it was the clock that was controlling their lives."

Voodoo god who guards the border between the visible and invisible worlds. "Moved by a wave of gratitude, I threw myself on him, kissed him everywhere and cried like a baby," she relates tragically. "It was my first orgasm. I was fifty-five years old."

Despite the complex power dynamics caused by money, these scenes are far from impersonal. "I wanted to explore the idea of whether a feeling can be purchased," says Laferrière, who then quotes Françoise Sagan: "Love is such a magnificent feeling, that when I'm old, I will pay to have some."

"I tried to get beyond the clichés that dictate that the exchange of money automatically signifies prostitution," he continues. "These women weren't seeking anything vulgar; they came because they wanted to feel something. The only trouble is that it takes two...But I didn't judge them at all. What interests me is to describe situations which would normally seem cynical and to show that feelings can pierce through – situations in which power dynamics are inevitable."

Laferrière is careful to distinguish between love and desire, claiming that the former is a feeling, which, for reasons of guardedness and practicality, one rarely experiences beyond childhood. "From what I've seen in Haiti, love is something that happens between the ages of six and 13. Beyond that, things are settled on more economic terms." In North America and Europe, where we enjoy greater economic ease, courtly love, according to Laferrière, can last much longer, "even up until the age of 20." Due to the influence of poets and songwriters, however, "there is a sort of *rêverie* that people want to recapture...Yet love can't work without total insouciance, a lack of self-control in which time ceases to exist." Once these criteria dissolve, says the author, "it's desire that follows, which can be confounded with love."

Laferrière doesn't necessarily see this as a negative thing. *Heading South* is replete with savvy young Haitians who use sex to empower themselves. Seventeen-year-old FanFan, for instance, uses his exceptional physical attributes to seduce the wealthy daughter of his parents' employers, thus improving his family's situation. "I already know that whoever controls

time wins," he says, in a scene where he seduces a much older woman for his own gratification. "I sit down calmly, across from her. I have all the time in the world." His target, a school principal, experiences the erotic charge of forbidden love as a sort of delirious resurrection. "You have no idea, Christina, I think I'm going crazy," confides Madame Saint-Pierre. "It's just that you've finally woken up, my dear," replies her friend. "Before you were asleep."

According to Laferrière, "Sex is an energy, a manifestation of life" that allows people to get beyond themselves as well as the boundaries imposed by social class. "Most people dream of being destabilized. It's the tale of *Sleeping Beauty*. People want for someone to come and wake them up," he says, alluding to the soporific effects of work and habit. "Because, in order to be rich, not necessarily with money but with all the things we accumulate, one must proceed in such a routine manner. You must work almost with your eyes closed. Work, work, work – one enters into his night of work. Eventually, you are asleep and you don't even realize it."

Since this form of destabilization "is such an intimate act, so violent and private," the only way that most people will allow themselves to experience it, says the author, is through travel, a transit in which time and social class cease to exist. In this privileged state of flux, one can "suddenly meet someone who isn't caught in the same tunnel. And to find someone who listens to you, whom you don't get the impression is just waiting for the right moment to discuss his personal ambitions...is much rarer than one might imagine."

Film scenes of hotel rooms, Laferrière points out, often seem beyond time, and there is a sense of timelessness that characterizes many settings in director Laurent Cantet's movie version of *Heading South*. A decidedly lighter tone distinguishes the book, however – a style the author claims is not deliberate. "That's how I see the world. I find that dark, pessimistic things told with a smile are



more interesting than things which are optimistic yet simple-minded," he explains, underlining his appreciation of paradox: "It's us. We know that we are going to die and yet we are full of life...we are paradoxical beings."

Listening to Laferrière's closing elaborations on desire, one senses that time is the greatest paradox of all, a tenuous, yet seductive journey – a passport bridge spiraling through the ever-shifting shores of life and death.

"Death excites me," he muses, recalling that since the Middle Ages the term for orgasm has been *la petite mort* (the little death). "It's the extinction of the senses. And to extinguish the senses, all the elements have to be turned on...we dream of that great orgasm." mrb



HEADING SOUTH
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young readers

Fall titles for young readers, in which, among other things, a chicken is stuck to a girl's butt

Twelve-year-old Josh has a great summer ahead of him, with marathon *Civilization* sessions, soccer games, and a new girlfriend to keep him busy. Just as it gets rolling, though, his mother dies in a bizarre car accident. Everything comes crashing to a halt for Josh, his little brother Sam, and their father. Now their father spends his free time holed up in the basement, trying to make a time machine that will bring his wife back. Sam takes to walking backward so that he'll never lose sight of the people he loves. Josh thinks he's the only sane one left – the one to do the laundry and make meals – but he's just as preoccupied by memories of his mother. He can't stop agonizing over the randomness of her death and the appropriate way to mourn her. Austen's protagonist is an endearing blend of smart-aleck and lost boy. The story – recounted in journal entries – deftly tackles such weighty topics as atheism, grief, and the ties that bind a family together. (Ages 9-12)

WALKING BACKWARD By Catherine Austen Orca Book Publishers \$9.95, paper, 167pp ISBN 978-1-55469-147-0
Reviewed from proofs



CATHERINE AUSTEN



In Monique Polak's *Junkyard Dog*, Justin's having a rough time: his mom walked out on him and his unemployed dad, who takes out his frustration on Justin. The 13-year-old is so tense from tiptoeing around his father that he's starting to go bald. He jumps at the chance to take on a part-time job, which will get him out of the house and help put food on their table. As an assistant with a security company, Justin helps care for guard dogs that have seen little love. Soon Justin must choose between a steady income and the animals' welfare. He finds allies in unexpected places when he moves to help put an end to his employer's crimes. As ever, Polak's narrative style is succinct and engaging. Such abstract concepts as ethics and empathy are given concrete forms through a story that will particularly appeal to reluctant readers. (Ages 10+)

girl's posterior; and the title story relays a banana's tragic quest for self-fulfillment. Johnson's landscapes are stark but glowing, and her impish characters flow across the pages.



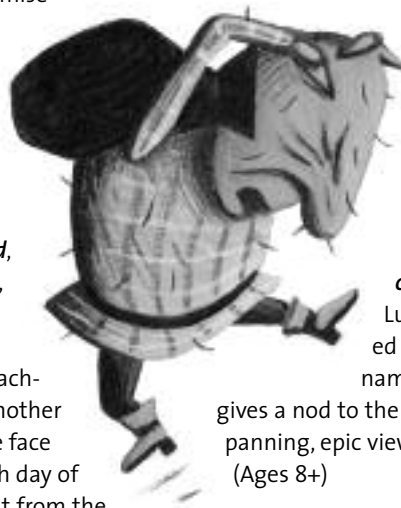
Humour and brevity combine in strange worlds that invite readers to create their own tangential storylines. (Ages 13+)

In Jane Barclay's touching picture book, *Proud as a Peacock, Brave as a Lion*, a boy sits on his grandfather's bed, listening to the man's wartime stories, as they get ready to attend a memorial service. As he talks, the grandfather uses animal imagery – reinforced by

Benoit's ghostly apparitions – to help explain how he felt when enlisting ("as proud as a peacock") and when on the battlefield ("I pretended to be as brave as a lion"). The boy is proud of his grandfather, though he can see that he still bears painful scars after all these years. The boy pledges to be like an elephant and remember his grandfather's contributions – a promise that resonates with readers as new wars draw bodies from younger generations. (Ages 4-7)

Far From Home by Frieda Wishinsky is the eleventh book in the *Canadian Flyer Adventures* series, which sees Emily and her friend Matt transporting back to key points in Canada's history via a magical antique sled. This time, they're taken to Pier 21 in Halifax in 1940, where they meet two young WWII evacuees from England, Kate and John. The siblings are billeted to stay with Emily's ancestors in her hometown, so Emily and Matt accompany them, posing as fellow Guest Children. But Kate is sick with worry about the family they left behind, and John refuses to speak a word to anyone. Can the time-travellers help them settle into their new lives? Franson's animated sketches are a good match for Wishinsky's text, which humanizes history for early readers by relaying one family's struggle to stay united amidst the chaos of war. (Ages 6-9)

"Once there was a tiny girl with wobbly arms and legs, all skin and bones like a newly hatched bird," begins this inspired story, *Bird Child*, by Nan Forler. Eliza is the bird child, but the story doesn't lead where you'd expect: she's already a confident girl thanks to her mother's teachings. Now it's Eliza's turn to help another – her new classmate, Lainey, whose face and drawings turn greyer with each day of teasing. Like Eliza, Lainey stands out from the crowd: her clothes are ragged and her hair is coarse, yet Eliza can see that Lainey is a gifted artist. Forler's tale is about individuality and the fight against oppression, subjects that even the youngest grade-schoolers can appreciate. And Thisdale's mixed-media illustrations, which blend dark with light so effectively, will further engage them. (Ages 5-8)



son, a nature-loving boy, is willing to risk asking the mighty Thunderbird, the Lord of the Sky, for help in restoring light to the land. Zeman-Spaleny effectively blends adventure with a pro-ecology theme. *Lord of the Sky* is based on Ludmilla's Zeman's animated short film of the same name, and her artistic style gives a nod to the cinema with their wide-panning, epic views and film-reel borders. (Ages 8+)

Part graphic novel, part children's picture book, Lesley Johnson's *The Banana Story of Agony* is a collection of four whimsical stories recounted primarily through Johnson's expressionistic illustrations. "Love" describes Paradise lost and then rediscovered; in "There's No One Home," a boy refuses to let Santa into his house; "Susan Had a Chicken on her Butt" really is about the fowl on a sulky




A Wizard in Love by Mireille Levert is the English translation of a French book that was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Awards in Children's Illustration.

Such recognition is well deserved, for Lafrance's renditions of a grumpy wizard encountering his light-hearted neighbour positively hum. Levert recounts the story of Hector, a retired wizard resigned to spending his days boarded up in his house with his lazy cat and an endless supply of cookies...until the day when a beautiful woman moves in across the street and disrupts his solitude with her music. Hector plots an evil way to silence her, but her song proves irresistible. Children will love the magic-heavy plot, and the quiet details awaiting discovery in Lafrance's illustrations. (Ages 4+)

When Linda Zeman-Spaleny arrived in British Columbia from the Czech Republic as a girl, she admired the totem poles standing proud in the landscape of her new home; her mother, Ludmila Zeman, called them the "wooden pictures" of the First Nations. Years later, mother and daughter pay homage to these markers with a beautifully produced picture book, *Lord of the Sky*, which tells of a coastal village plunged into darkness when children slay a pesky raven. Only one per-

son, a nature-loving boy, is willing to risk asking the mighty Thunderbird, the Lord of the Sky, for help in restoring light to the land. Zeman-Spaleny effectively blends adventure with a pro-ecology theme. *Lord of the Sky* is based on Ludmilla's Zeman's animated short film of the same name, and her artistic style gives a nod to the cinema with their wide-panning, epic views and film-reel borders. (Ages 8+)

In Per-Henrik Gürth's *When Wishes Come True*, Little Bear looks out at the Arctic tundra dancing with colours, and frowns. Mother Bear pries the problem out of him: he doesn't understand why his most fervent wishes never come true. Mother Bear helps him to recognize the little joys of their daily life together – gazing at the northern lights, playing with the belugas, sliding down snowy hills. Gürth's story emphasizes family bonds and the power of hope, through soft and playful images. (Ages 3-7) 

By **Andrea Belcham**, a writer living in Pointe-Claire.

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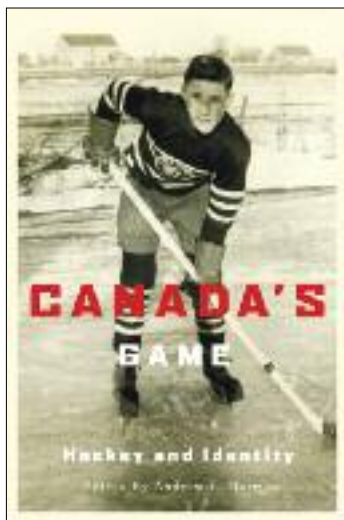
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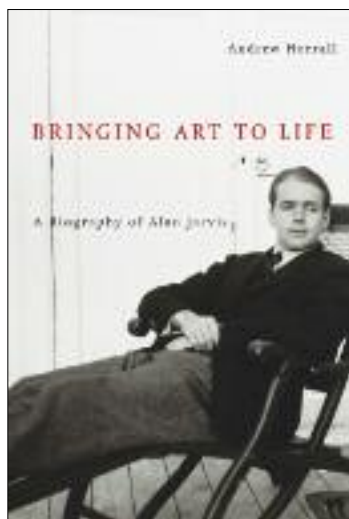
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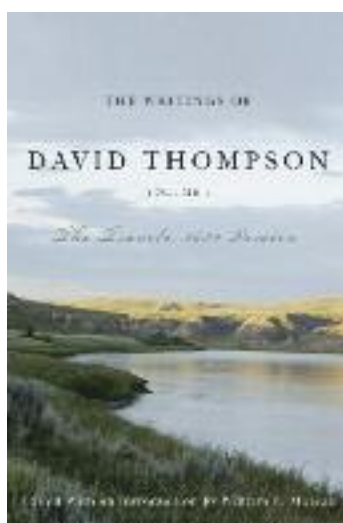
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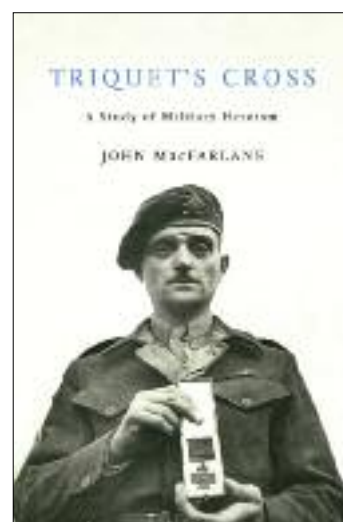
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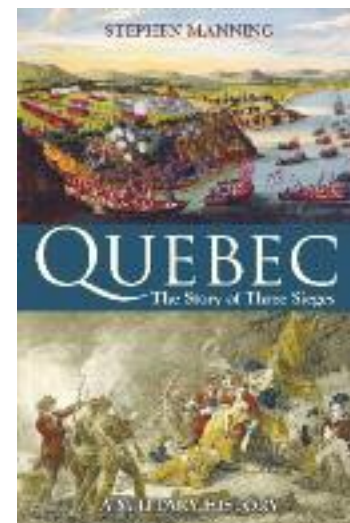
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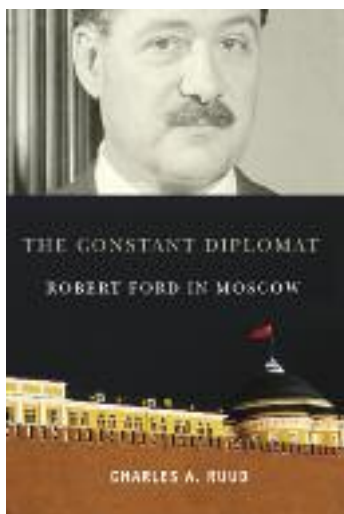
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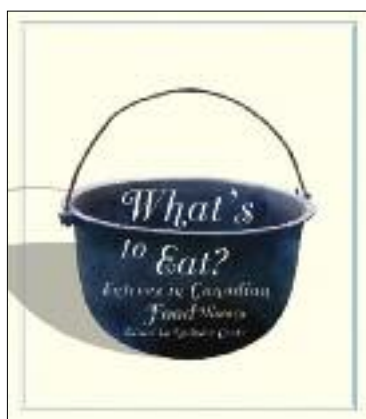
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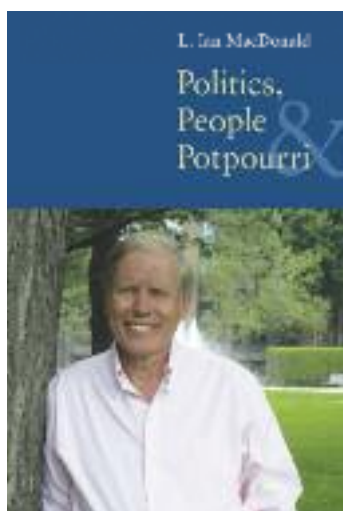
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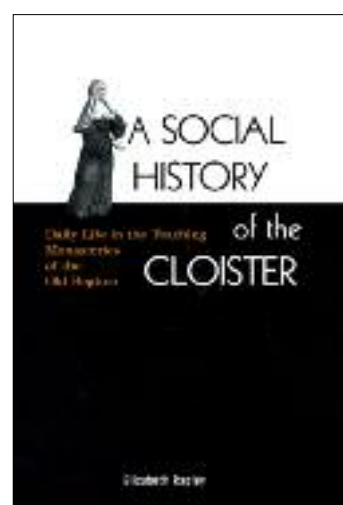
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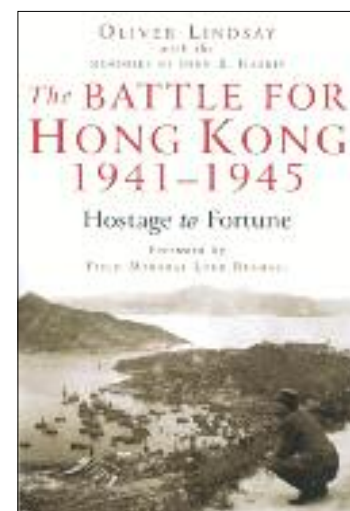
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