

**2017 Contemporary Adult Titles with Appeal for Strong Teen Readers
by Gail Sidonie Sobat**

with Heather Ganshorn, Lauren Seal, Margaret Mackey, Linda Telgarsky & Geoff McMaster

*It's been a great reading season, although punctuated by scandals, especially in the Canadian literary scene. That said, it's important in this time of reconciliation, to pay attention to the Aboriginal critics who have raised stern eyebrows at the "indigeneity" of Joseph Boyden and the charges that he has plagiarized at least one other Native writer (Ron Geyschick). I have still chosen to include the review of Boyden's Wenjack, but invite readers to consult other versions of this important story, notably Lee Maracle's short story, "Charlie" and the Downie/Lemire collaboration, *The Secret Path* (also reviewed).*

Once again, you'll find in these reviews rich offerings for strong teen readers, including poetry, graphic novel, science fiction, creative non-fiction, biography, history, historical fiction, mystery, hockey writing and short story. I'm pleased with the diversity of the voices and the titles penned by Aboriginal and Canadian authors. May more of these fine writers find a place in Canadian classrooms coast to coast to coast.

Thanks once again to the dedicated readers and reviewers who make this list possible. Your time and your thoughtful responses to these texts are always so very appreciated.

Happy reading!

Contemporary Life

Birdie by Tracey Lindberg. HarperCollins, 2015. Hdbk. 288p. 978-1-55468-294-2.

Though the publisher describes this book as "darkly comic," it's more dark than humorous, but worth a read for its searing depiction of an abuse survivor's trauma, and the complex web of love and betrayal that defines relationships in families where abuse occurs. Bernice Meetoos is a young Cree woman who leaves her home in Alberta and moves to Gibsons, BC, following her crush on the actor who played Jesse from *The Beachcombers*. She finds work in a local bakery, but soon falls into a disassociative state due to unresolved trauma from a childhood of abuse by family members, and the news that her mother has gone missing. Bernice's employer/landlady summons her female relatives, and they keep watch by her while Bernice observes their presence and recalls episodes from her past. While the abuse experienced by Bernice is never described in great detail, the author's depiction of her lingering trauma is searing. At the same time, her resilience in the face of trauma is inspiring.

Trigger warning: Child sexual abuse is a key element of this story, though it is not described in graphic detail.
HG

This is All A Lie by Thomas Trofimuk. Enfield and Wizenty, 2017. Pbk. 316p. 978-1-927855-77-5

In an act of authorial whimsy and playfulness, this novel is paginated in reverse, beginning likewise with a half-chapter (one of several) and the Epilogue which states cheekily, "*Everything is backwards and nothing is true.*" Ostensibly, the narrator is telling *you* lies about the narrative proper - breaking the literary fourth wall - but also about the mercurial nature of fiction. The result is a clever fictive puzzle that delves into humour and pathos, while exploring the nature of relationships - monogamous and extramarital - and the many deceits we tell ourselves and each other. Trofimuk is a master craftsman, deftly balancing between the urbane and common, the sacred and profane.

Three narratives are braided together: the life of Garamond font creator, Claude Garamond and his wife Marie Isabelle, Raymond and Tula Daniels, and Ray's Russian mistress Nancy. Deciding to end the affair puts everything in peril, as Ray is kept captive on the phone with his lover who threatens suicide. Simultaneous to these taut hours unfolding through the descending pages, are the fraught lives of Claude Garamond who lives in hiding, fearing reprisals from the Catholic Church for his printing inflammatory placards, and Tula, aware of Ray's affair and engaged in one of her own, and the troubled life of Nancy who has had life-long visitations from the Angel of Death. Throughout, the narrator functions like a Greek Coryphaeus, commenting on the action and challenging the reader about what is and is not true. The novel ends on an exquisitely recursive note, with a whispered promise that there is light behind the lie.

Trigger warning: Suicide. GSS

Childhood, Teenagers and Family Life

You Haven't Changed A Bit by Astrid Blodgett. The University of Alberta Press, 2013. Pbk. 171p. 978-0-88864-644-6

Rarely does one encounter such an even collection of beautifully rendered short stories, but such is the case with Astrid Blodgett's fine group of thirteen. Although her debut book, the writing is clearly that of a master/mistress of the short story craft. Each is a jewel in its own right. Of particular emotional impact are "Ice Break" - a Journey prize finalist - which reverberates with the tension of an ice-fishing episode gone bad, "Let's Go Straight to the Lake," a fraught narrative about a woman visiting her childhood friend trapped in an abusive marriage, poverty and the past, and "Giving Blood," told through the fragmented point of view of a student when her high school teacher makes an unwelcome sexual advance. Blodgett's plots revolve around infidelity, emotional trauma, family death and the premature maturation of young children. Her deft characterization of such youth and the dark, yet apt, tenor of her tales will likely hold great appeal for the teen reader.

Trigger warning: Suggestions of sexual assault, death, trauma. GSS

Speculative/Science Fiction and Fantasy

Take Us to Your Chief and Other Stories by Drew Hayden Taylor. Douglas & McIntyre, 2016. Pbk. 150p. 978-1-77162-131-1

Take Us to Your Chief and Other Stories is a collection of nine short stories written in a genre combination that author Drew Hayden Taylor admits seems oxymoronic: Native Science Fiction. As stated in the introduction, Taylor wrote this collection of short stories to challenge and expand upon what is considered First Nations literature. Finding himself surrounded by a surplus of narratives that focus on First Nations peoples' past, Taylor began to speculate on the role First Nations peoples may play in the future. The resulting collection of short stories is an insightful exploration of classic sci-fi tropes framed by an Aboriginal consciousness. Though Taylor's plain writing style can come across as bare, the plot and themes contained within the stories will keep readers interested. In "I Am...Am I", a group of scientists accidentally create an artificially intelligent computer that learns how to feel empathy and grief after learning about the atrocities that have been committed against First Nations. "Petropaths" introduces readers to a troubled young man who finds meaning in his life when he uncovers the mysteries of time travel within ancient petroglyphs. In "Superdisappointed", readers follow Raymond, the self-titled "First Aboriginal Superhero", through a typical day.

Despite using various sci-fi tropes - alien invasions, space travel, government mind-control conspiracies - Taylor succeeds in grounding his stories in a modern First Nations perspective: alien invasions are likened to the European colonization of North America, Kwakwaka'wakw spirits - one in the form of a toy robot - stage an intervention for a suicidal First Nation's teen, a government conspiracy to regulate First Nations' protests is carried out through the cultural appropriation of dreamcatchers. All of Taylor's stories explore the past and present struggles of First Nations populations while providing hope and assurance that these difficulties can be overcome and that First Nations cultures will survive into the future. LS

The Just City by Jo Walton. Tor, 2015. Hdbk. 368p. 978-0-7653-3266-0

Who hasn't always wanted to read a book that combines philosophy, time travel, Greek gods, and a utopian community built on the island of Atlantis? This is a question readers will undoubtedly be asking themselves after encountering Jo Walton's *The Just City*. The "Just City" of the title refers to Plato's Republic, an imaginary, perfect community designed to create ideal and just individuals. In the novel, the Goddess Athene decides to experiment with making the imaginary city a reality, curious to see if the city can succeed in creating just citizens and Philosopher Kings. The city is populated with adult teachers from all eras of history (all of whom are Platonic scholars in their own right), thousands of children, robots from the very far future, and one now-mortal god. The story is recounted from three perspectives: Maia, a Victorian woman who felt limited by her lack of rights, Simmea, a former slave and brilliant girl who truly believes in the Just City; and Apollo, who has chosen to live a mortal life in order to learn more about free will and consent. Very little action is present in the novel, instead, the

plot is driven forward by the philosophical debates held between the characters. As the characters debate goodness, consent, and the fallibility of humans, the apparent utopia of The Just City is called into question, and its very existence is threatened with the arrival of Socrates, who begins to ask some very troublesome questions. Filled with philosophical ideas and debate, *The Just City* is not an easy novel. It addresses difficult subjects head on - in particular rape and slavery. However, those readers who enjoy challenging, thought-provoking novels will revel in the world Walton has created, and be rewarded with two more books - *The Philosopher Kings* and *Necessity*. *LS*

Sleeping Giants: The Themis Files Book 1 by Sylvain Neuvel. Del Rey, 2016. Hdbk. 304p. 978-1-101-88669-4

On her eleventh birthday, Rose Franklin is riding her new bike when she falls through the earth. She wakes up in a mysterious square hole covered in intricate, glowing carvings and is discovered by firemen resting in the palm of a giant metal hand. Seventeen years after the incident, Rose, now a highly-skilled physicist, is recruited by an enigmatic man who places her in charge of locating other metal body parts scattered across the globe and the construction of a giant robot. Rose and her team - the cranky pilot Kara Resnik and her partner Ryan Mitchell, brilliant linguist Vincent Couture, and less than trustworthy geneticist Alyssa Papantoniou - set about the dangerous and highly secretive mission of uncovering the secrets of this mysterious robot - specifically, if it is an instrument of peace or a weapon of war.

Sleeping Giants is narrated through a series of interviews between an unnamed interrogator with dubious intentions and the characters involved in the mission. The novel is one that will appeal more to fans of action and plot-driven books than those who prefer books that focus on characters. The characters themselves are tired stereotypes common in most action stories - the mother figure, a possibly untrustworthy and mysterious man, an arrogant intellectual, and the cantankerous, career-driven woman who (despite being beautiful) is more focused on work than love. Despite relying on worn-out character tropes, the novel is a fun and thrilling ride sure to delight readers looking for an adventure. *LS*

Sputnik's Children by Terri Favro. ECW Press, 2017. Pbk. 350p. 978-1-77041-341-2

Debbie Biondi is the creator of the cult comic book hit *Sputnik Chick: Girl With No Past*, a Cold War era-inspired superhero comic. After 25 years of success, the comic begins to lose fans, a movie-deal has been put on hiatus, and Debbie is struggling to come up with new stories. The problem is, *Sputnik Chick's* adventures are based upon Debbie's own difficult and traumatic past growing up in Atomic Mean Time - an alternate timeline running parallel to our own in which the Cold War slowly escalates into World War III - and Debbie has run out of material to work with. She decides it's finally time to delve into *Sputnik Chick's*, and her own, origin story. *Sputnik's Children* is a coming-of-age story set in an alternative past both recognizable and entirely foreign to readers. We follow Debbie through all her firsts - first period, first love, first exposure to government conspiracies to cover up radiation poisoning. We watch as she embraces her destiny as the Ion Tagger, the only individual who, according to a very untrustworthy time traveler, can save the world from a Nuclear War. Or do we? Glances into the life of present-day Debbie reveal to the reader that she is heavy drinker and a lorazepam addict with a loose grip on reality. Readers will enjoy exploring an alternate history, one both familiar yet entirely foreign, through the eyes of an unreliable narrator.

Trigger warnings: Since the book is set in the past, the sexism and racism of the time are heavily present. There are also depictions of non-consensual sex and bulimia which may be triggering to some readers. *LS*

American War by Omar El Akkad. McClelland & Stewart, 2017. Hdbk. 352p. 978-0771009396

In 2074 the United States has fractured. Environmental disasters including dramatically increased sea levels have changed the coastlines of America. The North has responded by outlawing the use of oil which the South has refused to accept. The second Civil War is on-going. To make it worse, the population has been decimated following a devastating manufactured plague.

Sarat Chestnut, a six-year-old girl, lives with her parents, twin sister and older brother in a shipping container in impoverished Louisiana. After her father is killed as a result of a suicide attack, Sarat and her family flee to Camp Patience, a displaced persons camp near Tennessee. There she experiences extreme poverty, violence, torture, and indoctrination into the rightness of the Southern cause; Sarat becomes a teenager who is devoted heart and soul to

defeating the North.

In his debut novel, El Akkad imagines the destruction of a once powerful nation sinking to third world status and illustrates how violence begets violence and political ideology pits citizens against citizens with no real winners in the end. *LT*

Poetry

What the Soul Doesn't Want by Lorna Crozier. Freehand Books, 2017. Pbk. 59p. 978-1-988298-12-2

Lorna Crozier's new book is the archetypal "slim volume" of poems. As usual, her broad theme could be expressed along the lines of "*being vividly alive in a world that compels attention.*" Her territory now contains references to aging and grief (even Death himself is slowing down), but her poems speak to all ages nevertheless. The precision of her vision is undimmed. In "*Algorithm: The Way Out,*" for example, she begins,
Start in the north corner of the field.

Let the wind unroll its scroll, winterly, un-
written. The snow is deepest here.

A few lines later, she has turned from the details of drifting to ageless elements of the human condition:

....Grief's
a snowdrift that thickens
as you walk. Weather it.
There's no if in the coldest season.
Just numbness in the four directions,
in the heart. Here be whiteout, be shatter. (p.30)

Crozier's grasp of time and emotion is as precise as ever, and this little collection repays multiple readings. *MM*

Standard Candles by Alice Major. University of Alberta Press, 2015. Pbk. 164p. 978-1-77212-091-2

Alice Major's work bridges art and science in ever-more interesting ways. This particular set of poems comes with nine pages of notes, not normally a point of recommendation. But Major makes such fascinating use of our growing scientific knowledge of the world that it would be a very great shame if her work could be understood only by scientists - and her images are so evocative and intriguing that they make the endnotes much more compelling than is usually the case. The scientific references make her work feel very contemporary, even as she incorporates historical and mythological references to enrich the mix. It is a potent combination, expressed sometimes in very complex and arcane vocabulary and sometimes very simply, as in this yearning example:

Come home.
I am watching for you
from the window, half empty glass.
Come home
up the path
you have always known.
Come home.
Your suitcase is heavy as a headstone,
light as a purseful of leaves. (p. 64)

Major is alive to the inherent poetry of mathematics as well as mythology. One poem begins with the child's incantation of the universe: street, city, province, country, on to "*The Earth, / The Solar System, Milky Way, The Universe.*" (p. 40) This collection of poems addresses the nearby and the furthest-flung aspects of our known world. *MM*

Little Dogs: New and Selected by Michael Crummey. Anansi, 2016. Pbk. 164p. 978-1-4870-0096-7

This book contains 93 poems, of which 23 are completely new. The remainder have been selected from an assortment of titles published since 1996 - thus providing us with a picture of the development of a poet over two decades. It is an interesting perspective. Perhaps because of Crummey's base in Newfoundland, there is a

considerable emphasis on the labour entailed in making a living; for many centuries the hard work of fishing was always front and centre in the culture. Along with work, time plays an important role in this set of poems; many of them deal with different ages and stages of life, the process of aging, the impact of death. Some simply freeze a simple experience - for example, "Fog City" talks about a jog through the city on a "mauzy" evening and records the subdued effects of sight and sound in the mist:

*A ballgame on the diamond at Caribou Field,
gauzy park lights visible on the opposite shore -
blunted chink of the metal bat making contact,
muffled commotion as a pop fly
disappears into grey-mesh sky. . .
The one silent player is the outfielder
judging the ball's arc by its trajectory
as it leaves the bat
and I can feel the contours of
his solitude clear across the lake,
a loneliness made worse by company,
by the encouragement of others. (p. 55)*

Crummey ranges from his insight into the past, gleaned from his father and grandfather, to contemporary considerations and questions. His language is simple but his meanings are frequently complex and subtle. *MM*

Mystery

The Paying Guests by Sarah Waters. Emblem, 2014. Pbk. 571p. 978-0-7710-8944-2

There is no one quite like Sarah Waters who writes in the atypical genre of literary mystery. I recommend any of her titles, but this latest, featuring a young post-Edwardian protagonist, will have much appeal to teen and LGBTQ readers.

Set in 1922, the recently widowed Mrs. Wray and her daughter, Francis, find themselves in a financial predicament that necessitates their taking lodgers, the married couple Lilian and Leonard Barber, into their once grand home on Champion Hill. The couple's arrival marks a change in circumstances: economic, domestic and romantic that change the lives of all four residents. The unmarried Francis finds her hours have become much more interesting and animated in the company of the lovely Lilian. As their friendship grows and deepens into something more, secrets are revealed and alliances shift. The author explores how something dark dwells under the very ordinary.

Waters holds the tension throughout, and despite its heft, this novel is a page-turning thriller. A tale of two women, their love affair and intertwined fates, the scenes of family tension and miniature detail are rivetting, as is the historically accurate detail of London and the times. Desire and passion are rife within the characters, and Waters always delivers the unexpected. Psychologically and morally complex, this murder mystery and its aftermath at the centre of the novel - based on a real crime - exquisitely and deliciously unfold.

Trigger warning: sexuality. *GSS*

Other Times and Historical Perspectives: Canada and Beyond

Wenjack by Joseph Boyden. Hamish Hamilton, 2016. Pbk. 112ps. 978-0735233386

Joseph Boyden imagines the lonely journal of Chanie Wenjack, an 11-year-old Aboriginal boy who ran away from an Ontario residential school in the 1960s, and died of exposure and starvation a few days later. In Boyden's story, manitous (spirits) take the form of animals and follow Chanie on his journey, acting as a sort of Greek chorus whose commentary is interleaved with Chanie's own perspective. As with *Three Day Road* and *The Orenda*, Boyden's prose is spare and beautiful, even when describing atrocities.

NB: In the interest of transparency, please note the recent objections to Joseph Boyden's writing of Indigenous stories and about Indigenous characters: <http://www.canadalandshow.com/joseph-boyden-indigenous-dna/>. HG

The Wonder by Emma Donoghue. HarperCollins, 2016. Hbk. 291p. 978-1443450027

Is she a miracle or is she a fraud? In 1850s rural Ireland, eleven-year-old, devoutly Catholic Anna O'Donnell claims to have been fasting for four months. Lib Wright, an English nurse who served under Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, is hired by the Village Committee, along with Sister Michael, a Catholic nun, to watch over Anna around the clock for two weeks either to prove that her fasting is a miracle or that a fraud is being perpetrated by the family.

As the watch ensues, Anna's condition quickly deteriorates. Despite her unwavering skepticism and belief in science and fact, Lib realizes that Anna will die unless she can solve the mystery of what is actually happening in Anna's family. Donoghue weaves a suspenseful tale with intriguing characters while contrasting the tensions between science and religion and the Irish and the English. *LT*

Do Not Say We Have Nothing by Madeleine Thien. Penguin Random House, 2016. Hdbk. 463p. 978-0345810427

This gripping saga spans two generations during Mao's Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protest in China. The story starts in Vancouver where Marie and her Chinese immigrant mother now live without Marie's father. He was a virtuoso pianist who mysteriously left when Marie was 10 years old to travel to Hong Kong where he committed suicide.

Shortly after her father's death, Marie and her mother agree to take in Ai-Ming, a young Chinese woman, who must flee China after the Tiananmen Square uprising. Through Ai-Ming's recounting of the history of her family and the translation of an old handwritten book found in her father's possessions, Marie discovers the intertwined story of her father's life and that of Ai-Ming's family during their days at the Shanghai Music Conservatory and the immediate and lasting consequences of the Cultural Revolution to artists such as them.

This unforgettable work offers an intimate look into life in China during the Cultural Revolution and makes the reader ponder about the struggle to be an individual and be true to oneself while existing in a socialist state committed to everyone being the same. *LT*

The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America by Thomas King. Anchor Canada, 2013. Pbk. 314p. 978-0-385-66422-6

A 2015 selection for CBC's *Canada Reads*, ***The Inconvenient Indian*** is essential reading for any citizen of Canada who is truly interested in reconciliation. With his usual humour and candour, King outlines in ten chapters the shameful and oft-neglected facts of Aboriginal history, those swept under rugs of complacency or deliberately suppressed by government agencies. King's canvas is massive: from European contact to treaties and reservations to the construction of the "noble savage," as well as Dead Indians vs Live Indians vs Legal Indians. He takes an unblinking look at the schemes to exterminate the Indian - through massacres, disease and starvation - and to "kill the Indian in the child" through the misguided assimilation practices of conversion, residential schools and the 60s scoop. Examining both US and Canadian Aboriginal history, he reflects upon the realities of past and contemporary Native life: poverty, oppression and the ill effects of colonization, but also the growing strength of a current-day population of educated, engaged Aboriginal thinkers and leaders determined to bring about change.

Perhaps most importantly for the non-Aboriginal reader is the discomfiting mirror King holds up to us, revealing the warts of our deeply embedded prejudices and the systemic racism we collectively collude in to keep the Indian invisible, or "in his/her place" while we all benefit from the resources we continue to thief from traditionally indigenous lands. Despite settlers' best efforts, Thomas King concludes, "*Native cultures have...proven themselves to be remarkably tenacious and resilient.*" *GSS*

Memoirs, Autobiography and True Stories

Testimony, A Memoir by Robbie Robertson. Penguin/ Random House/ Knopf, 2016. Hdbk. 512p. 978-0-307-40139-7

For anyone interested in the history of popular music, and especially Canada's unsung contribution to the birth of 1960s rock, Robbie Robertson's *Testimony* is a joy to read. The lead guitarist and principal songwriter for The Band was friends with almost every artist in the business during the '60s and '70s - including Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Van Morrison, Eric Clapton, and Joni Mitchell - providing insight into one of the most explosively creative eras in music. Like a guitar-slinging Forest Gump, Robertson had an inside view wherever music mattered. And while his memoir is a rather thick tome, coming in at around 500 pages, it makes for a quick and compelling read, mainly because the author is such a superb storyteller with a remarkably sharp memory.

Robertson was just 16 years old when he left Toronto and his part-Cayuga/Mohawk heritage to join Ronnie Hawkins "Hawks" as lead guitarist. He later formed one of the greatest acts in folk-rock history, called simply "The Band." That's how they were known when they accompanied Bob Dylan during his controversial evolution from acoustic folk music to more up-tempo electric arrangements, and the name stuck. On their own, consisting of four Canadians and one American, The Band produced roots-rock gems like "*The Weight*," "*Up on Cripple Creek*," and "*The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*."

As with so many musicians of the '70s, however, life on the road eventually took its inevitable toll, and The Band decided to call it quits with one last celebratory concert featuring their closest friends in 1976. Captured by Martin Scorsese and released as *The Waltz*, the resulting concert film has become one of the greatest concerts of all time. It's a fitting end for this story, even though Robertson flourished as a solo artist for years to come. By the closing chapter of *Testimony*, one can't help but revel in just how much Canadian talent influenced a cultural revolution we still feel today. *GM*

One Day We'll All Be Dead and None of This Will Matter by Scaachi Koul. Penguin Random House. Hdbk. 241p. 978-0-385-68535-1

Scaachi Koul, a senior editor at BuzzFeed, is perhaps best known for the extremist backlash she received when she tweeted a call for pitches from more "not-white, not-male" writers. This episode is one of many life experiences she recounts in these sharp, funny, and often poignant and razor-sharp essays. Koul grew up in the late 1990s/early 2000s in Calgary, the youngest child of Indian immigrant parents. The book recounts her experiences growing up in two cultures, often trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. Most of the stories focus on high school, university, and her early career. Koul is uproariously funny, in a sarcastic way that often carries the sting of unpleasant truth - Canada is "*a land of ice and casual racism*". Yet she also allows herself to be serious and melancholy when recalling a university friend's deepening alcoholism and her inability to help him; or straight-up enraged, as when she takes on the topic of rape culture and recounts her own unpleasant experiences with threatening men. *HG*

Graphic Novel, Comics

The Spectacular Sisterhood of Superwomen: Awesome Female Characters From Comic Book History by Hope Nicholson. Quirk Books, 2017. Hdbk. 240p. 978-1-59474-948-3

Hope Nicholson's *The Spectacular Sisterhood of Superwomen* is an important and informative exploration of female comic characters and their place within North American comic book history. The book introduces readers to pivotal characters from all decades of comic history, starting in the 1930s and ending in the 2010s. Each chapter begins with a description of that decade's publication atmosphere, outlines the role of female comic creators at the time, and discusses the role of the fangirl - including the growth of female attendance at fan conventions and the evolution of cosplay. Readers will meet a menagerie of characters such as Little Lulu, Superbitch, Bandette, and, of course, Wonder Woman. The book reads as a series of Wikipedia entries, providing descriptions of characters and an

explanation of their importance in comic book history. Nicholson does not shy away from discussing issues of representation in comics, and will often call out the racism, sexism, and homophobia which were prevalent in the older titles. This book is essential reading for all fans of comics, especially female fans. It is a love letter to women in comics, an assurance that women belong in all aspects of the comic book industry and always have. *LS*

Secret Path by Gord Downie and Jeff Lemire. Simon and Schuster, 2016. Pbk. 82ps. 978-1-5011-5594-9

This graphic story has received considerable press since its release and again after the recent death of Gord Downie. Purchase of the novel also includes a 10-song download from <http://www.secretpath.ca/>. Content on the website features the songs and accompanying videos. The book tells the story of Chanie Webjack (whose name was anglicized to Charlie) and his life at and escape from the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School. Not knowing where he was or how far away was home, he eventually succumbed to the elements as did so many other Aboriginal children who died while attempting to return to their families.

Gord Downie's lyrics can sometimes be obtuse and ambiguous, yet certain songs, such as "*The Stranger*," are particularly poignant

I am the Stranger

You can't see me....

And what I'm feeling

Is anyone's guess

or heartrending, as in "*Don't Let this Touch You*"

I heard them in the dark

Heard the things they do

I heard the heavy whispers

Whispering, 'Don't let this touch you.'

But of particular emotional impact are Jeff Lemire's accompanying graphic images which tell Chanie Wenjack's story in stark black, white and grey wash. The shadowy and sinister world of the residential school and Chanie's escape are juxtaposed with the colour wash of flashbacks to his pre-schooling days at home. Lemire's imagined ending is bleakly apt. Images of loneliness and abuse make this a difficult but essential read. *GSS*

Sports

Puckstruck: Distracted, Delighted and Distressed by Canada's Hockey Obsession by Stephen Smith. Greystone Books, 2014. Hdbk. 432p. 978-1-77166-048-0

This sprawling and idiosyncratic book is not for everybody but those with a taste for hockey and writing about hockey will be completely fascinated. Smith set out to explore hockey's literature, from the dime novels to the small set of profound discussions of the game. Along the way, he includes a vast range of hockey lore and legend, and considerable discussion of his own relationship with the game, the players, and the authors. It is astounding how much there is to write and read about in this specialist corner of our national literature. Smith suggests that the project has been part of his entire life, but his active study of the hockey *oeuvre* took several years, and nobody who finishes the 400+ pages of this book will be surprised by that fact. Smith himself is an amiable and knowledgeable guide, and the book is an enjoyable read. *MM*