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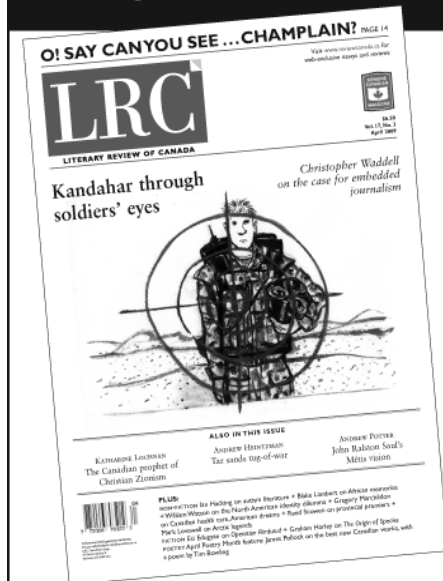


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by T.P. Byrnes

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THESE ARE THE GOOD OLD DAYS

By Michael Carbert

For all but the youngest residents of Montreal, the events and images are still vivid: millions of people without power or heat; thousands in overcrowded shelters; the military called in to provide support; everything enveloped in a thick layer of glistening ice.

One of the most devastating natural disasters in Canadian history, the ice storm of 1998 caught Ontario and Quebec completely unprepared. Over four million people lost power, 28 people died, close to a thousand were injured, and the total cost amounted to over five billion dollars.

Will it happen again?

“Count on it,” says Cleo Paskal, author, academic, and regular columnist for the *Toronto Star*.

The more pertinent question, however, is not whether it will happen again, but whether we are prepared for a time fast approaching when severe storms, droughts, and floods will be far more common than they used

to be. The truthful answer, once again, is not what we would like to hear.

As Paskal makes clear in her new book, *Global Warring: How Environmental, Economic and Political Crises will Redraw the World Map*, climate change is happening now. Time, as they say, waits for no one. Well, climate change doesn't wait around for humanity to reach a consensus on what's causing it or how to deal with it.

And sadly, to resort to another cliché, one can never underestimate the power of denial. It appears the vast majority of the world's governments are still thinking and acting as if a stable climate and predictable weather patterns, the very conditions upon which the development of civilization depends, will continue to be there in the future. They won't be.

Paskal's goal is not to be alarmist. Instead, she wants to bring attention to the big changes both happening and likely to happen because of a warming planet, and to the simple fact that we need to prepare now for what's coming our way. *Global Warring* is unique among books on climate change as it eschews a strident tone in favour of a cool assessment of the changes to come, their likely outcomes, and the difficult choices we presently face.

For those caught up in the seemingly never-ending debate as to whether climate change is even caused by human activity, the premise of *Global Warring* may be disconcerting. Have we really reached a point where a runaway greenhouse effect is a fait accompli? As we continue to

continued on page 18

DON'T BE A WIMP, BUTT-END SOMEONE'S GRANDPA!

BHAGAVAD GOALIE

By Ian Christopher Goodman
Buffalo Runs Press
\$10.00, paper, 62pp
ISBN 978-0-9811434-2-2

No one who was swept up in Canada's recent run to Olympic hockey gold will have any trouble with the notion that our national game can embody all the qualities of an epic. Ian Christopher Goodman's timing, post-Vancouver, thus looks positively uncanny. What better moment for a retelling in hockey terms of one of the great war tales of world literature?

Somewhere between 20 and 25 centuries old, the Bhagavad Gita consists largely of a conversation between Lord Krishna and the warrior Prince Arjuna, the former counselling the conscience-stricken soldier as he prepares to enter the field of battle against his cousins. It is a gripping yarn and a lodestone of yogic philosophy but, more than that, it is a sacred text. Goodman, as a non-Hindu coming to this material with less than entirely reverent designs, is engaged in a balancing act of no small delicacy.

It helps Goodman's case that Hindus themselves haven't been averse to popular adaptations of their foundation myths. Comic-book versions of Krishna stories are hugely popular with Indian youth, and a 1980s television serialization of the Gita's source text, the Mahabharata, scored the highest ratings in India's history. Besides, as Goodman points out in his introduction, having a bit of fun with a sacred cow is surely in the spirit of the blue-skinned mischief-maker Krishna himself.

So, does Goodman's gambit actually work? Yes, most of the time. The core themes of the Gita – loyalty versus duty, morality versus life necessity, personal mastery versus collective responsibility – slip surprisingly smoothly into a hockey setting. Wisely, Goodman has chosen not to deal with Olympic-level hockey – let's face it, for all the intensity of Canada versus USA, those players were wealthy union brothers temporarily wearing national jerseys – but with the hardscrabble small-town prairie brand of junior hockey, where players are likely to be facing off against people they've grown up with, and where the colour of the uniform carries a tribal charge absent in the big-bucks NHL. The Okotoks Oil Kings and the Prairie Pistons may not be the Kauravas and the Pandavas, but the principle isn't so far removed.

Given that he is working from what is essentially a translation of a translation of an ancient Sanskrit text, Goodman is right not to get too caught up in replicating the tone and rhythms of his model. Indeed, the considerable comic punch of *Bhagavad Goalie* lies in the surprise value of contemporary vernacular set alongside a more elevated original. (In a clever act of interpretive layout, Goodman's dark-type adaptation alternates lines with Mahadev Desai's translation in faint type, allowing the reader equal ease whether reading concurrently or separately.) What's more, Goodman clearly knows his hockey talk: "earthly joys" is updated

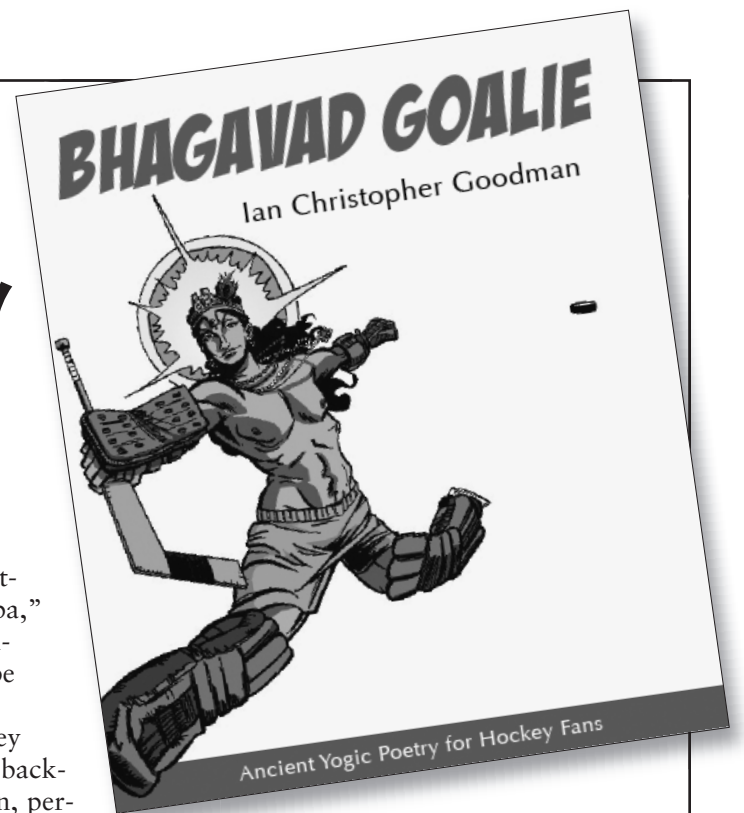
to "puck bunnies," "slay these venerable elders" becomes "butt-end someone's grandpa," "yield not to unmanliness" is now "don't be a wimp."

At times the hockey thread fades into the background and Goodman, per-

haps a little daunted by his undertaking, engages less in adapting and updating than in mere paraphrasing. Is anything really gained when "their wits

warped by greed" becomes "their brains tainted with greediness"? Would a hockey player even say "their brains tainted with greediness"? Here and at several points elsewhere the tone becomes muddled, the intent confused. Still,

"I don't mind plucking some sanctity from a source where it's abundant, and offering it up somewhere else."



Goodman scores enough body checks and belly laughs to justify the enterprise. "I don't mind plucking some sanctity from a source where it's abundant, and offering it up somewhere else," Goodman writes. By making that "somewhere else" as unlikely yet fitting a place as a hockey rink, he has pulled off a small but delightful coup. If not quite the Sidney Crosby of adaptations, *Bhagavad Goalie* is at least the Roberto Luongo. **MB**

Ian McGillis is a novelist and regular contributor to *The Gazette*.



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poetry

Dreaming in the Presence of Reason

THE CERTAINTY DREAM

By Kate Hall
Coach House Press
\$16.95, paper, 96pp
ISBN 978-1552452233

PAUSE FOR BREATH

By Robyn Sarah
Biblioasis
\$17.95, paper, 80pp
ISBN 978-1-897231-59-3

CAST FROM BELLS

By Suzanne Hancock
McGill-Queen's University Press
\$16.95, paper, 72pp
ISBN 978-0-7735-3720-0

BLUE POPPY

By Iлона Martonfi
Coracle Press
\$16.95, paper, 70pp
ISBN 978-0-9687599-3-6

THE CROW'S VOW

By Susan Briscoe
Signal Editions
\$16.00, paper, 72pp
ISBN 978-1550652871

The great Italian poet Eugenio Montale once said that “poetry is a dream dreamed in the presence of reason.” Kate Hall’s brilliant debut draws on René Descartes to dream such dreams. The French philosopher brooded on the nature of knowledge and wondered in the *Discourse on Method* if we could ever be sure that our knowledge is reliable or merely a dream. He seems to take the side of reason, and he is usually described as a Rationalist, yet he discovered his vocation as a thinker through three dreams he had on the Vigil of St. Martin, November 10, 1619. In *The Certainty Dream* – a title that is itself ambiguous – Kate Hall exploits the ambiguous epistemological and rational status of dreams in her poems. As in the *Odyssey*, it is difficult but essential to distinguish the true dreams that come through the Gate of Horn from the false dreams that issue out of the Gate of Ivory.

Hall’s spirit guide in the realm of dream is the mynah bird, a brilliant choice as Descartes differentiated human beings from animals on the basis of language. But mynahs can learn to talk, making them a borderline case. Hall’s sympathy is with birds, and some of her most memorable poems are about them. Images of containers – boxes, glass jars, vit-

rines – also run through the book, the sorts of constraints (and by implication, categories) that the mind imposes on reality; dreams subvert rigid orders.

The tour de force in the collection is “Suspended in the Space of Reason: A Short Thesis,” a poem cast as a subversive inquiry into reason. It is delivered in a parody of an academic thesis on whether we see things or only our own minds, and Descartes provides the epigraph, a claim that what he thought was seen with his own eyes was grasped only with the mind. The subversion in Hall’s pseudo-thesis comes from the eruption of contingent facts into the mind of the narrator, such as chipotle-lime mustard, elephants (of course: they’re always in the room), Mars rovers, and game shows. The Mars vehicles are good examples of surprises that ambush reason: they are products of science but have long outlasted their projected period of use; the prediction failed, the mission more than succeeded. Hamlet’s epistemology comes to mind: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

It is bracing to read a poet who can engage with the ideas of G. E. Moore, Ronald Searle, Blaise Pascal, and Daniel Dennett. In his third dream on the Vigil of St. Martin, Descartes saw a dictionary and a book of ancient Latin poetry. The dictionary he saw as the “sciences gathered together;” the poetry as uniting philosophy and wisdom. Kate Hall unites philosophy and wisdom – without forgetting the chipotle-lime mustard.

Robyn Sarah’s poems engage the textures of daily life rather than philosophy. In fact, in “Run With It,” she compares the theories of philosophers to sticks discarded by dogs on their way home. Although Sarah is one of our best poets, this collection is too bland, a pit stop in her career – or, to play with its title, a pause to take breath. Friends meet on a winter street and exchange pleasantries, a leaf clings to a tree, a sneeze gets a page and a quarter of description, but such moments don’t often yield Sarah’s signature epiphanies. Sometimes the images do work well,

as in the final poem where a bee buzzes the knuckle of the speaker, who feels the infinitesimal breeze of its wings all day. And in a poem about November, the poet describes chopping vegetables and savours a stub of a vegetable, tasting “the ghost of a rose / in the core of the carrot” – a superb image. The poems would have benefited from greater formal demands. One of the most successful poems is a sonnet, “Blowing the Fluff Away,” in which a brown and brittle sprig of bloom covered with fluff turns out to have genuine flowers underneath. There is too much fluff in *Pause for Breath*, but no doubt the poet still has access to “the tiny, perfect flowers” of her talent.

Suzanne Hancock’s *Cast from Bells* was inspired by one of the great radio documentaries of our time, Peter Leonhard Braun’s “Bells in Europe,” about Hermann Goering’s plan to melt down all the bells of Europe, some 80,000, except for ten in Germany. The best poems in the book concern this act of vandalism – bells cut from the sky to make weapons – and convey a great deal about the construction, naming, and other folklore of bells. The “Holy Ghost Bell” in Strasbourg, to use one vivid example, was never rung except when there were two fires in the city at once.

Bells symbolize human beings in various ways: they have lips and tongues and bellies, they sing, and they sound when struck. Hancock uses the bells of Europe as metaphors for a troubled relationship, which creates a problem of proportion: war in Europe and a faltering love are not perfectly congruent. The poet effectively conveys reconciliation and renewal, however, by describing the transformation of munitions back into bells at the end of the war. This is a brilliant conceit, adding one stage to the Biblical formula: ploughshares beaten into swords, swords turned back to ploughshares. In place of titles, the poems are headed with rather phallic-looking bullets or shells, and these perhaps anticipate the transformation of destruction into fecundity.

One of the best poems has no bell imagery at all but uses the blind dolphins of the Ganges as a way of talking about the awkward dealings of people with each other: the dolphins rely on sonar in their tentative relations with each other. This poem and several others make it clear that Hancock is not just a poet who hit on a lucky formula through the story of the bells of Europe: she has metaphorical reach of her own. The formal variety of the book and the richness of the language make this a strong collection. She can

spread lines in patterns over a page; she can also write a good sonnet.

Iлона Martonfi’s poems in *The Blue Poppy* have more human than literary interest. She writes about life as a refugee (she was born in Hungary, was a refugee in Germany) and as an immigrant to Montreal. Much of her work is about family relationships, and these are probably the most successful.

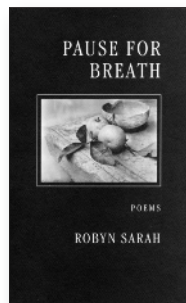
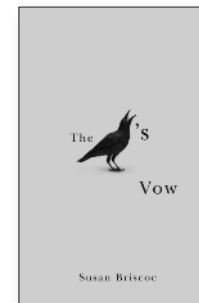
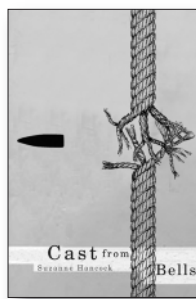
Others deal with an abusive marriage and an ensuing bitter divorce with all the complications of dividing property. The reader will sympathize with her plight but the poetry usually tells what happened without turning it into art. The best of the poems about domestic turmoil is “Weddings,” which catalogues the family members who went to each family wedding: a whole set of complex and conflicted relationships emerges in a series of couplets. The tidiness of the form collides with the untidiness of the relationships.

Susan Briscoe’s *The Crow’s Vow* is another work dealing with a dysfunctional union. Her poems in this sequence are dignified and reticent, so reticent that the terms of estrangement are never made very clear. When one of the poems provides a few outer details – there appears to be a blended family with children, a wife who writes essays, and a man who has clients – the reader seizes them eagerly, hoping to discover a context. The gulf between the man and woman is shown

by their differing responses to nature and gardening – they seem to live in the country – and by the widening gulf in the bed. The wife longs for an arm around her waist, if only to shrug it off.

The sequence of the poems follows the seasons, but it is not clear if the pattern covers a single year, and this tough-minded poet would not think of ending the sequence with spring. The man (who is presented very sketchily) repeatedly speaks of love, but the woman doesn’t believe him and dismisses his love as “skimmed milk virtue.” The reader starts to long for the couple to seek counselling or break into open conflict instead of passive-aggressive manoeuvres: Briscoe knows how to build tension. The presence of the crows throughout the book creates an ominous atmosphere, especially as they have much in common with the humans. Like Kate Hall’s mynahs, they argue, they build a home, and like the characters in the poem, they don’t sing. Perhaps they have marriage vows of a sort, as the title of the book hints.

At the end, after a separation, the wife does appear to admit the husband to her consciousness, to take him seriously, as a man wanting to be seen. Our last glimpse of them finds



see next page

non-fiction

Hi-Toned Obscurantist Lesbo Smut

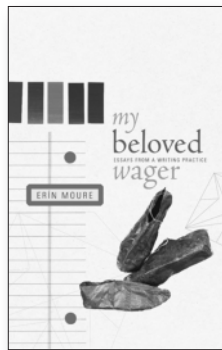
MY BELOVED WAGER

Erin Mouré

NeWest Press

\$24.95, paper, 352pp

ISBN 978-1-897126-45-5



Erin Mouré is known as a “difficult” poet. Her tendency to “push words forward and make them tumble” rarely lulls or comforts the reader. In her new collection of (mostly) prose writing, *My Beloved Wager*, Mouré gives readers a map of her process as a poet, theorist, philosopher, and general heavyweight intellect.

This book, in its density, use of poststructuralist theory, and intellectual *essais*, is no less demanding and no more soothing than her poetry. What’s required to follow Mouré’s process is not a PhD, but a willingness to re-read paragraphs slowly, or backwards, or upside down. Theory, after all, like poetry and stories, deals with the basic elements of human and social life: the body, relationships people have with each other and with the world, and our negotiations with the structures that surround us and through which we move. Mouré communicates the aesthetics of marginalization, the impos-

sibility and importance of translation, and the damage censorship causes to the soul and the body.

It’s not neuroscience.

Or it is – if like Mouré we consider that language proceeds from the actual atoms that form our brains. Poetry is, in Mouré’s view, a scientific process as much as a cultural one.

But the cultural element can’t be ignored. Mouré believes poetry is radical, in both senses of the word: revolutionary as well as “of the roots” since it deals with communication on the most basic level. And this book is radical, politically as well as poetically; though, as a work of poetic exploration, it makes more sense to refer to its driving force as “poetics” rather than “politics.” A radical poetics, then, articulated and explored through questions of citizenship, censorship, identity, borders, and body.

And as such, a poetics committed to the transformation of daily life. Mouré asserts that writing should be treated as a practice rather than a product – a verb rather than a noun. The book does not contain analyses of the meaning of poems, neither Mouré’s nor those of the other poets she features.

Instead, readers are invited to think about what poetry does, as well as how and what it is. Readers are often trained to approach the reading of poetry as a kind of decoding of images, metaphors, and word choices, as though every work is simply a conversion of another clearer, less “poetic” idea. Mouré’s tactics against this approach are, at the very least, exhilarating.

The pieces in this book are varied in theme and tone, but they build on each other and carry ideas forward. We see the author in different frames: coping (wryly, humorously) with the corporate co-opting of poetry, discovering contemporary Toronto through the work of an early modernist Portuguese poet, and, while cooking a pan of quails, attempting to “[participate] with them in the fragility of another act related to song, that of eating.” Mouré

remains remarkably present, as a writer, a woman, a feminist, a lesbian. (At one point, she describes her work, only somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as “hi-toned obscurantist lesbo smut.”) These essays insist upon a philosophy that is sunk in the real, while

remaining ethically and practically bound to the realm of the possible.

Mouré’s “beloved wager” is on the possibilities offered by books: the opportunity at every page to be changed by language and have the world created anew. To read this book is to gamble on one writer’s belief in the importance of words.

It’s a pretty solid bet. **msb**

Anna Leventhal is a writer and performing artist living in Montreal.

What’s required to follow Mouré’s process is not a PhD, but a willingness to re-read paragraphs slowly, or backwards, or upside down.

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MONTREAL CONFIDENTIAL

The Low Down on the Big Town!

By Al Palmer

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Véhicule Press

ISBN 978-1-55065-260-4

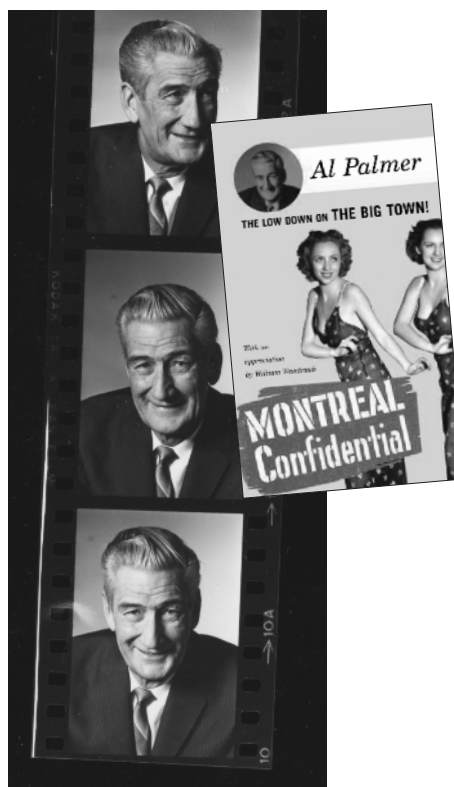
Montreal Confidential was first published in 1950, at the height of this city’s rip-roaring years as an after-dark playground for music, booze, and organized crime. A tell-all confessional written by police and entertainment reporter Al Palmer, this how-to guide to the city’s demons and demigods was a product of “Man About Town” and “Cabaret Circuit,” popular columns he had been writing for the *Montreal Herald*, and a precursor of the work he would continue with the widely read *Gazette* column “Our Town.”

According to the William Weintraub, who writes an appreciation for this Véhicule reissue, Palmer was a star, “a man who knew all of Montreal’s secrets.” He was also a harbinger of what has become a tradition among Montreal writers of a certain strain – Joe Fiorito and Bill Brownstein come to mind – journalists who’ve used their local newspaper beats as springboards to tackle the unique characteristics of Montreal in book form. Palmer also published a pulp novel – *Sugar Puss on Dorchester Street*, which now commands as much as \$89

on the collector’s circuit. His journalism archives at Concordia University show that he regularly wrote for the papers up to his death in 1971.

It’s not hard to see where the attraction lay in bringing this book, sixty years later, to new generations of readers. Reading *Montreal Confidential* is like exhuming a long-lost neighbourhood within the city you thought you knew. For the most part, Palmer’s Montreal no longer exists. The street names have been changed in part to accommodate a different cultural history, and the pleasure arena of fancy nightclubs and eateries that was once St. Kit’s (as St. Catherine Street was known to Anglo locals) has been pushed to the edges of downtown by office buildings and brand-name stores.

There is a strong procedural aspect to Palmer’s writing, and, among other things, the approach reveals a period-specific code of interaction that would be unfamiliar to Montrealers today. Palmer will tell you in great detail (and *tell* is the operative verb here; this book is littered with blunt dos and don’ts) where to take a date, depending on how much money you have to spend, and how much to tip all levels of restaurant and nightclub staff. If you’re a girl moving to Montreal, he’ll tell you where to stay on your first night in town, and where to go afterwards. If you’re looking for beer,



this town inside and out, and *Montreal Confidential* is an amusing and frequently intriguing snapshot of a time when Anglos had a stronger foothold in the city’s business community and nightlife. Véhicule Press’ venture into reissuing Montreal’s cultural history ought to be applauded. Palmer, after all, belongs to the lineage of writers who currently fill this city with words, and one would hope that the regional independents would take even greater interest in reissuing the works of more long-gone local talents. **msb**

Dimitri Nasrallah is a novelist and music journalist.

poetry (from page 6)

them in bed, though they appear to have come to the house, single file, through heavy snow – the kind of simple but subtle detail that Briscoe excels at. She is a brilliant writer whose brilliance manifests itself in small strokes, images of “kisses like slim dimes,” sharp-eyed observations (“the snow melts first / at the base of things”) and sudden shifts of tone. Her reference to Erik Satie in one poem points to an aesthetic of minimalism, of small utterances that imply more than they say: an honourable approach to poetry. **msb**

Bert Almon’s new book, *Waiting for the Gulf Stream*, is due from Hagios Press in the autumn of 2010.

Palmer’s got advice on that as well.

When Palmer’s colourful period slang soars – waiters are “tray toters who served the stupor suds”; World War II is the “Late Hate” – his habit of telling readers what to do can feel like a bona fide insider’s view of the big town. There are more than a few occasions, however, on which Palmer spends pages painstakingly documenting, say, the careers of various headwaiters across the city, and one has to wonder if this degree of detail would have been advisable even when the book was first published.

Either way, Palmer certainly knew

Shakespeare Versus Shareholders

SELLING OUT

Academic Freedom and the Corporate Market

By Howard Woodhouse

\$39.95, cloth, 360pp

McGill-Queen's University Press

ISBN 978-0-7735-3580-0

Academics just can't seem to get it right.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift ridiculed how removed their pursuits were from daily life. He depicted them as so caught up in the abstract that they couldn't walk or talk without having a "flapper" remind them of the task at hand with a smack on the face. He also mocked their areas of interest by inventing some of his own, such as "extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers" and reconstructing food from excrement.

Yet now, almost three hundred years later, academia is under fire for doing exactly the opposite. Instead of delving into the arcane, many universities are pandering to the needs of big business in order to turn a profit.

The question is: which is worse? Alienating the taxpaying – and univer-

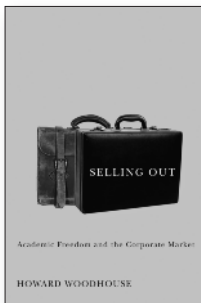
sity-supporting – public with inaccessible research or prioritizing applied research because it pays the rent?

From the title of his new book *Selling Out*, it is clear where Howard Woodhouse stands. Before presenting his arguments

against corporate meddling in higher education, he demonstrates how tight the relationship between companies and academia actually is. He is rightly disgusted when he hears

Dr. Tom Brzustowski, Ontario's deputy minister of colleges and universities, say that "the one global object of education in Ontario must necessarily be a greater capability of the people of Ontario to create wealth."

Woodhouse, co-director of the University of Saskatchewan Process Philosophy Research Unit, is concerned about the way many universities are currently adopting the market model by partnering with companies



which, in exchange for financial support, dictate instructional approach and the direction of research programs. This arrangement means that the company gets the patent for whatever idea emerges from professors' research.

As Woodhouse points out, there is an inherent contradiction between the goals of companies and those of universities. While universities seek "knowledge [which] is itself a public

Woodhouse proposes an alternative educational model that focuses on pursuing truth rather than money.

good whose value is realized through its being shared," companies can only generate wealth by owning the ideas. He goes on to defend the idea of an education system free of corporate puppeteers, exposing the problems posed by the market model through theoretical analyses as well as concrete examples taken from Canadian universities. While the conventional idea today is that the market model is the way of the future, Woodhouse proposes an alternative educational

model that focuses on pursuing truth rather than money.

He makes his case convincingly. Sometimes, though, he is so committed to restating his thesis that *Selling Out* reads like a well-researched term paper. Even when recounting the dirty dealings of deans and business people – the stuff of spy novels – he fails to create a narrative arc that makes one want to keep reading. On occasion, Woodhouse might have been forced to sacrifice compelling prose for the sake of a watertight argument, but that he does so throughout the book is frustrating for the reader. It's a pity, as Woodhouse cares deeply about his subject, and has covered it thoroughly.

But readers should not let Woodhouse's overly academic approach turn them off his ideas. His point of view is important for anyone who values the acquisition of knowledge. By letting corporate interests oversee the education system, society stands to lose the possibility of properly engaging with ideas that are too abstract to interest the corporate world, as well as the honesty and freedom that should characterize higher education in the 21st century. As novelist J. M. Coetzee puts it: "If we can't trust the university, who can we trust?" mb

Eric Boodman is a Montreal writer, musician and student.

The Cadence of Exile

GROWING WITH CANADA

The Émigré Tradition in Canadian Music

By Paul Helmer

\$49.95, cloth, 384pp

McGill-Queen's University Press

ISBN 978-0-7735-3581-7

The flight of European artists from Hitler dramatically altered cultural life on both sides of the Atlantic. The contribution of these refugees to American music has been explored in books such as *Hitler's Loss* (Peter Owen, 2001) and *Driven into Paradise* (University of California Press, 1999). Now, in *Growing with Canada: The Émigré Tradition in Canadian Music* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), retired McGill professor of musicology Paul Helmer examines, through interviews and archival research, the impact of refugee musicians on this country.

Helmer identifies 121 musicians who left Europe between 1933 and 1948 and eventually settled in Canada. These he casts in a heroic glow. They are not "exiles," but "émigrés" who exercised free will and chose to leave: "In that moment the 'exile' transforms himself or herself into an émigré, thereby freeing himself or herself from tyranny, and a new life becomes possible. Each time this occurs it is a victory for humanity [...]."

This rather romantic perspective informs the central theme of the

book, what Helmer calls the "exile as émigré" model." He proposes this paradigm in opposition to the standard *Exilforschung* ("Exile studies"), a sub-genre of literary studies that examines the cost of the Hitler's cultural policies to Germany and its artists.

His positive spin focuses not on Europe's loss, but on the musicians' contributions to their new-found home.

The narrative that follows, however, cannot quite bear the weight of this theoretical framework. The structure of *Growing with Canada* reflects its subjects' life journeys, and Helmer struggles to condense the experiences of 121 individuals into a coherent story. Over seven chapters, Helmer traces the musicians' journeys from their European homes through statelessness to their arrival and new lives in Canada. In a brief epilogue, a few émigrés reflect on visits back to their homelands.

In the early chapters, Helmer groups together common experiences – "The Decision to Leave," "Choosing Canada," "The Camp Boys" – and spills them onto the page. But the profusion of anecdotes only confuses the reader. Names appear briefly at first only to resurface halfway through the book. The final chapter is

equally overwhelming: in only 46 pages, the reader must wade through 59 mini-biographies of performers, teachers, administrators, impresarios, and benefactors who participated in Canada's musical life.

In the middle chapters, Helmer finds his stride. Here the author turns his attention to two central characters, Arnold Walter and Helmut Blume, and their roles in reforming

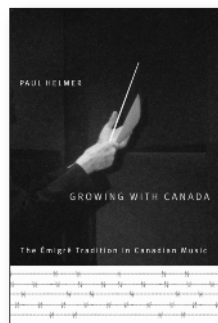
postsecondary music education in Canada. Between 1944 and 1952, Walter struggled to establish music – both academic and performance studies – within the University of Toronto. He had to break down an outdated British education system and borrow from his Central European tradition, as well as new American models, thereby creating a typically Canadian hybrid.

Helmer draws an interesting parallel between this achievement and the McGill University Faculty of Music's own coming of age five years later. In 1957, faced with the prospect of an imperious, imported Brit as dean, Helmut Blume and other music instructors threatened resignation. The appointment was ultimately revoked and a trio of local musicians, Blume included, set about building McGill's international reputation for music education.

The appendices of *Growing with Canada* form another valuable aspect of this book. Helmer points future re-

searchers towards both archival and published sources of information about each émigré musician that complement his own interviews. Canadian music research is still in its infancy and, as Helmer's research poignantly demonstrates, our connection to the past is literally dying away. The interviews he has compiled document some extraordinary contributions to Canada's musical heritage. One only wishes the book could have been as compelling. mb

Brian McMillan is a Music Liaison Librarian at the Marvin Duchow Music Library of McGill University.



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Stories from the Sea Ice

ENCOUNTERS ON THE PASSAGE

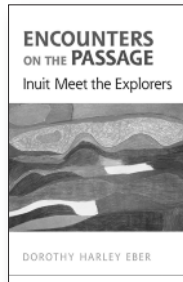
Inuit Meet the Explorers

By Dorothy Harley Eber

\$21.95, paper, 240pp

University of Toronto Press

ISBN 978-1-4426-1103-0



Long before our present-day global thaw would make it feasible, western nations dreamed of trading with the Far East via a nice, direct polar route over the Americas. There are a great many books on the search for the Northwest Passage, including published accounts by the intrepid explorers themselves. During the 19th century the British and North American public watched with bated breath as expeditions braved death by slow freezing, sickness, and starvation in what seemed to be an impossible – and impassable – environment.

But what say the people who were already there? What say the Inuit, who were watching from the sea ice?

Dorothy Harley Eber helps answer this question with her important book *Encounters on the Passage: Inuit Meet the Explorers*. Eber is a Montreal-based writer who has already written many books on the Inuit, with particular attention to the oral histories still told in Arctic communities.

Drawn from her own interviews as well as from archived collections of oral history in communities of the Arctic archipelago, the stories in Eber's book offer readers a glimpse into another side of the "encounter": the discovery of a pale-looking people, rich with wood and metal. Inuit stories of these new people describe conflict, deceit, and occasional murderous intent on both sides. They also recount times of mutual aid, sympathy, and even affection.

Encounters on the Passage draws extensively from a wealth of explorers' first-hand accounts, providing contexts for Inuit oral histories that go back as far as when Martin Frobisher sailed under orders from Queen Elizabeth I. Subsequent voyages are covered, under historic figures such as John Ross, William Edward Parry, Sir John Franklin – whose expedition is famously mysterious and tragic – right through to the

first successful passage by Roald Amundsen in 1906.

The explorers' stories are essential to the narrative; Eber has selected relevant, engaging, and often witty excerpts from original sources. Even so, readers might find themselves wanting a greater emphasis on the Inuit perspective. Oral history, however, is like other dwindling resources: we must make do with what remains. As the author puts it in her introduction, "When I arrive in a community, I often wish I had been in time to talk to storytellers of a frustratingly recent past." In the chapter "New Franklin Stories," informant Lena Kingmiatook of Taloyoak finishes her tale in the same spirit: "Sadly the story ends here. We would like to know more about it, too."

Eber's writing is vivid and she is usually crystal clear in the service of her selected passages. Frequently, however, the author does not give her dense thoughts the space they deserve: "The colours of the Arctic today are blue and dove grey, like a Tony Onley watercolour, and on this brilliant clean morning John Macdonald, director of the Igloolik Research Centre, is driving us over the road that leads to the point off which William Edward Parry of the Royal Navy – whom Inuit call Paarii – anchored his expedition in the winter of 1822–3." Crammed and confusing, assemblages such as these are a shame because they are so easily fixed.

The book is generously illustrated with reproductions of Inuit artwork and art inspired by exploration voyages. Maps and a chronological list of the voyages are also provided.

The author is scrupulous about presenting the contradictions between oral accounts, and acknowledges those which have perhaps been blended from earlier stories about separate events. But in *Encounters on the Passage*, Eber demonstrates that oral histories offer us a viewpoint which historic documents cannot, and provide further answers to our questions about Canada's past. mb

Raquel Rivera is a writer, artist and co-founder of In My Hysterical Opinion (www.imho-reviews.com).

All the Wrong Reasons

AFGHANISTAN AND CANADA

Is There an Alternative to War?

Edited by Lucia Kowaluk and Steven Staples

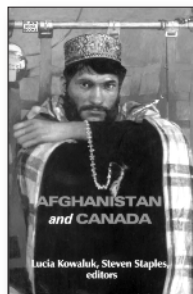
Black Rose Books

\$24.99, paper, 362pp

ISBN 978-1-55164-328-1

The attacks of September 11, 2001 changed the way people from many countries viewed their place in the world. Within days, it seemed that news organizations around the globe were focussing on U.S. security and Western foreign policy. Soon this focus shifted to the harsh landscapes of Afghanistan: Afghanistan? What did the Afghans have to do with 9/11? Were those responsible for this attack really hiding in the remote mountains of this country?

Afghanistan and Canada: Is There An Alternative To War? is a collection of essays about one of the most controversial Canadian military involvements in recent memory. Edited by Lucia Kowaluk, a grass-roots community organizer, and Steven Staples of the Rideau Institute, a research, advocacy, and consulting group on public policy issues in Ottawa, contributors include experts such as Asad Ismi (who contributed an interview with Afghan MP Malalai Joya), Pierre Beaudet (Professor at the University of Ottawa), Tariq Ali, and Linda McQuaig. These writers seek



not only to educate and inform readers, but also to bring into focus what they consider to be the real reason Canadian soldiers are risking their lives: the United States' desire to turn Afghanistan into a corridor from

which to access and control the untapped oil resources of Central Asia. After reading a few of these persuasively written chapters, one cannot help but believe that Canada is in Afghanistan for all the wrong reasons.

A photographic survey of Afghani daily life opens the mood and establishing context. Each photograph in this survey, which is only a few pages long, gives a small taste of how much better life in Afghanistan could be. For example, one photograph shows three Afghani men holding up their voting cards, a hopeful gesture which demonstrates the desire for change. The subsequent essays are arranged in a series of interlinked topics that can easily stand as separate reads. The sequence in which the essays are presented is questionable. One particular section called "Women's Question" would have been better positioned at the beginning of the book as it gives an extremely informative overview of the rights of Afghani women, both past and present, as well as Afghani life in general. The emotional overtones and historical

perspectives in this section would help establish a stronger connection between the reader and the people of Afghanistan if it immediately followed the photographic material.

The essays in this collection, which are academic in tone, contain many notes and references to substantiate the writers' assertions. There are, however, passages that merely express opinions. For example, the organization *Échec à la guerre* asserts in one essay, without proof, that Canada would have suffered political and economic repercussions had it not joined the United States and its allies during the weeks that followed 9/11. But this becomes less important once the reader absorbs the organization's claims as a whole and the facts put forth to support them.

This book is not bedtime reading and, at times, its content is frustrating simply because its subject matter is difficult to confront. It does, however, provide the reader with an alternative view of the Afghanistan conflict. *Afghanistan and Canada* will appeal to readers who are sympathetic to Noam Chomsky's political views. And as with Chomsky's books, *Afghanistan and Canada* must be read more than once if readers are to understand a conflict that is much more complex than portrayed in the mass media. mb

An avid student of current affairs, **Franc Gagnon** is a freelance copywriter and indexer.

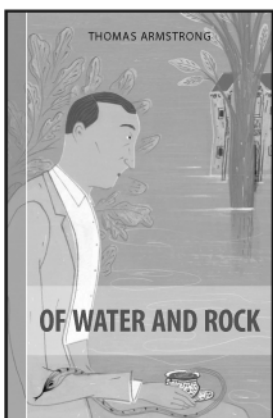
Spring 2010

Fiction

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WHEN TORONTONIAN EDWARD HAMPSTEAD STEPS OFF THE PLANE IN BARBADOS, IN THE WINTER OF 1969, HE CROSSES MORE THAN THE TARMAC AT SEAWELL AIRPORT. AS HE NAVIGATES THE ISLAND'S RACIAL AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES, HE LEAVES BEHIND AN EMPTY LIFE OF COMFORT AND DISCOVERS A VIBRANT WORLD OF SIMPLE BEAUTY, AN UNDISCOVERED FAMILY, AND RECONCILIATION WITH THE MEMORY OF A LONG DEAD FATHER.

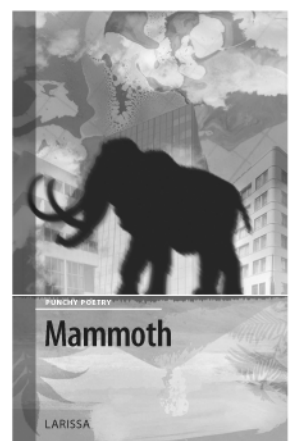
AS WELL AS REVEALING THE TRUE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PROTAGONISTS, EDWARD HEARS HIS FATHER'S VOICE, COMES TO UNDERSTAND AND PITY THE MAN THAT HE HAS FOR SO LONG DESPISED, AND RESOLVES TO UNITE HIS NEWLY DISCOVERED FAMILY IN A WAY HIS FATHER NEVER COULD.

OF WATER AND ROCK
BY THOMAS ARMSTRONG
— \$19.95 PAPER, \$34.95 BOUND



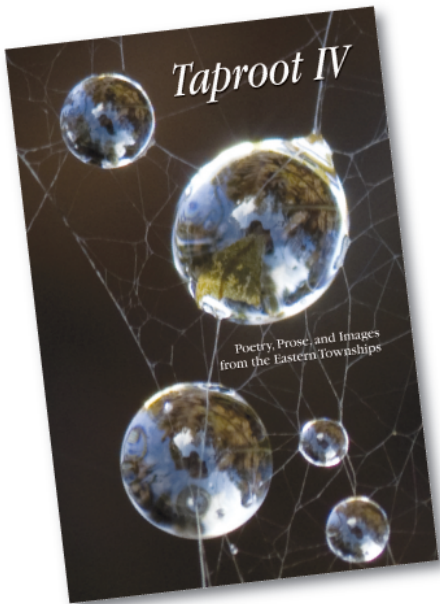
LARISSA ANDRUSYSHYN'S DÉBUT COLLECTION CONFRONTS LOSS AND MOURNING BY EXPLORING THE LYRIC SCIENCE BEHIND KEEPING THINGS ALIVE IN A WORLD WHERE TECHNOLOGY IS AT WORK REVIVING EXTINCT SPECIES. WITNESS TO THE PROCESS AND FACT OF HER FATHER'S DEATH, ANDRUSYSHYN PROCEEDS TO FIND HIM AGAIN THROUGH A SERIES OF INNOVATIVE POEMS THAT MOVE SEAMLESSLY FROM THE MUSEUM TO THE PETRI DISH, THE FAIRGROUND TO THE CLONING LAB. MAMMOTH APPROACHES THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF DEATH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BLAKE'S 'AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE' AND CONSEQUENTLY DEVELOPS ITS OWN MODE OF POST-DARWINIAN ELEGY, WHEREIN DEATH IS EXAMINED WITHOUT BATHOS, THROUGH THE PALEONTOLOGIST'S MAGNIFYING GLASS AND THE GENETICIST'S MICROSCOPE.

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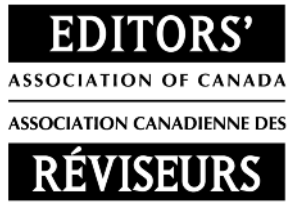
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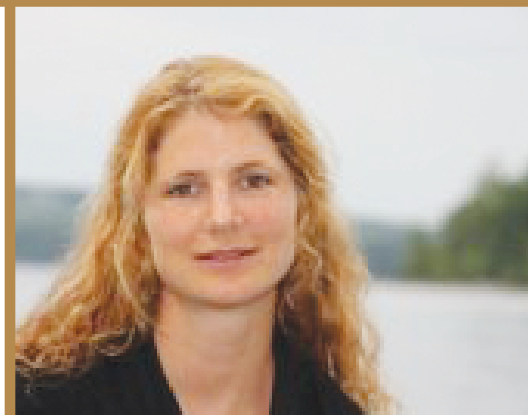


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HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, DAD

Johanna Skibsrud's
debut novel examines
the all-too-human need
to simplify the past

Montreal writer Johanna Skibsrud's last name couldn't be more appropriate. It is Norwegian, she told me recently in a crowded café near her home in the Mile End, and means "ship's rudder."



It is appropriate because the central image of Skibsrud's artful debut novel, *The Sentimentalists*, is a sailboat. Napoleon Haskell, father of the book's female narrator, builds it himself in an inland town in Maine, beginning work in the year of the narrator's birth and continuing for the next few years, regaling his wife and two daughters with promises of an ocean sail.

The promises turn out to be empty. The carpenter-father deserts his family without explanation or apology, leaving them in a half-finished house with a half-finished boat. It would be easy to cast such a man as a villain, but Skibsrud refuses to do so, delivering instead a character of convincing complexities and contradictions. This chain-smoking, alcoholic wreck of a man whose sole pleasure in his final years seems to be doing the daily crossword is so closely drawn, he comes across as sympathetic, as flawed people are in real life. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War, we learn, who has never spoken about his wartime experiences to his wife or children or, presumably, anyone else. He is also "a great reader and a great

rememberer of things, though he never remembered anything in the right order, or entirely," Skibsrud writes, "and always had just little bits of all the books and poems he'd ever read floating around in his mind."

Besides conveying the mind of Napoleon Haskell, this passage introduces one of the book's major themes – the slippery nature of memory.

When the novel opens, Napoleon Haskell is dying of lung cancer in the town of Casablanca, Ontario, on the shores of a man-made lake. At the bottom of this lake lie the remains of the original town, submerged decades ago when the lake was created. Napoleon lives there with Henry, the father of his old friend, Owen, who died fighting in Vietnam.

When her lover betrays her, the narrator leaves her apartment in Brooklyn and retreats to the Casablanca house, where she spent summers as a child. She comes to this supposedly simpler place, evocative of memories of a supposedly simpler time in her life, and immediately finds herself immersed in complicated stories from her family's past. These sto-

ries seem to lurk everywhere, just below the surface of things, much like the submerged town of Casablanca.

The idea for the novel came to Skibsrud in the summer of 2003, right before she moved to Montreal to begin an MA in Creative Writing at Concordia University. Originally from Nova Scotia, she had spent the summer of 2003 on Flagstaff Lake in northern Maine, canoeing over a submerged town. That autumn, her father telephoned her and, for the first time, began to recount his wartime experiences.

"I am still not sure exactly why he told me his story when he did," Skibsrud confides, "but I think it had to do – it was 2003 then – with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which had been for some time stirring in him a deep anger toward a government willing to repeat the mistakes of the past at the expense of innocent people; soldiers as well as civilians."

The setting for the novel was eventually switched from Maine to the "lost villages" of Southern Ontario, flooded when the Saint Lawrence Seaway was expanded

continued on page 16

CANADA AND ISRAEL

NEW THIS SPRING

**Islamophobia and the Question of Muslim Identity:
The Politics of Difference and Solidarity** by Evelyn Leslie Hamdon
9781552663394 \$15.95

This book follows a Muslim coalition as they consider the concept of identity in the aftermath of September 11th and under the shadow of Islamophobia.

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by Charles T. Adeyanju
9781552663417 \$15.95
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9781552663561 \$17.95
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True Patriote Love

THE RIOT THAT NEVER WAS
The Military Shooting of Three
Montrealers in 1832 and the
Official Cover-up
 By James Jackson
 Baraka Books
 \$29.95, paper, 360pp
 ISBN 978-0-981240558

“History will record that the criminal instigators to riot and bloodshed ... had the shameless effrontery ... to attempt to poison and pervert the minds of illiterate multitudes, to cover their own iniquity, and cast the blame of blood from their own guilty heads upon the official defenders of the laws and the peace of society.”

Such was the accusation levelled by one newspaper editor at the Patriotes, a political party in Lower Canada (present-day Quebec), and one of its prominent members, Irish-born journalist Daniel Tracey. Tracey won a by-election with a slim margin in

May 1832. When the polls closed on May 21, Patriote supporters started a riot in the Place d’Armes, and British troops opened fire on the crowd, killing three people. The author of the above passage had no doubt that the Patriotes, as the instigators of the riot, were to blame for the deaths.

In *The Riot that Never Was*, James Jackson disputes this interpretation, arguing that the skirmishes and celebratory outbursts in the square that day simply did not add up to a riot. He makes the case that the magistrates who ordered troops to fire were hoping to control the outcome of the election with their show of force. Relying primarily on government journals and newspaper editorials, Jackson describes the final day of voting in exhaustive detail and scrutinizes the testimony of dozens of witnesses in the subsequent 14-month inquiry.

His argument is persuasive: it seems likely that the authorities’ reaction to post-electoral excitement was out of proportion to the danger posed, and that they were eager to put Patriote supporters in their place. On the other hand, it does not seem implausible that the magistrates, already predisposed to view Tracey’s

supporters as unruly members of the lower classes, genuinely saw the situation as explosive. The Patriotes had been pushing for democratic reforms for some time, and the ruling class may well have felt threatened by the groundswell of support for Tracey. Indeed, five years later tensions erupted in a rebellion led by the Patriotes. Whatever the magistrates’ motivations, their actions had an unintended polarizing effect.

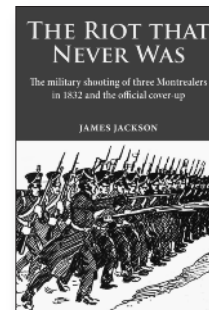
Unfortunately, Jackson shows little inclination to situate this incident in a historical context. In a provocative introduction, he notes that he “avoided wider historiographical issues surrounding the events of May 21 such as the nature of civil-military relations at the time, their impact on society and political life, the role of ethnicity in what happened and the use made of public space. Instead, I have concentrated on events rather than on theory.”

He is true to his word, rarely stepping back from the day in question to look at the bigger picture. For anyone not well-versed in Quebec history, this

is likely to cause some frustration. Even a brief discussion of attitudes to colonial power, the emergence of the Patriote movement, or the ethnic divisions that marked Montreal society would help to orient the reader. Instead, Jackson dives into a sea of names and details, leaving the unsuspecting reader to breathlessly sort out which ones are important to retain.

He spends even less time analyzing the repercussions of the event. In the final paragraph of the book, he notes that the shootings and their aftermath radicalized some Patriotes, paving the way for “the events of 1837 and 1838.” This confusingly vague reference to the Patriotes’ rebellion deserves to be developed and explored, but instead it serves as a closing statement. Jackson is engaging as a sleuth, but he focuses his investigative lens so narrowly that he may fail to convince readers of the broader significance of a seemingly minor historical episode. **mb**

Kate Forrest is a Montreal writer, translator and reviewer.

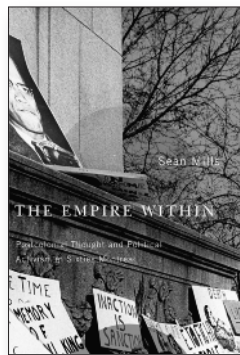


Empire Québécois

THE EMPIRE WITHIN
Postcolonial Thought and Political
Activism in Sixties Montreal
 By Sean Mills
 McGill-Queen’s University Press
 \$29.95, cloth, 318pp
 ISBN 978-0-7735-3683-8
 Reviewed from uncorrected proofs

In *The Empire Within*, Sean Mills describes and analyzes a period of social turmoil in Montreal (from 1963 to 1973) whose legacies have shaped contemporary political and social life, both in the city and Quebec as a whole. Bringing to life a period that shaped current events and brought forth much current activism, the book contributes to an understanding of contemporary debates concerning language and Aboriginal rights as well as reasonable accommodation.

The era covered in the book gave rise to multiple social struggles. The roots of various women’s, labour, Black, and community movements can be traced to a period principally linked, in Quebec, to the birth of the Quebec independence movement. Every one of these struggles was influenced by a common framework yet retained a “distinct narrative of liberation.” Each took its place in a movement of opposition, based in Montreal, which influenced the whole of Quebec society. In a context where the language of decolonization shaped radicalism, the ideologies and struggles expressed by these movements were not unique to Montreal and Quebec. The international movements against colonialism shaped both the analysis and the vision of the period, and Mills presents radical nationalists as French-speaking Quebecers who understood that they were a colonized minority within Canada and North America. The connections between nationalism, the demands to make French the language of Quebec and the radicalization of the labour move-



ment – along with some of the major events of the period such as strikes, rallies, demonstrations, *The War Measures Act*, etc. – are clearly documented, and the book includes writings of major intellectuals who influenced these movements.

In order to dispel the myth that the voice of liberation in Quebec spoke only French, the book includes chapters on the Black community, the English-speaking minority, feminists, those involved in neighbourhood struggles and in McGill Français. The chapter titled “Montreal’s Black Renaissance” shows that Montreal was a centre for Black intellectual ferment and action which converged with some radical nationalist activities. Another chapter, devoted to the origins of the women’s movement, demonstrates the power of the movement’s challenge to male domination in everyday life as well as within the nationalist and labour movements.

Though it provides readers with a wonderful historical starting point, the book fails to elaborate on the legacy of the ten-year period in question. The leaders of the nationalist movement understood that French-speaking Quebecers were a colonized people, but ignored the demands of the First Nations. As a consequence, social movements in Quebec have been slow to support the demands of Aboriginal communities. This has resulted in events such as Oka and the Mercier Bridge blockade. Likewise, the definition of nationalism shifted from one located within a radical decolonization tradition to one based on identity and language, which marginalizes the English-speaking and immigrant working classes. This consequence is particularly important as migration to Quebec from the “Global South,” with many using English as their first North American language, increases.

As someone who came of age politically in the latter part of the period covered by the book, I remember many of the incidents described. More im-

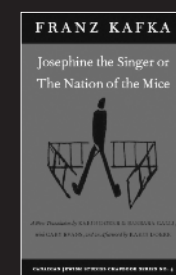
In order to dispel the myth that the voice of liberation in Quebec spoke only French, the book includes chapters on the Black community, the English-speaking minority, feminists ...

portantly, however, I have seen over the past thirty years how this earlier period has both limited and given strength to various movements and organizations. The strength this period gives comes from its militancy and prevailing view that the target of social change movements was a system, namely capitalism and the power of “Empire.”

This is an accessible book that, for the most part, does not get lost in arcane theoretical discussions, as might be implied by the title.

The Empire Within should be required reading for anyone who wants to understand Montreal and Quebec society. **mb**

Eric Shragge is Associate Professor and Principal of the School of Community and Public Affairs of Concordia University



JOSEPHINE THE SINGER OR
THE NATION OF THE MICE
 By Franz Kafka
 Hungry I Books
 \$12.95, paper, 46pp
 isbn 978-0-8894-7471-0

The Concordia Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies recently published the fourth title in its Chapbook Series: Franz Kafka’s *Josephine the Singer or The Nation of the Mice*, translated by Karin Doerr, Barbara Galli, and Gary Evans. Printed by Gaspereau Press, this slim, beautifully made book contains a new translation of Kafka’s last short story as well as an essay by Doerr. Doerr’s thoughtful, precise, and accessible essay places Kafka’s story in the context of German anti-Semitism of the early 1920s and analyzes Kafka’s Jewish identity within that context. Kafka’s story is rich but dense, and Doerr’s essay provides readers with some guidelines with which they can navigate the work, whether they are already familiar with Kafka’s writing or not. **VB**

Om Canada

WILD GEESE

Buddhism in Canada

Edited by John S. Harding,

Victor S. Hori, and Alexander Soucy

McGill-Queen's University Press

\$29.95, paper, 476pp

ISBN 978-0-7735-3667-8

Reviewed from uncorrected proofs

*The wild geese do not leave traces,
The water has no mind to receive
their image*

—Zen verse

When does casual bedside reading qualify as legitimate Buddhist practice? How should devout spiritual practitioners who resolutely refuse to identify with an institutional label be classified? Is there any value in distinguishing between Western converts to Buddhism and native Asian practitioners? These are some of the questions raised in *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*, a collection of 15 scholarly essays edited by John S. Harding, Victor S. Hori, and Alexander Soucy.

Hori skillfully presents the “us” and “them” mentality of Western convert versus Asian ethnic Buddhist as a fallacious dichotomy that grows more complex as subsequent generations of Buddhists become integrated into Western culture. Hori perceptively notes that many Western converts to Buddhism raise “dharma brats,” whereas many third-generation Chinese immigrants do not practice Buddhism at all. The question translates further into religious devotion and consistency. The Western “night-stand Buddhist” sits up late reading Pema Chödrön and Chögyam Trungpa. More committed practitioners may jump from one tradition to another, attending Zen meditation sessions one week, meeting with a Theravada teacher the following week, and reading literature from the Dalai Lama the next.

Several essays address these diverse Buddhist traditions across Canada, mapping their spread across the provinces and the ways in which they intersect. Terry Watada traces the lineage of Buddhism in Canada from its Japanese roots going back to 1905, when Buddhism was regarded with suspicion and intolerance, to the blow taken by the Japanese Buddhist population during World War II, up to the present day. Traditions covered include Jodo Shinshu, Shambhala, Fo Guang Shan, Lao, and the more popular Tibetan and Zen forms. The anthology often

highlights the two-way cultural exchange between East and West and the evolution of Buddhism on both sides of the globe. The distinction may be best expressed as one not of race or immigration or language, but of practice.

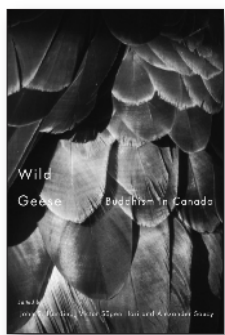
Canadian Zen Buddhism, for instance, emphasizes meditation, traditionally a less prominent part of the practice, and downplays the customary importance of karma and rebirth. Many subjects interviewed for Patricia Campbell's Zen article engaged in “religious shopping.” Peter, a fifty-six year old librarian, says, “most accomplished Buddhists or authorities will say: choose a tradition or choose a practice and follow it. But what I've been doing over the last several years is picking and choosing, finding

what works for me and following that.” The result is a pastiche of religious traditions that may ultimately dilute the power of discrete religious association in favour of an amorphous, continuously evolving Buddhist tradition.

The final chapters on spiritual leader Albert Low – who now heads the Montreal Zen Centre – and practitioner Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri will appeal more to the non-scholarly reader. They present a tangible, concrete face to Buddhism and fit into a coherent narrative structure. The winding road of Low's spiritual crises and breakthroughs makes for a less formal, more compelling portrait of Buddhist spiritual life in Canada, and Sugunasiri's life story serves as “a prism through which the history of Buddhism in Canada comes into focus.”

There's a lot to digest in a dense 400-page compilation. For the casual reader seeking a better understanding of Buddhism, the anthology brings more questions than answers. *Wild Geese* critically deconstructs the concepts presently applied to Buddhism in the West and builds a foundation for further study. The anthology ties the culture of Buddhism in Canada to the international evolution of Buddhism. As a sweeping, if not comprehensive, analysis of the Buddhist institutions in Canada, and a call to elucidate issues standing in the way of further research, it is a fine start to a burgeoning field of study. **mb**

Sarah Fletcher is a regular contributor to Rover Arts and works as a copywriter and web marketing specialist in Montreal.



Dishing out the Past(a)

ITALY REVISITED

Conversations with My Mother

By Mary Melfi

Guernica Editions

\$25.00, paper, 326pp

ISBN 978-1-550712865

In the memoir *Italy Revisited: Conversations with My Mother*, Mary Melfi takes up a daunting task: she sets out to mine her mother's memories about life in a medieval Italian town during the first half of the 20th century. More poignantly, as an immigrant's daughter, she attempts to construct a framework in which she can fit herself and her notion of where she comes from. The past, Melfi writes, “is like the North Star, helps one navigate; find one's way home.” The memoir could just as easily have been subtitled “In Search of Me.”

Mary Melfi and her family arrived in Canada as part of the wave of immigrants fleeing Europe after WWII. Left behind was the land (*la patria*), grinding poverty (*la miseria*), relatives – and family history, which children of immigrants, like Melfi, often push aside. But when an elderly aunt dies, Melfi decides there's no time to lose in capturing the past. It is no coincidence that Melfi begins resurrecting her family's history on Palm Sunday and, 71 conversation-like chapters later, ends it on Easter Monday.

Having grown up in Montreal as someone who fit into neither “founding culture,” Melfi knows of the disconnect between generations and conveys it very well. For Melfi, as for many immigrant children, language and knowledge of the prevailing culture become weapons to beat off Old World ways. Acting as translators, children obtain a measure of power over their elders.

But the author has an agenda and, in a courtroom, Melfi's questions to her mother would be called leading. Sometimes, the voices of mother and daughter even become indistinguishable. As

though unable to shrug off the role of translator, Melfi labours to give her mother's stories contemporary meaning by filtering them through the modern lens of feminism and a new-found pride in *la patria*. She clings to romantic notions about a way of life lost but for the stories she pries out of her mother. Unfortunately, Melfi's unwillingness to accept the realities of *la miseria* is too often an intrusion.

Melfi's mother is alert to her daughter's efforts and resists exploring her memories, especially when preparing dishes her daughter never had the patience to learn how to cook. “You're looking for beautiful memories but I just have sad ones,” she says.

Without common terms of reference, Melfi's ability to translate grows harder. To compensate, Melfi – a poet and writer of fiction and children's stories – peppers the book with statistics, historical information, and personal observations. These take the reader away from the central relationship and the compelling flow of Melfi's lyrical style.

Chapters reveal village mores, superstitions, the barter system, all the harshness of rural life lived in a stone cottage with no amenities and, always, the food that sustained daily life and marked feast days. Melfi even tosses in a few recipes for good measure. These sections are short and readable, when Melfi is not adding her own spin on every tale.

The book's main strength and main weakness both lie in its tension of viewpoints. In *Italy Revisited*, the clash of wills between daughter and mother limns the contrast between them as well as the pervasive regret on both sides over lost opportunities. It also poignantly illustrates why, as modern women, immigrant daughters have an additional handicap in understanding their mothers. “Am I writing non-fiction or fiction here?” Melfi asks. For the reader, her mother's life ultimately holds more fascination than Melfi's take on it. **mb**

Gina Roitman is a Montreal poet and author of a collection of short stories titled *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth*.



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fiction

Rebels Without a Cause

THE JIHADIST

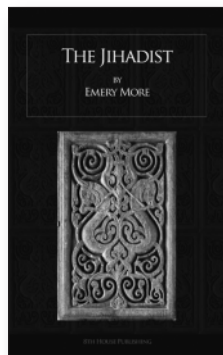
By Emery More
8th House Publishing
\$15.88, paper, 96pp
ISBN 978-0-980910889

UNWANTED HOPELESS ROMANTIC MORONS

By Geoffrey Alexander Parsons
8th House Publishing
\$15.88, paper, 174pp
ISBN 978-0980910896

In *The Jihadist*, Emery More sets out to explore the psyche of someone driven to militant extremism. This interesting premise is, unfortunately, hampered by a story that is directionless and mired in melodramatic language.

Inigo suffers from “a lugubrious state of mind,” spending far too much time brooding in his apartment, feeling both alienated from society and drawn to a grand but uncertain purpose: “the more steps he took in its pursuit, the tighter was that mesh which held the seat of his being wound until a tension was created and storms unleashed and the waters blown up and the whole world about him plunged into darkness impenetrable.” The melodrama is suffocating and makes Inigo appear more manic-depressive than long-suffering.



Despite the book's provocative title, More strips his story of religion and politics, a problematic approach to a subject fundamentally linked to both. It is hard to believe that the vague anxieties and frustrations that plague Inigo could lead him to his final act – though what exactly he is acting against is unclear. Any connection between Inigo's ranting and actual jihad remains tenuous.

The text offers enticing clues:

Inigo's father was killed overseas by a bomb; Inigo steals library books on a subject that is hidden from the reader; a pamphlet he carries in his pocket is emotionally connected to feverish fantasies of revenge. Unfortunately, these clues remain mysterious and are never developed into a coherent storyline, leaving the impression that *The Jihadist* is incomplete.

Ultimately the story – a short story stretched into a novella – remains too ambiguous to capture the reader's attention.

Although *Unwanted Hopeless Romantic Morons* begins with what appear to be disconnected tales, it settles (almost reluctantly) on Tom, a shallow, misogynistic, violent, verbally abusive man who feels that his generation, including himself, is turning “into a hopped up bunch of dead-at-25's.” Tom moves from place to place, on and off the



street, spending his days doing lines of cocaine, drinking whiskey, telling cops to fuck off, and getting laid. He hangs out, almost by default, with his sort-of friend, Jack, a transient introvert.

A narrative eventually picks up, though it simply wanders from exploit to exploit. The emphasis is on keeping the story edgy, a tactic that, by itself, cannot sustain interest. The book is further hampered by sloppy editing, and the reader constantly stumbles over phrases with missing or misplaced commas and spelling errors.

Both Tom and Jack remain two-dimensional. Parsons' reluctance to explore his characters does them injustice, for they have the potential to be intriguing figures. Tom has only brief moments of internal conflict and self-awareness. He wonders at his loyalty to his “racist idiot friend” and is vaguely aware of his own dissatisfaction with his life – but these feelings remain ill-defined. After yelling at his girlfriend for worrying about his excessive drinking, Tom says: “I feel bad. I put the feeling out with beer.” Tom's refusal to face his demons keeps the book from developing an underlying conflict, let alone an arc or resolution.

In the end, Tom merely recognizes the same purposelessness that has vaguely bothered him since the book began: “You wish you never wasted your time on petty things that brought you pain.”

It is unclear how we are supposed to react to Tom or his story. He is not presented as particularly tragic or comic, nor as hero or anti-hero. The book does not revel in the comedy, beauty, or youthful energy of his antics, nor does it find them horrific or even sympathetic. Abuse, to oneself as well as others, simply exists; it is empty and pathetic. Readers ultimately feel only pity for Tom, which is perhaps what he feels for himself. **msb**

Correy Baldwin is a Montreal writer, editor, and publisher.

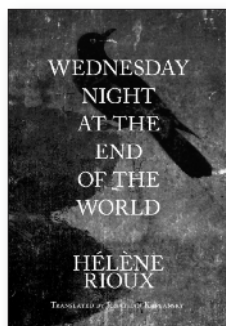
Escape to the End of the World

WEDNESDAY NIGHT AT THE END OF THE WORLD

By H el ene Rioux
Translated by
Jonathan Kaplansky
Cormorant Books
\$21.00, paper, 250pp
ISBN 978-1-897151426

“The world is a cocoon; everything converges, everything is subtly linked.”

Rioux's novel opens in a late-night neighbourhood restaurant in the Petite Patrie area of Montreal called The End of the World. A snowstorm is gathering outside, while inside the scene unfolds around a group of regular diners and card players composed of middle-aged women and taxi drivers. Their eating, drinking, and playing, the sounds of radio ballads, and an old movie flickering on the TV screen soon make way for a grimmer reality as a sudden crisis moves the



action into high gear. It is at this juncture that Rioux lifts us out of the restaurant and takes us on a journey. A string of story segments ensues, each one a self-contained narrative set elsewhere but united in time (the stories all occur on December 21)

and with elements that link the far-flung episodes to one another.

Rioux develops her characters from initially two-dimensional figures into complex individuals who nurture vivid imaginations, hopes, dreams, and memories as counterpoints to their mostly dreary, everyday realities. One episode portrays two exotic dancers stranded in a motel and sharing their respective life stories. Their

questionable career choices are shown to be subject to deeper aspirations linked to an essentially human pursuit of happiness: the support of loved ones, the purchase of a home, the desire to belong. Another episode brings together a middle-aged Montreal taxi driver vacationing on a Caribbean beach and a young local woman who nurtures dreams of her own by (usually) accommodating those of tourists.

And yet, despite the connections that string these stories together, the isolation and suffering of the individual characters remain evident, as do their respective escapes into the world of dreams, memories, and fantasies. If most of them stay trapped, inert in the face of their real-life predicaments, their imaginations do take flight, allowing for individualist action, albeit on a fictional plane: “Tormented men held women in their

arms, secrets were revealed, figures embraced in rose gardens.”

Some readers will be confused by the multiple names and characters, especially as some characters undergo name changes or have names and descriptions very similar to those of other characters. A mysterious unshaven man in a black turtleneck, for example, appears in several of the story segments. At times, he seems to be an already deceased author languishing in purgatory, at others a would-be revolutionary locked up in prison decades ago. In spite of these time and mobility challenges, however, the character crops up in Montreal, Florida, and Mexico City.

Kaplansky's translation is rendered in fluid prose, conveying the rich and varied imagery of the original text. More rigorous editing, however, would have spared the reader such typos as “carrera-marble,” “Marquis of Sade,” “definitely,” and “I'd really liked to have heard him in therapy.” Kaplansky

astutely preserves some French elements, including elegantly inverted bilingual sequences (“*Gino's Subs & Pizzas, Free Delivery, Livraison gratuite, 24 Hours a Day, 24 heures par jour*”), thereby keeping the text's origin as well as its setting visible to English readers. The decision in favour of literal translations of frequently recurring phrases (“it seems”/“it seems to me”), on the other hand, can result in a wooden quality: “The Chinese also wear them, it seems to me.”

Wednesday Night at the End of the World takes the reader on a journey that goes beyond the predictable, delivering surprises as well as mystery. It gives us an inkling of a world of fragmented individuals, held together not by the bonds of kinship, friendship, or solidarity, but by escapist needs and habits. **msb**

Michael Varga is a linguist, writer, and translator living in Montreal

graphic novel

MARKET DAY

By James Sturm

Drawn and Quarterly

\$23.95, cloth, 96pp

ISBN 978-1-897299975

A Life Unravelling

Set in Eastern Europe in the early 1900s, James Sturm's new graphic novel *Market Day* is about a Jewish rug maker who struggles to survive in a world that will no longer support his way of life. Mendleman is an anxious man who worries about his ability to care for his family, which will soon include a baby. One day, he goes to the marketplace to sell his rugs only to discover that the man who used to buy them has retired.

The industrial revolution, which values plentiful goods at a cheap price over fine craftsmanship, has begun, and when Mendleman loses the one person who valued the quality of his rugs, he is thrust into an unwelcoming marketplace. Unprepared for such a change, he starts to sink deep into despair as his livelihood slips away, making him reconsider his vocation. After selling his goods for a fraction of their former value, he dejectedly starts the journey home and thinks: "Tomorrow I sell my loom."

Sturm – an Eisner-award-winning graphic novelist well known for his historical fiction, such as *The Revival* and *The Golem's Mighty Swing*, and for his superhero series *Unstable Molecules* – has crafted a story of heartbreak and misfortune out of an all too common situation. Unfortunately, Mendleman has difficulty negotiating the world around him, except through his rugs: "Even when my mother died. It wasn't sitting Shiva that comforted me. It was sitting at my loom making a rug." Abandoning his work means letting go of the one thing that allows him to cope.

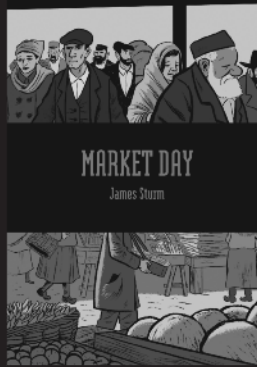
The panels are illustrated in a simple and minimalist fashion. There are big spreads that look sparse and the human figures don't have many distinguishing features. The plain compositions give the pastoral settings a very open and airy look. Neither the art nor the narrative has to battle for prominence and the syncopation they achieve at certain points is very moving.

This austere style also accentuates Mendleman's mood. When he perceives the marketplace as an exciting and invigorating place, we see children playing and the abundance of goods. But when the market turns on him, the panels are filled with the ugly wretches and pitiless people who are also present. The stark drawings pull in the readers' focus so that they can share in the nuanced emotions of the protagonist. It allows readers to see how the narrative he articulates to himself compares with the things he envisions. What people are willing to commit to words doesn't always fully express what they actually imagine.

In the space of a day, Mendleman's world has been turned on its head. Ever fearful of his uncertain future, his anxiety is compounded by the loss of his patron and the pregnancy of his wife, who waits for him at home. What he decides in the end is left uncertain. This is not a story of triumph or resolve; it is a tale about adapting to a life that takes you away from the one you were meant to live.

During an interview with Comic Book Resources, Sturm said, "The book was intended in part as a cautionary tale for myself." But there are many who can empathize with the rug maker's dilemma. This beautifully simple graphic novel tells a sad story in a plain yet striking manner that sticks with readers.

Lori Callaghan is a visual arts critic for *The Gazette* and *Rover Arts*.



fiction

Objects of Revulsion

OBJECTS OF WORSHIP

By Claude Lalumière

Chizine Publications

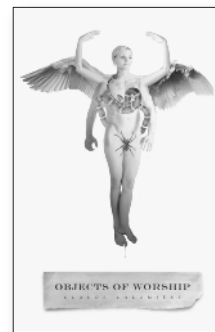
\$18.95, paper, 276pp

ISBN 978-0-9812978-2-8

Claude Lalumière's first collection of short stories, *Objects of Worship*, emerges from the dark world of fantastic fiction. This genre certainly has its followers, but the uninitiated reader may be caught off guard by the visceral subject matter. To begin with, there is a lot of gorging on guts.

There are also sea monsters, superheroes, zombies, phone calls from hell, and other creatures and scenarios set in a warped version of this world. Apart from Bari, Italy, referred to in one story, the only city ever cited is Montreal. Even when the setting remains unidentified, the collection as a whole evokes Montreal. Whether besieged by werewolves or altered by an ice age, Montreal is stereotyped as a laid-back, almost comatose, community-oriented haven of cheap real estate: an underemployed couple shares a late and luxurious breakfast with a megalomaniac god; a superhero Dad keeps his ambitions local. ("I like the good I do here, in Montreal. Let the other heroes fight the big menaces. For me this is all about the people.") This stereotype isn't altogether wrong, but it is incomplete and projects life in Montreal as overly uncomplicated.

The stories are well-crafted and will have readers racing through their trim sentences to find out what happens next, but Lalumière certainly intends to shock them with gory details. Is it shock and gore for fun, or are the entreaties of various creatures loaded with a political agenda? Unsurprisingly, zombies frantically feasting on the brains of their pet "fleshie" in a story titled "The Ethical Treatment of Meat" turned my stomach and made me cringe at the thought of fast food line-ups. Still, this revulsion was temporary and these stories do not – nor should they – succeed



as moral tracts. Like any decent literature they provide readers with an angle from which to view their own lives.

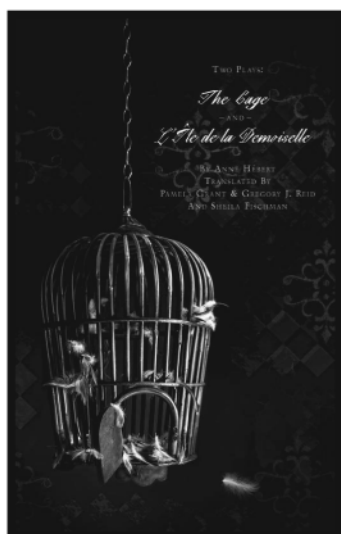
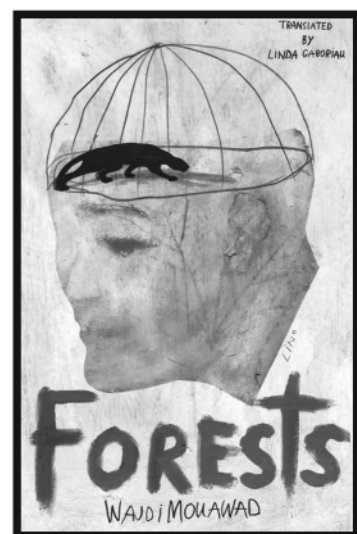
Plus, they're fun and disgusting. "They reached her office in the back. She offered him a glass of brain juice. 'It's organic,' she said. 'From free-range fleshies.' It

tastes the same as regular brain juice, he thought." The stories do produce a legitimate challenge to more conventional storytelling. Lalumière unleashes his imagination on the reader and unapologetically weaves fantasy into his work. In some places, though, it feels as if he employs plot twists and gloomy endings for their own sake, which can leave readers wondering why.

In other stories, Lalumière is better at addressing ordinary human problems. Themes of love, sex, and the relationship of humanity to technology are evident throughout the collection, but one story of post-apocalyptic teenage love deals with them best. "This is the Ice Age" takes place in a version of Montreal that is mostly destroyed by a sudden electrical-based freeze. In just a few pages, Mark must deal with his newly fundamentalist brother; Martha, with falling in love and leaving behind her home. These situations contain a gravity that is nicely complemented by the earnest innocence of the two young protagonists. The outlandish setting – including a frozen upended plane at the intersection of St. Catherine and St. Lawrence – is another asset to the story.

At the end of the collection, Lalumière offers an account of the influences behind each story. For the most part, the stories can be left to speak for themselves. But Lalumière's appendix to the book's superhero theme reflects a genuine and long-standing passion that provides a glimpse into the roots of his eccentric imagination. **mb**

Vanessa Bonneau is a contributor to *Rover Arts*.



Forests by Wajdi Mouawad, translated by Linda Gaboriau

As she tries to unravel the mystery of her origins, Loup opens a door onto an abyss where the memory of her bloodline lies entangled in a sequence of impossible love affairs. Following *Littoral (Tideline)* and *Incendies (Scorched)*, *Forests* is the third part of Wajdi Mouawad's internationally acclaimed dramatic quartet set in the painful wake of the past century.

Two Plays: The Cage and L'île de la Demoiselle by Anne Hébert, translated by Pamela Grant & Gregory J. Reid and Sheila Fishman

Inspired by events in French Canada's colonial history that have become mythologized in literature and culture, both plays centre on women struggling to break the bonds of their confinement. Published here for the first time in English translation, *La cage* and *L'île de la Demoiselle* illustrate the depth and strength of Hébert's talent as a playwright and writer.

playwrightscanada.com
PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS

Skibsrud (from page 11)

in 1958. Casablanca is not actually one of the sunken Ontario villages. Skibsrud took the name from the 1942 movie, in which Humphrey Bogart plays an American war hero opposite Ingrid Bergman. In Skibsrud's novel, *Casablanca* is the Haskell family's favourite film. "It's a crazy world," Napoleon likes to say in a high-pitched Bergman imitation. "Anything can happen."

Skibsrud herself is not so keen on the film, calling it "war propaganda." It responded, she says, to a nostalgic yearning for moral certainty at a time when "it was becoming more and more evident how untenable it was to assert this and to convince the American public of it."

Skibsrud's title, *The Sentimentalists* refers to our all-too-human need for a simpler imagining of the past. At one point in the novel, while rummaging in a kitchen drawer for a lost drug prescription, Napoleon discovers a poem written by the narrator as a teenager. The poem is about Henry. Napoleon reads it aloud and his daughter is appalled that she could have "imagined it all so simply; that Henry could have been for me, just, a man who fished. Who fixed the engines on boats. Who solved math problems with beatific patience in the evenings."

Napoleon quotes a second poem relating to this issue. "Remember me when I am dead," he recites on another occasion, "and simplify me when I'm dead."

Simplification is the second major concern of the book. How can we take something as evanescent and vastly complex as a human life and attempt to capture it in words? This is the problem Skibsrud sets for her narrator, a young woman of poetic sensibility.

She also sets it for herself, the reader suspects, for she shares a number of traits with her narrator. Like the narrator, Skibsrud is a young woman of poetic sensibility and aspiration. Her first publication was a book of poems, *Late Nights with Wild Cowboys* (Gaspereau Press, 2008), which was shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Award. A second poetry collection is due out with the same publisher this spring. Also like the narrator, Skibsrud has a father (now deceased) who fought in Vietnam.

The book is rife with examples of the human need to simplify. Almost every character engages in an activity that provides clear-cut answers. Napoleon does crosswords. Henry solves math problems. And the narrator's mother tries to tease out the causes and effects of her sorrow in a daily journal. For a while, the narrator also hunts for simpler answers to the mysteries of her life. In the book's second half, however, the focus shifts away from her nostalgic musings to the father. The reader is given the father's war stories straight up, without the daughter's filter. In fact, the narrator is all but expunged from the book's latter half. The stories centre around an incident at a place called Quang Tri – a real incident, it turns out, that resulted in the trial of an American officer for the shooting death of a Vietnamese woman.

Skibsrud's own father testified at this trial, and she inserts part of the court transcript into her final

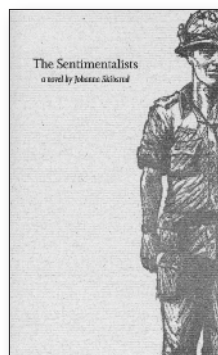
How can we take something as evanescent and vastly complex as a human life and attempt to capture it in words?

pages. This artful mixing of fact and fiction is destabilizing, forcing readers to re-examine their notions of memory, storytelling, and ultimately of life itself.

"When," the narrator muses, "in the winter following my father's death, I read the transcript of his testimony – most of which I will now record below – my own sense of these things was only further confounded, and sometimes now I'm astonished by the audacity of any attempt, including my own, at understanding anything at all."

The irony here is that this narrator and her creator seem to understand life a good deal better than most of us do. And happily, as a novelist, Skibsrud has a firm hand on the tiller. This poetic, probing work of fiction steers us closer to difficult human truths. **MB**

Claire Holden Rothman is the author of *The Heart Specialist*, longlisted for the Scotia Bank Giller Fiction Prize in 2009.



THE SENTIMENTALISTS
By Johanna Skibsrud
Gaspereau Press
\$27.95, paper, 216pp
ISBN 978-1-554470785

TAPROOT IV

Poetry, Prose, and Images from the Eastern Townships
Edited by Brenda Hartwell, Carolyn Rowell,
and Ann Scowcroft

Published by Townshippers' Association

Paper, 106pp

ISBN 978-0-9686298-5-7

To mark its 30th anniversary, the Townshippers' Association – a not-for-profit association which represents different sectors of the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships – has recently issued *Taproot IV*, its fourth collection of poetry, prose, and images. Since the first edition, issued in 1999 to celebrate the Townshippers' Association's 20th anniversary,

these collections have exclusively contained works by local storytellers, poets, and visual artists.

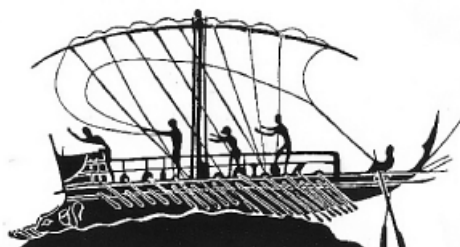
Taproot IV contains pieces of varying calibre and represents the active English-speaking artistic community of the Eastern Townships – a community full of both established and emerging artists. Many, it seems, have discovered the joy of writing thanks to the Townshippers' Association's call for submissions. From stories that express the joy of sleighing in the numerous hills of the region to poems about Vancouver churches and wintery pictures of Lake Massawipi, this anthology is a collection that has something for everybody.

Edited by Brenda Hartwell, Carolyn Rowell, and Ann Scowcroft, *Taproot IV* offers a glimpse of the vibrancy of the Eastern Townships' creative class. **MG**

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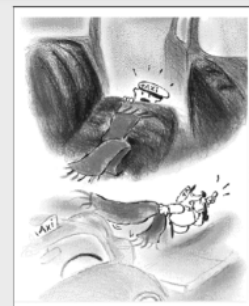
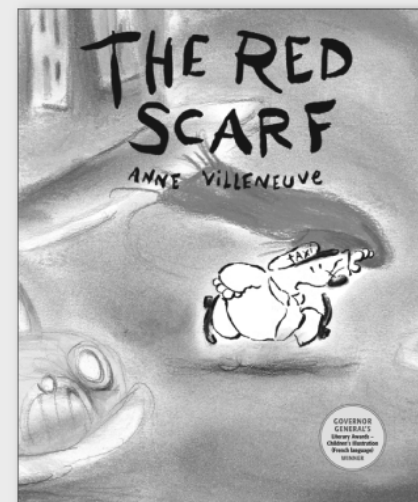
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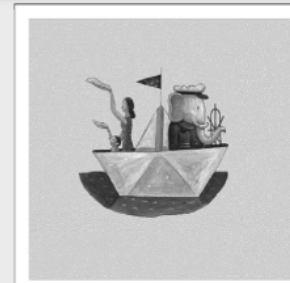


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THE CROW'S VOW Susan Briscoe

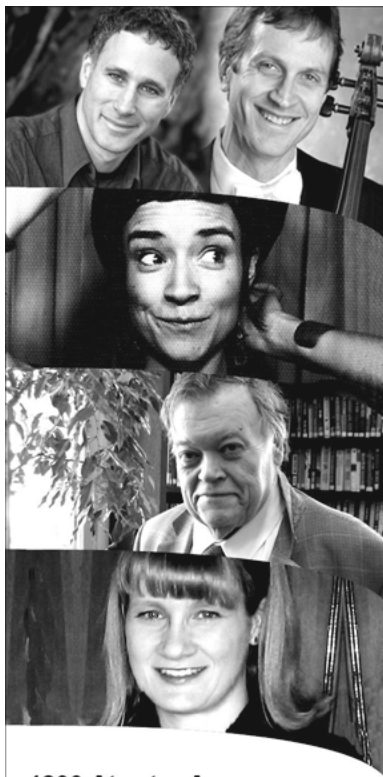
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LUNCHTIME SERIES Upcoming Events Schedule Free Admission - Donations Invited

Thursday, April 29 at 12:30 pm

Award-winning writer Eric Siblín discusses his bestselling book *The Cello Suites: J.S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece*, accompanied by Montreal Symphony Orchestra principal cellist Brian Manker.

Wednesday, May 5 at 12:30 pm

Métis sound artist Mœ Clark, the first *Leonard Cohen Poet-in-Residence* at Westmount High School, performs her work and discusses her career.

Wednesday, May 12 at 12:30 pm

Historian Neil Cameron gives a talk entitled "*From Isaac Newton to Climategate*".

Thursday, May 20 at 12:30 pm

Myriam Cloutier, Director of Heritage Programs at Mount Royal Cemetery, gives a talk about the cemetery's history and the famous people buried there.

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PATHS OF OPPORTUNITY

By Sharon Callaghan
Shoreline Press
\$19.95, paper, 136pp
ISBN 9781896754659



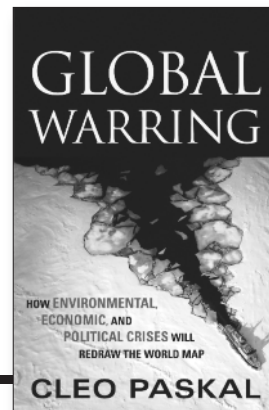
This genealogical study of the lives of John and Bridget Callaghan, Irish immigrants to Montreal and the author's forebears, is understated yet moving in its detail. The book traces the journey of the Callaghan family from the arrival of young John and Bridget in 1845, at the start of the Great Potato Famine, to the more prosperous epoch when their grown children have established careers and families.

As in contemporary immigrant tales, there are periods of struggle and catastrophe. There are also numerous small triumphs: the Callaghans buy property, send their children to school, see their daughter married. One son joins the Church, to be followed by other sons. The arc of steady improvement in the family's lot is a reflection of their adopted city's development: as the Callaghans acquire money and stability, Montreal adds gas lighting, hospitals and railways.

The meticulous research in *Paths of Opportunity* is a crucial element of its charm. When a notary's document reveals that, after much labour, "John was intending to increase the height of one his two wooden houses," the reader is cheered. Anyone with immigrant roots, or an interest in how people leave everything behind to build anew, will find this book of interest. More significantly, stories like this are a reminder that the immigrant 'other' is us – give or take a century. **AS**

Paskal (from page 4)

"We worry quite a bit about our effect on the environment ... It's time now to start worrying about the environment's effect on us."



GLOBAL WARRING
How Environmental, Economic and Political Crises Will Redraw the World Map
By Cleo Paskal
Key Porter Books
\$32.95, cloth, 288pp
ISBN 978-1-552638308

pour billions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and as the temperature continues to rise, is it time to just dig in and prepare for the apocalypse?

Not quite. "We need to stop it, of course," says Paskal, "but in the meantime there are so many other issues that aren't being dealt with."

Issues like the fact that, in North America, millions of people and billions of dollars in infrastructure and real estate are less than three metres above sea level. Or that we continue to plan as if climate change isn't happening, developing areas certain to be flooded or hit by massive storms. Or that in Asia, even modest increases in sea level mean a disaster of biblical proportions when millions of refugees from Bangladesh start looking for higher ground. Or that complex legal and political questions are certain to arise when entire nations in the South Pacific are swallowed up by the rising ocean.

Thankfully, Paskal is far more interested in solutions than problems, a fact reflected both by her book and the audience its author hopes it might reach.

"The book is intended for anyone who wants to make informed decisions for the future," says Paskal. "It's my hope it will be read by decision-makers who want to incorporate some of the likely effects of climate change into things like infrastructure planning, because the decisions we make now are going to determine how things play out in the future. And the fact is, there are options; there are good choices to make. But we need to start making them now."

Paskal is a woman of impressive journalistic and academic credentials. Although she was a columnist for both the CBC and the *National Post*, as well as an Associate Fellow at the renowned Chatham House in the United Kingdom, it was in fact her experiences as a travel writer that led her to write a book on climate change that had something new to say. While visiting the atolls of Kiribati in the South Pacific, she saw for herself the profound gulf existing between our political and cultural assumptions and, as she puts it, the facts on the ground.

"The atolls in Kiribati are being eroded at an extremely fast rate," says Paskal, "and it brought home the fact that the changes happening now are already so substantial that every-

thing – economics, politics, security – is going to be effected all over the world."

"We worry quite a bit about our effect on the environment," she adds. "It's time now to start worrying about the environment's effect on us."

Thus *Global Warring*, far from being simply another Al Gore-type warning about the peril we face, examines the likely future outcomes in terms of geopolitics, territorial sovereignty, trade, and national security. Thankfully, Paskal goes beyond a simplistic doom-and-gloom analysis that promises more disasters and more suffering. While increased chaos and conflict is likely, Paskal highlights the fact that options also exist and that few of the questions being raised by our shifting environmental conditions are anywhere close to being resolved.

For example, Paskal cites studies showing that Africa is especially vulnerable to disrupted weather patterns and that the lives of close to 200 million people are threatened by drought. But she also states that "just a few policy changes could go a long way toward alleviating suffering," adding that since much of Africa's infrastructure has yet to be built, the continent could head off disaster if it factors climate change into its planning and infrastructure development. Similarly, when discussing the challenge of water management in China, she cites the potential promise of desalination technology as a viable option for the future.

If some outcomes are still to be decided, *Global Warring* makes at least one thing appear certain: the Western ideology of globalization and free-market solutions is in serious trouble. China and Russia, among others, are increasingly indifferent to Western opinion, and their pursuit of "nationalistic capitalism" – in which the market is considered to serve the state – gives them a strategic advantage. Unhampered by the gospels of free trade or human rights, China, in particular, is free to establish foreign partnerships and supply routes purely on the basis of state interest. An increasing number of Third World countries seem inclined to follow China's example. Additionally, addressing the challenge of climate change means shifting from short-term gain, the primary concern of the free market, to long-term planning and preparation. New political or economic models may be needed to support

initiatives not strictly focussed on the next fiscal quarter or the next election.

Once-unlikely alliances may also prove necessary. For example, since Canada's efforts to assert sovereignty over a suddenly volatile Arctic region have been frustrated by the United States and Europe, agreements with former rivals more open to Canada's claims may one day appear very attractive. Limited partnerships with China or Russia may eventually prove more advantageous. It's just one of many intriguing examples showing how the effects of climate change promise to put the entire geopolitical sphere into a state of flux.

Accessible, lively, and at times chilling, *Global Warring* is a book offering much-needed insight into a future where nothing can be taken for granted. With an eye-opening examination of the Hurricane Katrina disaster and its aftermath, a cogent analysis of China's increasing global influence, and convincing arguments in favour of overhauling infrastructure and possibly even abandoning low-lying cities in Europe and North America, Paskal's book is timely and necessary reading. It's difficult to shake the idea that this is one of those books that needs to be read by as many people as possible, as soon as possible, because the near future promises to be extremely interesting, to put it mildly.

Or, as Paskal puts it, "These are the good old days." **mb**

Michael Carbert is a Montreal writer and teacher.

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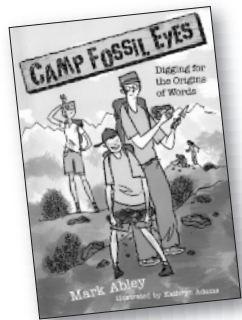
In her entrancing first novel, *Somewhere in Blue*, Gillian Cummings addresses the topic of teen suicide with sensitivity and skill. Sandy is frozen in grief after the death of her father in the depths of winter. Spring's finally arriving, but the 16-year-old can't be warmed by the possibilities opening up around her. Schoolwork, the support of her best friend Lennie, even the budding romantic interest of the boy next door do nothing to break her fixation on her father's absence. Rather than talking to her career-driven mother, Vivian, who seems to have shed mourning like an out-of-fashion coat, Sandy has imaginary conversations with the parent she lost or wanders the shores of Lake Ontario in dull silence. Cummings balances the teenager's descent into severe depression with the personal struggles of three women close to her: Lennie, who scorns the bar-hopping lifestyle of her own mother, Teresa; Vivian, whose marriage was in trouble long before cancer struck; and Teresa, the single mom forced to confront the demons of her past when her brother shows up on her doorstep. Like these women, Sandy has to find the strength to rise above her pain and begin again.

Somewhere in Blue By Gillian Cummings Lobster Press \$14.95, paper, 336pp ISBN 978-1-897550-84-7 Ages 14 years + Reviewed from advance reading copy



Preteens with a fondness for Indiana Jones will be entertained and educated by Andreas Oertel's *The Archaeolojesters*, which brings Ancient Egypt to small-town Manitoba. Twelve-year-old Cody's summer prospects are literally drying up before his eyes: because of a recent drought, his hometown's tourist industry has gone belly up, and his best friend Eric will have to move if his mother can't find work. With the help of Eric's sister, the boys fabricate an Egyptian tablet and embed it in the local landscape, hoping its discovery will revitalize Sultana's economy. Cody wonders what they've gotten themselves into when a CNN truck pulls up at the town diner, and a shady man starts following the trio. Oertel keeps the action moving while sprinkling the text with fascinating details about hieroglyphs and their ancient scribes. The book ends with a teaser that promises further adventures for the young pranksters.

Another book about an unusual summer vacation is Mark Abley's *Camp Fossil Eyes*. Jill and her younger brother Alex are attending camp somewhere in the "badlands" while their parents move house. Jill is dismayed while Alex is delighted to find that this camp is all about uncovering the history of English: campers explore various terrains like Old English Hill, Nordic Spur, the Greek Mountains, and the Indo-European Wastelands, searching for "the fossils of words." The story is structured as a series of emails sent by the teens to their parents in which they recount their discoveries. Etymologist-cum-camp director Dr. Murray interposes his own mini-lectures on the evolution of English. This fun book, with hip illustrations by Kathryn Adams, will encourage children to see language as a window into past and present cultures.



Although it assumes the format of a children's picture book, Jocelyn Pinet's *Human Nature* seems best suited to older teen and adult readers. Pinet looks to natural phenomena and animal behaviour for guidance

on leading a balanced life. The African baobab, for instance, teaches by its example that resource management will help us endure life's challenges. The caterpillar lends wisdom about personal transformation, the snail emphasizes the importance of refuge, and the single blade of grass represents an important individual contribution to a field of change. Véronique Dumas's simple black and white illustrations capture the essence of Pinet's philosophies. This is a book to be savoured.

In Beatrice Masini's modern fairytale, *Here Comes the Bride*, Filomena is a plain seamstress who's ever the wedding dress designer, never the bride. That is, until Rusty, the mechanic next door, works up the courage to ask for her hand in marriage, propelling Filomena into an obsessive quest to create the ultimate gown for the ceremony. Anna Laura Cantone's collage illustrations are as carefully crafted as one of Filomena's creations. Both florid and elegant, they're stitched with tiny puns that await the attentive reader's discovery. Buried beneath all the tulle is the simple message of staying true to oneself.

Author and illustrator Luc Melanson pays homage to the grand imaginative powers of children with *Topsy-Turvy Town*. A small boy sees magic in his earth-toned urban environment: buildings willing to stroll with you, a robot scrubbing his back in the bath, a postman hitching a ride on a cloud. Adults close their eyes to the fantastic potential of the day - except for Mom, who welcomes broccoli rain with a smile as wide as her son's. Melanson's peg figures and retro stylings contribute to the playful mood of this picture book, making it a sure hit with preschoolers.

Marie-Louise Gay turns back the clock on her popular redheaded heroine with *When Stella*

Was Very, Very Small. Although she can't yet "open doors, look through keyholes or even tie her shoes," Stella has grand adventures in her living room and backyard, ascending sofa mountaintops and enduring fierce windstorms in her desert sandbox with her trusty dog by her side. Gay's delightfully airy watercolours and simple storyline are endearing, and young readers will be encouraged by Stella's achievements as a small person in a large world.

The ever-amusing battle between creator and creation continues in

Chester's Masterpiece by author and illustrator Mélanie Watt. Tubby tortoiseshell cat Chester has staged a coup by hiding Watt's art supplies; seizing a fat red marker, he proceeds to ink his own story, casting himself as the ultimate hero. But it's a tale without principles or direction, and Watt tries to salvage the book by interposing suggestions and admonishments via a scavenged pencil and a pad of sticky notes. Chester parries each attempt at editing until his marker runs out ... A romp for children and parents both. mb

Andrea Belcham is a reviewer and writer living in Pointe Claire.



THE ARCHAEOLOJESTERS
By Andreas Oertel
Lobster Press
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Reviewed from advance reading copy

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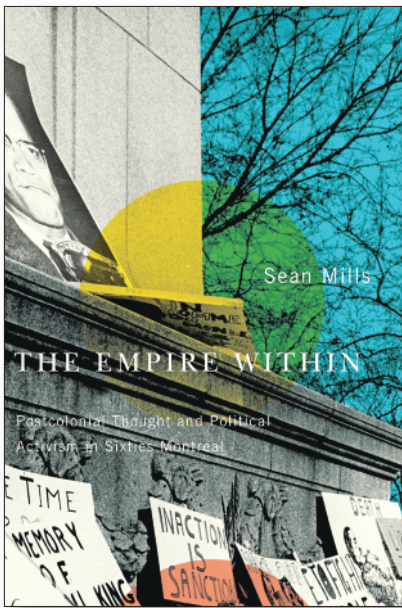
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Upper left: Double-page spread from *Here Comes the Bride*
Below: Illustration from *Chester's Masterpiece*

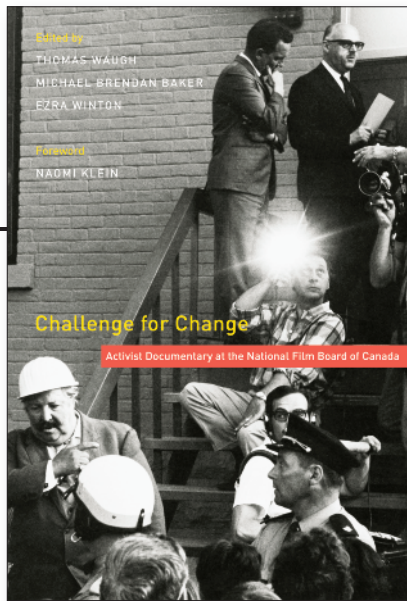


HISTORY

The Empire Within

Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal
Sean Mills

“It seems that I have been waiting for this book my entire adult life – there is nothing like it. *The Empire Within* is a remarkable study that explodes our old understanding of 1960s Quebec and Canadian history. By revealing the extent to which global decolonization theory informed radical Montreal activists of the time, Sean Mills takes us beyond the scene’s usual Anglophone-Francophone divide. This book is a refreshing change and will prove to be a compelling read for all. Activists, take note!”
–Steven High, Concordia University



FILM STUDIES

Challenge for Change

Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada
Edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton
Foreword by Naomi Klein

“Challenge for Change is amongst the most exciting, bold, and innovative moments in the history of film. Now we are fortunate to have the perfect chronicle of this distinguished series through a stunning collection of documentation and critique. Bravo!”
–Toby Miller, author of *Global Hollywood 2*

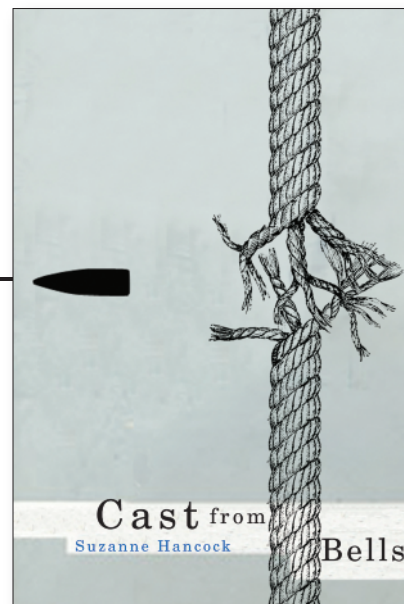


RELIGION

Wild Geese

Buddhism in Canada
Edited by John S. Harding, Victor Sögen Hori, and Alexander Soucy

“I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Buddhism. It is a deep breath in, and a deep breath out.”
–Charles Prebish, Utah State University



POETRY

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Suzanne Hancock

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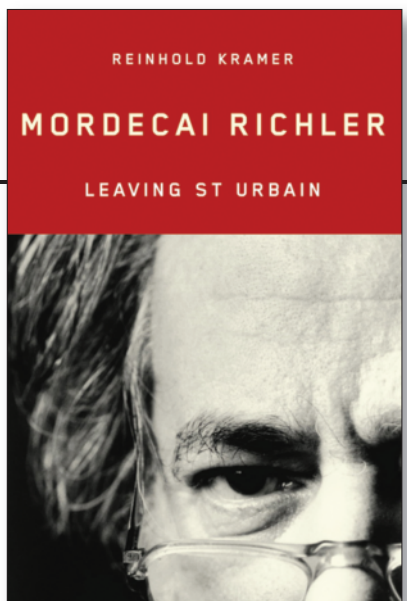


HISTORY

Spirited Commitment

The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation
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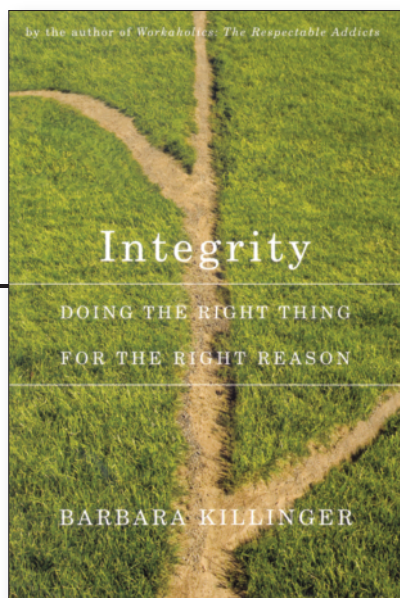


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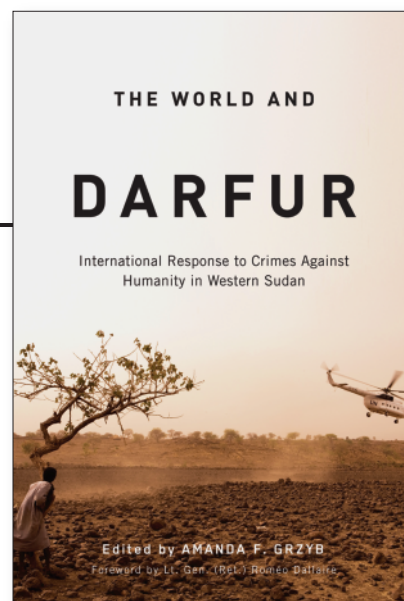


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