

*Contemporary Canadian Adult Books for Strong Teen Readers*  
*Margaret Mackey*

with

*Joanne de Groot, Gail de Vos, Heather Ganshorn, Ingrid Johnston, Jill Kedersha McClay, and Kristine Moruzi*

This column is number 17 in an annual series that dates back to 1996 (you can find a compilation of all the columns at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~mmackey> this current column will be added to the bigger list in the spring of 2013).

The readers who put this column together every year work on the principle that young readers can benefit from support and advice as they begin to move away from adolescent literature into more adult reading. We select titles from the pool of new Canadian adult publishing that are of potential interest to strong teenage readers. Our main selection criterion is that the book should be of possible interest to some (not all) teen readers. We do not worry about strong language, or graphic sex and/or violence, assuming that a strong teen reader will be capable of putting down a book that is not to his or her taste. We do reject books that focus entirely on middle-aged crises on the grounds that there is plenty of time for young readers to grow into an interest in such topics. All the titles listed here speak to youth in one way or another.

We make no claim that every reader will like every book on this list - nor should they. As usual, our column is a testimony to the lively and perceptive world of contemporary Canadian fiction, with a few sample titles from other genres. MM

*Whose society?*

*Half-Blood Blues* by Esi Edugyan. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2011. Paperback. 304 pages. 978-0887627415.

*Half-Blood Blues* is turning the relatively unknown novelist Esi Edugyan into a big name in Canada and around the world. This Giller prize-winning novel was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and appeared on several other prize lists. World War II is well-trodden ground among novelists, but *Half Blood Blues* offers a new and fascinating portrait of this period, seen through the eyes of some black musicians living in wartime Berlin. Sid Griffiths and his friend Chip Jones move to Germany in the 1920s to escape the pervasive racism of the U.S. Their band, the Hot Time Swingers, is one of the most famous acts in Berlin. As Nazi power grows, though, the polyglot Swingers come under pressure. Their Jewish pianist is targeted by the regime, and the American members of the band are advised to get out of Berlin. The most tragic figure in the book is Hieronymous (Hiero) Falk, the band's young trumpet virtuoso. Falk is a mixed-race German, the product of a liaison between a German woman and a black African soldier (the French sent Senegalese troops to occupy the Rhineland after World War I). While he feels out of place before the Nazi era, he is literally deprived of his citizenship during it.

After an altercation with some Nazis in which one of the Nazis is killed, several of the band members escape to Paris, where they begin work on a record with the legendary Louis Armstrong. Paris is only a temporary refuge, however; it is soon occupied by the Germans. When Sid and Hiero risk a visit to a cafe, Hiero is arrested by German soldiers and taken away to a concentration camp while Sid, on a visit to the mens' room, avoids detection. Decades later, on his way to attend the Berlin premiere of a film about Hiero's life, Sid reminisces about the band's turbulent years, the fates of its members, and his own guilt in the matter of Hiero's capture. *HG*

*Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2012. Paperback. 221 pages. 978-1-55365-4002-5

A great Canadian novel will address profoundly important questions about Canadian society, and this book qualifies on all counts. Saul Indian Horse is burrowing back into his life story, hoping to find a way of saving himself from the alcoholic depths that will certainly close over him if he cannot escape. His story is grim, and all the grimmer for being so familiar. He lived on the land with a wise Ojibway grandmother until the age of eight. At his grandmother's death, he was captured (the word is not too strong) and confined to the appalling limits of a residential school. There he learns that he has a gift for playing hockey that for a time offers him a way of escape.

Saul's hockey talent is remarkable, and at least one opponent refers to him as a shape-shifter. Hockey as a form of physical magic is a theme that dominates the central part of this story. A more down-to-earth way of addressing his talent and the response to it can be summed up in two realistic questions: what if Wayne Gretzky had been an Aboriginal? How might his life have played out differently? Saul Indian Horse supplies a possible answer to these questions, and if the reader finds that answer sobering, Saul takes it in the other direction.

This book is captivating and important. It marries two large Canadian stories in a single narrative and the result is not a pretty picture - but it is a book that is very hard to put down and that leaves a residue of significant questions lingering in the mind. *MM*

*The Antagonist* by Lynn Coady. Toronto: Anansi, 2012 (2011). Paperback. 337 pages. 978-1-77089-104-3

Rank (Gordon Rankin, named after the father who goads him at every turn) believes an old friend of his has taken secrets he confided in their youth and turned them into a novel. Consumed with anger, he writes back, an ongoing series of emails to his erstwhile friend Adam, outlining his own version of his adolescence and early adulthood. "There you are in the picture," the book begins (3), and much of the story is written thus in the second person. It is greatly to Coady's credit that she sustains this difficult construction and makes it compulsively readable. She also uses it to make us aware early on that we probably should not

entirely trust this narrator.

Adam is silent throughout, but as Rank pursues his story of the secret that shaped his life, he becomes franker, his observations grow more thoughtful and nuanced, and his account of his past life becomes fuller. Apart from being marked indelibly by his sorrowful secret, his life has also been shaped by the fact that from boyhood he was bigger and stronger than he knew how to handle or control. Automatically selected to be the goon on the hockey team, he also earns a semblance of a living by acting as a bouncer in a seedy bar. A major theme of this book is of Rank learning to live with the consequences of that strength, and a second involves living with the perception of being a constant outsider.

Rank and his college buddies live vividly and funnily on these pages. Coady is perceptive and witty in her account of their often drink- or drug-addled lives. The book is a triumphant merger of some of the goofy and witless elements in the lives of young men and the serious and disturbing questions they confront. *MM*

***Monoceros*** by Suzette Mayr. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2011. Paperback. 265 pages. 978-1-55245-241-

At the start of this subtle and gripping story, we learn of the suicide of Patrick Furey, who killed himself after his bisexual lover rejected him, his lover's girlfriend bullied him, and a variety of other people paid very little attention. This book takes us through the fallout of that death, through the voices and thoughts of about a dozen different people, whose lives change direction after Patrick's suicide. Mayr takes us into the minds and hearts of Patrick's classmates, his lover and the girlfriend, his teachers, principal, and guidance counsellor, and his parents. The comedy and pathos of everyday life is suddenly edged and etched with tragedy, and Mayr does a brilliant job of conveying the intermingling nuances of dailiness and high passions, all bound round and through by ongoing elements of hypocrisy and deceit. The book is entertaining, troubling, and very, very hard to put down. "Monoceros" is the Greek name for the unicorn, and Faraday, a girl who once served Patrick at Tim Hortons and now wishes she had paid him more attention, is obsessed by unicorns. The addition of the fantastic element these unicorns bring to the story is delicately handled and the ending is a startling and remarkable. *MM*

***Requiem*** by Frances Itani. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2011. Hardback. 288 pages. Hardback. 978-1443406895

This multi-layered lyrical novel moves readers from present day Ottawa to Canada's west coast during World War Two when Japanese Canadians were forcibly moved from their homes and sent to desolate camps in Southern Alberta. The present day story focuses on Bin Okuma as a middle-aged Japanese Canadian artist who has recently lost his wife and is driving across Canada to revisit the internment camp he lived in as a child. On the journey, Bin recalls his past life in the camp and the events that caused him to be estranged from his father. The vignettes of his early life are evocatively described; readers come to understand Bin's anger at the racism that forced his family out of their home and gain insight into how his life was enriched by his "second father" who was a talented musician. Itani is a talented writer with the ability to write descriptively and empathetically about human experiences and historical events. *IJ*

***New Under the Sun*** by Kevin Major. Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2010. Hardback. 397 pages. 978-1-897151-85-3

In *As Near to Heaven by Sea*, Kevin Major wrote a highly accessible history of Newfoundland. In ***New Under the Sun***, he takes some of the most significant events from that history and re-imagines them in a very layered fiction. Shannon is a Newfoundlander who has moved to BC and is now moving back again, apprehensive about what she will find in the province she left many years before. Her new job with Parks Canada involves work with the tourist sites presenting the major meeting points between Aboriginal and settler cultures in northern Newfoundland and in Labrador. As part of her work, she reads a range of other documents, which are also presented to the book's readers: a novel about the Beothuk, letters and journals of William Cormack who studied Beothuk culture in its final days in the 19th century, and a short story about Basque fishermen on the Labrador coast. Major diversifies the voices in these different documents with variable success, but the alternation of perspectives is more completely achieved.

Meetings can take place in a variety of ways and at least two characters in this novel are of mixed blood. The issue of whether the Beothuk could have survived complete extermination through such means also arises.

The book does feature a didactic streak but Major succeeds in presenting a complex history in imaginative ways. *MM*

### ***Other Times***

***The Cat's Table*** by Michael Ondaatje. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2011. Hardback. 288 pages. 978-0307700117

The characters, setting and events that take place on this ocean liner from Ceylon to England in the early 1950s are narrated by eleven-year-old Michael who is going to England to be reunited with his mother. The cat's table of the title refers to the least privileged place in the dining room where many of the least privileged and respected passengers are assigned to dine. This table of solo travelers includes Michael, called Myna, two boys his own age, and several adults who undertake a quasi-type of responsibility for entertaining the three youngsters. The three boys, however, are quite capable of entertaining themselves throughout the three-week voyage and discover (and try to explain) all types of unconnected and bizarre behaviour by the rest of the passengers and the ship's crew. The seemingly unrelated actions and characters are threaded into a seamless narrative by the author's poetic writing and skilful weaving of events. The adult Myna makes an appearance as well, offering commentary on

some of these events and characters that have helped shape his identity and journey towards adulthood. Although the main character and the author share their first name, Ondaatje has repeatedly claimed that his novel is not autobiographical. It is, however, a rewarding novel of coming of age, identity and storytelling. Highly recommended for teen readers. *GdV*

***A Good Man*** by Guy Vanderhaeghe. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 2011. Hardback. 480 pages. 978-0-77108-740-0.

Guy Vanderhaeghe is one of the great storytellers of the Canadian West, and this latest novel is a wonderful addition to the genre. Wesley Case is a man who heads west trying to escape an overbearing father, and the burden of guilt from a tragic mistake in his past. Initially, Wesley joins the Mounties and is stationed at Fort Walsh, under the command of the famous James Walsh. Wesley has a small inheritance from his mother, and he decides to resign his commission and purchase a ranch near Fort Benton, Montana. He also agrees to act as Walsh's unofficial representative to the American military in Fort Benton. Both countries at this time are concerned about the actions of the Sioux, led by the charismatic Sitting Bull. Sitting Bull moves back and forth between the two countries, refusing to accept a move to a reservation, and threatening the growing white communities that have displaced his people. Vanderhaeghe does a wonderful job of capturing the moral discomfort of Walsh and some of the other more enlightened whites, who seek to find a more conciliatory way to coexist with the native tribes, but must work within the confines of two governments who are determined to thoroughly conquer these tribes. Wesley has the opportunity to meet Sitting Bull and other historic figures. He is also troubled by the mysterious Michael Dunne, an unbalanced man who has resorted to murder in the past, and who falls in love with the same woman as Wesley. This is a wonderful tale that brings to life an important period in the history of this country. *HG*

***A World Elsewhere*** by Wayne Johnston. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2011. Hardback. 295 pages. 978-0-307-39989-2

Landish Druken is a larger-than-life character, and Johnston places him for much of the book in the larger-than-life setting of "Vanderland," the lavish estate built by one of the richest men in the world, Padgett Vanderluyden or Van. Landish and Van met at Princeton and their friendship is underscored and marred by different forms of frustration. Landish is used to frustration; as the son of a sea-captain and sealer who is cruelly indifferent to the well-being of his men, he has never satisfied his father or even much wanted to do so. His life, nevertheless, is enriched immeasurably when he steps up to a responsibility that his father shirked. Captain Abram Druken abandoned the first mate of his sealing vessel on the ice; the pregnant widow died soon after her son was born and wrote Landish her wish that he should take responsibility for the baby, Deacon. The young man and the little boy become an inseparable pair.

It is a complex set-up for a story and Landish is a complex character, declaiming, punning, philosophizing, and burning every word that he writes. When he and Deacon move from Newfoundland to Vanderland, the plot and the language thicken, if possible. The mystery surrounding the death of Van's baby sister propels much of the story but much of its impetus arises simply from Landish's grand vision of the world.

It does not sound like a recipe for a page-turner but the book is compelling in its own distinctive ways. Not for every reader, it will richly reward those who have a taste for the grandiose and the exaggerated, a tall tale of striking proportions. *MM*

***Drift*** by Leo Brent Robillard, Leo Brent. (2011). *Drift*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2011. Paperback. 192 pages. 978-0-88801-385-9.

Poet and educator Leo Brent Robillard delves into a part of Canadian history that most students are probably quite unfamiliar with in this novel. The year is 1899. Will and Mason have been best friends their entire childhood growing up in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Will is planning to go to university in Winnipeg, but Mason has a thirst for adventure, and persuades his friend to abandon his academic plans and enlist in the Winnipeg Rifles' "A" company, which is shipping out to South Africa to take part in the Second Boer War. Will goes along willingly enough, but soon after their arrival, he begins to question the purpose and rightness of the war. As Will learns to kill, and to question, he and Mason grow apart. Will learns much about war, love, and human nature from the others he meets on his journey. Among them are Robert, a geologist fleeing an unhappy marriage; Campbell Scott, a South African who operates a reconnaissance hot air balloon; and Claire, an Australian nurse with whom Will falls in love. *HG*

***The Virgin Cure*** by Ami McKay. Toronto: Knopf, 2011. Hardback. 368 pages. 978-0-67697-956-4.

This is the story of Moth, a girl born into a New York slum in the late 1800s. McKay portrays unflinchingly the hardscrabble environment in which parents have too many mouths to feed, young boys fall early into petty crime, and young girls fall into prostitution. Syphilis is a poorly understood disease that ravages all classes of society, and desperate men seek "the virgin cure," in the belief that deflowering a virgin will cure their illness. Moth grows up with a single mother who barely scrapes together a living as a fortune-teller. Moth's mother, heartbroken and abandoned by her father, has little love to give to Moth. When Moth is eleven, her mother sells her into a domestic service job with a wealthy woman who turns out to be cruel and abusive. Moth runs away from her situation, but once on the streets, her desperation lands her in a brothel euphemistically called an "infant school," where the madam auctions young virgins off to wealthy bidders.

While Moth is being groomed for her fate, she meets “Dr. Sadie,” a female physician who tends to the brothel’s girls. Moth’s young age and her obvious intelligence attract the doctor’s attention and sympathy, but her new friend may not be able to protect her from the fate that Moth’s station in life has decreed for her. The character of Dr. Sadie is based loosely on McKay’s own ancestor, Dr. Sarah Fonda Mackintosh, a physician who worked in the slums of New York City. *HG*

***The Little Shadows*** by Marina Endicott. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, DATE. Hardback. 544 pages. 978-0385668910

Marina Endicott’s latest novel is an expansive coming-of-age story of three sisters and their mother as they perform on vaudeville stages throughout the western United States and Canada before and during the First World War. Aurora, Clover and Bella are intrepid young women, fully aware of their talents and charms but also realistic about their precarious situation in life following the death of their father. The story follows the many adventures and romances of the girls and their determined but fragile mother as they negotiate the challenges of the vaudeville scene. Despite its length, the novel is never boring thanks to Endicott’s appealing writing style and her ability to keep the action moving between melodrama, hilarity and sorrow. *IJ*

***The Reinvention of Love*** by Helen Humphreys. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2011. Hardcover. 320 pages. 978-1554684434

This intriguing novel is set amidst the political turbulence and artistic excitement of 19th-century Paris. The protagonist, Charles Sainte-Beuve, is an influential critic who earns the friendship of the already famous Victor Hugo after writing a review celebrating Hugo’s poems. The story focuses on the love affair between Sainte-Beuve and Hugo’s wife, Adele. Humphreys subtly shows how Sainte-Beuve negotiates his feelings of love for Adele with his jealousy of Hugo’s success as a writer and his desire for revenge. Through Sainte-Beuve’s self-deprecating voice, we acknowledge his flaws of overarching ambition and malice, but also come to appreciate his vulnerability and human qualities. Part of the interest of the book also lies in the depiction of famous literary figures such as the egotistical Victor Hugo and the novelist George Sand who forms part of Sainte-Beuve’s group of friends. Humphrey’s strong characterizations, witty writing style and insights into human nature offer a memorable read. *IJ*

***Freddy’s War*** by Judy Schultz. Victoria: Brindle & Glass, 2011. Paperback. 257 pages. 978-1-897142-55-4

Freddy is seventeen when he signs up for the army and is sent off to join World War II in Hong Kong. He is there only briefly before he is captured by the Japanese, but during his six weeks as an active, fighting soldier, he has experiences that change his life forever.

This book tells a war story with consequences - not just a brief burst of blood and glory but a lifetime of after-effects. The plot moves back and forth in time (sometimes with a casual mingling of past and present tense in ways that don’t always help a reader, though explicit chapter headings do fill in some of the blanks). The book evokes young love, compensatory love, brutal violence, death and uncertainty, remorse and sorrow, several varieties of racial prejudice, and the inevitable connections between China and northern Canada that play out in Edmonton, Vancouver, and Trout Creek, Manitoba, as well as in Hong Kong. The characters are compelling enough to sustain interest throughout this movement through time and space (though it is a pity that the wily old amah is never given a name).

One way of separating books into categories that allow readers to gauge potential enjoyment is to say that some are about action and adventure while others are about relationships. This book contains all of the above. *MM*

***The Forest Laird: A Tale of William Wallace*** by Jack Whyte. Toronto: Penguin, 2011. Hardback. 720 pages. 978-0-67006-846-3.

This is the first book in Scottish-Canadian author Jack Whyte’s *The Guardians trilogy*, which will tell the story of Scotland in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. ***The Forest Laird*** imagines the life of William Wallace (the title character played by Mel Gibson in the film *Braveheart*). The tale is narrated by Will’s cousin Jamie, a priest who grew up with Wallace as a near-brother. Little is known about Wallace’s actual early life, but Whyte applies his superb imagination to the task of creating a story in which the orphaned son of a minor landowner becomes a forest outlaw, a rebel hero, and eventually a Guardian of the Realm. Whyte effortlessly weaves a great deal of historical detail into his fast-moving plot. This is a great read for fans of medieval history, Celtic history, or blood-and-guts war stories. *HG*

### ***Other Places***

***A Thousand Farewells: A Reporter’s Journey from Refugee Camp to the Arab Spring*** by Nahlah Ayed. Toronto: Viking Penguin Canada, 2012. Hardback. 356 pages. 978-0-670-06909-5

Born in Winnipeg of Palestinian parents, Nahlah Ayed is well positioned to report on the current dramatic events of Middle Eastern countries. To ensure that their children knew their Palestinian heritage, Ayed’s parents uprooted the family and settled in a refugee camp in Amman, Jordan. For seven years, the Ayeds endured harsh conditions as displaced people, and young Nahlah

learned to conform to cultural expectations there, until the family returned to Canada. This early education gave Ayed a strong compassion for people who live through the upheavals, uncertainties, and sheer terror of war. Subsequently, as a Canadian reporter covering crises in Middle Eastern countries, Ayed has focused upon the people whose lives are disrupted rather than on the politics of the wars. The memoir spans her childhood in Winnipeg and Jordan to her post-9/11 reporting from Iraq and Lebanon, as well as from Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Libya. She reports on people who seek, despite great personal risk amid seemingly inevitable sectarian hostility and violence, to bring democratic processes to their homelands. This heartfelt, clear-eyed memoir provides an intriguing blend of personal, cultural, and professional tensions; Ayed writes candidly of the emotional toll that too many years of living in war zones took on her. While the book can get bogged down at times in explanation of one relentlessly destructive event after another, *A Thousand Farewells* is a valuable and insightful read for those who contemplate the current events in the Middle East. *JKM*

*Under an Afghan Sky: A Memoir of Captivity* by Melissa Fung. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins, 2011. Hardback. 358 pages. 978-1-55468-680-3.

In October, 2008, Mellissa Fung, a journalist for CBC television's The National was in visiting a refugee camp near Kabul, Afghanistan. She had been interviewing refugees for a story she was doing on the effects of the war on people living in the camp. As she was leaving the camp, Fung was grabbed by masked men who stabbed her, threw her into a car and drove her into the desert. From there, she was forced to walk miles through the Afghani countryside until she and her captors reached a village in the middle of nowhere. Once there, Fung was forced into a hole in the ground where she was held for the next 28 days. *Under an Afghan Sky* recounts Mellissa Fung's 4 weeks in captivity. Recounting her story in a series of diary-style entries, Fung never loses sight of her role as a reporter. Throughout the book she talks honestly about fear and loneliness, and ultimately the resiliency and hope that helped her get through those 28 days of confinement. We also see her captors as real people, who have been pushed to take extreme and desperate action while living in a country surrounded by poverty and war. *Under an Afghan Sky* is a compelling and honest book about conflict and fear and captivity. Young adult readers who are particularly interested in journalism and exploring issues related to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan will appreciate Mellissa Fung's candor and the insights she provides into the role of reporters in places of conflict. *JdG*

*419* by Will Ferguson. Toronto, ON: Viking/Penguin, 2012. Hardback. 399 pages. 978-0-670-06471-7.

Well known for his travel writing and his comedic novels, Will Ferguson offers *419* as his first foray into the dramatic. *419* is part mystery, part family story, and part historical fiction. In the end, it is a novel that tells a number of seemingly separate stories and which ultimately weaves the pieces together in a dramatic conclusion. At the heart of this story is Laura Curtis, a lonely book editor from Calgary, whose father falls prey to an email scam (known as 419 in Nigeria) and loses his family's savings. When her father kills himself because of the swindle, Laura takes it upon herself to try to untangle the lies and travels to Nigeria to confront the scammers. Woven into the story is a mysterious African woman with scars on her face and a young man who is enmeshed in the violence and greed that is at the core of these 419 scams.

*419* is an interesting and unique story, particularly because we all have received those spam emails that start with "Dear Sir or Madam, I am the daughter of a Nigerian diplomat and I need your help..." The fact that we can all relate to the the unwitting Henry Curtis who is only trying to help and in the end loses so much makes the story even more compelling. In some cases, the divergent stories in the novel can be difficult to keep straight and the historical detail about the oil industry in Nigeria may become tedious for some readers. However, the mystery and the layered characters will likely be enough to keep most teenage readers engaged with the story. *JdG*

### *Other worlds*

*The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern. Toronto: Random House, 2011. Hardback. 387 pages. 978-0-385-67171-2

This is a magic realism novel with the excitement of a travelling circus and the challenge of a contest between two young illusionists: Celia and Marco, who have been trained since childhood to compete in a "game" of imagination and will. The circus itself, billed as "Le cirque des rêves" appears suddenly in a particular location after sunset with no announcement, offering surreal experiences of contortionists, fortune telling, acrobatics and magic acts, with tropical gardens, night skies, and amazing illuminations appearing and disappearing. Celia and Marco, who begin as competitors in a game they do not really understand, end up in a romantic relationship with consequences for everyone connected to the circus. While the romance is rather uninspiring, the story itself is fascinating and is narrated in an engaging writing style that will delight most readers. *IJ*

*The Wild Ways* by Tanya Huff. New York: DAW, 2011. Hardback. 295 pages. 978-0-7564-0686-8.

This sequel to *The Enchantment Emporium* (2009) is related by another member of the Gale family, and, as was the first in the series, is a coming-of-age story for two characters. At almost thirty years of age, Charlie, the narrator of this book and a character from the first book, and one of the Wild Ones, is late to claiming her family powers. Approximately six months after the events of the first book and along with her fourteen-year old cousin Jack, a Dragon Prince, Charlie travels from the family

base in Calgary, Alberta to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia to aid in rescuing the Selkie seal skins taken in an attempt to stop the protest against corporate offshore drilling. Her guitar playing and wild powers, focused by the music, are sorely tested when pitted against another member of the Gale family, Aunt Catherine, and the not always ethical selkies, goblins and a troll. The characters are all well rounded, the issues contemporary, and the magic, well, both magical and musical. Huff is not didactic in her environmental message, presenting an enchanting adventure to alleviate the boredom of Charlie and Jack and to engage the reader long after the book is finished. For young adult readers there are plenty of bad jokes, sexual references, and somewhat realistic escapades in this intelligent urban fantasy reworking ancient folkloric themes and stories. *GdV*

***Eyes Like Leaves*** by Charles de Lint. San Francisco: Tachyon, 2012. Paperback. 348 pages. 978-1-61696-050-6.

Originally written in 1980 but first published in 2009 by specialty publisher Subterranean, this epic fantasy has now been released for the general reading public. In this conventional epic quest fantasy, the wizard apprentice Tarn attempts to deliver the champion of the people, an untested and reluctant heroine, to the Green Isles to awaken the Summerlord in order to defeat the evil Icelord. Along with the tense excitement, de Lint offers the reader a chance to know his well rounded characters, empathize and identify with their needs, deeds and choices through shifting points of view and invigorating narrative and attention to the setting. Magic, and particularly the magic of shape-shifting, plays a major role in the battle among the forces in the Green Isles. These transformations result in the characters' exploration of their own identities and values and, as a result, some soul searching on the part of readers themselves.

This is not a polished work by any means. In the forward, de Lint explains that he did not make any major changes to this early manuscript but the hallmarks for his more recent writing are definitely here in his poetic writing style, his young and complex characters, the complicated conflict of good and evil, and personal choice as a major theme. *GdV*

### ***The Need to Know Our Stories***

***One Story, One Song*** by Richard Wagamese. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011. Hardback. 201 pages. 978-1-55365-506-0.

This book contains another treasury of reflections and reminiscences on the people, places, and events that help shape the author's world view, writing and identity. The fifty-five concisely written reflections are roughly divided into four sections, each reflecting a direction and a principle taught by traditional First Nation teachers: east (humility), south (trust), west (introspection) and north (wisdom). Each of the four directions (sections) is prefaced with a brief commentary on the corresponding principle. All of the pieces embrace and celebrate story and storytelling and their importance in maintaining balance in our world. As Wagamese states, "the ancient teachings are not a romantic throwback to a vanished lifestyle but a resonant reminder of our contemporary responsibilities" (13). There is celebration as well of the burgeoning presence of First Nation authors and creators in Canada's mainstream publishing world. This is not a book to rush but to savour and experience with all five senses for readers of all ages. These reflections on personal growth, identity, anger management, love and respect should be essential reading for all. *GdV*

***Shelter*** by Frances Greenslade. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2011. Hardback. 372 pages. 978-0-307-36031-1

***Shelter*** is the story of two sisters, Maggie and Jenny, raised in the 1960s and 70s in the wilds of the Chilcotin region in British Columbia, and their quest to find out what happened to their mother after she billets them in Williams Lake and never returns. The main narrative centres on the effects of loss on the two girls: first, their father's death in a work accident, and then the disappearance of their strong, independent mother Irene. Maggie's quest to find their mother is motivated by circumstances that separate Maggie and Jenny at a time when maternal guidance is vital. The mystery of their mother's disappearance drives the last half of the narrative, with Maggie gradually uncovering her mother's past.

The need for shelter - both physical and emotional - is an overarching theme in the novel, which is divided into three sections - Food, Water, and Fire - also crucial elements to survival in the wilderness. The final section, Fire, is the shortest and is also structurally different. The answer to the mystery is uncovered through stories told to Maggie by others who knew her mother, perhaps a nod to oral storytelling traditions. *KM*

### ***Poetry***

***Testament: Poems (2000-2011)*** by Dennis Lee. Toronto: Anansi, 2012. Paperback. 130 pages. 978-1-77089-111-1

Dennis Lee has reworked the poems he published in *Un* and *Yesno* (both reviewed in this column) and added some new ones. Like its predecessors, *Testament* is a brave and challenging book. Lee mentions the idea of a "deathwatch" on the opening page, and he talks about the difficulty of comprehending just how fast things are changing: "Contusions of slippage & sloppage & inconsolable / us, re- / formatted to the new" ("Rupture," 8). He speaks of the need to "comb the signs, to / stammer the uterine painscape / in pidgin apocalypse" ("Pidgin," 14). Clearly this is not a book for the fainthearted, but there is a cathartic pleasure in seeing the unspeakable spoken - even if often in polysyllables and neologisms that sharpen our awareness of the opaque languages so often spoken around us: both the mysterious words of science and the glb creations of popspeak. Yet a line that also

resonates survives from Un: “to / be is a bare-assed wonder” (“Admire,” 26). This life is what we have, and Lee’s penetrating lament is also a testament to the wonders of being alive. *MM*

***Wells*** by Jenna Butler. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012. Paperback. 65 pages. 978-0-88864-606-4

This book is for and about the author’s grandmother, who has degenerated into senile dementia. Told in the form of a long, interconnected prose poem, it dips into moments of the lives of the grandmother and her family. The author, in a note at the back of the book, describes it as a collection that “is a homage to all the things that underpin memory. Stories: some of them true, some overheard, extrapolated, or fabricated. Scents, images, places imaginary and real. Everything tatted together. These words are all I have to give to the grandmother I so deeply love, who, for years, has not known my face, let alone my name.” Many people first meet this kind of pain in the advancing loss of a grandparent, and this book explores the nature of that loss and the qualities of our lives that our memories guard. It is short - few pages and many of them containing few words - but it highlights what it is that we value about the existence of ourselves and those we love. *MM*

### ***Sport***

***Wayne Gretzky’s Ghost and Other Tales from a Lifetime in Hockey*** by Roy MacGregor. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2011. Hardback. 369 pages. 978-0-306-35641-0

Thirty-five years stretch between 1976 and 2011, and during all that time Roy MacGregor was writing about hockey. This book is a compilation of much of what he wrote. The title comes from the period of time after Wayne Gretzky’s retirement when MacGregor acted as his ghostwriter for a newspaper column.

MacGregor is a fine writer with an extremely good grasp of where to draw the line between genuine sentiment and banal sentimentality. He has always been excellent in writing about the emotions involved in hockey, and many of the articles in this big book testify to that talent. Different readers will find different favourites in the broad range of material on offer; one of the most poignant stories for many will be the retrospective look at the Swift Current, SK, bus crash of 1986 that was occasioned by another horrific bus crash in Bathurst, NB. In both cases, hockey teams were gutted as players died and young men tried to come to terms with a senseless loss. Hindsight allows MacGregor to point out that a second, hidden tragedy was unwinding at the same time; the coach of the Swift Current team was no other than Graham James, notorious for his sexual predation against adolescent hockey players on his teams.

Readers interested in the history of hockey, in fleshing out their understanding of famous names and achievements, and in understanding the appeal of the game will all find satisfaction in this appealing book. *MM*

***Winter Sport: Poems*** by Priscila Uppal. Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2010. Paperback. 122 pages. 978-1-894469-4

Priscila Uppal was poet-in-residence for Canadian Athletes Now during the 2010 winter Olympics and Paralympics in Vancouver. During these Games, she published two poems a day on a variety of websites, particularly those of Canadian Athletes Now and Literary Review of Canada. Like the athletes, she points out, “I had to train and then I had to prove my mettle through public performance” (17). To train, she studied all the rules for each sport in the Olympic, Paralympic and Arctic Games winter repertoires. Often she read her poems as part of the gold medal celebrations.

This book collects those poems along with an extended introduction and a pair of essays on the Paralympics and the Arctic Games. The immediacy of the circumstances in which they were composed comes through vividly. It certainly helps to have followed these particular Olympics and the Canadian stories that arose from them; to take a particularly striking example, “A Brother Has Your Back - for Alexandre and Frederic Bilodeau” certainly gains resonance when a reader is aware of the back story of the medal-winning brother and the brother with cerebral palsy: “Remember early morning fights over Tonka trucks / and television dibs? You were only allowed to lose / to me” (31).

Many of the poems are short, haiku or other strict forms. Many of them involve intricate word play, as seems fitting for the occasion. The collection as a whole is a reminder that poetry can play a lively role in social rituals of many kinds, and that its inclusion in a playful celebration of the best in sport is a logical addition. An enjoyable read. *MM*

### ***Mystery***

***A Trick of the Light*** by Louise Penny. New York: Minotaur Books, 2011. Hardback. 339 pages. 978-0-312-65545-7

This village mystery novel is the seventh in Penny’s series about Chief Inspector Gamache, who operates in rural Quebec. Artist Clara Morrow celebrates her one-woman show in Montreal with a party in her home village of Three Pines, but the party is disrupted when the body of one of her childhood friends is discovered in the garden. As the police move in to investigate the murder, Clara must also begin to come to terms with the jealousy of her husband Peter over her artistic success.

Penny has a very unfortunate enthusiasm for sentence fragments and the predilection takes on the nature of a highly distracting tic. Nevertheless, she does a good job of conveying the tensions and pleasures of village life as it is disrupted by violent crime. This book offers enjoyable twists and turns, and the characters’ interactions are complex and intriguing. *MM*

***Crime Machine*** by Giles Blunt. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011 (2010). Paperback. 294 pages. 9978-0-679-31434-9

Giles Blunt has written five novels about police detective John Cardinal of Algonquin Bay in northern Ontario. Cardinal is a vividly complex character, not entirely likable and certainly not always in the right, but persistently sympathetic. Algonquin Bay is as three-dimensional a setting as has ever existed in a mystery series.

In this book, Cardinal is slowly coming to terms with his wife's death (an event that occurred in book four of the series, *By the Time You Read This*, a title that speaks to some of the agony of that occasion). He has settled for a very quiet, low-key way of life, but this decision is disrupted by the shocking discovery of two decapitated bodies in a summer home. Blunt is expert at mingling the challenges of the police work with the ongoing sorrows of Cardinal's home life, and the result is a compelling story. *MM*

***Hang Down Your Head*** by Janice MacDonald. Winnipeg: Ravenstone Books/Turnstone Press, 2011. Paperback. 364 pages. 978-0-88801-386-6.

In her fourth appearance as an amateur sleuth, researcher Randy Craig tangles with characters, both real and invented, involved with the Folkways Collection library, the Edmonton Folk Festival and the city of Edmonton, Alberta. Craig's relationship with a city policeman allows her access into the crime material machinery but it also causes social problems for her as well. Craig has been hired as a researcher for the Folkways collection but an untimely murder (are there any other kind?) has her focusing on the trials and tribulations of characters involved with the folk music scene. The first person narrative races along, accompanied with pithy commentary from the main character, until the final denouement at the legendary Edmonton Folk Festival. Edmonton readers will appreciate the author's faithful details regarding the University of Alberta, several Edmonton neighbourhoods, the folk festival and the prestigious folk music collection housed at the University. Unfortunately for this reviewer, some of the attention to detail was missing with reference to the Child Ballads, and, in particular the ballad of "The Gypsy Laddie/Gypsy Davy." While these oversights would not bother most readers, it was difficult to believe in the main character as a competent researcher and therefore, perhaps, as a reliable narrator particularly as details from several of the ballads were instrumental in the solving of the mystery itself.

Although Craig is much older than the teen reading audience, her personal angst regarding relationships, clothing choices, food references and her lack of self esteem, renders her quite relatable for that reading audience. *GdV*