

# mRb

Montreal Review of Books

SPRING 2024



MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL

# POETRY PRIZE

2 — 0 —

Judged by  
A.E. Stallings  
Oxford Poetry  
Professor

— 2 — 4

Award of  
\$20,000 CAD  
Cash Prize

## ENTRIES

Multiple entries accepted  
40 lines per entry



## INFORMATION

[montrealpoetryprize.com](http://montrealpoetryprize.com)  
[@montrealprize](https://twitter.com/montrealprize)

The Montreal International Poetry Prize is committed to encouraging the creation of original works of poetry, to building international readership, and to exploring the world's Englishes.



# DEADLINE 15 May 2024

*Irina Zhurav*  
23

**Montreal Review of Books**  
is published by the Association of English-language  
Publishers of Quebec (AELAQ). Circulation: 37,500

Malcolm Fraser • Editor  
Nived Dharmaraj • Associate Editor  
Rebecca West • Publisher  
Alexandra Sweny • Associate Publisher  
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: editor@mtlreviewofbooks.ca

For advertising inquiries contact:  
ads@mtlreviewofbooks.ca

ISSN # 1480-2538  
Copyright 2024, the authors and the AELAQ.

Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec and the  
National Library of Canada, first quarter, 2024.

We wish to thank the Canada Council for the  
Arts, the Government of Canada, SODEC, and the Conseil des  
arts de Montréal for their generous support, without  
which this publication would not exist.

One-year subscriptions available for \$15  
Please visit [mtlreviewofbooks.ca/subscribe](http://mtlreviewofbooks.ca/subscribe)

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

Visit us online  
[mtlreviewofbooks.ca](http://mtlreviewofbooks.ca)  
[aelaq.org](http://aelaq.org)

Cover illustration by Kezna Dalz

PRINTED IN CANADA

## contents

### features

- 4 **Oonya Kempadoo**  
By Val Rwigema
- 8 **Klara du Plessis  
and Khashayar "Kess"  
Mohammadi**  
By Emily Mernin
- 9 **Padma Viswanathan**  
By Malcolm Fraser
- 24 **Caroline Vu**  
By Olivia Shan

### fiction

- 6 **Love and Rain**  
Carmela Circelli  
Reviewed by Kimberly Bourgeois
- Sadie X**  
Clara Dupuis-Morency  
Translated by Aimee Wall  
Reviewed by Alexander Taurozzi
- 7 **Here Is Still Here**  
Sivan Slapak  
Reviewed by Tina Wayland
- The Cat Looked Back**  
Louise Carson  
Reviewed by Sharon Morrisey

### graphic

- 10 **Food School**  
Jade Armstrong  
Reviewed by Emily Raine
- Portrait of a Body**  
Julie Delporte  
Translated by Helge Dascher  
and Karen Houle  
Reviewed by Sarah Mangle
- 13 **Between Gentlemen**  
Rupert Bottenberg
- Botanica Drama**  
Thom  
Reviewed by Connor Harrison
- So Long Sad Love**  
Mirion Malle  
Translated by Aleshia Jensen  
Reviewed by Ashton Diduck

### non-fiction

- 16 **The Calf with Two Heads**  
Louisa Blair  
Reviewed by Alexander Hackett
- Cosmic Wonder**  
Nathan Hellner-Mestelman  
Reviewed by Meaghan Thurston
- 19 **Stolen Family**  
Johanne Durocher  
Translated by JC Sutcliffe  
Reviewed by Dana Bath

**Arsenic mon amour**  
Jean-Lou David and  
Gabrielle Izaguirre-Falardeau  
Translated by Mary O'Connor  
Reviewed by Emma Dollery

20 **Before Canada**  
Edited by Allan Greer  
Reviewed by Jack McClelland

**Restless in Sleep Country**  
Paul Huebener  
Reviewed by Karolina Roman

21 **Ghost Stories**  
Judith Adamson  
Reviewed by Aishwarya Singh

### poetry

22 **Listening in Many Publics**  
Jay Ritchie

**Life Cycle of a Mayfly**  
Maya Clubine

**Talking to Strangers**  
Rhea Tregobov

**you**  
Chantal Neveu  
Translated by Erin Moure

**Whiny Baby**  
Julie Paul  
Reviewed by Ronny Litvack-Katzman

### young readers

26 **Highlights of the Season's Books  
for Young People**  
Reviewed by Phoebe Yi Ling



Saturday,  
April 13  
&  
Sunday,  
April 14  
10 AM – 4 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



Gabrielle Drolet is a writer and cartoonist in Montreal.



Canada Council  
for the Arts  
Conseil des arts  
du Canada



SODEC  
Québec



BY VAL RWIGEMA



# Myth Conception

Oonya Kempadoo's recently published novel, *Naniki*, is a work of magic realism and Caribbean futurism. The shape-shifting co-protagonists, Amana and Skelele, elemental beings intertwined with Taíno and African ancestry, set out on an archipelagic journey with their animal avatars – their *naniki* – to search for the strange future seen in their dreams. When disaster strikes, they are summoned by their elders to take on a quest travelling back in time, to find the origin of the First Peoples' knowledge.



Naniki  
Oonya Kempadoo  
Rare Machines  
\$24.99, paper, 200pp  
9781459751491

I meet with Kempadoo for lunch on a cold but sunny afternoon in Montreal's Mile End. The restaurant we had initially planned to go to has closed down, so we spend the first moments of our meeting wandering in and out of restaurants and cafes along Saint-Denis. Once we finally peel off all of our winter layers and sit down to order, we immediately jump into conversation.

Kempadoo remained in the Caribbean for most of her life, until her relatively recent move to Montreal in 2017. "Living outside of the Caribbean as a creative, I'm just beginning to understand all of the complexities of what that means. I'm discovering myself as 'first-generation diaspora' Oonya." Describing her first time living in a city for so long, particularly in the West, she tells me about her realization that unless you're white, you're a person of colour before anything else. "It puts you in a position of being the Other, an experience that I have not lived for any extended period of time. It's a tough reality to accept."

Kempadoo comes from a family immersed in the arts; her parents were creative types in their own ways. Born in England and brought up in Guyana, she recounts details of her upbringing and her parents' rejection of the colonial education system. "We were homeschooled up until secondary school. My mom really nurtured the arts in our curriculum and my father has written two novels, so there are a few artists in the family." Her writing bridges generations: "My son grew up with me reading to him. When I started writing my first book, I read pieces out to him as a way of sharing bits of my childhood with him. So he's my first listener. That's why I dedicated [*Naniki*] to him and to my mom, who was my first storyteller and giver of stories."

Having lived in some of the regions mentioned in the book, I wondered in what ways living in those different areas impacted her writing, especially going from the Caribbean to Montreal. "Moving around and being away from somewhere, but from it, allows me to see it better, and [in] that way describe it and be able to reflect that in my writing. While I was in Trinidad, I wrote about Guyana; when I was in Grenada, I wrote about Tobago," she replies. "My movement to Montreal is connected to this story and wanting to produce it in ways other than writing."

*Naniki*, Kempadoo's fourth novel, while already a departure from her other work, is much more than a book. In fact, she didn't see the story coming to life in book form when she started writing it almost eleven years ago. "When I found this story's seed, it was not best as a novel. It felt like it needed to be interactive, so I started exploring that in multimedia,"

Kempadoo tells me. "I would love to see it as a graphic novel or animated. That's how I see it and that's why [a novel] was not the first form that I tried to bring it into." As an eco-social multimedia story project, *Naniki* has also been produced as an immersive experience with audiovisual components called *Naniki Immersive*.

Written unconventionally, the book defects from the traditional structure of a novel. Curious, I ask her why she chose this approach. "At first, I thought I wanted to write it as a YA novel because of the protagonists," she says. "But my reaction to the fiction that I read is that there are a lot of fear-based narratives. It's all angst-driven action and plot."

---

## "That flow through water is what the characters are pulling you through. That's what I followed."

---

The expectations of formulaic genre writing didn't feel right to her. "I have a hard time consciously working that into a story for the sake of driving the plot," Kempadoo continues. "To what end, you know? Do we really need more anxiety? Is that the only compelling thing there is to a story? Can it still be readable outside of that? It wasn't a conscious choice of breaking the formula, I was just enjoying the writing process. That's what I wanted to explore with it as a book, and I did."

In its effortless fluidity, the story carries the reader gently through its pages. This sentiment is confirmed when Kempadoo shares that for her, it was like going for a swim. "That flow through water is what the characters are pulling you through. That's what I followed. During the editing process, there was a push to make the characters more human, more emotional. But just because they lack human emotions, does that mean they're unidentifiable? Human self-obsession is partly what I wanted to escape. It's that imaginary place where we're not focused on ourselves so much." The theme of inter-connection, and the idea that other beings and other forms of life are just as important as we are, underpin the story. The novel is not character-driven. The protagonists are instead our guides, like their *naniki* are to them, steering the reader.


On their journey, Amana and Skelele encounter the concept of race for the first time

when moving across Hispaniola from the Dominican Republic to Ayiti, a nod to the colonial history between the two countries. They discuss the colonial idea that borders supposedly define ethnicities, language, and where you belong. "How we operate as humans and how we divide ourselves is what led us to this point of killing the planet. The ability to freely exchange and access that fluidity is always there, part of any ecosystem that knows no borders," Kempadoo explains.

With a strong inclination towards the re-Indigenization of knowledge, Kempadoo expresses her hope that the West might eventually accept and acknowledge the Indigenous stories and cultures that have been around forever. Even in the Caribbean, Indigenous erasure is prevalent, and it's assumed that its populations are only Afro-Caribbean. "Across the islands, because of the colonial curriculum, Indigenous peoples are talked about as if they no longer exist, which isn't true at all." For example, "many have Taíno ancestry, and when you go somewhere like Guyana, there is a significant Indigenous population."

Kempadoo points out that "the Creolization of the Caribbean throughout its horrible history is also something that gets put into the black-and-white lens here in North America." She felt that it was important to bring to the surface the combination of cultures that make up the Caribbean, "to acknowledge it and expand it," using the first names of the islands and having the characters switch languages and communication styles fluidly.

When asked how the characters' roles shifted as she wrote, Kempadoo admits that "it did end up becoming more human-based, because of the experiences that they had to overcome. It becomes more of a hero's journey, as their role to save the natural world from humans was what they were tasked with. It wasn't deliberate, it's just the way the story transitioned. But that search for ontological meaning – wondering [how to] find ways to regenerate, survive, be part of this world without killing it – is the biggest question that I wanted to ask."

A piece of speculative climate fiction, *Naniki* is a love letter to the Caribbean and its light-flecked waters. Despite its critical content, it is playful, refreshing, and luminous, inspiring an almost childlike curiosity and urge for exploration, while illustrating the importance of understanding our past to safeguard our future. 

**Val Rwigema** (they/he) is a Rwandan-Filipino writer and vocalist who grew up in the Alberta prairies, currently based in Montreal.

# fiction

## Music as Medicine

**Love and Rain**  
Carmela Circelli  
Guernica Editions  
\$20.00, paper, 272pp  
9781771838139

“Life is an adventure of our own design, intersected by fate and a series of lucky and unlucky accidents.” Wise words by rock poet Patti Smith serve as an epigraph for Carmela Circelli’s debut novel, a psychological, philosophical, and often poetic page-turner thrumming with musical mentions. References to Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Lhasa de Sela, Bob Dylan, Nick Drake, and others loop through *Love and Rain*, conjuring a dusky coffeehouse vibe as this intergenerational story stretches back and forth across time, cultures, and continents, inviting readers to suss out a family secret steeped in dark dissonance.

Told from three women’s viewpoints, the story is divided into four long chapters, the first and last narrated by Chiara, whose name (meaning “clear” in Italian) provides a crystalline clue to her true origins, ironically concealed by her well-meaning parents. Born in Montreal, Chiara has lived in Toronto since the early ’80s, when her English-speaking

family left Quebec to avoid “the political situation.” By 2013, the emotionally unavailable thirty-something-year-old is wrapping up her MA in Philosophy at York when she starts dating Daniel, who tests her usual coolness. “It was always easy before. I would just lose interest, feel no obligation or commitment,” she notes, having sabotaged all previous relationships before they got serious.

One can almost hear Circelli’s experience as a psychotherapist and philosophy professor humming like backing vocals, supporting Chiara’s character arc. Unyielding to the vulnerability required for emotional intimacy, Chiara resists when Daniel slips past her barriers, triggering a crisis that convinces her to consult a therapist. With the help of her psychoanalyst, she remembers how, even as a child, she never cried, and begins to investigate “the thing,” a buried familial trauma described as: “An inner storm tearing through my clear blue detachment, like a hurricane.”

In the second chapter, narrator Francesca guides readers back to the ’60s and ’70s, and from Montreal to Rome, recalling the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and the Red Brigades in Italy. Here, we perceive Quebec nationalism through the eyes of southern Italian immigrants, and tune in to the passions

of two sisters struggling to self-actualize within a dysfunctional family. In the lead-up to a tragic accident, one finds her *raison d’être* as a gifted singer-songwriter; in the aftermath, the other projects the personal outward, attempting to restore order through political rebellion.

Spanning the mid-’80s through the early 2000s, the third chapter features a tiny seaside house on the coast of Amalfi, threatened by rising waters. The external reality of climate-related storms (an underlying theme throughout the novel) echoes the characters’ emotional overwhelm and catharsis, as narrator Cassandra, a nurse and herbalist, revives her grandmother’s traditional witchy wisdom, treating locals with teas, potions, and tarot card readings.

*Love and Rain* tackles a broad range of topics, weaving political, historical, and even magical tones into the mix. While suspense is successfully built upon tracing “the thing” back to its source, occasionally there is a tendency to summarize events for the purpose of conveying values. When Francesca distills her experience with “revolutionary justice,” for example, her interior monologue is im-



bued with lessons learned. In the final chapter, one also senses a slight rush to resolve the trauma haunting Chiara’s unconscious in order to end, rather romantically, on a positive note.

Yet, overall, this is an engaging novel that purrs with the restorative powers of beauty and music. Thanks to a captivating circle of protagonists, whose lives are often linked through synchronicity, we’re reminded that beauty, as Francesca reasons, is “as necessary as air and water, and sometimes, the only antidote to the terrors and horrors of life.” Like a musical balm, *Love and Rain* is for anyone who’s ever loved deeply and not been loved back, but who dares to sing again to the beat of a healing heart. **mrb**

**Kimberly Bourgeois** is a Montreal-based writer/singer-songwriter. Visit her at [kimberlybourgeois.com](http://kimberlybourgeois.com) for news about her music and writing projects.

## Science Friction

**Sadie X**  
Clara Dupuis-Morency  
Translated by Aimee Wall  
Book\*hug Press  
\$23.00, paper, 240pp  
9781771668477

Clara Dupuis-Morency obtained her PhD in comparative literature from Université de Montréal in 2016, completing a study on the works of Proust; his style is a spectre here. Perspectives blur in *Sadie X* when the protagonist’s experience and the narrator’s commentary conjoin. Under layers of complexity are world observations, inner musings, and visions of music and marijuana. The reader faces the challenge of parsing through these narrative layers, and the book promises to present an as-challenging story.

*Sadie X* begins with the titular character working in a Marseille



biology lab with scientist Dr. François Réigner. She soon discovers a *Pandoravirus*, a mega-virus that defies how viruses are believed to live. She travels back to Montreal to identify it—coincidentally, her father, Dr. X senior, possesses the resources and contacts to achieve this. At an emotional cost, Sadie decides to extend her stay and confront the life she left behind. While she has transformed, her memories of

Montreal force her to reckon with the past. Studying the virus and its mystery becomes key to her meditations and journey through change.

While the narrator lingers on ideas of transformation, I felt a profound distance from the main character. Sadie loves drugs and music, she feels out of touch with her younger coworkers, and she sympathizes with the viruses she studies; she grapples with her queerness and her past, and on the surface, she appears to be a character with personality and depth. But I have little idea of why Sadie reacts the way she does, or her sense of agency within the story. Ultimately, she falls to the tsunami of the narrator’s thoughts and beliefs, creating a blurred reading experience that takes me out of the story, much to my disappointment.

During a family dinner near the end of the book, Sadie encounters her estranged sisters for the first time in years. Under the ailing condition of a family member, the dynamic has changed. Here, Sadie must face a decision to stay and be there for her family, or to leave. In the end, her choice displays her character and demonstrates how her actions are guided by what matters most to her;

I wanted scenes like this earlier and more frequently in the novel.

Yes, change is a constant in life. But having ways to process that change is also a part of that quintessential human experience. Making mistakes is what brings tension and drama to a narrative. And maybe I just don’t get Proust and can’t appreciate sentences that span an entire page. Maybe I would think differently if I had read the novel in the original French; much of the meaning and the experience of reading is tied to a language. But Sadie’s musings and inner turmoil did little to resonate with me because of the distance placed between her and the reader. Experimental in a good way, *Sadie X* falls short of the emotional complexity I expected, preferring instead to drown the reader in a philosophical stream of consciousness. **mrb**

**Alexander Taurozzi** is a writer currently residing in Tkaronto/Toronto, Canada, who writes fictional short stories, non-fiction pieces, and other laminated experiments. He enjoys hiking, creating films and writing scripts, and dreams of becoming one of them Greek papous drinking frappé on the islands all his days.

## What Makes a Life

Here Is Still Here

Sivan Slapak

Linda Leith Publishing

\$22.95, paper, 240pp

9781773901466

In Sivan Slapak's debut novel *Here Is Still Here*, we follow Isabel – born into a Montreal Jewish family in which the past casts overhanging shadows and the future holds the tenuous hope of fixing everything. Moving to Jerusalem first to

even when it felt like she was going nowhere.

Most men in Slapak's novel slip in and out of Isabel's life without sticking – boyfriends, one-night stands, neighbours, acquaintances, coworkers, rabbis, taxi drivers, and even friends. Only her father and the feral tomcat she finds keep their place in her peripheries, where she can love them at a distance without being hurt by their damage.

Isabel is grounded, instead, by the women around her. Her sister Loren is a steady presence, a link to the past, home, and family. Her friends in Jerusalem and Montreal – Miriam, Suri, Dikla, Amira – acknowledge Isabel's pain and provide a balm in the form of food, advice, support,

LEA GRAHOVAC



*“There are no ruins here  
... Just life happening.”*

study and then to live, Isabel navigates the contrasts and conflicts around her as she explores what identity, place, and belonging mean when *here* is less a place to settle than the ability to be present.

Away from Montreal and her family, Isabel attempts to build the life she thinks is expected of her. Her goal of finding a husband and starting a family proves elusive, each potential partner either unsatisfying or unable to commit, leaving Isabel empty and frantic. She watches with fading hope as exes marry and have children, friends settle into relationships, and people move on around her. “Maybe I was, in essence and everywhere, just too much to take,” she thinks.

Yet Isabel also fills her life with everything that is on offer. She joins a Yiddish library-nightclub, learns Arabic from a Palestinian coworker and Yiddish at a summer program in Lithuania, tries cardamom coffee, *knafeh*, tofu. A friend helps her take up running, and while attempting to shed her life as well as her weight, she encounters new people and parts of Jerusalem. “How the hell did I get here?” Isabel wonders as she signs up for her first marathon, unaware or simply in denial that her life has always been in movement,

and friendship. Even her mother appears to see Isabel better than she can see herself. “You say you want to meet someone, but I’m not sure you do,” she tells her. “You have so many interesting friends.”

More than anyone else, it is her grandmother who frames Isabel's life – her Bubbe, a Holocaust survivor who lost everyone and started over, in many ways stuck in the past, her grief a legacy but also permission for her family to keep living. “The woman was a wound,” Isabel says, and it is ultimately Isabel's choice whether the wound she inherited will fester or heal.

Slapak's prose is pensive and resonating, touching on truths about aging, family, friendship, and what makes a life, offering these to us through Isabel's lens of traumatic history, self-doubt, and hope. “There are no ruins here,” Isabel thinks as she sits, not needing to be anywhere else, in the afternoon sun. “Just life happening.”

*Here Is Still Here* is a journey that will move you profoundly, no matter where you are. **mb**

**Tina Wayland** is currently completing her Creative Writing MA at Concordia University. She is a freelance copywriter and has published fiction in such places as *carte blanche* and *OpenDoor Magazine*. Her work was recently longlisted for the CBC Nonfiction Prize and shortlisted in *Room Magazine*.

## The Purr-fect Crime

The Cat Looked Back

Louise Carson

Signature Editions

\$17.95, paper, 240pp

9781773241258

In Louise Carson's latest Maples Mystery novel, we find out Gerry Coneybear is honeymooning around Ireland, England, and Scotland with her new husband. Back in Lovering, her friend Prudence Crick (Prue for short) is housesitting for her. The Maples, the large old house overlooking the Ottawa River Gerry inherited from her Aunt Maggie, is also home to twenty cats, who all live more or less peacefully according to a well-organized feline social structure that paces Prue's days.

As a part-time housekeeper, she also works for other residents in the small town of Lovering. In spite of the legendary discretion of this very good housekeeper, her curiosity always wins out. What really happened to Mme Ménard, and where is her cat? Who started the fire that engulfed the two townhouses, and whose body was found in the ashes? More recently, though, Prue's also been thinking of making changes, big changes, to her own life.

Everything starts out with Mme Ménard having a stroke, followed by a house fire that engulfs two townhouses: the one in which she lived, and the home of Mrs. Lester and her son Walter. When Prudence asks Mrs. Lester about her hospitalized neighbour, she finds her answer quite abrasive. Did she have something to do with this? And then there's the Coco Poco, the new coffee shop, not far from where all this occurred – how does it tie into these sinister events?

Among the different narrators Carson uses to tell her story, the one I enjoyed the most is Mme Ménard's cat, Luc (or Fluke, as he was originally baptized). While clearly a victim of transpiring events, the feline, with his eye-level narration, gives us a point of view not afforded by any of the humans involved, one fraught with clues.

But what actually takes on the largest role in the novel is Prue's life. This backstory, which initially runs along the mystery, becomes more prominent as the novel progresses. Her short marriage, ending with her husband's murder, has haunted her for years, though the guilt and shame associated with his bank-robbing



activities are finally starting to dissipate. She starts to toy with the idea of reusing her maiden name, Catford. (Yes, the feline theme is never far away.)

The handsome antiques dealer, Bertie Smith, might have something to do with this wind of change. He comes to visit from Montreal with their friend Marion Stewart, an elderly woman whose martini-laden straight talk has a way of evening out the terrain in the small town's rumour mill. The two-week visit tests Prue's nerves and heartstrings. Prompted by feelings for this new friend, could she be ready for something else? The visit also proves very useful in figuring out the true value of a key element in the mystery.

Throughout her novel, Carson layers and weaves several narratives that seem unrelated to readers who, like me, have not read the five preceding books in the Maples Mystery series. In this one, Gerry makes her appearance in the form of emails only. From what I understand, it is usually she who takes centre stage. Could this indicate a shift in the series' direction?

It's always a challenge deciding what to reveal and what to keep under wraps when reviewing a mystery novel. I'll just add here that several layers will need uncovering before we figure out who is ultimately responsible for the fire and the body found in the ashes. But whereas I had expected the mystery and intrigue to take a front-row seat, I found that it was really Prue's bildungsroman-like self-revelations that took up much of Carson's novel. With a ghost story, involving her deceased mother and the help of a medium, let's just say that Prue may finally be able to move on to the next stage of her life. **mb**

**Sharon Morrissey** is hiding out here from her other professional life.

By Emily Mernin

Klara du Plessis and Khashayar “Kess” Mohammadi

## *Translingual Playground*

**G** is a new book by Klara du Plessis and Khashayar “Kess” Mohammadi that began in a fricative sound that bridges their two native languages – Afrikaans and Persian.

In both languages, “g” is a guttural sound, a throat-borne utterance that does not use the vocal cords. The closest equivalent in English is at the end of the word “loch.” The idea of a poem built around “g” seeded the ground for a poetic collaboration in which two poets met in their shared language – English – and together explored other languages and meaning. The result is a translingual playground that, though rooted in the poets’ mutual interest in linguistic theory and translingual poetics, is inviting, warm, and decidedly unserious. Structured in three parts – “نابز,” “G,” and “Speech” – *G* is not simply a co-authored book of poetry, but rather a record of an expansive artistic collaboration that lives both on and off the page.

Du Plessis is a South African-Canadian poet and scholar, whose previous work has often explored translingualism, collaboration, translation, and her multifaceted poetic worlds in both Canada and South Africa. Mohammadi is an Iranian-born poet and translator based in Toronto, whose work has been similarly focused on translingual poetics and translation. They connected shortly after the publication of du Plessis’ poetry collection *Ekke* (2018), which inspired and guided Mohammadi through the writing of their first book, *You, Me, Then Snow* (2021). During the pandemic, Mohammadi reached out about working on a project together, which quickly became the idea to co-author a poem in a shared document.

“It was meant to be one poem,” Mohammadi tells me. “We wrote four pages, and were like, ‘Ah, let’s keep going.’ We wrote twelve pages, and I was like, ‘Ah, let’s make this a chapbook.’ Then Klara said, ‘Let’s make this a book.’” Du Plessis agrees, saying simply, “The book is a testament to how good the energy was.” This dynamism comes through on every page. The reader is looped into not only an exciting poetic space, but a collaboration that feels wide open to anyone who may encounter it.

When I ask them about their decision – innate, intentional, or somewhere in between

– to make the book accessible and warm, du Plessis says: “There was a line at the beginning of the book, ‘the conspiracy of meaning,’ that our editor wanted the book’s title to be. It was such an off-putting suggestion to me that I went and changed the line to ‘the hospitality of meaning.’ In many ways, that made me understand the project of our book better. Even between the two of us as collaborators, it is a project of hospitality.”

That line appears in the very first poem, “زتورپ” (which translates to “Prothesis”), in which the written word is presented as an extension of the self, as an arm: “Flickers of text, dust, and ink, composite in unity, / relax into the hospitality of meaning.” At the fore of the book’s theoretical framework, in its first utterance, this is a welcome sign. The problem of language gets briefly reduced to the simplicity of written text – a marking on a page – and is reconsidered from there.

Throughout the entire first section, “نابز,” which translates to “Language,” you get a sense of two discrete voices working in concert, eking out a poetic meeting place, one they can share with anyone who might join them. “نابز” aims to reconstitute the surfaces and sounds of language by experimenting with translingual homonyms. It reads as a conversation in poems, full of gentle directives; the poem “Vestigium” ends:

the key is repeating words into primal  
abstraction  
don’t take yourself too seriously  
let words stare.

The second, titular section of the book, “G,” is flurried in comparison. Here, the voices of the poets merge, ricochet, and twist around each other. They pull the reader into a world where the differences between languages are in question, and where the distance between them is being closed. They write:

Against all odds,  
*share* is poem in Persian.

So I *share*  
and you *share*  
and we *share*  
in this sheer fantasy of names  
overlaid and veiled.

Experimenting with sound and images, from the guttural “g” to the duality of meaning in words like “god” (which means god in Afrikaans but self in Persian), they discover and rediscover the aim of their poetry: “This us / this me-and-you / poem resides in the we.”

The first two parts of the book were written in a shared document over the course of six weeks, and then submitted to their editor. Over a year later, after having received a few editorial changes, they began to think about a third component to the project. “It felt like

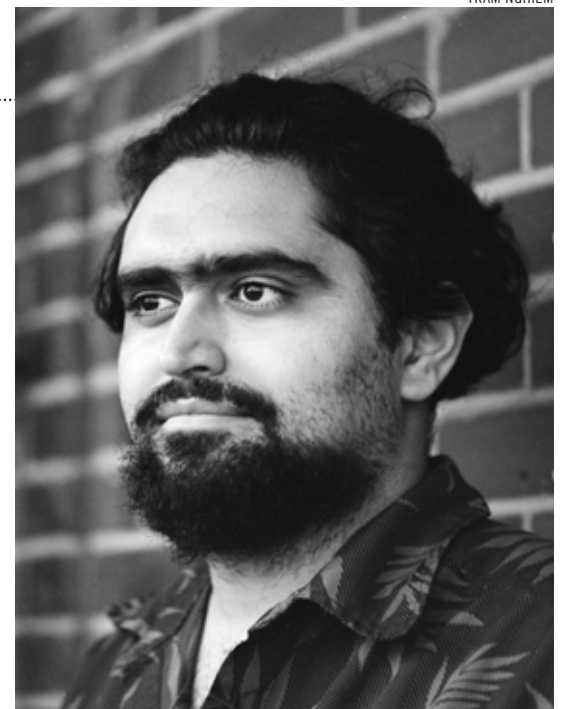
the book needed something,” says du Plessis. The third part of the book – “Speech” – stands apart. In a series of poems, or speeches, the reader is brought into an oral animation of the authors’ previous collaboration. Mohammadi tells me of its process and importance: “So we composed the entire third part by speaking. It’s the difference between the philosopher’s academic book and their lectures.” By expressing the nexus of ideas and impulses invented in the earlier, written part of their collaboration, they bring their new lexicon to life.

There is a puckish urgency to “Speech.” Where the formatting of the text is occasionally cheesy – asides bleeding into the margins, shifting between different sized typefaces to change volume, letters gleefully multiplying and dancing across the page – this section adds an important dimension and energy to the text. Du Plessis says of it: “The first two parts of the book are so keenly about language in a more conceptual and experimental way. Having the third section be about speaking that language embodies it. It’s been taken off the page. Where language was the subject [in the first two parts], it has more agency in the last part.”

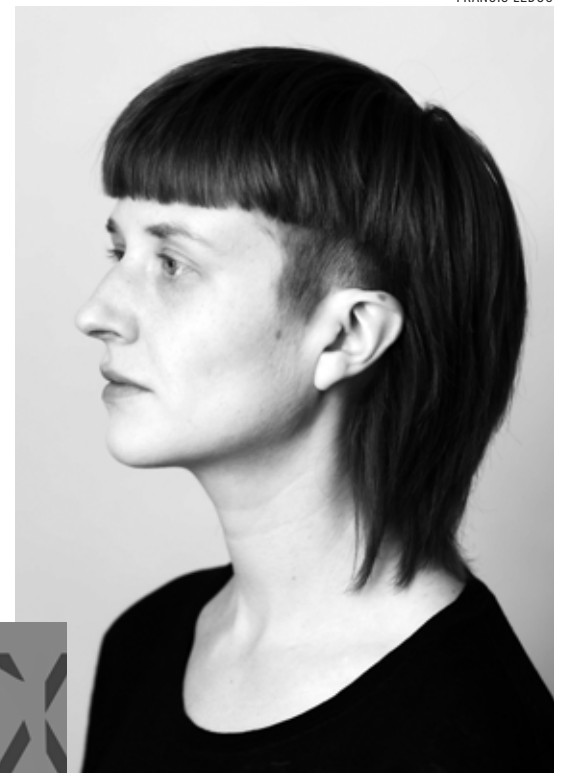
In “Speech,” we re-meet the distinct voices of the poets in conversation, but this time they are, as they speak, focused on the way language moves in the body. The physical reality of speech, “the lynx of the larynx sinking,” is the problem being considered and toyed with in this section. In a standout poem that begins “On meeting one of my favourite artists,” the speaker mines a simple interaction – an awkward greeting – and reveals the heaviness of the embodying language:

To be pinned down in the catastrophic  
garment of being.  
Burdened and bedded with voice.  
I hand my hands to the artist.  
Within the exoskeleton of speech,  
of giftgiving, of yes, here, please,  
I regress into a redness so potent  
that the tips of my life are reborn.

Across this section, their poetry is lifted out of abstraction. The certain speakers become coughing people with wet, spit-filled



FRANCIS LEDUC



**G**  
Klara du Plessis  
and Khashayar “Kess” Mohammadi  
Palimpsest Press  
\$21.95, paper, 80pp  
9781990293542

mouths. In turn, their written collaboration transforms into a vital record of the real, living thing.

Shortly after the publication of *G*, du Plessis published a collection of literary criticism, *Impossible collab*, in which she suggests that essay writing is necessarily collaborative and dialogical. Later this year, Mohammadi will be publishing *Daffod\*ls*, a collection of dream poems that were all composed orally during the process of falling asleep and transcribed upon waking. There are traces of *G* in both projects, and, I expect, in much of their work to come; it reads as a pivotal moment for both artists, a project that brings fresh air and new modes for thinking moving forward.

As a collection of poems, *G* is fun and deeply felt, especially for readers who have more than one language. It serves as a reminder that at its best literature is flexible, unexpected, and hospitable. Above all else, it is a selfless and freeing model for making literary art in tandem. **mrs**

Emily Mernin is a writer based in Montreal.



By Malcolm Fraser

## Padma Viswanathan

# *Embracing the Shadow*

Padma Viswanathan's *Like Every Form of Love* is hard to classify. The subtitle, *A Memoir of Friendship and True Crime*, comes close, but only scratches the surface of this complex and profound work.

A novelist, translator, and teacher, Viswanathan divides her time between Montreal and Fayetteville, Arkansas, where she and her husband, poet Geoffrey Brock, both work as professors at the University of Arkansas. "Like many Canadians, I never even said the word Arkansas before I ended up moving there," she laughs. "It doesn't have the kind of urban vibrancy that Montreal has, and I admit to having really missed that." But she describes the small college town with fondness, adding that "Montreal is also a city of villages... in that way, the places are not that dissimilar." On a phone call during one of her Montreal sojourns in late 2023, she tells me about some of the themes and challenges of her latest, utterly unique piece of writing.

*"After twenty-plus years of thinking about this story, I felt like I was following it more than generating it".*

As she recounts in the book, on an early-'90s trip to Vancouver Island in the fallout of a failed marriage, Viswanathan randomly meets Phillip, a local eccentric even by island-hippie standards, with whom she strikes up a deep and long-lasting friendship. White, gay, working-class, estranged from his family, and somewhat unselfconscious in his manner, Phillip is as different from Viswanathan as two people can be, and she notes throughout the book how many people are perplexed by their connection. Phillip's traumatic childhood becomes an increasingly primary thread in the narrative, as Viswanathan unpacks the stories of his parents: Harvey, his politically progressive but personally tyrannical father, and Del, his tough but loving stepmother with a mysterious criminal past.

*Like Every Form of Love* is a book with a lot of digressions and unpredictable twists, both narrative and thematic. It's difficult to summarize without spoilers, especially since each new revelation throws previous assumptions into doubt. Amid these threads, Viswanathan weaves

a series of Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales – a side quest that's as delightful as it is unexpected.

A fan of Andersen's tales since childhood, Viswanathan found her interest in the author rekindled when she read them to her own children. "And then this wonderful biography by Jackie Wullschlager [*Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller*, 2000] was published," she recalls. "And when I read that, I learned what an interesting figure he was as a person, as an artist. He was

queer, and his biography spreads throughout his amazing tales." Unlike his predecessors the Grimm brothers, who collected their famous fairy tales from regional oral stories, "Hans Christian Andersen

was one of the first modernists. His tales were originals, even if they drew on many sources and folklore around him," Viswanathan explains in full lit-prof mode.

"When I came to write *Like Every Form of Love*, I realized that three of my favourite stories sort of dovetailed perfectly with the ambivalences that I wanted to illustrate in this book," she continues. She describes "The Snow Queen" (from which Disney's *Frozen* franchise is very loosely adapted) as simply "the story of two friends on a journey," although her book explores its narrative and symbolism in much more detail. "The Ugly Duckling," meanwhile, is "a story of becoming, a story of learning to recognize who you are, and it's the story that [Andersen] considered his most autobiographical. And it seemed a wonderful allegory to demonstrate this painful, but also beautiful, process that my friend underwent in coming to own his own sexuality."

The third Andersen story is where the most compelling allegory comes through: "The Shadow" – which is about the internal schism that many writers feel, of

wanting to be part of life but needing to be outside it, feeling like we need to embrace our own darkness to be able to say something true – this seemed to be a way to communicate to the reader what I felt I went through emotionally trying to tell this story."

Indeed, Viswanathan struggles throughout with how she can tell Phillip's tale – both internally, in her writing process, and in terms of how the experience challenges her friendship with him. The conflict between her roles as friend and writer is present from early on – she writes in a diary entry after meeting Phillip that she must "kill the butterfly in order to preserve it," a surprisingly dark and violent metaphor that inescapably complicates her frequent, and genuine, expressions of love for her difficult and tormented friend.

The book also lays bare the unglamorous realities of a writer's life, from unproductive writers' retreats to dealing with discouraging feedback from professional and personal relations. This could have risked being a little too precious, were it not for Viswanathan's brutal honesty about her own failings; as she documents, *Like Every Form of Love* is the result of a third attempt to capture the story, after abandoning two earlier efforts. "I couldn't pretend that I had written it out of some easier process. I failed miserably at it, twice," she laughs. "And it was out of that that this book emerged, for whatever it is." About her choice to include the warts-and-all elements of her process, she says: "It didn't really feel like a decision. I wrote that third iteration in like ten weeks. After twenty-plus years of thinking about this story, I felt like I was following it more than generating it. Part of that was just trying to be as absolutely honest as I could about what this was and what it had been."

In this same spirit of honesty, Viswanathan is forthright with her mixed feelings about leaning into the "true crime" element of Phillip's stepmother



**Like Every Form of Love**  
**A Memoir of Friendship**  
**and True Crime**  
**Padma Viswanathan**  
**Random House Canada**  
**\$35.00, cloth, 296pp**  
**9781039006201**

Del and her murky past, an intriguing and multifaceted story that could almost have constituted its own book. "I confess to my snobbery about the genre," she admits. But the story "does contain true crime elements, so it would be kind of dishonest not to include that. I sort of didn't want to, but at the same time, a huge part of what intrigued me about the book was this true crime story at the heart of it," she says. "I think if I have a problem with true crime, it's probably with the way it pretends that questions – say, about motivation, about psychology – can be answered. But often, those real meanings might elude us or might shift over time."

This ambiguity is at the heart of *Like Every Form of Love*, a book both intimate and universal in its exploration of writing, friendship, and the human desire for closure that remains stubbornly out of reach. "It used to be that when people asked me why I write, I said that it was because I was attracted to unanswerable questions," Viswanathan says. "But writing non-fiction really made me confront that, because people want their questions answered. I wanted my questions answered. But even when they were, ambiguity still remained. And I had to make my peace with that – with what was quote-unquote true, with what I believed, with what couldn't be known."

Viswanathan may not have all the answers, but she poses the questions beautifully in this achingly honest book that stimulates the heart and mind at all levels. **mrb**

**Malcolm Fraser** is a writer, musical entertainer, occasional filmmaker, host of the *What Is This Music?!* podcast, and editor of the *mRb*.

# graphic

## Eat Your Heart Out

**Food School**  
**Jade Armstrong**  
**Conundrum Press**  
**\$15.00, paper, 80pp**  
**9781772620962**

For readers who haven't had much exposure to people struggling with eating disorders, or ED, *Food School* may feel like just that – a quick eighty-page education in the mechanics of ED psychology. This short, raw, slice-of-life story follows Olive, a young person beginning a recovery program to deal with these issues. Author and illustrator Jade Armstrong pivots between trauma jokes, confession, and explaining how disordered eating and exercise play out emotionally, adding a bit of raunchy, self-deprecating humour and visual gags to lighten the didactic load.

The *Food School* project has had an unusual genesis, starting out as a PDF comic created for the 2022 Short-Box Comics Fair, an online festival. The local Hello Boyfriend comics collective, of which Armstrong is a member, published a rejigged version last year, and now it's been developed into a compact, perfect-bound edition from Conundrum. Armstrong is no stranger to the North American manga market, having also published the polished, full-colour YA



title *Scout is Not a Band Kid* (2022) with Penguin Random House. *Food School*, though, is framed as *josei*, a genre of manga for adult women that tackles complex topics using an expressive comic style.

Maybe a little surprisingly, manga is an excellent fit for *Food School's* subject matter. The format places the simultaneous silliness and seriousness of characters' internal muddles into stark relief, frame by frame. Armstrong deftly reveals how our own compulsions can twist us into patterns of thinking that are at once terribly grave and utterly absurd, drawing heavily on the comic technique

of graphically externalizing characters' emotional states and preoccupations.

Much of what happens in Olive's story does so in hyperbolic reactions and explosive outbursts of feelings so big they swirl in the air around characters' heads – halos of cupcake and candy! Freakouts that break out of frame! Rage that sends facial features right off a character's head! Even outside the mind, the world of *Food School* is cacophonous. Armstrong's shaggy linework names sounds to make the work more multidimensional and sensory – the "skree" of a character's chair being pulled out, a transcribed inhale, the clatter of a tray being set down – and to mirror the chaotic noise of obsession. This style broadcasts the turbulent mental landscape of someone struggling with ED, highlighting how food-related preoccupations can colour their perception of the world around them.

While much of the story unrolls inside its protagonist's mind, Armstrong also highlights the interpersonal nature of recovery. Olive's roommate, for example, serves as a foil to show what a healthy relationship with food can look like as she explains how eating habits shape social ties – shared food can stitch a person into their community, while the interiority of obsession keeps them apart.

But Olive's recovery from ED isn't just a matter of education: It's a war. A counselling session with their therapist is framed like a cartoon boss fight. Olive is forced to literally confront reality, again bending the conventions of manga for



insight into the struggle to get well.

Over the course of the work, we watch Olive change alongside their relationships with food and people. After using food to suppress or supplant emotions, they reconnect with their own interiority, and Armstrong's light touch works well to convey Olive's mixed joy at learning how to feel things again, even when they hurt.

Manga is very much a genre of the imagination, where anxieties and fears get pulled into the real world as myths or monsters or superpowers. For folks who are already comics fans, *Food School* is a winner, with storytelling that's deftly timed in pared-back halftone. And as a tool for people who struggle with or want to learn more about ED, *Food School* offers a no-shame, judgment-free primer on the challenges of learning how to eat and feel better. **msb**

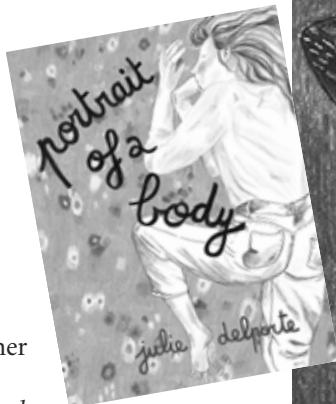
**Emily Raine** is a writer, editor, creative strategist, and lapsed academic.

## Zones of Ambiguity

**Portrait of a Body**  
**By Julie Delporte**  
**Translated by Helge Dascher**  
**and Karen Houle**  
**Drawn & Quarterly**  
**\$39.95, paper, 268pp**  
**9781770466807**

Julie Delporte and I don't know each other well, but we've interacted a few times in and around zine and comic events in Montreal. Delporte's skillful and sensitive use of coloured pencils, coupled with her prolificacy, has always impressed me. By my count, *Portrait of a Body* is her thirteenth book, not including zines. I have read her work in both English and French over the years – often delightfully encountering her books in our public library system. Her drawings often transport me into a dreamlike trance where time is suspended, and I find myself wondering about the corners of under-examined dreams and memories.

Delporte employs a distinct style of confessional, sparse storytelling with accompanying observational



drawings that seem like they could have been printed directly from her diary – except that unlike most people's diary drawings, all of hers are heartbreakingly beautiful, with skilled use of colour and blending. *Portrait of a Body* is created in the same style and layout as

has become Delporte's signature – curiously handwritten in pencil, accompanied by images drawn in coloured pencil and India ink.

While Delporte doesn't shy away from depression and sorrow, *Portrait of a Body* is less steeped in sadness and solitude than her previous work. In this book, Delporte's "Dear Diary" style of storytelling is more focused on trauma, healing, and layers of social and self-rejection. She explores questions of a hesitant, angry, and retreating sex drive, late-to-lesbian identities, and the layered discomforts of navigating perceptions of others on one's own desires and what those perceptions could possibly mean and aid in uncovering.

It is in the drawings of this book where Delporte's work shines and delivers the reader to new experiences of time and reflection. She uses coloured pencils in a way I can only describe as painting with them. I don't mean she uses those watercolour pencils that you draw with

and then paint over with water. What I mean is: Delporte's ability to sensitively layer colour, and her range of light mark-making, evoke a softness in texture and

continued on page 25

# ONE FOR THE MEMORY BOOKS



★ “Explores memory from numerous angles and adapts its tone accordingly, from humorous to respectful and solemn when needed. The real-life examples are fascinating, and readers will come away with in-depth knowledge on the mind...  
A must-have title.”

—School Library Journal, starred review



Orca Think introduces us to the issues making headlines in the world today. It encourages us to question, connect and take action for a better future. Now that's SMART THINKING!

## PETER McCAMBRIDGE



2023 GGBooks  
winner for Translation



CONGRATULATIONS!

QC FICTION An imprint of Baraka Books

Canada Council for the Arts / Conseil des arts du Canada



## SHAKESPEARE IN THE SPRING

JOIN OUR ANNUAL EXCURSION INTO THE WORLD OF SHAKESPEARE!

Starting April 16, 2024  
6 weeks, Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 PM

Explore two Shakespeare plays from the 2024 Stratford Festival: **Romeo and Juliet** and **Twelfth Night**.

Enjoy thought-provoking discussions on close readings, film clips from previous productions, and interpretations by critics!

ONLINE OR IN PERSON AT 3405 ATWATER.

REGISTER TODAY!

[www.thomasmore.qc.ca](http://www.thomasmore.qc.ca)

Atwater 3405 Ave.  
Montreal QC  
514 935-9585



Québec

## TEXT/CONTEXT

### Writings by Canadian Artists

Artists' writings are compelling primary sources that illuminate artistic practice. Text/Context publishes collections of essays, statements, articles, lectures, and other written interventions by Canadian artists, collating published and unpublished texts that are otherwise scattered, hard to find, or not easily accessible to readers. In bringing together artists' written works, the series explores the interrelations of what and how artists write, as well as where they publish, to the rest of their practice. Books in the series illuminate an artist's relationship not only to her/his/their own work, but to their peers and to broader social, economic, cultural, and political questions.

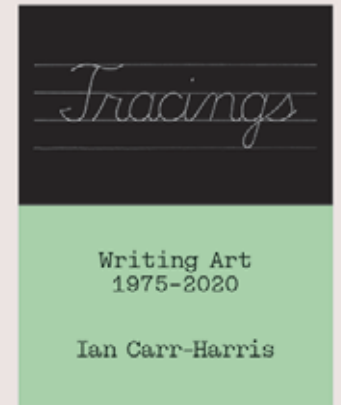
CONCORDIA  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS



**Subject to Change:**  
Writings and Interviews  
Liz Magor  
\$59.95 | 2022



**Some Magnetic Force:**  
Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald  
Writings  
Michael Parke-Taylor, ed.  
\$64.95 | 2023



**Tracings: Writing Art,**  
1975-2020  
Ian Carr-Harris  
\$69.95 | Spring 2024

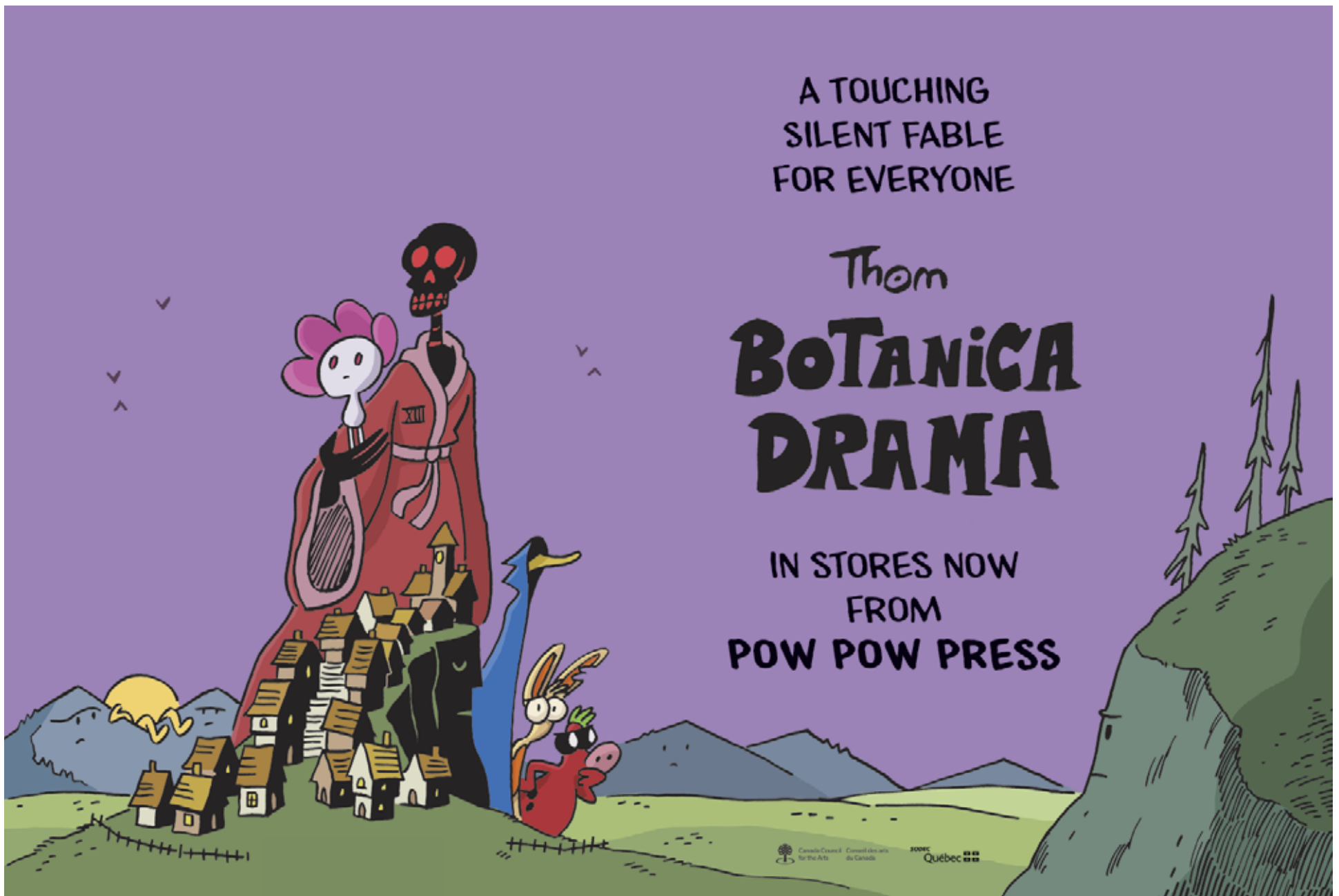


**More Voice-Over:**  
Colin Campbell Writings  
Jon Davies, ed.  
\$69.95 | 2021



**Everything is Relevant:**  
Writings on Art and Life,  
1991-2018  
Ken Lum  
\$64.95 | 2020

concordia.ca/press  
press@concordia.ca  
@concordiapress



## More Than Words

**Between Gentlemen**  
 Rupert Bottenberg  
 Conundrum Press  
 \$10.00, paper, 64pp  
 9781772620900

**Botanica Drama**  
 Thom  
 Pow Pow Press  
 \$29.95, paper, 244pp  
 9782925114314



PRUNE PAYCHA

“**B**etween Gentlemen,” the titular story in Conundrum Press’s reissue of four short comics by Rupert Bottenberg, contains the collection’s entire use of written language. The gentlemen are two boys identical but for their shirt collars and shorts; between them is a friendly contest, a back-and-forth of experimentation. Let’s call one boy Magic, and the other Science. Science first displays “The Cryptovecto-jector!,” a torch with a beam of black light and esoteric design. Magic responds with an enchanted glove that transforms armpit sounds “into sweet music,” and he is surrounded by musical notes. By the end of the contest, they arrive at the same invention, the same trick: flight. In the last panel, we watch from above as the two boys fly over park and houses in silence.

The story is a sweet one, and illustrated by Bottenberg in soft, choppy black-and-white, but it is clear that written language is something for him to step outside of. Even within “Between Gentlemen,” Magic begins to speak in arcane lettering, for that’s where the magic is. In the other three short stories, Bottenberg talks instead through his medium – ink, white space, the aesthetic play and pleasure of dream language, a well-laid punchline. In his story of Babylon, history is an endless queue of flat hieroglyphic figures, each a practitioner of a different language. The letters crowd in noisy speech bubbles above their heads as the queue climbs the Babylonian tower, and the figure at the top is pushed to their death. We are left with a skull and crossbones, an exclamation, and the toppled 8 of infinity. Everything in *Between Gentlemen* is at the service of Bottenberg’s ability to suggest a larger world within the brevity of the comic form. It’s a deceptively simple collection of stories, one that seems to change shape after each new read.

Though given much more space than *Between Gentlemen* to tell its story, it remains impressive how Thom’s *Botanica Drama* is able to evoke a complete and casual mythos. Similar to Bottenberg, the only text present in the narrative is onomatopoeia – the first being the “BANG!” to signal the beginning of time and space and story. Thom walks us beautifully in monochrome through a Miltonic formation of heaven and earth, until the conditions are right for life to appear. The first of this life are ghostly bodies, Slenderman-like in shape and presence, that can only live in the dark.

Up to this point we are moving through a desolate and chiaroscuro story, but with the sun’s first rising over the mountains, *Botanica Drama* shifts into its main, cutesy style. Because like any cartoon sun, this one has two eyes and a pleasant smile. Fish and mammals and birds begin to evolve in its image, doe-eyed and anthropomorphic. A medieval town is built by the animals,



where they drink coffee, watch TV, and carry suitcases to work.

Once in full swing, the novel centres on XIII, or Death, a friendly black skeleton who appeared alongside the first complex life forms, and Philomène, a tiny flower. The two run a café in town and ride from home to work on a moped, the suggestion being that the town runs like clockwork forever, each animal with its own cute job and family. The eventual drama comes not from the town, then, but the sun itself, who refuses to wake one morning from a cosmic hangover. Meaning no daytime, no bright-eyed creatures making pastries, and the return of those gaunt and pale night monsters.

Thom’s incorporation of both light, *Looney Tunes* comedy and the horrors of a permanent night means the world never becomes maudlin. While in one panel a pig in a military helmet uses a detonator almost as big as he is, another sees the ghostly night figures, opening their heads like black holes to feed on stray rabbits. Reminiscent of the video game *Spiritfarer*, another tale of gentle death from Montreal, *Botanica Drama* is at core a love story, charmingly told. **mb**

Connor Harrison’s writing has appeared in *Evergreen Review*, *LA Review of Books*, *EVENT*, and *Cult MTL*, among others. He currently lives in the UK.

## Learning to Listen



**So Long Sad Love**  
 Mirion Malle  
 Translated by Aleshia Jensen  
 Drawn & Quarterly  
 \$32.95, paper, 212pp  
 9781770466975

**M**irion Malle’s *So Long Sad Love* starts off with the dream of many contemporary city-dwellers – fleeing towards nature. The story follows Cléo, a comic artist who, after moving to Montreal from Paris with her boyfriend, Charles, struggles to carve out a place for herself in an unfamiliar city. At the same time, she is trying to build an artistic practice, working to create a new project that she is passionate about.

Malle’s art style mirrors the illustrative practice of the main character, carefully blurring the line between her creative projects and the story’s narrative. After meeting Farah, a mutual friend and fellow artist, Cléo unearths truths about Charles’ past, causing her to completely reimagine her world. As a result, Cléo

must trust in herself and her experience, traversing the impact these discoveries have on her own life.

At its core, *So Long Sad Love* gives Cléo the space and patience to feel her way through the betrayal of finding out that someone you trusted could be just another cautionary tale – another example of toxic male behaviour, deemed harmless by complicit friends and insti-



tutions while actively harming others. The book resonates with the familiar feeling of wanting to accept easy answers, while also having to learn to listen to yourself and the voices of

those who have been historically shamed and silenced.

Cléo must wrangle with what she knows and what she is learning about life’s uncomfortable realities. Malle treats these situations with such care, letting Cléo tenderly unravel her life at her own pace, through a deeply rooted understanding of how common

continued on page 25

APRIL 25 TO 28, 2024

# BLUE METROPOLIS

## INTERNATIONAL LITERARY FESTIVAL

METROPOLIS  
**BLEU**  
BLUE MET  
FESTIVAL

### DREAMS & UTOPIAS

More than 120 events, 150 guests, 10 languages



Sky Gilbert

Léonora Miano

Jean Sioui

Margo Glantz

Robert MacFarlane

[BLUEMETROPOLIS.ORG/2024FESTIVAL](http://BLUEMETROPOLIS.ORG/2024FESTIVAL)



THE PODCASTS

BLUEMETROPOLIS.ORG/BOLDCREATIVE



METROPOLIS  
**BLEU**  
BLUE MET  
FESTIVAL

# BOLD & *Creative*

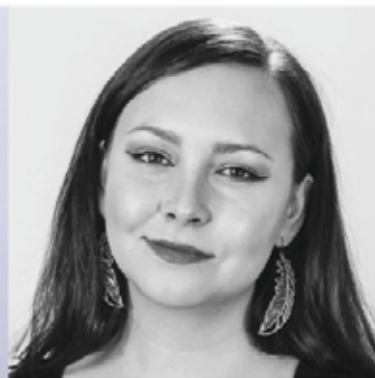
SIX RICH, WIDE-RANGING, REFRESHING CONVERSATIONS  
**ABOUT THE WRITING LIFE**



Daniel Allen Cox



Tawhida Tanya Evanson



Liz Howard



Curtis McRae



Linda Morra



Dimitri Nasrallah



**Rachel McCrum**

Host & Curator of the project

In partnership with

*Secrétariat aux relations  
avec les Québécois  
d'expression anglaise*

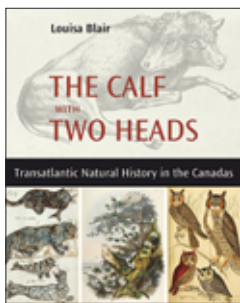
Québec

# non-fiction

## Cabinet of Curiosities

**The Calf with Two Heads**  
Transatlantic Natural History  
in the Canadas

Louisa Blair  
Baraka Books  
\$29.95, paper, 136pp  
9781771863308



Who knew that a book about the taxonomy of mollusc penises, cow throats, intestinal worms, and animal deformities could be so compelling?

Louisa Blair's *The Calf with Two Heads* is a whimsical and entertaining collection of vignettes about Canada's first naturalists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From Indigenous traditions of mapmaking and medicine, to the French Jesuits' early contributions to botany, and the eventual rigour of organized science in the age of Darwin, Blair charts the activities of those who had a thirst to categorize and understand the natural world in what would eventually become Canada.

Drawing from a wealth of documents (the bibliography is impressive), Blair has

a knack for finding little-known historical episodes and making them interesting.

She keeps things light and accessible and has an affinity for the gritty, muddy side of the early naturalists and their work.

The stories are many and varied. Blair touches on everything from how predicting a lunar eclipse saved Christopher Columbus' life in Jamaica, to James Cook's stint in Quebec during the Seven Years' War, to how fashion trends in Paris drove

a demand for hummingbirds, which women pinned to their hats in the 1880s. She describes the world of nature illustrators and painters (often women), the arctic expeditions of Joseph-Elzéar Bernier and Newfoundland's Robert Bartlett, the trials of Darwin's lesser-known rival and peer Alfred Russel Wallace, and Quebec's early, stubborn opposition to the theory of evolution (including from John William Dawson, McGill's principal from 1855 to 1893).

Blair has a soft spot for underdogs and self-starters, such as Alfred Russel Wallace – who, she writes, “was not independently wealthy like Darwin.” Wallace's string of terrible luck, including a ship fire that

cost him all his specimens and saw him drift on a lifeboat for ten days, partly explains why he is much less famous today than Darwin. Nonetheless, he never lost his passion for observing the natural world, and trying to understand why species of plants and animals changed over time and didn't remain static.

Wallace was an early progressive and environmentalist. “To pollute a spring or a river, to exterminate a bird or a beast should be treated as moral offenses,” he wrote in 1910. “Never before has there been such widespread ravage of the earth's surface by destruction of native vegetation ... and by pouring into our streams and rivers the refuse of manufactories and of cities.”

Sympathy for mavericks and do-it-yourself types runs through the book. Blair tells the story of the Lady Botanists of Quebec City in the 1820s, including Countess Dalhousie, who spent much of their time searching for and categorizing new species of plants, becoming a crucial source of local knowledge for the director of Kew Gardens in London.

As the anecdotes unfold, *The Calf with Two Heads* becomes not just about natural history, but Canadian history in general – about how we organized ourselves first as a colony and then as a young nation, and how we built up our cherished institutions, including museums, universities, and libraries.

A fascinating and nuanced portrait of nineteenth-century Canada emerges. It's



become commonplace, in our time, to think that the past was all doom and gloom, oppression, injustice, and suffering. But regular men and women, Indigenous, French, and English alike, often shared common objectives, living and working together respectfully. And when you think about it, life would necessarily have required such collaboration in a land as massive and unforgiving as Canada.

A slim volume that will leave lovers of the esoteric wanting more, *The Calf with Two Heads* is a refreshing tonic, a cabinet of curiosities that puts our society, history, and relationship with the natural world into perspective. **mb**

**Alexander Hackett** is a writer and translator from Knowlton, Quebec. He lives in Montreal.

## Rising Star

PARK PHOTO STUDIO BY MATT KIM

**Cosmic Wonder**  
Our Place in the Epic Story of the Universe  
Nathan Hellner-Mestelman  
Linda Leith Publishing  
\$24.95, paper, 216pp  
9781773901596

Growing up in rural Nova Scotia, I was spoiled with unobstructed views of the stars. On one particularly starry night, a question sprang to mind: what contains the universe? Such questions – including mine in different terms – drive science writer Nathan Hellner-Mestelman's captivating exploration of the cosmos as we know it in his debut non-fiction book, *Cosmic Wonder: Our Place in the Epic Story of the Universe*.

From the title, you might reasonably believe that *Cosmic Wonder* will unmask at least some of the mysteries of the universe, but Hellner-Mestelman quickly disavows you of that assumption. “This book is not supposed to make sense—not because the author is a bad writer, but simply because the universe is too awesomely vast to be understood,” he writes in the book's forwarding disclaimer.

A bad writer Hellner-Mestelman is not, though he is remarkably young (sixteen years of age at the time of publication). And while the universe may defy understanding, he makes a good case for why it should inspire awe – that feeling of wonder and fear.

*Cosmic Wonder* is organized according to core themes: the vast universe; the origin story of the universe and life on Earth; the cosmic future; the potential for life beyond



Earth; most importantly, humanity's place in this grand and improbable story.

In finer terms *Cosmic Wonder* delivers a primer on the Milky Way galaxy, lays out theories on the expansiveness of the universe, unpacks what we know about matter and the elusive dark matter, explains the origins and evolution of the basic units of life – RNA and DNA – and delves into rogue planets and the potential for extraterrestrial life. And more.

As for those stars I love to gaze at, Hellerman-Mestelman explains, “Most of the stars in our night sky are hundreds, or sometimes thousands of light-years away, and since it takes centuries or even millennia for light to cross that distance, it creates a trippy optical illusion: we're viewing the night sky in the distant past.”

Imbued with dry wit, and a soupçon of existential dread, *Cosmic Wonder* manages to be both sobering and reverential as it explores these rich areas of scientific in-

quiry. Hellner-Mestelman's illustrations bring to life some of the trickier concepts, such as cosmic inflation – the biggest bang in cosmic history (bigger than the one you're thinking of) – and cosmic singularity, one of an infinite number of scenarios that might bring about the end of our universe.

Hellner-Mestelman's exposition on the definition of life is particularly intriguing. “We keep assuming that water and carbon are the two key ingredients for life. But what if they're not?” He points to the discovery by the Cassini spacecraft's RADAR team in 2010 that demonstrated some forms of life could theoretically thrive on cold methane and ethane.

Richly researched, perhaps *Cosmic Wonder* could have named-dropped more of the people leading these groundbreaking studies, but an extensive bibliography will lead curious readers in the right directions.

*Cosmic Wonder* is a travel guide for explorers with no known destination. Put another way, this is a book of questions. While it would be wrong to suggest Hellner-Mestelman entirely deprives the reader of the satisfaction of answers, he is unpretentious as he charts the current knowledge about the universe's explosive origins and the unlikely evolution of human life on Earth.

About one thing Hellner-Mestelman is certain: human conflict and destruction are colossal wastes. “It's unfortunate that we are so obsessed with arming our planet against itself, rather than looking outward toward the universe and the future of the human race.”

Another certainty: this is one up-and-coming writer to watch. **mb**

**Meaghan Thurston** is a Montreal-based arts and science writer, co-editor of the anthology *With the World to Choose From: Seven Decades of the Beatty Lecture at McGill University*, and mother to two budding readers.





BASED ON THE GILLER® PRIZE-WINNING BOOK

A SEGAL CENTRE FOR PERFORMING ARTS PRODUCTION OF



# FIFTEEN DOGS

ADAPTED AND DIRECTED FOR THE STAGE BY MARIE FARSI  
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY ANDRÉ ALEXIS

COMMISSIONED AND ORIGINALLY PRODUCED BY CROW'S THEATRE, TORONTO  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, CHRIS ABRAHAM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SHERRIE JOHNSON



Mar 31  
- Apr 21  
**2024**

**BUY TICKETS & SUBSCRIBE NOW!**

514-739-7944 / [segalcentre.org](http://segalcentre.org)

\*VALID ONLINE AND BY PHONE. APPLICABLE ON THE PLAY FIFTEEN DOGS ONLY.

## Just Good Reads...



*One Long Line of Marvel:  
200 Years of Montreal's  
St. Patrick's Parade*  
Alan Hustak

Intriguing stories about a community event that reflects the spirit of the Irish diaspora and unites the city's diverse population.

\$22.95



*Talking to Strangers*  
Rhea Tregebov

"Poems of penetrating honesty."  
—Anne Michaels

\$19.95



*The War You Don't Hate*  
Blaise Ndala  
Translated by Dimitri Nasrallah

The paths of a Canadian documentary filmmaker and two former rebel soldiers from the Congo collide in this searing revenge tale about those who profit from the misery of others.

Winner, 2019 Combat des livres  
Winner, 2018 Prix Émergence

\$22.95, April 15



*National Animal*  
Derek Webster

"The bifold title of Derek Webster's ambitious new collection embodies the primary forces at work in these poems, namely the body politic, entangled in war and estrangement."

—Diane Seuss,  
Pulitzer Prize for Poetry 2022

\$19.95



Available in bookstores and online  
[vehiculepress.com](http://vehiculepress.com)

f X @vehiculepress



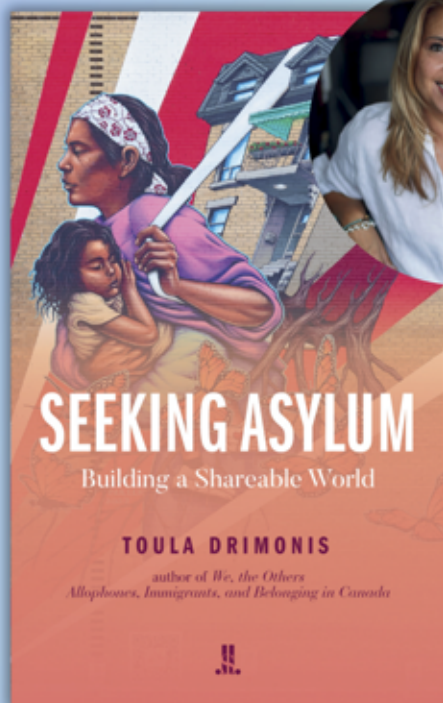
**The Word Bookstore**

QUALITY SECONDHAND BOOKS SINCE 1975

**VISIT US THIS SPRING!**

[THEWORDBOOKSTORE.CA](http://THEWORDBOOKSTORE.CA)

514-845-5640 - 469 MILTON STREET



**Seeking Asylum: Building a Shareable World,**  
 an essay by  
**Toula Drimonis**  
 ISBN 9781773901527  
 \$21.95 | March



**Here Is Still Here,**  
 Stories by  
**Sivan Slapak**  
 ISBN 9781773901466  
 \$22.95 | March



**Cosmic Wonder: Our Place in the Epic Story of the Universe,**  
 YA essay by  
**Nathan Hellner-Mestelman**  
 ISBN 9781773901596  
 \$24.95 | May

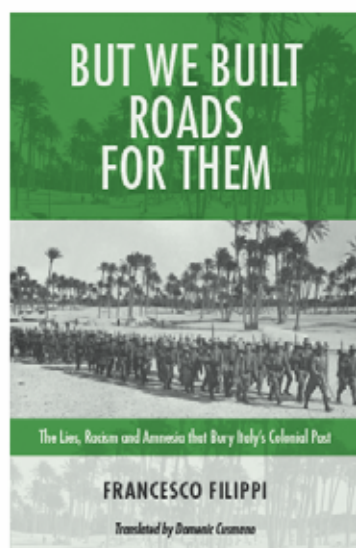
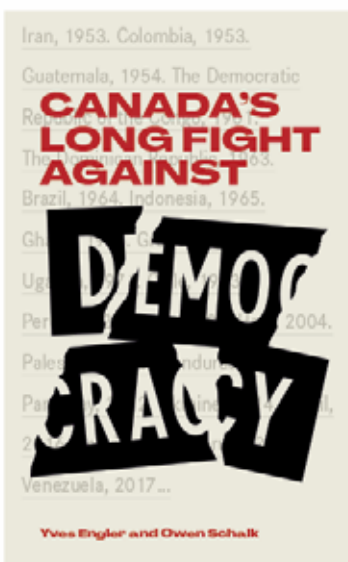
**LINDA LEITH PUBLISHING**

**BARAKA BOOKS • 15TH ANNIVERSARY • SPRING 2024**

**CANADA'S LONG FIGHT AGAINST DEMOCRACY**

Yves Engler & Owen Schalk

A sweeping overview of Canadian-backed coups since 1950.



**BUT WE BUILT ROADS FOR THEM**  
 The Lies, Racism and Amnesia that Bury Italy's Colonial Past

Francesco Filippi  
 Translated by Domenic Cusmano

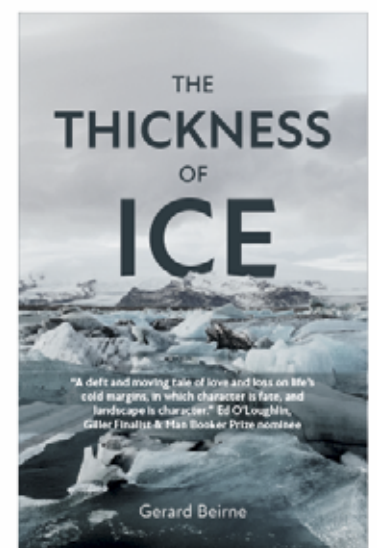
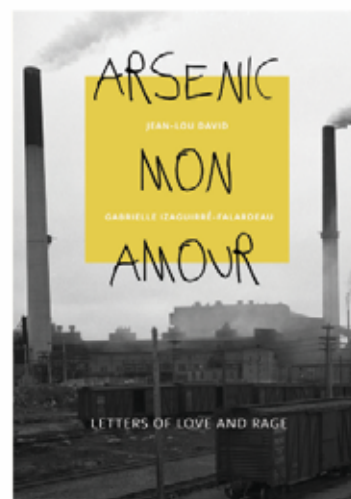
Foreword by Publisher Robin Philpot

**ARSENIC MON AMOUR**

Letters of Love and Rage

Jean-Lou David & Gabrielle Izaguirré-Falardeau

"Poetic, almost violently emotional, romantic, and heartbreaking." Pascal Chevrette, *L'action nationale*



**THE THICKNESS OF ICE**

Gerard Beirne

"A masterpiece in cadence, rhythm, metaphor, symbolism."  
 Leila Marshy, author of *Philistine*

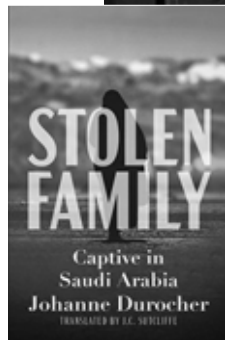


Baraka Books

www.barakabooks.com

## A Mother's Mission

**Stolen Family**  
**Captive in Saudi Arabia**  
**Johanne Durocher**  
 with Julie Roy  
 Translated by JC Sutcliffe  
 Dundurn Press  
 \$23.00, paper, 248pp  
 9781459750425



In the preface to *Stolen Family*, the author, Johanne Durocher, addresses the subject of her memoir directly: “Just as you have often asked me to, I have written this book to tell your story.” The knowledge that this project was not Durocher’s idea prepares the reader for the product. In narrative and literary terms, it falls short in many ways, but it may serve the purpose it was meant to.

When Durocher’s daughter, Nathalie Morin, was seventeen, she fell in love with a Saudi man she met in Montreal, became pregnant, and, after his deportation, decided to join him in Saudi Arabia, where he became abusive. Ensnared in Saudi laws that prevented her from bringing her (eventually four) children back to Canada, she has remained with her partner, Saeed, in Saudi Arabia ever since. Durocher wants the Canadian government to intervene so that Nathalie and her children can return home.

Nathalie is a fascinating person. She undermines her own best interests repeatedly: she describes horrific abuse at Saeed’s hand, but also seems inexorably drawn to preserve their relationship; she gives contradictory stories to her mother, to various Saudi and Canadian government bodies, and to the media; she lashes out at her mother for not doing enough to help her, while Durocher devotes most of her hours and a great deal of money to petitioning political officials to intervene. In a literary work, such a character would need profound and sensitive development on the page, but in this case, Nathalie and her motivations remain opaque and confusing.

The details of this extremely complex political situation are also difficult to follow. Making narrative sense of them really requires the hand of an investigative journalist with access to experts in Saudi and Canadian law, among other things. Durocher is not the best writer for this job, but one cannot fault her desire to bring as much visibility as possible to her daughter’s story.

Durocher’s pain, as she tries to

rescue Nathalie from both her circumstances and herself, is apparent and touching. She periodically runs out of financial and emotional resources for this struggle, and is enraged by Saeed’s treatment of her daughter, the enigmatic behaviour of Saudi officials, and the whimsical interest shown by Canadian media. She is also clearly frustrated by the various ways Nathalie undermines her own case. For example, when a prominent Saudi activist tries to help, Nathalie, apparently in order to protect herself, tells the media that the activist is collaborating with Durocher to kidnap her. This lie places the activist (who has already been arrested for getting involved) at serious risk of imprisonment. Durocher never wavers in her desire to protect Nathalie and her children, but she acknowledges that Nathalie herself sometimes makes everything much harder.

The bulk of Durocher’s ire is reserved for the Canadian government, which she feels has failed to meet its responsibilities. She believes that this failure is due at least in part to discrimination based on Nathalie’s gender, her Quebec citizenship, and especially her intellectual capacities: “I feel as though the Canadian government is prepared to speak out about the fate of people who are members of certain intellectual elite, but not that of a young woman like Nathalie, who didn’t finish school, speaks with a stutter, and got herself into this mess.”

This interesting and troubling situation cries out for a deeper analysis. In the meantime, in fulfilling her daughter’s wish that she tell her story through a book, Durocher has provided a starting point from which another writer might wish to take up this cause. **mb**

**Dana Bath** teaches English language and literature at Vanier College in Montreal.

## Mining the Depths

MARIE-RAPHAËLLE LEBLOND



**Arsenic mon amour**  
**Letters of Love and Rage**  
**Jean-Lou David**  
 & **Gabrielle Izaguirré-Falardeau**  
 Translated by Mary O’Connor  
 Baraka Books  
 \$9.95, paper, 56pp  
 9781771863384

To bury into the earth and strip it of minerals is to cut holes and tunnels out of its body. What happens beneath the surface has a visible exterior effect: the leaching of the skin, the depressing pimples of industrialism. This is the image that young Québécois writers Jean-Lou David and Gabrielle Izaguirré-Falardeau paint of the mining region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Quebec, in their “letters of love and rage,” collected in *Arsenic mon amour* and translated by Mary O’Connor. Both continuously drawn to this region, the authors weave a tapestry of longing and rejection, nostalgia and despair.

The letters are most powerful in moments of focused description. The visual landscape of and around the twin cities of Rouyn-Noranda – built and populated primarily to feed the nearby gold mines – is disturbing yet beautifully rendered. The mine of Mont Powell is a “misshapen beast that suffers and moans as it lies on its grey, filthy bedding and exudes layers of waste and black cinders.” The Cadillac Fault is an open wound, exposing the earth’s flesh for mining. The air is so thick with chimney smoke that it’s difficult to breathe. “What keeps you here?” The authors ask this question of each other as well as of themselves. The answer might be that there is a strange kind of beauty in the rotting landscape. “Is it beautiful or ugly?” asks Izaguirré-Falardeau. “It’s certainly both simultaneously.”

Another complication is unearthed in David and Izaguirré-Falardeau’s despairing love for their shared hometown: that of decaying visions of the past, “the muck and shame of broken dreams.” David’s fascination with the ghost towns scattered around Abitibi is especially evocative: ghost towns are abandoned places, buildings left to rot. They also imply spaces filled with spectres, hauntings by those who worked in the mines. These empty towns are the ruins of the good life that the gold rush guaranteed. Perhaps

CHRISTIAN LEDUC



they are the result of the earth demanding its pound of flesh: an eye for an eye, soil stripped of its gold for the lives of its miners. What are the ephemera of a greed laced with hope?

The letters in *Arsenic mon amour*, clearly filled with

passion and poetic talent, occasionally verge on pretension and vagueness. The title itself – a bold nod to Alan Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), a film about a love story in postwar Hiroshima, groundbreaking in its depiction of the palimpsestic present and the complex tango between personal and communal pain – is case in point. While David and Izaguirré-Falardeau illustrate, gorgeously, their personal ties to Rouyn-Noranda, their attempts at philosophizing about abstract concepts fall flat. We learn little about the protest(ors) of the past or the contours of the action that this book is supposedly calling for.

Izaguirré-Falardeau, whose father is originally from Honduras, struggles to write effectively about the impossibly complex (and ultimately exploitative) relationship between the Global North and the Global South. In an effort to combat the tragedy-porn of media coverage about Honduras, she paints the country as a place of eternal sunshine and the people as ambiguous, heroic victims of the West, an oversimplification that strips the country and its residents of agency and power. The same can be said about David’s allegorical musings on the vague “empire” that he trashes, which serve more to mystify than explain how power struggles work on a practical level.

The contemporary moment is rife with enigmatic horrors. Worldwide pandemics, climate change, the effects of globalization, and more impossibly huge issues, taken on an abstract scale, feel insurmountable. Books like *Arsenic mon amour* are vital in illuminating specific areas with specific issues; however, they must be careful not to fall into the same abstracting patterns that they attempt to work against. We don’t need more impenetrable anxieties or texts that slip into the passive-aggressive tone of “too late.” What we need right now are specifics and plausible action points. **mb**

**Emma Dollery** is a chill guy, pool shark, fan of film and literature.

## Mapping New Histories

**Before Canada**  
Northern North America  
in a Connected World  
Edited by Allan Greer  
McGill-Queen's University Press  
\$44.95, paper, 426pp  
9780228019213

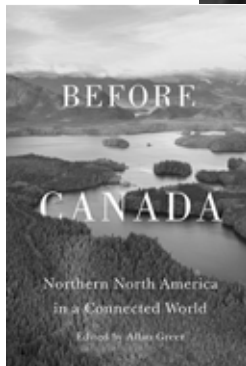
Reading a good piece of scholarship is a lot like cooking a challenging dish – while the process is viscerally active, demanding every ounce of one's attention, the final result is immensely satisfying if not wholly enlightening.

*Before Canada: Northern North America in a Connected World* features eleven of the smartest minds in early Canadian history, archeology, geography, and literary studies. Editor and McGill history professor emeritus Allan Greer brings together this eclectically interdisciplinary bunch to present ten scholarly chapters; ten challenging dishes, if you will. Throughout the book, which is the eighth in McGill-Queen's University Press' series on "Studies in Early Canada," Greer's contemporaries define, demystify, and dismantle the imagined histories of the centuries preceding Canadian federation. As Greer states in the introduction, the book pushes back at our society's generally racist tendency to disregard the pre-settler history of northern North America.

From this savvy introduction, the chapters of *Before Canada* traverse academic disciplines as well as the various landscapes of what we now call "Canada." One of the more engaging studies early on is Université de Montréal professor Brad Loewen's retelling of Basque-Indigenous-French connections at the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. Loewen illustrates this network by way of the *chaloupe*, a long-boat common throughout New France whose origins lie in the Basque boat known as a *txalupa*. Introduced to First Nations groups around the gulf by Basque fishermen, the *txalupa* serves as a symbol of the international networks at play, with Loewen's anthropological research illuminating how these same Indigenous communities moved by *txalupa* between the French hubs of Tadoussac, Gaspé, Percé, and Miscou.

The next chapter departs from the realms of anthropology to a literary scholar intrigued by maps. MIT professor Mary C. Fuller shows how early globes were constructed by long-distance and cross-national exchanges of ideas, demonstrating the usefulness of a close reading beyond the realm of overtly "literary" texts. In doing so, Fuller helpfully demonstrates the transferability of literary training to other disciplines (in this case, geography).

But while some authors in *Before*



CH DELORY

*Canada* put their revelatory insights on clear display, others sadly shroud theirs behind flowery language and academic jargon. Jack Bouchard (Rutgers) also writes his chapter on European fishers around Newfoundland in the early sixteenth century, but hides his most interesting thoughts behind inaccessible language. When discussing the reason European fishers found themselves in around Newfoundland at the turn of the century, he brings

*Greer's contemporaries define, demystify, and dismantle the imagined histories of the centuries preceding Canadian federation.*

up the Little Ice Age, a period of relatively cool temperatures across Western Europe, that negatively impacted agriculture efforts and pushed the search for sustenance to the seas. Instead of introducing the phenomenon in plain language, Bouchard refers to "the climate anomaly known as the Spörer Minimum," which certainly made this reviewer's eyes glaze over.

But while some early points in the book struggle to impress, perseverance is rewarded, and before you know it, *Before Canada* builds to a dramatic crescendo of decolonial research. Oxford French professor Katherine Ibbett offers an elegantly written reading of literary "drowning" narratives in New France, invoking Christina Sharpe's notion of reading "in the wake." And Christopher Parsons of Northeastern ends the book by calling for a decolonial turn in Early Canadian studies, revealing the malevolent roots of Canada's myth-making project by shining a scrutinous eye on our most prized national icons: the beaver and the maple tree.

Taken together, the chapters of *Before Canada* represent a dynamic discipline in flux, with a healthy balance of new- and old-guard thinking. While every reader may not enjoy the whole pie, most would be remiss to not indulge in a slice. MRB

**Jack McClelland** is a writer and translator based in Montreal.

## Wake-Up Call

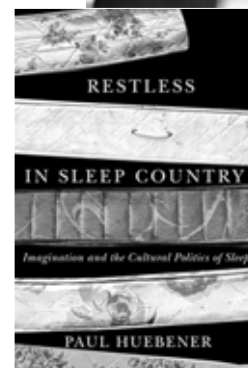
**Restless in Sleep Country**  
Imagination and the Cultural  
Politics of Sleep  
Paul Huebener  
McGill-Queen's  
University Press  
\$39.95, paper, 256pp  
9780228020387

In *Restless in Sleep Country*, Paul Huebener proposes a critical analysis of sleep as a human activity and as a symbol in Canadian culture. As in his previous work on time, *Nature's Broken Clocks*, Huebener supports his analysis by making use of a broad range of cultural objects – from poetry, literature, and cinema to advertisements and cellphone apps.

Beyond a simple account of the prevailing narratives of sleep in Canada, *Restless in Sleep Country* exemplifies "the importance of the humanities in investigating concerns that are usually assumed to belong to the realms of science, technology, and consumer capitalism." Huebener shows how sleep is not just a biological process, but a space from which we negotiate our use of time, the value of our rest, and the social conditions that impact these rights.

Indeed, the strongest aspect of Huebener's approach to the study of (sleep) culture is his versatility. In inviting us to unpack the narratives underlying advertisements, he gives us tools both to live and to think critically about the reality we may otherwise take for granted. For example, he draws together a COVID-era car ad and another for a mattress company to undermine the supposedly "sleep-positive" views they propose, convincingly demonstrating that while sleep may seem to be a valued commodity in Canada, it is almost exclusively deemed so only when placed in relation to an increase in productivity. His critique of productivity worship under capitalism does not end there. Huebener's text is rife with examples of sleep at the margins: the criminalization of sleep experienced by the unhoused, the sleeplessness imposed on those experiencing poverty, systemic racism, and/or other forms of oppression.

The sleep narratives Huebener centres throughout the book are incredibly diverse, both in terms of authorship and medium. He walks the reader through his choice of literary works to read critically, analyzing in parallel poetry and prose by Métis author Cherie Dimaline, Sri Lankan-



Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje, and white Al-Bertan veteran Benjamin Hertzog. In addition to the work of these award-winning authors, he also turns his attention to the "Sleep Stories" on the Calm app and to *Awake*, a Netflix apocalyptic thriller

that was "lambasted by critics."

While *Restless in Sleep Country* offers thorough close readings of such varied objects, Huebener sometimes casts too wide a net. The last chapter, on the links between climate change and sleep(lessness), includes as examples several works of speculative fiction, Rita Wong's poetry, Marlene Creates' visual art, and Simon Orpana's illustrations, to name a few. As a result, his analysis is not nearly as detailed as in the previous chapters, and the image of "Sleeping in the Anthropocene" he paints isn't as persuasive. Though Huebener is right about the possible effects of climate disasters on sleep – as exemplified by his own experience of heatwaves and flooding in Alberta – the connections he draws are far more tenuous. Does climate change impact sleep directly, or does it simply exacerbate the demands made on sleep in Canadian society outlined in previous chapters?

Huebener's book is an engrossing read, and the diversity of sources from which he draws ensures that readers will find one that speaks to them. In this way, Huebener shows us that cultural narratives about sleep are everywhere, and that we all have the power to shift them if we just learn to read critically. MRB

**Karolina Roman** loves translation, exercise, knitting, and awful television programming.

# Following the Breadcrumbs

**Ghost Stories**  
**On Writing Biography**  
**Judith Adamson**  
**McGill-Queen's University Press**  
**\$24.95, paper, 200pp**  
**9780228021032**

Judith Adamson's *Ghost Stories* is an exploration of biography as a form of storytelling. A memoir itself, the book describes Adamson's own path into literature and academia, situating her in the vibrant literary scenes of Montreal and London during the second half of the twentieth century. Through accounts of her relationships with her biographical subjects – largely writers and artists like Graham Greene, Charlotte Haldane, and Trekkie Ritchie Parsons – she shows us that the biographer is not merely a stenographer. As is the case with any writer, they transform a story – a collection of events, observations, experiences – into a narrative. *Ghost Stories* shows how this transformation is mediated by archives, institutions, and the biographer's own social position.

*Ghost Stories* offers tender depictions of how some of Adamson's work emerges out of, or turns into, friendships with her subjects. Other times, her subjects are figures from the past, often assigned to the margins of literary history. In either



case, she sifts through the archive – poring over records, letters, and papers. It is well understood that the archive is marked by absence, that it thus simultaneously enables and frustrates the creation of a narrative. Likewise, Adamson struggles with documents that are withheld, lost, or destroyed – sometimes at the request of the subject.

Challenges are also posed by the specific locations of archives and how their use is governed by the institutions that own them. For instance, while researching Charlotte Haldane, Adamson is presented with “boxes of disordered papers and not allowed to copy anything, or [confronted] with old and overused

machines to reproduce even older microfilm or newsprint.” However, she values the process of navigating the physical archive, especially when she compares it to the relative ease created by digitization: “But if electronic searches are easier, they also dampen the hunt and, frustrating as the trail often was, I loved following the breadcrumbs Charlotte had left.”

There is some sense in which this sentiment overlooks how historical records are fortified from the public and undermines the value of greater access to them. However, it also gestures to the way in which physical archives – due to the absence of distraction, the necessity to recall information in the future – allow a writer to experience a deeper form of attention.

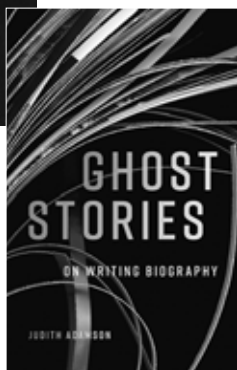
Adamson also examines how events are curated in a biography. How does the biographer choose not only what to include, but *where* to include them in the chronology of someone's life? Particularly when portraying women writers, Adamson considers the political implications of the events she chooses to centre, as well as where she chooses to begin or end the story. At the same time, she values what she calls “critical distance” in her writing, the ability to immerse oneself in the subject's motivations and desires without

projecting onto them one's own personal baggage or historically specific paradigms.

This is perhaps a delicate balance because, as Adamson goes on to suggest, her narratives were impacted by what she “was doing while [she] was writing – mothering, teaching, and being a wife.” *Ghost Stories* indicates that such roles not only give the biographer a particular point of view, but also structure their time in decisive ways.

Biography may centre the individual, but often these individuals' lives stand in for the experiences of communities or offer insight into historical situations. Moreover, the genre makes what is intimate available for public interpretation. Adamson expresses her sensitivity for the privacy of her subjects: “To whom did our lives in fact belong?” she asks. “As a biographer, the question challenged me for decades. I'd found so much about people's secret lives that I knew was enticingly publishable. But early on I had decided to hold back anything that didn't add to our understanding of literary or cultural history.” It is not always clear what ought to be disclosed or protected, but Adamson points to how a sense of ethical responsibility guides the biographical process. Ultimately, the biographer must reconcile her private attachment to her subjects with her commitment to produce a narrative that matters to the public. ms

Aishwarya Singh is a writer, researcher, and MA graduate of McGill's Department of English. She lives in Montreal.



## Serving Readers and Celebrating Writers



Check out our eBooks, eAudiobooks and physical books.

Enjoy our in-person, online, and hybrid activities: author talks, poetry readings, book club, and AWE workshops.

For info and help with digital devices:  
**514-935-7344** or **info@atwaterlibrary.ca**

1200 Atwater Ave. (Atwater métro) • [www.atwaterlibrary.ca](http://www.atwaterlibrary.ca)

Bibliothèque et centre d'information  
**Atwater**  
 Library and computer Centre



**David Winch**  
 Editorial Services /Services éditoriaux

Writing and Editing for Texts of all Types  
 See <http://davidwinch.website>

Journalism, government & academic texts  
 - 35 years UN, newspaper and magazine work

Cell: 514.796.7162  
 email: [dcwinch-editorial@yahoo.com](mailto:dcwinch-editorial@yahoo.com)

feminist, queer, anti-racist,  
 communist, anarchist,  
 antifascist, decolonial ...  
 and much, much more!

**WWW.LEFTWINGBOOKS.NET**

free shipping in canada for orders of \$50 or more



5670 Sherbrooke Street West  
 Montreal, QC H4A 1W7

**ENCORE**  
 Books & Records

A book and culture lover's  
 paradise in the heart of NDG!

Always buying quality books,  
 records, comics, CDs, and more.

Questions?

✉ [encorebooks@gmail.com](mailto:encorebooks@gmail.com)  
 ☎ (514) 482-5100  
 🌐 [encorebooks.ca](http://encorebooks.ca)

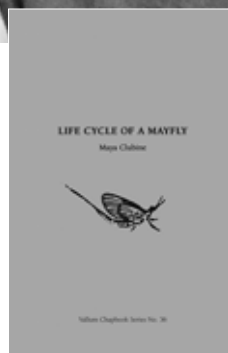
# poetry



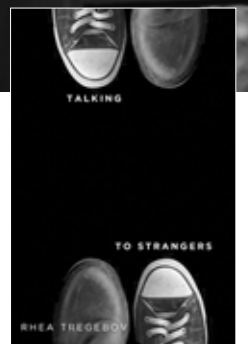
STACY LEE



BRUCE JEFFREY



ELISA S



## Listening in Many Publics

Jay Ritchie  
Invisible Publishing  
\$23.95, paper, 104pp  
9781778430442

It is a queer thing, for a poet to fear images. Most poets spend their lives in chase of them, others conceal them in metaphor. Jay Ritchie meets them in an unwilling embrace. *Listening in Many Publics*, Ritchie's second published collection, admixes an anxious, capitalist surrealism with the fleeting liminality of memory, speaking back to a visual culture, where to look is to see but not feel. It is also a meditation on language, powerful in its ability to conjure images that, once spoken, entrap, first in the limits of language and then in the worlds it creates. Generous repetition disallows forgetfulness, and a central set of reluctantly disclosed images – trees, fences, a varia of commodities – act as an axis for the work, appearing

to repeat as you pass,  
their boundary doubling,  
dividing in from out, have from haven't,  
is from was [...]

Soon this grammar becomes the image itself, found everywhere from “The trees beside the street / an ellipsis” to the “reeds / that bend like question marks.”

The thrust of the collection returns, however, to a genuine grappling with the incoherencies of modern life. This honestly comes at a price. Tepid metaphors unfurl because they are not metaphorical, but literal. Other times, figuration is disavowed entirely, and the common struggle plainly named: “capital, sustenance, capital, sustenance.” The poems fall back to materiality not for lack of imagination, but as a consequence of confronting the hard edge of a life, where figuration proves insufficient in the face of mounting crises.

Who is the enemy? The image dispirited by moder-

nity or the poet's reluctance to capture it? By turns disparaging and optimistic, *Listening in Many Publics* refuses an easy answer. Instead, it amounts to a survival tale – of trying to sustain oneself on nimble poetic disposition under the continuous and varied threats of exhaustion that come from both without and within.

**Life Cycle of a Mayfly**  
Maya Clubine  
Vallum  
\$12.00, paper, 32pp

Set along the banks of the Credit River, *Life Cycle of a Mayfly*, Maya Clubine's debut chapbook, is a family chronicle written in water and soil. Sparse in images as the moonlit landscapes it describes, the collection quietly centres the river's hidden lives – both human and non-human – revealing a world visible only through attentive observation.

As the title suggests, the collection is cyclical, each section corresponding to a stage in a mayfly's life cycle. Clubine works effectively within this self-imposed limit without wearing out the concept. Images come and come again: an icy grave, fishing boots, rustling swallows, returning each time charged with new life. Although slim, the chapbook spans three generations of river folk. Rather than in years, their lives are measured by other cycles: ecological, geological, hydrologic; at moments “suspended, / caught ragged on the rafters, swaying cold,” or collapsing only to begin anew:

And for a time it seems that I belong  
to all past seasons on this river's edge  
where rain dripped down and ran along this canvas,  
then drew away toward the skies again.

There is nothing especially enrapturing about Clubine's language, which works more in service of narra-

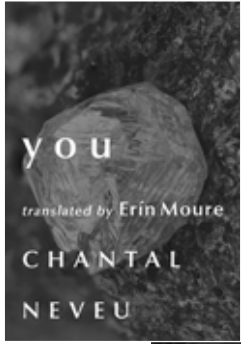
tive cohesion than abstract figuration. What the collection lacks in mystification, however, it more than makes up for in prosody. Clubine masterfully commands her form in inconspicuous ways: the length of stanzas grows as the speaker ages; scarce rhyme, deftly doled, evokes the staying power of memory as well as its tendency toward restless change.

Only briefly does Clubine allude to the fact that mayflies spend most of their lives in water, emerging as winged adults to live only one day. Less an omission than a conceit, Clubine's extended metaphor for life after childhood recalls the sordid task of returning to those images that make a memory, anticipating how they might change, fearing they already have. To live as such is to live precariously, like the nymph tethered to the riverbank preparing for flight – “Remaining still / she merely seems a casting of herself.”

**Talking to Strangers**  
Rhea Tregebov  
Véhicule Press  
\$19.95, paper, 80pp  
9781550656602

To be a flower in Rhea Tregebov's garden, a bird in her window, a passerby on the street, is to be loved indiscriminately. This generosity of feeling is palpable in every line of *Talking to Strangers*, the eighth book by an enduring voice in Canadian poetry. The collection proceeds in a series of short, narrative poems, cataloguing a life led in search of love and found in unlikely places.

The eponymous strangers are a motley crew – rambling hippies, weeping widows, drunkards, IDF soldiers – some more immediately sympathetic than others. Yet, strangers are not always unknown, as several more intimate poems on family, aging, and loss remind us. Often, we find ourselves feeling estranged from those closest to us. More often we are strangers to ourselves.



RYAN ROCK



The simplest things  
elude me.  
What was the life I had.

Today I don't  
know where I stand [...]

today might be yesterday and I  
the girl waiting for her life.

Many of the poems are situational, moving from the particulars of observation to a moral quandary answered in the final lines. While quaintly touching, this formula often falls flat – too immediate, too neat – each poem striving for a kind of internal closure that leaves the thread of the collection difficult to sustain at book length.

What joins the poems is Tregobov's characteristic tenderness and enviable capacity for sympathy. Central to this persona of quiet confidant is the death of her sister, a theme that dominates the collection's final section, the strongest despite its brevity. These elegies formed from minutiae do not arrive at easy answers, but recall the all too human capacity to seek familiarity in the strange, especially in times of strife. In these moments Tregobov softly asserts herself as both witness to and companion in sorrow. Against the immensity of her grief is the possibility of love's consolation, whispered as if into a mirror. Remind yourself: "we don't need love to be a thing / we can put our hands on to trust."

**you**  
Chantal Neveu  
Translated by Erin Moure  
Book\*hug Press  
\$20.00, paper, 80pp  
9781771668828

Chantal Neveu's *you*, a self-described love poem, fills its brief in the broadest sense imaginable. Floating seamlessly between sensuality and desire, confusion and anger, and their attendant dislocations, *you* asks what it means for a relationship to fail and by what criteria. Persistent through the tumult is the transformative power of love, a force that, in every embrace, might envelop its bearers and metamorphose the world into something less than material.

mirror on my neck  
a breath  
you are my fantasy  
mercurial drape of the curtains  
prisms and photons  
on the wall  
gold  
solid  
gleaming

*you* is a soupy dictionary that runs at times fluid, at times viscous. It is hypnotic, lyrically enrapturing, and yet, in premise, a little too convenient. Whose amorous phantasmagoria have we entered, exactly? In a postscript, translator Erin Moure dismisses the mediatory function of the poetic voice, writing that "it is we, as readers receiving the text, who construct narrative connections." I do not doubt readers will find connections in Neveu's labyrinthian work, but the poem falters in its feigned denial that such connections are not already being made for us. Therein lies a contradiction between the voice, which has something to say about love and says it, and the form, whose forced ambiguity negates that meaning.

voracity of intuitions  
nullity of double dyads  
impermeability and discretion are not enough  
previous admixtures offer me no clues  
once again he faces my tears  
baroquisme of our eros  
in his hand

However commendable for its formal vision and lyrical expansiveness, for a topic as ineffable as love, one must be wary of attempts to form meaning from non-meaning, and the thin distinction between evading sense and having none.

**Whiny Baby**  
Julie Paul  
McGill-Queen's University Press  
\$19.95, paper, 120pp  
9780228020745

*Whiny Baby*, Julie Paul's second collection, is a phone call received in the middle of the night. You want to ignore it, but now you're awake and unnerved, the ringer

blaring. "Pick up," bleats the answering machine. The voice is familiar, tinged with maternal anxiety that is at once both comforting and perverse.

Colloquial in tone and by turns rambling and self-deprecating, *Whiny Baby* catalogues daily trials we'd rather not confront, from the deeply personal, such as motherhood and the aches of aging, to the universal: the looming threats of pandemic, climate change, and gun violence. The latter poems limp along, giving up the gambit too quickly and often clunkily.

[...] maybe it was the giant hole  
in the logic of importing butter  
from New Zealand  
or the giant hole in the ozone –  
wait, isn't that healing? Didn't we do  
one thing right?

If the overtly social poems falter in lukewarm critique, it's the latent politics of the personal that gives the collection its teeth. Paul evokes, at times, Mary Oliver, as witness to the double bind of womanhood, or Elizabeth Bishop's comically vivid self-awareness. Although wanting in both poets' prosody, the collection's strongest moments hinge more on creating emotive resonance than on anything characteristically lyrical. A late ekphrastic poem captures the want to make sense of one's life through art, or to find a kind of self-reanimation within the art-object itself.

I want to sink deeply  
into the natural world, to access,  
[...] whatever unites all beings,  
to [...] *make the painting a living thing*

but mostly I want to be this woman

In these poems, Paul's authentic voice – proud mother, anxious citizen, wonder-filled child at fifty – breaks through. For all she claims to fear, Paul displays genuine courage in confronting the question of whether artistic practice is a viable form of self-determination despite all that threatens to undermine it. mb

Ronny Litvack-Katzman is a writer and poet who, after a decade in Montreal, still gets lost in the metro. He recently graduated with an MA in English from McGill University.

By Olivia Shan

## Caroline Vu

# *Dust of Life*

One of the first things I ask Caroline Vu as we sit down to discuss her latest novel *Catinat Boulevard* concerns her choice of profession. As a fellow Asian Canadian, I know well the specific career expectations Asian immigrant parents typically impose on their children, and how inflexible they can be. “I read that you were a physician *on top* of being a writer, is that true?” It is. Talk about having your cake and eating it too.

Vu tells me that going to medical school felt like the dutiful thing to do to appease her Vietnamese mother – turning to a writing career wasn’t so obvious. With no formal training in writing, and conscientious of the fact that English is her third language, she admits that she still finds her prose to be “not great.”

What truly kickstarted her writing endeavours was the discovery of new literary inspiration, which she found thanks to her medical practice, of all things: stories, particularly those from her patients in immigrant clinics. “Paying attention to my patients’ narratives, listening beyond the stethoscope, made me a better doctor. I feel lucky to be able to share my patients’ longings, happiness, fear, and sorrows. Real, raw emotions... I wouldn’t be able to find this in writing classes!” Indeed, Vu’s novels are not only richly researched accounts of historical fiction, they’re also centred on emotional, character-driven journeys – this empathetic lens is what most compels Vu in her work.

Her most ambitious book yet, *Catinat Boulevard*, takes a bold and unconventional approach to her usual themes of race and cultural identity. Readers are plunged headfirst into the immersive, unreliable narrative voice of Nat, who recounts memories from a far-gone past, much of which he reveals predates his birth.

These memories primarily follow the turbulent lives of two Vietnamese women, Mai Ly and Mai, from when they become fast friends as young girls, to how their paths diverge and

re-merge over the duration and aftermath of the Vietnam war. Mid-century Vietnam is a waking beast of a country; coming out of the dregs of French colonial rule, the political messiness of the 1960s soon divulges into civil war. In the meantime, Mai and Mai Ly are quickly coming into their teenage years, attracted by and curious about the arrival of many American GIs in their city.

Mai soon enters into a short affair with Michael, a young African-American soldier. She falls pregnant, much to the ostracization and disgust

**“Little was known about these abandoned children in the US. It is thus important for me to tell their stories.”**

of her parents, and eventually abandons her child at a Christian orphanage. Mai and Michael’s baby, we soon learn, is none other than Nat himself.

In our current times, discussions of the role of intersectionality in culture and literature are becoming more and more prominent. Even so, historical fiction seldom explores how mixed-race people often face overlapping racial discriminations. This may be due in part to how some non-white authors are pigeonholed to write through established formulas and feel compelled to tailor their stories to the comfort and expectations of their white readers. Sticking to these

constraining, reductive conventions when writing about people of colour doesn’t actually offer any significant representation. Rather, it perpetuates specific archetypal plots and characters that most appeal to mainstream white audiences, thus robbing BIPOC stories of their intrinsic complexity and humanity.

For Vu, making Nat biracial was indeed very deliberate. While researching for her novel, Vu learned about how the children of African-American GIs and Vietnamese women were seen as shameful *bụi đời* – “dust of life” in Vietnamese – subject to ostracization and racism: “Little was known about these abandoned children in the US. It is thus important for me to tell their stories.”

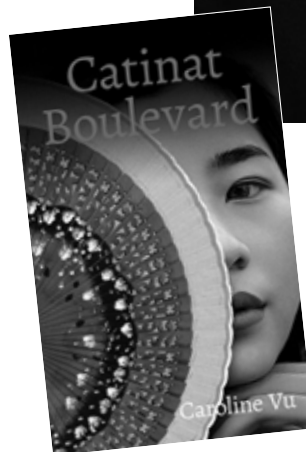
Nat being both Black and Asian makes his narrative unreliability all the more fascinating. Having had no contact with either of his parents for years, he is naturally drawn to the realms of imagination and fiction to fill in the narrative gaps of his life. The thin line between what is “real” and what is “imagined” gradually disintegrates as the story begins

catching up to Nat’s present day in New York: chapters flit from first- to third-person narration, letters and writings from other characters are revealed, dreamlike accounts of memories resurface.

Most of the novel’s chapters are incredibly short, making *Catinat Boulevard* intensely consumable despite its 482-page length. Reading through these chapters sometimes feels more akin to flipping through the yellowed pages of a photo album with Nat sitting by your side; reimagining, recontextualizing still frames of life in real time. This particular quality may also explain how sensorial many of Nat’s descriptions feel, his fixations on certain images and details: a crack in a stone wall and sprouting grass, the taste of snake wine, the scent of tiger balm and lemony cinnamon. Amid the foggy, unreliable realm of human memory, it is those emotions most connected with the senses that ultimately stay with us the longest.

Sometimes all we are left with when remembering a loved one are literal

*continued on next page*



**Catinat Boulevard**  
Caroline Vu  
Guernica Editions  
\$25.00, paper, 482pp  
9781771838276



and figurative fragments, of which no satisfying or complete narrative can be derived from, not for lack of trying. By recording these memories, however fractured or confused, Nat grants a degree of permanence to his parents' stories; much the same way Vu herself strives to immortalize her family through her novels: "My children are born here," she says. "They don't know much about Vietnamese history. They don't know much about their family's story. Through my writing, I hope they'll be able to explore lost connections with their past."

Vu's *Catinat Boulevard* deliberately problematizes the conventional Vietnam War narrative, not only by making all of her protagonists people of colour and shedding light on both anti-Asian and anti-Black racism, but also by grounding her characters with impulsivity, hypocrisy, promiscuity, humour – making them whole and human.

Our cultural consciousness of the Vietnam War, just as of the country itself, is one still dominated by Western-centric narratives. In Quebec, the province that holds the second-largest Vietnamese

population in Canada, Vietnamese cultural presence is surprisingly lacking. Aside from the best-selling novels and triumphant media success of Kim Thuy, "there remains a gap in representation of Vietnamese in mainstream Quebec media."

But Vu recognizes a new shift coming: "With the Canada Council for the Arts' emphasis on diversity, we are starting to see more Vietnamese stories." She cites fellow writers Mai Nguyen and Yasmine Phan-Morissette, as well as recently lauded filmmakers Khoa Lê and Carol Nguyen. Vu hopes that their work will "contribute to the diversification of the Quebec cultural landscape."

Before we depart, I ask Vu what she's planning to write next. "AI sex dolls!" she proclaims with glee, and tells me how excited she is about her current project, a short story collection exploring the ethics of technology in modern society. "I can't write about Vietnam forever." mrb

**Olivia Shan** is a freelance writer, editor, journalist, and illustrator based in Montreal. You can find her on Instagram @youngmiddleold

feeling, on the page and within me, that is hard to reach. While the writing is straightforward, the drawings generously allow themselves to be explored and not fully understood.

The pages of *Portrait of a Body* are peopled with ambiguous shapes, and it's this colourful and bold ambiguousness that I find holds the strength of this book. Are they opening-up landscapes? Rocks? Barnacles? Shells? Bedsheets? Are they large cross-sections of gemstones? Root systems? Brooks? Tears? Lichen? Flower petals? Leaves? In allowing the viewer to explore the nature of these images, we are able to linger on the edges of perception, and witness Delporte's story of deepening and changing self-narration.

In terms of queer storytelling, I found myself hoping for more nuanced understandings of gender beyond biology. The book is at times unfortunately stuck in gender essentialism. In contrast to this, though, I was delighted by her briefly depicted moments of creative sexuality – in particular a story of sexual exploration using Moomin as a portal, and embracing Leonardo DiCaprio in *Romeo + Juliet* as a lesbian icon. There is another brief moment where Delporte describes making a room full of lesbians uncomfortable by singing a song about political lesbianism but not knowing why they are upset with her. I found these depictions of social discomfort compelling and just a bit under-explored. I wanted the writing in this book to leap or cautiously walk into the same ambiguous zones of the drawings, not needing to so quickly declare itself as one thing or another. mrb

**Sarah Mangle** is an artist, educator, and researcher based in Montreal. She is currently a master's student in Public Health at the University of Montreal. Her work has been featured in *The Globe and Mail*, *Hello Giggles*, *Shameless Magazine*, *Art/iculations*, *Montreal Review of Books*, and *Broken Pencil*. Most recently, her comic work was published in *Nova Graphica* (Conundrum Press), *Watch Your Head* (Coach House Books), and *Nat Brut* (online).

an experience like hers, or Farah's, is. The story presents itself as an affirmation, not only for the characters but for the reader as well. Farah asserts: "What I am sure of though, is that just because the worst didn't happen doesn't mean it wasn't serious."

In the aftermath of her relationship, Cléo's life begins to mend, and we are able to spend slow and comforting moments with her. Malle artfully guides the reader through periods of discomfort, and ultimately provides them with the satisfaction of emerging out the other side. Like us, Cléo is flawed, just trying to figure out her life when it feels as though it's falling apart. At the same time, she reminds us how to respond in difficult situations – she learns from her missteps, leans on the support of her friends, and treats herself with compassion.

While the unfolding of *So Long Sad Love* is triggered by a romantic relationship, the standout characters are the female friends and queer support system Cléo finds along her journey. It is their strength that ultimately reminds her of her own. When she's finally out of the city, the reader sits in on an intimate evening with a whole group of new characters being together and sharing space. Everyone has different stories and is here for different reasons, but have ultimately ended up together, and you feel as if this is right where they are meant to be.

As Cléo follows her lifelong instinct to flee, *So Long Sad Love* reminds us how, through trusting our own version of happiness, we can get through difficult situations and find true spaces of belonging – those moments where "everything feels sweeter." mrb

**Ashton Diduck** is a queer writer currently residing in Tiohtià:ke. He graduated from the Honours English and Creative Writing program at Concordia University in 2023 and is currently the Communications Manager for *carte blanche*.

**Annual Subscription (3 issues)**

**\$15 Canadian orders**  
**\$20 International orders**

**Subscribe to the mRb**

**Did you know that you can receive the mRb by mail?**

[mtlreviewofbooks.ca/subscribe](http://mtlreviewofbooks.ca/subscribe)

**Salon du livre ancien de WESTMOUNT Antiquarian Book Fair**

**CENTRE GREENE**  
Greene Avenue Community Centre  
Centre Communautaire de l'avenue Greene  
1090 avenue Greene,  
Westmount, QC H3Z 1Z9  
(just below Dorchester / près de Dorchester)

**Saturday 30 March 2024**      **Samedi le 30 mars 2024**

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Information 514-935-9581 Renseignements	Entrée \$3.00 Admission
---	-------------------------------

Dealers offering used and rare books, ephemera and maps

Les libraires offrent des livres anciens, éphémère et des cartes

[www.defreitasbooks.com/wbf](http://www.defreitasbooks.com/wbf)

# young readers

This season's choice of books for young readers is a marvellous mix that touches on the joys of friendship, the importance of our natural environment, and good old-fashioned fun. In this selection of titles that features work by award-winning creators, there's no going wrong. Happy reading!

## Walking Trees

City life is exciting. It's lively, charming, and full of opportunity, yet the urban landscape can also prove to be cramped, noisy, smoggy, and in the summertime, especially hot. Touched by a contemporary "walking" forest project carried out in a northern town in the Netherlands, Mary-Louise Gay brings us *Walking*



*Trees*, a story that gives readers a taste of how sweet the effects of going green can be.

An undeclared environmentalist, all Lily wants for her birthday is a tree. When she finds one waiting for her on the balcony the next morning, rather than stare down at the world from above, Lily decides to take her tree – which she names George – out on the streets to experience city life. Wherever they go, the shade George provides is a welcome gift to everyone they meet. When some of the other kids in the neighbourhood realize how cool having a tree really is, they join Lily's movement and get trees of their own.

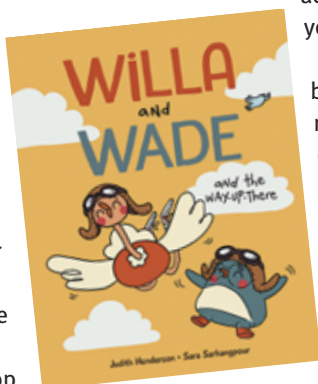
It's not long before the small crew of tree enthusiasts turns into a walking forest, providing relief to fellow residents enduring the rising summer heat. The walking forest soon becomes an entire community movement, as more people, plants, flowers, and even birds join the party! Another gem added to Gay's oeuvre, *Walking Trees* will get readers excited about summer, and certainly even more excited about the idea of bringing nature closer to home. A fine pick for the budding environmentalist, leader, or changemaker in the family.



## Willa and Wade and the Way-Up-There

Willa is a high-top-wearing ostrich and Wade is a small but mighty penguin who both have so much in common: their names both start with "W," both are daydreamers, and they're both flightless birds with a yearning to fly. The best part of their friendship? They're always up for something new!

In *Willa and Wade and the Way-Up-There*, every frame is thoughtfully animated, giving off the sense that readers are watching their favourite cartoon. The characters are just so cute and likeable in their demeanour. Determined on their quest to fly, it seems like Wade has all of the brilliant ideas while Willa is his biggest supporter. They experiment by moving at top speed to get a running start or trying ballet to achieve lift-off, but at every



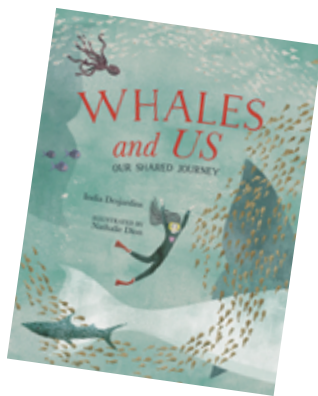
adorable pair of pals in this story as they reach for the sky.



## Whales and Us

In May 2020, not long after the world was plunged into a global pandemic and forced into quarantine, the presence of a humpback whale in Montreal's harbour was a sight to behold for the thousands who flocked to witness the incredibly rare occurrence. This local whale tale is but a snippet found in the astonishing picture book originally written in French by India Desjardins, translated by David Warriner, and illustrated by Nathalie Dion (FYI, I'm an official fan now after also loving Dion's work in *Kumo: The Bashful Cloud*).

Moved by her personal fascination with the largest living creatures on Earth, *Whales and Us: Our Shared Journey* is the author's proclamation of just how extraordinary whales are. As readers learn about whale anatomy, communication styles, and behaviour, we're also lured into the more mysterious depths of old myths and legends, immersed in Dion's use of soft



aquarelle lines and cool, yet deep, colour palette.

Due to its awe factor, the book is reminiscent of the much-loved *Childcraft* encyclopedia of yesteryear – it's visually stimulating and loaded with interesting facts, creating an effect that will have readers poring over the pages trying to soak it all in. What's more, Desjardins takes the educational and inspirational aspects of her book even further by touching on themes

like climate change and human activity as threats to the welfare of the natural world. A list of how to protect whales and other marine life included at the end of the book also encourages readers of all ages to take action, making it a worthwhile choice for shared reading time.



## The Piano

Joaquín Camp's *The Piano* looks as if it was put together on a rainy afternoon, pencil and ruler in hand, along with an old pack of soft pastels lying around with some of the colours missing. Yes, the story's artwork is rudimentary and childlike, but whoever said that was a bad thing? The book's aesthetic is hip, reflected in the unrefined lines, flat, 2D faces, and sometimes disproportionate body parts of the story's characters.



What's most impressive about this pick in *The Secret Mountain's* growing collection of musical picture books is that as simple as it is, it opens up a whole world to readers' imagination. Centred on two children, a piano, and an adult's bidding *not* to touch it, what ensues is a musical riot in the best sense of the word. Given the minimal text in *The Piano*, watching the accompanying video on the publisher's website will enhance the overall experience. It's also really fun to watch on its own!

Ironically, although Camp's story doesn't contain many words, readers will still pick up a few snazzy ones, like "onomatopoeia" (the use of words to imitate sounds) and "synesthesia" (experiencing sensory information through unrelated senses, like tasting colour or feeling sound). Need I say more?



## My Dog and I

*My Dog and I* is a lighthearted and quirky story about friendships that are one of a kind. It takes a special someone to see past appearances and beyond our differences, yet to the young heroine brought to life by Luca Tortolini and Felicita Sala, it's something that comes naturally.

A girl's wish to have a dog comes true one



*Walking Trees*  
Mary-Louise Gay  
Groundwood Books  
\$21.99, cloth, 36pp  
9781773069760  
Ages 3 and up


*Willa and Wade and the Way-Up-There*  
By Judith Henderson  
Illustrated by Sara Sarhangpour  
Kids Can Press  
\$16.99, cloth, 40pp  
9781525308420  
Ages 6–8

*Whales and Us: Our Shared Journey*  
By India Desjardins  
Illustrated by Nathalie Dion  
Translated by David Warriner  
Orca Book Publishers  
\$24.95, cloth, 56pp  
9781459839342  
Ages 8–10

*The Piano*  
Joaquín Camp  
The Secret Mountain  
\$19.95, cloth, 44pp  
9782898360541  
Ages 5–9

*My Dog and I*  
By Luca Tortolini  
Illustrated by Felicita Sala  
Milky Way Picture Books  
\$25.99, cloth, 48pp  
9781990252303  
Ages 4–8

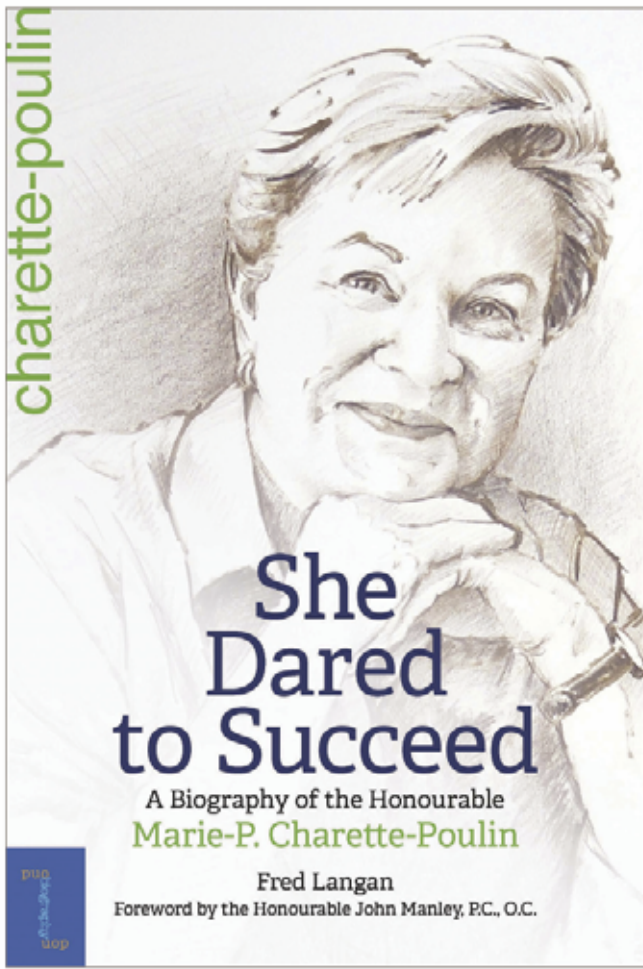
fortuitous day after finding one in the park, alone and lost. From the get-go, it's clear to readers that the dog is not a dog, but in fact, a big brown bear. While everyone else seems terrified by the bear, the companions are inseparable as they ride the bus, go on long walks, and enjoy a cup of tea while on picnics. As this unspoken bond strengthens, the story feels all the cozier thanks to the rich hues of blue and mauve watercolour that dominate Sala's art. Friendship, however, isn't only about being together and having a jolly time. Sometimes, we must part ways, if only for a short while.

As feelings of joy and togetherness come and go, readers understand that eventually, so do feelings of sadness and loneliness. What *My Dog and I* shows us is that along the way, new friends appear in our lives (in this case, a small, gentle cat \*wink\*), and when we least expect it, old friends will return because a true connection always holds up to the test of time. 

**Phoebe Yi Ling** is a freelance writer, editor, and full-time explorer who marvels at the intricacies of intra/interpersonal communication. She has recently joined the team at Kativik Iisarniliriniq, where she works in the development and promotion of literacy across the communities of Nunavik.



charette-poulin



Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa  
University of Ottawa Press

# She Dared to Succeed

## A Biography of the Honourable Marie-P. Charette-Poulin

Fred Langan

"Trailblazing former senator Marie Poulin's career was conspicuous by its precedents—the first founding station manager at Radio-Canada, the first female francophone senator from Ontario, and the first woman francophone president of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Veteran journalist Fred Langan's account of Poulin's life details her evolution from impoverished single mother to a seat in the Senate, from a late blooming legal career to her unlikely victory as president of Canada's natural governing party. It was a rise apparently powered by a forceful and engaging personality.

Langan's well-researched study takes the reader from Poulin's childhood in post-war Sudbury, through her time at the CBC and eventually to the Senate of Canada, where she became embroiled in the expenses imbroglio that tarnished the reputations of all it touched.

Poulin emerges as a likeable, dynamic figure whose dedication has fortified some of the country's most important institutions."

— John Ivison, *The National Post*



9780776637976 • \$31.95

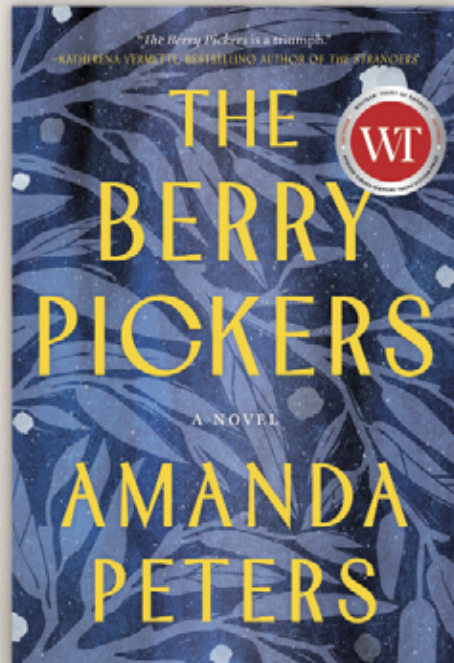
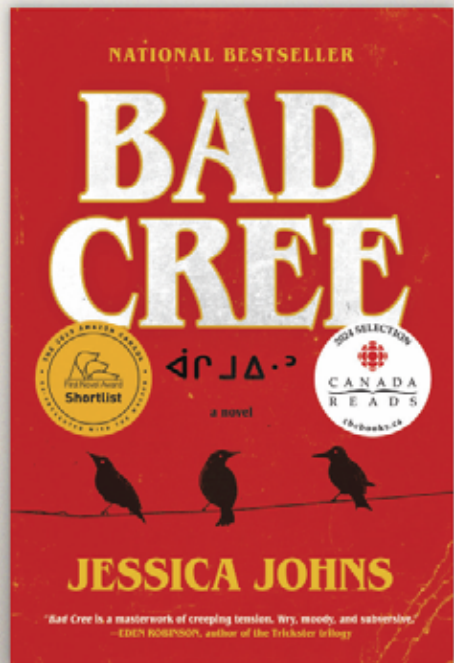
[www.Press.uOttawa.ca](http://www.Press.uOttawa.ca)

# CANADIAN FICTION FAVOURITES

**CANADA READS**  
2024 Selection

**FINALIST**  
Amazon Canada  
First Novel Award

"A masterwork of creeping tension...  
Couldn't put it down."  
— EDEN ROBINSON, AUTHOR  
OF THE TRICKSTER TRILOGY



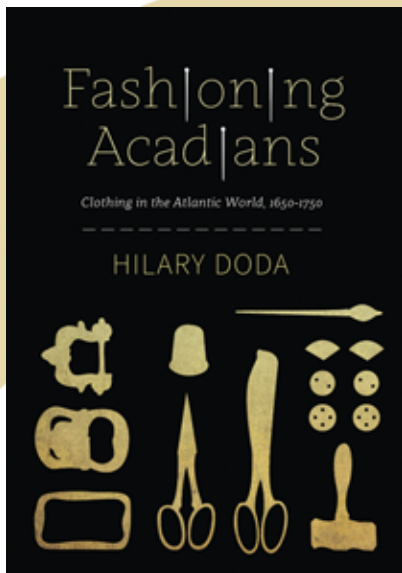
**WINNER**  
Andrew Carnegie Medal  
for Excellence in Fiction

**FINALIST**  
Atwood-Gibson  
Writers' Trust Fiction Prize

"An amazing read from  
a talented new voice."  
— MICHELLE GOOD, AUTHOR  
OF FIVE LITTLE INDIANS

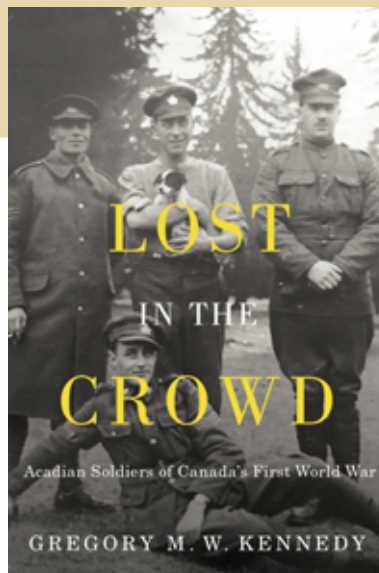
Available wherever books are sold

Discover these books and more at  
[harpercollins.ca](http://harpercollins.ca)



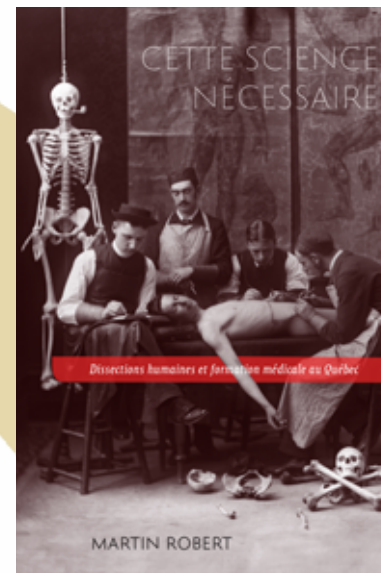
**Fashioning Acadians**  
*Clothing in the Atlantic World, 1650-1750*  
**Hilary Doda**  
Cloth | \$65.00 | 320pp | 90 photos

“This book will be a solid reference work for years to come ... a great example for future studies on dress cultures.”  
Linda Welters, author of *Fashion History*



**Lost in the Crowd**  
*Acadian Soldiers of Canada's First World War*  
**Gregory M.W. Kennedy**  
Paper | \$39.95 | 312pp | 28 images

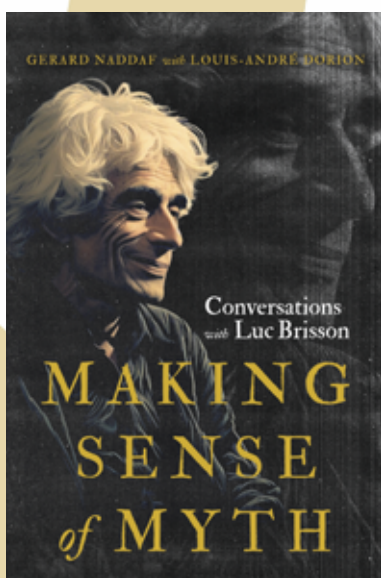
“Groundbreaking. While a great deal has been written about Canada's participation in the First World War, the Acadian dimension has received relatively little attention.”  
John G. Reid, author of *Essays on Northeastern North America*



**Cette science nécessaire**  
*Dissections humaines et formation médicale au Québec*  
**Martin Robert**  
Paper | \$45.95 | 248pp | 15 photos

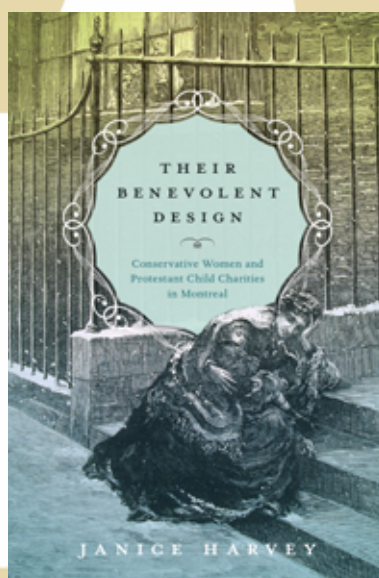
Entre cimetières et salles de dissection, une enquête étonnante et fouillée sur les débuts de la médecine professionnelle au Québec.

# Telling Stories



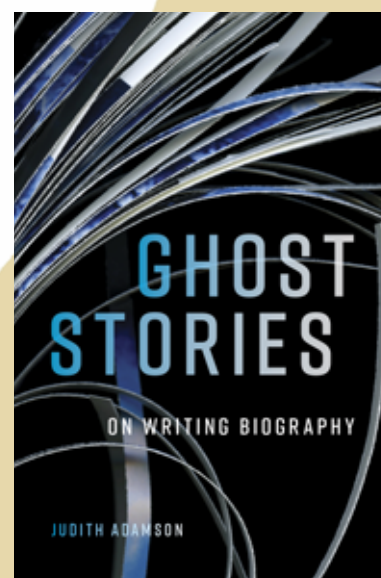
**Making Sense of Myth**  
*Conversations with Luc Brisson*  
**Gerard Naddaf**  
**With Louis-André Dorion**  
Paper | \$39.95 | 328pp

“These conversations move beyond the biographical, while Naddaf's discussion of myth adds an interesting dimension to the discourse.”  
Radcliffe Edmonds, author of *Myths of the Underworld Journey*



**Their Benevolent Design**  
*Conservative Women and Protestant Child Charities in Montreal*  
**Janice Harvey**  
Paper | \$49.95 | 420pp | 22 photos

“This book is excellent social history that documents poverty relief at a key moment in Montreal's history.”  
Tamara Myers, author of *Youth Squad*



**Ghost Stories**  
*On Writing Biography*  
**Judith Adamson**  
Paper | \$24.95 | 200pp

The memoir of a literary biographer in twentieth-century Montreal.  
Available May 2024

