

**Contemporary Adult Canadian Books for Strong Teen Readers**  
by  
**Margaret Mackey**  
with  
**Gail de Vos, Heather Ganshorn, Ingrid Johnston, and Kristine Moruzi**

This column is the nineteenth in an annual series produced by a small and dedicated group of reviewers in Western Canada. Our aim is to select titles that will speak to teenagers out of the rich pool of current Canadian publishing for adults. Potential interest for teen readers is our main selection criterion; no stories about middle-aged crises need apply here! We do not censor for sex, violence, or other graphic content; strong teen readers are perfectly capable of stopping reading if they do not like what they find.

As we close in on two decades of this work, I would like to thank the readers listed above, who, as ever, have read for enjoyment and then reviewed for other readers. I would also like to thank *Resource Links* for providing the initial impetus for this column and for giving us a home ever since.

For nearly ten years, we have also supplied a compilation document of all the reviews since the outset of the column. This compilation is normally mounted in the spring, but website problems delayed the publication of the 2014 compilation. The editorial work has been completed and the new document will appear at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~mmackey/Adult%20Canadian%20Books%202014.pdf> to be succeeded in the spring of 2015 by the newest version.

As ever, we are spoiled for choice, and a number of excellent titles appear in the list below. Happy reading! *MM*

*Canadian Families*

*Medicine Walk* by Richard Wagamese. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2014. Hardback. 246 pages.  
9780771089183

Richard Wagamese's previous book, *Indian Horse*, enormously successful. Following a hit novel can be difficult, but *Medicine Walk* give its readers many of the elements they so enjoyed in *Indian Horse* (though there is no hockey). It will give them plenty to think about as well.

Franklin Starlight lives with the old man who has raised him, and encounters his biological father, Eldon, on rare and random occasions. When Franklin is sixteen, however, his father comes back into his life in a way that changes his whole sense of the world. This book tells the story of that final encounter.

Eldon is dying, and wants his son to take him to the final resting place he has chosen. The way is difficult for the ill and alcoholic father. Franklin feels he owes little to the man who has never given him any sense of family or ever illuminated his Metis heritage, and he resents the effort it takes to make the journey. On the way, however, Eldon fills in some of the blanks about Franklin's own past in ways that address some longfelt pain and resentment.

It sounds sentimental, but Wagamese avoids that trap. He is often lyrical about the appeal of the land, but he is hardnosed about ways in which people abuse their relationship to that land, and this book pulls no punches. People betray one another but they also help each other, and the end of the book offers some sense of balance.

Like *Indian Horse*, book is immensely readable. The sense of the land is palpable and compelling. Eldon, with all his errors and treacheries, tells a gripping story, and Franklin must grow to meet the challenge of listening to it as must readers. *MM*

*The Hungry Ghosts* by Shyam Selvadurai. Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2013. Trade paperback. 371 pages.  
9780385670685

Sri Lanka and its history are central to Shyam Selvadurai's latest novel, which focuses on the most violent period in the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government, a conflict that left thousands dead, dislocated, and dispossessed. Shivan, the protagonist of *The Hungry Ghosts*, the son of a Tamil father and a Sri Lankan mother. He is buffeted by the broad strokes of national history as well as the more intimate consequences of the epic story of three generations of a Sinhalese family. His grandmother, a Sri Lankan slum lord, is a fierce presence in his life, educating him using the Sri Lankan myths of hungry ghosts who are punished for desiring too much in their human lives.

When he and his mother and sister eventually flee Sri Lanka for a new life in Canada, they leave his

grandmother behind. Although Toronto proves to be a safe haven, Shivan struggles to come to terms with his sexuality and to find a place in this new world. When his grandmother falls ill, he returns to Sri Lanka but finds it is no longer his home either.

Against the backdrop of escalating violence in Sri Lanka, Shivan discovers a new love that proves threatening to his grandmother and results in a betrayal that has far-reaching ramifications. *KM*

***Kicking the Sky*** by Anthony de Sa. Toronto: Doubleday, 2013. Hardback. 336 pages. 9780385664387

In this novel about a boy on the cusp of adolescence, Anthony de Sa explores the landscape of his childhood, Toronto's Little Portugal in the late 1970s. Antonio Rebelo and his two friends Manny and Ricky have a childhood of almost unlimited freedom, roaming their Toronto neighbourhood largely unsupervised, as their Portuguese immigrant parents work long hours to make ends meet. Everything changes one summer with the tragic rape and murder of 11-year-old Emmanuel Jacques, a Portuguese shoeshine boy (an event that happened in real life). While parents in the community struggle with how to keep their children safe, Antonio and his friends begin to see that the adult world can be a dark one, and many of the children around them are abused and exploited by adults. Ricky's mother has left her child and husband, and his father is an abusive alcoholic, facts that leave him vulnerable to abuse by other adults. At the age of 12, Manny already smokes, uses drugs, and steals bikes. A local girl, Agnes, is impregnated by her stepfather. And all three boys are drawn into the influence of James, a troubled young man whose motives for befriending the much younger boys are unclear. *HG*

***The Son of a Certain Woman*** by Wayne Johnston. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2014 (first published 2013). Paperback. 435 pages. 9780345807908

This book is rambunctious, rowdy, and risqué, not to mention risky. In an over-the-top epic of adolescent pains and desires taken to their logical extreme, Johnston tells the story of Percy Joyce, son of Penelope and Jim (though Jim never appears, having abandoned his fiancée Penelope when she was two months pregnant). The James Joyce allusion is no accident, and Percy is certainly one of the suitors of Penelope.

Percy Joyce is heavily disfigured by a birthstain that covers his face, a blobbing lower lip, and hands and feet that are too large for his body. He lives across the street from Brother Rice High School, a real institution in St. John's, Newfoundland. He is protected from the cruelty of other children by orders of the Archbishop of the nearby Basilica (also a real life organization), and by his mother's robust defences. The story is set in the 1950s, but it is hard to imagine it being published in that era. Johnston's book includes the following: a virulent attack on many aspects of the Roman Catholic religion in general; a terrifying and violent account of the local details of Catholic schools in St. John's; a detailed description of the beautiful and witty Penelope who sleeps with her lodger for money (he is the vice-principal of the school across the street) and with the sister of her former fiancée for love; and a major plot engine entailing Percy's ever increasing lust for his mother.

For the first couple of hundred pages, the book is also genial and funny in ways that call to mind Johnston's early book, *The Divine Ryans* another book charged with sexual secrets. Gradually, however, the humour becomes less dominant, and the difficulties of Penelope's domestic life play a more important role in the story. The final chapter carries the book completely over the top, jumping all available sharks.

Blasphemous, obscene, and often very funny, this is not a book for everyone, but those who read it will remember it! *MM*

***In the Land of Birdfishes*** by Rebecca Silver Slayter. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2013. Paperback. 385 pages. 9781443407373

In her first novel, Slayter creates a strange and compelling story set first in rural Nova Scotia and then in Dawson City, Yukon. The protagonists, twin sisters Aileen and Mara, are blindfolded by their grief-stricken father after they viewed their mother's suicide. His mad and misguided effort to save them from seeing the miseries of the world has disastrous consequences. When they are finally taken away from their father and their blindfolds removed, Mara is blind and Aileen only has partial vision and the girls are sent to different families to be raised. Decades pass and Aileen finally decides to look for Mara in Dawson City, where she is believed to be living. The remainder of the story unravels the story of what happened to the twins after their separation and focuses on the relationship between Aileen and her twenty-four-year-old nephew, Jason. Interwoven chapters are narrated in the voices of Aileen, Jason

and Mara. The book is poetic and mythic in style and content. The story is full of secrets and darkness and is overly long in some places, but it offers a fascinating look at complex relationships and the power of the land and Aboriginal mythology to influence lives. *IJ*

***Watch How We Walk*** by Jennifer LoveGrove. Toronto: ECW Press, 2013. Trade paperback. 260 pages. 9781770411272

This first novel from Ontario poet Jennifer LoveGrove offers a heartbreaking view of the scars left behind by a fundamentalist religious upbringing. Emily and her older sister Lenora are Jehovah's Witnesses, a fact that governs every aspect of their lives. At school, they must excuse themselves from singing O Canada and are expected to Witness to their teachers and fellow students. Much of their free time is spent at Kingdom Hall meetings and going door to door Witnessing. Their faith governs who they may associate with (no friendships with "worldly" kids allowed). The preteen Emily is quiet and obedient by nature, but consumed by anxiety and guilt over her lack of fervent religiosity, and worried about the possibility of her nonconforming uncle and her strongwilled sister being "disfellowshipped" from their faith. At 16, Lenora is beginning to rebel against the strictures imposed by her parents' religion. Chapters from this period in their lives alternate with ones from the perspective of an older, universitybound Emily, and it is apparent early on that Lenora's rebellious behaviour led to tragic consequences. LoveGrove is masterful at depicting the loving, infuriating and conflicted relationship between the two sisters, and the stresses placed on children raised in a rigid and unforgiving belief system that places them at odds with the larger culture. This is an impressive debut. *HG*

***Road Ends*** by Mary Lawson. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2014. Paperback. 311 pages. 9780345808097

Like her previous two novels (Crow Lake *The Other Side of the Bridge*, of which have appeared in past columns), Mary Lawson's *Road Ends* mostly set in the unforgiving country of northern Ontario. The story is told from the perspectives of three characters, siblings Tom and Megan and their father Edward. "Dysfunctional" seems too shallow a word to describe their family life. Megan leaves home and Tom and Edward in different ways retreat into themselves. Edward is a bank manager and his job provides a shield of respectability that prevents other members of the community from seeing how bad things are inside the house, where seven brothers and a single sister are striving to grow up in very unpromising circumstances.

It all sounds extremely gloomy, and in many ways it is; the fate of the secondsmallest brother, Adam, in the household maelstrom of chaos and indifference is heartwrenching, and will keep many readers turning the pages just to ensure that he is going to be okay in the end. But the three different perspectives, offering three different explanations for how things have gone so badly adrift, introduce subtlety and nuance to this horrific scenario, and, unlikely as it sounds, all the characters are appealing, even if damaged. Although it is very domestic in focus, it also contains some highly dramatic scenes, whose consequences linger through the years in highly convincing ways.

The result is a highly compelling book, very difficult to put down and likely to stick in a reader's mind long after it is finished. *MM*

### ***New Families***

***The Figures of Beauty*** by David Macfarlane. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2013. Hardback. 343 pages. 9781443415965

Early in this story, one of its narrators introduces us to a marble statue of a woman pouring water. As my mother pointed out, you can actually feel the shifting of the figure's weight as she kneels to pour. You can actually sense the tipping volume of liquid inside the jug. The statue is carved with such skill you can sense the immediate past and the immediate future in the poise of the figure's present. You can see motion in its stillness. (910)

Macfarlane shows us many moments where the past tips into an unknown future but because his novel covers several decades from the perspectives of a variety of characters, we sometimes already know what that future will contain. Paradoxically, this knowledge serves to emphasize that transient, fulcrum quality of the present moment, moving forward into something not yet understood. In this beautiful book, Macfarlane deals with the ongoing significance of human decisions.

At the heart of the story is the short-term romance of Oliver, a naive young Canadian in Europe for the first time in 1968, and Anna, a sophisticated Italian sculptress. The novel ranges as far back as 1922 when an accident in a marble quarry precipitates some of the events that move the plot; it incorporates horror stories from Italy's wartime dangers; it brushes up against the events of 1968 in France; and it moves into the 21st century in Ontario and Italy. Forty years after his time with Anna, Oliver discovers he has a daughter.

There is no straight chronology; readers must assemble their own timeline from a series of fragments, each one rich and intriguing in its own right. Characters move between youth and middle age. Events that were significant in their own times precipitate unexpected consequences, sometimes decades later. It sounds like a challenging read, but the pages slip away as easily as the water pouring out of the marble jug. *MM*

***Going Home Again*** by Dennis Bock. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2013. Hardback. 258 pages. 9781554680702

In Dennis Bock's first award-winning novel, *The Ash Garden*, characters reflect on the impact of the bombing of Hiroshima on their lives. In his latest book, *Coming Home Again*, also draws on the power of memory to evoke reflections, but this time in a contemporary setting focusing on lost love, murder and sibling rivalry.

We learn at the start that Charlie Bellerose will be relating his 'strange year' in which he returns to Canada from Spain, leaving behind a failed marriage and a teenaged daughter. Moving to Toronto to set up a new Language Institute, Charlie reconnects with his brother, Nate, who is also recently separated from his wife. Charlie tries to be a mentor to Nate's young sons and to reconnect with his brother, but his earlier misgivings about his brother's character turn out to be true. Charlie's life in Toronto is further disrupted by an encounter with his first love, Holly, and their traumatic recollections of the death of Holly's first partner who was also Charlie's best friend.

Bock's writing style in this novel is somewhat fractured and readers are less inclined to feel drawn towards his characters here than in his first book. Nevertheless, the plot is interesting and Bock succeeds in offering an intriguing snapshot of contemporary life and relationships. *IJ*

### ***Other Times***

***The Orenda*** by Joseph Boyden. Toronto: Hamish Hamilton, 2013. Hardback. 496 pages. 9780670064182

Joseph Boyden's most ambitious work to date is an epic tale of early encounters between aboriginal peoples and Europeans. The story is told from the perspectives of three very different protagonists. Bird, a Wendat (Huron) warrior, has lost his wife and daughters to an attack by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois). His never-ending hunger for revenge leads him to seek out and kill members of that tribe, adding to the bad blood between the two groups. He adopts a Haudenosaunee girl, Snow Falls, after murdering her parents and brother before her eyes. He imagines she will be a replacement for his own lost daughters, and he sees that she has spiritual powers that can aid his people. Snow Falls, however, is traumatized and thinks only of returning to her own people. The third protagonist is Christophe, a Jesuit who has come from France to bring Christianity to the Wendat. He labours fruitlessly throughout most of the story to gain even a few converts to a religion that is utterly alien to the Wendat's way of life. As the years pass, the French bring both trade goods and devastating diseases to the Wendat people, and the Wendat's conflict with the Haudenosaunee grows increasingly violent.

At nearly 500 pages of challenging prose, this novel isn't for every reader. There are also historically accurate but extremely graphic depictions of torture that some may find difficult to stomach. But for those with an interest in Canadian or aboriginal history, or who are up to a more challenging literary work, this is a truly great Canadian novel. *HG*

***The Cartographer of No Man's Land*** by P.S. Duffy. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2013. Trade paperback. 366 pages. 9780143186861

A hundred years after the outbreak of World War I, this epic novel makes sobering reading. It tells the story of a small Nova Scotia family. Angus MacGrath is married to Hettie Ellen Hant, whose brother Ebbin is his best friend as well as his brother-in-law. Ebbin goes to war first and is declared missing in action, and Angus enlists, at least in part to find him.

The story then alternates between Angus's time in the slaughterhouse of Vimy Ridge in France, and the events that affect his family at home in Snag's Cove.

Angus's father Duncan is a pacifist; his son Simon, in his early teens, is left to try to make sense of these differing perspectives. The other major character in Snag's Cove is the schoolteacher, Avon Heist, whose German heritage lays him open to ever greater suspicion among the families of this small community.

With this small cast of characters, augmented by some of Angus's compatriots in the trenches and a French family with whom he finds occasional respite, Duffy weaves a largescale tapestry. She brings to compelling life the scale of damage, physical and emotional, to the soldiers who battle in incomprehensibly terrible conditions and to the fabric of French society; at the same time, she contrasts the surface security and underlying turmoil of the little Nova Scotia village that has sent its sons overseas and is trying to make sense of a conflict it is not experiencing directly.

The battle scenes are vivid; the clashes of moral certainty and moral confusion are subtly delineated, and the characters are unsentimentally drawn. There are many fictions of World War I but this one will enrich the understanding even of readers who have encountered this territory before. *MM*

***Swedes' Ferry*** by Allan Safarik. Regina: Coteau Books, 2013. Paperback. 232 pages. 9781550505610

Fans of Guy Vanderhaeghe will find a lot to like in this historical crime novel by Saskatchewan poet and writer Allan Safarik. The setting is the border territory around Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and North Dakota in the late 1800s. When a lone gunman robs a bank in Bismark, North Dakota and makes off with the \$40,000 railway worker payroll it was holding, the Pinkerton Detective Agency is called in to investigate. The Pinkertons are widely despised for their brutal tactics and their unionbusting, but also widely respected for their ability to get their man. They send one of their most unsavoury operatives, the sinister Jiggs Dubois, north of the border on the suspicion that the crime was committed by a rogue Mountie who rode hard for the border and blended back into the force to lie low for a while. Naturally, the RCMP brass aren't very interested in investigating themselves )some things never change(. This is an entertaining tale for anyone who enjoys heist capers or historical fiction, and it definitely adds some colour to what students may have learned about the history of the Mounties and the Great Plains. *HG*

***Dear Everybody: A Woman's Journey from Park Avenue to a Labrador Trapline*** by Anne Budgell. Portugal CoveSt. Phillips, NL: Boulder Publications, 2013. Trade paperback. 319 pages. 9781927099179

Anne Budgell works from the papers of Barbara Mundy to tell this true story of a Manhattan socialite, who sets off to do charity work in Labrador in 1944 and falls in love both with the austere setting and its inhabitants, and, more specifically, with a fur trapper, Russell Groves. The contrast between Barbara's society life in New York (which she finds sterile and uninteresting) and the hardships and poverty of Labrador (which she embraces with enthusiasm) contributes to a fascinating story of commitment at many levels.

Barbara Mundy was an avid letterwriter who kept carbon copies of her correspondence to her many friends and relations when she first arrived in Labrador; she also kept a diary of two winters on a Labrador trapline after her marriage. Budgell makes good use of this raw material and much of this book is told in Mundy's own words. A set of inserted photographs enriches this compelling account still further.

The idea that part of what is now Canada was a destination for rich charity volunteers and missionaries as late as the 1940s will take some contemporary readers by surprise, but the stark poverty and deprivation of some inhabitants of Labrador is very clearly conveyed. Budgell interweaves the historical and the personal elements of this unique story in intriguing ways. *MM*

***The Confabulist*** by Steven Galloway. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2014. Hardback. 320 pages. 9780307400857

Galloway follows his earlier successful novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo* with this very different but equally fascinating novel. *The Confabulist*, a blend of fiction and fact, revolves around the life of the famous escape artist, Harry Houdini, as related by Martin Strauss. This character is based on the man who punched Houdini in the stomach, reportedly causing his appendix to burst, which led to his death. Strauss's doctor has told him that he is slowly losing his mind and that his real memories will soon be replaced by invented ones. Strauss's prognosis encourages him to tell his life story to Alice, who claims to be Houdini's daughter. The notion of what is real and

what is illusion underpins the entire book as the story winds through Strauss's life and his strange relationship with Houdini. The reader is presented with a version of Houdini's life that differs from the known facts: we know that he was an amazing magician and could escape from almost all locks and knots; we know he was involved with the Romanov royal family in Russia and fought to expose spiritualists as frauds, but was he really a spy who worked for both the US and England? This is a fascinating novel that blends mystery, magic and intrigue with invention and historical reflections on a worldwide celebrity. *IJ*

### *Other Places*

***The Colonial Hotel*** by Jonathan Bennett. Toronto: ECW Press, 2014. Hardback. 227 pages. 9781770411784

This short novel is a powerful and heartbreaking story of war, love and forgiveness. Set in an unnamed African country on the brink of a civil war, the story of the three main characters, Paris, Helen and Oenene is a loose adaptation of the Greek myth of Paris and Helen. Paris, a doctor, is in love with Helen, a nurse working for an NGO, and he follows her from one wartorn country to another, helping with the dying and injured. When they are abducted during a rest period at the Colonial Hotel, Helen, pregnant with Paris's child, is set free, but Paris is imprisoned for years as a brutal civil war rages, and is finally rescued by Oenene, a local leader. Paris focuses his waning energies on writing a diary of his experiences to the daughter he has never met. Readers are introduced to the story through the alternating voices of the three characters. Bennett, an awardwinning poet, writes with flair and precision. His novel may be too harrowing for some readers, but the brutality of the setting is mitigated by the novel's poetic language, the beauty of the relationships in the story and the powerful insights it offers into the life of the imagination. *IJ*

### *Sports*

***Orr: My Story*** by Bobby Orr. Toronto: Penguin Viking, 2013. Hardback. 290 pages. 9780670066971

Bobby Orr, possibly the greatest defenceman in the history of the National Hockey League, here tells the story of his career in hockey, one marked by playing genius, physical problems with his knees that forced early retirement, and financial treachery on the part of his advisers.

Orr is not arrogant in his narration of his own story. With a mix of anecdote and reflection, he gives a great deal of credit to other people. Roy McGregor suggests that hockey players are more tightly connected to their families than some other athletes, simply because parents must be invested in their son's success for it to happen at all; no child can manage alone in getting that heavy hockey gear to the stadium at assorted and atrocious times of day. Whatever the merits of this general argument, Orr is certainly very attached to his own parents and their values.

In fact, this book is as much about values as it is about hockey. Orr is not above offering a friendly lecture on the importance of developing character, through sport, through financial probity, and so forth. Yet there is a lot of hockey in this book as well, and many, many famous players of the 1960s and 1970s make an appearance. For those interested in NHL history, it is essential reading. For those looking for a "warts and all" account of being an NHL great, it is perhaps a bit of a sanitized experience. *MM*

***Keon and Me: My Search for the Lost Soul of the Leafs*** by Dave Bidini. Toronto: Penguin Viking, 2013. Hardback. 295 pages. 9780670066476

Dave Keon was one of the greats on the Toronto Maple Leafs, back in the 1960s when it was possible to talk about the Leafs and the greats in the same sentence without irony or bitterness. In this thoughtful book, Bidini, rock star and sports author, addresses the decline of the Leafs through the perspective of a diehard fan (and dying hard is part of the skill set of this discouraged breed!) (Bidini uses the vehicle of the story of Dave Keon's upanddown relationship with the Leafs; he won four Stanley Cups and many awards and trophies and ended his time there as team captain. In 1974, the Leafs not only failed to renew his contract, they also blocked other teams from signing him up by requiring huge compensation from any team who wanted to acquire Keon. Notorious Leafs owner Harold Ballard made public attacks on Keon. Never completely comfortable in the public arena, Keon became ever

more reclusive.

Dave Bidini was eleven years old when Keon left the Leafs. In his peripatetic life as a member of the rock band, the Rheostatics, and as an author of numerous books, Bidini has never lost his further identity, that of a committed hockey fan. This is a book about fandom as much as it is a book about Dave Keon. The complex relationship between a fan and his or her team is a major element of this book. We meet the public persona of Dave Keon and the private boyhood of Dave Bidini and explore how their paths did and did not intersect. It is an intriguing story. *MM*

### *Speculative Fiction*

***The Silvered*** by Tanya Huff. New York: Daw Books Inc., 2012. Paperback. 484 pages. 9780756408060

The story in ***The Silvered*** prompted by a prophecy, one that leads Emperor Leopald to invade the kingdom of Aydori, home to the Hunt Pack of werewolves and the Magepack of female magicians skilled in the six disciplines of air, fire, water, earth, metals and healing. Only Mirian Maylin observes the capture of five of the six pregnant mages of the prophecy and it is up to her a lowlevel mage and Tomas Hagen the younger brother of the Pack leaders to save them. This adventure story is well plotted and the characters fully realised. As the daughter of welltodo parents, Mirian is an unexpected heroine but she rises to the challenge with wit, humour, and courage. The alternating points of view, including one of the captured mages and the imperial soldier determined to capture Mirian, add depth to the narrative.

Tanya Huff has been writing speculative fiction since the late 1980s, including five fantasy series, a science fiction series, standalone novels and short story collections. This novel is, according to the publisher's website, the first in a series, but it is selfcontained and thoroughly entertaining. A must for anyone who likes fantasy! *KM*

***Seconds: A Graphic Novel*** by Bryan Lee O'Malley. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2014. Hardback. 323 pages. 9780307363060

Katie is a young woman whose life would appeal to many readers: she's a gifted chef who runs her own successful restaurant, and she is considering opening a second. When things turn sour in her life, they go wrong very quickly, however, and she is tempted by the chance of a doover. A mysterious girl appears in her room at night with a magic mushroom, that undoes recent events. Katie is very pleased with this strange power, and soon she is tempted into bingemushroomconsumption, undoing decision after decision, and rapidly losing track of where in her world she now is. O'Malley makes good use of the affordances of the graphic novel, using colour and labels to help readers keep track of Katie's wild lurches through past, present, and restructured past. The book is an easy and enjoyable read at one level, but it raises important questions about consequences in a lighthearted way. *MM*

### *Adventures*

***The Troop*** by Nick Cutter. New York: Gallery Books, 2014. Hardback. 368 pages. 9781476717715

Novelist Craig Davidson (writing under the pseudonym Nick Cutter) has managed the seemingly impossible here, endowing bucolic Prince Edward Island with a palpable sense of menace. Banish all thoughts of Anne of Green Gables - this dark tale is equal parts Stephen King and *Lord of the Flies*. 14yearold Boy Scouts and their scoutmaster take their annual trip to a small island off the PEI coast to spend a few days roughing it and learning survival skills. As the boys keep each other awake with dark tales the first night, something truly horrible lurches toward their cabin: an emaciated man carrying a very contagious parasite. The Scoutmaster is the first to succumb (along with the shortwave transmitter that is their only link to the outside world). Cue the LordoftheFlies antics as the boys must cope with a terrifying situation in the absence of any adult authority. This book is not for the weak of stomach, and should definitely not be read while eating spaghetti and meat sauce, gummi worms, or any other wormlike food. *HG*

***The Bear*** by Claire Cameron. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2014. Paperback. 240 pages. 9780385679022

Cameron's novel may at first sight seem to be too scary to read as it is based on the true story of a fatal bear attack in which two campers were killed and eaten. The novel, however, is filtered enough to ensure most readers will not be overly daunted by the content. Cameron adds two fictional child characters in her novel and the story is told through the voice of Anna, the five-year-old daughter who survives the attack along with her two-year-old brother. Her point of view provides a child's perspective that helps to mitigate the horror of the event. Inevitably, the success of the child's voice in *The Bear* be compared to that of the child narrator in Emma Donoghue's novel *Room*. is not as skillful as Donoghue in portraying events through a young child's voice but she keeps the narrative straightforward and linear, and there are moments of humour and childish behaviour in Anna's telling that lighten the tension of the story and move the plot forward in an interesting way. This is not a book for everyone but is one worth reading. IJ

### ***Poetry***

***For Tamara*** by Sarah Lang. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2014. Paperback. 83 pages. 9781770893672

Sarah Lang's long poem is written as a postapocalyptic survival guide by a mother for Tamara, the young daughter she has had to leave behind. The poem is a hauntingly multifaceted artifact that moves between an elegy for a lost world as we know it today and practical advice on how to survive with very few of the resources we take for granted. The opening lines effectively set the tone for the poem:

*Basil is very temperamental. I'm sorry, I have no idea how to make a TV./ Find a library, sweetheart, please./ Intact. (1)*

The book's mix of poetry, practical advice and sketchy drawings works effectively in the poem, thanks to Lang's elegance of style, and mixture of humour and deep emotion. Interspersed with comments about her own efforts to save lives, the mother anticipates her daughter's needs, moving from basic necessities and homemade medicines, to science, literature, and relationships.

*I know this isn't by the book./ But Darling, we've run out of those./ Trust your Mother./ This works./ I'm teaching you to make painkillers.(9)*

Reflections on the beauty of a lost world interrupt descriptions of the horrors of a postnuclear wasteland and offer insight into all the aspects of the world we take for granted until they are gone:

*Before all this, we sent people into space, to the moon even./ We had pictures of the Earth from the moon./ Very pretty, like you. (23)*

***For Tamara*** is not a comfortable read but it is a poem that rewards the reader with a new recognition of the value of life and motherly love even in the most dire circumstances. IJ

***Satisfying Clicking Sound*** by Jason Guriel. Montreal: Signal Editions, 2014. Trade paperback. 63 pages. 9781550653731

This small book seems like a miscellaneous assortment of poems on first glance, but it is subtler than such a description would indicate. It consists of many short reflections on absurdities of contemporary life, intermingled with more serious reflections. Thus we have a "Song of the Speed Bump": "I'm too dull to be cutting / anything, let alone edge, / but far too jarring / to be mistaken for the middle / of the road." (23) A few pages later, "My Father's Stamps" takes us to a very different kind of relationship between people and inanimate objects: the father who collected stamps and juxtaposed them in an album, now silenced by a stroke; the son turning the pages to find his father's favourites; the nurse who stops by and talks "the baby talk / that seems to be an old man's birthright" (29) but does not really take in the achievement of the album. Many of the poems include puns and many of the puns are very clever. Like the stamp album, however, the book's juxtapositions sometimes read very randomly. MM

### ***Mysteries***

***Wild Justice*** by Kelly Armstrong,. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2013. Paperback. 362 pages. 9780345813022

While this thriller is the third and final book in a series, it stands well on its own for those who may not have previously encountered hit man Nadia Stafford. Without alienating readers familiar with the series, Armstrong effortlessly provides enough of the back story to satisfy new comers to the series. And, to be fair, since the second title in the series, *Made to be Broken*, published in 2009, followers of the series perhaps needed the refresher as well. Nadia has always been driven by the fact that she failed to protect her older cousin Amy when she herself was thirteen. Jack, Nadia's mentor, offers her a way to quell that sense of failure by providing her with pertinent information about Amy's murderer.

The novel provides readers with a roller coaster of action, twists and turns in the plotline as well as a thought-provoking exploration of the definitions of good and evil. All of the characters are mature adults but the recurrent examination of Nadia's emotional state at age thirteen and how it shaped her growth as an adult would be of interest to a mature young adult reader. There are scenes of violence, sex and mature language but all of these elements have been written into the story with great thought and purpose. All of the characters are three dimensional, human beings with emotions, needs, and desires. A satisfying wild ride as well as a melancholy one as this reader, for one, is sad that Nadia's adventures have been told and the series is complete. *GdV*

***The Dead in their Vaulted Arches*** by Alan Bradley. Toronto: Doubleday, 2014. Hardback. 320 pages. 9780385668156

In this sixth installment of the highly successful Flavia de Luce mystery series, the author deepens the readers' understanding of his main character, the secondary characters and the mysterious underpinnings of the de Luce family. While extremely accessible for all readers, this book, unlike the previous books in the series, is best read in sequence as it is truly a personal journey for the protagonist as she gains maturity and understanding of, and for, herself.

Readers will definitely better appreciate the trials and tribulations of Flavia's situation in this novel if they have been previously introduced to her madcap situation and thinking processes. This novel, while highly engaging, is less about the humour and the mysteries that were the focus of the first five books and more about the deepening of Flavia's self-identity as she faces the final chapter in her quest for her relationship with her missing mother. There are moments of humour and mystery (and chemistry) to be sure, but the introspection and reflections by Flavia offer a seriousness of tone only suggested in the previous books.

The novel begins where the last book, *Speaking from among the Bones* left off with Flavia, almost twelve, awaiting the appearance of her mother, lost when Flavia was but a baby. Winston Churchill, strangers, and even stranger relatives, wait alongside the de Luce family as Flavia, and readers, are introduced to the mysterious past in which Flavia's mother was such a force far beyond the confines of the home hearth. Who was the stranger who gave Flavia the obscure message? What could it have possibly meant? Why and how did the messenger die so conveniently? What of her mother's plane and the helpful but mystifying pilot?

This novel marks a transition novel for Flavia as she moves from home to attend Miss Bodycote's Female Academy in Toronto for the next installment of the series. She has grown substantially since readers met her in the first books but is still the rather delightful misfit and chemistry and particularly poisonous substances nerd that she has always been. I don't see this changing and I look forward to more mayhem and mysteries on this side of the pond. Although written for adults, Flavia's age and her whimsical engagement with her family members and the extended community offer a satisfying read for proficient junior high and high school readers. Additionally, at the time of this review, a television series is in the works, which may bring more attention from young adults to the books themselves. This installment is highly recommended to young adult readers but with the caveat that perhaps those readers should immerse themselves in the series from the beginning to fully appreciate this offering. *GdV*

***Condemned to Repeat*** by Janice MacDonald. Winnipeg: Raven Stone, 2013. Paperback. 395 pages. 97800888014153

In this recent addition to the ongoing series of spunky amateur detective and researcher, Randy Craig, the setting takes precedence to the mystery and the characters. Steeped in the city of Edmonton's early history and several of its vibrant historic resources available to the public, the reader, journeying along with Randy, discovers the downside of the upstairs maid during the early twentieth century in the frontier city. While Randy is admittedly a frustrated academic long beyond the teenage years, she suffers many of the same anxieties regarding relationships, selfidentity and her future as young adult readers may have. Many of the popular culture references, however, are

rather dated and will most probably not be of much interest to those same readers. At the same time, the references to haunted houses, contemporary legends regarding Halloween treats and several Halloween scary activities will do the trick.

Those from the Edmonton area should be familiar with the historic sites of Rutherford House, Fort Edmonton Park, and the Ukrainian Cultural Village. For those not familiar with them and the various interpretative programs, historical and contemporary such as murder mysteries and Halloween entertainments, this is a splendid primer. Randy, as usual, is in the midst of all of the activities, innocent and dire, as result of a recent research contract to construct an interactive website surrounding the Rutherford House on the University of Alberta campus. MacDonald knows and appreciates this history and this city although she seems a bit hesitant regarding the surrounding area. "I was a little nervous, since I'd never been east of the highway except to go to the Tyrell Museum in Drumheller" )348(. Hesitant to travel an hour or so outside of Edmonton but not to rush head first into all possible danger with murder victims piling up around her and her policeman boyfriend?

As someone who has worked and researched in many of the same historic sites as Randy does in this book, I enjoyed the glimpses into the past and the people and artifacts that bring that past alive for us in the present. Randy's character is as angst ridden as it was in the first book in the series and I keep hoping that she will eventually mature as her experiences with murder offer her additional insight into her own being. Her sense of humour and sense of the ridiculous shine through the book making Randy an appealing, if not frustrating, character. *GdV*

***Children of the Revolution*** by Peter Robinson. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2013. Hardback. 400 pages. 9780771076305

Robinson's latest detective story featuring DCI Ian Banks is another good read in his series of mystery novels. An emaciated tramp with five thousand pounds in his pocket is found dead on a railway viaduct and turns out to be a disgraced former college lecturer. Banks is convinced the murder is connected to the past, and to a relationship with Lady Veronica Chalmers. The plot thickens when Banks is warned by his superiors to stay away from pursuing this line of investigation; following his usual pattern of behaviour, Banks continues to work on the case surreptitiously. Robinson's novels are popular both for his intriguing plots and perhaps even more for his interesting characters. This latest one will not disappoint old and new fans. *IJ*