FREE/ISSUE 34

mRb

SPRING 2011 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

Whither Canada?

Roméo Dallaire on the Need for a Humanitarian Leadership

THE MILE END CAFÉ

When Rights Are Wronged

Nasrallah's *Niko*

Sze's *The Anatomy of Clay*

Homel's *Midway* • Scott's *Obituary* • Yanofsky's *Bad Animals* • Leith's *Writing in the Time of Nationalism* • Thomas's *Lives: Whole and Otherwise*

Correction

The print issue of the Fall 2010 **mRb** contained errors in passages quoted from Alisha Piercy's *Auricle/Icebreaker*.

The first misquoted sentence should read: "Mother goes out alone one night after being in alone all day." The second misquoted sentence should read: "Alice looks at Zeno's body, and while he daydreams the sped-up kind she now recognizes as euphoria, Alice wonders what harm touching him right now would do."

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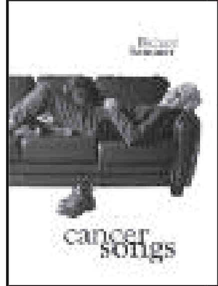

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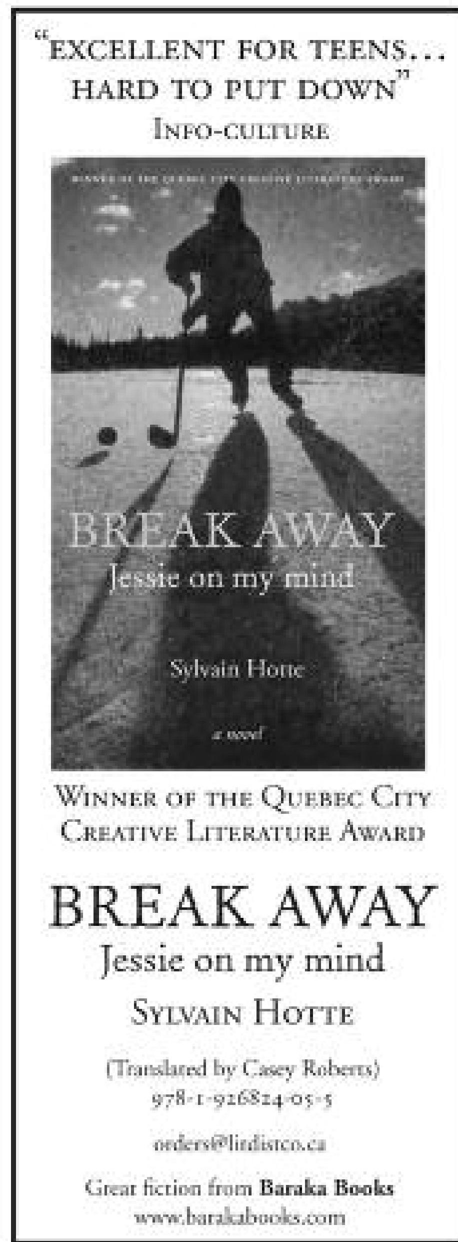

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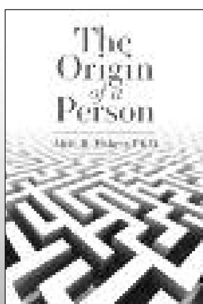

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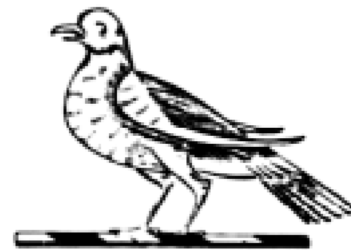

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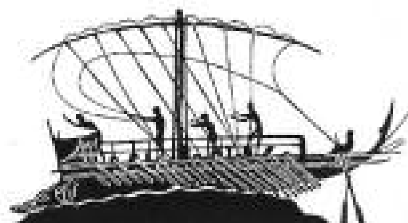

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Cover photo of Roméo Dallaire
by Terence Byrnes

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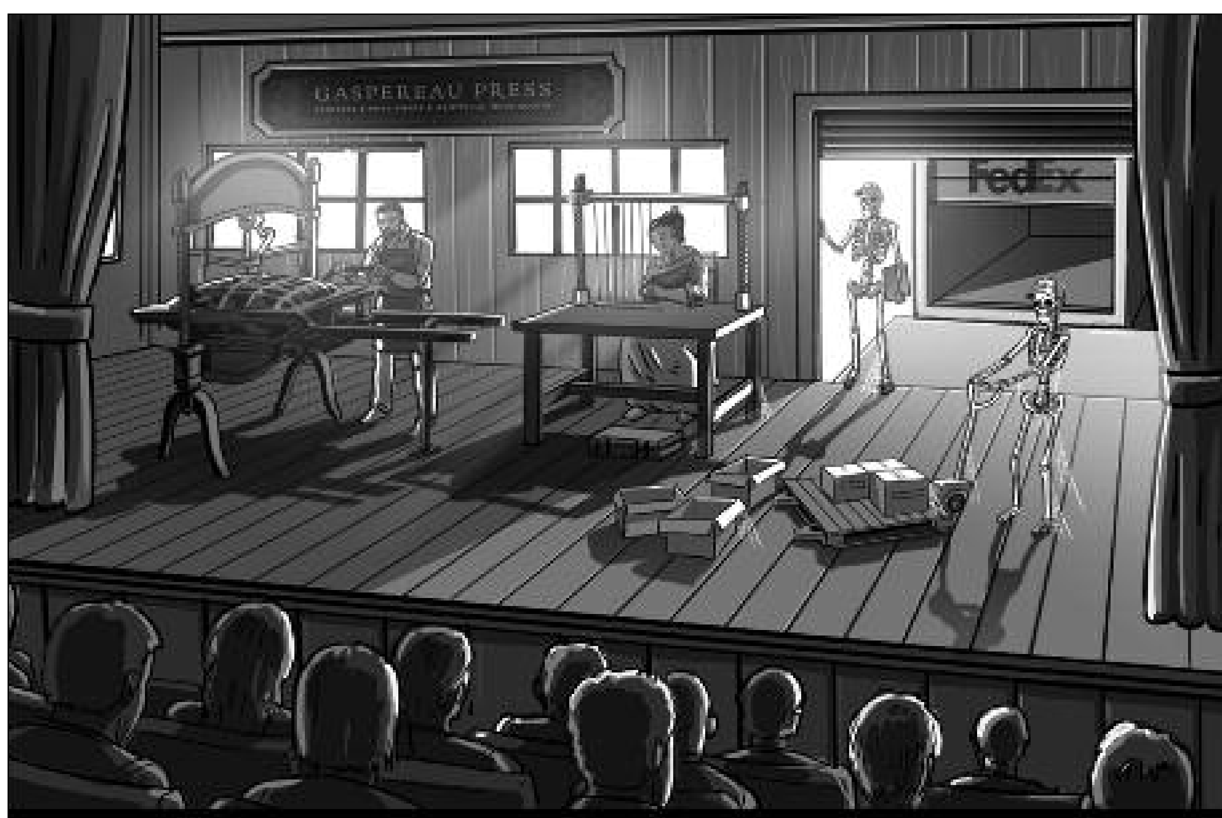

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THE PRE-EMPTIVE HUMANITARIAN

By Aparna Sanyal

Photo by Terence Byrnes

"How many kids can you shoot?" asks Lt.-Gen. the Honourable Roméo Dallaire (ret'd), fixing me with a penetrating blue stare. "Even under the mandate of protecting other people? Or under the international law of self-defence?"

A dilemma worthy of a Greek tragedy, it is one faced by professional soldiers on foreign missions in the developing world. Dallaire's new book, *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*, reveals the plight of an estimated 250,000 child soldiers currently used by paramilitary and military organizations around the globe. Most of these children have been abducted or forced by poverty and violence into a ferociously abusive system in which they are drugged, beaten, raped, tortured, and terrified into soldierly obedience. These "little killers" – readily available, low-technology, manipulable – are what Dallaire refers to as a "complete end-to-end weapons system."

In a small, bare room at Concordia University's Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS), where he is Senior Fellow, Dallaire explains that he became involved in the issue of child combatants following his service as Force Commander of the disastrously underfunded UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMIR) during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Dallaire – whose 2003 book *Shake Hands With the Devil* recounts his experiences during the Genocide, which left him "broken, disillusioned and suicidal" – states that "the child soldier dimension was … experiential from … '94 where the bulk of the killing was done by youth militia."

Among the most resonant chapters in his new book are several written from a child's point of view. One offers a glimpse of Dallaire's childhood summers in the Laurentians, spent dreaming in the forest, watching for dragonflies and listening for birdsong. The other chapters follow, in the first person, the life of a fictional child abducted from a happy village life in Africa and forced to become a child combatant. The early experiences of both fictionalized child soldier and the young Dallaire are parallel in terms of wonder and potential. By the time the child soldier encounters and is shot by a UN peacekeeper, into whose portrait Dallaire has injected, by his own admission, much of himself, the two lives cannot have diverged further. Yet, in their shattered innocence, they reflect each other.

Nowhere is Dallaire's sensitivity to childhood more evident than in the way he focuses on the largely neglected role of girl soldiers. Composing 40% of all child soldiers, the girls set up bivouacs, prepare food, handle logistics, engage in combat, become sex slaves and bush wives. Dallaire underscores that the girls are not only generally more abused, physically and psychologically, than the boys, developing infections and internal injuries due to rape and early childbirth, but – unlike the boys – they are revictimized when their male-dominated communities reject them, upon return, for being "soiled." "The sin behind it," says an impassioned Dallaire, "is that the girls feel guilty."

Astonishingly, in spite of the widespread use of child soldiers, no modern militaries have created any doctrine or "any different equipment to use – nonlethal weapons versus lethal weapons – or training in regards to child soldiers." Dallaire wants to rectify this, though his approach to the child soldier issue has "created some frictions" with organizations that view the issue through a purely rights-based lens and think he has "militarized the discussion." But, Dallaire states, "I want to look at how [child soldiers] are being used in the field and how do I make them a liability for the adults who are using them?"

Call it pre-emptive humanitarianism. Dallaire's commonsensical viewpoint is made all the more compelling by the fact that he has, in the course of the interview, chokingly described the "catastrophic impact" on a professional adult soldier of encountering a child soldier.

The professional soldier's dilemma might seem a remote one to many Canadians. Why should we get involved if our interests – or our children – are not at stake? Dallaire's response is instant and fiery:

> We have a Charter of human rights that is the law of our nation, right? It doesn't say for only those living in Canada … It says all humans are equal. So if a child from another country is recognized as a human being then why isn't that child considered as important as our children? The whole aim is to move – and we have not succeeded yet – the argument from the lowest common denominator which is self-interest to the highest common denominator which is humanity.

If *They Fight Like Soldiers* gives us a glimpse into the heart of Dallaire's humanitarianism, *Mobilizing the Will to Intervene: Leadership to Prevent Mass Atrocities* is all mind, a policy instrument for this humanitarianism. A slim volume co-authored by Dallaire and his MIGS colleagues Frank Chalk, Kyle Matthews, Carla Barqueiro, and Simon Doyle, it is the kind of book that can change the world.

Written mainly, according to Lead Researcher Kyle Matthews, "for politicians" and for civil society groups who want to "better navigate the halls of power," the pur-

"[U]ntil we get a leadership that is able to move us back with even increased capability … into that international sphere, we will be failing humanity. We will be held accountable in history as a country that became egoistic at a time when it could have led."

pose of the book is to help others "build the political will to prevent mass atrocities." It "argues that the prevention of mass atrocities should be prioritized as a vital national interest by the governments of the United States and Canada," using two detailed case studies: the Rwandan Genocide and the 1999 Kosovo crisis, in which NATO staged an air campaign that helped stop atrocities perpetrated by Serbian soldiers. In studying these and other cases, the authors note, "the W2I [Will to Intervene] researchers were struck not by the absence of the will to intervene to prevent genocide but by the presence of the will *not* to intervene." To counter this "will *not* to intervene," they recommend a series of institutional political changes, in both the US and Canada, prioritizing the prevention of mass atrocities.

The co-authors make a strong case that the "costs of inaction" are far more damaging in the long run to national interest than preventive action. These costs include, among others, the global security risks associated with the destabilization of entire regions, the increased risk of pandemics, spill-over effects in Canadian and American cities (such as the crippling 2009 protests by Tamils in Toronto), and the immense financial outlay involved in resolving the humanitarian crises that inevitably accompany mass atrocities.

Dallaire, whose frantic appeals for resources and action from the international community during the Rwandan Genocide fell on deaf ears, remarks: "I could not get 200 million dollars to run my mission … Yet within months of the Genocide the international community invested billions in international aid … Leaders of the international community, particularly the developed world, are essentially managing conflicts … there is no fundamental leadership in trying to resolve the conflicts."

Yet, as Kyle Matthews points out, some have accused the W2I researchers of being "warmongers" for "saying that you sometimes might have to use military to stop people from being murdered," while others suggest they are "naive." (Interestingly, conservative commentator Margaret Wente, who initially supported the invasion of Iraq, devoted her March 26, 2011, column in *The Globe and Mail* to lambasting the "humanitarian imperialism" of Dallaire and others.) The Obama administration, however, has begun to implement the W2I policy recommendations, with President Obama recognizing the prevention of genocide as vital to the US national interest in his 2010 National Security Strategy. And how has the Harper government reacted to the W2I team's call for systemic change? "We are still following up, but as to date we haven't had a very positive response," says Matthews.

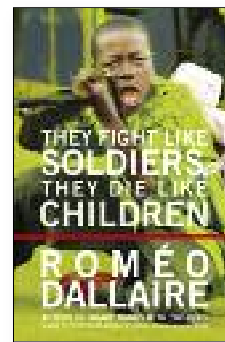
Dallaire refers to Canada as a "great nation" with an ease that is utterly devoid of posturing. It is clear *why* he thinks thus: "We're among the ten or eleven most powerful nations in the world … We are not a nation that desires to colonize others … Rule of law and human rights are integrated within our values and our ethical and moral references … we've mastered technology and we have quite an extraordinary work ethic."

But it is also evident that he thinks our position as a nation dedicated to "the advancement of humanity," established during the fifties, has been under threat for some time: "There has been a deliberate retrenchment … as if some mandarins around a decision body of our nation sort of said, you know, 'why should we get involved in all this?' Taking this … pragmatic, nearsighted, short term and … local perspective of what Canadians need and what they aspire to." Instead of a "Kennedy-esque perspective" which could help the country "maximize its potential" for promoting human rights, "what we have articulated on the contrary is meeting our own needs more and more."

Consider the treatment dealt by Canada to its own child soldier, Omar Khadr, who in spite of being a youth at the time of his capture in Afghanistan, and a Canadian citizen, still languishes in US military detention: "Not only did we lose an opportunity … to apply a convention that we led the world in agreeing to," says Dallaire, but "we have lost credibility."

For Dallaire, such narrowness of vision could lead us to the brink of moral catastrophe. "[U]ntil we get a leadership that is able to move us back with even increased capability … into that international sphere, we will be failing humanity. We will be held accountable in history as a country that became egoistic at a time when it could have led." mRb

Aparna Sanyal is editor of the *mRb*.



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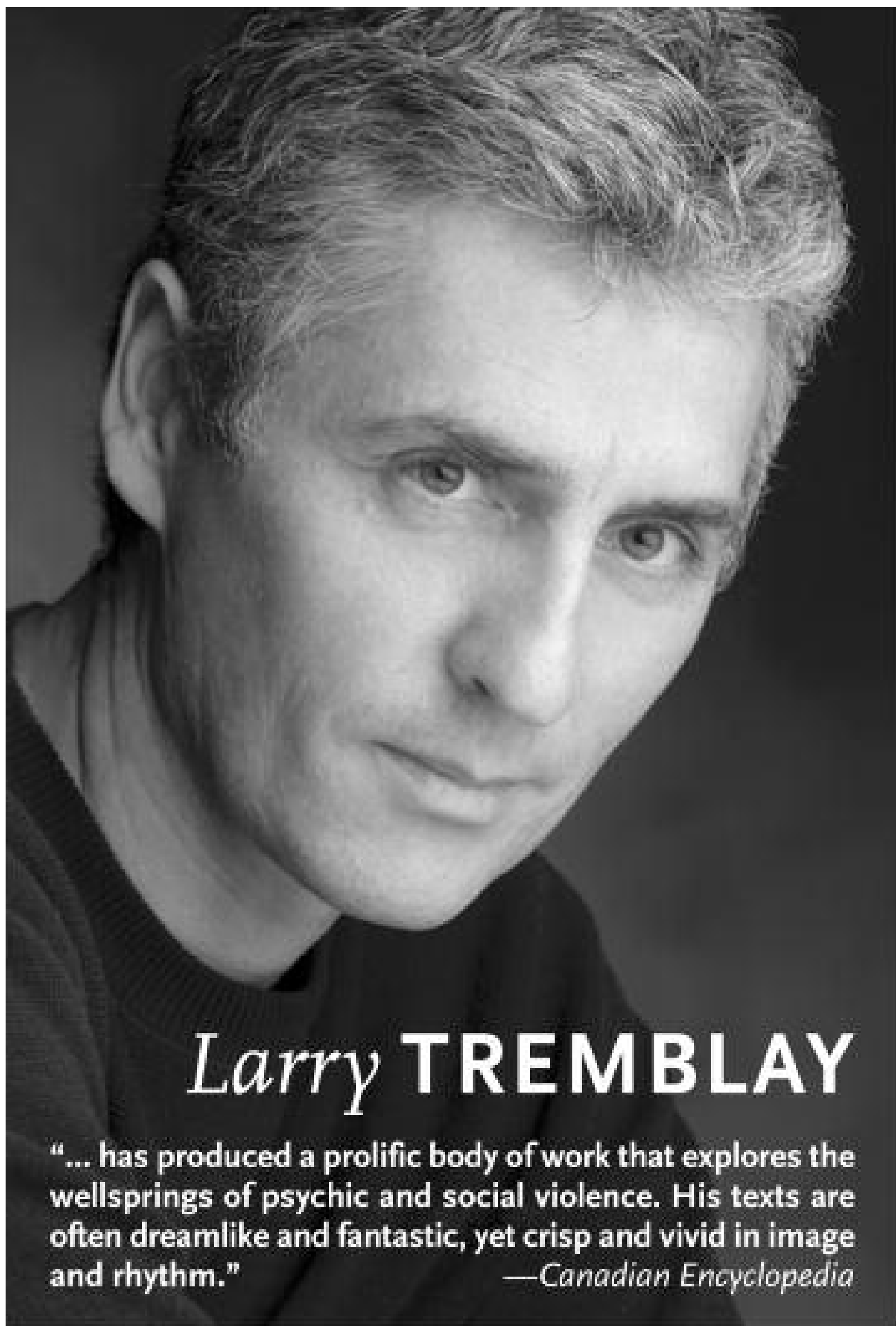

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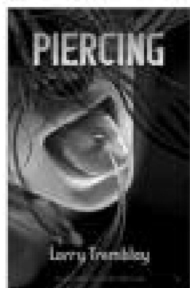

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THE OBITUARY
Gail Scott
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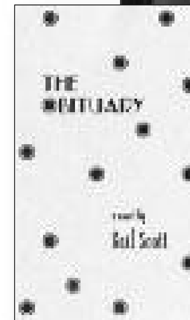
It takes a long time to read *The Obituary*, the eighth book from acclaimed writer Gail Scott, considering it's a mere stripling of 162 pages. It's a question of density, partly, but also of shifting gears – you might need to enter this book slowly, as you would a cold lake. Gail Scott trades lyricism for a language chopped, excised, and expurgated: words are stricken from the text, fragments hop like fleas, letters drop like flies. The syntax favours the inelegant, breathless present-progressive and long unbroken lines like commands spewed from a computer:



> Yesterday, riding bicycle down sidewalk, past deserted bank building, sticking middle finger straight up in fuck-you sign a former prime minister making famous. I liking best when he wearing fringed jacket + paddling a canoe.

It's tempting to call it prose poetry and leave it at that, but there is something else going on here, beyond experiment for experiment's sake. What purpose, then, does such overt stylization serve?

As Umberto Eco points out in the afterword of *The Name of the Rose*, "writing means constructing, through the text, one's own model reader." While Eco putatively spends a hundred pages preparing his reader for the rest of the book, Scott takes about five. After that, a kind of *jouissance* sets in as you adjust to *The Obituary*'s particular rhythms, tones, and shifts of voice; you swim willingly through the pages, creating meaning as you go.

The Obituary (sort of and mostly) follows Rosine, a woman spiralling around the "central" question of her identity as a mixed-race aboriginal in a city and culture that demand adherence to yes or no. It's a richly embodied text, erotically charged and scatological in a Genet-esque way – someone is always "letting go noisy rush of mephitic air" and there are more cracks than a St. Henri sidewalk. Rosine herself is not simply an unreliable narrator; she's an amalgam of several questionable speakers, each with its own longings, obsessions, and shames. One is a footnoting historian, another is a woman both on the move and at rest, and a third, observing everything like the proverbial fly on the wall, is actually a fly on the wall. Here the style is confrontational, challenging ideas of who/where/when is telling the story, and the struck-out words suggest not so much the work of an editor as the work of the internal censor, that super-egotistical beast forever making us say what we don't mean, and vice versa.

Alongside this nuanced and obsessive prodding of identity and narration, the novel's strongest feature is its portrayal of Montreal at the beginning of the third millennium. Scott plays with the signal-to-noise ratio to create a literary vision of contemporary urban life, a highly experiential street-level tour that is the real payout of the novel's stylistic wager. It's a glorious, gritty, clattering, and chugging paean to a city where everything has (at least) two meanings; who here hasn't riffed, punned, or played on a street sign whose name suggests an awkward transliteration, or coined a Franglais *bon mot*? The book captures Montreal in a series of View-Master slides that click, overlap, and spill over with places, smells, bits of conversation, *joual*isms, crumbs of *steamé* buns, and the associative synaesthesia of living in a city.

In some ways, *The Obituary* recalls Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, another novel of hybrid identities, mixed and crooked tongues, whose very title hinges on a slipped consonant. Like Diaz, Scott is attuned to the losses of migration, and to the hauntings and possessions we risk in unearthing family histories. But she is also sensitive to the elusive joy of reclaiming some part of one's sad, broken, painful, messed-up legacy. It's a thoroughly twenty-first century novel – equal parts liberating and disturbing in its treatment of the modern subject. mRb

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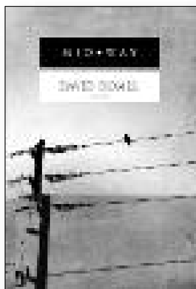

"Do not create anything," famously wrote Bob Dylan in his poem "Advice for Geraldine on her Miscellaneous Birthday": "it will be misinterpreted. / it will not change. / it will follow you the rest of your life."

Dylan fortunately ignored his own demons and advice, and went on to write rather prolifically. Ben Allen, the hero of David Homel's latest novel, *Midway*, might very well do the same.

Ben is a married, middle-aged Montreal literature teacher who has written a semi-fictional, historical essay on *dromomania*, a condition he imagines affected men in nineteenth-century France, causing them to abandon the comforts of domesticity and wander off into foreign lands.

Upon learning that his essay has won a prize, Ben echoes Dylan's apprehension: "Every piece of writing is an ungrateful monster. Instead of being happy just to exist, it demands more and more of the creator's being. Never write anything if you can help it."

Ben's caginess is validated when his essay attracts the attention of Carla, a seductive young artist/communications officer, who threatens to rouse his own latent version of *dromomania*. His sense of foreboding only escalates when, in an interview, Carla asks about his future literary plans. Ben answers: "You know what Saul Bellow said – books are our future self-portraits. That could be true for essays too. In that case, maybe I should be afraid."

Yet Ben's budding artistic inclinations prove harder and harder to repress. He romanticizes the dark and dangerous side of creativity, and even contemplates the suicide note as a literary genre, wondering how he could get a hold of 100 samples for research.

Soon, the reader begins to sense that art is but a sexy metaphor for another frisky business: infidelity. Both activities involve risking everything to wander off into an uncertain future, and both, Ben supposes, can involve hurting those closest to you. "When he met Laura, she was an artist, or at least a woman with artistic inclinations. But when she explained she was going into art therapy, he felt betrayed," recalls Ben of the first time he considered leaving his wife.

> Art means self-expression, even to the point of hurting people, not helping them … Besides, he wanted to sleep with an artist – that sounded sexy and free – not an art therapist, with the scent of musty Puritanism that surrounded the therapeutic professions.

Yet Ben is also a family man with a somewhat sensitive disposition. His urge to wander conflicts with his longing to connect more deeply with his father, son, and wife. Through Ben, Homel explores a realm more commonly depicted by female writers: the inner sphere of house and home. Studying close interpersonal relationships from a distinctly male perspective, he offers poignant portraits of fatherhood, such as when Ben watches over his sleeping infant son: "He stood over his bed and listened to Tony breathe, convinced that by just being in the room, he was shielding him from death."

Also touching is Ben's epiphany that the person he actually most craves an adventure with is Laura. At first, Ben doesn't see how this could work. "The very words sounded absurd. You cannot have an affair with your wife." But, as the story progresses, the idea takes root, leaving the reader wondering: if Ben chooses Laura over Carla, is he opting for *art therapy* over *art*, or – more romantically – is he about to make *art* of his marriage?

Whatever the case, one senses that his essay, as sometimes with art in general, may be more of a *past* self-portrait than a *future* one. By the time Ben's – and perhaps Bob's – demons were committed to the page, some may already have had one foot in the grave.

Kimberly Bourgeois is a Montreal writer and performer whose album of songs and spoken-word was released on March 28, 2011: www.myspace.com/kimberlyandthedreamtime

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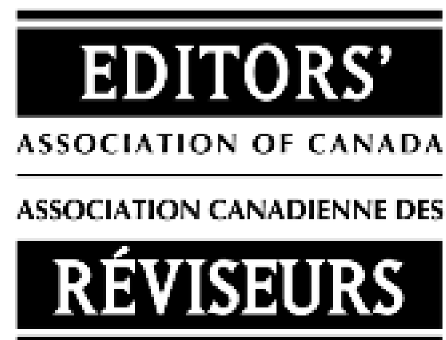

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If I Were a Man Whore

SPAT THE DUMMY
Ed Macdonald
Anvil Press
$20, paper, 270pp
ISBN 9781897535318

Go into any bar of a certain type and you're almost sure to see a guy like Spat Ryan. He'll look like he's been there for a while, sitting alone, but not so alone that he's not compelled to voice his comments about all and sundry: the music, the weather, politics, women. He's not old but not exactly young anymore either; not an obvious sociopath, but someone you nonetheless feel you'd engage at your peril, exuding, as he does, the hard drinker's volatile mix of self-righteousness and self-loathing. So, would you like to get to know him? Well, Ed Macdonald's debut novel is your chance. And here's the thing: you'll be glad you did.

"If I were a man whore, I'd be stinking rich," unemployed divorcee Spat says of himself early on. "I'd probably have a little more self-respect, too. Maybe even some respect from other people." The Montreal setting places him in a lineage: he's a Leonard Cohen hero gone to seed, an older Duddy Kravitz, but without the ambition. There are no prizes for guessing that Spat's bluster and self-deprecation belie a man in denial of something very upsetting; in his case it quite likely involves the small-time Irish hood who raised him. You'd be skittish, too, if you couldn't see a maimed person on the street without wondering whether it was your father who'd done the damage. The spur to get to the root of all the angst comes when Spat learns that his ex-wife Patty (referred to by him, with typically charming affection, as Hitler) announces that she's pregnant and that the child may be his. Using some handily inherited money, he flies to Australia, his mission to glean some family knowledge from his long-lost mother before embarking on the perils of parenthood himself.

Macdonald has done a lot of writing for television and the theatre, and it shows in his sure-handed sense of pacing. Spat has his introspective side, as has been hinted, but Macdonald is wise enough not to give it too much space: we're never far from the next bit of gleefully inappropriate behaviour, the next booze-fuelled public pratfall. The dialogue, too, is spot-on. Spat and his contemporaries speak in the terse inverted-comma tones of people who've grown up on the movies. The Australians sound Australian without lapsing into Bruce-and-Sheila cliché. The resulting variety of voices is crucial, as few would want to spend too long at a stretch in the clammy confines of Spat's head. Here is a writer who knows how to put people together on the page and let the sparks fly: passages between Spat and an older, fellow alcoholic he encounters at a recovery meeting are drawn with the delicacy and barbed wit of a good inner-city vignette from *The Wire*.

Structurally, Macdonald takes some risks, and they don't all pay off. The big dark secret – the one alluded to repeatedly in the early chapters, the thing that will presumably make sense of the emotional train wreck Spat's life has become – is revealed surprisingly early, and from that point on the novel is less a plot-driven family-mystery story than an extended first-person character study. In that sense, the book's success really does depend on how the reader takes to Spat, and he's by no means an easy ride. At several points, when it appears he's attained some measure of maturity, he goes and gets plastered again. It can be maddening, but then, Spat is a maddening man. To present him as anything else would be to sell him short and to render less meaningful his ultimately poignant groping toward a greater self-recognition. Rest assured that even in enlightened mode Spat is still, frankly, a bit of a jerk. We wouldn't want him any other way.

Ian McGillis writes a twice-weekly literary blog at www.montrealgazette.com/narratives.

Ku Klux Kanada

LIVES
Whole and Otherwise
H. Nigel Thomas
TSAR Publications
$20.95, paper, 160pp
ISBN 9781894770613

As Canadians, we pride ourselves on our national image as protectors of multiculturalism; H. Nigel Thomas's new short story collection *Lives: Whole and Otherwise* offers a bleaker picture of our supposedly progressive nation. Thomas presents poignant, blunt, and hauntingly heartbreaking accounts of members of the Caribbean community in Montreal, many of whom struggle with the physically and emotionally frigid conditions of their new home.

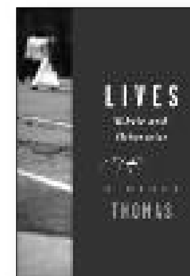
Thomas delves deeply into the underreported lives and diverse perspectives of those who face leaving a physically and emotionally abusive partner; the impoverished reality of dedicating their lives to activist causes; and the racist biases that are subtle enough to fly under the radar of government-imposed diversity mandates, but that still continue to oppress and hinder people of colour. As a result, Canada – specifically, Montreal – reveals itself as a cruel place where women of colour are fired upon suspicion, not proof, of theft and where a white depanneur owner can get away with shooting a black man. The unfair racial bias is chillingly expressed in "My People! My People!," framed in a newspaper article that uses a matter-of-fact tone:

> "A poll conducted today in the Montreal region shows that the overwhelming majority of Montrealers support the jury's decision to acquit depanneur owner Felix Lukelsky of any wrongdoing in his alleged crippling of Jonathan Commisong when the latter allegedly stole a litre of milk from his store."

With frequent use of present tense and the matter-of-fact description of everyday prejudices, Thomas's prose asserts that inequality and oppression are not things of the past.

But perhaps the most devastating issue Thomas depicts is the internal rift of the community, and the unwillingness of those within the community to help others – whether it's Percy, who succumbs to insanity because his religious sister will not accept his homosexuality ("Percy's Illness") or black community organizations that devolve into self-serving means to a capitalistic end ("My People! My People!"). Domestic abuse also makes a frequent appearance, creating an uncertain future for women who often appear helpless, yet unwilling to leave their violent present. Many anti-racist discourses tend to gloss over the internal class differences or sexism within a community, but Thomas does not shy away from them here.

Canada – specifically, Montreal – reveals itself as a cruel place where women of colour are fired upon suspicion, not proof, of theft and where a white depanneur owner can get away with shooting a black man.



The uncertainties of relocation and migration are structurally reflected in the stories with frequent flashbacks that disorient the reader spatially and temporally – at times, a bit too much. Many of the stories do not "begin" or "end" in a narrative sense either; instead, the stories end as the characters begin to approach a resolution or as an existing conflict takes a new turn.

While many of the stories depict the negative realities of living as a racial and ethnic other, some do offer hope for a better future. There's the story of Mary Fellows, a sex worker of colour who organizes a political rally on St. Catherine Street ("Memoirs") to demand better working conditions for sex workers, and who uses the political and religious connections of her clientele to make a real impact. By ending the collection with "Spiders," a story about an energized though at times hostile discussion about religion and the Bible in a Grade 8 classroom, Thomas seems to offer a glimpse of hope that the next generation may be ready to treat diversity in a more progressive manner than the past ones.

In the same year the collection was published, an interracial couple in Nova Scotia became victims of a racially motivated hate crime as they woke up to a cross burning in their front yard. Thomas's collection is a sombre reminder of the long way Canadians have to go in creating the multicultural paradise that Canada often represents to outsiders.

Rosel Kim is a writer and blogger living in Montreal; her personal blog is *What Are Years?* (www.jroselkim.wordpress.com).

Post-Adolescent Purgatory

BATS OR SWALLOWS
Teri Vlassopoulos
Invisible Publishing
$16.95, paper, 144pp
ISBN 9781926743073

The characters in Teri Vlassopoulos's debut short story collection, *Bats or Swallows*, are trying to make sense of themselves and the world. Many are in that purgatory between adolescence and adulthood, when the security of childhood erodes and the ugly complexities of the self and human experience are revealed. Using signs, symbols, and other tools of the occult – a secret handshake, a palm reading, psychic powers – they seek meaningful human connections and the comfort in knowing there is a higher power governing their fates.

In "Swimming Lessons," a young woman struggles to come to terms with the drowning death of her father when she was a little girl. Moving from Toronto to Montreal for school, she meets a young man whose little sister died when he was sixteen. She falls in love with their shared tragedy, looking for solace in her infatuation with him. Vlassopoulos's voice carries a sweet, palpable honesty, peppering the story with lines that tickle the heart. "His hair in my hand curled just like a Fibonacci spiral," the main character observes, "the kind of perfection you only find in nature."

Fun facts about mathematics, science, the black arts, and secret societies are woven into every story, adding a richness and depth to the characters, a smooth and controlled pacing, and a distinct originality to the storytelling. In "The Occult," a young woman's failed relationship is told in the form of six numbered vignettes under the headings Palm Reading, Astrology, Extra-Sensory Perception, Exorcism, Prophecies, and Signs. Each vignette is a small piece of the puzzle, revealing the innocent beginning and devastating end of a summer fling. In "Baby Teeth," a woman abandoned by her mother in the woods as a child overcomes her trauma by embracing the rumours that she was raised by wolves. "A Secret Handshake" depicts a younger sister trying to bond with an increasingly distant adolescent brother by creating a secret handshake modelled after those of the Freemasons.

It is this whimsical and charmingly naïve tone that makes these stories easy to read and their moments of depth sometimes surprising. Vlassopoulos began as a writer by creating zines, those photocopied quasi-diaries defined by their heart-on-sleeve quality. While this influence has infused her writing with a delicate simplicity, she sometimes gives in to the urge to tell rather than show, wrapping up her character's feelings or thoughts too neatly or dissecting metaphors until there's no meat left. The voice is a young one and, although strong, it tends to make the few adult characters seem like caricatures.

But the strength of this debut collection far outshines its small imperfections. Stories like "Art History," "What You Want and What You Need," and "Bats or Swallows" are carefully crafted portraits of life with endearing characters the reader can stand behind. A work of literary fiction, this collection would also resonate with teens and young adults, who might see parallels between themselves and the young protagonists. Vlassopoulos has found a way to carry over the wide-eyed curiosity and innate goodness of childhood into the mysterious, often sad, often tragic world of adulthood. The confidence in the voice, the originality of style and the achingly beautiful images are evidence of greatness to come from this engaging young writer.

Taylor Tower is a freelance writer and public relations professional living in Montreal.

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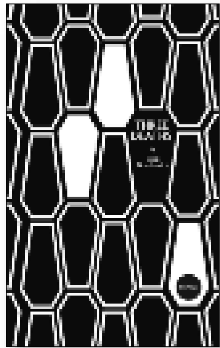
Croatian Book of the Dead

THREE DEATHS
Josip Novakovich
Snare Books
$12.00, paper, 109pp
ISBN 9789780966575



When you pick up a book whose cover motif is interlocking coffins and find that it is set in Croatia, you can bet there'll be more than three deaths inside. True to the title, though, the three stories are about the poisoning of a golden and cherished child, a father's blood-frothing deathbed address, and a mother who spent a decade dying.

The first story in Josip Novakovich's thin volume evokes Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, with which it shares many elements: an idyllic family, the poisoning of a child, a bribe for the doctor. In Novakovich's version, however, the role of the stinging scorpion is played by a syringe of measles vaccine. America was testing immunization formulae in Yugoslavia in 1952 because of the latter's absence of medical malpractice laws, but a bad batch of serum killed eighty children. Institutional corruption in both America and Croatia forms the backdrop of the story, which introduces readers to a Croatia where politics, religion, and family crowd the sparse storyscape with guilt and duty until it's as though the devil's own bureaucrats are in charge.

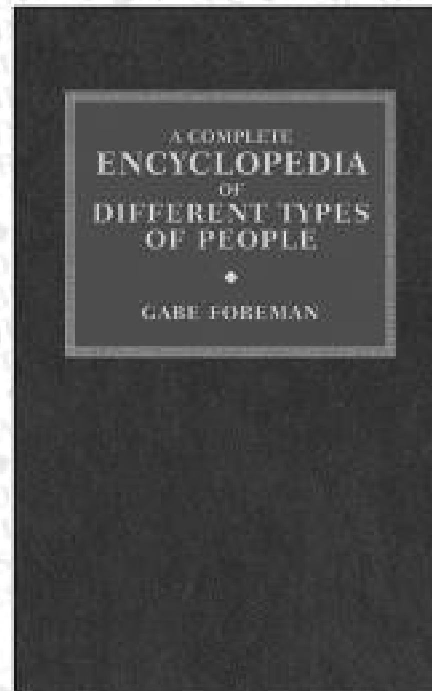
Novakovich's prose moves through the first two stories just like the overwhelmed family it describes: with methodical purpose. Readers feel as though there is a God, and he cares, he really does; one just has to hold on till he can get to this particular problem, because the world is a real mess. In the meantime, readers are dragged with deliberate grace through the machinations of mortality, so that each death is rendered unique.

The book's third piece is billed as a personal essay. It is the author's recollections of his mother as he travels from the United States to Croatia to attend her funeral. In it he reveals that the poisoned golden child is the author's older, unknown sister whose death destroyed their mother's hope, while the patriarch on his deathbed is their father. But while the two stories are told with minimalist clarity, the essay is digressive; it slides between the present and the past, through recollected dialogues with the author's brothers and his hypercritical mother. It ties together the three deaths, and contextualizes them, but some of the paragraphs seem to be too personally significant to the author for him to effectively communicate why they should be to the reader. The failure to untangle this knot of emotion perhaps says more than anything about the relationship between mother and son.

The three stories and the deaths they describe can be read, given the wars endured by Croatian society, as stand-ins for Innocence, Security, and Hope (or perhaps Potential); the allegories seem to sublimate from the surface of the patient plots. The mastery of this volume, though, is in its pacing. The author gives us a hint as to the significance of his rhythm in the second story, as the narrator walks with his father's funeral procession. So to give Novakovich the closing words, which say a great deal about this poignant collection:

> The steadfastness of the pace held a lesson for us, some lesson anyway, as we shifted from one leg to another. Howsoever slowly we went, by howsoever many places, we could not deviate from the crooked path that led into the graveyard. mRb

Rob Sherren participated in the 2010 QWF fiction mentorship program and is currently looking for a publisher for his novel *A Tree and its Shadow* – see and hear his work at www.youtube.com/robsherren



WHAT TYPE OF PERSON ARE YOU?

People who rely on stereotypes are often vilified. But really, is there a better way to classify people? How else can you know if you've spotted an armchair psychologist or a kleptomaniac?

Gabe Foreman's *A Complete Encyclopedia of Different Types of People* is not your average reference book. It turns a series of case studies of various stereotypes into a functional encyclopedia that doubles as a unique, achingly funny, always engaging poetry collection. 'Bad Apples,' 'Day Traders,' 'Entomologists' and 'Perverts' are all dutifully catalogued in this series of luminously strange lyric and prose poems.

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GUERNICA CELEBRATES ITS INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATIONS

Join us Sunday May 1 at 1:00 pm for a Blue Met launch party as we pay homage to our writers from across the sea

Swiss poet, **Oliver Scharpf**, Latvian poet, **Edvins Raups** and his translator, **Margita Gailitis**, and **Robert Buranello**, translator of Italian writer, Giuseppe Conte, will launch and read from the newly translated publications: *A Choice of Uppercuts, Then Touch Me Here*, and *Angelina's Lips.*

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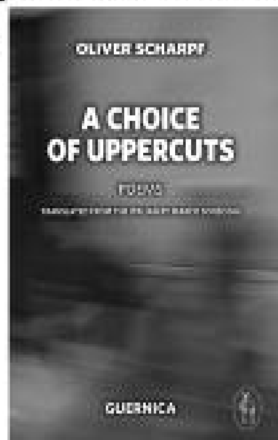

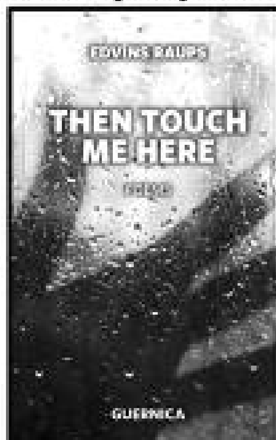

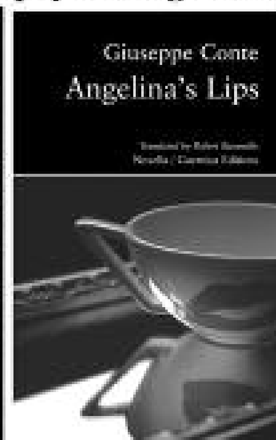

A Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival Event

Oliver Scharpf will also read, with Quebec poet **Madeleine Gagnon** and others, on April 28th, 6:00 pm at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, 200 Dr. Penfield Ave. (In collaboration with the Swiss Consulate)

Swiss poet Oliver Scharpf's appearance made possible through the generous support of the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

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Polaroid Poet

By Abby Paige

THE ANATOMY OF CLAY
Gillian Sze
ECW Press
$18.95, paper, 120pp
ISBN 9781770410145

"I LIKE SNAPSHOTS," Gillian Sze says brightly. There is a plate of charmingly small cookies between us, and she is taking a picture of them with her phone. "I like trying to crystallize moments or little details. But then again maybe all poets are trying to do that."

Maybe. But in her new collection, *The Anatomy of Clay*, Sze elevates the moment to the preferred unit of poetic time. Her poems are snapshots that, by focusing with photographic detail on the humdrum of the everyday, evoke life's less effable animating forces. "I would never call myself a photographer, but I'm like that," she says, meaning a bit of a voyeur, interested in framing an image to tell a story. By capturing ordinary moments, Sze enacts a search for what, if anything, is universal in human experience. She is reticent about any grand thematic pronouncements, though. "It's a book about people," she smiles, knowing the description is as incomplete as it is apt.

If *The Anatomy of Clay* is about people, her 2009 debut, *Fish Bones*, was a book about art. While designing her master's program at Concordia, Sze read an essay on the poetic tradition of *ekphrasis*, in which the poet responds to a work of art; think Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" or Auden's "The Shield of Achilles." Particularly to a poet with such a deep interest in the visual, *ekphrasis* seemed like fertile territory. "It would always renew itself for me," she recalls. "If I was in a museum or a gallery and I didn't like what I was looking at, I'd just turn around. I like that sort of aleatoric process." From that exercise, Sze developed a group of playful yet meditative poems that shine in the absence of the artworks that inspired them. Just as she was wrapping up her master's, *Fish Bones* was published by DC Books and went on to receive accolades, including a place on the shortlist for the Quebec Writers' Federation's 2009 First Book Prize.

continued on page 13

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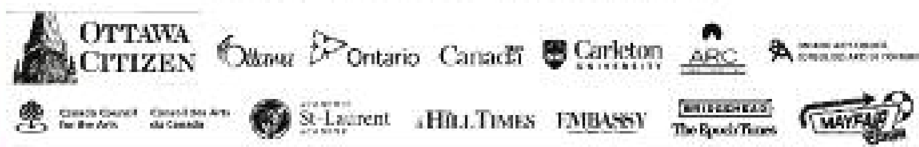

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is worth
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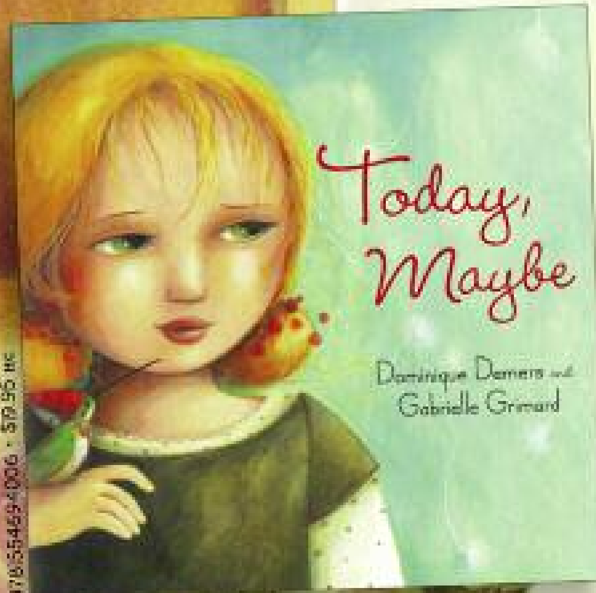

Today, Maybe

Dominique Demers

Illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard

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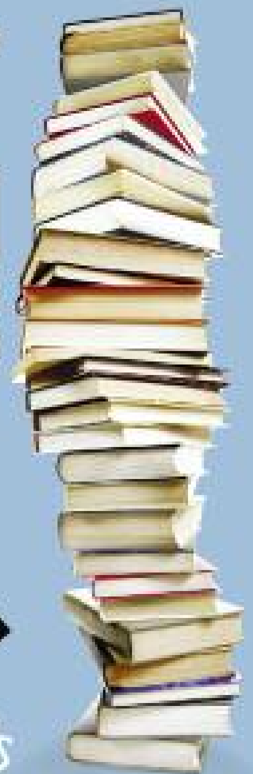

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What Memory Believes

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Artie Gold
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ISBN 9780889226524

WHERE WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN
Don Coles
Signal Editions
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Ann Scowcroft
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Aurian Haller
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BLOOD IS BLOOD
Endre Farkas and Carolyn Marie Souaid
Signature Editions
$19.95, paper, 48pp
ISBN 1897109466

Montreal legend Artie Gold published only two books after his great outburst of creativity in 1974–79, and one of those was made up of poetry from the late 1970s; a big collection of his work is very welcome. Sadly, *The Collected Books of Artie Gold* is a posthumous compilation, as Gold died on Valentine's Day, 2007, after years of debilitating respiratory illness.

Gold was heavily influenced by two Americans, Frank O'Hara and Jack Spicer, and there are whispers of Leonard Cohen in his work. His first book was completely derivative, but he quickly assimilated the American voices. Gold's poems are protean: he can be delicate and gross, and his imagination thrives on daily life (as in the "I do this I do that" poems of his beloved O'Hara), but has a mythological reach as well. In the middle of the book are two amusing changes of pace: a set of poems about jockeys that take the visual form of horse-and-jockey, and a group of poems about his cherished cats. It is time for a good assessment of this writer – he shouldn't remain merely a legendary figure – and *The Collected Books* will make such a valuation easier.

Don Coles has been a steady writer and a much honoured one, but the garrulous memory poems in *Where We Might Have Been* will not enhance his reputation as a poet. The recollections are not extraordinary, and the tone is smug and whimsical (he decides not to tell a story, then tells it in a footnote, and then says, "See? Not worth your time"). The nudging asides and words in quotations marks become tiresome. His poems about Albert Camus, Art Buchwald, and Charles Ritchie are just exercises in name-dropping, excuses to bring in his own memories, to little effect. Two poems stand out: One, "*Liebespaar vor* Dresden," is about a couple who posed for a painting in Dresden in 1928, and ends with the melancholy question: did they die in the firestorm created by Allied bombers in 1944? The other, "Proust and My Grandfather (and Eaton's, God Rot Them)," uses a passage from Proust to summon up memories of being offered a pear by the grandfather. The pear is a memory trigger like Proust's famous madeleine. However, most of the poems in *Where We Might Have Been* show that not every morsel offered by memory is worth nibbling.

The core of Ann Scowcroft's first book, *The Truth of Houses*, is a sequence built on memories, none of them trivial. The set is called "(Palimpsest)," and the parentheses call attention to the nature of a palimpsest, a text written over erased texts. In this case, the "text" is a set of memories of childhood sexual abuse over two generations. This is no longer unusual material, but Scowcroft imprints the recovered memories on us in two ways: through a fractured time scheme that makes us decipher the events as memory recovers them, and through references to brain structures and their functions, like the hippocampus, the amygdala, and Broca's area. Describing body states is a powerful means of conveying emotion, and evoking brain function is an extension of the method. As Faulkner says in *Light in August*, "memory believes before knowing remembers." In another sequence, "Selected excerpts from the atlas of desire," the poet conveys emotions by describing the formation of sounds in the mouth: she is a specialist in Applied Linguistics. This book needed more editing: the best poems at the heart of it are flanked by rather sentimental works about family life that do not have the same impact.

Helen Hajnoczky's first collection, *Poets and Killers*, is high concept poetry. Her plan was to satirize advertising by imagining the life of an advertising man (1940–2010) and narrating his story though lines taken from ads. Unfortunately, the found material is not very interesting, nothing on the level of the witty Vancouver magazine *Adbusters*. The poems are followed by an explanatory essay to make sure that we get it. An episode of the television series *Mad Men* offers more insight into advertising, without the preachiness.

Sheryda Warrener's *Hard Feelings*, from the same small press, is a far better book. Warrener has written a formally varied collection – in this debut, she uses prose poems, a pantoum, a ghazal, and, most interestingly, a long poem in prose about Georgia O'Keeffe, with italicized quotations from the famous painter inserted in spaces at the right-hand side of the page. Her long sequence on a family breakup puts passages about later lives of the father and mother on facing pages – with some interpolated comments by their child: narrative and commentary work well together. The travel poems, which have a whole section, combine crisp description with a lyrical tone: she avoids guidebook reductionism. It's amusing to find a poem about Grimsby, Ontario, sandwiched between works on Barcelona and Yamanaka-ko.

Taxidermy is the unlikely focus of Aurian Haller's outstanding collection, *Song of the Taxidermist*. The eight-part title-poem, which opens the book ("Song of the Taxidermist II" closes it), sometimes looks at taxidermy, sometimes at things that are preserved, like Togo, a dog that took part in the famous mission to bring serum from Anchorage to Nome in 1925. Haller uses couplets that are as sharp as a scalpel to present his subjects, and his lyrical tact is superb. To choose one example, "Novecento, Maurizio Cattelan, 1997. Horse in taxidermy with sling" ends with a fine metaphor, "See, even the moon is / a hoofprint on the darkening shore." Haller's description of the creations of taxidermy is essentially a variant on that popular form of our time, the *ekphrasis*, a poem describing a work of art. The book has seven poems based on paintings of Betty Goodwin, and there are others that describe rocking horses, with pictures of the horses provided in the text. Haller's intellectual brilliance is made clear by his poems about the nature of language, gathered wittily as "Speechless": another set of poems in precise couplets. Cleverness does not trump feeling in the book: the reader never knows when a descriptive poem will open vistas of terror or create pathos (as in the poems gathered as "Five Drownings"). He may go too far with a poem in which a man kills kittens by dropping them in boiling water: "He spoons them one by one / like blind dumplings / into soup."

Cleverness does not trump feeling in the book: the reader never knows when a descriptive poem will open vistas of terror or create pathos ...

Endre Farkas and Carolyn Marie Souaid have prepared a DVD and book that remind us that Arabs and Jews are both Semites, and that, as in the Yin and Yang symbol, each zone of interacting black or white has a dot of the opposite colour at the heart of it. Farkas is a Hungarian immigrant, the child of Holocaust survivors. Souaid has Lebanese Arab ancestry – Christian rather than Muslim. Their work juxtaposes a series of statements by "Jew" with statements by "Arab," printed on facing pages and exploiting parallelism and contrast. The best pair of statements contrasts the Jew's ideas for whimsical Passover games (use marshmallows to simulate the Plague of Hail!) with a long list of Wartime Emergency Provisions by the Arab. The horror of stockpiling for war reminds us of the emergency that Passover commemorates: how deeply conflict is embedded in the Middle East. Vituperation and recriminations eventually give way to statements of love (treasonous though they might be, ideologically) and to a celebration of Arab and Jew sitting on their balconies and enjoying the same evening, something like the Biblical image of Everyman sitting under his own fig tree.

The real impact of the work is in the "video-poem" on the DVD, which the reader should play before reading the book. Shot mostly in black and white by the talented videographer Martin Reisch, the film provides a backdrop of relevant images as the poets read the text. There is an informative website for the project at www.bloodisblood.com.

The poem ends ambiguously with *en face* lines that say, "Let us take an eye for an eye till everyone is blind," which is perhaps a variation on the saying attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, "an eye for an eye leaves everyone blind." Souaid and Farkas provide us with a grim reminder of vengeful elements in Mosaic and Sharia law, but they also imply that revenge might exhaust itself into tolerance, that survivors might become blind to differences. mRb

Bert Almon teaches a poetry masterclass with Derek Walcott at the University of Alberta. His most recent book is *Waiting for the Gulf Stream* (Hagios Press).

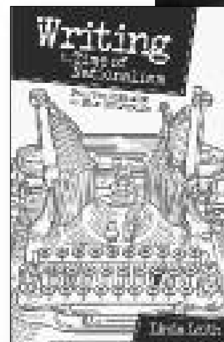
non-fiction

Ms. Leith, Tear Down This Wall!

WRITING IN THE TIME OF NATIONALISM
From Two Solitudes to Blue Metropolis
Linda Leith
Signature Editions
$18.95, paper, 204pp
ISBN 9781897109489

Linda Leith's memoir, *Writing in the Time of Nationalism*, records her stellar career: she pioneered the teaching and researching of Anglo-Quebec writers, worked to establish QSPELL (Quebec Society for the Promotion of English-language Literature) – later the Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF) – served as editor of *Matrix* magazine and various collections, wrote three novels and a number of academic papers, and undertook the organization of the cross-linguistic literary event Write pour écrire which ultimately led to her crowning achievement, the mammoth and much celebrated Blue Metropolis Festival. For historians and academics, Leith's memoir will forever stand as the first single-authored monograph on the subject of Anglo-Quebec literature and a unique source of documentary evidence on the establishment of the QWF and the Blue Met. Leith's telling, however, seems to shine less brilliantly than the historical period and events she describes. The problem is not so much the author's modesty as her paradoxical determination to tell her story against the all-too-familiar backdrop of a myth of two solitudes.

Leith's career – in fact, her very existence as an Anglo-Quebec author and impresario – is a contradiction of the notion that English and French live in total isolation from one another, yet Leith chooses to reify the myth by making her memoir "a story about the effect of two rival nationalisms." Nationalism has long been the favourite whipping boy of Canadian academics and literati, so it is not terribly surprising that it plays the straw-man villain in Leith's narrative. Nonetheless, Leith's insistence on the binary argument stretches credibility. For example, having transformed the solitudes into "two nationalisms" and then into two cities, Montreal and Toronto, Leith then tries, against ample evidence to the contrary, to reconstruct Margaret Atwood as an icon of Toronto-centrism and, by implication, the Anglo solitude.



Leith's broad brush strokes along the fault line of two solitudes repeatedly obliterate what might be surprising, different and compelling – not to mention more accurate. She tells the reader, for example, that "Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer; Michel Tremblay is a Quebec writer," followed by near-tautological though dated observations that English Canadian literature tends to be taught in university English departments, Quebec literature in French departments. What gets overwritten by these ostensibly obvious declarations is "the news" that Tremblay has recently been vilified by Québécois nationalists (Bernard Landry announced he would never again attend a Tremblay play), that Canadian literature is being taught and researched worldwide in French and English in a comparative context, and that virtually every university in Quebec offers courses on Anglo-Québécois literature these days.

Leith's claims that the 1940s and 1950s were a "golden age" for English-language writers in Montreal, that the rise of English-Canadian nationalism caused a decline in the fortunes of Montreal's English-language writers, that Quebec nationalism caused a further decline, and that we are currently enjoying a "revival" of the "golden age" of the 1940s and 1950s are all debatable in varying degrees. To their credit, many Anglo writers were struggling to pursue their craft during *la grande*

continued on page 16

Sze (from page 11)

Sze was eager to free herself from the museum after *Fish Bones*, but she acknowledges that *The Anatomy of Clay* grew from a similar observational impulse. "It's still in a way drawing on *ekphrasis*," she nods. "A painting is like a single moment, and then the poet looks at it and tries to expand it. I like doing that with people and objects, looking at it, and then expanding on it, building a little narrative."

Indeed, many of the new poems begin with an observed moment – a neighbour talking to his plants, a busker attracting a crowd on a street corner, birth in a nest in the tree outside the bathroom window – and develop as the poet finds or imagines connection. The speaker of "Dundas & Crawford" watches a homeless woman at a downtown Toronto bus stop and supposes:

> Once, surely, there was a man
> who loved to watch the way her body bent
> when she opened the dishwasher,
>
> how she looked in the morning,
> her silhouette as she unfolded from bed,
> stretched,
> and brought a half-bottle of wine to her lips.
>
> Her hair, tumbled in knots,
> is still tied to that.

With the omnivorous appetite of the *flâneur*, Sze wanders many landscapes, often urban, but the internal landscape is of greatest interest; exploration of the self is the journey's ultimate aim. Even the poems written in the third person are more lyric than narrative, and they reveal as much about the observer as the observed.

Throughout *The Anatomy of Clay*, revelation is made primarily through imagery, giving the poems sensual focus and suggesting that the body (the "clay" of the book's title) is the common filter through which we experience the world. In "21st Ave.," a house whose "thin walls were a single note / on a reed flute" represents the clean simplicity of new love about to be cluttered by the inevitable complexities of cohabitation. In "Divining," the speaker searches for meaning in the cracks in the pavement and finds that "Each dash of straw in the fields / is lying to somebody." The metaphors are searing and efficient. They create, by turns, a sense of reverent wonder or an air of world-weary wisdom, giving the collection interesting emotional range.

"I am pretty obsessed with the image," Sze confesses. "I remember one of my earliest, kind of visceral encounters with an image that I still think about, and I don't know if I've used successfully in any piece of work, but I was at a supermarket, and you know in the meat section? How they lay the fish out on a bed of lettuce? They were cleaning up before closing time, and I remember the sight of the blood on the lettuce. I don't remember how old I was, but it was such a loaded image for me. Everything about it felt interesting and wrong. I'm always captured by the image."

Often the image itself, rather than its metaphorical potential, is the aim of the poem. The purest snapshots in *The Anatomy of Clay* are those that are confined in the moment and unelaborated by commentary, relying completely on the image, like "10/18/09," which consists of a short list of the day's events on a city block, or "The Nightgown," which observes a girl mending.

Perhaps because it is a collection of snapshots – "or a panoply," Sze volunteers – the collection can feel episodic and at times struggles to sustain its energy, as some individual poems fail to distinguish themselves. Thankfully, the poet does alter her approach. Longer, more narrative poems like "This Is How You Turn the Soil" and "Delilah in Seven Parts" provide a welcome change of pace, as their greater length allows for more elaboration and depth. Sparer, more obscure pieces like "Anima" and "First Hymn" recall the daring of *Fish Bones* by taking greater lyrical leaps. Sze's playfulness leavens the collection in places, as well. "The Right Tenor," for example, is a quiet and heartfelt poem about loss, but captures the feelings of awkwardness and absurdity that grief can leave in its wake by making a goofy allusion to the etymology of "tragic":

> The next day, I have an urge
> to write something
> where I use the word *tragic*,
> easily, naturally,
> without bringing in heaviness
> or theatrics, or what it really means:
>
> *tragikos: something pertaining to goats.*
>
> If that's even possible.

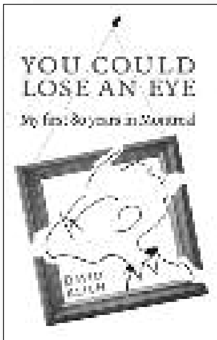
Such moments offer a release from the imagistic compression and earnestness that characterizes most of the poems and convey something of the unassuming brightness that the poet radiates in person.

For her part, Sze is comfortable with the collection's episodic rhythm, which is fitting, after all, for a group of poems preoccupied with the search for connection. The book's design is more intuitive than narrative. "That's something I like about poetry," Sze affirms with a hint of mischief. "I like the holes that poetry almost requires." After all, some of the most memorable snapshots derive their strength from what is just out of frame. "That's why it's so interesting," she says with sincere pleasure. "It's like a machine. I don't need to be there while you're reading it. It's there for you to have the way that you want."

Abby Paige is a poet, playwright, and freelance reader.

Fear and Architecture in Montreal

YOU COULD LOSE AN EYE
My First 80 Years in Montreal
David Reich
Baraka Books
$22.95, paper, 200pp
ISBN 9781926824031



Jewish mothers worry. This is a truth so universally acknowledged that it has not only become a cliché, it's become a running gag. Even so, the joke behind the title of David Reich's new autobiography – *You Could Lose an Eye: My First 80 Years in Montreal* – is not so much about his mother's overbearing concern for Reich's welfare, but how willing he has been to take her concerns to heart. Growing up in Montreal in the 1930s and 1940s, the 80-year-old architect-turned-author was pretty much convinced he was going to lose an eye, at the very least.

As a consequence, the young Reich eschewed danger, even fun, and embraced his true risk-averse nature. As he puts it: "While my friends were happily flying down hills on their skis, or roller skating in traffic … or risking dismemberment or death in a hundred ways, I was able to convince myself that caution was a cardinal virtue. I replaced these suicidal urges with more sedentary pastimes. I'll never know what I missed. But I still have both my eyes."

If Reich wasn't having fun as a kid, he was, as is apparent in passages like the one above, developing a knack for finding things funny – himself in particular. *You Could Lose an Eye* is a self-deprecating, warm-hearted book.

Reich is at his best early on when describing his immigrant parents and the experience they shared with other East European Jews who arrived in North America at the turn of the twentieth century. "They travelled light," Reich explains. "Their only baggage was intelligence, energy, and burning ambition. It was more than enough." The portrait of his first-generation childhood is similarly observant. Parents expected their children to succeed, really succeed: "[They] never doubted that we had brains, but they desperately coveted … diplomas."

But while Reich's storytelling is lovingly detailed on the subject of his childhood, he's much more circumspect about adulthood. There's nothing in the book, for instance, about love or marriage or other personal relationships. We only learn that he has children on the second-to-last page.

There are also few surprises in *You Could Lose an Eye*, which reads, at times, like it belongs to a new, curious kind of literary genre – the authorized autobiography. For instance, details about the more difficult moments in Reich's long, accomplished life are either overlooked or dealt with superficially.

Like the workaholic he portrays himself as, Reich focuses in the middle section of the book on his business relationships and his architectural career, which is distinguished as much by the projects that Reich, risk-averse as always, said no to as those he accepted. He was, however, an astute businessman, making a good living taking on unglamorous jobs, designing, by his own description, the "dirtiest projects" – industrial sites for oil and iron ore companies.

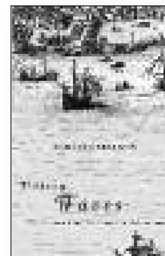
If the book reads, at times, a bit too much like an extended CV, albeit one full of its author's trademark quips, the final section of *You Could Lose an Eye*, a tribute to "those who enriched my years," sees Reich back on track. Family stories dominate. For instance, Reich's portrait of his father's younger brother, Nathan, is well told. Nicknamed The Professor, Nathan was an enormous influence on Reich, who includes a series of excerpts from Nathan's own memoir. These provide a rare, invaluable glimpse into life in the "old country," before Nathan immigrated to North America. Similarly, Reich includes riveting passages from the lives of other family members who survived the Holocaust.

Finally, in his typically self-deprecating manner, Reich offers up his story as a font of "priceless information" about "the several thousand things" he did in his life that didn't work out. "I may not have good advice," he writes, "but I have lots of good stories." As it turns out, that's just what most readers, Montreal readers in particular, will want from *You Could Lose an Eye.* ■

Joel Yanofsky's new memoir is *Bad Animals: A Father's Accidental Education in Autism*, published by Viking Canada.

Portugal, Warts and All

MAKING WAVES
The Continuing Portuguese Adventure
Mary Soderstrom
Véhicule Press
$22.95, paper, 208pp
ISBN 9781550652925



In her latest book, Mary Soderstrom – inspired first by the veritable world map of imported foods she saw at the Portuguese grocer's as a child and then by a trip to Portugal decades later – sets her sights on the "little country with great ambitions." Soderstrom's story is a much-needed addition to the genre of historical non-fiction, in which Portugal remains largely unrepresented compared with its European neighbours.

Making Waves: The Continuing Portuguese Adventure touches upon many elements of Portugal's culture and history, including slavery, religion, literature, architecture, and music. We find traces of memoir and travelogue here, as well as an overview of Portugal's greatest heroes and moments. Soderstrom begins the narrative by reflecting on the Portuguese-American family that left a clear impression on her in her youth in California and, to close the book, the author writes about her search for the family's descendants. Maritime exploration is an ever-present theme. Soderstrom describes the vegetation on the coast of Southern India where fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Portuguese explorers settled and integrated, and casually notes the schedule of a village ferry in the Azores, inviting us to enter the scene. As with the best books of this genre, readers become acquainted with historical narratives beyond the oft-told.

One fascinating example of such a historical narrative relates to the eighteenth-century prime minister, the Marquês de Pombal. "To much of the old aristocracy … Pombal was an upstart, a near-nobody where blood and lineage were concerned," writes Soderstrom, who nonetheless calls him the "right man for the job." Pombal was a forward-thinking, well-connected, worldly statesman who executed significant social and economic reform in Portugal and rebuilt Lisbon after a catastrophic earthquake. Soderstrom nicely juxtaposes the latter accomplishment (including new approaches to city planning) with the modern development of Brasília.

In general, the author manages to segue from the historical to the modern quite seamlessly. Soderstrom chronicles the human suffering in Portugal's slave trade alongside the country's steadfast exploration in Africa and the Americas, including Brazil. She delivers both sides of this imperial tale with depth, providing the staggering numbers of souls sold as well as a heartbreaking description of a new shipment of slaves. Equally detailed are the author's accounts of the Portuguese incursions into South India and South America, and the resulting racial mix when "the men took partners wherever they found themselves." Soderstrom considers the contemporary fallout of these past methods of spreading the empire, and wonders about the competing characterizations of modern-day interracial Brazil: is it a racist society with a persistent colour-class correlation or a meritorious melting pot?

There is a tremendous amount of information here. What is missing, however, is a feel for the people of Portugal. Soderstrom is a great observer but never seems to engage directly with the lifeblood of the culture she is so interested in, nor with the present-day Portuguese. She remains more researcher than reporter, and the book suffers slightly as a result. At the same time, Soderstrom's zeal for the past can be infectious.

Given Portugal's extraordinary history and the dearth of commercial literature on the subject, it would have been a real pleasure to have had more to read. While parameters must be extremely tough to draw with such a subject, there were some topics introduced that could have been more fleshed out: Portugal's relationship to other European countries, its educational system, and the 1974 Carnation Revolution (made more intriguing given current civil resistance movements in the Middle East), which restored democracy in Portugal. What we do get is a well-researched, well-told story, the result of enthusiasm rather than birthright. ■

Joni Dufour is a freelance editor and writer and the fiction editor of *carte blanche* www.carte-blanche.org/.

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Niko.

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Dimitri Nasrallah

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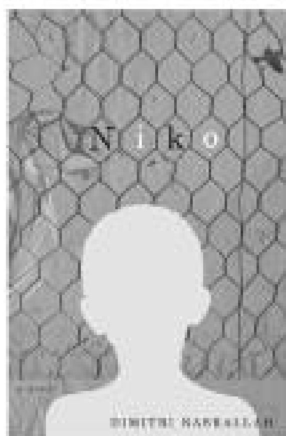

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www.qwf.org

Doom in the Womb

THE ORIGIN OF A PERSON
Alvin R. Mahrer, Ph.D
Howard Gontovnick Publications
$20.95, paper, 181pp
ISBN 9780968186565

In his recent book, Alvin R. Mahrer, Professor Emeritus at the University of Ottawa, explains his distinctive approach to the analysis of personality, which he calls the "experiential approach." The author maintains that the period from conception (approximately) to shortly after birth contains the origins of lifelong feelings, worries, troubles, behaviour, and so on – all of which constitute personality. While the alternative approach in psychotherapy sees events in the mother as "transmitted largely through the umbilical cord," the experiential approach views them as "also happening in the baby."

"The experiential approach departs from the alternative approach in that the parent can provide the infant with a relatively sophisticated personality even before what is called biological conception." This is a "revolutionary" approach, according to Raymond Corsini in the sixth edition of *Current Psychotherapies*, that has far-reaching implications for the treatment of personality disorders. Professor Mahrer points out that the experiential approach could also have significant consequences for education, religion, and attitudinal change.

The book is a companionable introduction (for the layperson as well as for future parents) to an influential and pioneering approach on the making of a person.

Prosenjit Dey Chaudhury is a Montreal writer.

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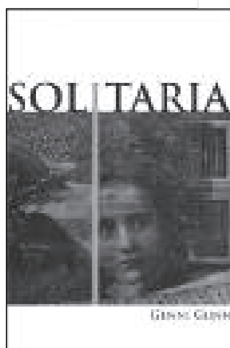

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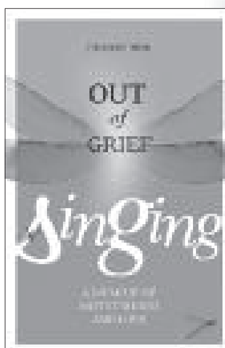

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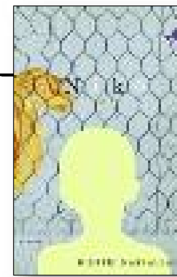


NIKO
Dimitri Nasrallah
Véhicule Press
$19.95, paper, 241pp
ISBN 9781550653113
Reviewed from uncorrected proofs

Shipwrecked By Eric Boodman

There is a whole branch of philosophy about the Just War, but Dimitri Nasrallah remains sceptical. "Ultimately, war is chaos," the Montreal author says. "The vast majority of people are caught in the middle. They're waiting for the shelling to die down so they can go to the store, hoping that the electricity doesn't cut off long enough for their food to go bad or that a bullet doesn't come through their window."

Niko, Nasrallah's second novel, begins with this chaos in the form of the Lebanese Civil War. The book comes out this April, and, given recent world events, it couldn't be more timely.

We met to discuss *Niko* over a beer at a Little Burgundy café. Easygoing and friendly, he admits that he is usually the one doing the interviewing. When not working on his novels – including what he calls his "mistress novel," which he writes when his main project isn't going well – he works as the electronic music editor at the Canadian magazine *Exclaim!* and contributes to a variety of publications. But it is for his fiction that he has gotten the most attention. His first novel, *Blackbodying*, won the 2005 McAuslan First Book Prize from the Quebec Writers' Federation and his story "The Forested Knolls of Elbasan" won the 2006 Quebec Writing Competition.

Like the boy in that short story who slips away and joins a family of dogs while his parents are fighting, the main figures of *Niko* are all looking for ways in which they can regain some sense of stability in a new context. But while the "dogchild" is trying to escape his tumultuous family life, the characters in *Niko* are all trying to escape the effects of war.

We first meet the novel's eponymous protagonist when he is six years old. His days are unstructured, as the schools have closed because of the war, and he spends his time watching television, hunting flies around the family's small apartment, and hanging out with his father Antoine, whose camera store has been bombed. Niko's mother is expecting another child, and she spends her day working as a writer, trying to keep her idle husband and son from breaking her concentration.

The Beirut scenes alternate between boredom and the meaningless acts of cruelty that punctuate it. As Niko and Antoine drive home from church one Sunday, they are forced to watch as the teenagers manning a checkpoint tie a plastic bag around a captive's neck "so that it inflates and deflates with every breath, like a giant heart." The teenagers laugh as he tries to breathe.

This kind of detail captures the war-torn city in a few deft strokes. Early on, we begin to feel for the characters caught in this landscape who Nasrallah describes as being on "the side of ordinariness." We are especially empathetic when Niko's mother dies in a bombing.

When Niko and Antoine have lost everything that was keeping them in Lebanon – wife and mother, business, home – they leave. The reader follows them as they move from Cyprus to Turkey to Greece, looking for a place where Antoine can work, and where Niko can go to school. But they are barred from establishing themselves anywhere. So when Antoine's sister-in-law offers to take in Niko while Antoine gets himself back on his feet, Antoine agrees.

Niko joins his uncle and aunt, Sami and Yvonne, in their small apartment in Montreal North. The boy resists settling in, convinced that his father will return at any moment to whisk him away from the desolate life of a new immigrant. In the meantime, he turns to petty crime to keep himself amused.

Antoine keeps moving without his son, trying to scrape together enough money to fulfill his role as Niko's father once again. Nasrallah was particularly interested in exploring father-son relationships, he says, because "around the eighth or ninth draft I realized I was going to become a father myself, and then around the twelfth draft, my kid was born."

By alternating the focus from one character's inner life to another's, Nasrallah creates a series of cliffhangers which propel the story forward. But the pleasure of reading *Niko* comes from more than just its fast pace. In this novel, Nasrallah has created complete worlds that you carry around in your head after you put the book down, worlds to which you want to return. What makes these settings so enticing is the way they are built up around the characters.

There are, however, some character-environment pairings that are more interesting than others. For example, Niko's desolate early life in Montreal seems predictable in comparison with his father's adventures.

Antoine finds work as a sailor, which takes him from North Africa to the coast of South America, where he gets shipwrecked. The scenes that take place on both sides of the Atlantic – Nasrallah calls them "mythic" and "surrealistic" – show us better than anything else in the book that we are in the hands of a master storyteller.

He wonderfully captures the sense of loss that accompanies the immigrant experience:

> Everywhere around him, the street lamps flicker on, turning the island into a constellation of stars, a minor universe in the middle of the sea. Had he arrived here without his problems, Antoine would have very much enjoyed the slow pace of this idyllic island. Maybe in another time, he and his wife and the boy could have vacationed here.

"I don't consider this an immigrant novel," Nasrallah said when I asked him about the Lebanese community's reaction to *Niko*. "If they see their own stories in it, fine. It's not an anthropological book. I've never expected it to be representative of the story of a community."

The author's own story, though, can be read into some parts of the plot. Nasrallah was born in 1977 in Lebanon, during the civil war, and his childhood was spent trying to escape the violence. His family moved to Kuwait temporarily during "the more explosive parts of the war," and then to Athens, where his father's advertising company had been relocated. "There was this whole economy in the countries around Lebanon that took shape around these people waiting for the war to end," Nasrallah said. "We were part of that for a while."

He arrived in Greece in time to start kindergarten at an American international school, and Nasrallah felt at home there. "That school was a collection of foreigners," he recalled. "You didn't really feel like an outsider there because everyone was an outsider." But because of Greek immigration laws, the Nasrallah family wasn't allowed to set up their own life there, so they moved again, this time to Canada via Dubai.

Nasrallah's arrival in Montreal at age eleven was more difficult. He didn't speak French, having learned English at school in Greece and basic Arabic in Lebanon, but he landed in a French school because of Bill 101. This left him feeling mute and excluded, a position he portrays in *Niko*. Nasrallah describes the book as dealing with "the manifestations of alienation that come with being in an environment that's not your own."

He hadn't intended to write about his own story. In 2005, after *Blackbodying* came out with DC Books, an editor at another publishing house suggested he write about his roots. "This was not something I took well," Nasrallah said. At the time, he had been working on what he terms a "speculative, Kurt Vonnegut-style story," and he had no interest in writing about his origins. "But I figured the question was going to keep coming up, so I had a go at it, and for the longest time it didn't work."

Six years and fourteen drafts later, it works. mRb

Eric Boodman is a Montreal writer, student, and musician.

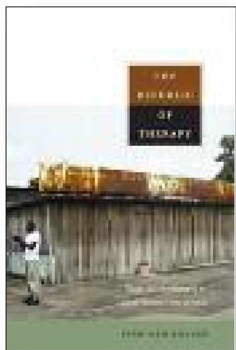
Leith (from page 13)

noirceur in Duplessis's Quebec. Ralph Gustafson was in New York, Richler was in Europe, Mavis Gallant had moved to Paris and was publishing in *The New Yorker*. As Gustafson succinctly describes the period in "Québec, Writing in English" (*The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*): "English Québec was abroad." What the real drama of Leith's narrative, her confrontation with that other "solitude," Franco-Québécois nationalism, reveals, aside from perceived slights, bureaucratic red tape, scheduling headaches, and a series of misunderstandings with Denise Boucher, author of *Les fées ont soif* and then president of UNEQ (Union des écrivaines et des écrivains québécois), is Leith's consistent essentializing of the Québécois – as if "Québécois" meant being the bearer of some immortal, homogenous, immutable essence. Her consequent vision of Anglo Quebec is explicitly not Québécois; it is a vision of a circumscribed Anglo Montreal.

Leith's memoir follows the structure of a novel, with a buildup of conflict and tension, various reversals leading to a happy ending (the Blue Metropolis Festival), a denouement (Leith announcing her retirement), and a post-climactic, asyndetic epilogue of recent Anglo-Québécois literary successes. Ultimately, the two solitudes offer a mythic background foil to the David-against-two-Goliaths story that Leith wants to tell – and Leith deserves this emblem. For once again, when no-one else dared, she has launched the discussion of Anglo-Quebec literature and a debate that will take us long into the future. mRb

Gregory J. Reid is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the Université de Sherbrooke.

Band-AIDS



THE REPUBLIC OF THERAPY
Vinh-Kim Nguyen
Duke University Press
$22.95, paper, 238pp
ISBN 9780822348740

When the AIDS epidemic in Africa exploded in the 1990s, global relief initiatives sought HIV-positive Africans to testify for their campaigns. Their recruitment, however, was frustrated by stigma. AIDS confessions often deeply upset social and familial hierarchies and many sufferers preferred to live in denial. The limited medical resources available at the time thus created a barter system in which victims who were more forthcoming banked on their stories for treatment, even as others were left to die.

Practicing HIV physician Vinh-Kim Nguyen's *The Republic of Therapy* lays out this bleak landscape of AIDS treatment in Africa from the 1990s to the present. At once personal testimony and cultural study, Nguyen's account reveals the unacknowledged triage system that arose with the overwhelming and insurmountable demand for treatment. Nguyen's experiences in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire support his portrayal of AIDS relief as "political in the strongest sense, projecting the power of life or death." His examination presents the dark side to treatment initiatives and shows how their criteria for classifying people resonate with similar examples from Africa's colonial history.

In the 1990s, the combination antiretroviral therapy available for treatment came with a price tag of upwards of fifteen thousand dollars annually and was simply out of reach for Africans. At a time when there was a dearth of available medicine, AIDS treatment in Africa focused on therapeutic discourse. Nguyen delves into the practices and applications of support groups and shows how communal exercises coaxed people into conversation. It was at once a desperately needed practice to open dialogue (a "technology of the self," he calls it, drawing on Foucault), and laughably insufficient.

The ultimate result of these practices was that "not all lives had the same value." From therapeutic groups, the most open and extroverted people were elected to represent international campaigns – and thus the ability to "tell a good story" became a requisite for securing treatment. "By placing a premium on finding "real" Africans with HIV, the international community inadvertently fostered competition over public HIV testimonials," Nguyen explains. Left behind were the taciturn, the self-effacing, and all those who could not risk admitting the truth to their families. With an in-depth historical approach, *The Republic of Therapy* presents an intimate portrait of what it means to be HIV positive and torn in these two competing directions.

In depicting the harsh realities of treatment programs and figurehead organizations, Nguyen draws potent parallels between AIDS triage and systems of classification in colonial Africa. He notes, "The dividing practices introduced by colonialism to better manage the population and the economy transformed arbitrary distinctions into real differences between people …"

The classifications of AIDS triage began to manifest in chilling ways, as inconsistent access to drugs became transcribed in the bodies of HIV-positive individuals. Fighting to meet the need and boost treatment numbers, some organizations dispensed partial drug cocktails of the antiretroviral therapy in a bid to medicate more patients. These individuals developed resistance to the drugs, short-circuiting their hopes for treatment as medicines became more accessible in later years. Nguyen highlights the clash between the political reasoning for these kinds of decisions and the biological realities of the disease.

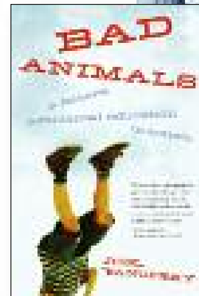
Nguyen's medical background is valuable in navigating the complex landscape presented in *The Republic of Therapy*. Neither activist, nor politician, nor patient, nor pharmaceutical provider, Nguyen brings a more objective perspective to the AIDS crisis, even as he gives a first-hand account and conveys his close relationships with HIV-positive patients. A telling and provocative study of AIDS treatment in Africa, *The Republic of Therapy* offers no prospective solutions, but highlights the complexities and power dynamics inherent in the process of intervention.

Sarah Fletcher is Web coordinator at the Canadian Centre for Architecture. She holds a master's degree in English Literature and is a regular contributor to *The Rover*.

The Book of Joel

BAD ANIMALS
A Father's Accidental Education in Autism
Joel Yanofsky
Viking Canada
$34, hardcover, 288pp
ISBN 9780670065103

Joel Yanofsky and his wife share an Asshole List – a running tab of fathers who are even worse than he is. When they meet a new one or hear stories, Joel looks so good in comparison that rare marital sex ensues. Hey, I'm only reporting what I read.



Author of the new memoir *Bad Animals: A Father's Accidental Education in Autism*, Yanofsky – though he portrays himself as not so charming a person – is an endearing and intelligent writer. After years devoted to reading, he finds himself, in his forties, finally ready for "[my] life to have the kind of narrative structure and coherence it had always lacked." In other words, settle down and have a baby.

Jonah's birth is a small miracle. Yanofsky and his wife, together only briefly when she gets pregnant, say yes to this great adventure. The child is so beautiful that Yanofsky half-seriously wonders if Uma Thurman and Ethan Hawke's new baby had been "switched at birth and that somewhere, in Hollywood or Martha's Vineyard, our real kid had a nanny and a pony and a swimming pool …" As he grows into toddlerhood, "it was almost embarrassing. There was no way to account for his exquisite cheekbones, his strong chin, his light brown hair, and his perfectly unobtrusive nose."

But this happiness has strings attached. Soon they are getting notes from daycare, well-meaning friends avert their eyes, and their son's odd proclivities begin to add up to something. A diagnosis is finally delivered: autism. The shock is almost unbearable, especially when the presiding doctor closes the session with a cheerful, "Have a nice drive home."

What follows is a wide-ranging journey through the chaos of the next eight years of their lives. At one point there are "as many as four therapists doing three-hour shifts seven days a week" in their house. Bouncing between strategies, approaches and orthodoxies, Yanofsky and his wife are at turns confident and desperate. Yanofsky admits, "Cynthia and I retreated to our bedroom, closed the door, and put pillows over our heads to shut out what was being inflicted on our son, what we were, by proxy, inflicting on him."

The author dives bravely into the contradictions and conflicts that raising an autistic child – let alone any child – engenders. It comes close to undoing Yanofsky's marriage, and it clearly undoes Yanofsky daily. Recalling the book of Job, he identifies with the Biblical character's endless travails. "What must [Job] have been thinking when it finally sunk in that all of it was gone? Only one thing: It wasn't supposed to be like this."

Yanofsky doesn't shy away from his own shortcomings. He confesses that he ducks out of family duties and obligations: "I'm a consistent no-show at Jonah's play dates." Other shortcomings are left to the reader to judge, such as how he pulls back from hugging or kissing Jonah. And in case the reader misses it, there's always his wife to point out a flaw. The repeated intrusions of Cynthia, in the form of italicized commentaries inserted by her husband, are annoying and frivolous. *"First, sweetheart, calm down." "Breathe, sweetheart." "It's nothing you can't do, too, sweetheart." "Who are you talking about, sweetheart? Because that sounds like you."* It's one thing for someone to be written into a memoir, but quite another for him or her to function as a literary device.

Yanofsky's journey from shock to denial, then acceptance to pride is an affecting one. In between, father and son share a sense of humour that is genuinely wonky. It is in these moments of sharing, when the two collaborate on an ongoing bedtime story about the "Worst-Daddy-Ever," or when Yanofsky wonders whether he should do something about an idea for the "S.O.S. League or Superheroes on the Spectrum," that you know that *Bad Animals* will have a great sequel, whatever it's called.

Leila Marshy is literary editor of *The Rover*.

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young readers

How to Win Friends and Influence Animals

Milo Cruikshank may struggle with academics and the social intricacies of junior high school, but when it comes to keeping his nose down and his feelings at bay, he's an expert. He's already moved house five times in his life, which is why he now keeps most of his belongings permanently boxed in his closet, ready for the next relocation. Alan Silberberg's novel begins with another new home and school for the awkward hero, only this time Milo doesn't have the stability of a supportive family to help him through the transition: his mother recently died and his father and sister are just as lost in a "fog" as he is. Milo is constantly reminded of her passing, but, thankfully, life is also full of distractions, like new best friend and fellow Freezie-guzzler Marshall; a persistent girl-next-door fond of sticky notes; and, the object of Milo's secret infatuation, the perfect (and perfectly-indifferent-towards-him) Summer. Milo's ironic observations as the "geek" outsider are sure to make readers guffaw, especially when complemented by Silberberg's cartoonish illustrations. Yet while the delivery is wry, the message is serious: slowly the school year progresses, and so does Milo, who is finally ready to look beyond the fog and retrieve his memories – painful and good – of his mother.

MILO: STICKY NOTES AND BRAIN FREEZE By Alan Silberberg
Aladdin • $18.99, hardcover, 278pp • ISBN 978-1-4169-9430-5 • Ages 9-13

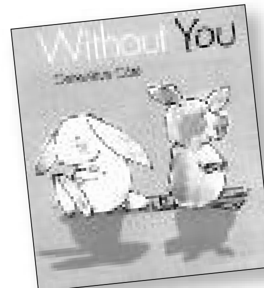
Fifteen-year-old Willow has grown up entertained by her Nana's stories of Mistolear, a magical land complete with princesses, knights, and fairies. Then Nana – her guardian since infancy, when Willow's parents perished in a fire – dies, and Willow is transported into the realm she had always thought of as myth. It turns out that Willow is a real princess, sent to Earth to come of age safely while her home kingdom of Gallandra battles the neighbouring kingdom of Keldoran, in an elaborate quasi-chess game set up by a mischievous Dark Fairy. Willow has to quickly come to grips with her magical powers and her destiny as the kingdom's saviour, for pieces are advancing across the board to "capture" her, just as her own, true, royal parents were taken.

Captured's elaborate politics and cast of characters may be disorienting for readers at first, but like Willow, one soon becomes captivated by the possibilities of a fantastical realm. Wood infuses her fairy tale with a modern perspective, making Willow scoff at the stiff ideas of femininity carried by her "pompous pig" knight-protector (and potential love interest), Brand. And her mission is a relatable one, more psychological than material: in the words of her fairy "nethermother," "[to] be strong in your knowledge of who you are, but at the same time, open up to what is still possible." Wood offers a delicious debut to her *Divided Realms* series.

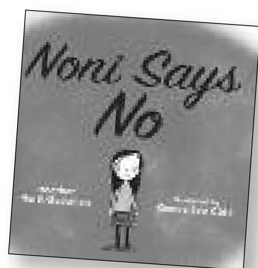
Raffi McCaffrey, Sylvain Meunier's determined boy-hero with sickle-cell anemia, returns for another adventure in *Raffi's New Friend*. Raffi and his faithful pal Carlito witness an act of bullying that draws them to the victim: Fatima, a new student at their school who is hounded by three peers for wearing a headscarf. Later, Raffi and Carlito stumble upon her private

moment of grief as she feeds mourning doves in her backyard, singing with a voice "as light as a sigh, pure as crystal." Their mutual interest in the birds draws them together, and the boys discover the reason for her sadness – not the schoolyard taunts, as they imagined, but the absence of her beloved father, gone missing in her war-torn homeland. Although Meunier's novel – a translated work – sometimes falls into awkward phrasing, it is successful in its discussion of prejudice and violence, using a scenario accessible to young Canadian readers. Eudes-Pascal's ink sketches convey the characters' emotions with flair.

In her new non-fiction title for young adult readers, *Into the Mist: The Story of the Empress of Ireland*, Anne Renaud focuses on the elegant ship from the Edwardian era that sank in the St. Lawrence River, taking over 1000 lives with it. In Renaud's account, the wreck isn't depicted until the second half of the book, the author taking care to first make a case for the liner's contributions to Canadian industry and society. The *Empress of Ireland* was built in 1905 in Scotland for the Canadian Pacific Railway to carry mail between Britain and Canada. At the time, Canada was seeking European immigrants to settle in the lands newly linked by the railway and the *Empress of Ireland* became an important vessel for bringing settlers into the country. Renaud's descriptions of the tiered accommodations available to passengers – which included a barbershop, a library, and a children's playground – illustrate the class divisions of the era. She further humanizes her story by making case studies of some of those who traveled on the ship. The many photographs and historical documents, such as advertisements and newspaper headlines, included in the book help the reader visualize the period, so that by the time the sinking is described, its tragedy seems all the more profound.



No rodent does paranoia and compulsion better than Scaredy Squirrel, ushered back by creator Mélanie Watt in *Scaredy Squirrel Has a Birthday Party* to celebrate his birthday – in as quiet and orderly a fashion as possible. Party décor, location, cake recipe: all are meticulously planned, no matter that the birthday boy is the only invited guest. But then Buddy the dog mails Scaredy a card, and as "a kindly gesture deserves a kindly response," Scaredy widens his guest list just a little more... When a gang of neighbourhood mutts shows up for the party, Scaredy's hyperscheduling and numerous back-up plans go out the window. Will Scaredy emerge from his self-induced coma in time to enjoy the day? Watt's latest, rendered in her characteristic brightly coloured style, is sheer fun.



Noni's proud that she's big enough to tie her own shoelaces and help care for her baby brother. But a big challenge shadows her happy days: "Noni cannot say *no*," most especially to her best friend Susie. Susie's requests are small enough to begin with, and Noni indulges her wishes with only a twitch of discomfort. Then her friend's whims grow wilder: when Noni finds herself sporting a new and very clumsy hairdo by Susie's hand and having to sleep on her own floor because Susie would rather take the bed, Noni finally puts her foot down. In *Noni Says No* Hartt-Sussman offers children preoccupied by peer acceptance a gentle lesson in assertion, buttressed by Côté's airy sketches of the timid Noni, who gains in colour and movement when she learns to say no.

Governor General Award–winner Geneviève Côté's endearing new picture book *Without You* begins with a falling out between two good friends, a bunny and a pig: "You're so careless!" accuses the rabbit; "You fuss over any little mess!" declares the pig. So each goes off to play alone, relishing for a time the freedom gained. It soon becomes apparent, however, that their painting, playing music, reading, and dressing-up lack the pleasure brought by companionship: "[M]y cookies taste better when I share them with you!" confesses Pig; "A wagon can be an airplane when I'm with you," muses the bunny. Rendered in soft pastel watercolours and simple pencil lines, Côté's tale of reunion emphasizes the bonds of friendship over petty differences.

In Dominique Demers's intriguing tale of faith, *Today, Maybe*, an unnamed girl lives with her little bird in a house by the forest. Everyday she wakes up with the words, "Today, maybe he'll come." Just who, readers don't know, and neither does the girl. Every now and then, a visitor arrives to disturb the golden calm of her cottage, sometimes threatening – like the jagged-toothed thieves and the hulking wolf – sometimes sweet, like the handsome prince. Gently but firmly she turns them all away, waiting for that special visitor. Demers's protagonist is an inspiring heroine for young readers, a problem-solver confident in her purpose. Grimard brings a classic beauty to the story with pictures that contrast yellow warmth and comfort, and the girl's smallness, against the sweeping, dark shapes of the outside world. The author and illustrator effectively build anticipation with each new encounter; rest assured, the girl's long wait *is* worth it.

Andrea Belcham is the author of the forthcoming *Food and Fellowship: Projects and Recipes to Feed a Community* (The Alternate Press/Life Media).

CAPTURED
The Divided Realms Series, Book 1
By Maggie L. Wood
Lobster Press
$12.95, paper, 284pp
ISBN 9781770800717
Ages 13+
Reviewed from advance reading copy

RAFFI'S NEW FRIEND
By Sylvain Meunier
illustrated by Élisabeth Eudes-Pascal
translated by Sarah Cummins
Formac Publishing
$5.95, paperback, 64pp
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Ages 10-13

INTO THE MIST
The Story of the Empress of Ireland
By Anne Renaud
Dundurn Press
$14.99, paper, 106pp
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Ages 10+

SCAREDY SQUIRREL HAS A BIRTHDAY PARTY
By Mélanie Watt
Kids Can Press
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Ages 3-8

NONI SAYS NO
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illustrated by Geneviève Côté
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Ages 2+

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illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard
translated by Sheila Fischman
Orca Book Publishers
$19.95, hardcover, 32pp
ISBN 9781554694006
Ages 4-8
Reviewed from advance reading copy

feature by Mélanie Grondin

THE MILE END CAFÉ

When Rights Are Wronged

The conventional wisdom is that history is told from the perspective of the victors. But in Canada the "winning" side doesn't always control the narrative. Soon after World War II, when Japanese-Canadians were released from internment camps only to be deported back to Japan, massive public protests against these deportations occurred and, in 1950, 1,434 Japanese-Canadians received some compensation for losing their property. While an apology for this shameful treatment and a more complete compensation only came in 1988, this ability to occasionally acknowledge wrongdoing and try to rectify it has long buttressed Canada's reputation as a nation dedicated to civil liberties.

During the October Crisis of 1970, however, civil liberties in Canada were suspended through the application of the *War Measures Act*, a first in times of peace. Two recently published books on the October Crisis illustrate just how important perspective is when it comes to such a controversial episode and how relevant the issues discussed back then are today.

On the one hand, there's *The October Crisis, 1970: An Insider's View* by William Tetley, written in an attempt to counter "the whole revisionist history that has sprung up since 1970" (i.e. books written by *péquistes*, *felquistes*, *souverainists*, and civil libertarians). First published in 2007, it was recently reissued in paperback in time for the 40th anniversary of the October Crisis. A lawyer, professor of law at McGill University, and Minister of Revenue under the Bourassa government during the crisis, Tetley gives an account that firmly supports Robert Bourassa's actions, unequivocally backing up his decision to call in the army and implement the *War Measures Act* (two very different decisions, Tetley stresses).

On the other hand, there's *Trudeau's Darkest Hour: War Measures in Time of Peace, October 1970*, edited by Guy Bouthillier – also a lawyer and president of Mouvement Québec français – and Édouard Cloutier – a professor of political science at Université de Montréal. While Tetley's book reads, at times, like a hagiography of Robert Bourassa, *Trudeau's Darkest Hour* is nothing short of a demonography of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Not only do the editors wonder if "… Trudeau [was] nostalgic for the old days when Duplessis enjoyed triumphant 'unanimity'," thereby likening him to the prime minister who ruled over Québec during *la grande noirceur*, but they practically accuse him of autocracy ("The prime minister could quite bluntly but accurately say to the provinces 'L'État, c'est moi!' and you are nothing") and don't shy away from quoting an unnamed member of Parliament who, referring to the Trudeau Liberals, said, "I thought I was sitting with a bunch of Mussolini blackshirts."

An anthology of source material pertaining to the *War Measures Act* and the October Crisis, *Trudeau's Darkest Hour* contains newspaper columns (by Nick auf de Maur, John Cruickshank, Peter C. Newman, etc.), book excerpts (by Thomas R. Berger, Hugh Segal, etc.), minutes from meetings, parliamentary speeches, and poems written at the time by Margaret Atwood and Mervyn Procope. Given Tetley's apparent belief that anything that doesn't correspond to his version of the events of October 1970 is revisionist history – he spends ten pages attacking various conferences and other books on this charge – Bouthillier and Cloutier's use of source material is wise. Indeed, one can hardly qualify the minutes of House of Commons debates as revisionist.

Unlike numerous other state violations of civil liberties in Canada, the October Crisis became legendary, and it seemed that many – including lawmakers who replaced the *War Measures Act* by the *Emergencies Act*, which, unlike its predecessor, is subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms – didn't want such an event to happen again.

Until, that is, the G20 summit in Toronto on June 26–27, 2010. Queen's Park was chosen as a "designated speech area" where protesters could rally and exercise their right to free speech. After the violent actions of a few anarchists, Queen's Park became a place where badgeless police officers manhandled protesters, whether they had actually committed acts of violence or not, before bringing them to a temporary detention centre. Pepper spray was used on sitting protesters and rubber bullets were shot into the crowd. Students from all over Canada who were sleeping in the University of Toronto gym were woken up by a Sunday morning raid and arrested by police armed with tactical weapons for unlawful assembly or for rioting. In all, more than 1,100 people were arrested, including seventy university students still in their pyjamas, crammed into the detention centre without food (at least for the first 12 hours) and with very little water. Detainees were strip-searched, didn't have access to a lawyer (because martial law was in force, a police officer allegedly claimed) and didn't receive required medical attention. In the end, 709 detainees were never charged.

In comparison, 497 people were arrested without warrant during the October Crisis – some in the middle of the night. They didn't have any contact with their families, let alone a lawyer. Only 62 were charged and the others were released days, even months, later. In a way, the October Crisis pales in comparison to the violation of civil liberties that occurred during the Toronto G20. Indeed, Ontario ombudsman André Marin said, "the most massive compromise of civil liberties in Canadian history" had occurred during the G20 weekend.

The Ontario government's perspective on civil liberties – like that of the federal and the Quebec governments during the October Crisis – seems to correspond to Tetley's belief that certain actions are acceptable as long as "… the effect [is] mostly positive and the rights taken away [are] not extensive." But civil liberties in Canada and elsewhere shouldn't be privileges that a government grants its citizens as long as its interests are served by doing so. They are rights that every citizen must defend tooth and nail. As Robert Stanfield writes in *Rumours of War* (excerpted in *Trudeau's Darkest Hour*) "Civil liberties in Canada … depend basically upon the importance Canadians attach to them and upon our willingness to defend them even in times of stress. In our search for protection from violence we must recognize that arbitrary abrogation of individual rights weakens rather than strengthens social order."

From stalling the Afghan detainee controversy to refusing to launch public hearings on policing at the Toronto G20 summit, Canada seems to be trying to change the way it's telling its stories, making sure that the victors are writing these specific bits of history. But, as Roméo Dallaire claims in this issue's cover story, "we will be held accountable in history," not only internationally, but also nationally. Let us hope that history will also remember how we righted the wrongs recently committed. mRb

Mélanie Grondin is associate editor of the *mRb*.

THE OCTOBER CRISIS, 1970
An Insider's View
By William Tetley
McGill-Queen's University Press
$27.95, paper, 274pp
ISBN 9780773538016

TRUDEAU'S DARKEST HOUR
War Measures in Time of Peace, October 1970
Edited by Guy Bouthiller and Édouard Cloutier
Baraka Books
$19.95, paper, 206pp
ISBN 9781926824048

More Punchy! Bring yourself and bring your friends to the Blue Met.... www.bluemetropolis.org

Writers, editors, friends of the press – all are welcome to celebrate Punchy Poetry and Punchy Prose's third birthday during the 13th Blue Metropolis Montreal International Festival, April 27 – May 1, 2011. Editors Jason Camlot and Steve Luxton will be there, opening the line-up with five new and very recent books, like Larissa Andrusyshyn's *Mammoth* or *The Emperor's Sofa* – Greg Santos' debut collection, a sprawling gift of outrageous artifice, a world of Mad Magazine intensity. Santos imagines a poetic land of deranged heroes and unmasked anti-heroic marvels – funny, poignant, and profound.

Louise Bak's third collection of poetry, *Syzygy*, continues to reinvent the English language as a sharp and challenging postmodern argot that combines terminology ranging from Cantonese and Mandarin to Latin, Korean, punk and Klingon.

From a gifted student of science embarrassed by his parents, to a musician who loses his son to a different kind of music, to an old woman reluctant to leave her Chinese prison, the stories of Kenneth Radu's *Sex in Russia* often begin on a seemingly minor detail or event and travel from there to the heart of disaffection, despair, hope, and unusual forms of recovery and understanding.

In Tom Armstrong's *Of Water and Rock*, when Toronto's Edward Hampstead steps off the plane in Barbados, 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 for an undiscovered family and reconciliation with the memory of a long dead father.

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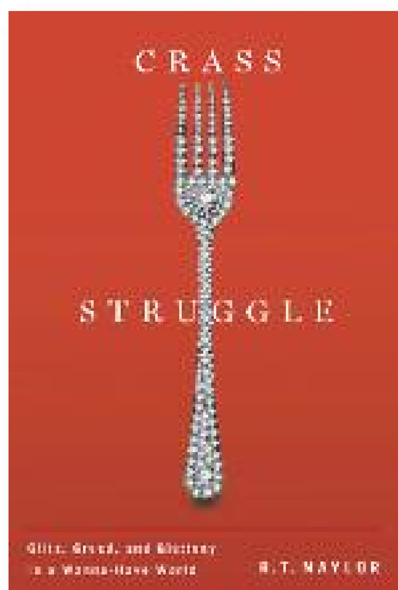
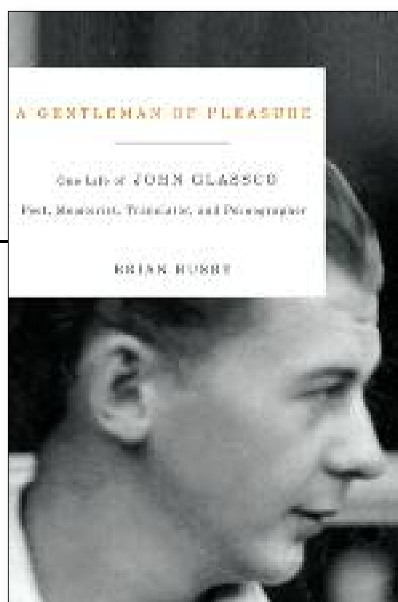


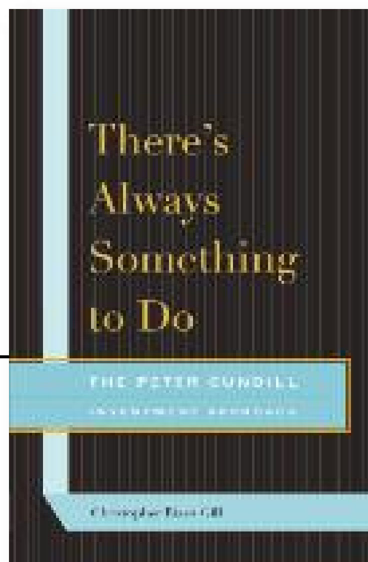
Crass Struggle
Greed, Glitz, and Gluttony in a Wanna-Have World
R.T. Naylor

"My parents survived the Great Depression and taught me my most important lesson: 'Work hard to earn money for the necessities in life. Don't think having lots of money or stuff makes you a better or more important person than anyone else.' This book documents the incredible lengths to which people will go to acquire obscene levels of wealth. Naylor's documentation is both fascinating and horrifying."
– David Suzuki



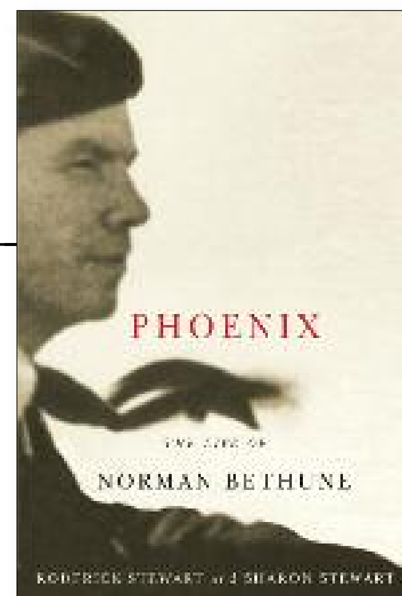
A Gentleman of Pleasure
One Life of John Glassco, Poet, Memoirist, Translator, and Pornographer
Brian Busby

"In his own elegant prose and with a profound appreciation of his subject's life and work, Brian Busby introduces us to the life, the times, and the writings of a man who was not merely a gentleman of letters and pleasure but also a fabulist of the first order." – Sheila Fischman



There's Always Something to Do
The Peter Cundill Investment Approach
Christopher Risso-Gill

A book for everyday investors as much as professional investors, offering a compelling perspective on global financial markets and on how we can avoid their worst pitfalls and grow our hard-earned capital.



Phoenix
The Life of Norman Bethune
Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart

"At long last, the whole Bethune – flaws and contradictions intact, making the extraordinary accomplishments of this troubled and near tragic figure all the more remarkable to unravel. I was riveted, from beginning to end."
– Ken Gass, artistic director, Factory Theatre

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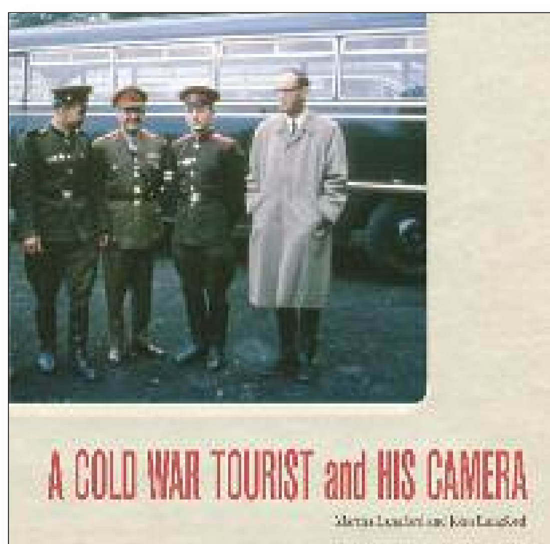
Spring Ahead with MQUP



A Cold War Tourist and His Camera
Martha Langford and John Langford

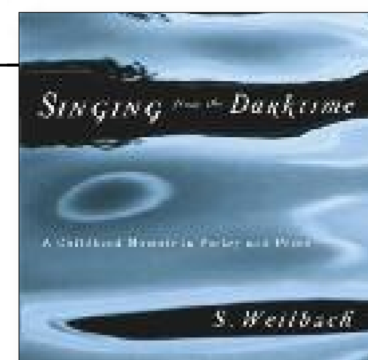
An intelligent and personal look at the ways that the historical and the private are represented and remembered, *A Cold War Tourist and His Camera* stages the family slide show as you've never seen it before.

Blindfold
John Mikhail Asfour

A collection of poems which investigates the ways in which disability influences our lives and is magnified in our minds.

Particles
Michael Penny

A lively and surprising poetry collection which joins together inner and outer space and suggests that you might not know what you think you know.



Singing from the Darktime
A Childhood Memoir in Poetry and Prose
S. Weilbach
With an afterword by Doris Bergen

A unique voice of innocence and resilience in a cruel and frightening world with an afterword by renowned Holocaust scholar Doris Bergen.

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