

# mRb

SPRING 2013 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS



## Like a Rolling Stone

Susan Gillis is reluctant to lay down roots



# Three.

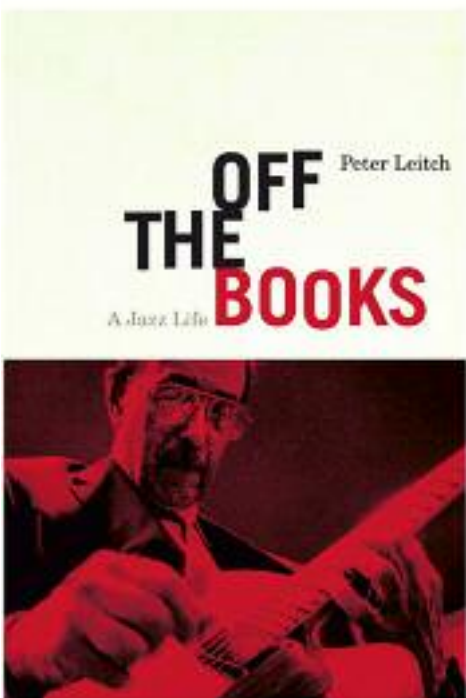
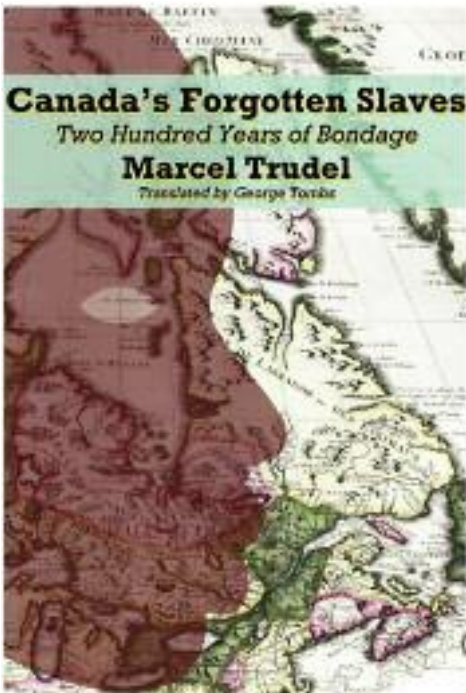
[AVAILABLE MAY]



The Heart Accepts It All

Selected Letters of John Glassco

Edited by Brian Burby



Véhicule Press  
www.vehiculepress.com

15<sup>e</sup>

## BLUE MET METROPOLIS BLEU

### FESTIVAL

The Power of Words

APRIL 22 TO 28, 2013



COLM TÓIBÍN



JONATHAN GOLDSTEIN



ALISON PICK



EDMUND WHITE



PHYLLIS LAMBERT

Over 200 writers  
& events  
15 countries  
6 languages

Grand Prix winner for 2013, Irish writer **Colm Tóibín** (*The Master*) on stage with **Eleanor Wachtel**, Israeli superstar **Etgar Keret** at the Jewish Public Library and at Chapters/Indigo. Best-selling UK/Libyan writer **Hisham Matar** (*In the Country of Men*) and Ideas host **Paul Kennedy**. Cookbook writer and former NYT columnist **Molly O'Neill** on cookbook writing. O'Neill talks Baseball and Beer with the American author of *The Art of Fielding*, **Chad Harbach**, via Skype. The Wairus Talks with **Alison Pick**, **Vincent Lam**, **Henry Mintzberg**, **Jonathan Goldstein** and others. The best-known writer in Portuguese, Mozambican **Mia Couto**, and one of Italy's best-loved writers, **Erri De Luca**. Event such as... *Lost Yiddish Women Writers of Montreal*, *Fascist Rome* and *The Jewish Husband* and many more...

HÔTEL 10, 10, Sherbrooke Street W ☺ St-Laurent  
BLUEMETROPOLIS.ORG INFO FESTIVAL: 514.937.BLEU  
TICKETS: LAVITRINE.CA

#BLUEMET2013



The **mRb** is available at these bookstores and libraries.

- MONTREAL**  
Argo Books  
Arts Café  
Atwater Library  
Babar Books, Pointe-Claire  
Beaconsfield Public Library  
Bertrand's Bookstore  
Montreal  
Baie d'Urfé Public Library  
Bibliophile Bookstore  
Bonders Bookstore  
Café Imagination  
Centaur Theatre  
Clio, Pointe-Claire  
Concordia University Bookstore  
Dawson College Bookstore  
Dollard-des-Ormeaux Public Library  
Dorval Public Library  
Drawn & Quarterly  
Eleanor London Library  
Encore Books and Records  
Galerie Samuel Lallouz  
Jewish Public Library  
Kirkland Public Library  
McGill University Bookstore  
Mile End Library  
Montreal Arts Interculturels (MAI)  
NDG Public Library, rue Botrel  
Nicholas Hoare, Greene Avenue  
Pages  
Paragraphe  
Park-Extension Library  
Pierrefonds Public Library  
Pointe-Claire Municipal Library  
Reginald Dawson Library, TMR  
Saul-Bellow Public Library, Lachine  
Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Public Library  
TMR Library  
Vanier College Bookstore  
Verdun Library on Bannantyne  
Livres Welch  
Westmount Public Library  
The Word  
The Yellow Door
- NEWFOUNDLAND**  
Memorial University Bookstore, St. John's
- NOVA SCOTIA**  
Box of Delights, Wolfville  
Bookmark Inc., Halifax  
Trident Booksellers and Café, Halifax  
King's Co-op Bookstore, Halifax
- ONTARIO**  
The Miller's Tale, Almonte  
The Bookshelf, Guelph  
Campus Bookstore, Queen's University, Kingston  
Novel Ideas, Kingston  
Oxford Book Store, London  
Books on Beechwood, Ottawa  
Carleton University Bookstore, Ottawa  
University of Ottawa Bookstore, Ottawa  
Octopus, Ottawa  
After Stonewall, Ottawa  
Furby House Books, Port Hope  
TYPE Books, Toronto  
University of Toronto Bookstore, Toronto  
Wordsworth Books, Waterloo
- PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**  
Bookmark Inc., Charlottetown
- QUEBEC**  
Librairie Lac Brome, Knowlton  
Librairie livres d'or Sutton  
Librairie Black Cat, Sherbrooke  
La Maison Anglaise, Quebec City  
Bibliothèque municipale de Saint-Lambert  
Bishop's University Bookstore, Lennoxville  
Cooperative l'Université de Sherbrooke
- SASKATCHEWAN**  
McNally-Robinson Booksellers, Saskatoon  
The White Cat Book Company, Saskatoon
- YUKON**  
Mac's Fireweed Books, Whitehorse
- ALBERTA**  
Pages, Calgary  
Audrey's Books, Edmonton
- BRITISH COLUMBIA**  
People's Co-op Bookstore, Vancouver  
Simon Fraser University Bookstore, Burnaby  
Misty River Book Store, Terrace  
Munro's Bookstore, Victoria
- MANITOBA**  
McNally-Robinson Booksellers, Winnipeg
- NEW BRUNSWICK**  
Westminster Books, Fredericton
- Fredericton Public Library  
Tidewater Books, Sackville

[aelaq].org

Presents:

San Francisco author and publishing visionary

## KEVIN SMOKLER

It Begins With a Reader:

"Publishing from the Outside In"

Thursday  
April 4th  
5 to 6:30  
FREE  
Atwater Library  
Auditorium  
1200 Atwater

RSVP [admin@aelaq.org](mailto:admin@aelaq.org)  
or on Facebook

more info [aelaq.org/events/kevin-smokler](http://aelaq.org/events/kevin-smokler)



# mRb

SPRING 2013  
Volume 16 No. 2

## Montreal Review of Books

is published by the  
Association of English-language Publishers  
of Quebec (AELAQ).  
Circulation: 40,000

Lara de Beaupré Publisher

Mélanie Grondin Editor

Vanessa Bonneau Associate Editor

David LeBlanc Designer

Michael Wile Advertising Manager, National

For editorial inquiries contact:

AELAQ 1200 Atwater Avenue, Suite #3

Westmount, QC H3Z 1X4

Telephone: 514-932-5633

Email: [mrb@aelaq.org](mailto:mrb@aelaq.org)

For advertising inquiries contact:

Montreal: [admin@aelaq.org](mailto:admin@aelaq.org)

National: [ads@lrcreview.com](mailto:ads@lrcreview.com)

ISSN # 1480-2538

Copyright 2013, the authors and the AELAQ

Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec  
and the National Library of Canada,  
first quarter, 2013.

We wish to thank the Canada Council for  
the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage,  
and SODEC for their generous support,  
without which this publication would not exist.

Thanks to Julia Kater for copy-editing assistance.

One-year subscriptions available for \$12  
Please send a cheque payable to the AELAQ.

Opinions expressed in reviews and articles  
in the **Montreal Review of Books** do not  
necessarily reflect the views of the editors  
or the AELAQ.

Cover photo by Terence Byrnes

PRINTED IN CANADA



We wish to thank the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department  
of Canadian Heritage, and SODEC for their generous support,  
without which this publication would not exist.

# contents

## features

- 4 **Susan Gillis**  
By Abby Paige
- 9 **Carmine Starnino**  
By Kimberly Bourgeois
- 10 **Tavi Gevinson**  
By Sarah Lolley
- 14 **Josh Freed**  
By Eric Boodman
- 18 **The Mile End Café**  
By Jean Coléno

## poetry

- 6 **The Smooth Yarrow**  
By Susan Glickman
- The Major Verbs**  
By Pierre Nepveu
- For as Far as the Eye Can See**  
By Robert Melançon
- A Rhythm to Stand Beside**  
By Jack Hannan
- All Souls'**  
By Rhea Tregebov  
Reviewed by Bert Almon

## fiction

- 7 **The Lava in My Bones**  
By Barry Webster  
Reviewed by Sarah Fletcher
- The Barista and I**  
By Andrew Szymanski  
Reviewed by Sara Freeman
- 8 **To the Spring, by Night**  
By Seyhmus Dagtekin  
Reviewed by David Homel
- And the Birds Rained Down**  
By Jocelyne Saucier  
Reviewed by Claire Holden Rothman
- 13 **First Spring Grass Fire**  
By Rae Spoon  
Reviewed by Peter Dubé
- Serial Villain**  
By Sherwin Tjia  
Reviewed by Rob Sherren

## graphic novel

- 12 **Fanny & Romeo**  
By Yves Pelletier & Pascal Girard  
Reviewed by Heather Leighton

## non-fiction

- 15 **Life on the Home Front  
Montreal 1939-1945**  
By Patricia Burns  
Reviewed by Dane Lanken
- 16 **The Orphanage  
An Autobiography**  
By Richard Bergeron  
Reviewed by Oksana Cueva
- 17 **The Secret of the Blue Trunk**  
By Lise Dion  
Reviewed by Lesley Trites

## young readers

- 19 **Highlights of the season's books  
for young people**  
Reviewed by B.A. Markus



ILLUSTRATION BY PASCAL GIRARD

The future  
is unwritten...

Just write it

QUEBEC WRITING  
COMPETITION  
2013

A partnership between CBC Quebec, the Quebec Writers' Federation,  
Maisonneuve magazine and Véhicule Press

Prizes include publication, story broadcast and \$2,800 in cash prizes  
For details and entry form visit [cbc.ca/qwc](http://cbc.ca/qwc)  
Deadline: May 1st, 2013 • Info: [www.cbc.ca/qwc](http://www.cbc.ca/qwc)



**T**here is a restlessness in Susan Gillis's poems, a reluctance to lay down roots, that doesn't take long to reveal itself in conversation with the poet. "I think the conditions of travel are conditions that I've always sought," she tells me. "There's something about the force on the psyche of a place that doesn't know you or care about you. It doesn't hate you. In fact, it often welcomes you, but it has no vested interest. That kind of opening is the condition I seek most."

Gillis's poems show evidence of travel and how it can sharpen one's senses. While her first two collections were published in Montreal, both seem to have been conceived elsewhere, as they scramble through the streets and back alleys of other cities. *Swimming Among the Ruins*, which was shortlisted for both the Pat Lowther Memorial Award and the ReLit Award in 2000, includes poems set in Greece and Turkey, and a section of "Postcards from London." *Volta*, which appeared two years later and won the

2002 A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry, finds itself in similar climes, and also includes fifteen "translations" of sonnets by the Earl of Surrey, relocated to British Columbia's Quadra Island.

If Gillis's work defies regionality, it may be in part because the poet has ties to many places. Born and raised in Halifax, she travelled across the continent to go to school in Victoria and remained there for some time, undecided about which coast to call home. In the end, she stayed in B.C. for some twenty years, running a vintage

clothing business. After another period of transition, and a long series of storage lockers, she resettled in Montreal in 1998. Today she teaches at John Abbott College, and when school's out, she commutes back to her home base near Perth, Ontario, her feet still planted in two different places. Having two homes works for her, she has decided, perhaps in part because it keeps her a bit out of a routine, a bit uprooted, which drives her work. It is, perhaps, a way of simulating the disruptions of travel while staying close to home.

Closer to home is where Gillis's latest collection, *The Rapids*, mostly finds itself, and with its poems she proves herself capable of mining moments of purposeful dislocation from the everyday. She contemplates the Lachine Canal, Habitat 67, or a creaking house on a winter night with the same perplexity as a traveller observing these for the first time. The opening that travel creates can be found in the familiar, she says, "in looking at the same landscape every day and seeing the small differences, particularly when there's just been rain, and when there hasn't been rain, and when there's cloud instead of sun..."

Gillis's poems often take place outdoors, but they do not merely observe nature. Rather, they are activated by it, often at its most violent, turbulent, and powerful. The thundering force of a storm, the relentless muscle behind the river's current, the shock of bitter winter cold – these dwarf us. They are awesome, threatening. "Stepping outside the house at dusk I'm afraid / I'm stepping into another form," she writes in "Stepping Outside the House in Late December," one of several poems where the speaker mysteriously loses form

# Mining of moments purposeful dislocation

BY ABBY PAIGE

PHOTO BY TERENCE BYRNES



or disappears into his or her surroundings altogether. At times, the poems are almost disorienting, as the boundary between speaker and setting blurs, as though the poet looked so closely and for so long, she was swallowed up inside her surroundings and was lost.

It's appropriate, then, that white water is a central and recurring image behind the book, as the river's rapids are literally capable of this kind of swallowing. We know that the Lachine Rapids, in the St. Lawrence River toward the west of Montreal, swallowed at least one of Samuel de Champlain's men, and they were voracious enough to force travellers to portage around them until the Lachine Canal was built in the 1820s. At times Gillis's river has this same deadly force, "full of noisy intent / and vortical pull" in "View with Cameos"; "caught in its own thrashing" in "Mid-Winter Dragon"; and in "Spring Storm":

...the river reared up like a dragon,  
scales flapping; the sun, smoke,  
the far faint islands, all  
collapsed in the froth of its lashing.  
I had never been so small,  
atomic. I was tossed. I have to  
say "maelstrom." I wanted out.  
I wanted time to turn back.

Gillis is especially interested in those moments of maelstrom when life propels us toward dramatic change, when we no longer steer the boat of our own destinies,

but are propelled toward action by forces greater than ourselves. She seems to seek the animating force behind the storm, what she describes in "Ars Poetica" as "the push / in the fist-like bud, knowledge / held without knowing."

"I definitely feel some..." Gillis stops to consider, "surprise isn't quite the word – when people say, 'Well, the river's a metaphor, isn't it?' And I think, well, partly. But it's also partly *itself*. It's also *the river*. I'm really interested in ... not erasing myself from a place, but fading a bit into the background of a place, getting to know it on its terms."

For *The Rapids*, this meant reading up on the history and geology of the St. Lawrence, at times in great scientific detail. "I found almost randomly in the library a couple of books that were studies of the river's geology and every aspect of it physically: the flora and fauna, the physics of water flow, the geology of the riverbed – all that kind of science stuff that you can kind of absorb and then forget. I could not have written about the river without knowing that stuff. I think it provided me with a language, a way of looking at them [the rapids] that didn't just sort of superimpose my human emotional stuff onto them. I didn't want to just be romantic about them. I wanted to understand as much as I could of the language of that place and the physical

phenomenon so that when I was interpreting it, I would have some sense of what it was saying."

This effort to write about the river on its own terms is related to Gillis's work with Yoko's Dogs, a collective of four poets – Gillis, Jan Conn, Mary di Michele, and Jane Munro – who collaborate through the poetic form of *renku*. Gillis describes the

*Gillis is especially interested in those moments of maelstrom when life propels us toward dramatic change, when we no longer steer the boat of our own destinies, but are propelled toward action by forces greater than ourselves.*

collaboration as a discipline that has shaken up her habits and assumptions about writing. "I wanted to practice a kind of poetic composition that would allow me to step right out of what I was doing, to practice looking and [using] the image with its own resonance, rather than through its figurative power." (Yoko's Dogs will release a shared collection from Pedlar Press in 2013.) Of course it is impossible for the poet to remove herself completely from what she's doing, but the influence of this discipline is apparent in *The Rapids*, as the human often recedes into the background, either "wanting form," like the lonely hotel

patron in "Neruda's Rain," or, like the tiny homeowners in "A Good Plan," so dwarfed by their surroundings that human concerns seem hopelessly absurd.

But then, nature's power often puts our concerns into stark and humbling context. For Gillis, the ocean held this power for a long time, what she describes as "the power to erase the borders between the particulate you and the world." Now she recognizes a similar power in the river to make her feel small, borderless, elemental. "The river doesn't do it exactly the same way," she qualifies, "But that strong flow, that urge from the inland source out to the sea ... A river is like a giant muscle. It's powerful."

With *The Rapids* Gillis draws on that power, startling us, jostling us, but ultimately ferrying us smoothly out toward wider, bigger waters. **ms**

Abby Paige is a writer and performer based in Ottawa. Her chapbook of poems, *Other Brief Discourses*, appeared this winter from Ottawa's above/ground press.



**THE RAPIDS**  
Susan Gillis  
Brick Books  
19.99, paper, 105pp  
978-1-926829-79-1

## Transformation, Reconciliation, and Obfuscation

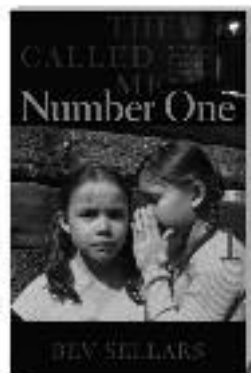


**Liquidities**  
Vancouver Poems  
Then and Now  
Daphne Marlatt

*Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* gathers many of the poems from Daphne Marlatt's 1972 *Vancouver Poems*, somewhat revised or in some cases substantially revised, and follows them with "Liquidities," a series of recent poems about Vancouver's incessant deconstruction and reconstruction, its quick transformations both on the ground and in urban imagining.

*Vancouver Poems* were a young woman's take on a young, West Coast port city as it surfaced to her gaze in the late 1960s. In these "re-visions," it remains verbal snapshots, running associations, sounding locales and their passers-through within a shifting context of remembered history, terrain, and sensory experience.

\$16.95 / 96 pp / Poetry  
978-0-88922-761-3



**They Called Me  
Number One**  
Secrets and Survival at an  
Indian Residential School  
Bev Sellars

Xat'sull Chief Bev Sellars spent her childhood in a church-run residential school whose aim it was to "civilize" Native children through Christian teachings, forced separation from family and culture, and strict discipline. In the first full-length memoir to be published out of St. Joseph's Mission at Williams Lake, BC, Sellars tells of three generations of women who attended the school, interweaving the personal histories of her grandmother and her mother with her own. She tells of hunger, forced labour, and physical beatings, often with a leather strap, and also of the demand for conformity in a culturally alien institution where children were confined and denigrated for failure to be White and Roman Catholic.

\$19.95 / 256 pp / Non-fiction: Autobiography  
978-0-88922-741-5



**Kafka's Hat**  
Patrice Martin  
Translated by Chantal Bilodeau

In Patrice Martin's ticklish tip of the hat to the writing of Franz Kafka, we follow the misadventures of a bureaucrat – aptly named "P." – as he embarks on the illustrious task of collecting the titular headgear. "P." expects that accomplishing this seemingly simple task will grant him a promotion. But our eager protagonist has overlooked the systematic difficulty in modern bureaucracies – as well as in some of twentieth-century's best fiction – of getting things done. And so *Kafka's Hat* is increasingly unreachable: express elevators get stuck between floors, suitcases must be searched, unsympathetic bureaucrats must be confronted. "P." knows that every hero has his coming-of-age trial to go through; trouble is, he's no modern Ulysses.

\$12.95 / 144 pp / Fiction  
978-0-88922-743-9



**TOM  
AT THE  
FARM**  
Michel Marc Bouchard  
Translated by Linda Gaboriau

Following the accidental death of his lover, and in the throes of his grief, urban ad executive Tom travels to the country to attend the funeral and to meet his mother-in-law, Agatha, and her son, Francis – neither of whom know Tom even exists. Arriving at the remote rural farm, and immediately drawn into the dysfunction of the family's relationships, Tom is blindsided by his lost partner's legacy of untruth. With the mother expecting a chain-smoking girlfriend, and the older brother intent on preserving a facade of normalcy, Tom is coerced into joining the duplicity until, at last, he confronts the torment that drove his lover to live in the shadows of deceit.

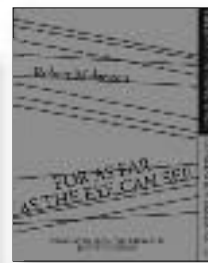
\$16.95 / 96 pp / Drama  
978-0-88922-759-0

**Talonbooks**  
www.talonbooks.com



# poetry

## Today's Music



### THE SMOOTH YARROW

Susan Glickman  
Signal Editions  
18.00, paper, 78pp  
978-1-55065-330-4

### THE MAJOR VERBS

Pierre Nepveu  
Translated by Donald Winkler  
Signal Editions  
18.00, paper, 72pp  
978-1-55065-339-7

### FOR AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

Robert Melançon  
Translated by Judith Cowan  
Biblioasis  
19.95, paper, 152pp  
978-1-927428-18-4

### A RHYTHM TO STAND BESIDE

Jack Hannan  
Cormorant Books  
18.00, paper, 96pp  
9781770862463

### ALL SOULS'

Rhea Tregebov  
Signal Editions  
18.00, paper, 78pp  
978-1-55065-338-0

Susan Glickman's book, *The Smooth Yarrow*, shows a chilling awareness of mortality through the accumulation of injuries like broken bones and the loss of teeth. Not old yet, she is close enough to celebrate elderly women "who use their best china every day / and jump the queue at the grocery store because they have so little in their baskets / and no time to waste." Even her garden poems mix exquisite celebrations of new life with knowledge of the transience of beauty. The first section of her work is called "Homeopathic Principles." Whatever the truth of homeopathy as a medical practice might be, the philosophy of treating an illness with drugs that induce its symptoms is – suggestive. A poem can build up our resistance by administering mild doses of the very toxins that we suffer from in living: sickness, age, grief. The loss of a loved one is the greatest toxin of all, and Glickman's elegy

for her father, "Breath," offers not consolation but a powerful recreation of his passing, with the breath of the dying man as the focal point for a family unsure how to react. Emily Dickinson's great poem, "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" comes to mind, but the confusion in Glickman's poem is in the watchers, not the person dying. "We hesitated, no longer sure what to pray for." Uncertainty is the paradoxical remedy here, evidence of how deeply the family cares. The poem that deals explicitly with homeopathy as a metaphor is "Homeopathic Remedies for Scar Tissue." Glickman knows that life is a series of scarring experiences. One remedy is to smear sandalwood paste on the injury. It will attract bees, from which we may learn how to dance in the sun and how to fight back, though a bee's self-defence is fatal. But life is fatal, after all. In one of her excellent garden poems she celebrates the compacted hearts of rosehips (analogues for the mature poet), and calls them "Late bloomers: late / as in late Brahms. Not tardy / but ripe." The analogy with the great autumnal works of Brahms is a good one and also fits Glickman's own wise and elegant work.

Pierre Nepveu's collection of poems, *The Major Verbs*, translated skilfully by Donald Winkler, is also wise and elegant. A Montrealer, he has won the Governor General's Award three times. The third section of his book, "Exercises in Survival," is his expression of filial piety, an elegiac sequence about his parents. It is not surprising for a poet of the Baby Boom (he was born in 1946) to approach this subject. Piety does not exclude frankness, however, and he documents his conflicts with them over religion. He knows that family conflicts are small on the cosmic scale, that we "wound ourselves bravely / with kitchen implements," but grief is not trivial in spite of the

domestic metaphor. It forces us into the realm of major verbs. He says: "to be born, to grow, to love, / to think, to believe, to die." The alternatives to these experiences are quietism (to live in the infinitive, un conjugated, and therefore immobile), or, in a similar way, to retreat into the self so far that the verb "to go" no longer has meaning. The elegy for his parents is followed by a celebration of the universe: a poem modeled on the great Navaho chant, "We walk in beauty." The implication is that the catharsis of grief leads to a new perception of harmony in life. The rest of Nepveu's book is cast in two sequences: a meditation on a handful of stones (the subject is really the loss of a lover) and a brilliantly empathetic set about an immigrant woman who has fallen asleep on the subway after a night of menial labour. Nepveu's work shows variety and fulfills his own goal of writing with the major verbs.

Robert Melançon's brilliant book, *For as Far as the Eye Can See*, originally published in 2004 as *Le paradis des apparences : essai de poèmes réalistes*, is about art and perception. His tone is detached in comparison with Nepveu and Glickman, but art has many mansions and therefore many windows on reality. The poems, which he calls "light sonnets," are twelve-line units, each in four stanzas. There are 144 altogether: twelve times twelve, and each is numbered. The poems function like window frames, he tells us in number 36: they are "lesser sonnets" and their shape is rectangular. The narrator makes a few trips in the city, but mostly he observes and paints (his favourite metaphor) "the paradise of what I see," mostly skies, streets, and walls. His seeing is inspired by artists, not poets: he cites Claude, Turner, O'Keeffe, Caravaggio, Brueghel, Poussin (his closest affinity), Hals, Friedrich, the Cubists. He also admires the clear and cerebral piano music

of Glenn Gould. Mostly he is interested in urban landscape, but now and then he retreats from the window perspective and creates a still life (*nature morte*). The point of view in the book is so consistently confined to a room that it becomes a little claustrophobic, and the reader is relieved to follow the narrator out to a poetry reading and a book launch, both presented humorously. He provides two poems about unwashed street people as if to show that he is aware of what Wordsworth called "the reek of the human." One hundred forty-four poems of acute observation: Melançon's invention is impressive. Judith Cowan's rendering of the poet's work into English is adroit and fully idiomatic.

Some of Jack Hannan's poems in *A Rhythm to Stand Beside* are not written but generated. The biggest effort is "A brush through a mathematical selection of G," a work that required selecting words from John Berger's novel *G*, and then writing a poem using only that selection. Another poem, "Cirlot's cross," is "made up of words and phrases that were taken from an old edition of Cirlot's Dictionary of Symbols." In his original poems, Hannan still generates a great deal of verbiage and the reader can grow impatient with the sheer quantity of language delivered with a whimsical tone. He is often at his best when he violates the norm of conceptual poetry and employs anecdotes. John Cage is the godfather of this kind of generated poetry. Generated or manufactured? It is easy to be skeptical, but our leading conceptual poet, Christian Bök, once said at a poetry reading that "today's noise is tomorrow's music." It is possible that Hannan's constructions will seem musical tomorrow. But he needs to keep the major verbs in mind.

Rhea Tregebov's work, *All Souls'*, is today's music and very listenable. Like

Glickman, she is clearly (and admits to being) "of a certain age" and aware of the infirmities of the body. Both poets were born in 1953, baby boomers like Nepveu. Boomers don't need seminars on retirement; they need seminars on caring for what a Dickens character affectionately calls the "Aged Parent." Tregebov laments the aging of her parents in a series of poems focused on family dinners, a very effective strategy for exploring the intimacies of relatives over a long period. The last family dinner is a brief glimpse of the father cinched in a Geri Chair near the nurses' station, courteously offering to share his Spanish rice. The brevity generates the pathos. The concluding poem, "Abundance," is a stunning look at the Old Jewish cemetery in Prague, where the dead were buried in twelve-deep layers. The title of *All Souls'* hits home with this scene of community in death. "The streets of the living are among the streets of the dead," the poem says. The Book of Common Prayer puts it in a similar way: "In the midst of life we are in death." The tragic history of the Jews in Prague is the unspoken background of the poem. The conventional image of grapes on a tombstone is an ironic symbol of abundance in an area packed with the dead. Another gravestone, commemorating a tailor, has a pair of shears, perhaps an echo of the shears of the Fates. On a less sombre note, Tregebov's gardening poems (Boomers like to garden, it seems) are excellent. She also has three fine works about spices. She tells us that vanilla, which is used to flavour white ice cream, comes from the blackest of fruits. With such paradoxes the poet flavours the world. mrb

Bert Almon is a retired professor who taught creative writing at the University of Alberta for more than forty years. He was born two years before the Baby Boom.

# fiction

## Between a Rock and a Hard Place

### THE LAVA IN MY BONES

Barry Webster  
Arsenal Pulp Press  
16.95, paper, 377pp  
978-1-55152-478-8

“I think a lot of Can Lit is about restraint,” Barry Webster tells me. “It’s this really subtle aesthetic where everything is presented obliquely and not directly.” The description doesn’t even remotely apply to his first novel. With *The Lava in My Bones*, Webster skips Molson and reaches for the absinthe; he ratchets up the volume on the dance floor until brains ooze out of ears; he burns down the highway in a spaceship at 20,000 miles an hour. His implacable style has inspired me to ply this Ontario-born writer with booze and pick his brain.

The story follows geologist Sam as he travels to Zurich for a conference on global warming, whereupon he meets the narcissistic artist Franz. Sam embarks on a watershed gay affair and the lovers take up rock eating. Meanwhile in Canada, Sam’s sister Sue begins excreting honey from her pores and attracts the attention of a swarm of local bees. Their fervidly religious

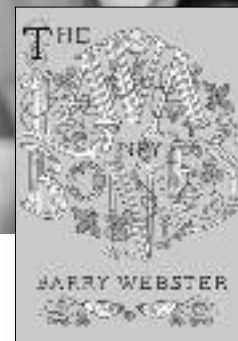
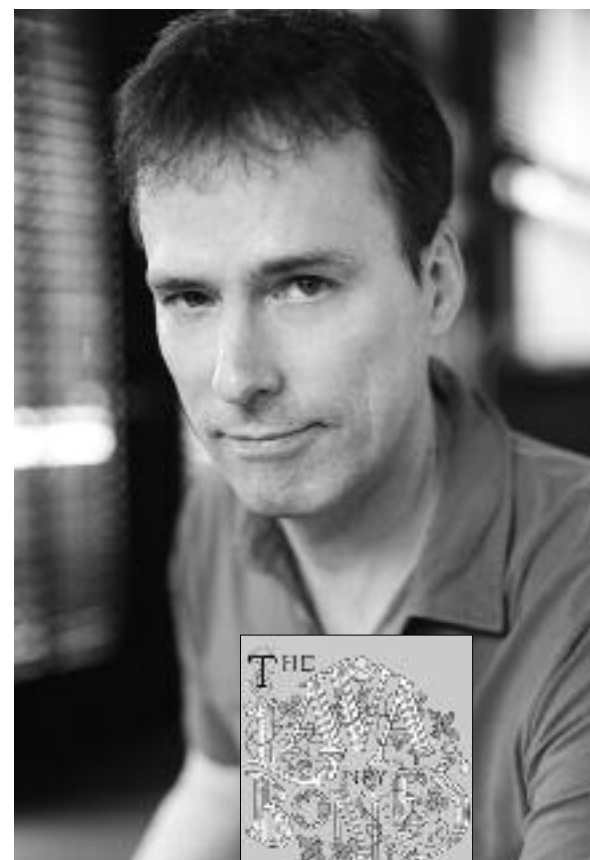
mother struggles to save the souls of her children as their absent father chases mermaids. An escape from a psychiatric institution and a desperate cross-Atlantic boat ride later, Sam returns to Zurich to find Franz a thoroughly changed man.

“Restraint” is not the first word that comes to mind. The story is a tsunami of feeling made manifest in colourful landscapes and characters. Webster’s prose evokes an almost schizophrenic sense of possibility. To read *The Lava in My Bones* is to regularly bump up against sentences like, “every inch of the forest is covered with foot-high piles of semen that twinkle in the sun like manna descended from heaven,” or “the Earth’s core detonates, and lava shoots up through the planet’s vents and longitudinal fissures, blasting the tephra stoppers from volcano mouths as, on every continent, streams of torrid molten rock hurtle into the atmosphere.” Salmon sing the Hallelujah chorus and schools of dolphin flurry by in choir gowns. Sam crosses the Atlantic using his erect penis as a rudder. The novel addresses all manner of themes – climate change, love, gender, and the body – with considerably more

ejaculations than in any other story I’ve encountered.

In sum: the magical punches are unrelenting. It’s refreshing to find a writer so dedicated to his approach. Webster paid multiple editors out-of-pocket to review the manuscript before finally securing publication with Vancouver-based Arsenal Pulp Press. But if it’s true that emotions carry an inborn magic, it’s also true that what makes magic powerful is its contrast to the real. It’s a delicate balance and there are points when the absurdity becomes so ingrained as to lose its potency. There’s something to be said for the García Márquez way: spending a couple hundred pages developing a character and then having her quietly fly away as she’s hanging laundry.

Webster explains the increasingly feverish imaginativeness as a necessary progression in the narrative: “You have to keep constantly adding things. You can’t just suddenly drop the magic elements.” He continues, “It’s hard to balance reality with fantasy. It’s like a parallel railway track running all the way through. It’s way harder than realism.” He pauses. “It’s way, way harder.” I smile sympathetically and buy him another beer. We agree that reception to his novel will likely be quite polarized.



Hard to say what’s next, but Webster’s steadfast refusal to temper the force of his imagination has created a unique voice with a refreshing absence of self-consciousness. In the parlance of our times: he’s a writer to watch. **mRb**

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*.

## Bad Connections

THE BARISTA AND I  
Andrew Szymanski  
Insomniac Press  
19.95, paper, 131pp  
978-1-55483-084-8



In his slim debut collection, *The Barista and I*, Andrew Szymanski concerns himself with the hollowed-out realities of young, seeking, male protagonists. Although most of the stories are blessed with short patches of energetic and intelligent prose, Szymanski’s vision suffers from his clumsy renderings of ambivalent and alienated interior lives. This is most visible in “The Recruit,” where a nameless protagonist hounds an unsuspecting female classmate and convinces her to come with him to Taiwan, where he secretly hopes to track down his ex-girlfriend (she bears the unpleasant moniker “the flower”).

Although the premise of “The Recruit” is fun, its execution is flat. Upon first spotting his recruit or “sweet little

bird,” as he likes to call her, the protagonist has this unsavoury thought about her: “Quite possibly not the sharpest stone on the earth. But I could not ignore my semi.” The cumulative effect of these frank, but awkwardly phrased private moments is to create a droning background noise out of this barely believable misogyny. We’re not given any other details to take shelter in, either. We end up in Taiwan, but hardly see it. We find out, in a single sentence, that the protagonist’s father recently died, but it’s hard to know what to make of this information.

Szymanski’s stories are often abruptly interrupted by his characters’ interior monologues dramatizing a perceived war of the sexes. In the story “After the Silence,” the main character, taking refuge in a café in order to escape the tense silence of the apartment that he shares with his girlfriend, notes:

Every woman appears a problem. I picture each of them sitting across the room from me with an idiotic

glazed expression on her face, contorted in an attempt to mean deep contemplation.

In this moment and others like it, the writing seems too emphatic in its stereotyped distaste for women, taking away from the otherwise compelling estrangement of the characters.

But if solitude and the desire for connection are Szymanski’s primary fixations in this collection, then it is a mighty relief that the title story itself does a playful job at bringing these themes to life. In “The Barista and I,” we watch as a single sentence gives rise to a charming and funny flight of fancy: “And the sun was actually the moon and I was actually in love and the barista said ‘I love you too actual-ly’ and everything was very actual and I felt good and I knew that it was good and right and true because I felt it.”

Here Szymanski turns skepticism into humorous enchantment and the language seems, finally, untethered.

Another moment of respite in this collection comes in the shape of “People I hardly Know,” a young man’s quiet drama at the laundromat. In this well-paced story, we tenderly shadow the comings and goings of a university

student as he tries then fails then, finally, sort of, manages to make a connection with another human being. After encountering Leila, the laundromat attendant he has his eye on, he reflects:

We barely knew each other but I felt our relationship was very complex, and depending on the week, she either seemed pleased to see me or flustered and put-off, never neutral... I might not have thought about Leila much if I had many conversations, but I didn’t, so I did.

The story relies nicely on these simple moments of interiority to subtly convey the character’s complexity. The story’s ending also artfully suggests that desire is more complicated than its mere satisfaction.

*The Barista and I*, as a collection, doesn’t live up to the promise of its title story, but provides a few glimpses of salvaged humanity along the way. **mRb**

Sara Freeman is an MFA candidate in Fiction at Columbia University, where she also teaches in the Undergraduate Writing Program. Her fiction has appeared in *Maisonneuve* magazine. She is at work on her first collection of short stories.

## The Living World



**TO THE SPRING, BY NIGHT**  
Seyhmus Dagtekin  
Translated by Donald Winkler  
McGill-Queen's University Press  
19.95, paper, 200pp  
978077354155-9

The Kurds are a nation without a country, and of course they're not the only ones in that situation. The territory they live on extends across Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and when they are in the news, it's usually bad news: a gas attack or a political assassination. So it's refreshing to read a lyrical novel from a Kurdish poet who conjures up his lost village, his lost country, his lost childhood, all with subtlety and grace.

This poet turned novelist is Seyhmus Dagtekin, born in 1964 in a small village in eastern Turkey. These days, thanks to immigration and the school that was built in his village, Dagtekin is a Parisian, a poet, and the winner of several major poetry prizes, among them the Prix Théophile Gautier of the Académie française. So though we're in the kingdom of childhood with this short novel *To the Spring, by Night*, we're not in the hands of a naïve writer.

Dagtekin is more like a magical writer. The village and its surroundings described by the young narrator owe a lot to animism, despite the village's adherence to Islam. Every stone, every cloud, every gurgle of water from every spring hides its portion of truth. And the narrator, both boy and man, is attentive to all of this. The knowledge of the natural world, which is, in reality, a knowledge of myths and fears and stories,

comes from adults, who are generous in their stories, especially the scariest kind. There is no natural world in Dagtekin's story; instead, it is a supernatural world. This sense of wonderment is learned at the elders' feet. "We were told," the beginning of many sentences read. And what we are told – we and the young narrator – imbues us with a mix of fear and wonder.

Goats, corn, tobacco, grapes, wheat – the village ekes out its life from famine to famine, from winter to winter. It is a place removed from time. The grave of a local saint oversees everything from the top of the hill. Men pray to God for their goats to be protected from wolves, while the wolves are praying to the same source for relief from their hunger. Who knows which

prayer will be heard in Heaven? Both are equally valid.

If the wolves prey on goats, it's because they have the right to, since every animal must eat. The stories that abound in the boy's village are mostly about how humans must not act like wolves, though the former suffer from hunger too. On the edge of the village stand rocky outcroppings and citadels where ancient civilizations had their strongholds; they have disappeared because of their inequity. For the human world is more vicious than the world of wolves or other imaginary predators: a man will destroy your vineyard without feasting on the grapes.

Everything is frozen in time until, at the very end of the book, modernity enters the village. Paradise is lost when the State decides that the children of this village must learn to read and write. A teacher arrives, and the young narrator thrives on the diet of letters he offers. But there are no teachers without schoolhouses, and to build one, a road is pushed through the mountain pass where, before, only goats and smugglers could squeeze through. Suddenly, this village paradise, which was also a place of darkest superstition, joins the contemporary world because a few kids have learned to read. The boy traces his first letters in the dirt at the teacher's feet, and, suddenly, the gates spring open. A Kurdish goatherd can end up as a poet in Paris, writing a moving memoir we can all read. mrb

David Homel is a Montreal novelist whose latest work is *Midway*.



## Heart of Quebec

**AND THE BIRDS RAINED DOWN**  
Jocelyne Saucier  
Translated by Rhonda Mullins  
Coach House Books  
18.95, paper, 155pp  
978-1-55245-268-4

Writers of fiction are said to stand on the shoulders of giants. In her fourth novel, Abitibi writer Jocelyne Saucier has climbed onto the shoulders of Joseph Conrad. Her setting is northern Canada rather than the Congo and her main character is a female photographer rather than the seagoing Marlow, but *And the Birds Rained Down* still bears a striking resemblance to *Heart of Darkness*.

Saucier has made a name for herself in French Canada writing novels about the North, in particular Quebec's Abitibi region and the mining towns created when gold and other metals were discovered in the area in the late 1920s. In *Les héritiers de la mine* (2000), she tells the story of a Québécois prospector and his large family who lose everything when the bottom falls out of the zinc market. In *Jeanne sur les routes* (2006), translated as *Jeanne's Road*, she describes a visit by famous labour activist Jeanne Corbin to the mining town of Rouyn in 1933. Like Conrad, Saucier is a political writer.

In *And the Birds Rained Down*, Saucier steps across the border into northern Ontario. She also steps out of traditional novel structure, telling her story with multiple first-person narratives. The first narrator, identified only as the Photographer, is the protagonist. We learn only one thing about her: she is on a quest through the wilderness to find a man she has never met. Sound familiar? The man's name is Boychuck not Kurtz, and she drives a pickup not a steamboat, but these are details.

As the book opens, the Photographer has spent a day driving through "labyrinths of quad trails and skidding roads" surrounded by "walls of spruce"

so thick she can barely penetrate them. She wants to find Ted Boychuck and photograph him for a series of portraits she is assembling of people who survived catastrophic fires in Northern Ontario during the first decades of the twentieth century. Rumour has it that Boychuck lost his family in the deadliest of these fires in 1916.

She never finds her man. He dies a week before she reaches his remote camp. What she finds instead is a pair of fiercely independent octogenarians, friends of Boychuck's, eking out an existence in this unlikely northern setting. The men have freed themselves from all their past ties and responsibilities.

Their only links to civilization are two young marijuana farmers who drop by periodically with food and supplies.

This discovery astonishes the Photographer. When one of the dope growers arrives at the camp with his elderly aunt, an escapee from a psychiatric institution, things take an unbelievable turn. Like Conrad, Saucier takes a dim view of civilization. Her elderly characters have been victimized by a rapacious, consumer-oriented, institutional society, and have sought refuge in the wilderness. Unlike Conrad, though, Saucier suggests that there's a better way forward.

She creates a Canadian utopia in which an old man can be miraculously cured of kidney failure; a woman who's spent sixty-six years in a mental institution can discover she's not really mad, just misunderstood; a lifelong drunk can give up scotch without a tremor; and sex can stay great to the end of one's days. No murmurs of horror here.

Evocations of landscape are the best part of this novel, ably translated into English by Montrealer Rhonda Mullins. The historical research is strong, and Saucier plays with promising themes like aging, self-determination, and death. But her book might have shed a truer light on the human condition if it had carried a little more darkness in its heart. mrb

Claire Holden Rothman is a Montreal writer and translator whose new novel, *My October*, will be published soon by Penguin Canada.



ISBN 978-1-897430-89-7  
Poetry  
218 pages  
\$25.95  
6 x 9

Available now from Ekstasis Editions

### FIGHT FIRE WITH SPIRIT

selected and new poems by  
Carolyn Zonailo

In *Fight Fire With Spirit: Selected & New Poems*, drawn from over twenty years work, Carolyn Zonailo paints with clarity and humour a vivid world, at once mythic and recognizable, that celebrates the luminous in everyday life.

Available in Montreal at **The Word, 469 Milton Street**  
phone 514-845-5640 [www.wordbookstore.ca](http://www.wordbookstore.ca)

Ekstasis Editions – Box 8474 Main P.O. Victoria B.C. V8W 3S1  
[www.ekstasiseditions.com](http://www.ekstasiseditions.com) – [ekstasis@islandnet.com](mailto:ekstasis@islandnet.com)



By Kimberly Bourgeois

## poetic justice

Carmine Starnino may be a tough critic, but he's definitely no "lazy bastard." I didn't inquire directly during our recent email interview, but I suspect he's no nervous Nellie either. How daunting is it to criticize one of CanLit's stars? I asked instead, referring to his review of Margaret Atwood's *The Door*, a particularly feisty piece in his latest collection of critical prose. "At this point, not that daunting. Over the last 15 years, I've gone after many of the darlings of Canadian poetry: Tim Lilburn, Susan Musgrave, Christopher Dewdney, Christian Bök, Anne Carson, Michael Ondaatje. These are all poets whose reputations, I argue, depend on an overly enthusiastic, ultimately lazy reading of their work – another kind of lazy bastardism." (The first kind is explained below.) While admitting he's "been pilloried for speaking so honestly," Starnino still believes in "disagreement, debate, controversy," contending that "a literary scene afraid of these things is not healthy – it promotes lying, dissembling, self-censorship."

There is nothing slipshod about Starnino's own relationship to literature. In fact, the very nature – and scope – of his career suggest a tireless penchant for precision. An experienced editor as well as reviewer, in 2011, he left his job as editor-in-chief at *Maisonneuve* magazine for a senior editor position at *Reader's Digest*. Today, he continues on as editor at Signal Editions (the poetry imprint of Véhicule Press), where, in 2005, he published *The New Canon: An Anthology of Canadian Poetry*.

With his fingers in so many poetic pies, it's a wonder Starnino also managed to publish four books of his own poetry before the age of 40, the most recent of which, *This Way Out* (2009), won the A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry and was nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award.

*Lazy Bastardism* is Starnino's second collection of reviews and essays, and, here, he shows no signs of slacking off. "I finish a poem, and immediately forget how I was able to do it," he relates in his title essay. "Of course, I know very well how I did it: the hard way. Twenty drafts to realize number nine was actually the way in (and then backtracking and lighting out again in full knowledge I've probably ducked down another blind alley)."

Woven throughout his reviews of famous and not-so-famous poets (Starnino has a soft spot for the underdog), are two underlying themes: the status of poetry itself, and the role of criticism in relation to poetry. "And the tradition would not exist – poetry itself would not exist – if those conversations did not happen," argues Starnino in his prologue, again defending debate.

And yet, as a critic, Starnino has mellowed over the years. Though he can still pack a poetic punch, his latest publication is less aggressive than some of his earlier work. Asked what caused this transition, he replies:

Age. I was younger then, and angrier. I was burning to change everything around me. I've since grown older, and realize that it's harder – and more effective, in terms of the long game – to write essays and reviews that can so persuasively advocate their bias they're able to change a reader's mind about a poet, or cause readers to second-guess their assumptions. I now want to be in the persuasion business, not the pissing-off business. Though I do recognize that, sometimes, it's impossible to do the former without the latter.

Changes in the poetic scenery have also informed the critic's views. "There's been a sea change over the last decade toward more formally intelligent, sonorous poetry, something which I tried to track in my anthology *The New Canon*," he emails. "A young poet writing today inhabits a very different context." Starnino also addresses this shift in *Lazy Bastardism*, perhaps most notably in his "Steampunk Zone" essay, where he reports "more is going on in Canadian poetry than ever before."

"More going on" is not to be confused with "more of a market share," however. In *Lazy Bastardism*, poetry's waning popularity is in fact a recurring theme, upon which Starnino elaborates during our interview: "How well does poetry stack up against its competitors – other art forms?" he asks. "The answer is: it doesn't. Poetry is, at best, seen as a high-prestige niche activity that doesn't take up any space in the public imagination. Gifted writers who dream of making their mark don't go into poetry. They become screenwriters or novelists or magazine writers or journalists."

Starnino doesn't claim to know all the reasons for poetry's plunge, though he doesn't blame the poets themselves. In *Lazy Bastardism*, he argues: "There is no once-popular style and subject that, if brought back, will stop poetry's sliding poll numbers." Nor does he see boosting poetry's accessibility as the solution. "Poets who ... claim to heed the wishes of the common reader out of populist duty, are lazy bastards," he declares in his opening essay, revealing his title's intent.

"Contemporary poetry seems afflicted by self-loathing," he clarifies during our interview. "That's part of where the lazy bastardism comes from. As poets, we hate what we're told we've become – obscure, difficult, incomprehensible – and some of us turn to the only medicine we believe will lick the problem: anti-intellectualism, fear of elitism, hatred of form. We need poets who recognize, without embarrassment or apology, that poetry is a contrived product, that all of poetry's "instinctive" properties – sincerity, spontaneity – are fabricated. And we need readers able to admire a poem not only for the seriousness of its content or emotion, but for the achievement of its structure and diction. We have to trust that these readers exist."

Similarly, in his Eric Ormsby chapter, Starnino claims "A good poet ... will help a reader grow up," and argues: "We are coddled enough by a vapid, linguistically slack media (who have



**LAZY BASTARDISM**  
Essays & Reviews on  
Contemporary Poetry  
Carmine Starnino  
Gaspereau Press  
27.95, paper, 272pp  
9781554471188

done their part to make us more intimidated, less resourceful readers than we used to be)." And in his review of Jay Parini's *Why Poetry Matters*, he contends that poetry critics must also hold the linguistic bar high: "A critic who wants to excite readers about poetry must lead by example .... A critic's main hold over readers is through words, not ideas. How you say it counts for everything."

In this regard, Starnino leads well. His own language is typically high-heeled – his essays dressy, like well-tailored suits with sharp linings. Whether or not you share his opinions, it's hard not to admire his poetic prowess. He requires attentive readers, appreciative of detail, patient enough to peel through layers of intellectual fabric. Stated simply: Starnino does not accommodate lazy bastards.

And what is the purpose of all this toil, one might wonder? Does Starnino wish to win poetry converts? Though he hopes his work will be of use to others, his motives are in fact mainly personal: "I don't write 5000-word reviews out of some mission, I write them because I can't help it: I'm driven to do it. I basically write these pieces for myself – to parse my own pleasures and investigate my irritations."

Pleasure, Starnino later suggests, is also an underlying motive for poets – which might partly explain poetry's persistence, despite society's apparent indifference. When I ask about poetry's purpose, and whether it needs to be rescued, his reply reassures. "What's the purpose of a sport like hockey or a video game like Halo 3?" he muses, reminding me of the obvious – for poets, there is no such thing as "all work and no play":

Poetry exists because it gives pleasure to those who write it and those who read it. It exists because whatever you say in a poem sounds better and means more. So poetry isn't something society "keeps alive." It's wired into the very fabric of our language: how we speak and sing. It's virtually unkillable. As long as words exist, someone somewhere will assemble them into poems. mrb

Montreal writer/singer-songwriter Kimberly Bourgeois is grateful to be up to her ears in verse: kimberlyandthedreamtime.com.

**MONTREAL ON FOOT**  
WITH AN ARTIST

**MOUNT ROYAL**

WORLD-RENOWNED ORGANIST AND HARPSICHORDIST GENEVIÈVE SOLY ACCOMPANIES YOU ON THREE CULTURAL EXCURSIONS AROUND THE SMALLEST OF MOUNT ROYAL'S PEAKS: THE LITTLE MOUNTAIN.

- 1 First tour: both sides of the Côte-des-Neiges pass
- 2 Second tour: Summit Park
- 3 Third tour: Côte-Saint-Antoine Road, King George Park, and the Saint Joseph's Oratory plateau, including Surrey Gardens

10 x 18 cm  
128 pages  
978-2-923503-42-4  
17,95 \$  
Also available in electronic format

**Sgräff**



By Sarah Lolley

There is something intensely reassuring for book lovers in the publication of *Rookie Yearbook One*, a collection of the writing, photography, illustrations, and playlists that have appeared in Tavi Gevinson's online magazine for teens, *Rookie* magazine (rookiemag.com). It suggests that the market still gives value to books – not just to the information they contain, but also to the books themselves – and that this value is being recognized by a new generation of readers. As Gevinson writes in the introduction, using capital letters for emphasis, “being able to actually HOLD art and writing that you love is kind of really special.”

Gevinson was just fifteen when she started *Rookie* magazine but she was already three years into her career as an internationally famous blogger. At age twelve, Gevinson started the fashion blog *Style Rookie*. It propelled her into the limelight, bringing both praise and derision from the fashion industry. It also saw her published in *Harper's Bazaar* and invited to New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week, two of the industry's most prestigious events. She started *Rookie* magazine, Gevinson writes, “because I felt there wasn't a magazine for teenage girls that respected its readers' intelligence.” When, in the spring of 2012, *Rookie's* editorial direc-

tor Anaheed Alani approached Montreal-based publisher Drawn & Quarterly about turning the website into a book, “we jumped at the chance,” says Associate Publisher Peggy Burns. “There was absolutely no hesitation.” There are already plans to publish *Rookie Yearbook Two* in the fall of 2013.

The blog-to-book phenomenon is nothing new. Throughout the early 2000s, the market was flooded with books that originated online. Some faded into obscurity but others, like that of Julie Powell, the New Yorker who



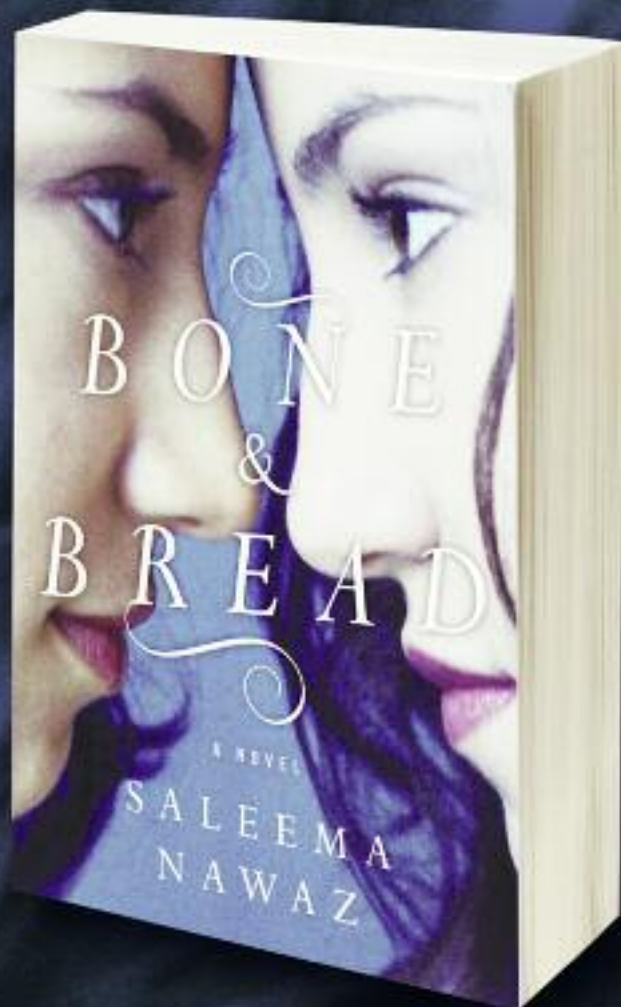
challenged herself to cook every one of the 524 recipes in Julia Child's cookbook *Mastering the Art of French*

*Cooking* in 365 days, rose to superstardom. The book, published by Little, Brown and Company in 2005, was a national bestseller. Four years later,



Nora Ephron brought it to the silver screen in the movie *Julie & Julia*.

Canada has seen its fair share of blog-to-book success stories, too. Some, like the 2007 book *Regret the Error* by Montreal-based Craig Silverman, have helped launch careers. A collection of writing from Silverman's long-standing blog of the same name, *Regret the Error* chronicles errors made by the media and



A story about the mysterious, at times physical, struggle to find peace with family, love, and mental illness.

“This is a soulful, absorbing novel about identity, memory, and the resilience of family.”

— Alix Ohlin, author of *Inside*

ANANSI PUBLISHES VERY GOOD BOOKS



WWW.HOUSEOFANANSI.COM



the fall-out that accompanies them. It won the National Press Club's Arthur Rowse Award for Press Criticism and helped solidify Silverman's reputation as an expert in the field. Other successes, like the 2008 book *Stuff White People Like* by Toronto-born author Christian Lander, based on his website of the same name, and the 2012 paperback version of the Tumblr feed *Dads are the Original Hipsters* by American-born Montrealer Brad Getty, channel the in-joke of the moment.

Perhaps the greatest Canadian blog-to-book success story in recent years is that of Toronto-based Neil Pasricha, who started *1000 Awesome Things* as a way of bringing himself some levity during a dark period of his life, which included divorce and the suicide of a close friend. Just as the title suggests, the blog enumerates life's simple pleasures (awesome thing #836: When you push the button for the elevator and it's already there). In 2010, based on the popularity of *1000 Awesome Things*, Pasricha published *The Book of Awesome*, which became an international bestseller.

Does this mean that any blog with a large following is ripe for publication? Toronto-based liter-

ary agent Denise Bukowski says no. "Often people who write blogs really don't have the inclination or the sensibility to write a book," she says. "Sometimes they can't write something that's integrated or beyond 500 words." The best

way to attract an agent's attention remains the old fashioned way, she says: follow the agent's submission guidelines.

Like *The Book of Awesome*, *Rookie Yearbook One* is intended to comfort and inspire the reader. "This is the stuff that needed to be in pages adorned with doodles and glitter; that is revisited in times of angst and crisis, and that couldn't be just stared at on a screen for such an occasion," Gevinson writes. But unlike *1000 Awesome Things*, *Rookie* magazine is not a solo blog: it is a massive, sprawling website that contains hundreds of articles and interviews from dozens of contributors.

That could have made its conversion to a book disastrous. But *Rookie Yearbook One* is charming both in content and in layout, despite being as heavy as a biology textbook and equally packed with information. Credit is due to the extraordinary talent and skill of the book's designer, Tracy Hurren of Drawn & Quarterly, to lead artist Sonja Ahlers who created all of the collages, water colors, and title headings by hand, and to Gevinson's gifted contributors, many of whom are internationally famous authors and screenwriters.

Gevinson contends that *Rookie Yearbook One* is not a how-to guide to being

a teenager, but rather "a place to make the best of the beautiful pain and cringe-worthy awkwardness of being an adolescent girl." It is that, yes, but it is more: *Rookie Yearbook One* is a tool of empowerment for young women and I dare say young men as well. There are essays from celebrities (including especially poignant pieces from Lena Dunham, Joss Whedon, and Jack Black) describing their own difficult adolescent experiences and how they survived them. There are articles I wish had been available to me when I was a teenager (or, at least, that I wish I had known my peers wanted to read, too); articles such as "How to Approach the Person You Like Without Throwing Up" and "How to Look Like You Weren't Just Crying in Less Than Five Minutes." There are pieces that tackle difficult subjects like coming out, recovering from an eating disorder, or recognizing a bad relationship for what it is and getting out of it. And there is solid practical advice that adolescents and parents will both love, such as a primer on thrift store shopping, an article entitled "How to Clean Your Room in 10 Minutes," and a guide to dressing for a party that tells readers to ignore all those fashion magazines comparing the

shape of a woman's body to a piece of fruit and instead to wear clothes that are practical, comfortable, and confidence-inspiring ("ask all the questions a mom would ask," it encourages).

*Rookie Yearbook One* is also really, really fun. It is as mixed media as a book can be, with illustrations, photographs, stickers, suggested playlists to accompany specific articles or situations, and even a flexi disc. There is a continuous re-evaluation of what is the "best thing ever" (contenders: glitter, *The Golden Girls*, deep-sea creatures) and various taxonomies (midnight snacks, sweaters, hairstyles of the musicians of the 1980s).

When asked who *Rookie Yearbook One* was written for, Burns of Drawn & Quarterly says there is no ideal reader "other than any young woman interested in smart and fun articles." But this reviewer would argue that even Burns' definition is too narrow. *Rookie Yearbook One* is about adolescence, yes; but it is not just for teenagers. It is both a comfort for readers trudging through the swamp of adolescence and a balm for the wounds that older readers still carry, no matter their age. mb

Sarah Lolley is a Montreal-based writer of fiction, non-fiction, and travel features.

"This is the stuff that needed to be in pages adorned with doodles and glitter."

**ROOKIE YEARBOOK ONE**  
 Edited by Tavi Gevinson  
 Drawn & Quarterly  
 29.95, paper, 353pp  
 978-1-77046-112-3

THE OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL  
**writers festival**  
 www.writersfestival.org  
 613.562.1243

**OPEN YOUR MIND**

**APRIL 25<sup>TH</sup> TO THE 30<sup>TH</sup>**

**CANADA'S FESTIVAL OF IDEAS SINCE 1997**

**DON'T MISS THESE SPECIAL PRE-FESTIVAL EVENTS**

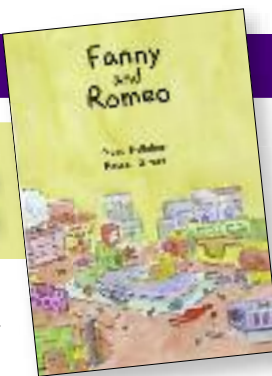
April 10: Alexander McCall Smith  
 April 18: Will Ferguson  
 April 20: Etgar Keret

OTTAWA CITIZEN | Ottawa | Ontario Canada | Carleton UNIVERSITY | ARC | INFO ARTS COUNCIL ONTARIO | Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des arts du Canada | UNIVERSITÉ ST-LAURENT | HILLTIMES | EMBASSY | THE SPINNING WHEEL | 91.5 FM radio

**www.writersfestival.org • 613.562.1243**



# DODGING THE CLOCK



peanut-free lunch. To make matters worse, their bungalow looks onto a street inhabited by young boys playing road hockey, with an ever-present golden retriever bounding back and forth. It's all too much for a wannabe mother.

Fanny needs an escape and goes to the video shop where she runs into none other than Cedric, her two-timing ex. He's with his new girlfriend who, as fate would have it, is expecting a child, something the two-timer refused to do with Fanny. After picking up a few films with mothering themes, she heads over to her friend's apartment, and, by chance, meets the irresistible Romeo, a fluffy orange tabby her friend has taken in but later must give away. Fanny is immediately smitten with Romeo, much to the chagrin of Fabien, who is allergic to cats. As expected, Fanny's mothering instinct takes over, and the feline drives a wedge between the two. Fanny goes solo until she learns that cats, too, are fickle creatures.

Yves Pelletier has penned a story that will resonate with many people. We all know someone who wanted children but for whatever reason had to settle for a dog or cat. Fanny's obsession with Romeo – her doting on him, bathing him, and taking him in a backpack to sit on Santa's knee – is funny, particularly because we all know a few crazed cat lovers who would do this if kitty would allow them. However, Pelletier uses a third-person objective narrator, which prevents the reader from knowing Fanny's thoughts and, consequently, from establishing a connection with the character. As a result, Fanny's character is flat when it could have easily been fleshed out with a few more thought balloons or some interior mono-

logue. In the end, the story comes across as the first draft of a great idea.

In terms of graphic elements, Pascal Girard has produced some nice water-colours, particularly

some great establishing shots. But there is a heavy reliance on the six-frame page, which at times becomes monotonous. In addition, too many of the frames are medium close-up and medium-long shots, which further create a distance between the characters and the reader. A few more close-ups zeroing in on expressions would have added some variety and necessary detail. Finally, the architectural style of the bungalow, the town centre, and the apartment of Fanny's friend felt more like the South Shore of Montreal than a small town. Instead, readers can tell it's a small

town by the sheer number of times Fanny unwillingly runs into Cedric.

Overall, *Fanny & Romeo* is a good story with solid graphics, but the reader can sense that the writer and artist did not work closely together on this. As a result, this album does not reflect the talent of either artist, whereas closer collaboration would have probably yielded something truly remarkable. **mb**

Heather Leighton has written for the *Montreal Gazette* and is a regular contributor to *The Rover*. You can find more of her writing online at *The Unexpected Twists and Turns*.

**FANNY & ROMEO**  
**Yves Pelletier**  
**Illustrated by Pascal Girard**  
**Translated by KerryAnn Cochrane**  
**Conundrum Press**  
**20.00, paper, 130pp**  
**978-1-894994-65-1**

Unfortunately when the biological clock goes off, there is no snooze button, and thirty-something Fanny, a freelance graphic artist, knows this all too well. While she obsesses about having children, her pragmatic partner, Fabien, thinks that saving more money should be their first priority. Fanny's urgent need to nurture takes her down a comical yet realistic path in Yves Pelletier's *Fanny & Romeo*. The Quebec director, actor, and comedian of *Rock et Belles Oreilles* fame has teamed up with award-winning artist Pascal Girard to create this modern-day love story, set in a small Quebec town.

Many women who have worked on their careers in their twenties with the hope of starting a family in their thirties will readily identify with Fanny and her uncontrollable urge to reproduce and dote. Fanny not only prepares Fabien a full breakfast but also packs the allergy-prone real estate agent a

There  
~~Their~~ are many ways to improve a text.

**YOU SHOULD HAVE HIRED AN EDITOR!**

**EDITORS'**  
 ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
 ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES  
**RÉVISEURS**

Contact our Quebec-Atlantic Canada **HOTLINE**  
 at [rqa-qac@editors.ca](mailto:rqa-qac@editors.ca)

Or consult our  
**ONLINE DIRECTORY**  
 at [www.editors.ca](http://www.editors.ca)

**Library**

- Books, eBooks, and DVDs

**Educational and Cultural Events**

- Speakers, authors, poets, musicians

**Community meeting facilities at low cost**

**Computer Centre**

- For-fee courses and private instruction
- Digital Literacy Project for community groups and schools

1200 Atwater Avenue  
 (at Ste-Catherine)  
 514-935-7344  
[www.atwaterlibrary.ca](http://www.atwaterlibrary.ca)

**FEET OF THE ANGELS**  
 EVELYNE DE LA CHENELIÈRE  
 TRANSLATED BY NIGEL SPENCER

**A BOMB IN THE HEART**  
 by WAJDI MOUAWAD  
 Translated by LINDA GABORIAN

*Feet of the Angels*  
 by Evelyn de la Chenelière, translated by Nigel Spencer

Ever since her brother's death, Marie has been fascinated with angels. Now as a young woman, she has dedicated her doctoral thesis to the subject: the sudden portrayal of angels' feet in Renaissance paintings. As Marie tries to analyze the motive behind this, she begins to uncover questions of existentialism, societal perceptions of women, and the meaning of art and life. Her biggest challenge, though, becomes grasping a seemingly impossible understanding of her brother's suicide, and dealing with her own dislocation.

*A Bomb in the Heart*  
 by Wajdi Mouawad, translated by Linda Gaborian

A call late at night has Wajhab springing into action. Despite a blinding snowstorm, an irritating bus driver, and a spinning wheel of worries, Wajhab travels to his dying mother's hospital room. A journey of two kinds, *A Bomb in the Heart* is about a young man's relationship to his mother, the pain of loss, and about understanding the voice deep within.

Available Now  
[www.playwrightscanada.com](http://www.playwrightscanada.com)  
**PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS**



## On a Plain

### FIRST SPRING GRASS FIRE

Rae Spoon  
Arsenal Pulp Press  
14.95, paper, 142pp  
978-1-55152-480-1



Rae Spoon's debut short story collection *First Spring Grass Fire* weaves together a number of interesting threads that are rarely seen in relation to one another, though they often should be: coming of age, coming out, gender, evangelical Christianity, place, recognizing an artistic avocation, family dynamics, and mental illness to name a few. I say they probably should be, of course, because human life is rich and multi-faceted and our literature should be no less so. Needless to say then, so complex a palette is all to the good. What is at least equally good is that the stories in which they come together are sharply focused and direct; each of them is a snapshot of a particular moment and experience in a young person's life.

The memorably titled "Sasquatch in My Shower" explores the relationship between fear and self-doubt using the lens of the eponymous monster and a family's "pro-life" work with pregnant young women. In it, the narrator's friendship with one of the women prompts them<sup>1</sup> to ask questions that both drive away their terror of monsters and begin to break down an uncritical faith. The story "Second Coming," on the other hand, captures an episode in which religious beliefs about an imminent apocalypse become literalized and fill everyday life with a "thick layer of foreboding." The picture here is powerfully painted with quick strokes, short sentences and flashes of insight that, at their best, are compelling. In fact, *First Spring Grass Fire*'s strengths lie in this economy and its ability to make connections between what initially seems like divergent areas of experience.

<sup>1</sup> The plural pronoun is used in accordance with the preference indicated by the author/publisher in the press release.

Its weaknesses, not unusual in a first book, are found in some areas of craft. Although the writing program dictum of "show, don't tell" should not be taken as gospel, it should also not be too readily tossed aside, as parts of this collection do with an unfortunate insouciance. Lines like "Kurt Cobain was the personification of the rage I felt," or "When my father grounded me for months for defying him, he let me keep my guitar; hiding in my room, I felt like it was all I needed to survive," both from the story "Music Saves," are so flatly declarative, not to mention dangerously close to cliché, that they create psychological slightness in the characterization and flatten out affect. In some cases, a paragraph will tie together several such declarative statements, as in this example:

I can go back to those moments and remember how complete I felt. She was the first person that I ever felt safe to be myself around. It gave me hope that I could construct something secure and new for myself. It gave me a reason to work out the ugliness inside me.

Although this construction clearly works towards minimalism of a sort (and the repetition of several declarative sentences does enjoy the benefit of a curious rhythmic effect), its reliance on generalized observation rather than sensory or psychological detail leaves it without the texture that grants readers emotional access.

Of course, some readers will find the account itself sufficient to involve them. They will be willing to follow this remarkably resilient young person's voyage to self-affirmation; there is insight, incident, and courage enough in the account. For others, however, the fact that so much has merely been *explained* to them will leave them wanting to be let in, wanting to see, hear, and feel the challenging connections they can sense – just below the surface. mrb

Peter Dubé is a Montreal-based writer. His most recent book, the novel *The City's Gates*, is published by Cormorant Books.

## Dirty Dozen

### SERIAL VILLAIN

Sherwin Tjia  
Conundrum Press  
17.00, paper, 360pp  
978-1-894994-67-5

*Serial Villain* is a cross between a short story collection and a comic book, written and illustrated by the prolifically un-pigeonhole-able Montreal artist Sherwin Tjia.

The collection of "A Dozen Thrilling Illustrated Tales!" works the noir genre in a style that is heavily informed by contemporary crime drama. Every third or fourth page of the book is a black-and-white illustration that depicts action scenes with purposefully gauche stiffness – think pulp novel covers done in comic strip flatness. The stories are driven by plots that ask questions like what if an assassin travelled back in time to kill Hitler's parents but fell in love with his mother, or what if a serial killer was being tormented by the ghost of one of his victims? Tjia's willingness to escalate the action and take these concepts to – and beyond – the extents of their natural limitations is the collection's strongest point.

Character details and motivations are what give short stories their texture, but *Serial Villain* uses the tics of individuality to justify its plot twists; the bodyguard's brother who kills their mutual client says, in the middle of a car chase, "I'm in over my head Tim. I owe some very dangerous people a great deal of money... It was the gambling." Dialogue exposition is done this way in TV and film for scene economy, but print is not governed by the same pacing or visual constraints. The gambling debt is an opportunity to define the tone and fabric of the story, but this revelation is hard to accept when it pops up like a jack-in-the-box at an implausible point in the action. The stories would be richer if these threads were woven in earlier, and more thoroughly integrated with the illustrations.

If *Serial Villain* is to be evaluated as neo-noir then it must stand up to stiff

competition. Ellroy, Tarantino, and the Coen brothers use the beats between depravities to deliver human truths – consider the foot massage bit in *Pulp Fiction*, or McDormand lecturing Stormare at the end of *Fargo*. When opportunities for depth occur in *Serial Villain* the protagonists instead use sexual deflection in statements such as "Maybe he'd stick his penis in her aortic valve. He'd have to think about it later." Violence and sex are the classic noir pairing, and these stories have plenty of both; however, something is lacking in the execution. There is a scene which has two people shooting at one another inside the same car: "BLAM! Falsetto fired. The bullet embedded itself in the ceiling," but a bullet would punch right through the *roof* of a car. This can

be read as a simple technicality, but it is also an illustration of why *Serial Villain* is unsuccessful in its attempt to be noir. The noir genre makes us ponder the consequences of violent acts – *The Black Dahlia* follows the waves that ripple outward from a single murder; Jack Nicholson wears an awkward bandage on his nose

throughout *Chinatown* because of one knife flick – but the violence in *Serial Villain* is discontinuous and repetitive. Characters who are beaten unconscious twice in the same evening still think perfectly clearly afterwards. Like the bullet that embeds itself in the roof of the car, the consequences of the acts stop artificially wherever the author abandons them and so the events leave little physical or emotional mark on the characters or the reader.

The collection's inventive plot devices and cinematic pacing show enormous potential. The illustrations define their own style and tell their own stories. *Serial Villain* is clearly smart, like the kid at the back of the class who doodles inventively disturbing scenes in textbook margins, but in a world where senseless violence and graceless sex are easy to find, this collection does little to add to either theme or improve our relationships with them, and ends up feeling like just another scream in the cacophony. mrb

@RobSherren is a Montreal writer and musician who reviews fiction and short stories for the *mRb* and the *Winnipeg Review*.



The killers on our side are men of peace. Nothing is heard ever of contrition for crimes measured by their absence. We are the king's sons, the clamour of boots and tongues, the story that a story makes. Content and form are of equal importance in the destruction of one then the other, establishing both. Very troubling.

To speak is to say exactly nothing.



a novel by Claudio Gaudio



QUATTRO BOOKS

Texas [moredeathandtexas.com](http://moredeathandtexas.com) • Claudio Gaudio [claudiogaudio.com](http://claudiogaudio.com) • Quattro Books [quattrobooks.ca](http://quattrobooks.ca)

\$18.95  
9781927443095

If you're trying to reach Josh Freed, don't call him on a Friday afternoon. When most of us are wrapping up our workweek, he is fiddling with his humour column, trying to smooth out the kinks so that it is ready to go to press in the next morning's *Montreal Gazette*. His column has been appearing on Saturdays for over twenty years now – long enough to make us wonder how he still has anything to be funny about. But “our speed-crazed, tech-obsessed, password-plagued, financially-jittery, fitness-fetishist, gluten-sensitive, fatness-fearing world” is absurd enough to keep him laughing, and to keep us laughing with him.

His jokes just became more permanent in his new collection of columns, *He Who Laughs, Lasts*. These pieces, selected from the last twelve years of his *Gazette* column, touch on everything from politics to parkas, iPhones to Anglophones.

The book isn't the only excitement Freed has seen this year. In March, he added a column in *L'actualité* to his usual work as an English journalist and documentary filmmaker. The first piece he wrote, “Bonjour, mon nom est Josh Freed,” became the most clicked article ever published in *L'actualité*.

I met up with Freed to chat about his new book and what it's like to be funny for a living.

**Eric Boodman:** You have been sitting on these columns for over a decade. What made you want to put out a collection now?

**Josh Freed:** It was a good year for Montreal. First you had the student strike that went on and on, then you had the crazy tense PQ election, then you had the never-ending Charbonneau scandal, then you had the mayor's resignation. All that was missing was an earthquake, except we had one of those too. The whole city was on this never-ending roller coaster, and I thought that the only way to enjoy the ride was to laugh. The higher the tension level, the more people laugh. And now is the discontent of our winter, so it's a natural time to do it. A good smile is as good as a good parka for the average Canadian.

**EB:** What is the column-writing process like?

**JF:** Being a columnist makes you concentrate on the world: everything is a potential column. But by nature I'm a deadline writer. Friday is a religious day for me: I'm not allowed to do anything else; it's humorous Sabbath. My IQ rises about fifty per cent in the last two hours of writing. Terror breeds comedy, you know? When I'm really, really up against the wall, I become funnier, I write better.

**EB:** You are now writing columns for *L'actualité* in French. Can you talk about your upbringing and the kind of French education you had?

**JF:** I'm a classic Montreal Anglo: I'm Jewish. English Jews were sent to the English Protestant School Board. So I spent all my time learning all these Protestant hymns

that only Jews in Montreal can sing. I could go to any synagogue in Montreal and lead them in “Onward Christian Soldiers.” While they were teaching me all these songs, they weren't teaching me French. My French teacher was Mrs. Schwartz. She had an accent that was one part Paris, two parts Cavendish Mall. I couldn't go east of Schwartz's Deli and be understood because my accent was so terrible. Back then, it was *terra incognita*. Today, young Anglos like my son go to French school. He's got the French accent of a lumberjack and the wine sophistication of a sommelier.

**EB:** Were you the class clown in school?

**JF:** No, I was the class writer. I've learned to be funny on stage in recent years – I spent six months of my life practicing for a comedy show at the Centaur – and I do a lot of public speaking, so I'm okay. But I'm not a joke teller. I don't know any jokes. I don't remember jokes. I don't laugh at jokes; I don't even like jokes. I like observational humour, thoughts on life, wordplay. I don't like the three-part joke. A man walks into a bar with a parrot on his shoulder, I fall asleep. One of the great burdens of being a humour writer – the only burden – is that everybody wants to tell me jokes.

**EB:** Is having Stephen Harper at 24 Sussex good for Canadian humour?

**JF:** Yeah, he's a great source of humour: he's so serious you cannot not write humorously about him. He's like a robot designed in some secret laboratory in Alberta. The man who shakes hands with his children. His bizarre adoration for the monarchy. He doesn't seem to believe in parliament. But doing humour about Harper in Quebec is effortless because no one in Quebec can stand Harper.

**EB:** What do you, as a columnist, think of the “newspaper crisis” that everyone says is at hand?

**JF:** There's no doubt newspapers are in a crisis. When I hand my seventeen-year-old son the newspaper, I might as well be handing him a tree trunk: that's how foreign it feels in his hands. And my wife's a journalist and I'm a journalist. Our house is twenty-five per cent furniture, thirty-five per cent newspapers. Despite that, my son grapples with newspapers. Everybody's switching over to the Web. They think

they can get their information online. The thing they don't realize is that almost all the news online comes from somebody's newspaper somewhere. You have to have somebody out there with reporters who cover the news. Newspapers and a couple of TV stations have reporters, but most radio stations get their news from newspapers, and most TV news stations get their stories by following newspapers. And all these little online sites steal newspaper stuff and recirculate it. So you kill the newspapers, you kill the news.

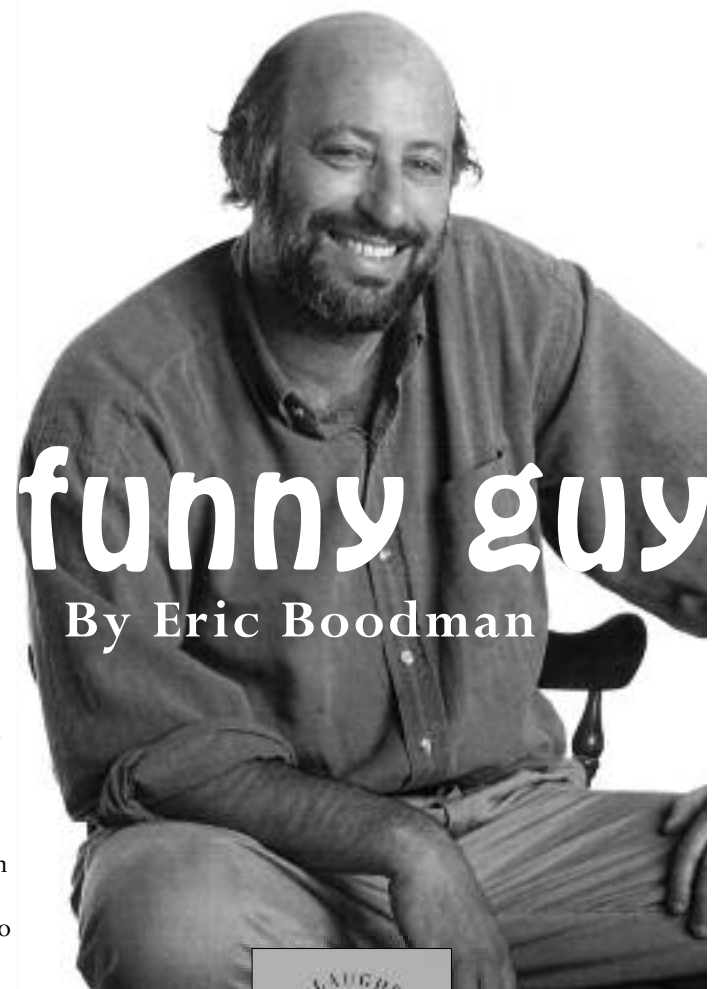
**EB:** You seem to find a lot of inspiration in technology. Can you talk about that?

**JF:** I write a lot about technology because it's the centre of our existence. If Descartes had been alive today, he would've said “iPhone therefore I am.” It's an app-happy society. If your pollution-measuring app is working you're happy that day, if you can't download it you're sad. Who could imagine these would be the great problems of an age? Everyone's got password amnesia. One of them is based on my grandmother's maiden name backwards followed by the year I took oboe lessons. The average person has more passwords than the chief of command in World War II. Why do we need all this security? Are burglars going to break into my house to rob me of my messages? They can steal my messages, as long as they answer them!

**EB:** Do you think there's something fundamentally depressing about these absurd obsessions?

**JF:** No. We live in an incredibly luxurious age in the Western World. We don't worry about the things other humans have worried about throughout our existence: starvation, tuberculosis, diphtheria, the black plague, infant mortality. We have the luxury to sit around and obsess about all these tiny terrors like cellphone rays, humidifiers that kill, or sick car syndrome. People throughout history would have torn out their fingernails to worry about the things we worry about. mrb

**Eric Boodman** is a Montreal-based writer, musician, and student.



# funny guy

By Eric Boodman



**HE WHO LAUGHS,  
LASTS**  
Josh Freed  
Véhicule Press  
20.00, paper, 156pp  
978-1-55065-346-5



**TWIT-TWO  
USED BOOK SALE**

**Saturday, April 13  
& Sunday, April 14, 2013  
10 AM to 5 PM**

*Quality used books for  
everyone on all topics  
at amazing prices*

**VICTORIA HALL  
4626 Sherbrooke St. West  
Info: (514) 483-5604  
(Donations of books  
accepted year-round)**

**Friends  
of the Westmount  
Public Library**



# non-fiction

## Homeland

### LIFE ON THE HOME FRONT

Montreal 1939-1945

Patricia Burns

Véhicule Press

20.00, paper 292pp

978-1-55065-341-0



Butter was hard to get. Women joined the workforce. And tens of thousands of men were in uniform and far away from home.

World War II didn't leave Montreal a flattened ruin, as it left so many cities overseas, but it did affect every aspect of life in the city; some things temporarily, others permanently – none more so than the legions of sons and husbands who never came home.

It's an interesting area of inquiry – changes brought about by war in a metropolis well removed from the war itself – and it's one handled very nicely by author Patricia Burns in *Life on the Home Front*, a thorough, well-organized, and very readable history of Montreal in the 1940s. It isn't a schol-

arly work, and some readers will find fault with the absence of footnotes and detailed sources. But there is a lot of information here, and it is well assembled, well presented, despite some misspelled words – it's the Capitol Theatre, not the Capital, and it's Delorimier Stadium, not Delormier – and inconsistent punctuation.

*Life on the Home Front* – which follows Burns' earlier histories, *They Were So Young: Montrealers Remember World War II* (2002) and *The Shamrock and the Shield: An Oral History of the Irish in Montreal* (2005) – begins with a survey of the city just before the war: the era of King, Duplessis, and Houde; of linguistic division and economic hardship; of the "Canadian führer" Adrian Arcand; and of the Empire-rallying royal visit of 1939.

English Montrealers generally supported the war, French Montrealers didn't. But both sides joined up in substantial numbers, some out of a sense of duty or a sense of adventure, others for family tradition. Many just needed a job.

Burns provides vignettes of numerous individual soldiers, memorably Guy Biéler of Earnscliffe Avenue whose

success as a saboteur behind enemy lines ended with a German firing squad. Biéler became the posthumous recipient of 11 medals, Burns notes, and there are street names or memorials to him today in France, Holland, Germany, and Canada.

The fear of losing loved ones was a constant for the folks at home, and the appearance of a telegraph boy dreaded. Burns speaks of a mother standing at the stove and knowing, suddenly, unmistakably, that her son was dead. The telegram came several days later.

There were 1.1 million Canadians in uniform in World War II (out of a population of 11.5 million). Two-thirds of them were under 21. And 50,000 of them were women. For many more women, though, the war meant work outside the home for the first time, and a new sense of independence. The Catholic Church in Quebec disapproved of the trend, but magazines were generous with advice to women on how to maintain their "femininity" while doing the work of three men.

Montreal factories turned out thousands of planes, tanks, weapons, and explosives during the war, much of it


destined for British and Russian armies. The emphasis on armaments meant fewer domestic goods, automobiles, new homes, and foodstuffs. Here it was the federal government that stepped up with timely advice, including a suggestion to "serve meat gravy on potatoes instead of butter."

Montreal had always enjoyed a lively entertainment scene, and during the war, with thousands of soldiers and sailors passing through, the city's restaurants, nightclubs, and brothels were busier than ever. Celebrities regularly came through town, many pitching Victory Bonds, and Charles de Gaulle, the Free French leader, visited in 1944 to stir up enthusiasm for the cause. "Vive le Canada," he cried from a Windsor Hotel balcony, a sentiment he appears to have forgotten when he returned 23 years later and cried "Vive le Québec libre" from a balcony on city hall.

The end of the war, in Europe in May 1945 and in Japan in August, brought huge, happy crowds into the streets of downtown Montreal. Car horns, ships' whistles, and church bells provided a background din. It was a war, as Burns says, "that, in its scope, cruelty and depravity was unprecedented in the blood-soaked annals of the world." Yet it left Canada an industrialized, successful, wealthy, and much-admired place, a legacy from which we still benefit. mtb

Dane Lanken is a writer and editor with a long-time interest in Montreal history.

A good book,  
the cure for spring fever.

 Follow us on Facebook!

2220 McGill College Avenue, Montreal – Phone: 514 845-5811



**Paragraphe**  
Librairie / Bookstore  
A Quebec Media Corporation

# Portrait of the Politician as a Young Man

**THE ORPHANAGE**  
An Autobiography  
Richard Bergeron  
Translated by Peter McCambridge  
Baraka Books  
12.95, paper, 112pp  
9781926824550



Although the back cover of Richard Bergeron's autobiography, *The Orphanage*, suggested the book would make for gloomy reading, it proved to be not only a page-turner, but also a delightful, light hearted, and entertaining account. Bergeron – Montreal city councillor, architect, leader of Projet Montreal, and advocate of sustainable urbanism – unzips his heart with a tone that alternates between dramatic and humorous while staying true to the story's rawness. But humorous as the book may be at times, there's nothing funny about being placed in an orphanage at the age of four, about scrubbing the refectory's floor after each meal, or seeing the nuns strap bed-wetters on a daily basis.

The book takes place in the 1950s, a period when the Church had a say in almost every aspect of Quebec's society. Precocious, the Alma-native author turns every painful situation into a lesson, resilience being the first. "I swore I would never be caught out again. And I wasn't," he writes after receiving his first and only strap for wetting his bed. Gratitude is another, "These nuns, the nice ones, really did exist. There were a few of them at the orphanage of Chicoutimi. And a few of them were a wonderful gift," he recalls with fondness. Nevertheless, the main lesson Bergeron learns is how to stand out from the rest. "The question to ask myself was: What was important in their eyes? What would make them happy?" As though he knows that these sound like the words of a sycophant, Bergeron continues, "I had no choice. Like any child, I depended on the adults around me. But none of them were won over ahead of time." It could be said that Bergeron's early inference still governs his life today; now in his mid-fifties, the man is mostly sympa-

thetically perceived for his community involvement.

The style, though rudimentary and obvious, conveys the simplicity of a child's outlook on life. When remembering the poor quality of the food, he describes "shapeless stews" made from "reform cattle," which goes "into cat and dog food nowadays." The chapter entitled "Routine" recounts heartfelt highlights that break a monotonous existence: the Saturday night movie, a flood at the orphanage, started by a rebellious boy left behind while the rest are at the zoo. Furthermore, amusing descriptions slice reality's grayness in a masterful way, such as the one of the giant cooking pot – "the devil's cauldron" – that spilled over on Bergeron, leaving him to convalesce for months in bed with third-degree burns.

A particularly touching part of the book is his memories of holidays and the happiness of a nurturing relationship with his grandmother. Ultimately, Bergeron unveils the reason for ending up at the orphanage in the first place: his mother was left paralyzed while giving birth to her fifth child. A construction worker, his father preferred to place his kids in a limbo state for six years rather than give them up for adoption to family members. Readers may look for a hint of bitterness or melancholy in these harsh truths, only to find none. Instead, it is the story of somebody who breaks through the thorns of struggle into the light. "What happened next? Life. Life happened next. Just life," the book ends.

Half a century has elapsed since Bergeron's stint in the orphanage and a question remains: is he trying to erase his emotional scars or does he simply want to admit their existence by sharing his experience? **mrb**

Oksana Cueva is a self-proclaimed world citizen. Writer, poet, and journalist, she strives to recreate with words what otherwise enters through the senses. Her coverage encompasses diverse artistic, literary, and cultural events.

Check out our new arrivals on Facebook



## The Word

469 Milton Street  
Montreal Tel: 845-5640  
Purveyors of the finest

Second-hand Books  
Specializing in Literature

## Why Worry...Flexible and Affordable.

If you're unable to work because of illness or accident would you want your loans and/or mortgage payments taken care of?

**Solution:** One contract to cover all your loans...Mortgage, Line of Credit, Credit Card,

RRSP loan, Personal Loan, Car Loan, even Student Loan.

Call Sam Olliel at Ogilvy & Ogilvy (since 1924)

for a quote 514-932-8660 or

[soliel@ogilvy.ca](mailto:soliel@ogilvy.ca)

Summer 2013 – July 19-21

# KNOWLTON WordFest

FESTIVAL LITTÉRAIRE • LITERARY FESTIVAL

Josip Novacovitch  
Sally Armstrong  
Bill Haugland  
Suzanne Aubry  
Shelagh Rogers

Steve Luxton  
Peter Gossage  
Richard Petit  
Barbara Reid  
Sonia Day

PLUS Repercussion Theatre & Shakespeare on the Beach  
Peter Gzowski PGI for Literacy Gala

Info: [www.KnowltonWordFest.ca](http://www.KnowltonWordFest.ca)

## Coach House brings the heat this spring, with new books from Goldbach and Brossard

**The Devil and the Detective**  
a novel by John Goldbach

Imagine the *The Big Sleep* via Fernando Pessoa, with a side of Buster Keaton. That's something close to John Goldbach's debut novel, *The Devil and the Detective*, a noir novel about the biggest mystery of them all: consciousness. Private detective Robert James, more interested in chronicling his cases than solving them, is dragged into a dark underworld of corruption, betrayal and flower delivery

**White Piano**  
poetry by Nicole Brossard  
translated by Robert Majzels and Erin Moure

Between the verbs quivering and streaming, *White Piano* unfolds its variations like musical scores. A play of resonance between pronouns and persons, freely percussive between prose and poetry, and narrating a constellation of questions, the book offers readers a language that cultivates its own craters of fire and savoir-vie.

Coach House Books | [chbooks.com](http://chbooks.com)

Coach House gratefully acknowledges the super-hot assistance of the Ontario Media Development Corporation.

# ARGO BOOKSHOP

Selling new books since 1966

1915 Rue Ste-Catherine O.  
Montréal  
Tel: 514.931.3442



[argobookshop.ca](http://argobookshop.ca)  
Special orders welcome



## Suitcases in the Attic

THE SECRET OF THE BLUE TRUNK

Lise Dion

Translated by Liedewij Hawke

Dundurn

21.99, paper, 168pp  
978-1-45970-451-0



There are some books that deserve to be read in one sitting. When read uninterrupted, their narrative power quietly but forcefully steals over you as you flip the pages faster and faster.

Lise Dion's *The Secret of the Blue Trunk* is one of those books. First published in 2011 as *Le secret du coffre bleu* and now available in an English translation by Liedewij Hawke, it tells the true story of how Dion's mother, a young nun from Quebec, ended up in a German concentration camp during the Second World War. Rather than straining to impress with literary prowess, it makes a frank appeal to readers on an emotional level.

Growing up, Dion knew she was adopted, but her adoptive mother's past was in many ways a mystery to

her. When her mother died, Dion was finally able to open her "mysterious, unfathomable, untouchable blue trunk," which had been off limits for Dion's whole life. She was shocked by what she discovered inside: a photo of her mother in a nun's habit, a German document from 1940 stating her mother's arrest, and five notebooks with the title "So that I will always remember." "Now my mother transformed into a real heroine," Dion writes. "I knew she had the backbone to come out of the war alive."

The familiar quest of an adopted child is that of the search for a biological parent. Dion, on the other hand, goes on a search for the truth of her adoptive mother's past.

The contents of the notebooks become the basis for a reconstructed biography of her mother, Armande Martel. Following Dion's introduction, the book takes the form of an extensive letter from mother to daughter, written in Armande's voice.

Dion is well known in Quebec as a humorist, but this story is anything but humorous. Yet her talent as a storyteller is evident. The narrative is told in straightforward, mostly unadorned prose, yet there's also a certain exuberance to the writing style that might have been polished out in a different kind of book. For example, Dion uses the occasional exclamation point, a

punctuation mark that is usually reserved for dialogue, but in this case suits the voice of the narrator. What reads as sometimes slightly choppy honesty gives the writing an immediacy that makes it both compelling and convincing.

When Armande leaves Chicoutimi in 1930 to travel overseas and train to become a nun in France, she delights in many new experiences: "I simply couldn't get over it. We could eat, sitting at a table, while the train travelled along! And, what's more, while admiring the passing scenery!" The sweet naïveté evident in these scenes makes the later gritty, shocking details of life in the concentration camp all the more heart-wrenching.

Eventually forced to confront what had been happening in the world outside the "comfortable cocoon" of her isolated religious community in 1940, Armande voices the utter senselessness of her experience: "I could die, then, simply because I was a Canadian citizen! That didn't make sense. My crime was being a British subject. It was all so abstract for me since I had never even set foot in England!" From here, the narrative takes a turn, and the reader is drawn into a very dark world.

A slight reprieve comes in the form of an unlikely bond that develops into a love interest, a lifeline for a despair-



ing reader. The other bright spot in an otherwise dark narrative is the celebration of the bonds of female friendship; most likely what kept Armande alive.

Although it doesn't necessarily have any new information to add to the glut of literature surrounding the war, Dion's reconstructed narrative offers a new (and specifically Quebecois) voice, one that is refreshingly direct and compulsively readable. **mb**

Lesley Trites is a Montreal-based freelance writer and the author of *echoic mimic*.

## Translating Difference: The Latest French-English Translations from Guernica Editions



### Things That Fall

Finding words to give meaning to pain and death: the poetry of award-winning author Denise Desautels



ISBN: 9781550713732 \$20 CDN



### Human Presences & Possible Futures

Capturing the idea of north in the everyday: a bilingual selection from GG award winner Robert Dickson



ISBN: 9781550716665 \$20 CDN



### The Stalinist's Wife

Duplicity, the intellectual vanguard and a break for freedom: France Théoret's novel of a woman who re-invents herself



ISBN: 9781550716306 \$20 CDN

[www.guernicaeditions.com](http://www.guernicaeditions.com)

Contact: [cristinarizzuto@guernicaeditions.com](mailto:cristinarizzuto@guernicaeditions.com)

## DC Books Spring Launch. Bring yourself and bring your friends to the party at the Blue Met... [www.bluemetropolis.org](http://www.bluemetropolis.org)



Writers, readers, friends of the press – all are welcome to celebrate our spring launch during the 15<sup>th</sup> Blue Metropolis Montreal International Festival, April 24<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup>. Hosted by the inimitable David McGimpsey, the line-up begins with Kenneth Radu's superb short story collection *Earthbound*, featuring all his remarkable ability to portray ordinary people in sometimes extraordinary circumstances.



After her success with *The Originals*, in *Pluto's Gate* novelist L.E. Sterling tells the epic tale of Percy's voyage through the Underworld, whose rules of existence are as unfathomable as the mysterious red flowers that suddenly blanket its fields. And DC's Punchy Poetry series, edited by Jason Camlot, brings two new voices to the fore.



In Kathryn Mockler's *The Saddest Place on Earth*, God appears on Oprah, and Hurt Feelings and Anger rent a cottage together on Lake Huron for a week in August. Through the meditative lens of prose poetry, Vision TV Director Concetta Principe's deeply intimate *walking: not a nun's story* explores religious difference and secular politics, God and promises.

Columnist Barbara Kay of the *National Post* wrote this about Keith Henderson's latest novel, *The Roof Walkers*: "A fictional tour de force of Canada moving toward Confederation in the eighteenth-sixties, told through letters sent to the head of Canada West's secret service by a young Montreal Irishman who has penetrated the Fenian movement in New York. A superb, hugely enjoyable historical thriller, written with clarity and elegance."



# You Spin Me Right Round

*“Of what value is the opinion on any subject, of a man of whom everyone knows that by his profession he must hold that opinion?” –John Stuart Mill*

If there is one political profession even less reputable than that of the career politician, it is that of the party spin doctor. Despite their corrupt image, most politicians expend a good deal of energy helping out their constituents – sometimes out of a cynical desire to get re-elected, but other times out of genuine concern for their fellow citizens. Spin doctors, however, spend their days trying to twist the truth to the benefit of their own party and the detriment of others. It’s easy to see this profession as a pernicious one with purely baleful consequences.

James S. McLean’s *Inside the NDP War Room* gives a refreshingly nuanced account of the role played by spin doctors. A professor of journalism at Concordia University, McLean acknowledges the dangers posed by party strategists to public discourse, but he also points out that these strategists can play a constructive role by challenging the positions and records of opposing parties.

McLean repeatedly draws attention to the limits faced by party strategists when trying to spin the truth to their advantage. In pluralistic democracies like Canada, even the mightiest party machines will find their influence curtailed by rival parties, by the traditional media, and by the ever-vigilant blogosphere. Party strategists can’t conjure facts out of thin air without losing credibility; they therefore focus their efforts on “framing” truths or half-truths without painting outright falsehoods.

Party strategists could learn a thing or two from this book’s publisher, McGill-Queen’s University Press, which has engaged in some clever framing of its own. Readers who purchase books on the basis of their covers are likely to be disappointed with this one. The book’s title, *Inside the NDP War Room*, isn’t entirely inaccurate, but the book’s far less sexy subtitle, *Competing for Credibility in a Federal Election*, gives a better sense of its contents and style. The back cover blurb promises “a vivid, first-hand account of campaign strategizing.” This book has its virtues, but it is hardly the “vivid” page-turner readers are led to expect.

Although the publisher is trying to reach a broad public, this is very much a book written to impress the academic community, with endnotes full of references to heavy-weight theorists like Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu (the latter provides McLean with the analytical lens through which he views his subject).

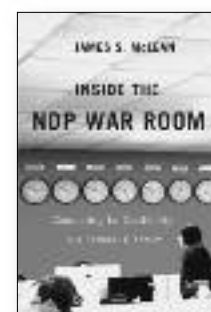
Unless they’re used to the conventions of academic writing, political junkies aren’t likely to slog through this book’s theory-laden second chapter. Those who *do* read past that chapter to the book’s end will come across no startling revelations about the NDP’s activities. McLean was allowed access to the party’s war room during the 2005–2006 federal election campaign; he was also included on the electronic list-serve used by NDP operatives during a part of that campaign. Unfortunately, this experience was of limited value. McLean has useful insights into the role of party strategists, but few of these insights seem to have been sparked by his experience in the war room of a campaign that turned out to be rather uneventful for the NDP (in 2006, the party increased its number of seats by ten and raised its share of the popular vote by 1.8%). The book’s only dramatic section is its brief analysis of the NDP’s electoral breakthrough during the 2011 federal election. One can’t help but wish that McLean had been imbedded in the NDP’s war room during that far more pivotal moment in the party’s history.

This book’s value lies not so much in the modest

insights garnered from the author’s short time in a party war room, but in its balanced analysis of communication strategy in the Internet age. McLean describes a public relations battlefield in which each party seeks to promote its own vision of the social world. In doing so, a party encounters resistance from a variety of forces: political opponents who contest that vision, fact checkers in the traditional media and on the Web, and the shifting changes of fortune. McLean points out that no party can impose its view of the world with impunity, for a party whose views are blatantly at odds with reality loses credibility with the public. Moreover, spin doctors who spout vitriolic rhetoric or engage in outrageous behaviour run the risk of losing legitimacy with voters outside their party’s core base (a fact borne out by the recent American presidential election).

*Inside the NDP War Room* undermines the notion that party strategists control a helpless public through their Machiavellian arts. So long as other political actors remain vigilant, the power of spin doctors to do harm remains limited. By scrutinizing rival parties as they do, spin doctors may even contribute in a small way to the public good. mb

Jean Coléno holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Toronto and teaches in the Humanities Department at Dawson College.



**INSIDE THE NDP WAR ROOM**  
Competing for Credibility  
in a Federal Election  
James S. McLean  
McGill-Queen’s University Press  
29.95, paper, 222pp  
9780773540934

APRIL 6 - 16 AVRIL  
imagination.morrin.org

featuring / mettant en vedette JIAN GHOMESHI / EMMA DONOGHUE / PAUL ALMOND / DENI Y. BÉCHARD / ROBERT J. SAWYER / CHARLES FORAN / PETER DUBÉ / GUY VANDERHAEGHE / DOUGLAS GIBSON / CHRISTINE EDDIE / KEN HOWE / H. NIGEL THOMAS /

Québec 2013  
**imagination**  
Writers' Festival • Festival d'écrivains

Morrin Centre  
44 Chaussée des Écossais  
Québec, Québec G1R 4H3  
418-694-9147

Canada Council  
for the Arts / Conseil des arts  
du Canada

MAISON  
ANGLAISE

leSoleil

Entente de  
développement culturel

Chronicle Telegraph

simons

Québec



# young readers

## Adventure Is Out There!

It's not easy to find books in English for young adults that shine a literary light on the colourful history of New France. A recent translation from French of Martin Fournier's Governor General Award-winning *The Adventures of Radisson: Hell Never Burns* sets out to fill the gap.

*Hell Never Burns* is part one of Fournier's exploration of Pierre-Esprit Radisson's life. His English publisher Baraka Books calls *Hell Never Burns* a historical thriller, and the description rings true. There are generous helpings of blood and gore starting with Radisson's initial capture and torture by the Iroquois, moving on to the murderous attack he inflicts on two young Iroquois who have befriended him, and then on to his participation in assaults against the Erie people where he enthusiastically hacks away at defenseless men and women.

Radisson is a complex figure and Fournier effectively depicts the struggle the young man feels when he is torn between two cultures. Pierre-Esprit Radisson came to Quebec from France at fifteen years old. He was captured and then adopted by the Iroquois, but returned to live in New France as a European. Radisson, like many of the early traders who came to the New World, thoroughly enjoyed the freedom and adventure of the Iroquois way of life, but was ultimately more inspired by the idea of becoming a successful trader and the promise of the big profits to be made from the fur trade.

Radisson's passion for trade is unquestioned. He and his brother-in-law Médard des Groseilliers were responsible for the creation of the Hudson's Bay Company, which will be covered in Fournier's second instalment of the biography. Whether we deem that this character from the past was admirable or not, Fournier has provided us with something we don't see very often: the literary portrait of a historical figure from early Quebec especially for the young adult reader.

### THE AWESOME ALMOST 100% TRUE ADVENTURES OF MATT & CRAZ

Alan Silberberg  
Aladdin

19.99, paper, 336pp  
978-1-4169-9432-9



Writer and illustrator Alan Silberberg's last book for young adults, *Milo: Sticky Notes and Brain Freeze*, managed to take a heartbreaking subject – the death of a mother – and treat it with compassion, truth, and, above all, humour. That book won him, among other accolades, the Sid Fleischman Humor Award and the QWF Prize for Children's and Young Adult Literature.

This latest book by Silberberg takes a lighter look at the issue of early adolescent angst. Still, the thirteen-year-old protagonists Matt and Craz have some difficult issues to deal with at home. Matt's parents are separated and his older brother Ricky has decided that it's more fun to humiliate Matt than to treat him as a best friend like he used to do. Craz lives in a house filled to bursting with siblings, and his parents spend all their energy just trying to get something possibly edible on the table. School also presents its trials and tribulations. Matt has the potential to be a good student but he is preoccupied with his troubles at home and perpetually distracted by his hobby – drawing cartoons. Craz's life is so chaotic and messy that it's a miracle he makes it to school at all. And when he does, his brain and body bounce around like a Ping-Pong ball on steroids. Their social lives are equally unsatisfactory, especially for Matt who pines for the illusive and alluring Cindy Ockabloom.

In a lot of ways, Craz and Matt are opposites – Matt is dreamy, serious, and anxious; Craz is off-the-wall and out-of-control. What the two boys share is an obsession for cartooning. That obsession and their unlikely friendship is what this book is about.

For months Matt and Craz have been trying to get one of their cartoons into the school paper. But despite their best efforts – “Butt Ugly Bob,” “The Adventures of Mary the Meatball Sub,” “Melvin Gerkin Pickle Boy” – the dictatorial student editor Skip Turkle rejects and humiliates them over and over again. Matt and Craz are on the verge of giving up when they stumble upon the Draw Better Now website and the magical Boyd T. Boone. From that moment on Matt and Craz find themselves in possession of a pen and ink that can make their wackiest thirteen-year-old fantasies come true.

Silberberg happily indulges his protagonists' desires. The magic pen turns annoying older brothers into obsessive house cleaners, makes Craz's favourite superhero into his new buddy, gets Matt a date with Cindy Ockabloom, and sends Mrs. Bentz, the worst English teacher in the world, on an extended holiday to Treasure Island. Of course things backfire, a magic pen and ink can produce unexpected and unwanted results after all, but Matt and Craz have a lot of fun in the process – and we do, too. In the end, even if they drive us crazy sometimes, the boys also learn something about friendship and the importance of accepting differences.

### MOOMINVALLEY TURNS JUNGLE

Tove Jansson  
Drawn & Quarterly  
9.95, paper, 37ppp  
978-1-77046-097-3



### MOOMIN'S WINTER FOLLIES

Tove Jansson  
Drawn & Quarterly  
9.95, paper, 45ppp  
978-1-77046-098-0

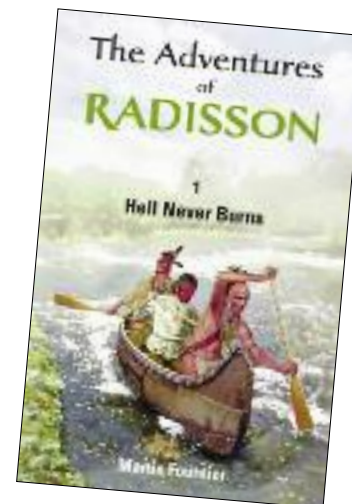


Finns and Canadians have some things in common: we have a similar climate, we've got a lot of fish and forests, and we love hockey. But the Finns have the genius of Tove Jansson and the world of Moominvalley.

We have Drawn & Quarterly to thank for bringing two more of Jansson's Moomin stories to North America. How fortunate we are to have access to Jansson's unique vision and to her world filled with wry wit, cynical intelligence, and wonderful illustrations.

These two new Moomin books, *Moominvalley Turns Jungle* and *Moomin's Winter Follies*, are both released for the first time in soft-cover and in full colour.

But be forewarned, if you're in the market for gentle tales with politically correct lessons for the little ones, a trip to Moominvalley is not for you. In Jansson's stories bad things happen to good Moomin, good Moomin do bad things, and all sorts of scary scenarios are offered up for our perusal and pleasure. In *Moomin's Winter Follies*, Jansson invites us to laugh without guilt as we watch the spurned Moomin uprooting



### THE ADVENTURES OF RADISSON

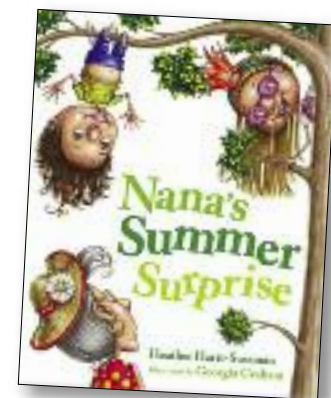
Hell Never Burns  
Martin Fournier  
Translated by  
Peter McCambridge  
Baraka Books  
19.95, paper, 228pp  
978-1-926824-54-3

a tree, pointing its jagged roots at the annoyingly macho Mr. Brisk, and declaring, “There will be no peace among our women if I don't KILL HIM!!” And to snicker when in *Moominvalley Turns Jungle*, Snork Maiden urges Moomin, who is hanging onto a tree vine getting ready to jump, “Hurrah, just like Tarzan. Come and abduct me.”

The Moomin books manage to achieve the Holy Grail of children's literature: they appeal to the kids, but entertain and amuse the parents as well. We have Tove Jansson, the Finns, and Drawn & Quarterly to thank for that.

### NANA'S SUMMER SURPRISE

Heather Hartt-Sussman  
Illustrated by Georgia Graham  
Tundra Books  
19.99, cloth, 32pp  
978-1-77049-324-7



### NONI IS NERVOUS

Heather Hartt-Sussman  
Illustrated by Geneviève Côté  
Tundra Books  
19.99, cloth, 24pp  
978-1-77049-323-0

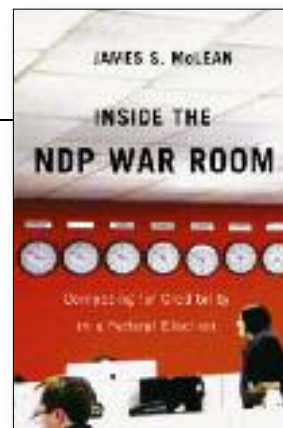
Two new books written by Heather Hartt-Sussman have been published by Tundra Books. The first, *Nana's Summer Surprise*, is the next instalment in the Nana Series. This time the book's protagonist – otherwise known as Nana's grandson – must contend with a summer spent at the cottage with Hortense – otherwise known as Gramp's granddaughter. The two young people have met before, but over the months since that last meeting Hortense has transformed from child to teenager, and the changes don't impress the grandson in question. It looks like the summer is going to be the worst ever with Hortense spending all her time painting her toenails and talking about boys, and our young protagonist getting a headache from all the girly stuff. Ultimately, their shared love for Nana brings the two young people together and results in the best surprise birthday party ever. As always, Nana is an inspiration for grandparents everywhere with her boundless energy and zest for life. Georgia Graham's illustrations do the job of bringing Nana's crazy outfits to life and drawing Hortense's gangly growth-spurred body and pimple-flecked skin in all their adolescent glory.

*Noni is Nervous* is a story about one of the landmark moments in every five-year-old's life. The first day of school is enough to make anyone nervous and someone like Noni, who worries about things like global warming and play dates, is having a hard time. Her parents and her little brother try to help but it's just no good. Eventually, Noni works up the courage to talk to the little girl who sits next to her on the school bus and before you know it, school is nothing to be worried about after all. Geneviève Côté's simple yet impressively skilful watercolour and pencil drawings express perfectly Noni's journey from anxiety to ease. **MBR**

B.A. Markus is a writer, teacher, and mother who would like very much to get a hold of a magic pen and ink.



# Montreal and the World

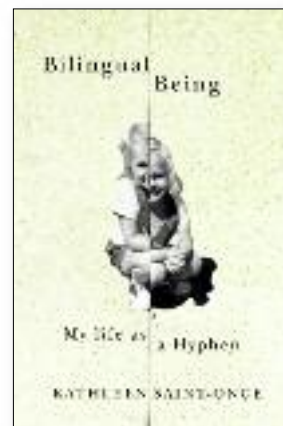


## Inside the NDP War Room *Competing for Credibility in a Federal Election*

James S. McLean

“McLean breaks new ground by both providing insight into the inner workings of Canadian federal politics and grounding his real-world experience in a fascinating theoretical discussion. *Inside the NDP War Room* is an exceedingly well-written book.”

Paul Benedetti, Western University

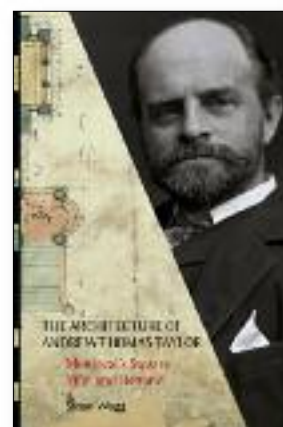


## Bilingual Being *My Life as a Hyphen*

Kathleen Saint-Onge

“This is a magnificent piece of work – original, courageous, fiercely honest, often searingly painful, enlightening, and inspiring. Saint-Onge’s depictions of a damaged childhood in the ‘60s and her reflections on what caused her to leap from one language to another as a means of psychological survival are delivered with breathtaking clarity.”

Moira Farr, author of *After Daniel: A Suicide Survivor’s Tale*



## The Architecture of Andrew Thomas Taylor *Montreal's Square Mile and Beyond*

Susan Wagg

The architect of some of Montreal’s most iconic landmarks, Andrew Thomas Taylor also advanced the quality of 19th-century architecture across Canada.



## The Video Art of Sylvia Safdie

Eric Lewis

A richly illustrated look at the work of a contemporary Montreal artist.  
220 full colour photos



## The Merger Delusion *How Swallowing Its Suburbs Made an Even Bigger Mess of Montreal*

Peter F. Trent

“... it is a masterpiece of sober analysis of what ails Montreal Island. It combines trenchant criticism with thought-provoking solutions.”

Henry Aubin, *The Montreal Gazette*

### Shortlisted

Shaughnessy Cohen Award for Political Writing  
The Writers’ Trust of Canada (2012)



## To the Spring, by Night

Seyhmus Dagtekin

Translated from the French

by Donald Winkler

An evocation of childhood, a lost world, and a lost time.

“This is a poetic voyage to the wellspring of childhood emotions ... In magnificent language, Dagtekin achieves universality.”

*Calou, livre de lecture*