

Véhicule Press

Fall/Winter 2022

FICTION

David Homel

NON-FICTION

George Elliott Clarke
Stanley Péan

POETRY

R.P. LaRose
James Pollock





Véhicule Press

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHERS

Even after the careful planning, it's always a surprise to see a season's line-up in the pages of our catalogue — books dressed in final covers, complete with jacket copy and all the bibliographic trimmings. We're delighted by the range of titles for Fall/Winter 2022 — from provocative essays on race in Canada to witty verse about everyday objects like microwaves and vacuum cleaners. We hope there's something here you'll want to bring along as you continue to reconnect with your city or plan holiday travel (hint: *Letters from Montreal* would make the perfect pairing for any flâneur in your family). Don't miss our back pages, where we take a look at some of the talent that has helped make Véhicule a premier home for translation.

Publishers

Simon Dardick
Nancy Marrelli

Associate Publisher

Carmine Starnino

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge that we are publishing from Tiohtià:ke, the Mohawk name for a historic place for gathering and trade for many First Nations. It is unceded traditional Indigenous territory, on which there have now been non-Indigenous settlers for more than 375 years. As publishers we know we cannot rewrite our history, but we can be part of a concerted effort to contribute to reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and Settlers.

Cover art by Kaia'tanó:ron Dumoulin Bush

Véhicule Press acknowledges the support of the Canada Book Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles du Québec (SODEC).

PRINTED IN CANADA



Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts

SODEC

Québec 

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A HOUSE WITHOUT SPIRITS

David Homel

When Paul is hired to write a monograph of the Montreal photographer John Marchuk, he assumes he'll be able to turn over the eccentric project in a matter of weeks. Little does he know that over the next few months his visits with Marchuk, in a house stuffed with boxes stacked floor to ceiling with his life's archive, will expose an emptiness in his own home.

In *A House Without Spirits*, Homel delivers some of his most memorable characters to date—reclusive artists, disaffected life partners, wandering ghosts, cult-affiliated nuns—in a contemporary Montreal noir that reveals how much we learn about ourselves when we begin to ask questions of others.



David Homel is the author of nine novels and a memoir, as well as a series of books for younger readers co-written with Marie-Louise Gay. A prize-winning writer and translator, he has worked in documentary film, print and radio journalism. He lives in Montreal.

Praise for David Homel

“Homel writes with remarkable grace about the simplest aspects of life, and the most complicated.” — *Quill and Quire*

“His novels are acts of witnessing, and his characters carry the conscience of our times.” — Marie-Claire Blais

“No matter where you are in your life journey, *Midway* is a fiction that will provide aesthetic and intellectual sustenance and emotional comfort on the road.” — *The Globe and Mail*

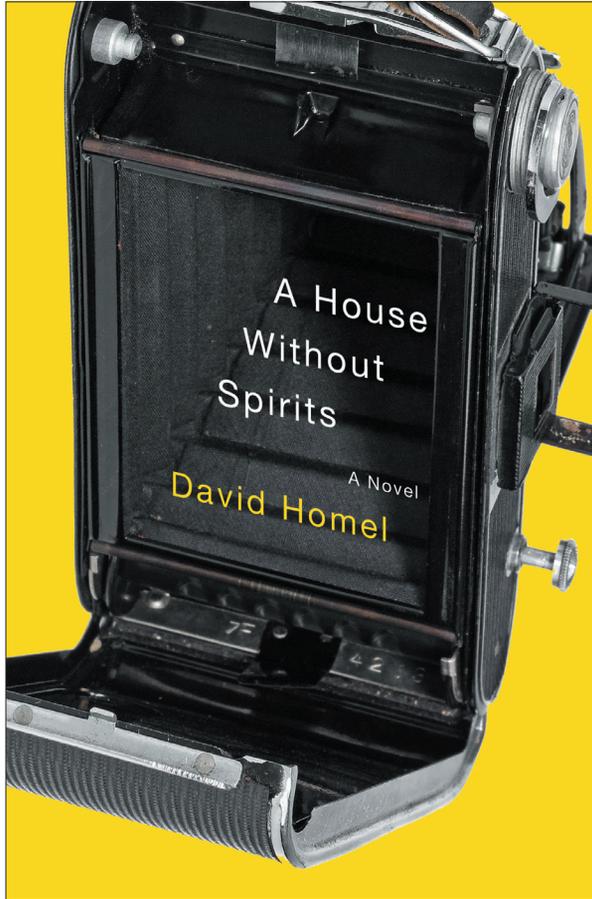
NOVEL • SEPTEMBER 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-606-0 • \$21.95 CDN

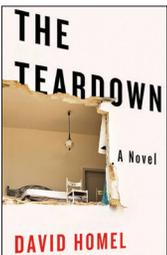
TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 228 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-612-1 • \$13.99

A contemporary Montreal noir that reveals how much we learn about ourselves when we begin to ask questions of others



Recommended Fiction



The Teardown

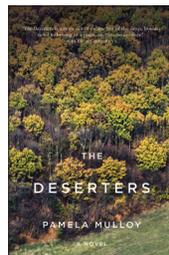
David Homel

ISBN: 978-1-55065-520-9

\$19.95 CDN

5 1/2 x 7 1/2 • 240 PP

EPUB AVAILABLE



The Deserters

Pamela Mulloy

ISBN: 978-1-55065-495-0

\$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

5 x 7 1/2 • 202 PP

EPUB AVAILABLE

WHITEOUT

How Canada Cancels Blackness

George Elliott Clarke

In *Whiteout: How Canada Cancels Blackness*, his new and essential collection of essays, George Elliott Clarke exposes the various ways in which the Canadian imagination demonizes, excludes, and oppresses Blackness. Clarke's range is extraordinary: he canvasses African-Canadian writers who have tracked Black invisibility, highlights the racist bias of true crime writing, reveals the whitewashing of African-Canadian perspectives in universities, and excoriates the political failure to reckon with the tragedy of Africville, the once-thriving, "Africadian" community whose last home was razed in 1970.

For Clarke, Canada's relentless celebration of itself as a site of "multicultural humanitarianism" has blinded White leaders and citizens to the country's many crimes, at home and abroad, thus blacking out the historical record. These essays yield an alternate history of Canada, a corrective revision that Clarke describes as "inking words on snow, evanescent and ephemeral."

"George Elliott Clarke is an extraordinary wordsmith, and so it is no surprise that his prose is often glorious."

—*Literary Review Of Canada*



George Elliott Clarke was born in Windsor, Nova Scotia, and grew up in Halifax. His acclaimed verse-novel *Whydah Falls* (1990), adapted for radio and stage, has been published in Chinese, while *Execution Poems* (2001) won the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. His recent books include *Where Beauty Survived: An Africadian Memoir* (2021). He is the E.J. Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto.

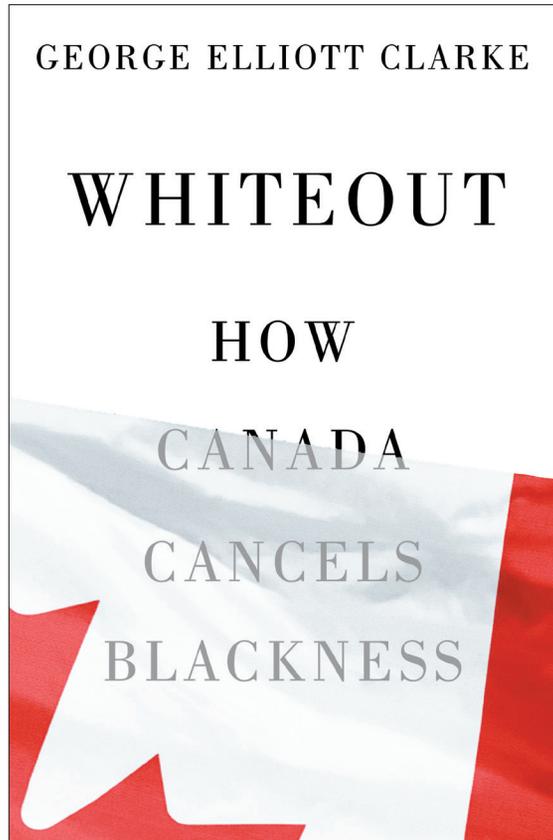
LITERARY NON-FICTION • JANUARY 2023

ISBN: 978-1-55065-607-7 • \$24.95 CDN • \$19.95 US

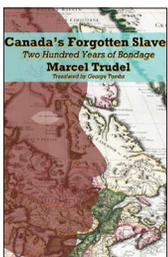
TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 300 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-613-8 • \$14.99

Essays that expose the various ways in which
the Canadian imagination demonizes, excludes,
and oppresses Blackness

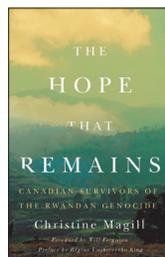


Recommended Non-Fiction



**Canada's
Forgotten Slave:**
*Two Hundred Years
of Bondage*
Marcel Trudel

ISBN: 978-1-55065-327-4
\$27.95 CDN • \$27.95 US
9 x 6 • 255 PP



The Hope That Remains:
*Canadian Survivors of the
Rwandan Genocide*
Christine Magill

ISBN: 978-1-55065-518-6
\$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US
5 ½ x 8 ½ • 212 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

LETTERS FROM MONTREAL

Tales of an Exceptional City

Edited by Madi Haslam

Letters From Montreal documents the experiences of Montrealers past and present, creating a portrait of the storied city unlike any other. Drawn from the celebrated column in *Maisonneuve* magazine, this anthology features Canadian writers chronicling a quintessential part of local life. Narrated with the intimacy of journal entries, each letter bridges the playful and profound. In early dispatches, Melissa Bull ditches a boyfriend over pétanque in Parc Laurier; Sean Michaels watches Arcade Fire lose Battle of the Bands; Deborah Ostrovsky frets over the sublime sophistication of the Plateau's French children. More recently, Ziya Jones spends a summer herding sheep through Parc du Pélican; Eva Crocker performs in a “fake orgasm choir” at the Rialto Theatre; and André Picard takes a pause from the pandemic by running up Mount Royal.



Madi Haslam is the editor-in-chief of *Maisonneuve* magazine. Her reporting has appeared in *This* magazine, *The Walrus*, *Briarpatch*, *Policy Options* and *GUTS*. She has received two Canadian Online Publishing Awards and a CAJ nomination. She lives in Montreal.

Edited by *Maisonneuve* editor-in-chief Madi Haslam, these letters buzz with a sense of possibility, surprise and transformation. They remind us that a city can't quite be defined, that every person inside it interprets it anew.

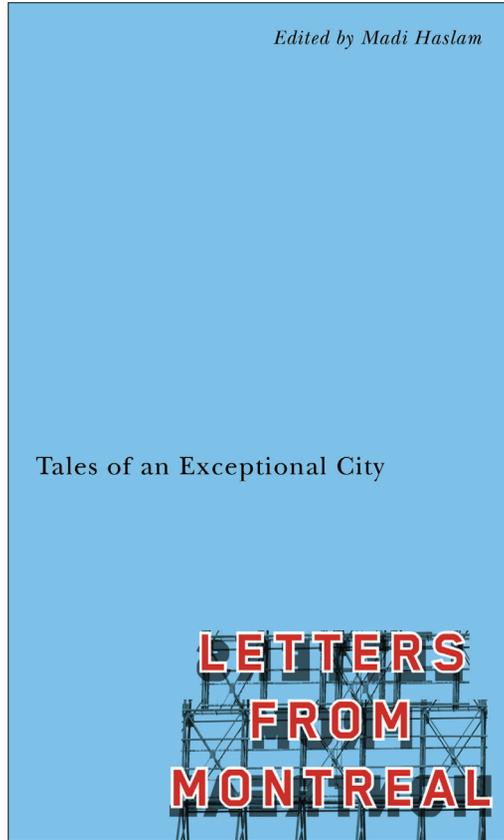
ANTHOLOGY • OCTOBER 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-608-4 • \$16.95 CDN • \$13.95 US

TRADE PAPER • 4 1/4 X 7 • 160 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-614-5 • \$11.99

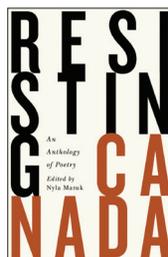
Writing about Montreal that buzzes with a sense of possibility, surprise and transformation



Recommended Anthologies



After Realism:
24 Stories for the 21st Century
 Edited by André Forget
 ISBN: 978-1-55065-596-4
 \$22.95 CDN • \$18.95 US
 5 x 7 1/2 • 342 PP
 EPUB AVAILABLE



Resisting Canada:
An Anthology of Poetry
 Edited by Nyla Matuk
 ISBN: 978-1-55065-533-9
 \$22.95 CDN • \$17.95 US
 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 • 280 PP

BLACK & BLUE: Jazz Stories

Stanley Péan

Translated from the French by David Homel

In *Black & Blue*, author and radio personality Stanley Péan guides us through a history of jazz, stopping at a number of high points along the way. He takes us behind the scenes with anecdotes that tell much about the misunderstandings that have surrounded the music. How could Jean-Paul Sartre have mixed up Afro-Canadian songwriter Shelton Brooks with the Jewish-American belter Sophie Tucker? What is the real story behind the searing classic “Strange Fruit” made immortal by Billie Holiday, who at first balked at performing it? And since this is jazz, there is no shortage of sad ends: Bix Beiderbecke, Chet Baker, Lee Morgan, to name a few. Péan also shows how musicians like Miles Davis worked with the emerging voices of hip-hop to widen jazz’s audience, as well as how the movies, Hollywood and European cinema alike, tried to use jazz, often whitening it in the process. Like jazz itself, Péan’s essays are spontaneous, thoughtful, and refined.



Stanley Péan is the author of eight novels and seven short story collections. He has been piloting “Quand le jazz est là” every week night on ICI Musique, Radio-Canada’s all-music radio network for the last thirteen years.



David Homel is a prize-winning writer and translator. He lives in Montreal.

Winner of the Victor-Barbeau Prize 2020

“The strength of this book is that it whets the appetite to listen to jazz... beautiful stories well told.”

— Patricia Powers, Radio-Canada

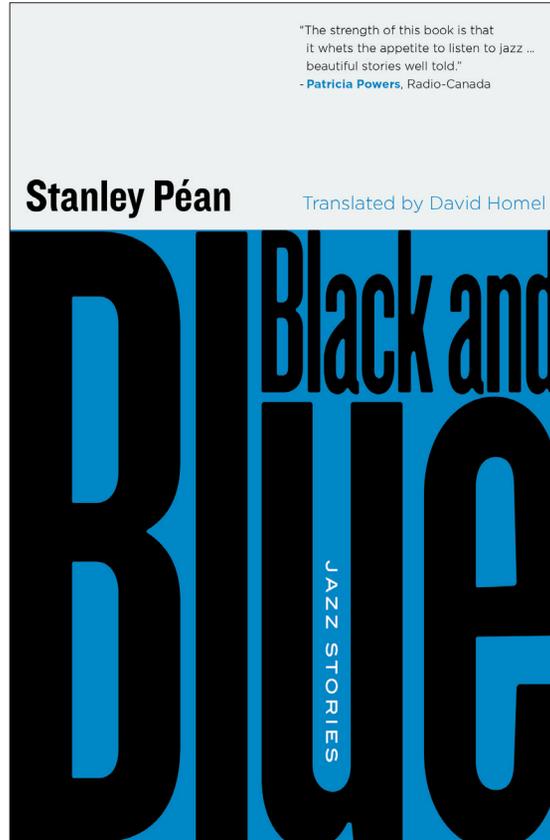
NON-FICTION • SEPTEMBER 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-611-4 • \$21.95 CDN • \$17.95 US

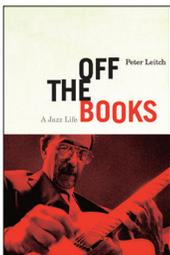
TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7½ • 240 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-617-6 • \$13.99

A history of jazz's high points,
misunderstandings and sad ends



Recommended Non-Fiction



Off the Books:
A Jazz Life
Peter Leitch

ISBN: 978-1-55065-348-9
\$20.00 CDN • \$20.00 US
8 ½ x 5 ½ • 188 PP



Rock 'n' Radio:
*When DJs and Rock Music
Ruled the Airwaves*
Ian Howarth

ISBN: 978-1-55065-469-1
8 ½ x 5 ½ • 240 PP
\$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US
EPUB AVAILABLE

WOLF SONNETS

R. P. LaRose

In his commanding poetry debut, *Wolf Sonnets*, R. P. LaRose indigenizes the sonnet, undoing its classical constraints and retooling the form for current political circumstances. Packed with family lore, these poems reflect on how deeply we can trust the terms we use to construct our identity. A proud citizen of the Métis Nation, LaRose even questions his right to identify as such: “I was made in someone else’s home,” he writes. *Wolf Sonnets* is verse obsessed with names, infinity, numbers, categories, and interconnectedness. Depicting his ancestors as wolves—symbols of survival and protection—LaRose brings fresh insight to his wider poetic project: castigating the inequality, greed, and racism inherent to colonialism.



R. P. LaRose grew up on the prairies near Buffalo Lake, Alberta, and the boreal foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Longlisted by CBC Writes, his poetry has appeared in *PRISM International* and *The Walrus*. His first chapbook, *A Dream in the Bush* was published in 2017 by Anstruther Press. He earned his BA at the University of Alberta and completed his MFA at Cornell University. A member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, he currently resides in Amiskwaciy Waskahikan (Edmonton).

“There are some really striking lines in LaRose’s poems, one that make me pause, or even stop dead in my tracks.”
—rob mclennan

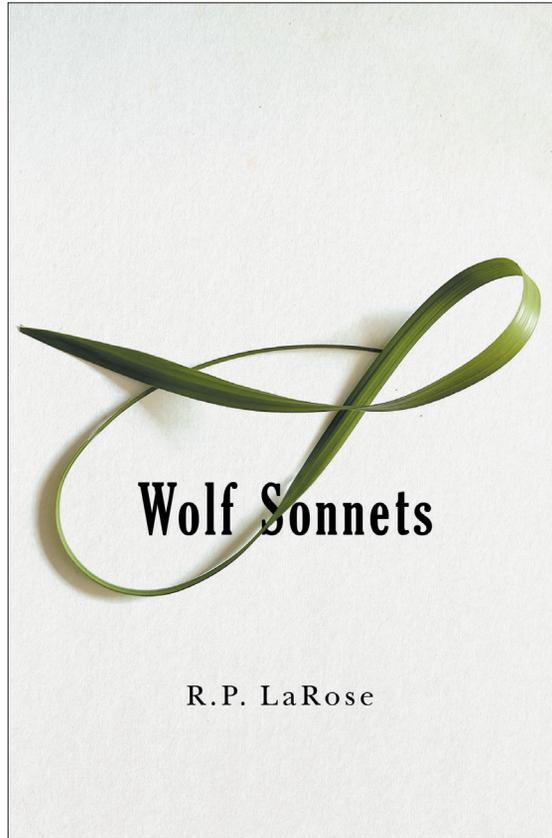
POETRY • SEPTEMBER 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-609-1 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

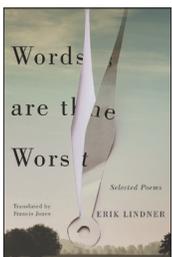
TRADE PAPER • 5 X 7 ½ • 75 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-615-2 • \$13.99

Poems castigating the inequality, greed,
and racism inherent to colonialism



Recommended Poetry



Words are the Worst:
Selected Poems

Erik Lindner
Tran. Francis R. Jones

ISBN: 978-1-55065-583-4
\$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US
5 x 7 1/2 • 96 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE



Nectarine

Chad Campbell

ISBN: 978-1-55065-581-0
\$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US
5 x 7 1/2 • 73 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

DURABLE GOODS

James Pollock

Durable Goods is a book of sharply imagined poems about everyday technology. James Pollock calls to surprising life everything from microwaves to kettles, sprinklers to umbrellas, with a precision both unerring and effortless. By conjuring the essential spirit of each object, the poet reveals the tools and appliances that surround us as both sympathetic reflections of ourselves—our fear, love, rage, hope and grief—and strange beings with inner lives of their own. “It knows how much pressure you’ve been under,” Pollock writes, of the barometer, “that you could use a change of atmosphere.” Read together, these poems immerse us in an imagined world with the power to make us see our own in a new way. Suffused with dazzling wordplay, razor wit, and rippling sonic effects, the poems richly reward being read aloud. For Pollock, the most durable good is language itself.



James Pollock is the author of *Sailing to Babylon* (2012), a finalist for the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Governor General’s Award in Poetry. His prizes include the Manchester Poetry Prize, the Magma Editors’ Prize, and the Guy Owen Prize from *Southern Poetry Review*. His other books include *You Are Here: Essays on the Art of Poetry in Canada* (2012) and *The Essential Daryl Hine* (2015). He grew up in southern Ontario, Canada, and is now Professor of English at Loras College. He lives with his wife and son in Madison, Wisconsin.

“James Pollock’s latest collection, *Durable Goods*, presents a speaker able to mine seemingly insignificant objects for the astonishing. These elegant but intimate poems echo the very best of Tony Harrison and James Merrill—works which, beneath the sparkle of their cheeky humour, exhale with vulnerability and generosity and edge towards the oracular.”
—Alexandra Oliver, author of *Hail, the Invisible Watchman*

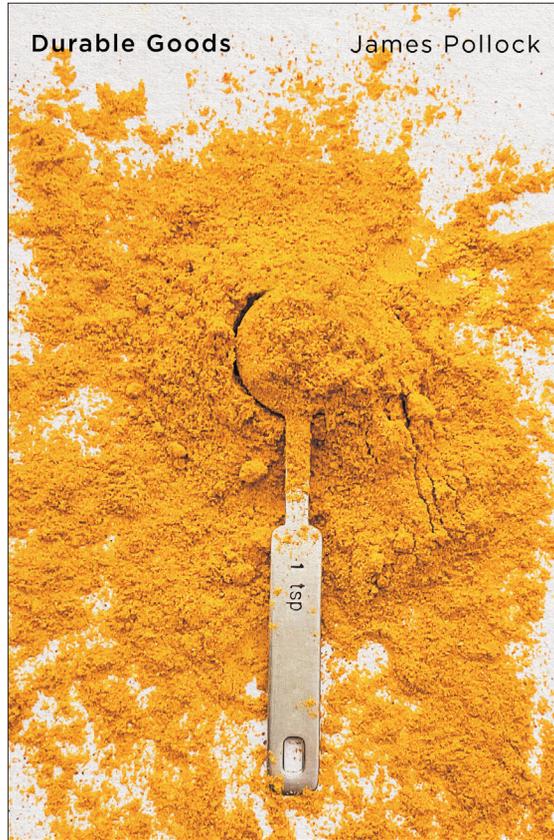
POETRY • SEPTEMBER 2022

ISBN: 978-1-55065-610-7 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

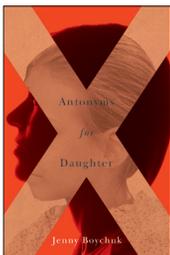
TRADE PAPER • 5 X 7 ½ • 75 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-616-9 • \$13.99

Sharply imagined poems about everyday technology



Recommended Poetry



Antonyms for Daughter
Jenny Boychuk

ISBN: 978-1-55065-566-7
\$17.95 CDN • \$14.95 US
5 x 7 1/2 • 75 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE



Hallelujah Time
Virginia Konchan

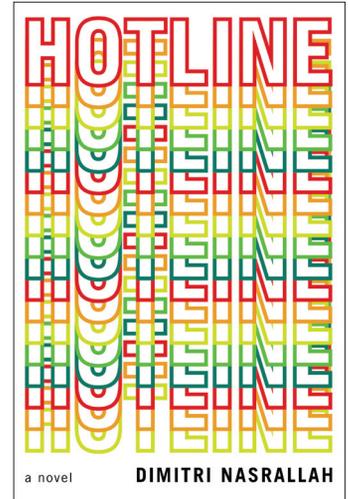
ISBN: 978-1-55065-582-7
\$17.95 CDN
5 x 7 1/2 • 110 PP
EPUB AVAILABLE

HOTLINE

Dimitri Nasrallah

It's 1986, and Muna Heddad is in a bind. After escaping Lebanon's civil war, she'd hoped to work as a French teacher in Montreal, but no one trusts her to teach the language. The only work Muna can get is at a weight-loss centre. All day, she takes calls from people phoning a hotline who are responding to ads seen in magazines or on TV. These strangers all have so much to say once someone shows interest—marriages gone bad, parents dying, isolation, personal inadequacies. Even as her new life faces invisible barriers at every turn, on the phone Muna is privy to the city's deepest secrets.

Following international acclaim for *Niko* (2011) and *The Bleeds* (2018), Nasrallah's intimate new novel is a vivid elegy to Montreal in the 1980s. Highlighting the era's marginalization of migrants, *Hotline*'s endearing portrait of struggle and perseverance raises issues that are still alarmingly relevant today.



“Hotline intertwines hope and sorrow to create a moving story that sears the heart.” — *Quire & Quire*

“A quietly transformative story, one that takes your assumptions, twists them into a shape you didn’t initially see and casts them back at you in a really lovely way.”
— *The Miramichi Reader*

“[A] significant addition to the literary chronicling of the Canadian immigrant experience.” — *Montreal Gazette*

NOVEL • ESPLANADE FICTION

ISBN: 978-1-55065-594-0 • \$21.95 CDN

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 280 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-600-8 • \$13.99

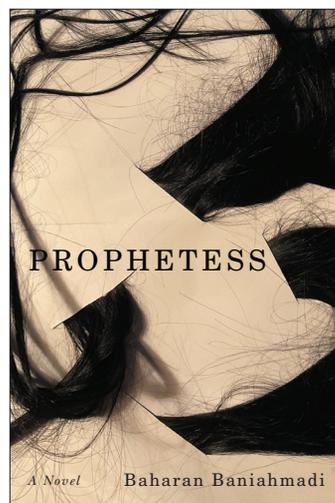
PROPHETESS

Baharan Baniahmadi

In the slums of Tehran, seven-year-old Sara witnesses the horrific murder of her sister Setayesh, an event leaves her in shock and unable to speak. As the neighbourhood frantically searches for the missing girl, Sara is locked inside herself, unable to tell her parents or police all she knows.

Over time, the mute Sara develops a strange allergic reaction, in which hair covers her face every time a man approaches her. One day in school, when an imam gets too close, she faints. After Sara reawakens, classmates show her video of her speaking freely and eloquently while unconscious. . . in Polish. These are only the first of many unexpected developments in Sara's life, as she grapples with how to live with her sister's memory in a world that abuses women from a very early age.

Prophetess is a fearless novel of gripping and surreal turns that push the limits of the imagination in their collision of tradition and nonconformity. Baharan Baniahmadi has crafted a wild, allegorical interrogation of trauma, women's rights, and religious tradition.



NOVEL • ESPLANADE FICTION

ISBN: 978-1-55065-595-7 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 180 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-601-5 • \$13.99

AFTER REALISM

24 Stories for the 21st Century

Edited by André Forget

After Realism: 24 Stories for the 21st Century is the first anthology to represent the generation of millennial writers now making their mark. Diverse, sophisticated, and ambitious in scope, the short stories in this groundbreaking book are an essential starting point for anyone interested in daring alternatives to the realist tradition that dominated 20th century English-language fiction. *After Realism* offers twenty-four distinctive talents who are pushing against the boundaries of the “real” in aesthetically and politically charged ways—forging their styles from influences that range from myth to autofiction, sci-fi to fairy tale, documentary to surrealism.

The selection is accompanied by a comprehensive and provocative essay by editor André Forget that explains the themes, tendencies and concerns of this group. In bearing witness to an extraordinary owering of contemporary fiction, *After Realism* will supply a new standard for Canadian writing.

“The volume provides a provocative snapshot of the forces dragging CanLit—kicking and screaming—into the 21st century.” — *The Toronto Star*

“With contributions from some of the country’s most exciting literary voices... this is a CanLit collection for readers who tend to cringe or yawn when they hear the term CanLit.”

— *Maisonneuve*



Contributors include:

Jean-Marc Ah Sen
 Carleigh Baker
 Paige Cooper
 David Huebert
 Jessica Johns
 Cody Klippenstein
 Julie Mannell
 Sofia Mostaghimi
 Téa Mutonji
 Fawn Parker
 Casey Plett
 Rudrapriya Rathore
 Naben Ruthnum
 John Elizabeth Stintzi

ANTHOLOGY

ISBN: 978-1-5506-5596-4 • \$22.95 CDN • \$18.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7½ • 342 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-602-2 • \$14.99

THE STRANGEST DREAM

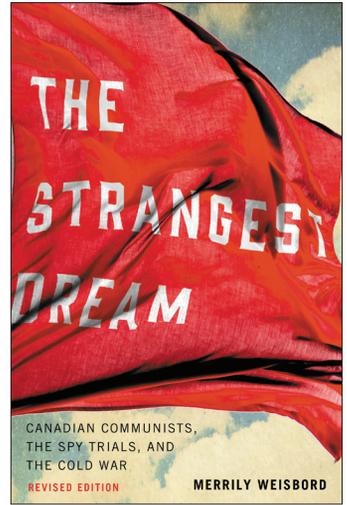
Canadian Communists, the Spy Trials, and the Cold War, Revised Edition

Merrily Weisbord

Lauded as the most eloquent book about Canadian communists and written like drama, *The Strangest Dream* animates the history and life of militants from the 1930's to Khrushchev's 1956 denunciations of Stalin.

An antidote to recurrent anti-communist vitriol, *The Strangest Dream* evokes not only the struggle “to make a better world,” but the warmth, generosity, songs, theatre, art, and exhilaration of party members for whom comradeship meant a way of life. Merrily Weisbord's research and contacts unearth historical documents and rare testimonies, including that of Canada's only communist MP, and of the accused in the Cold War spy trials.

The Strangest Dream is witness to the heyday and legacy of Canadian communists' courage and social conscience, and to the forces that destroyed their dreams. Published originally in 1983, this revised edition contains a new preface by the author, additional photographs, and previously unpublished letters.



“A generation of radicals comes to life in their own words and feelings as passionate, complicated, frequently attractive and certainly compelling human beings.” — Rick Salutin

LITERARY NON-FICTION

ISBN: 978-1-55065-599-5 • \$22.95 CDN • \$18.95 US

TRADE PAPER • 5 ½ X 8 ½ • 300 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-605-3 • \$13.99

MOTHER MUSE

Lorna Goodison

Lorna Goodison's first poetry collection to be published in Canada in over nine years, *Mother Muse* heralds the return of a major voice. The poems in Goodison's new book move boldly and range widely; here are praise songs alongside laments; autobiography shares pages with the collective past. In her exquisitely lyrical evocations of Jamaican lore and tradition, Goodison has always shown another side of history. While celebrating a wide cross-section of women—from Mahalia Jackson to Sandra Bland—*Mother Muse* focuses on two under-regarded “mothers” in Jamaican music: Sister Mary Ignatius, who nurtured many of Jamaica's most gifted musicians, and celebrated dancer Anita “Margarita” Mahfood. These important figures lead a collection of formidable scope and intelligence, one that seamlessly blends the personal and the political.



An *Irish Times* Best Poetry Book of 2021

“Through poems rooted in her Caribbean heritage and upbringing [Goodison] has created a body of enchanting, intelligent and socially aware poetry in the authentic registers of her own tongue.” — Simon Armitage

“Remarkable ... [Goodison's] language is often spare and exact, and the portraits cut directly to the social realities that shape peoples lives.” — Kaie Kellough, CBC Books

“A major voice in Caribbean poetry, distinctive for her blend of the demotic and lyric in poems that seek to realise Jamaica's complex past.” — Ben Wilkinson, *The Guardian*

POETRY • SIGNAL EDITIONS

ISBN: 978-1-55065-598-8 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 1/2 • 75 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-604-6 • \$10.99

INFINITY NETWORK

Jim Johnstone

Infinity Network completes Jim Johnstone's ambitious trilogy which began with *Dog Ear* (2014) and continued with *The Chemical Life* (2017). Central to each volume is the struggle with identity at a time of great social change. Justifiably acclaimed for his exquisite rendering of acute states of mind, Johnstone explores pressing questions about the ubiquity of surveillance and social media, and evokes, with a powerful intelligence, the neurosis of living in a consumerism-obsessed era.

Infinity Network not only attempts to capture the changing ideas of personhood, but also tries to create a new kind of verse to track it—a complex, bold, stark style able to give uncanny interiority to our digital dreads. As our lives descend further into disinformation and algorithmic control, Johnstone has emerged as the laureate of, in Keats's words, truth “proved upon our pulses.”



“Poetry cannot, and should not, escape the consequences of the echo chamber we have made, and Johnstone is daring in his willingness to take it on as subject, image, and sound.”

—Diane Seuss, author of *frank: sonnets*

“Infinity Network captures the overly connected world’s joys, pitfalls and promises as they relate to both personal identity and wider social concerns.” — *Montreal Review of Books*

POETRY • SIGNAL EDITIONS

ISBN: 978-1-55065-597-1 • \$19.95 CDN • \$16.95 US

TRADE PAPER, FRENCH FLAPS • 5 X 7 ½ • 78 PP

EPUB: 978-1-55065-603-9 • \$11.99

WHAT IS THE POINT OF LITERARY TRANSLATION?

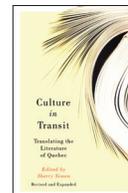
BY KATIA GRUBISIC

I've translated forever, as I imagine many children do who are born to immigrants who arrive in a country the language of which is not their own. My father speaks a dozen languages, including English, and very well, but his English has never been native. It's those articles, endlessly pesky to Slavic-language speakers—Where do they go? But why?—and his linguist's tendency to default to Latinate derivations when in doubt, a lethal, purple habit in English. Very young, I was tasked with Englishing his English, and later, when I had demonstrated some literary proclivities, to render his cribs as real and perhaps even worthy or at least publishable literary texts.

The aforementioned father has a goofy sense of humour. Buy me a beer one day and I'll tell you his favourite joke. He's also from a particular time, with then accepted slurs that colour an axiom he likes to repeat: literary translation is like a woman, either beautiful or faithful, but never both.

That belle infidèle chestnut barely begins to scratch the surface of the complicated ethics of literary translation. Still largely about fidelity versus treason, the discussion has not yet quite been breached by intersectional averments. Somehow, the conversation about cultural appropriation hasn't trickled into the literary-translation world. Is the act of appropriating a text into the target language and culture so totally appropriative that the actual perpetrator is incidental? Or are some experiences better rendered by a translator whose identity is more closely aligned with the author's? When I met with Haitian Québécoise writer Stéphane Martelly to discuss translating a book and an essay of hers, my first question was whether the translator oughtn't be Black. The texts already were, she said, and she was Black enough for two; the translator didn't need to be.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that the inexpressible is contained in the expressed is inverted in translation: the



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expressed must be contained in the inexpressible. The false words—the almost right words, what words may be found, must. It’s all loss, and it’s all finding.

All literary translators are failed writers, at least in the moment they are translating. By the time the translator sits down at her desk, the hard generative work has—pew—been done by someone else. The heavy lifting: the house has been built or at least the land razed and the plumbing roughed in for a new construction. The characters and plot and symbolic values are all laid out; all that remains is rewriting.

The German novelist Thomas Pletzinger, on a festival panel I chaired, spoke of socks that had changed colour from one page to another in the original German of his *Bestattung eines Hundes* and were caught and rectified by his English translator Ross Benjamin.

In the novel I’m just finishing, the title of which shall remain secret to protect the continuity trespasses of its author, someone jumps to her feet who had already stood up a sentence earlier.

Socks are one thing. We can fairly confidently correct errors of continuity and logic, though still preferably with the author’s approval. But when do a translator’s choices overstep? And where do the changes stop? Compensation within a sentence or line, a paragraph or stanza, and perhaps even a whole chapter or poem, can be rationalized. Entire worlds—systems of government, economic paradigms, cultural values. A Russian colleague (who actually still claims to be from Leningrad) told an anecdote about Monopoly. A mere mention of the board game in a Russian translation of an English-language short story had to be explained at length to

allow for at least some context of ownership, greed, and so forth. Can you imagine the confusion, how far you have to step out of the author’s voice and universe?

And what, dear reader, makes a good translation? Effective is often the operative word where beautiful or faithful fail us. Fluidity comes up again and again. Walter Benjamin is a big fan of high purposefulness. Robert Frost famously found his life’s work in the avowed table scraps of translated work. In an interview, Dutch-to-English translator David Colmer muses about gift horses: “A good translation accepts the gifts English offers and is not an endless procession of compromise and loss.”

A bunch of people feel that the mark of a good translation is the translator’s invisibility; others point to the ultimate invisibility of the source text. Still other translators speak of empathy, some of ruthlessness, and to the same end.

Julia Sherwood, the Czech half of a husband-and-wife team that translates into English, goes further still: the target text is like “a goulash or a soufflé prepared from locally available ingredients that comes out with a texture as stodgy or fluffy and that burns your palate or tickles your taste buds in the same way as the original.” Don’t try to unburn it.

Katia Grubisic is a Montreal writer, editor, and translator.

Adapted from “Ways of Looking,” published in *Culture in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec*, edited by Sherry Simon.

TRANSLATION IS SCARY, AND IT SHOULD BE BY MADELEINE STRATFORD

I am not bilingual, like other Canadians, but quadrilingual. I speak and write in French, English, German, and Spanish. Obviously, not all four languages are equal. French, my mother tongue, comes first, closely followed by English, its sister from another mother, so to speak. German and Spanish came into my life later, but also more or less at the same time: I like to think of them as adopted, heterozygous twins. I often slip or code switch. Keeping my languages in check requires constant efforts.

I was born in the Eastern Townships, a region of southeastern Quebec founded by loyalists, just north of Vermont. I have a French name and an English surname, but we spoke French at home. My English roots supposedly date back to my great-great-great-grandfather. My father's father, James, used to say that our ancestor, William Stratford, was an Englishman who enrolled in the Spanish Marines, sailed to the States, deserted, fled to Canada, married a Quebecer and that our family spoke French from then on. It sounded like fiction, but Grandpa had not gone to school long enough to know about Europe or Spain, so we all believed him.

I learned English very early on, when my parents decided, one day, that we would go to St. Patrick's, an Irish Catholic church in Sherbrooke. I must have been four or five when I discovered Sunday school, a concept that did not exist in Francophone churches. For me, it was a revelation that had nothing to do with religion or catechism, and everything to do with culture, communication, and language. It was then, as a five-year-old struggling with a budding form of acquired bilingualism, that I became aware that different languages expressed thoughts in different ways, and that these were not always equivalent, not completely anyway. I had barely learned how to express my thoughts and needs, how to understand and be understood, when I suddenly met new



Swallowed

Réjean Ducharme
Tran. Madeleine
Stratford

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people who spoke otherwise and discovered words that sounded different, mysterious. I was confronted with the renewed, painful, very real urge to communicate... at any cost. I was frightened, yet elated: in my mind, language was sacred, and thus terrifying... and ardently coveted.

At the time, I was far from suspecting that I would one day recreate the work of others, both in French and in English. I also did not know that I would feel the same anguish, the same urge to understand and be understood again at 16, in my first German-language class. A straight-A student all the way through high school, I panicked. The teacher kept repeating things like “Wie heißen Sie?” and “Wie alt sind Sie?”, strings of mysterious syllables that sounded like questions, but how could I possibly know? For the first time in years, I decoded nothing—nothing for sure. I felt completely lost. When I came home that night, I burst into tears, convinced that I would never be able to speak German. I went on to fight through my fear of the unknown, just as I had done as a child.

Fear drove me then, as it did a couple of years later when I enrolled—by mistake—in Introduction to Spanish Literature. I had meant to register in Introduction to Spanish Culture (which was taught in English, no less!). The previous year, my Spanish teacher, impressed with my progress, had given me a novel by Isabel Allende. I laboriously deciphered a few pages until I just gave up, convinced that I could never finish the first chapter. The night of my first class, I was so nervous that I spilled orange juice all over the professor’s notes. Despite my fear of Spanish fiction—and of being killed by my professor—I lived through the whole

semester, and was eventually able to read that Allende novel over the winter holidays.

My linguistic journey has been marked by fear, and so has my experience as a literary translator. I translate people who are never me, texts that are never mine. My life is necessarily different from my authors’. This is why I carefully choose whom I translate. Their age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or the colour of their skin bears no weight in my decision. I need to feel an affinity, a pull, something I can hold on to for dear life. Sometimes I feel the need to get in contact with my authors, or even meet them in the flesh. Sometimes it is not possible, because they prefer not to be involved, or because they are no longer around to help. Whenever I sign a new contract, I know what I am getting myself into. I am always fearful, yet determined, just as I was as a child, a teenager, and a young adult, still unsure, still learning. Fear keeps me focused. Determination keeps me going. Translation is scary, and it should be. It is a responsibility. It is a calling. It is a noble craft.

Madeleine Stratford is a poet, a literary translator, and a professor at Université du Québec en Outaouais. Her French translations of Marianne Apostolides (*Elle nage*, 2016) and Cherie Dimaline (*Pilleurs de rêves*, 2019) were both finalists for a Governor General’s Literary Award.

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ON TRANSLATING ERIK LINDNER'S POEMS

BY FRANCIS R. JONES

My aim as a translator is to recreate the source poem's imagery and poetic drive in an English-language poem—so to give neither my own poetic riff on the source, nor a literal crib. Though this aim already drives my first draft, it takes many redrafts till I feel I've achieved it.

Translating poetry involves three processes layered over each other. In the first, surface layer, I work out the word-meanings, images and poetic forms that the “source” (original) poem uses. I write my findings out as an English literal poem-plan, with lots of alternative wordings plus notes and queries. In a second, underlying layer, which happens both during and after the first, I look beneath the source poem's surface. I tease out allusions and unwritten assumptions, and explore why the poet wrote what they did. These insights are added to the poem plan. I then use the plan to write a first draft of the translated poem.

The third, deepest-level process happens more slowly, and unconsciously. It involves absorbing the poet's vision and voice, and developing an English counterpart. This counterpart, I feel, is what the poet might have used if they were writing in English. But it should still convey the refreshing force of the new, which the poet brings because they are writing in another poetic tradition. What makes Erik Lindner's poetry special for me, in fact, is his vision and voice.

One aspect of this is his almost filmic way of seeing and telling. “Witnesses at the Threshold 1,” for example, builds a Dutch semi-rural landscape with a sequence of close-up shots: windmill-sails and birds, dogs by houseboats on a canal, and so on. In my final English version:

Birds tilt at windmills
all in a whirl

barking by the houseboats
chains drag through the gravel



Words are the Worst

Erik Lindner
Trans. Francis R. Jones

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cartwheeling like clockwork
high in the sky

[...]

the gallery round the tower
its guardrail slanting outward

a river flowing
into a marshy field.

Linder's poetic camera, moreover, records without commenting—this, to my mind, gives his poetry its compelling strangeness. In Dutch, he uses verbal nouns and relative clauses to give a sense of actions as film-shots: “een regelmatige radslag” (literally, “a regular wheel turn/cartwheel”) and “een rivier die uitmondt” (“a river which debouches”) in the above lines, say. In English, I now see that I typically convey this with *-ing* nouns and adjectives: these two images became “cartwheeling like clockwork” and “a river flowing,” for instance.

A second aspect of Linder's vision is his poems' settings: often Dutch landscapes, interiors and, especially, coastscapes. These can often be recreated in English by translating literally. Or with slight tweaks—changing “molen” (“mill”) to “windmill,” for instance. Sometimes, however, non-Dutch readers may not have the knowledge to visualise the wider setting behind Lindner's zoomed-in images. In “Witnesses at the Threshold 1,” say, Dutch readers would know that “de overhellende balustrade / aan de rand van het plateau” (“the leaning balustrade / on the edge of the round platform”) is part of the windmill mentioned earlier. Most English-language readers, however, are less familiar with Dutch windmill architecture, so I gave them a clearer steer: “the gallery round the tower / its guardrail slanting outward.”

Occasionally, I also added such missing knowledge in endnotes: mentioning that the Leiden Lakenhal (in “Tokens of Identity 1”) is a museum, for instance. But end-note information should always be an optional add-on, I feel. Over-interpreting—whether in poems or endnotes—risks diluting the voice of the poet. After discussion, Erik Lindner and I decided, for instance, not to add a note telling that Acedia was inspired by the Flemish landscape where World War I was fought. We felt this would have robbed the poem of its open-endedness by implying it was simply about one event.

Lindner is the translator's ideal source poet. He answered quickly and in detail all my nit-picking questions, and alerted me to any misunderstandings in my drafts. But no less importantly, he gave me the freedom to decide what final renderings sounded best to my native-English ear. Poetry translation often involves re-creating, not simply reproducing. Over three centuries ago, John Dryden described poetry translators (at least those who, like me, try to be both faithful and poetic) as “dancing on ropes with fettered legs.” Poetic fetters, however, are not always harmful.

Michael Holman and Jean Boase-Beier, for instance, argue that constraints stimulate the translator's creativity. I feel, in fact, that creativity—as long as it is guided by the faithfulness to the source poem's imagery and poetic drive—is what enables translators to do the source poem justice. As I hope I have done throughout this book.

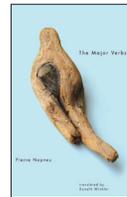
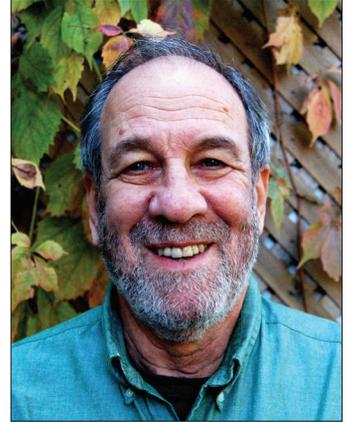
**Francis R. Jones translates poetry from
Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, Hungarian,
Russian and Dutch.**

A GLADIATORIAL EXERCISE

An Interview with Donald Winkler

Carmine Starnino: What drew you to the poetry of Pierre Nepveu?

Donald Winkler: I've been drawn to Pierre's poetry for a long time. I translated an earlier book, *Romans-fleuves* (Exile Editions, 1998), but I first translated a few of his poems way back in 1984 for the translation revue *Ellipse*. I felt an instant affinity. His poetry had—well, you would use the word “souffle” in French: a drive, a thrust, a muscularity and a concreteness that appealed to me greatly. And a capacity, out of its sheer momentum, to soar into surreal riffs without losing contact with reality. I can still remember trying to be true to that, wrestling with lines like “old archangel you know it all / you played the owl those canted nights / head trepanned with antennas and methanol / airs stirred up by sullen desire” (my version of it, of course). Translating him was a gladiatorial exercise. Still is. Pierre in person is gentle and almost self-deprecating, but something else kicks in when, as a poet, he puts pen to paper. I also like the way in which he feels his way into the characters in his poems. In *The Major Verbs*, one entire sequence, “The Woman Asleep on the Subway,” imagines the life of an immigrant night worker in a high rise office building, her alienation, and her memories, or fantasies, of the land she left behind. Nothing formulaic or didactic, but a powerful, often dream-like evocation. The sequence in memory of his dead parents is a collage in verse that is both an affectionate tribute to them and an honest portrayal of lives that knew their share of disappointment, that were at times troubled. Between these two is a series of meditations on a small pile of pebbles on a table, a representation in miniature of the outside world's opacity in a time of anguish for the speaker. But the book ends with a long contemplative poem set in the Arizona desert, a coda imbued with grace. All in all, an impressive achievement.



The Major Verbs
Pierre Nepveu
Tran. Donald
Winkler

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CS: If you had to nominate a Canadian poet as the anglo doppelganger for Nepveu in terms of shared subject and style, who would it be and why?

DW: I'm afraid that any specific example I may come up with might be misleading. But let me say this. As a literary critic, Nepveu has taken as his field of study all of America, and has written eloquently about the continental landscape, and the contradictory urges to celebrate wide open spaces (Whitman) and to seek a protective nest when confronted by them (Dickinson), the latter impulse being less widely recognized, in his opinion,

than it ought to be. His book *Intérieurs d'un nouveau monde*, which exists only in French, is a brilliant survey of Quebec, Canadian, American, and Haitian writers, as seen from this perspective. The book reflects his own travels (including a period when he lived in Vancouver), and deals knowledgeably with Canadian and American poets such as Dennis Lee, Atwood, Klein, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens. He is perhaps the most pan-American of Quebec poets. And I believe the influence shows in the diction and the vision and the psychology of his poetry, although this is more of an intuition on my part than anything else.

From "The Woman Asleep On The Subway"

The woman asleep in the subway
 conjures a hundred drawers that suddenly open
 in metallic fury on screeching tracks,
 she sees herself prone in one of them
 deeper and longer than a woman's body,
 the way babies were at times laid down
 during family gatherings low on beds—
 she hears the nearby stirring
 of files anxious to see the day,
 she is lulled by the rocking
 of laser printers and calculators,
 a whole world of keyboards embraces
 and enfolds her, she thinks of secretaries
 who do entrechats in high heels
 and young clerks whose creaseless shirts

speak to her softly of the smoothness of a cheek,
 the touch of a fingernail ember red,
 while deeper into the night she turns over,
 jolted back still by the graceless ring
 of a telephone blind to her presence,
 she wonders if innocence
 is enough protection, if to sleep during the day
 was part of the world's plan,
 its violent and ambitious program,
 its machinery for good and evil,
 or if an invisible finger gently impels
 the drawer to close back over her,
 ushering in silence and eternal night.

From *The Major Verbs* (2012)

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**The book remembers living
in the wood, / roots in the earth,
wet boughs in the sky.**

— James Pollock, *Durable Goods*



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