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SUMMER 2008 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

Poet without borders

Katia Grubisic's *What if red ran out*

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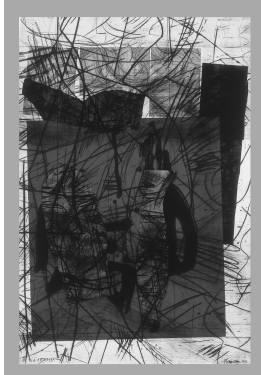
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SUMMER 2008
Volume 11 No. 3

Montreal Review of Books

is published biannually by the
Association of English-language Publishers
of Quebec (AELAQ).

Circulation: 40,000

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E-Mail: aelaq@bellnet.ca

For advertising inquires contact:

Telephone: 416-531-1483

Facsimile: 416-531-1612

ISSN # 1480-2538

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Dépôt légal, Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
and the National Library of Canada,
second quarter, 2008.

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

Thanks to Andrea Belcham and Mary Mony
for copy-editing assistance.

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

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

or the AELAQ.

Cover photo and photo on page 5 by T.P. Byrnes

PRINTED IN CANADA

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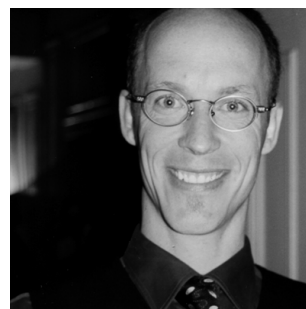
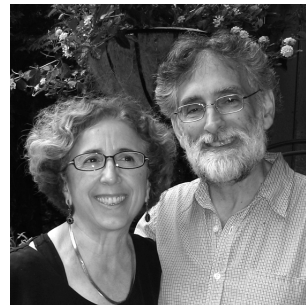
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A few years ago, Ian Ferrier of the Quebec Writers' Federation, Simon Dardick of the Association of English-language Publishers of Quebec, and writer Peter McFarlane went to Ottawa to propose a new project to people at the Department of Canadian Heritage. It seemed to the trio that when the media in the rest of Canada wanted some Quebec talent to talk about, the talent was always francophone. When they gave a thought to the anglos, it was Mordecai Richler and Leonard Cohen. Trouble was, Mordecai was no longer with us and Leonard (at least at the time) didn't have a new book out. (continued on page 9)



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

exploratory poetry

Katia Grubisic's *What if red ran out* crosses literal and metaphorical frontiers.

By Aparna Sanyal

There is a high-minded passion to Katia Grubisic's debut poetry collection which, despite its contemporary ethos, brings to mind the Greeks. Painstakingly crafted, these poems take the reader to the streets of New York, to isolated canyons and rivers, to a village in Croatia, to nameless bodegas, all without a trace of the traveller's self-consciousness. They exhibit, rather, the instinctive freedom of a hinterland explorer. We are guided through places which are both real and metaphorical, strange yet vaguely recognizable, by a voice which is at times oracular.

Grubisic meets me in a Mile End café, arriving late on her bike. She apologizes, mentioning she was delayed by discussions with a French general who fought in Vietnam. It is an aptly intriguing beginning. A trained dancer with university degrees in French and English literature, Grubisic is poised and graceful in person. She is also unsettlingly self-assured. Although a young poet, she delivers her answers with energetic precision, as though she has been thinking over the questions for years.

Where does the borderless quality of her work come from? In "A Hyena in the Bodega," for example, neither country,

nor situation, nor even identity is ever made explicit, yet the foreignness of the place is clear:

*Her dining companion is a good man
if a little uneasy. It is his fault, after
all,
that there's a hyena in the
bodega...she is a supplicant slaver-
ing at his legs and he continues to
smoke. She cannot keep him.*

As in an aboriginal tale, the human speaker is transformed into an animal and back again. The reader accepts this ambiguity in place and self without feel-

ing remotely lost, largely because the poet appears so comfortable with it.

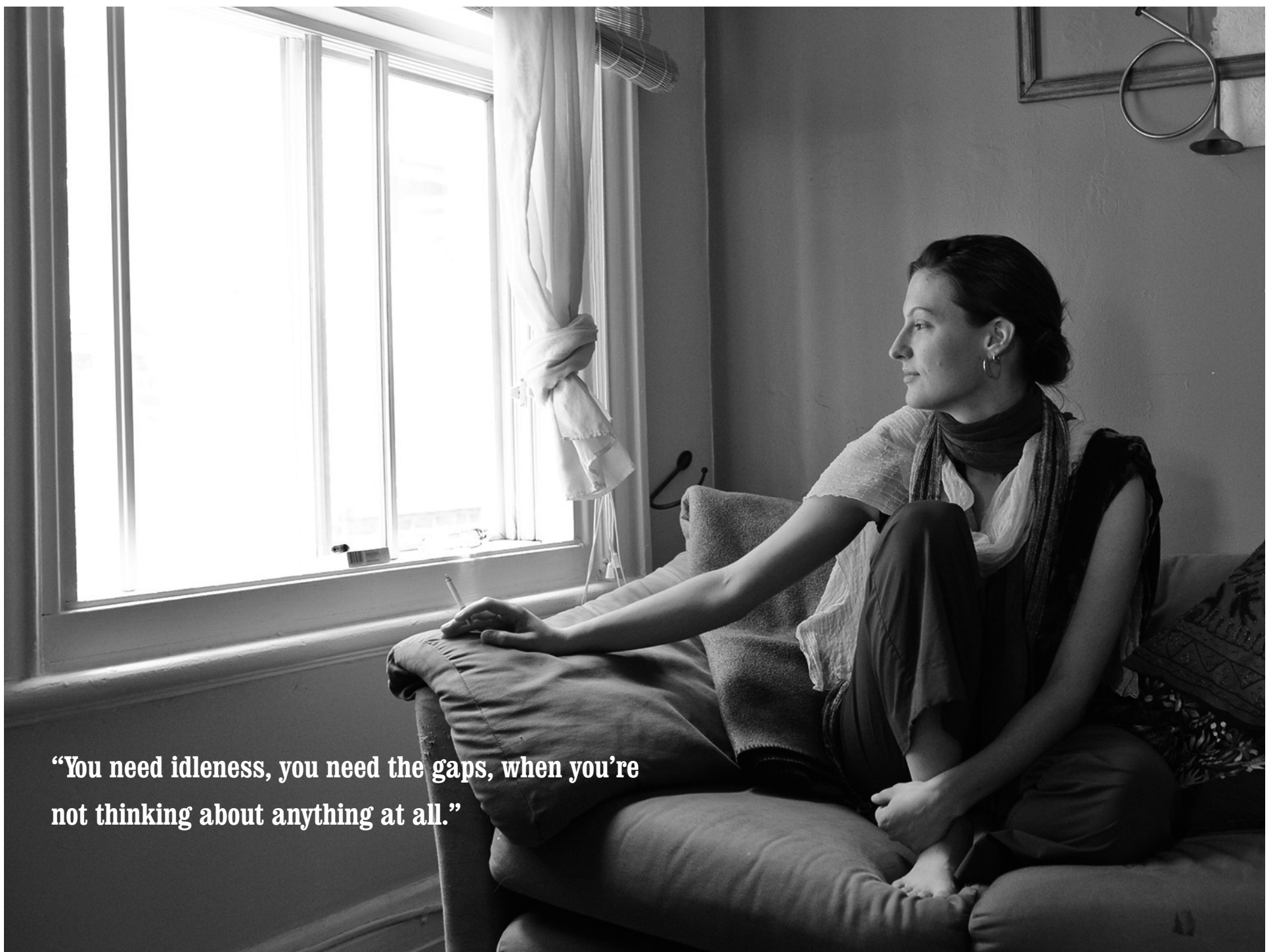
"When it works," says Grubisic, "it begins with a strong, specific sense of place. In 'A Hyena in the Bodega,' for instance, I had a place in mind, but obviously it's universalized. And the metaphorical aspect evolves. There isn't really a hyena in the bodega. But you need to construct a three-dimensional world for the poetic voice to inhabit. Otherwise, it's totally abstract, or it's based totally on an emotional space, or it's a postcard poem – 'Look at me being foreign in this foreign place, how weird, how exotic.' I am conscious of trying to

universalize it after I've hung it on a concrete place. There is this sense that you don't want to be so particular that the place takes over the metaphor."

The borderless quality might also come, Grubisic admits, from a certain innate restlessness. When she was growing up her family lived "all over Ontario." Her father is a Croatian writer, her mother is Swiss, and Grubisic's first language was French. All of her extended family lives in Europe. She does feel a part of the Croatian-Canadian community, particularly in Sudbury and Waterloo, where her family lived the longest. Grubisic notes that her five-year stay in Montreal is something of a lifetime record.

Grubisic's poetry is rooted, however, in another way. Birds, animals, insects, rivers, creeks are ubiquitous, drawn on occasion with supernatural vividness. The poems in which they figure are often mournful. "Poem to the Sand Verberna Moth" bears stoical witness to the helplessness and slow destruction of the natural world:

*There is no bunchgrass left
and the moth turns
to screen doors or lanterns or
the quiet corners where it understands
it is lost and waits tensely
for the death we elaborate for it.*



“You need idleness, you need the gaps, when you’re not thinking about anything at all.”

A rare intimacy pervades her depictions: a heron’s feet “wrap the rock/ like gnarled lichen,” a cormorant is “stretched, its orange beak distending sun.” Grubisic explains the almost tender detail: “For the Romantics, nature was about its reflection in the poet, in the self. The flip side of that, the fear of extinction, is [that] when you mourn someone, a parent or a friend, you mourn them fairly specifically. You owe it to the world that you are bemoaning, that you are eulogizing, to be specific about it.”

Grubisic offers that *What if red ran out*, the whimsical-sounding title of the collection, in fact “speaks to a fear of loss, including loss of the natural world.” A choreographer once mentioned the gradual extinction of the red cochineal bug, an insect related to the ladybug, which is harvested to make natural food coloring. Although Grubisic was never able to corroborate the insect’s extinction, the title’s broader abstract possibilities stuck. “We don’t know what to do with extinction, except mourn it when it’s done, and not actually prevent it in any way. We just keep driving and spewing junk into the air. The title stands for loss on a wider scale.”

The sustained sense of loss is, perhaps, what gives this poetic voice its deeply meditative, disembodied tone at times. Certain poems exhibit a remark-

able counterpoint between this tone and a feral subject matter. In “Paradise, Dam, North Shore” the narrator witnesses a heron devouring a fish, still squirming in its beak, and responds by remarking abstractly: “there is no forethought/ to concupiscence.” Later, while making love, the narrator recalls the bird’s greedy satiation.

Grubisic appears slightly disconcerted by the implication that there is a contrast between the meditative and the feral. “The contrast between the meditateness and the wilderness... is it an effort to domesticate?” she muses, turning away in thoughtful silence. She later observes of the last named poem and “Raven on the Watertower”: “[They] are examples of my attempt not to anthropomorphize beyond the boundaries of the human. I like the way Don McKay’s speakers have a humility in addressing the natural world without dumping all of this human baggage which is a little hubristic. In those poems there’s an alignment of the self to the natural world. At the end of ‘Paradise, Dam, North Shore,’ she’s with her lover and thinks back to what she saw in the bird. To bridge those two is a way to erase the difference between them. I don’t know if it’s meditation so much as an attempt to remove the ego a little bit.”

The last remark is as striking, in an

ego-saturated society, as the alien cry of Grubisic’s raven. Why, in a world that seems less and less interested, is poetry important? “Part of it is the general linearization of society. There’s a much more straightforward way we have of being advertised to, or entertained, or spoken to. On a communicative level, there’s less density and less tolerance, a kind of fear, maybe, for the kind of expansive metaphor that doesn’t tell you what it’s about. You have to make that decision yourself.” But, “you need idleness, you need the gaps, when you’re not thinking about anything at all.” She adds, “There was a time when the Hudson’s Bay Company advertised on the back of major newspapers with Gwendolyn MacEwen poems. That wasn’t that far away – one hopes that it will come back.”

Her voice is wistful. Later, struck by the image of Grubisic as a Cassandra-like figure, I reread “Basin no. 3,” which describes the “small fuse box/...its wires ragged” where:

two pigeons have come to die: their bodies bundled fatly, breast nestled, as though by art or design against breast, and flight is an eddy of old feathers, brown and unquilled at our feet.

Initially, the verses seem bare of emotion. But it is there, in the coolly rendered portrait – part funeral chant, part sacred testimony – of that avian death-embrace. One is made starkly aware of the beautiful thing Grubisic is trying to do. mrb



WHAT IF RED RAN OUT
By Katia Grubisic
Goose Lane Editions
\$17.95, paper, 100pp
ISBN 978-0-86492-509-1

Comedy in tragedy

Arjun Basu's debut collection explores the **Squishy** side of life

By David Ravensbergen

It's not necessarily the contents of your resume that determine how your life will pan out. Something as simple as forgetting to put on your jockstrap one day could change it all forever.

For Terry Johnson, an unspectacular guy from the small town of Peru, Illinois, life was full of promise. A born athlete with the makings of an all-around great ball-player, Johnson was drafted out of high school by the Chicago Cubs and quickly rose through the farm team ranks. After a particularly strong season he was invited for a tryout at the Cubs' training camp, and looked poised to win himself a position in the starting lineup. But then everything changed. On the day Johnson had his picture taken for his first baseball card, he didn't quite suit up in full gear. This seemingly harmless oversight set in motion a chain of events that would spell the premature end of both Johnson's career and his marriage. Sure, Johnson may be

merely the protagonist in a short story, but the kind of abrupt change of fortune his downfall represents is anything but fictional.

Such is the unifying premise for *Squishy*, the debut short story collection from Montrealer Arjun Basu. The book is a tightly packed volume of 13 tales about those situations when fate careens beyond our control.

"As I started plotting the stories, I realized I was writing about a certain moment in peoples' lives," Basu explains in a phone interview. "That moment was not the moment where we say we're going to take charge of things, or 'I'm gonna do this and it's going to change my life.'" Instead, Basu writes about moments of weakness, when his characters succumb to temptation or don't quite

pay enough attention to what's unfolding around them. These "squishy" moments end up shaping his characters' lives in ways they could never have anticipated. Says Basu, "If you go backwards in time to answer the 'how did I get here' question, which a lot of people ask every once in a while, sometimes you can't pinpoint that moment because it was such an innocuous thing. It was a phone call you didn't make or it was a business card that you kept, or it was crossing the street when you shouldn't have or going into one store rather than another."

While they range in setting from Dehra Dun, India to New York City, the stories in *Squishy* are united by a pervading tinge of fatalism. Characters strive to do their best given the limited information at their disposal, but are continually thwarted by circumstances beyond their control – namely, life. When asked if his world view is essentially tragic, Basu pauses before quipping, "I don't know if I have a tragic view



“I wasn’t trying to be overly contemporary, I was just trying to be myself.”

of life as much as I have a realistic view of life, but maybe that in itself is tragic.”

Readers immediately sense misfortune lying in wait as each story gets underway. Following these narratives, one gets the feeling of watching a slasher film, when the protagonist unwittingly blunders into the dark room where the machete-wielding sociopath lurks. Yet Basu’s stories are written with a craft and imagination that make them far from predictable. He makes effective use of dramatic irony, allowing his readers to sympathize with his characters and grin knowingly at their misfortune. “I consider myself [to be] generally a happy person; I quite like my life. At the same time I think there’s great drama in unhappiness, and great comedy in other peoples’ tragedy,” says Basu.

Writing the stories in *Squishy* was something of a departure for the author, who has worked for six years as the editor-in-chief of *enRoute*, Air Canada’s

in-flight magazine. At his day job, Basu aims to craft stories that are linear and direct, avoiding uncontrolled outcomes and loose ends. “In my professional life, I hate squishiness,” he explains. “That’s the irony, because as an editor you craft something with a writer that goes from point A to point B.” In fact, writing *Squishy* wasn’t exactly his idea in the first place. After being approached by David McGimpsey, a friend, poet, and editor at DC Books, Basu decided a fictional project was a good opportunity to change roles and work in a more artistic capacity. The transition proved to be a natural one, and Basu was able to create *Squishy* in between meetings, on weekends, and during the odd stolen moment. His abiding editorial respect for deadlines proved to be an asset in getting the stories done on time.

Perhaps as a consequence of his work creating up-to-date and relevant content for *enRoute* readers,

Squishy is adorned with details that place the stories firmly in the here and now. “I wasn’t trying to be overly contemporary, I was just trying to be myself,” says Basu. “The stories were all things I wanted to explore and they didn’t seem to have a time to them.” Stories like “Thursday” read like a series of observations from yesterday’s commute to work. The flicker of subway lights conjures spectres of al Qaeda, while passengers work on Sudoku puzzles to pass the time. In “The Idols,” a group of affluent twentysomethings speak in the fractured idioms of those more accustomed to text messages than conversation.

Throughout *Squishy* Basu reflects on timeless human dilemmas, interweaving details that reveal the strangeness inherent in our modern lives. This is where *Squishy* shines not only as entertainment, but also as an illuminating literary work. In revealing human pretensions and the

mechanisms of chance that govern our fates, Basu reminds us to treat each other with more compassion, and to take ourselves a little less seriously. Citing American author and radio personality Studs Terkel’s thoughts on the subject, Basu believes that “people are hungry for stories – they’re part of our very being. I still think fiction helps us beat the hunger.”

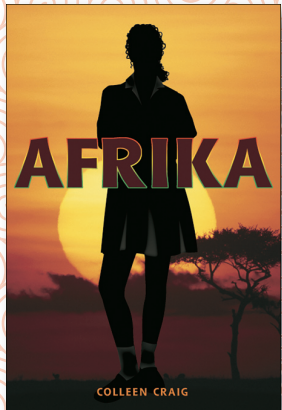
With his first published work of fiction now available, Basu plans to focus on his editorial projects, while taking notes and amassing material for his next round of fiction. He also hopes to one day release a novel that’s long been sitting almost completed in his desk – assuming, of course, that he can find the necessary time, and that life cooperates. As is explained in *Squishy*’s bio note, Basu’s life “is as squishy as anyone else’s.” For example, after arriving early at a party, Basu met the woman who would later become his wife, in the kitchen where

she was struggling to cook some beans. That chance encounter led not only to marriage, but in a rather squishy way to Basu’s editorial career. “I got my job by reading the classifieds. I never do that, but the page in the paper was left open (by my wife) and there it was on the table in the kitchen and I saw the ad. Who knew?” mrb



SQUISHY
By Arjun Basu
DC Books
\$18.95, paper, 148pp
ISBN 978-1897190364

Nothing means summer like
curling up with a good book...



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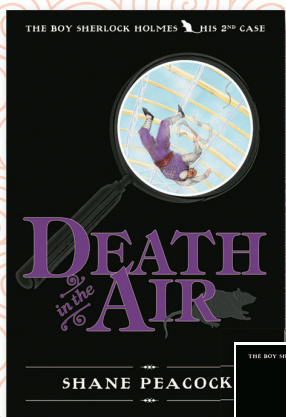
By Colleen Craig

"...this novel will really grab readers who appreciate realistic fiction about young people searching for their place in the world."

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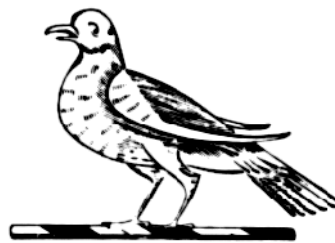
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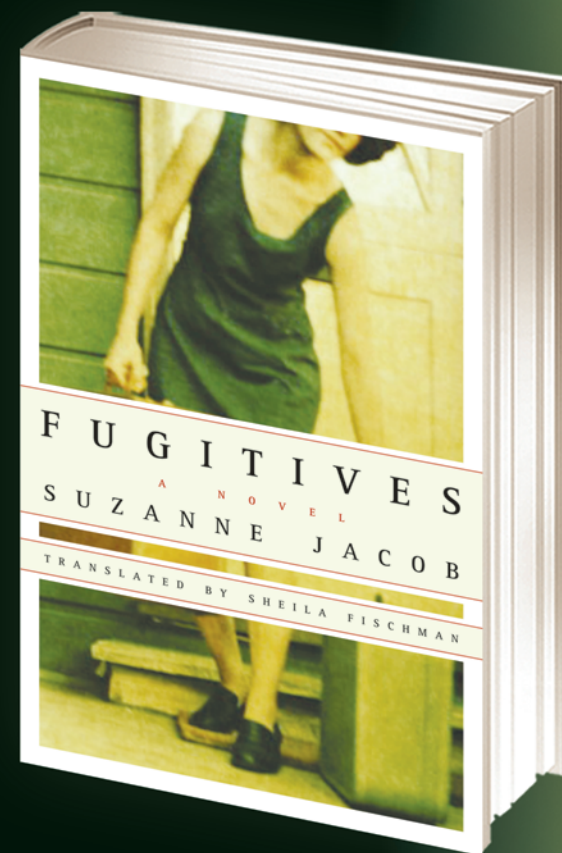
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Canadian Heritage decided that they had a point, and provided funding for research that proved conclusively that, yes, the rest of Canada basically knew two English-language Quebec writers: Mordecai and Leonard. So the Raise the Profile Project was born, funded by QWF, AELAQ, and ELAN (from the Canada Council), with matching funds from Canadian Heritage.

How to raise the profile of English-language writing with a brand that could become a household word? Committees don't usually come up with fun, sexy, playful proposals, but the QWF/AELAQ committee was an exception. The "Love Ms. Julie" campaign was the brainchild of committee deliberations, and was brought to fruition by project coordinator Maria Francesca LoDico with the help of Sherwin Tjia. Ms. Julie, a cross between Tina Fey and Stephen Colbert, is a pert librarian who "truly, madly, deeply loves" English-language writing from Quebec, so much so that she rates books on The Kiss Curve, stamping the covers with lipstick kisses, awards the QueBooker Prizes, and photoshops herself into images of the authors, her "best friends."

Ms. Julie, played by writer/translator/reviewer Adriana Palanca, took part in BookExpo Canada in Toronto, based at the AELAQ booth, but spending much of her time talking to publishers, authors, and media people. She gave out her saucy poster and her snazzy 16-page full-colour scrapbook featuring over 40 Quebec authors. She also hung around with Mélanie Watt, Nino Ricci, Monique Polak, Terry Byrnes, Claude Lalumière, and others. She was a hit.

Ms. Julie has just launched her blog, where more writers will have their day in the sun. At this moment the Raise the Profile campaign is promoting authors with new or upcoming books, but the future is wide open. Ms. Julie is

expected to attend several of the fall literary festivals and some local Montreal events as well.

Everywhere she appears, Ms. Julie sparks interest in Quebec's English-language authors and their books. QWF and AELAQ now feel like proud parents of a prodigy.



Ex-Montrealer Nino Ricci totally crushing on Ms. Julie.



Ms. Julie Loves

NEW ENGLISH-LANGUAGE WRITING FROM QUEBEC

For the rest of Ms. Julie's scrapbook, more Book Expo pix and her blog, go to www.qwf.org and www.elaq.org.



"Have you met my best friend, Stephen Colbert?"

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

According to Susan Pinker, gender in the workplace is an even more complicated issue than we thought

By Saleema Nawaz

Susan Pinker wants an iPhone. Over the counter of a chic yet affordable Westmount café, men are making and drinking coffee and discussing the highly anticipated Canadian release of a coveted all-in-one mobile device. Outgoing and alert, Pinker quizzes them for more details as she places her order. While the milk is being steamed for lattes, she confides she'd hoped the iPhone would be out in time for the release of her book so she could indulge herself with a reward.



As a practicing clinical psychologist, mother of three, and biweekly columnist for the Careers Section of *The Globe and Mail*, Pinker already seems plugged in – and not lacking in motivation either. In her “Problem Solving” column, she’s great at offering advice to individuals with sticky workplace problems, and in *The Sexual Paradox*, her new book, she tackles the complicated subject of sex differences in order to shed light on why career differences between men and women still exist in spite of widespread gender equity policies.

Part of the issue is that we’re still judging things by what Pinker dubs the “vanilla male model”: a framework that uses men as the generic standard. In this view, women who are afforded the same opportunities as men will behave like men. But if this were really the case, there would be a 50-50 split in all occupations – a balance that simply isn’t happening. Although the discrepancy seems to suggest discrimination, Pinker believes we shouldn’t be so quick to judge.

“I’m not arguing that discrimination doesn’t exist. I think discrimination does exist. I just think it’s not the whole story, and there are other interesting

parts of the story, and it’s time to move forward and recognize some of the science that has only emerged in the last five or ten years. We didn’t have it at our fingertips in the seventies.”

The story that’s emerging, according to *The Sexual Paradox*, is that, like it or not, biology does play a role in cognitive development and career selection. Women, on average, tend to favour people-based jobs where human interaction and social responsibility come to the forefront. They are also less likely than men to subject themselves to gruelling work weeks for the rewards of a high paycheque. But if women are opting for less lucrative fields and choosing to work part-time in order to pursue other interests or raise a family, then it might not be only the glass ceiling contributing to the salary gap.

And it isn’t that women don’t excel at math and science, either. In fact, *The Sexual Paradox* points out that women often thrive in academic settings, and in school, they outstrip the males at such a pace that many institutions of higher education now employ affirmative action admission strategies for males in order to achieve gender balance in the student body. But in

general, in spite of ability and rabid recruitment strategies, fewer women than men are choosing to go into male-dominated fields such as engineering, physics, and computer science, and there are still far fewer female than male CEOs.

According to Pinker, this goes back to the fact that women are choosing careers that emphasize people over things. Women are also less likely to thrive on risk and competition. A study by economists cited in *The Sexual Paradox* found that men and women had the same success rate in solving timed mathematical problems in a scenario in which each competitor was paid per correct answer. But given the option, the men were 40 percent more likely to choose a winner-takes-all model of the game, in which only the individual with the most correct answers receives a prize. The researchers found that even men who were less skilled at addition (and thus more likely to lose) were more eager than women to compete under these circumstances.

Pinker suggests that ignoring these temperament differences may actually hurt women in the long run, especially in the workplace, where advancement

“I’m not arguing that discrimination doesn’t exist. I just think it’s not the whole story.”

often depends upon blowing one’s own horn. “What’s happening now,” she explains, “is if we expect women to behave like men, and they don’t negotiate aggressively for salaries, then they’re going to come out behind because they’re not going to ask for the same types of raises. They’re not going to go into salary negotiations in the same way, so they’re going to take a hit. My view is that by pretending this doesn’t exist, you’re more or less allowing this to happen – instead of saying, ‘We know women aren’t going to negotiate, so how are we going to give them a leg up?’ Or, ‘We know women are less likely to throw their hats in the ring for a new promotion or a new project, so how are we going to go and solicit the talented women that we recognize out there in the talent pool?’”

Charming and diplomatic as she is, it’s hard to imagine Pinker giving offense, but she admits she was uneasy about the potential backlash of publishing. In January 2005, after she’d started work on *The Sexual Paradox*, then-president of Harvard University Larry Summers made comments about

continued on next page

PINKER

sex differences that sparked a flurry of news stories as well as widespread outrage. A year later, he was forced out, in spite of support from experts who pointed out the scientific basis for his comments.

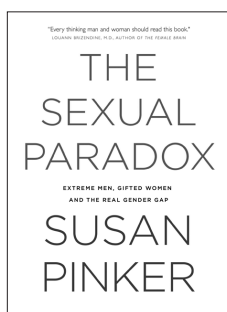
"I'm not as lofty a person as Larry Summers," says Pinker with a wry smile. "So if they can crucify him, what were they going to do to me?"

Biological determinism is a touchy subject, and *The Sexual Paradox* has received what Pinker describes as "some very splintering, blistering reviews, especially in the UK press." But Pinker is always careful to emphasize that, as she is writing about group averages, her findings will not hold true for every individual. She also points out that there is no prescriptive agenda to the research itself.

"I think that's where the confusion is," she surmises. "There's a kind of blurring between the empirical data that we have and what people would like to see happen." She believes that some of her critics haven't read the book all the way through. "Their notion is that this message can be badly abused," she explains, "but I actually spill a lot of ink to say that I'm not saying that mothers should stay home and should be barefoot in the kitchen. If I did say that, I'd be a hypocrite, because I haven't done that myself."

In terms of her own career trajectory, Pinker reveals psychology wasn't always her first choice. "I wanted to be a writer," she admits. "But I came to it late because, being a child of second wave feminism, I thought I actually had to make a living, and being a writer is not always the path to solvency. I thought I had to support myself. So I would say that this particular project and juncture is more serendipitous than anything else."

And as for the book, Pinker just hopes people will read it: "I'd like people to make up their own minds. I wrote it to be read and enjoyed." MRB



THE SEXUAL PARADOX:
EXTREME MEN, GIFTED WOMEN
AND THE REAL GENDER GAP
By Susan Pinker
Random House of Canada
\$34.95, cloth, 346pp
ISBN 978-0-679-31415-8

Saleema Nawaz's first story collection, *Mother Superior*, will be released by Freehand Books in Fall 2008.

non-fiction

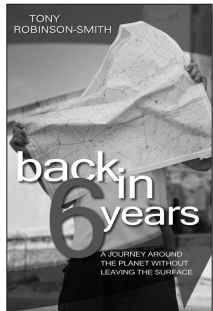
By any means necessary

BACK IN 6 YEARS:
A JOURNEY AROUND THE PLANET
By Tony Robinson-Smith
Goose Lane Editions
\$19.95, paper, 300pp
ISBN 978-0-86492-504-6

A nine-year-old explained the difference between watching television and listening to an oral storyteller: "When I watch TV," she said, "they make up the pictures. When I listen to a storyteller, I get to make up all my own pictures in my own mind."

So it is with Tony Robinson-Smith's account of his six-year trek through regions that would probably never make the top of anyone's cruise list: across a desert in trucks that were literally falling to pieces, on foot through a jungle, across Canada on bike the tough way, from Halifax to Vancouver into the prevailing winds. Each chapter offers a rudimentary map, but where are the photos? The nine-year-old has the answer. The pictures are in our heads:

...a truck squatted alone on the rutted desert. The windshield was a cobweb of fractures, a door was missing...the vertical exhaust pipe



was bent and adrift from its moorings...But it was the tires that bothered me. They were hairy. Long threads from the frayed edges of ill-glued patches and slim fingers of flaking black rubber curling off the rims...This vehicle was not capable of a four-hundred-kilometre journey across scorching roadless desert...

Tony Robinson-Smith was born in England. He was living in Tokyo, teaching English and studying karate and Japanese when, inspired by travel writer Ted Simon, who circled the earth on a motorcycle, he impulsively sketched out a world-wide trip that would keep his feet firmly on earth – or on a boat deck. No flying. "I would travel by whatever local means came to hand."

And he did, through countries that were not exactly tourist-friendly, across borders staffed by bribe-demanding, gun-slinging officials, aboard private yachts with incompetent owner-skipper. This last situation was, in fact, fair, given that Robinson-Smith had more than slightly exaggerated his own knowledge of sailing and boats in order to sign on as crew. Although he writes with an

unforced quixotic sense of humour that makes light of situations that were potentially life-threatening, Robinson-Smith never strays from the truth that Fourth World life and travel are complex.

There's not much about Robinson-Smith's story that would encourage any rational person, in particular one with a passion for hot showers and safe beds, to emulate him. Yet Robinson-Smith's word pictures are seductive. Readers are swept up, suddenly realizing that they know the bumbling skipper; that they could, given pressing need, probably figure out the rules for riding a Chinese train; and that they want to be fed and tended for the length of the St. Lawrence River by the successive waves of Hovington families who washed Robinson-Smith's laundry and fuelled his cycling muscles with pea soup, tourtière, cretons and toast, ice cream with maple syrup, and home-made beer.

The reader also knows the instant the adventure loses its zest and Robinson-Smith wants to revisit the real world of jobs and families, subways and running water – realizes the truth before Robinson-Smith puts the words into print.

Robinson-Smith now lives in Montreal. To explain why would spoil the end of the story. MRB

Joan Eyolfson Cadham is a Saskatchewan journalist.

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MONTREAL (AND FARTHER AFIELD) BY THE BOOK

BY MARGARET GOLDIK

Yes, there are plenty of guidebooks, and some of us even use them – when we host visitors, and when we want to brush up on our city’s attractions. But some books are more: they are guides, sometimes inadvertent, to the odd corners of Montreal that deserve some recognition. And some take us outside the city, to the Eastern Townships and to Quebec City. Here are a few.

SACRED GROUND ON DE LA SAVANE:
MONTREAL'S BARON DE HIRSCH CEMETERY
By Danny Kucharsky
Véhicule Press
\$18.95, paper, 242pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-196-6

Montreal's Baron de Hirsch Cemetery was created in what was called at the time Côte-des-Neiges West. It is Canada's largest Jewish cemetery, in a city that, at the time of the cemetery's inception, had the second largest Jewish population, after New York City, in North America.

Long before this cemetery existed, the earliest Jewish settlers in Quebec bought land in Trois-Rivières and what is now Old Montreal to bury their dead. Jews are obliged by their faith to absorb the costs of burying their indigent dead, and this became a major problem at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time the Jewish community, overwhelmed by rapid growth and immigration, appealed to Baron Maurice de Hirsch for aid. Hirsch was a European philanthropist whose donation became the basis of the Baron de Hirsch Institute and the starting point for community support for the quick and the dead.

Kucharsky adds a small walking tour of the Baron de Hirsch Cemetery at the end of the book, and while it can be used on its own, the reader will want the entire saga of the Jewish community in Montreal. Kucharsky includes the oddities: one of the six Titanic victims to be buried in Montreal, as well as Bernard Wilensky of Wilensky's Light Lunch (immortalized in Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*) have their last resting places here. D.R. Cowles's sepia-toned photographs of some of the older graves add a note of nostalgia.

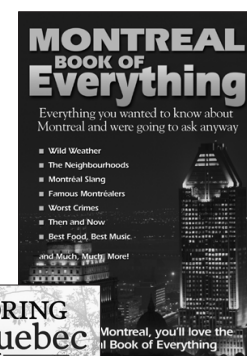
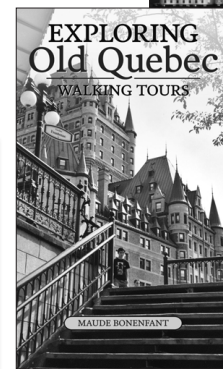
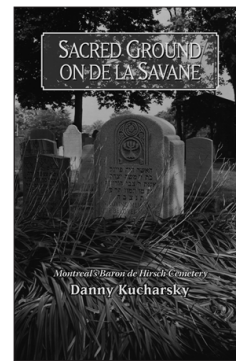
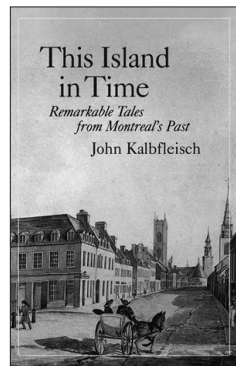
THIS ISLAND IN TIME:
REMARKABLE TALES FROM MONTREAL'S PAST
By John Kalbfleisch
Véhicule Press
\$17.95, paper, 188pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-241-3
(Reviewed from galleys)

Astute *Gazette* readers will recognize the author of "Second Draft," a column on Montreal history. *This Island in Time* is not a rehash of the columns, though the author admits to the occasional fleshing out of older pieces when more material has become available.

Kalbfleisch is clearly fascinated by the people whose stories he tells, and his enthusiasm is contagious. His easy writing style leads the reader through the eras, from the founding of Montreal to 1967 (an arbitrary cut-off date) with eyewitness accounts of deeds both wicked and saintly.

Even Abraham Lincoln is mentioned. John Wilkes Booth came to Montreal in October 1864 looking for support for the Confederate cause, and when he was drunk averred, "Abe's contract is near up." Later – several months after Booth was alleged to have been killed in a barn in the United States – a man answering Booth's description was discovered in Montreal. He was brought before a judge, who dismissed him without a question. (The same judge, obviously too sympathetic to the Confederate cause, also exonerated the St. Albans Raiders). German U-boats off Anticosti Island have Montreal links, and Kalbfleisch brings the characters to life, including a mysterious German who worked for *The Gazette* for many years, and a denizen of Anticosti Island who took carefully aimed pot shots at the U-boats.

There is a touch of romance, of the macabre, and of political events that changed our country's history but hung in the balance until affected by the actions of a handful of ordinary people. *This Island in Time* is a remarkable collection of remarkable tales.



MONTREAL'S SHERBROOKE STREET:
THE SPINE OF THE CITY
By MacKay L. Smith
InfiniteBooks
\$45.95, cloth, 144pp
ISBN 0-9683064-6-2

From Westminster Avenue in the west to Notre-Dame in the east, Sherbrooke Street spans 3.2 kilometres, diverse neighbourhoods, varied architectural styles, and 300 years of history. The street originally followed the path of an Aboriginal trail that "connected the tilled fields around the village of Hochelaga, near the Mountain, with various portages on the Island." The mountain's warming effect on the soil gave an extra week or so to the growing season, and that propelled cultivation between today's Décarie and Cherrier Streets. By 1927 Sherbrooke stretched its modern length from west to east.

Smith's book is definitely not meant as a pocket-sized guidebook, but its bite-sized chapters (Westmount, Atwater to Guy/Côte-des-Neiges, etc.) are easily assimilated, and a walkabout will then repay the pedestrian with delightful moments of recognition. There is much history of the buildings and their owners, lots of photographs and maps, and chapters on infrastructure, so *Montreal's Sherbrooke Street* will appeal to historians, walkers, and those who enjoy learning more about Montreal.

QUEBEC CENTRAL RAILWAY:
FROM THE ST. FRANCIS TO THE CHAUDIÈRE
By Derek Booth
Railfare/DC Books
\$39.95, paper, 160pp
ISBN 978-1-897190-02-9

A train museum between Delson and St. Constant, about an hour from Montreal, is a must-see for anyone with an interest in trains. Also indispensable is a series of books from DC Books and Railfare, all profusely illustrated and

designed for both train lovers and historians.

Quebec Central Railway is the third in the series written by Booth, a retired professor of geography at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, who brings his scholarly acumen to the history of the QCR. Towards the end of the 19th century, railway fever was at its height. Railways brought prosperity and settlement, linked outlying communities, and provided jobs. Charters for railways were taken up and subscribers courted; the government gave subsidies (for railways with wooden rails). On the other hand, start-up costs could be as much as \$20,000 per mile. Not all the farmers were keen on selling right of way, particularly if they were to be paid with railway stock. So railways failed and merged, and eventually the QCR, itself the result of mergers, became part of the CPR.

There is much here of general interest, particularly the economic and historical settings of the QCR, but train buffs will certainly be captivated by the amount of detail provided. The appendices include locomotive rosters and notes on the QCR infrastructure.

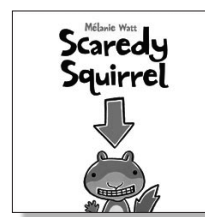
Some more books in the DC/Railfare series:

NIAGARA, ST. CATHARINES & TORONTO RAILWAY: A CANADIAN NATIONAL ELECTRIC RAILWAYS SUBSIDIARY
By John M. Mills
\$44.95, paper
ISBN 978-1-897190-27-2

TROUBLE ON THE TRACKS: GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY OF NEW ENGLAND TRAGEDIES ACCIDENTS THAT OCCURRED ON CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS' MONTREAL TO PORTLAND LINE
By Jeff Holt
\$29.95, paper
ISBN 978-1-897190-13-5

continued on page 15

When Fun



Mélanie Watt's *Scaredy Squirrel* shows kids it's okay to be afraid

Trumps Fear

A friend recently expressed concern that his parents were spending too much time watching TV rather than getting out and experiencing life firsthand. Asked if traveling might be of interest, they answered that they preferred documentaries, which let them explore foreign places in the safety of their own living room.

The story comes to mind after a chat with Mélanie Watt, who expects her bestselling *Scaredy Squirrel* series—*Scaredy Squirrel*, *Scaredy Squirrel Makes a Friend*, and *Scaredy Squirrel at the Beach*—to keep growing.

As suggested by his name, Scaredy has quite an impressive number of phobias, all of which seriously complicate his attempts to just “get out and have fun.” He lives in a tree and plans every nano-second of his daily routine so that each day looks remarkably like the one before. The trouble, of course, is that life gets boring and lonely, and Scaredy faces the challenge of trying to find ways to liven his routine without compromising any of his perceived security. But real life has a way of being unpredictable, even for the most careful of planners. No matter how hard Scaredy tries to play safe, he is inevitably confronted by unforeseen twists, catapulting him out of his comfort zone.

In his most recent adventure, *Scaredy Squirrel at the Beach*, Scaredy would like to enjoy all the benefits of the beach, but without having to deal with any of the associated risks: jellyfish, seagulls, sea monsters – or, worst of all, germs (a recurring theme throughout the series). Initially he tries to recreate a beach scene next to his tree, but soon realizes that something about his home entertainment centre doesn't quite measure up. Much to his discomfort, Scaredy figures he'll need to visit a real beach to bring back a sample of what's missing. True to his character, he leaves nothing to chance, planning his mission with the utter precision of an army general mapping out war strategies. In fact, by the time Scaredy takes one step from his tree, he is so laden with zany, protective gear that he looks nothing like a beach bum.



Although Scaredy is an extreme case, one suspects that his character has resonated with so many readers because Watt has tapped into the theme of

fear, a particularly hot and pertinent subject in a society that is giving up more and more of its freedom in exchange for “security.” Indeed, there is a bit of Scaredy in all of us, including Watt, who jokes that she is afraid of encountering the shark from *Jaws* when she goes swimming. But if there is one thing she needn't worry about, it's running out of material to keep her series going. (The next book will be about night fears.) “Whether you're a three-year-old or whether you're in your seventies, eighties, or nineties, there's always something to be afraid of,” says Watt.

Discussing the various societal factors that add fuel to the *Scaredy* fire, Watt underlines the barrage of cautionary tales transmitted by well-meaning family members, and by the media. In reference to the news, she says, “They tend to just show things that are about drama and things that went wrong, or things that we should be afraid of. That's what they say gets more viewers.”

Watt loves it when her books get kids thinking. “One of the greatest things a kid can ask me after reading *Scaredy*, is ‘Why is Scaredy afraid of green Martians if green Martians don't exist?’ For me that's such a perfect question because I think that's what we all have to ask ourselves: why are we so afraid of so many things?”

Watt encourages kids to seek out reliable information – “The more you know about stuff, the more you'll be able to

judge for yourself” – and suggests gaining perspective through quieting the mind, or “playing dead,” as does Scaredy when totally overwhelmed. “Be still, and you'll realize that it's not so bad.”

Laughter, which Reinhold Niebuhr once described as “the highest form of prayer,” is another great coping mechanism evoked by Scaredy. According to mythology, the only thing the Devil (fear) can't stand is to be laughed at. Watt attributes much of Scaredy's success to the fact that he's funny, specifying that for humour to work, people need to be able to identify with it. The fact that Watt manages to deliver humour that both adults and children can relate to on their own levels, adds to the broad appeal of the books. “It's fun,” she relates, “because I have teachers who buy copies for their students and then copies for themselves.”


While Watt has published 11 books so far, Scaredy is her first character to hit the big time. Kids Can Press, Nelvana Studios, and Nelvana Entertainment are preparing to further brighten his limelight, producing a television series and animated shorts for on-air, online, and on-mobile distribution. The launch of an international merchandise and licensing program is also planned. Although Watt seems very pleased, she admits that this is all “totally unknown territory.” Like Scaredy, however, she seems ready to take the leap. To her great delight, Scaredy is starting to pave the way for her earlier publications. “I'm signing more of my previous books than I was eight years ago,” she says.

Especially popular among Watt's other books is *Chester*, about a narcissistic cat who refuses to play second fiddle to a mouse. Once again, Watt credits humour for the book's success, underlining *Chester's* appeal to readers of all ages.

Although Watt has always loved to draw, she hadn't at first imagined making

a career of it. Joseph Campbell's “follow your bliss” philosophy comes to mind when she explains how everything seemed to fall into place once she abandoned her studies in administration to take up graphic design. “Immediately when I went from administration to design, I felt like I was in a new world where things came easily to me, like ideas. And it was fun.”

Following the advice of one of her professors, illustrator Michèle Lemieux, Watt submitted a school project to Kids Can Press, and her destiny was reshaped. Her first book, *Leon the Chameleon*, came into being, and she dropped her plan of working in advertising.

Eight years have since passed, and though Watt admits it was sometimes a struggle at first, sticking with what she loves is paying off. In her case, fun seems to trump fear, for while she may still get the jitters exploring new territory, one gets the impression that she'll be doing lots more of it anyway – and not necessarily from the safety of her living room. 

SCAREDY SQUIRREL

By Mélanie Watt
Kids Can Press
\$16.95, paper
ISBN 1-55337-969-4

SCAREDY SQUIRREL AT THE BEACH

\$16.95, cloth
ISBN 978-1-55453-225-4

SCAREDY SQUIRREL MAKES A FRIEND

\$16.95, cloth
ISBN 978-1-55453-181-3

Mélanie Watt was a double winner at the Canadian Booksellers' Association Libris Awards Gala in Toronto in June 2008. She was named Children's Author and Children's Illustrator of the Year.

35 UP

Three Montreal Publishers at 35, 15, and 10

BY ADAM GOLDMAN

In the spring of 1973, a fresh-faced graduate looking for steady work – not necessarily a career – stumbled onto an art gallery in Montreal’s Plateau district.

“When I turned up,” says Simon Dardick, co-owner and publisher of Véhicule Press with his wife Nancy Marrelli, “I was looking for work. I had experience publishing a magazine in high school. So I started, and never left.”

Founded a year earlier as an artist-run gallery in the shadows of what was once the legendary nightclub Café Montmartre, Véhicule Art Gallery soon morphed into a printing/publishing business, and eventually into one of Montreal’s largest English-language publishing houses. It has since published more than 300 titles and over 225 authors.

Véhicule’s ability not only to survive but to succeed in French-speaking Quebec says a great deal about Dardick and Marrelli. “It’s a very small operation that’s managed to hang in,” says Dardick of his press, a battle cry of sorts for anyone brave enough to try to grab such a small part of the Canadian reading market. Dardick, though, knows that to publish English books in Montreal, one needs a solid game plan, even if it’s come upon by accident.

“I don’t think we did it scientifically,” he says of Véhicule’s reputation for publishing literature within a local social context. “We published what we liked. If you look at the books we’ve published over the years, they are poetry, fiction, and books about the history of Montreal.”

And that’s where a small operation like Véhicule can blow the doors off its conglomerate competition. Take, for instance, Bill Brownstein’s *Schwartz’s Hebrew Delicatessen: The Story*, a fast-paced glimpse into Montreal’s legendary smoked meat institution. An established name like Brownstein surely would have drawn interest from the big boys down the 401, but Brownstein chose Véhicule as his vehicle.

“When it comes to books in Montreal that have a local social interest,” Dardick says, “out-of-town publishers have tried to do it. But I live in the city, and I know how to promote the books. A large publisher can’t sell any more than we can when it’s dealing with a Montreal topic.”

David Widginton, owner and operator of Cumulus Press, agrees with Dardick. “It took a few years to evolve, to know what I was good at publishing, what I wanted to publish,” he says.

Cumulus eventually settled on producing books on social justice and activism, staple products of the Anarchist Book Fair, which is one of Widginton’s favourite events. Sadly though, as announced at the press’s 10th anniversary press conference, Cumulus will be shutting its doors as Widginton shifts his focus from publishing to filmmaking.

That a successful operator like Widginton has decided to close his doors after ten years highlights the difficulties Montreal’s English-

language publishers face on an ongoing basis. For Widginton, Cumulus’s do-it-all maestro, passing into a new bracket of Canada

Council funding and having to increase his publishing commitment to four books a year gave him a firm nudge out the door.

“The thought of having to do four books in 2009 and 2010 was too much for me,” he says. “But I’ve been at it for ten years; I’ve done my part.”

Selling books without the built-in brand recognition of a name like McClelland & Stewart or Penguin is a tricky if not exhausting proposition, particularly in Montreal’s English niche market, Dardick believes. “You thought it was hard writing the book? You thought it was hard making the book? The really hard part is getting it to the reader.” Dardick attributes some of this difficulty to the erosion of library budgets and small independent booksellers, often the bread and butter of a small press. “They believed in Canadian literature and would carry our stock,” he says.

This is not to say that a company like Chapters does not believe in or support Canadian literature. Rather, they simply insist on a title generating a certain amount of profit – not exactly a scientific calculation for publishers and sellers. Christina Manolescu of Prince Chameleon Press agrees. “Ask any small publisher what the toughest part is, and they’ll tell you it’s marketing,” says Manolescu, who started Prince Chameleon in England 15 years ago, and brought it to Montreal when she moved back here in 2001.

Manolescu takes a not-so-traditional approach. Turned off by the nuances of conventional publishing,

she started Prince Chameleon as a self-publishing press, a segment of the industry with great support in the United Kingdom but seen as a poor cousin to traditional publishing in North America. “Traditional publishing is a closed shop,” she says. “And after many years, I decided it was time to try publishing myself. What is encouraging is that one can self-publish and go a bit of a distance on one’s own. Technology, in that sense, has been kind.”

Widginton agrees with Dardick and Manolescu on the issue of selling the books. “It depends on the title. I sell more at book fairs or at events that I tie the book into.” He adds, “But selling is difficult, especially if you rely on the traditional bookstore route.”

Small or large, all publishers are subject to the same industry trends and downturns, as well as an often fickle reading public. As rising production costs have bloated the price of books, consumers are choosing carefully – or, as Manolescu believes, not at all. “People are reading less, especially fiction, and other media are filling the gap. And it affects everyone. It’s a reality check for the publishers.”

For his part, Dardick disagrees. “I’ve not found that at all,” he says of the supposed downturn. “I think it’s a huge market still. I think there’s more reading being done than ever. What’s changed is the way books are delivered.” Book sales may have levelled off over the past few years (which, factoring in population growth, can be seen as a decline) but there is so much reading being done that simply cannot be measured by book sales and publishers’ profitability.

With that in mind, Dardick is stepping up his interactive efforts, vamping up the Véhicule website in order to stay in closer contact with his readers through newsletters and podcasts. As he figures it, more content will lead to a higher number of hits.

While publishers like Véhicule and Cumulus try (or tried) to decode a complicated industry on their own, Manolescu has taken a different approach. In 2001 she founded the Invisible Cities Network (ICN), a group of local artists – including many self-publishers – who gather throughout the city to support, critique, and

collaborate. The group initiates fiction, poetry, and theatre events, conferences, and highly successful self-publishing

Small or large, all publishers are subject to the same industry trends and downturns.

workshops. “It’s such a difficult thing,” Manolescu says of self-publishing. “Doing it yourself is tough. But quite a few writers have taken the initial plunge with this group.”

Although Dardick, Widginton, and Manolescu each hail from vastly different publishing corners, they can all agree on one thing: publishing English books in Montreal is not a gateway to riches, but a labour of love. It is a gruelling marathon in which one lives or dies with the closing of a small bookshop or the unexpected success of a small book that nestles snugly into a local niche.

“Sometimes you do this,” Manolescu says, “and the whole world ignores you. But I don’t regret what I did. My only regret is that I didn’t start it earlier.”

Widginton, who will pass on his list to one-time competitors to keep Cumulus titles alive under another name, looks back on his ten years with nothing but warm thoughts. “Who knows what will happen in ten years?” he says with regard to a potential revival. “But if I didn’t love doing it, I wouldn’t have done it.”

And for the man who walked into the uncertain world of Montreal publishing not knowing if he’d be in it for a day, a decade, or a lifetime, it’s all based on a very simple maxim: “After doing this for thirty-five years,” Dardick says, “Nancy and I are still excited. Working with authors and publishing literature is just very exciting.”

Few publishers would disagree. **mb**

Enthusiastic science

CHOOSING WILDNESS:
MY LIFE AMONG THE OSPREYS
By Claude Arbour
Translated by Joan Irving
Greystone Books
\$24.95, paper, 242pp
ISBN 978-1-55365-297-7



One of the many good things to be said for Claude Arbour is that the title of this book is the only egotistical thing about it. Perhaps it was the English publisher's choice. The French original, *Sentiers sauvages*, gives a better idea of *Choosing Wildness's* aim: an intimate look at nature in a remote part of Quebec's Mauricie district. The author tells you almost everything you need to know about him in the first six pages. After that you're one of the family at Lac Villiers, on the trail with Arbour's beloved huskies as they encounter a lone wolf, or up a tree as he builds an osprey nesting site.

The chapter on nesting sites typifies Arbour's narrative charm. He tells his dogs he won't be travelling with them today ("they watched me thoughtfully"), and heads down a trail "bordered by blueberry and Labrador tea bushes, strewn with dead leaves whose faint perfume of fermentation quickened the mind." He arrives at a bog where he has spotted a tree just right for an osprey nest (ospreys prefer pines or spruces with broken tops). Then he describes exactly how he builds a platform that will encourage ospreys to hatch their chicks there. At the end the reader knows not only how to make a nesting site, but how to climb a 30-metre pine and how to tell if the tree is safe, how many years ospreys will return to the nest, and how long it takes their young to incubate. All this in 1500 unhurried words.

The book is a series of short, discrete chapters, narrated in Arbour's friendly voice: telling you how acid rain and logging dams affect fish and why the balance of fish in the lake affects the ospreys, why otters love to slide in the snow, or how to attract a marten (burn birchbark: they love the smell). You'll also learn the ins and outs of privies in winter (a heat-reflecting seat is a must). Throughout, there's a sense of seasons passing on the Canadian Shield. The prose often rises to unforced poetry ("loons, the great tenors of our summer nights"), fluently rendered in Joan Irving's translation.

Arbour combines a scientist's ability to synthesize facts with a writer's talent for the telling detail, plus an amateur's enthusiasm. The latter sometimes borders on obsession: asked to do a monthly survey of bird

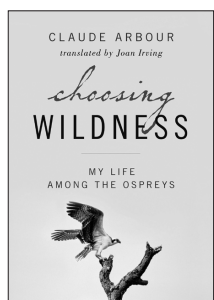
species in a 10-kilometre territory for four months, he decides he'll extend it to two years and 1,000 square kilometres, and will survey not only birds but also plants, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, soil types, and minerals. "I had bitten off a rather large chunk," he says, with typical understatement.

It's more like painting the Brooklyn Bridge: the territory takes him a month to cover (by canoe), and then he has to start all over again. But he never tires of life in the wild.

At the book's end, reflecting on over 20 years at Lac Villiers, Arbour comes as close as he ever does to self-congratulation when he says the nesting sites he's built have hatched over 200 ospreys. Here's a man who loves what he's doing and knows he's doing good work.

The author got his professional start when philosopher Jacques Dufresne put together a deal that Samuel Johnson would have recognized: a subscription. One hundred people forked out \$100 each, in return for which Arbour took up full-time residence at Lac Villiers and began writing the material that eventually took the form of this book. It's heartening to know that this useful tradition of literary commerce is still being honoured. mrb

By Ted Smith, an Ottawa writer and editor.



Many self-published books are submitted to the mRb for review. Most of them are badly edited: not only are there mistakes in grammar and spelling, but the novels lack structure, or the dialogue needs work. Non-fiction books are generally better, but even here, authors who consider self-publishing should also strongly consider hiring a qualified professional editor. Hiring a professional designer for the cover is also a good option.

That being said, two recent self-published books stand out. One is fiction, one non-fiction; both could have used the professional editor mentioned above, but both are worth more than a passing glance.

THE OVUM FACTOR

By Marvin L. Zimmerman
Synergy Books
US \$14.95, paper, 384pp
ISBN 978-1-933538-99-0

The earth's fragile ecosystem is being destroyed by humanity, and a think tank has identified the work of a professor of molecular biology as the last hope for mankind.

A young investment banker starts by assessing the professor's research, but soon embarks on a mission to find the plant that can save the world. There are bad guys too, including a Roman Catholic cardinal (fast becoming a cliché, thanks to Dan Brown).

The writing is skilled, the dialogue believable, and the premise fascinating, but *The Ovum Factor* bogs down in the middle, perhaps because Zimmerman did a lot of research and didn't want to waste it. Nonetheless, a good summer read with a gripping ending.

RAINDROPS, GLIMPSES, MOMENTS:

AN UNCONVENTIONAL MEMOIR OF AN UNPLANNED JOURNEY
By Len Richman
Llumina Press
\$12.95, paper, 169pp
ISBN 978-1-595263-37-2

When health becomes precarious, and sand runs through the hourglass of time more swiftly, what are the things that really matter in one's life?

Richman set himself this question, and answers with a memoir that meanders through memories of books loved and journal entries over the years revisited, with fond recollections of life-changing travels and people. Montreal's Thomas More Institute encourages learning through reading and discussion, and the author's involvement with TMI pervades his thoughtful reminiscences. *Raindrops, Glimpses, Moments* is in no way the linear chronology of a life: Richman dips into the past, and looks at it in the light of the present. This is an exercise in the examined life. mrb

MONTREAL BY THE BOOK continued from page 12

EXPLORING GOLD QUEBEC:
WALKING TOURS
By Maude Bonenfant
Translated by Vicki Marčok
Véhicule Press
\$9.95, paper, 120pp
ISBN 978-1-55065-226-0

Quebec City is celebrating its 400th anniversary this year, and what better way to investigate one of the most visited cities in North America than with this pocket-sized guide. There are seven tours: all can be walked in three days, at a comfortable pace. Bonenfant also has suggestions for those who have less time, or who prefer less walking. The thematic tours – those which use particular sites from one or another of the seven tours – include religious heritage, and arts and handicrafts. The Writers' Promenade, Ghost Tours of Quebec, and the Prophecy of Champlain are separate tours, some with a fee.

Two more books are

very different, but each fascinating in its own way. They are definitely not guidebooks, not even inadvertently, but Montreal is the star.

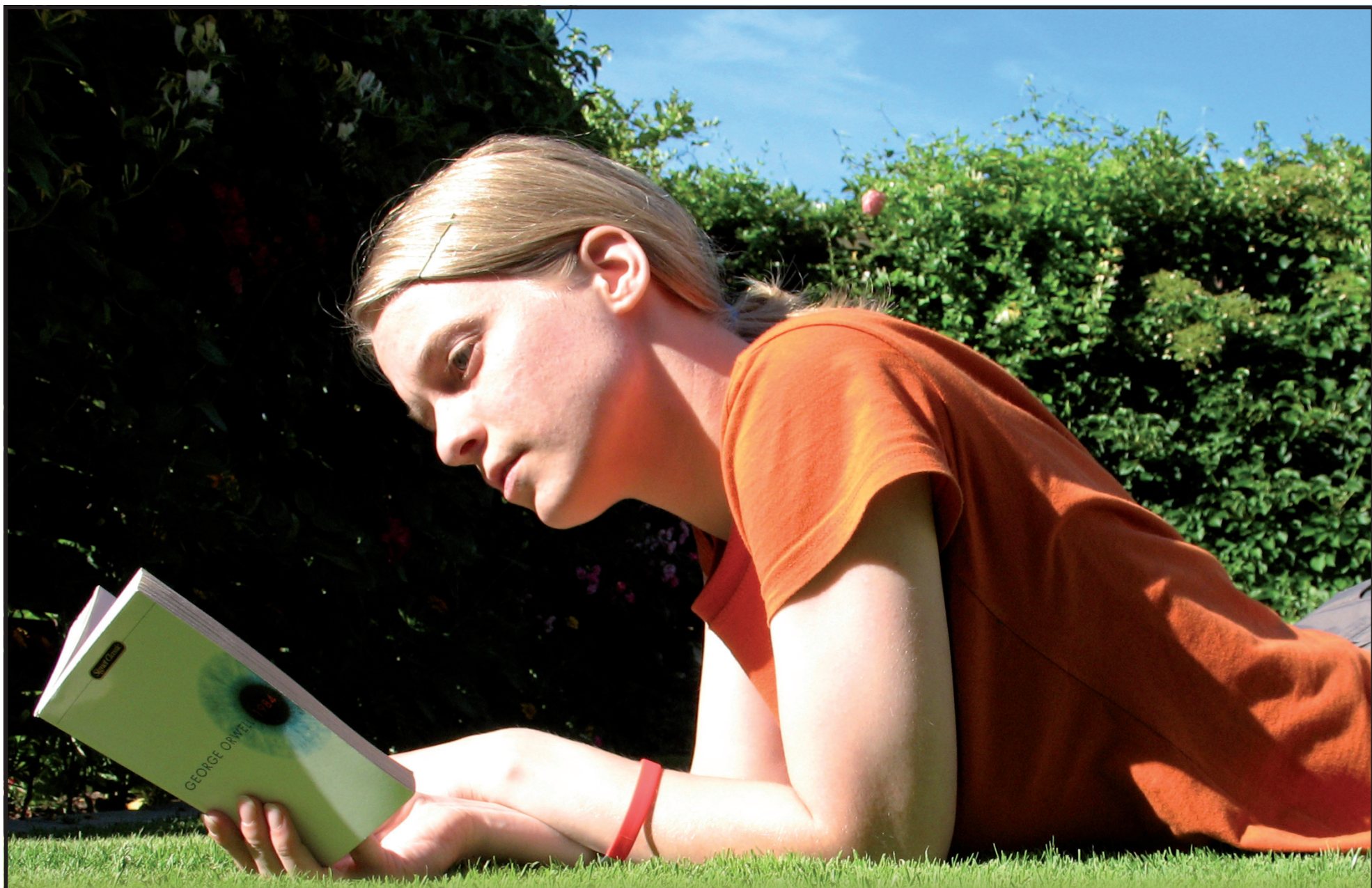
MONTREAL IN MIND
Ulysses Travel
\$12.95, paper, 64pp
ISBN 978-289464-843-8

Montréal in Mind – the English version of *Montréal en tête* – published by Ulysses Travel Books, is a pictorial guide to various Montreal neighbourhoods, with a nod both to history and to Montreal's diversity. With its trademark sumptuous photographs, Ulysses has created an affordable picture book to tempt visitors to Montreal, or to give as a souvenir of this unique city.

MONTREAL BOOK OF EVERYTHING
By Jim Hynes

MacIntyre Purcell Publishing
\$14.95, paper, 208 pp
ISBN 978-0-9738063-7-3

MacIntyre Purcell has a slew of *Books of Everything*, about cities from Edmonton to Ottawa. The books don't promise the reader hotel or restaurant recommendations, but do tell you everything you wanted to know about these places and were going to ask anyway. What were the five rainiest days in Montreal history? What were its five greatest architectural achievements? Most Montrealers already suspect that Montreal is the shadfly capital of Canada, and that our smog problem is the worst in Quebec. We have bilingual beggars, and more than 100,000 householders move every July 1. *The Montreal Book of Everything* is written by a Montrealer who obviously knows the city, and trivia buffs will love it. mrb



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