

BOOK REVIEWS

Madness, Religion and the State in Early Modern Europe: A Bavarian Beacon. By David Lederer. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2006. xx, 361 pages. \$90.00.

Lederer's book is a comprehensive study of the nexus of religion, state administration and mental health in post-Reformation Bavaria, based on a meticulous analysis of printed and manuscript sources and an admirable command of the broader scholarly literature. Lederer convincingly argues that the clergy in Catholic Bavaria saw their jurisdiction over the cure of the soul as including the care of various forms of madness, from mild to acute. The blend of Aristotelian faculty psychology and Galenic humoural theory which informed their practice linked "mental health" to the spiritual and religious ends of human existence. Lederer thus details how spiritual physicians located mental suffering within a series of spiritual concepts and practices—most importantly, an intensified self-examination, sacramental confession, pilgrimages, and exorcism. Lederer notes as well how many clerical authorities even subordinated physical health to spiritual health, although the relations of clergy and physicians in the care of madness are not explored in any detail. Yet his study convincingly shows that spiritual physic was a massively popular among the mad and their families in early modern Bavaria as a mode of consolation and healing well into the late seventeenth century.

In Lederer's analysis, the popularity of spiritual physic was related not only to a theologically situated model of the soul but also to a series of enterprises undertaken by the Jesuit order and the ruling elite to ensure political stability and to police religious dissent. Thus, the magisterial enforcement of confession and the dissemination of a heightened spiritual sensibility in print and in pulpit that reinforced the need to confess were in part instruments of a disciplinary impulse inseparably religious and political. This impulse grew out of an intensified piety at court, expressed in the concern that the recurring early modern crises of famine, disease, war and heresy were eschatological in nature, to be combated through spiritual warfare. Part of this warfare was direct engagement with the devil through exorcism, but Lederer argues that the very success of charismatic exorcists in finding devils everywhere led to the overall decline of spiritual physic. Mass exorcisms seemed to create the kind of social disorder rulers were trying to quell, and an increasingly sceptical stance towards the language of spiritual physic encouraged the ruling elite to develop an alternative approach to the care of the mad in the idea of centralised confinement. According to Lederer, however, confinement remained an ideal, and spiritual physic continued to be practiced, though largely unadvertised, throughout the eighteenth century. Lederer's concluding attempt to construe Freudian psychoanalysis as in part an early modern inheritance may not be particularly compelling, but he is to be commended for raising the issue, which is, more broadly, that of modern psychiatry's relation to its past. While exemplifying contemporary historical scholarship at its finest, Lederer has succeeded in his aim to write a history of early modern madness which gets at the richness of culturally situated meanings and practices and yet transcends mere antiquarianism.

Jeremy Schmidt

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How the Cold War Began: The Gouzenko Affair and the Hunt for Soviet Spies. By Amy Knight. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2005. 358 pages. \$36.99.

On 5 September 1945 a young cipher clerk named Igor Gouzenko at the Soviet embassy in Ottawa boldly set out with a sheaf of secret documents that revealed the existence of an extensive Russian spy network in this country to defect to Canadian authorities. His intention, he subsequently maintained under interrogation, was to expose the totalitarian nature of the communist system and its plans for world domination to Stalin's still naïve allies from the just ended war years. In undertaking this dramatic step, which was fraught with grave danger not only for himself and his wife and child, but also members of their families at home in the Soviet Union, Gouzenko unwittingly helped inaugurate the chain of international tensions that collectively soon became known as the "cold war." And in analyzing the very considerable repercussions of Gouzenko's revelations in Canada, the United States and Britain, Amy Knight, previously the author of several well-received volumes on the history of Soviet intelligence and police organizations, has now produced the first full length study of a seminal event in the tangled tale of postwar espionage. (Her book was deservedly a finalist in the Writers' Trust of Canada sponsored Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing competition in 2006.)

Utilizing newly declassified archival materials as well as extensive interviews with participants including a daughter of Igor Gouzenko, who himself died in 1982 after a chequered career in semi-concealment as an acclaimed hero and writer, then a much maligned Cassandra within his adopted land, Knight links his conflicted personality with high level security developments that profoundly affected three nations. In the case of Canada she forthrightly deplores the repeated disregard by the government and the RCMP alike for the civil liberties of persons accused, or only imagined, of having contravened the illiberal stipulations of the Official Secrets Act. It is safe to say that Dr. Knight would not cast her vote for W.L. Mackenzie King as the most effective Canadian prime minister: he dithered lamely in deciding whether or not even to grant Gouzenko asylum and hence safety from his enraged Russian pursuers. Worse yet in her view were the "Gestapo-like tactics" the Mounties and a pair of Supreme Court judges employed who collaborated in the Royal Commission established to investigate possible acts of espionage (126, 191). Almost alone, Minister of External Affairs Lester B. Pearson later tried—albeit ultimately without success—to shield diplomat Herbert Norman from the witch hunt set in motion by Gouzenko's accusations south of the border. There the anti-communist frenzy associated with the name of Senator Joseph McCarthy came to dominate public life for a generation; while contrasting British complacency allowed master spy Kim Philby, who might have been uncovered as a result of the Gouzenko affair, instead to continue betraying his countrymen. Perhaps its most fateful victim turned out to be proposals for international civilian control of atomic energy which were scuttled because of American fear of Russian duplicity.

Despite occasional slips related to Canada, whose Justice Minister in 1945 was not called "Mr. Laurent" (70), Canadians in particular would profit from reading this fine work of scholarship—not least for the problems it suggests in the area of contemporary security co-operation with our American neighbour.

Bay of Spirits. By Farley Mowat. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006. 360 pages. \$34.99.

Farley Mowat's memoir, *Bay of Spirits*, wistfully describes the coast of southern Newfoundland and the people living there in the late nineteen-fifties and early sixties. In addition to the author's formative experiences of the time, the reader finds beautiful natural settings, and yes, even some lurid adultery. Mowat sails the coast with various partners, including Claire Wheeler (whom he later marries), and his publisher, Jack McClelland, seeing "its mighty fiords, its tiny settlements" (85). Alongside a natural backdrop—"on this fine summer's day the barachois was a mystical place[,] a faint indigo haze made objects waver and fade" (73)—are issues of language and morals, which are respectively enlivening and riddling to the travel narrative.

Mowat celebrates and records the malleable Newfoundland language and etymology of place names. The names of towns are often renamed with each generation: "[Bay] Despair isn't its real name anyway. On eighteenth-century charts it's called Baie d'Espoir—Bay of Hope, itself a corruption of the first name on record: Baie d'Esprits—Bay of Spirits" (98). The bay is later renamed by Mowat and Wheeler as "Bay Desire" (271). Newfoundland English seems to bend around, but not quite grasp, the objects discussed: foreigners are "people from away" (24). As well, the wiles of modern, mainland living, "television ... sewry pipes and houtboard engines" (345), are named and damned straight to hell, "by the Lard livin' Jasus" (345).

The book is occasionally unpleasant when Mowat substitutes moral judgment for description, telling for showing. This occurs in various chapters, and seems tangential in theme to the rest of the memoir, reviving arguments against Newfoundland hunting found in Mowat's previous books. In addition to their tedium, these diatribes are logically flawed: Mowat abhors the killing of mammals such as whales and seals, but only fleetingly notes, and without emotion, the killing-to-extinction of non-mammals like great auks and cod. But because the aesthetics of land and language so overwhelm the flawed ethics, the book is well worth a read for anyone who enjoys atmospheric travel writing, who is interested in Newfoundland culture, or in Mowat's perhaps final observations.

Michael Goodfellow

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Collected Works of George Grant. Vol. 3, 1960–1969. Edited by Arthur Davis and Henry Roper. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2005. xxvi, 795 pages. \$125.00.

This volume marks the half-way point in the 6-volume project to present the (nearly) complete works of the late George Parkin Grant (1918–1988). It also marks what is arguably the climactic decade in Grant's career. He had just left Dalhousie University, the self-proclaimed "little college by the sea," where on the basis of his degrees in history and theology he had done a remarkable job of teaching philosophy. Now he returned to the metropolitan Canada where he had grown up, and took over direction of a new Department of Religion at McMaster University. *Lament for a Nation* (1965) made him a media star, and an unlikely spokesperson both for conservative nationalism and for the New Left. His conviction that he had moved to the very heart of Leviathan led to

his trenchant critique of North American society and modernity in general: *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (1969).

Canadian political debate still asks whether further continentalism is necessary (joint customs, a dismantled border, and a single currency, as in Europe), and whether there would then be anything independent left worth governing. This was Grant's central question in *Lament for a Nation*. Gad Horowitz promptly labelled him a "Red Tory," a category of significance in Canada until Stephen Harper made "conservative" mean "right." Less acknowledged is Grant's foresight about Québec. He admired Levesque's nationalization of Hydro Québec, but warned that taking economic power into French hands would require a reformed education system. This would undermine the Catholic conservatism that had so far guaranteed the survival of a distinct French fact in Canada. (In the event, Québec developed its unique CÉGEP system.) *Lament*, written "too much from anger and too little from irony," as Grant later put it (372), is still an informative and exciting read for students who are thinking about Canada. The fact that four decades later we are fighting in what looks more and more like another Vietnam makes Grant's analysis only more poignant and timely. In *Technology and Empire*, Grant confronted the war, but argued that "at a profound level the Vietnam catastrophe was the product of a relationship to nature, history, and human mastery that is deeply rooted in the Western tradition" (473–74).

There is much more of interest in the volume besides those two influential books. There are lectures, essays, broadcasts, book reviews (including a scathing one of Lester Pearson's *The Four Faces of Peace*), television scripts, letters (to John Diefenbaker among others), interviews, and more. An appendix lists seventy-six radio and television appearances, not quite the "second career" that the editors claim it is (xxv), but significant nonetheless. Worth special mention are the helpful introductions to *Lament* and *Technology* by the historian, Henry Roper. He explains Grant's interest in Leo Strauss: rather than accepting the Hegelian historicism which locked ancient authors in their time and place, Strauss argued that "the teachings of the ancients transcended their historical context" (474). It is part of Grant's legacy that he makes us want to read Plato anew as well as to rethink Canada.

Steven Burns

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The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology. By Ray Kurzweil. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005. 460 pages. \$42.00.

Ray Kurzweil's most recent book is another testament to what he calls his religion: the "veneration for human creativity and power of ideas" (2). It shares with other religions an unshakable faith in its postulates and great promises to its followers: once we are able to understand, model, and extend our own intelligence we will be able to manipulate the universe at our will. Like other religions it holds that its predictions concern an inevitable future, here the "Singularity." This term, borrowed from mathematics and physics, designates for Kurzweil "a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep that human life will be irreversibly transformed" (7). The changes fuelled by the threesome of genetics, nanotechnology

and robotics will be profound indeed. Genetic engineering will allow us to overcome the limitations of DNA evolution, cure currently incurable deceases, reverse aging and, eventually, avoid death. Nanotechnology promises to rebuild the physical world, including our brains, and will allow us to create an unlimited supply of resources. Strong AI (Artificial Intelligence)—machines as intelligent as humans—is just around the corner and soon the non-biological portion of our intelligence will dominate. Eventually, we will utilize all matter and energy patterns for computation and spread the intelligence of our civilization toward the rest of the universe. Kurzweil predicts a rather surprising date for the arrival of the singularity: 2045 (136).

Any reader expecting fundamentally new insights into technology, human nature, or the laws of nature will be disappointed. The technologies Kurzweil discusses already exist to a some degree and his predictions are essentially founded on one theme that reoccurs throughout the book: humans frequently considered a (technological) problem as unsolvable yet later generations with more knowledge solved this problem. However, from the premise: “We have never reached a limit of technology” we cannot necessarily conclude: “There is no limit for technology.” Further, Kurzweil spends little time evaluating whether or not we should *do* everything technology may allow. While he discusses potential risks of future technologies he mainly highlights their vast benefits and expresses an admirable confidence that we will resist their misuse. “[Strong AI] will protect us from malevolent nanotechnology because it will be smart enough to assist us in keeping our defensive technologies ahead of destructive ones” (426). This voluntary abandonment of the bad side of technology is the only instance in which our past behaviour cannot be projected into the future and, again, Kurzweil fails to provide plausible support for this argument.

Kurzweil’s book aims at a broad audience, but many of his intended readers will lack the scientific background needed to evaluate the soundness of his predictions. These readers have to rely on their intuitions when deciding whether they should believe Kurzweil who, like other seers, does what he claims to be impossible: he uses his present intelligence to predict a future that will be so radically different from the present “that we cannot comprehend it, at least with our current level of understanding” (29).

Christine Behme

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Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature. By Santanu Das. New York: Cambridge U Press, 2005. xiii, 269 pages.

Touch and Intimacy focuses on tactile imagery and tropes in battlefield literature of the First World War in order to discover the ways in which they “define the . . . experience in trenches and hospitals, and how they inform and shape war writings” (230). These recurring images and tropes are crucial to war literature, Das argues, because they give voice to a range of challenging and complicated ideas about soldierly subjectivity, male desire and intimacy, racial difference, gendered trauma, and literary form. Das divides his study into three sections, each with two chapters. The first chapter in each section offers a broad examination of a particular kind of tactile imagery and the second chapter extends or complicates that examination with closer inspection of a writer’s work. The first section matches a chapter on the images of mud and slime in trench poetry

and their relation to expressions of endangered human subjectivity with a compelling chapter on Isaac Rosenberg's sensuous and political trench poetry. The second section pairs a careful and complex reading of the frequent images of the dying kiss and masculine intimacy with a chapter on the homoerotic limits and sensibilities of Wilfred Owen's poetry. The final section extends a chapter on the ideas of trauma and gendered difference in nurses' narratives with closer readings of the work of Vera Brittain, Enid Bagnold, and Mary Borden.

There is much to recommend about Das's study: the consistency with which it justifies its focus on touch; its willingness to see sensuous images as vehicles for ideas about the self, sex, gender, and trauma; the frequent observation of the war's paradoxes; and the easy mingling of philosophic concerns and historical context. These are all admirable qualities. But most of all, this book succeeds because it avoids the sort of binary thinking that dominates the study of war literature (change vs. continuity, patriotic lies vs. trench truth, home front delusion vs. battlefield reality) and approaches war literature with appropriate complexity and sensitivity. The poetry of Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen, the memoirs, autobiographies, and journals of Vera Brittain, Enid Bagnold, and Mary Borden are important for Das, not because they prove what war is, but because their work comprises an archive of big ideas encoded in intimate and sensuous moments. Too often, studies of war literature interpret the sensuous imagery as evidence of the reality of war, the real-life conditions that soldiers faced, fought against, and died in. In these studies, war literature is a cultural or historical artefact that records the reality of a horrific situation, offers the truth of the trenches, and testifies to the deception of Owen's "old lie." The ultimate value of Das's study is that he examines this literature as literature, pays attention to the poetry's sonic effects (see especially the chapter on Owen), figurative meanings, rhythmic variations, and—most of all—kinds of imagery, and grounds his convincing interpretations in aesthetic, historical, and theoretical contexts. This war poetry provides for Das "a more affective and sensory record of the war" that is only accessible through careful analysis of the literature's complex gestures (230).

The minor irony, however, is that the more intimate moments of this study are sometimes the least satisfying. Occasionally, those moments of textual intimacy, when Das reads closely a poem, a letter, or a manuscript fragment, are more confusing than they need to be. In the second section, these readings are close to being mere catalogues of formal effects that overwhelm or obscure the interpretation of a specific poem. In other instances, Das is too vigilant with his focus on tactile imagery. To say that the horror in Barbusse's world is a result of when "man and nature touch and blend" is to push the point, especially when the evidence that Das offers says very little about touch. The horror comes from the excess and burden of the material world, and is less an issue of a sensuous experience than Das insists that is. Still, these are minor complaints about a major work, one that is impressive in its range of reference, commendable for the complexity and clarity of its argument, and significant to the study of war literature and the way it feels.

Vermeer's Light: Poems: 1996–2006. By George Bowering. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2006. 215 pages. \$19.95.

In the final lines of the essay which closes George Bowering's latest collection of poems, Canada's first Poet Laureate (2002–2004) laments the various incarnations of his most canonical poem, "Grandfather." "I say the poem ends," writes Bowering, "and it never does, except for the dead ear that will put such foolishness aside" (215). The essay has, of course, already made this point as it charts the extensive revision and publishing history of his most revisited piece, and it remains a suitable conclusion to *Vermeer's Light*. Bowering's poems from the past decade include significant meditations on loss, friendship, aging, and mortality, as well as the unabashed non-referential word play and linguistic experimentation upon which he has built his reputation as a fervently contemporary poet.

Much like Bowering's own career in CanLit, *Vermeer's Light* is lengthy and populated with occasional moments of brilliance. To extend the simile, though, we must note that with such prolific literary production (at last count Bowering had over eighty publications; *Vermeer's Light* has over two hundred pages) there is much chaff to be separated from a significantly lesser amount of wheat. A lengthy suite of poems entitled "A, You're Adorable," which Bowering published as a chapbook under the pseudonym Ellen Field, is reprinted here and explores the experimental play of language with which the poet has long been consumed. Despite the draw of its immediate cleverness the suite feels oddly juxtaposed beside a section like "Imaginary Poems for AMB," an extended elegiac series addressed to the poet's late wife Angela. It is difficult to reconcile the poet who simply writes "99" and entitles it "A Child of Nine" (103) with the one who mournfully asks his absent love "When we made love last night / was it for my last reading—" and "If I write poems for your ear / am I talking to myself—" (89). The same writer who mockingly criticizes spoken word poetry as somehow inauthentic ("I'm in a heap o' trouble / 'cause I just don't slam. / I'm workin' on a lyric/ gonna get me in a jam" (179)) mournfully reports to his dearly departed that their "baby is / driving my car across town; / this is the century / we all wanted you to / see" (94).

For readers familiar with Bowering's work, these contrasting voices are not surprising or even terribly jarring. Although this poetry is relatively new, it is, in fact, appropriately reflective of the poet's career: he has made a habit of doing what he wants, however he wants to do it, and with little regard to how it may be received by an audience conditioned by poetic conservatism. In *Vermeer's Light* we find the vintage Bowering who rewrites Shelley ("He is Not!") and Keats ("Do Sink"), and amusingly cuts and pastes Pound and Williams together in "Metro Spring:" "The apparition /of these white chickens / in the crowd, petals / on a wet red wheelbarrow" (104). We also find the simply whimsical Bowering ("It took a while/ to get here / and when I got here / I had grown older" (34)) and the jocularly humorous Bowering ("Here homely girls shoot pool. / I could suicide easily" (27) sitting unapologetically across from one another.

The collection does emphasize a relatively new voice which has previously only leaked out in strains—the mortal Bowering. With meditations on lost friends such as Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Malcolm Lowry and bpNichol,

and poems honouring his friendships with Margaret Atwood, Fred Wah, and Robert Kroetsch, *Vermeer's Light* suggests, if not gracious and genuine homage to the pillars of Bowering's poetic life, then at least some forgivable chinks in the armour of linguistic play and postmodern chaos which the poet has worn for so long. This collection is no swan song, but the fleeting and occasional moments of seemingly genuine reflection are more prevalent in *Vermeer's Light* than elsewhere in Bowering. This does not mean that the speaker is to be trusted or believed and that he has in fact become "the retired poet, his country's uncomplaining ward" (181). It suggests, rather, that the speaker and George Bowering seem to be finding that they have more in common than they have been willing, so far, to admit.

Owen D. Percy

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Visible Living: Poems Selected and New. By Marya Fiamengo. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2006. 120 pages. \$14.95 paper.

"A second look; a second glance"—the petition of a collection of "new and selected poems"—and how important this second glance may be for a woman, especially of Marya Fiamengo's generation. She is at the twilight of her career, her poetic output essentially complete and already dispatched to the judges for final reckoning. Or is it? There is no final judgment. A poet cannot be summed up in an editorialized version of "selected poems." The task is to the critic to imagine more, to extend, and to re-imagine the shape and form of the poet from the photographic glimpses that these "selections" allow.

Fiamengo published her first collection, *The Quality of Halves*, in 1958 at the age of thirty-one. And her poetry reveals the fate of a child who grew up in a world caught between the old and new. The overt feminism and political constellations that her verse traces are discovered en route. It is an evolving surge of energy that is extremely important to recognize, for Fiamengo is a feminine voice of a unique nature in the history of Canadian poetry.

The seven poems selected for this collection from *The Quality of Halves* show Fiamengo often at her worst: under the strain to be taken seriously as a poet. She stretches for literariness and "literary" features, often leading to neurotic un-synthesized allusions, sappy lyricism, childish nursery rhymes and bad parody.

But by the time of her third collection *In Praise of Old Women* (1976), a radical liberation is achieved. The poem "Overheard at the Pornographer's" is aggressive and loud, and where it bothers with literariness its obtrusiveness seems to fit so well that we are tempted to exclaim that this is one of the best Canadian poems of the seventies. (I will teach it in my poetry class for times to come). The poem begins with the speech marks: "Men over forty are attractive / women are merely middle-aged." In the third and fourth stanzas, she knifes and tears into middle-aged Lolita-chasing men, with a confidence and humour that is riveting:

And copulation
in the brightest light
will not relieve
the temporary silver

in your hair
 caught like the sea
 between the storms
 of fretful vanity.

I call on all the awesome
 women of the night
 the temple proud tall
 women of the past
 Hecate, Medea and great Artemis
 to salt that shrinking parcel
 of protruding limb
 into petrified eternity. (59–60)

Her narrative poems like “In Praise of Old Women,” “For Osip Mandelstam,” and “Faces Averted,” are more anchored than some of her overtly political poetry, and do not sit “dressed in the plumage / of passage” (“Atropos” 79) like her overly “literary” poetry. They far outstrip both of these. At her best, she is a tough poet of exceptional bravery, who can match her now famous but once fellow literary group peers like Alice Munro and Phyllis Webb in the intensity of their Canadian feminine voice.

Jason Ranon Uri Rotstein

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A Minor Planet for You and Other Stories. By Leslie Greentree. Edmonton: U of Alberta Press, 2006. 198 pages. \$24.95 paper.

A Minor Planet for You and Other Stories is Leslie Greentree’s first work of fiction. Her second book of poetry, *go-go dancing for Elvis*, was shortlisted for the Griffin Prize for Excellence in Poetry in 2004, and her past incarnation as a poet shows in her ability to capture characters with small, incisive details. Greentree is an Alberta writer, and, like much of her poetry, *A Minor Planet* is set in that province. Stories cut across class and evoke both urban and rural lives, but all are told from a female perspective and tend to focus on similar preoccupations.

Isolation is a common state among characters, from twelve-year-old Sophie in “Legerdemain,” who practises magic (badly) as an attempt to gain power and distinction, to childless June in “Vinegar,” ignored by her husband and engaged in an expensive flirtation with her grocery store manager, to Ellen in “The Erratic,” a victim of a bizarre form of adult-bullying who struggles with her jealousy. Each of these characters is invisible to those around her and endeavours to come to terms with that: Ellen uses alcohol as insulation, June retreats into a rich fantasy life, and Sophie—ignored by her enigmatic mother, three older sisters, and Mr. Phelps, the object of her adolescent affection—“thinks about stepping into a perfectly coiled rope, making herself disappear,” unaware that her self-immolation is unnecessary as she’s already invisible to everyone around her.

The notion of happy marriage as a construct or fiction is another undercurrent which runs throughout this collection. In “Hot Chocolate with Guy Lafleur,” Dawn, new to the upper-middle-class and feeling alone and empty in her absentee husband’s

large leather recliner, longs for her family of origin as she watches hockey on her big-screen television. The idea of marital harmony can only be located in her working-class past, a past she cannot—or perhaps refuses to—return to. Unlike Dawn, who feels conflicted about the notion of commercial booty in exchange for real love, Karen, in “Whether Monday is Odd or Even,” is accustomed to material comforts and doesn’t reflect much on her stale marriage until it becomes threatened. In what is one of the strongest stories in the collection, Greentree reveals Karen’s gradual reckoning of her husband’s affair when she finds herself admiring some wooden blocks which have been arranged into a message. That Greentree would have Karen’s fantasy world—all fake, all surface, surfeited with material goods—come crashing down with a home décor item found in a boutique, is a good move.

Religion makes only one appearance in this collection, in “While God Was Driving Away,” a story which about a crumbling friendship as well as a troubled marriage. Susan, perpetually in service to Nate, her remote PhD-student-husband, is devastated to find that her closest friend, Marion, is becoming a born-again Christian (the unhappy backdrop to Susan’s own childhood). What becomes clear, however, is that Marion’s willingness to give up everything for Jesus isn’t much different than Susan’s slavish devotion to Nate. While Susan is under the illusion that she has escaped evangelism for rationalism, we see that she’s really just swapped messiahs. Like her parents, Susan has given up everything for an unresponsive man, and this is ultimately a story about blind faith.

Ironically, Greentree’s success in authentically capturing these female characters seems to lead to the major weakness of the stories—a lack of well-rounded male voices. Except for Darin, the intellectual cowboy of “Chicken Fight” (“this is a chicken farm in Alberta. What the fuck do you expect? It ain’t no fucking Ibsen play”), the men in these stories seem to function almost representationally. If Greentree could flesh out her male characters without compromising the strong feminist undercurrent of the stories, her work would be a major planetary triumph for us all.

Meghan Nieman

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