

# BOOK REVIEWS

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*New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years 1952–1978.* By Janet B. Friskney  
Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2007. 284 pages. \$45.00.

In 1951, the authors of the *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts* (the Massey Report) called for “a creative culture that would reflect a unique Canadian social culture.” A resolution was passed at the 1955 Canadian Writers’ Conference that stated “to establish a continuing literary tradition in Canada significant works by Canadians must be kept in print and if necessary published in inexpensive editions for use both by students and by general readers.” In 1957 the Canada Council for the Arts was established. Janet B. Friskney suggests such attitudes and actions arose prior to the Second World War from a confluence of liberal humanism that “valued high culture as a means to enlightened individuality and judicious citizenship” and “romantic nationalism that conceived of a nation as a people who shared a common heritage of language, geography, and race.”

For a number of academics at Canadian universities, including Malcolm Ross, Canadian literature was a vital area of research and teaching. Ross “did not view literature as something that transpired in isolation of other forces.” He had read Donald Creighton’s *Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence*, which profoundly historicized his personal “sense of being Canadian.” As a member of the distribution branch of the National Film Board between 1942–1945 he had traveled the country, meeting the growing multicultural citizenry and realizing the need to shift from “the dual irony [of English and French] to the multiple irony ... to the many-coloured but miraculously coherent, if restless, pattern of the authentically Canadian nationhood.” He believed, as Friskney emphasizes, that the “pressures exerted by native and cosmopolitan forces” would ultimately lead to “a future synthesis of national and international influences on Canadian artists and their work,” and looked for ways to promote such a positive fusion of forces. In 1952 Ross approached former student Jack McClelland, who was manager and Executive Vice-President in his family’s publishing house, with the idea of a low-priced paperback series that “would do wonders for the teaching of Canadian literature” and the exposure of such literature to a wider reading public.

Over a three-year period Ross convinced McClelland that “the availability of the books would create a market for them,” and in 1955 the publisher committed to the series. It was launched in January 1958, the year McClelland became President of the company, with the printing of 5000 copies each of four titles by Frederick Philip Grove, Morley Callaghan, Stephen Leacock, and Sinclair Ross. McClelland initially called it an “experiment” for the marketplace, but Ross’s belief in the series was borne out by the publication of over 180 additional titles in the next twenty years.

As the list grew annually, literary critics debated issues of genre and the quality of selected titles. George Woodcock spoke of the “good safe books” available but

lamented the absence of “good dangerous ones.” Others wondered if certain works could “bear the weight of critical analysis.” There were calls for more poetry, short fiction, and drama, and even anthologies of critical essays. Publishing costs dictated a 256-page reprint limit, which clearly influenced the selection process. Ross was determined that the series maintain “a proper balance, not only in the kind of writing, but in the various historical phases in development of Canadian writing.” Other publishers entered the paperback marketplace, but New Canadian Library sales increased dramatically through the 1960s, with university course adoptions as the major base. Between 1967 and 1974, the number of Anglophone universities offering at least one course in Canadian literature increased from sixty to one hundred per cent. However, as Canadian cultural awareness expanded so did the number of marketplace players, and McClelland and Stewart’s overall share of paperback profits declined. The company was put up for sale in 1971 and only a one million-dollar loan from the Ontario government kept it solvent.

Given the combination of Ross’s culturally-based preferences and McClelland’s economic bottom line, there had to be compromises over authors and titles, and, in fact, only about one quarter of the works proposed by Ross actually appeared in the series. While forty-six per cent of the titles sold less than one thousand copies per year, a vital core group of two dozen significant writers did emerge from the successful reception of key choices over a twenty-year period—including Ernest Buckler, Sheila Watson, and Leonard Cohen, whose work consistently sold 3000 copies annually.

Friskney does an excellent job of presenting what she calls the “historical narrative” of NCL publication; however, she does not satisfactorily address the issue of editorial abridgement that raises the troubling question of when an author’s book becomes more that of an editor than his or her own. Eight of seventeen pre-1900 titles were abridged by NCL editors due to the financial constraints imposed by McClelland and Stewart, with arbitrary judgements often made as to which “extraneous things didn’t get left in.” Friskney offers no helpful illustrations or evaluative readings of the resultant “linear, fast-paced narrative[s] ... more in keeping with the taste of ‘modern readers.’” In addition, new editions were sometimes carelessly based on earlier incomplete versions of works.

Perhaps the most contentious matter arising out of the NCL selection process is that of the canonical status supposedly conferred by inclusion in the series. Not satisfied with the slow process of “cultural Darwinism” or “struggle for textual survival,” McClelland organized the 1978 Calgary Conference prior to which five hundred invited academics and writers were sent a list of 200 Canadian works of fiction and asked to select the one hundred “most significant novels” and the “ten best Canadian novels yet written.” An unhappy Ross stressed that the list was “tentative and merely experimental” and that he hoped it would “make us all more aware of the diverse regional values which should inform and enrich the Canadian imagination.” Unfortunately just over seventy of the one hundred books chosen were published by McClelland and Stewart. Ross was wrongly held responsible for opening a “Pandora’s Box of anger, gossip, and controversy” as those involved argued over the imposition of such choices on writers and readers alike.

In the end, Ross's own efforts to shape the cultural consciousness of Canadians were, as Friskney says, "much more inclusive" than those of many of his peers or of the academic generation that followed him. There is no doubt that without Ross's original concept and subsequent editorial vision, the Canadian literary landscape would have developed quite differently in the second half of the twentieth century. While it is interesting to argue about alternative cultural terrains, there remain the many good books that have been made available to a wide readership, the fictions, as Margaret Laurence insists, "more true than fact."

J.A. Wainwright

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*Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature.* Edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007. 204 pages. \$36.95.

A few years ago, three of the six finalists for the Man Booker prize were Canadian, but none was born in Canada, and two set their books substantially outside of Canada. Such circumstances do not, of course, herald the end of Canadian literature, but they do beg questions about its "ends." What books do we include on our syllabi, and why? Who is a Canadian author? And what, if anything, is peculiarly Canadian about Canadian literature today?

Recognizing that a national literature is increasingly inter- or even post-national "does not," as Paul Jay argues, "mean that we should abandon the study of literary texts and cultural practices in their relation to the modern nation-state." Instead, it means that we need to focus less on identifying what seems inherently Canadian about our literature, and "more on rethinking the connections among literature, nationalism, and cultural identity in the context of ever-expanding transnational relations." Such is the aim of *Trans.Can.Lit*. The essays that make up this volume were initially presented at the inaugural Transcanada conference (2005), which asked participants to rethink "the disciplinary and institutional frameworks within which Canadian literature is produced, disseminated, studied and taught." In this, they have succeeded admirably.

Although the editors describe the project as "future-oriented," it is indebted to recent collections that have taken up both the uneasy place of Canadian literature within postcolonial studies and the relationship of postcolonial studies, which typically foregrounds questions of national sovereignty, to transnational studies. (See, for example, *Home-Work: PostColonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*, edited by Cynthia Sugars.) But unlike most of those volumes, *Trans.Can.Lit* does not foreground close reading. With only one exception, the essays forego sustained literary analysis and focus instead on the changing social, economic, and institutional conditions and concatenations that shape the way we practice literary studies in this country. Despite their differences, all the contributors seem to agree with Diana Brydon, who argues that students and teachers of Canadian literature need to begin by "pay[ing] as much attention to the state as we have to the nation" (2). For some, this means critically scrutinizing its institutions, with particular attention to the ways in which they enable and constrain literary work.

Thus, Stephen Slemon suggests, for example, that we consider the extent to which the hiring practices in our departments hinder possibilities for “institutional renewal” by “fetishiz[ing] undergraduate and graduate training in our own specific discipline at the expense of real experimentation and inquiry across disciplinary programs” (82).

In response to those who would argue that the collection’s focus on institutions and citizenship distracts from the literary, Brydon argues that we need to re-imagine “what is meant by literature and its study” (2), so that the imagination and empathy cultivated by literary reading might be put in the service of social justice. To this end, she cites Gayatri Spivak, who argues: “In this era of global capital triumphant, to keep responsibility alive in the reading and teaching of the textual is at first sight impractical. It is, however, the right of the textual to be so responsible, responsive, answerable” (quoted in Brydon, 16).

Ashok Mathur and Lily Cho take up the question of how to make literary studies “answerable” by looking at the place of minority literatures within “canlit.” Mathur’s very lively essay begins with the observation that the “notion of ‘writers of colour’ came into the national literary consciousness as a marginal notation in the 1980s,” but he convincingly argues that they since “became canlit” (141): “What began as a brown wafer begging to be tasted has become the body it once opposed” (141). Though the “mainstreaming” of many minority writers is worth celebrating, it is, Mathur argues, deeply worrying insofar as it is the byproduct of “a market desire for a particular direction or focus” that rewards minority writers for reproducing stereotypes that have been appended to them (141). Lily Cho appears to concur with Mathur, but she focuses on the “trenchant critiques of Canadianness embedded within these literatures” and argues that Canadian literature scholars need to move beyond the tendency to complacently pronounce the discipline as “capacious enough for such critiques” (93). With this in mind, Cho’s erudite and elegant essay proposes the notion of “diasporic citizenship” as a rubric for thinking through the contradictions of Canadian literature: because “diaspora” and “citizenship” suggest very different histories and allegiances, wresting them together and then exploiting the emergent “dissonance” might, Cho argues, allow us to “think through the entanglements of a national literary that remains committed to long histories of dislocation even as it exists within the contradictions of citizenship” (108).

Like Cho and a number of other contributors, Len Findlay foregrounds the trope of citizenship with an eye to the cultivation of civic education, but the models he uses are artisanal and aboriginal because, he argues, such models “employ vernaculars where people are pre-eminent and economic processes subordinate to collective interests” (186). Lee Maracle’s meditation on Salish oratory might be said to exemplify some of the ideals to which Findlay speaks. The essay is a powerful testament to a culturally specific and historically-engaged model of teaching that aims to impart “a powerful sense of justice” and “a broad framework for seeing” in its listeners, thus helping them to “govern themselves” (70).

Despite the differences to which they speak, the thirteen essays contained in this collection have much in common and they are generally of a very high standard. The preface, written by editors Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki, does an excellent job of mapping the issues, ideas, and critical methodologies that are re-shaping the study of

Canadian literature. Whether or not one is inclined to ask “Whither the ‘lit’ in *Trans. Can.Lit.*,” this rigorous and far-reaching collection is necessary reading for those working within the discipline today.

Carrie Dawson

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*Trudeau: Long March, Shining Path.* By George Elliott Clarke. Kentville, NS: Gaspereau, 2007. 128 pages. \$21.95

In the 1988 introduction to her seminal (and eponymous) investigation of *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon wrote that “Canada’s major historical figures look like almost deliberately postmodern creations” (4). Twenty years later Hutcheon’s point remains contradictorily concrete: major historical figures like Louis Riel, John A. MacDonald, and even Susanna Moodie can be seen as great studies in contradiction, irony, and paradox. So too, suggests poet-professor George Elliott Clarke with his latest libretto, the most recent major inductee to the museum of Canadian mythology, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. In *Trudeau: Long March, Shining Path*, Clarke constructs—from the remnants of collective memory—a public PM rife with ambiguity and fault, but one who is consciously unafraid of being so. Trudeau—like Clarke himself—is a Romantic realist, a boisterous and blasphemous bard who insists on the necessity of dreaming of utopia while keeping his feet unflinchingly planted in the treachery of the present-day real world. While Clarke assures us that his libretto “crafts no elegy” (21), *Trudeau* remains an interrogation into the inevitable collisions of public and private, myth and history, stereotype and individuality that emerge when re-writing a life.

The opera opens on a mountainside in revolutionary China with Mao Zedong evaluating the success of his violent 1949 revolution. The young backpacking Trudeau trades barbs with (and gently chastises) the heavily armed Mao for his hastiness in turning to militaristic means to achieve his end. The next scene has Trudeau and a young JFK patting each other on the back in Fredericton (where Kennedy has just been given an Honourary Doctorate from UNB), playfully sparring as the latter convinces the former to enter politics by reminding him of the ‘fringe benefits’ of a public persona: “Pierre, man, grant politics a whirl:/ Rack up votes! Sack girl upon girl!” (44). *Trudeau* then moves on to Havana on the eve of the Bay of Pigs in 1959 as the protagonist sips rum and smokes cigars with Fidel Castro. On his jazz-journey Trudeau returns to Montreal, travels to Paris in March of 1968, to Tahiti, to Monte Carlo, to the convention floors of Ottawa, the PMO, and eventually even to his own funeral. *Trudeau* is Clarke’s third libretto and his second collaboration with jazz impresario DD Jackson; like 2003’s *Québécoisité*, it was performed at Toronto’s Harbourfront Festival to significant acclaim, though the Gaspereau publication has been amended from the performance text for distribution.

Clarke’s love affair with language goes public again in *Trudeau* and leaves his readers scrambling for their dictionaries, though throughout the text he includes definitions and footnotes from sources as varied as Slotkin, Shakespeare, Steve Biko and Lewis Carroll. Much of the language in *Trudeau* is not entirely Clarke’s though. In a prefatory

poem to the main text entitled “*Au Lecteur*,” Clarke staunchly asserts that “*On doit chercher l’homme dans ses mots*” (17) and thus Clarke’s characters fuddle-duddle their way through conceptions of a ‘just society,’ implore each other to ‘just watch me,’ and insist that the state has no business in anyone’s bedroom. These recognizably Trudeauvian quips accompany other infamous collective memories of the man, including his shifting fashion sense (Buckskin and Nehru jackets, Roman togas, karate outfits), his penchant for paddling (answering Mao Zedong’s angry query “Are you a Capitalist or a Communist?” with “Truthfully, I’m just a canoeist” [35]), his animosity towards the monarchy (pirouettes seem his preferred form of exiting the stage), and his reputation as a womanizer.

It is in this last depiction of Trudeau-as-ladies-man that we might find what we most expect in any creative depiction of the man. It is important to note, however, that it is a mini-skirted female reporter by the allusive name of Hélène Cixous who asks Trudeau the tough questions—about First-Nations assimilation, bilingualism, separatism—and who asks the fateful question, “How far are you willing to go?” when Trudeau begins to flaunt his own October-Crisis power. As *provocateur-par-excellence* to Trudeau’s press-hungry leader, Cixous eventually points out the largest of Trudeau’s “usual contradictions” (22) when she sings back to him the lines that he himself opened the play with after Trudeau comes to parrot the violent military mottos of Castro and Zedong:

How can men fire guns at others?  
 In such fog, aren’t all men brothers?  
 Who is fighting whom? Why? What for?  
 In history’s fog and fog of war?” (33)

While Clarke’s take on Trudeau offers several variations of a man, his disillusionment with Trudeau’s profession remains singular and unwavering. The House of Commons is repeatedly bathed in “Red-Light-District light” (82), and it is later noted that “brothel light saturates Gothic columns” (88) on the building. The frustrated PM (or is it the frustrated poet/professor/activist?) is downright down on parliament and how it seemingly operates:

Th’ opposition’s paid to protest—  
 Crazed as vipers in a hornet’s nest.  
 Donkeys, monkeys, flunkeys, and drabs—  
 Circus of curses, crapped by crabs—  
 The ‘House of Comics’ lacks all sense,  
*C’est un bordel*, a sty of pretense.  
 Its inmates squabble, squawk, and cry.  
 (I am each member’s chief bull’s eye.)  
 Rats backbite with crocodile smiles,  
 Orate poster-and-slogan styles. (89)

But yet Trudeau (and Clarke) remain steadfastly devoted to the *potential* of parliament, and poetry despite Clarke’s claim, in an introductory essay entitled “*Vrai: Un Essai*,” to be a “Baptist Marxist” (20). Clarke’s earlier political poems (particularly in *Black* [2006])

seem to acknowledge this same catch-22 but like those in *Trudeau*, their speakers refuse to acquiesce to any indifferent subject-position.

Occasionally reliant on a requisite level of particularly Canadian cultural capital, *Trudeau's* narrative is fragmented, erratic, and refreshingly unpredictable for such a seemingly exhausted public biography. It is surely more libretto than dramatic poem, though cannot be readily discounted from the latter designation. There is coherence here, however, and blunt, clear character development which lends itself more to the musical performance of text than to the text itself. Clarke's own in-text stand-in, a jazz pianist named Roscoe Robertson, acts as a tour-guide and commentator through the last half of the opera while maintaining a critical distance shared by Clarke. *Trudeau's* Trudeau remains, croons Robertson:

A two-faced speaker,  
A sideways leader,  
A funky Nero,  
A black hole zero,  
A kamikaze  
For *paparazzi*,  
His political craft  
Plies Superfly / Shaft. (92)

He is just as viably “a Judas to Québec, un ‘*Oncle Tom*’” and “a bullshit Machiavelli” (93), as aggressive separatist Jacques Fanon argues, as he is the champion of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms which makes even Nelson Mandela applaud him in a later scene. Realizing finally that “There’s no cultural purity. / Truth is there never was. / What we call humanity / Is a beautiful mess” (104), Clarke’s Trudeau epitomizes the postmodern contradiction of his real-life antecedent, and ultimately remains a “cosmo, anti-nationalist liberal” (22); the first PM “who was comfortable with a Canada that looked more like Expo 67 and less like the Grand Ole Opry” (20–21). Loved, lauded, laughed at, loathed, and now lionized in libretto, Trudeau may finally have found a medium—through Clarke—equal to the panache, vivacity, passion, and celebratory spirit that most erstwhile biographical sketches insist defined this enigmatic, now mythological, public figure.

Owen Percy

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*The Love Songs of Laura Ingalls Wilder*. By Sharon McCartney. Gibsons Landing: Nightwood Editions, 2007. 103 pages. \$16.95 paper.

I was in the middle of re-reading the “Little House” series, this time with my seven-year-old daughter, when a copy of Sharon McCartney’s startling collection of poems, *The Love Songs of Laura Ingalls Wilder*, was given to me for review. “Ah,” I thought. “More cheerful Ma and irrepressible Halfpint. More stoic Mary and stolid Pa.” I was wrong.

Cheerful Ma is absent in these poems, supplanted, instead, with a yearning, disappointed woman who would like to “walk back to Concord / in [her] green delaine. Never thread / a needle again.” Pa figures as a failed and frustrated prospector, selfish in his desire to fulfill his own needs (“Unspeakable, this longing for change / like longing

for a woman, all-consuming"). Mary, too, is recast as bitter in her blindness ("Kindness irks me ... I want to shout—Laura's meek / gloating, Ma's hush, Pa's unnatural, solicitous— / I hate their wholeness"). Interestingly, Laura, from whose vantage point the books are told, is almost totally absent from these voices, appearing only in the final poem in which she muses on the Sapphic love she tastes with Lena in a tent by the shores of Silver Lake ("The hooks and eyes of my spine undone").

But McCartney does not simply turn her gaze to the characters in the stories. Bits of people also get entire poems dedicated to them—Mary's eyes, Mary's fingers (now superior to the haughty eyes), Pa's penis (figured itself as a sort of pioneer with an "urge to go west, to penetrate, / ungovernable ... Desire / made manifest, destiny"). Animals are also the subjects of poems—Jack the dog, incensed after being left for lost ("Do they stop? Do I even get a backward glance ...? / All my years of fawning / What a fool I was"), Lady the mare breaking free, and then finding her way back to "home sweet / fucking home."

Perhaps the most clever register, though, is that of the poetic object, the anthropomorphized icon like Ma's prized china shepherdess ("How could / I have been so clay-headed?... / Where is my shepherd? / Where are my sheep?"), the stove, the churn, Laura's once beloved rag doll Charlotte, or the covered wagon (I'm not naïve; / I've been around, but I always forget / that the journey must end ... / My heart splinters with emptiness").

The conceit of these poems, this song cycle, is that of a love story in which people, animals, and objects play the part of mostly spurned, but sometimes exhilarated lovers, like the usually mysterious Carrie, who appears to us as one ruined by the ecstasy of tasting lemonade for the first time and then returning to "Greasy cow's milk a slap / in the face, admonishment, my guilt."

Desire, disappointment, and regret are the common notes in these songs, and McCartney renders them beautifully and with concision. Although intimately connected to the "Little House" books, that connection becomes almost incidental by the end. What we have here is something very particular which captures the drama of the human heart in a powerful, erotic, sometimes funny, and often sad way. That is hard to do well, and McCartney does it extremely well.

Meghan Nieman

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*Ride Backwards on Dragon—A Poet's Journey Through Liuhebafa.* By Kim Goldberg. Lantzville, British Columbia: Leaf Press, 2007. 128 pages. \$18.95 paper.

Straight off, I want to say that this is a book of wonderful poetry. But before I say more about this, some doubts.

Liuhebafa is a Chinese martial art with 66 traditional moves. The name of each move is a title of a poem in this collection; and in the epilogue, the last 30 pages or so of this book, Goldberg gives a short explanation of the symbolic meaning and "alchemical significance" she takes each title and corresponding movement to have.



We're told, for example, that "Wild horse chases wind," can be taken to represent the person controlled by desire or reacting to transitory or imagined events: the "wild horse" of untamed emotion chasing the "wind"—illusory phenomena. In Taoist tradition, practice of each move is supposed to contribute in a particular way to bodily and mental transformation, eventually to immortality. Goldberg doesn't appear to buy the immortality claim, but she reports profound changes in her life as the result of her own practice of these exercises. So the first section of poems is titled "External Transformation" and the second "Internal Transformation." The idea here is to give this collection structure—the progressive narrative of the author's journey toward wholeness.

Well, this is all very nice. Some readers will find the account and interpretation of this little-known exercise system interesting; and I'm happy that Goldberg found benefits in it for herself. But I have to admit that I found all this rather extrinsic to the poetry that constitutes the main part – the best part by far – of this book. As I read each poem I consulted the interpretation of its *Liuhhebafa*-move title in the epilogue, asking myself what the title had to do with the poem, and often came up with no answer. The suspicion grew in me that the account and decoding of *Liuhhebafa* at the end was not very strongly connected with the poetry. And I didn't really get what's supposed to be the overall narrative movement of the book. (Why do poets often suppose that a book of their poetry *needs* an overall narrative? What's wrong with just here's-one-poem-and-then-here's-another?) With disarming frankness, the poet herself expresses these doubts in poem #39, "Phoenix faces sun":

thots on epilog: do I even need one? Doesn't it just undercut the poems if I decode all the ancient esoteric Taoist mumbo jumbo of the titles? [...] is it clear that the first half of *liuhhebafa* involves external transformation and the second half internal? Or that the two halves of the book can be read as the two phases of a deconstructed/reconstructed self—be broken to be whole? [...]

Well, enough, or maybe too much, about my doubts. The poetry in here is great (and, after all, this is a collection of poems). There's no trace of the sort of Khalil-Gibran ultrasensitive wisdom-of-the-East dreamy mushiness that one might fear after reading the back-cover blurb about Taoism and spiritual journey. The language is direct, colloquial, emotional but hard-headed, energetic and forceful, enormously clever and inventive. There's frequent very effective use of (what at one time were thought to be central) poetic techniques: metaphor, symbol, rhyme, rhythm, sound. Many poems are cleverly laid out on the page; sometimes the spatial arrangement is a reinforcing metaphor for the content. Every poem is full of surprises in language and in point of view, though the subject-matter is always recognizable, often quotidian: the emphasis is always on the (revealing) particular, properly leaving the generalization, the "moral" of the story, unspoken but clear, sometimes only through a sort of cumulative emotive aura of the imagery. The poems are tough, smart, often funny.

What I like best about Goldberg's poetry is that each poem does something, very vividly. Each makes me see what it's after, and when you look at the elements of each, you can see how they all contribute. This makes reading these poems an enormous pleasure. Buy this book.

*Gospels and Grit: Work and Labour in Carlyle, Conrad, and Orwell.* By Rob Breton. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. ix, 246 pages. \$55.00.

As the title indicates, Breton studies the influence of the gospel of work, from the formulation of the idea in Victorian England to the influence of the idea in contemporary thought. Along with the three authors named in the title, Breton also writes brief commentaries on Dickens, Gaskell, Ruskin, Morris, Wells, Forster, and some other minor figures. Throughout *Gospels and Grit*, Breton demonstrates his knowledge of Marxist, sociological, political economic, postmodern, and postindustrial theories. In the last chapter, which is the best in the book, he identifies the unsettling connections between postmodern thought and the corporatized, globalized world of the present time. The questions concerning theoretical categories that obscure differences among distinct forms of work, the contemporary mis-valuation of work, and our dangerously high tolerance for instability and incoherency are well worth considering. The discussions of the theories relevant to his preoccupation with work and labour clearly reveal his real interest in the subject. In comparison, Carlyle and Conrad are secondary considerations. Until the chapter on Orwell, literature is used to merely substantiate the theoretical speculations. Despite the title, there is very little analysis of Carlyle's and Conrad's thought about work, and nearly nothing of their work of art and writing. The analysis of Carlyle and Conrad is confined to generalizations. Breton often repeats ideas found in other critical accounts: for instance, the discussion of Carlyle's style reads like a summary of G.B. Tennyson's work, and the discussion of Dickens's use of Carlyle's parable of the Irish Widow repeats the work of Q.D. Leavis and Michael Goldberg. There is no careful comparison of Carlyle's and Conrad's thought. He does not consider that Conrad writes a sustained criticism of Carlyle's thought about work, but instead insists that Conrad was influenced by and repeats Carlyle's ideas. Curiously, Breton narrowly focuses on *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* and ignores Conrad's rich exploration of work in *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*. The discussion of Carlyle is inexplicably confined to *Past and Present*. Too often, Breton uses highly questionable phrases, such the label "radical conservatism" to identify the tradition which Carlyle and Conrad are said to share, without exploring the meaning of them. The reader is expected to accept the valuations without seeing the arguments which would prove their usefulness. Another difficulty is Breton's assertion that "my intent is not to further denigrate Carlyle's reputation" (35), despite repeating the conventional and tired language which so many of Carlyle's detractors have used: authoritarian, paternalistic, etc. As Ian Robinson argued in *The English Prophets*, the unexamined use of this language continues the denigration. Breton's interest in "my version of the text" (32) ignores the authors' critiques of the ideas informing his study and his style. Although he addresses Orwell's attack on abstract language, Breton does not recognize that the accusation could be made against his own writing.