

BOOK REVIEWS

Jeff Bursey, *Unidentified man at left of photo*

Slovenia: Corona/Samizdat, 2020

282 pages, 11€/10€, ISBN 9789617036602

Jeff Bursey's *Unidentified man at left of photo* begins as a story about a man named Joe, who is new to town—Charlottetown or “c-town”—and has an inheritance. Helpfully, the author notes that “He could have been placed anywhere, but there’s not a lot of fiction set in pei, and the marketing niche might help.” Presumably, then, Joe could have been anyone, doing anything, or nothing. Bursey sets a playful tone early and takes pains to position himself as creator and thus the reader as being along for a ride. He will make seemingly arbitrary decisions, but like any author—or “narrator,” as he calls himself and other writers—he will have his reasons. By making them explicit, he writes something of a meta work—a piece of writing about writing and selling books.

Unidentified man also features a character named Farley McTeague, who is a self-published author hustling his work on consignment at a local tourist trap. “If I didn’t stock Island poetry people would talk,” the shop owner says. Such self-analysis runs the risk of boring the more casual reader, or anyone unconcerned with the notion of selling art. But Bursey succeeds at being deliberately silly and consistently funny. He flits in and out of story, anecdotes really, from character to character, interspersed with the writer’s interpretation of what’s going on or what else he’s thinking about as he writes it. When Joe is smitten, Bursey is skeptical: “Joe would have followed Ruby anywhere in the world. That’s what love songs would have you believe, since they’re penned by co-dependents.” He also refers to a movie being made in c-town called *Zombie Fathers of Confederation* and characters with names like Ellen MuckMicker, Frank MicMasterMan, and Alan MacKendolandyon.

As he has done in previous fiction—*Verbatim* (2006) and *Mirrors on*

which dust has fallen (2015)—Bursey pokes fun at Maritime provincialism, with Townies feeling superior to those living in Summerside and safer than they would in Halifax despite local “crime, meanness, and xenophobia.” More importantly, though, and recalling the idea that Joe could have been anywhere, Bursey notes that “[m]ost places are the same.”

He urges readers to work with him and to overlook his narrative shortcomings. “I have bestowed on [Raymond] complete health. . . . Why couldn’t the guy have a heart palpitation? . . . I’d have to bone up on this sort of thing, and that’s just too much work.” He refers to his own style as “loiterature,” with “no dramatic tension or story arc,” and offers perspective on the writer-reader relationship: “Look, I live with this thing for months or years, and you can get through it in half a day.” Surely any author can appreciate that sentiment.

Bursey’s asides, jokes, and jump cuts create just enough mania to escape the usual need for internal logic, so the book is at times authorial rant, at times vignette, and at times surrealist fantasy, like when real-life PEI author-poet-playwright J. J. Steinfeld’s moustache attends a gathering of writers: “The rest of J. J. stayed home, preferring his own four walls to sitting in a large crowd.” This is one of many references to Atlantic Canadian writers.

There is something deeper here too: Bursey’s sharp literary criticism. He is making it as clear as possible that he will do anything to sell a book but bow to convention or trends that happen to have been set by better-known writers. He specifically mocks the false modesty of Canadian (a word he can’t be bothered to capitalize) book marketing efforts: “This being Canada, that kind of impulse would be funnelled into an apparently modest project that’s actually quite self-aggrandizing, like the Year of the Short Story, the literary equivalent of a UNESCO 365-day cause married to public relations.” He also teases emerging literary political correctness, especially around gender issues, uncomfortably at times, but sometimes self-critically: “Another narrator said I skimmed on male descriptions and hovered too long over the women. I took the point.” Interestingly, there are more male characters, and they seem more fully developed—one female cellist goes unnamed and thus, in Bursey’s word, “objectified”—with the exception of a robust young woman named Chevon, who has a delightful scene telling off dudes engaged in what the ex-president called “locker room talk.”

Even as he chastises himself for laziness, Bursey expresses pride in his blunt method: “No set-pieces of fine writing where each letter and word is

finely calibrated. . . . Loveliness expressed in assonance. . . . My topics come and go as the mood takes me.” And he tips his hat to the reader for cluing in to the book’s lack of a story, with characters appearing and reappearing only to create some sense of continuity. He further pokes fun at himself with a blatant plot device at the end, a hurricane that brings the various characters together even though they aren’t necessarily connected. “The six standing characters didn’t know about this storm, but everyone else did. How is that possible? It’s an inconsistency I can live with. Some other narrators I know wouldn’t tolerate such a situation.” Just for fun, he writes in the sociopathic voice of the hurricane for a stretch, mostly in ALL CAPS, threatening at one point to “HURL OIL RIGS at Lisa Moore’s home,” among other nasty deeds, and puns a little too: “HAIL HAIL ROCK AND ROLL.”

This is an atypical novel, which some might call experimental or avant-garde. As Bursley notes, there’s not much tension to it. You can read a scene and put it down again for later. But it’s a delightful read because of its unconventionality, deliberate silliness, and blunt articulation. One is never left to wonder where the author stands. I got the sense from *Unidentified man* that Bursley had a lot of fun writing it, and we could use more playfulness in our letters.

—Chris Benjamin

Emma Donoghue, *The Pull of the Stars*

Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2020

304 pages, \$33.99, ISBN 9781443461788

Exactly midway through Emma Donoghue’s thirteenth novel, *The Pull of the Stars*, Dr. Kathleen Lynn explains to Nurse Julia Power the meaning of *influenza*: “*Influenza delle stelle*—the influence of the stars.” Since “influence” derives from “flow,” the novel is as much about flow as about pull—the bodily fluids of blood, sweat, and tears during the pandemic of 1918 in Dublin and around the world. Against the backdrop of World War I and the European theatre of war, the microcosmic maternity ward in Dublin has universal implications. In the basement mortuary Dr. Lynn also explains the meaning of *autopsy* as “to see with one’s own eyes.” Through the eyes of Nurse Power, the reader performs an autopsy on the novel, cutting away layers of meaning, character, and style.

First-person narration focuses on the optics of Julia, who views Dublin, the world, and the ward through a limited lens. Immediately before this scene of instruction, she says, “I wished I could unsee,” but there are details she can’t avoid seeing in her roles as narrator and nurse. She pictures star-crossed fates and “celestial bodies trying to fly us like upside-down kites”—the position of most babies in the womb. The shift from terrestrial to celestial recurs on the roof of the hospital when she teaches Bridie Sweeney, her temporary assistant, the same lesson: “In Italy, they used to blame the influence of the constellations for making them sick—that’s where *influenza* comes from.” In contrast to the darkness of Dublin and the hospital, the view from the roof is clear: “The old moon wrote its last faint C just above the parapet.” This lunar writing is grounded in Julia’s watch, which tracks each lost patient as she scratches circles on the back of her silver watch: “Every full moon means a patient of mine who’s died,” while the crescent scars represent the dead babies. The lyrical flow connects Julia and Bridie: “The chain between the two of us was a taut umbilicus. . . . Bridie stroked the silver curve. It’s a sort of map of the dead, then. A sky full of moons.”

In a novel filled with pathetic fallacies and objective correlatives, Julia and Bridie teach each other about astronomy and seeing the harsh life in the convent, until Bridie seizes the moment with a kiss: “Like a pearly moon in my mouth.” They share birthdays (November 1), truffles from Belgium (the war), and a blood orange from Italy (the origin of *influenza*), which flows between the two lovers. The orange is a gift from Julia’s brother, Tim, who was shell-shocked into silence in the war after being splattered with bits of his friend Liam Caffrey. These epiphanies on the roof flow from earlier revelations between Bridie and Julia when the former provides the colour scheme for the novel’s four sections: “It’s like a secret code Red to brown to blue to black.” Julia has her own secret code of alliteration, which helps her to remember details of nursing.

Donoghue’s opening paragraph establishes her code of alliteration that creates the voice, atmosphere, and pace in *The Pull of the Stars*: “Still hours of dark to go when I left the house that morning.” This incomplete first sentence captures the mood of a twilight zone between night and day, while the double sense of “still” contrasts the temporary stillness with the flow of frenzied activity to follow. Moreover, that initial word takes on the additional meaning of stillbirth, “Delia Garrett’s little still.” The spacing of “cycled . . . streets . . . slick” alternates with “reeking . . . rain” to recreate a rhythm

between Julia's point of view and the external scene. "My short green cape kept off the worst, but my coat sleeves were soon wet through." Alliteration balances the two halves of the sentence, as she balances on her bicycle: cape kept vs. coat, worst vs. wet. It also carries into the next sentence with "waft" and "waiting," "lane" and "livestock." An anonymous boy in a man's coat suggests the poverty and scarecrow misfit of life and death in Dublin. She pedals faster "past a motor car creeping along to eke out its petrol." Like the creeping car, pedestrians and patients barely eke out a living.

In this timeless world of plague, Julia measures the three days of her narrative with her watch and watchful eye. The first day is Halloween, and its atmosphere is all the more ghoulish during the pandemic. She takes charge of the cramped maternity/fever ward, where room and womb are equally constricted and divided between life and death. Having overcome a mild form of the flu, she is now immune and empowered to help others who are maimed, from blood-soaked Nurse Cavanagh to Sister Luke, who lost an eye during the war. "Sister Luke adjusted the elastic band of her eye patch, a puppet pulling its own strings. Like quite a few nuns, she'd volunteered at the front, and shrapnel had sent her home with an eye gone. Between her veil and her white mask, the only skin showing was the hinterland around the other eye." In this grotesque pull of fate we are reminded of the omnipresence of war and visual infirmities, as Donoghue performs autopsies on her Dubliners. Similarly, the orderly Groyne carries stretchers through the hospital as if it were a battlefield and sings upsetting verses. We learn later in the novel, thanks to Bridie, that he lost his wife and children and is therefore suffering from his own form of PTSD. Patient Ita Noonan wears a tin crucifix, a talisman against terror, like Tim's touchwood against his silent throat.

In spite of all the bleakness the novel ends on a redemptive note as Julia adopts Barnabas White, the final colour in the "Black" section of the novel. His mother, Honor White, dies despite Julia giving her a blood transfusion, but the baby survives. The baby is also a "stargazer," facing the wrong way, and after a forceps delivery is found to have a harelip. In the final paragraphs Julia imagines introducing Barnabas to her brother, a misshapen mouth to a mute, after her "fever dream of the past three days." Carrying the infant home, "an emissary from a far star," she shifts to plural pronouns: "we'll see what we'll see." All of the wounds and autopsies lead to a fuller vision aided by more powerful microscopes and telescopes.

Modernist influences penetrate unwallled cities, and James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) lurks in the background. For example, Joyce's story "The Dead" ends with "snow was general all over Ireland . . . like the descent of their last end," to which Donoghue responds: "the plague was general all over Ireland" and "I carried him along through the streets that looked like the end of the world." In addition to Joyce's sense of an ending, Bridie Sweeney also revises T. S. Eliot's "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" (1918), for Bridie is half-bride and half-bird, flitting among the Florence Nightingales and Tim's maimed magpie. Defying the "bone men" of death, Donoghue's nightingales sing against the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

—Michael Greenstein

Sherrill Grace, *Tiff: A Life of Timothy Findley*

Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2020

540 pages, \$39.99, ISBN 9781771124539

In *Tiff: A Life of Timothy Findley*, Sherrill Grace has written a fine biography of the late actor, fictionist, and playwright, who is best known for his novel *The Wars* (1977). Findley's oeuvre is as bad as it is good—a fact that seems mysterious until we consider the writer in the light of Grace's excellent account. As she says, Findley was, in his cultural formation, a "Rosedale boy." His Rosedale is defunct. Not demographic change but, rather, social media have dissolved the isolation of that strange Toronto neighbourhood. Stray corners of Rosedale formerly possessed, even in the midst of a vast city, an almost Brontëan quality of introversion. The numerous ravines acted as moats around ambiguously enchanted ground.

What was a "Rosedale boy"? The very precariousness of the status largely constituted it. Findley's was hardly the familiar Rosedale of misconceived *noblesse oblige*, of cool rich kids misbehaving, or of silly affluence wracked by fits of ill-advised fashionableness. Although it projects an impression of immemorial solidity, Rosedale only dates from the 1860s. Findley's family moved into and out of it, but he felt happiest there amid gracious (sometimes dilapidated) homes and arboreal parks. The neighbourhood for Findley became, in effect, a vast stone-built stage set on which certain kinds of dramas characteristically played out. They involved reverie, secrecy, rumination, genteel terror—a condition of pastoral quarantine, of collective psy-

chic incest. Grace documents these factors amply.

Findley loved men and came out to his parents at the age of fourteen, but stigma as well as the law blighted the expression of his desire. Grace tells us Findley cruised Rosedale ravines for sex. Like his father and brother, he drank too much. These experiences helped shape his vision of Rosedale: a perilous and imperilled theatre whose repertory took on distinctive forms. It was Findley's destiny, whatever his ostensible topic, to document his early environment's accents of falsity, beauty, profundity, and oppression. In his work, mental asylums function as outposts of Rosedale's distress. Whatever a character's talents and acquirements, psychiatric interventions, when they come, are barbaric. To the end of his career—with the novel *Headhunter* (1993), the original title of which was no less than *Heart of Darkness in Rosedale*—Findley elides mental institutions with (in Grace's words) "prisons, torture chambers, fascist venues for social control." Despite the advantages conferred by residence in Rosedale, its pervasive anachronism—its loyalty to untimely modes of life—tended to stifle human potentials as much as foster them.

In 1972 Findley published a story titled "Sometime—Later—Not Now." Reappraised in the light cast by Grace's biography, this piece offers a succinct depiction of the angels and demons that prospered and inhibited Findley's art. The year is 1950. When we meet her, the heroine of the tale, Diana Galbraith, is a prodigy—a female Glenn Gould. We find her discussing human reproduction with her friends, and the subject of mortality as well as birth engrosses the speakers. Of her own future offspring, Diana offers, "No. They won't die. They just won't happen." Findley's story then leaps ahead to 1969. Diana has had a breakdown: "Her hair was cut very short, even for a child . . . I wondered whose child it could be . . . I looked at her, wondering who it was—whose figure that could possibly be, so bent over." A pure Rosedale product (Grace helpfully points out her resemblance to Joyce Diblee, a brilliant Rosedale friend), Diana persists as the precocious spectre of ability broken by unkindness, by uncanniness, by disease, and by doctors. She suffers the pangs not of death or childbirth but of fated immaturity. In the figure of Diana, Findley may portray his muse. His Rosedale teases its inmates with the promise of fulfillment before confining them to a thoroughly Canadian sort of limbo. Although Grace does not really discuss "Sometime—Later—Not Now," she gives us trustworthy tools to reconnoitre the work in depth.

“Sometime—Later—Not Now” has flaws typical of Findley’s fiction. The author might have dragged his lesser characters, such as a Mephistophelian Eurotrash figure, from a fusty armoury of commonplaces. Grace, however, provides evidence that Findley was self-aware in this regard. She tells us he wrote a TV drama called “Paper People,” in which a Canadian sculptor, thwarted by stale received ideas, can only manufacture and destroy papier mâché dolls. If we read her carefully, she thus allows us to see how Findley preempted critics like Philip Marchand, whose negative perceptions include the plausible charge that Findley compromised his quotient of originality by too often introducing stock characters and stock situations. Although Grace does not—and cannot—draw every inference from her research and analysis, she provides her reader with the information to do so. I am grateful for her energetic and thoughtful record of Findley’s life—not a Rosedale boy’s, but a Rosedale man’s.

—Eric Miller, University of Victoria

Eli MacLaren, *Little Resilience: The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books*
 Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020
 256 pages, \$37.95, ISBN 9780228003496

Little Resilience: The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books is an astute and valuable excavation of a series of CanLit artifacts that has been hiding in plain sight. The set of cheap editions may sound like a recently unearthed treasure trove when described in its full magnitude of two hundred entries published between 1925 and 1962. But the kind of person who might read Eli MacLaren’s study is likely to have encountered them scattered among Canadian poetry collections in the library stacks, filed away in special collections, or accessible online. It’s the series’ omnipresence and singularity—recognizable, related to the canon in obvious ways, yet sprawling across categories and possessing a surprising depth—that makes a study like MacLaren’s so necessary.

MacLaren posits that the chapbooks were negligible in monetary terms yet “replete with the supreme value that poetry possessed for the scores of people who took part in their production.” *Supreme* is a good shorthand for various arguments about poetry’s intangible, unclassifiable, or subjective value, but the book isn’t content merely to riff on this pervasive un-

knowability. Instead, it explores the idea through four rigorously developed arguments: that the chapbooks' modest physical characteristics signify the difficulties faced by Canadian writers in the mid-twentieth century even as their continuation indicates a stubborn ideological character; that their commitment to poetry in spite of their negligible remunerative potential provided a model for Canadian small-press publishing; that their anti-imperialist nationalism and commitment to representative inclusion made them responsible in a political sense; and that their aggregate literary characteristics mixed romantic and modernist sensibilities. Following introductory sections on publishing in the 1920s and the launch of the series, the book devotes chapters to lesser-known authors Nathaniel A. Benson, Anne Marriott, and M. Eugenie Perry before moving on to more familiar territory with chapters on Dorothy Livesay and Al Purdy.

The argument builds upon a brief list of interdisciplinary works on literary publishing and the material conditions that have shaped its history and practices. Although this genealogy includes Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault as well as Robert Darnton, D. F. McKenzie, and Janice Radway, the focus of the book is deeply Canadian. With the chapbooks so inextricably connected with their press and its founder, *Little Resilience* works in tandem with Sandra Campbell's *Both Hands: A Life of Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press* (2013). It also builds on studies of the country's small presses and periodicals and the groups who used them to make their voices heard amid the mainstream of the time, like Dean Irvine's *Editing Modernity: Women and Little-Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916-1956* (2008), and evokes others that have explored the strategies these entities used to conform with the realities of publishing in Canada, such as Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith's *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture: Canadian Periodicals in English and French 1925-1960* (2015).

Little Resilience makes valuable contributions in all these areas. Its first chapter explores the humble and weird beginnings of the series, mapping out through the correspondence between editor Lorne Pierce and various contributors uncomfortable questions about the difference between small-press and vanity publishing—questions that still haunt even today's most well-regarded chapbook endeavours. The subsequent characterization of the chapbooks as “[p]art luxuries, part sacrifices” paves the way for MacLaren's compelling case studies of three of the series' lesser-known contributors. The chapter on Benson illustrates the “crush of new circumstances”

navigated by minor authors toiling in largely nineteenth-century poetic forms, characterizing his writing in “a number of practical, compromised ways” as a process of “fruitful contamination” that helped ease Canadian poetic production into the twentieth century. The chapter on Perry, one of the “allies of the deaf community” whose work Pierce supported and helped shape, draws attention to the differences between an early Canadian version of literary activism and how we conceive of the phenomenon today even as it reveals a continuity between the two.

The scope seems to change with the Livesay chapter, which treads more familiar CanLit territory with its discussions of her poetics and better-known publications. But things come into clearer focus when this kind of analysis is applied to Purdy, whose two Ryerson chapbooks reveal something new about Purdy’s development and debates about romantic and modernist impulses in Canadian poetry at the time. The reading further validates MacLaren’s larger argument for the comprehensive importance of the chapbooks: it’s as if the loose ends are all being gathered, MacLaren’s scholarly recovery of them itself gradually aligning with what would become the recognizable and dominant structures of present-day Canadian poetry, with its little (and online) magazines, chapbooks, and bigger publishing players.

While the book is unquestionably scholarly, it also resonates with more experimental interrogations of our continued fascination with the book object. There’s a metaphorical aspect of the thesis that appears again and again: the chapbooks are “slim, bound in paper until 1953, and blank on their spines until 1960, and therefore all but invisible on a shelf”; they show us the “fibre and the grain of the publishing conditions of Canadian poetry”; Perry’s work “represents the tissue” of the series in the 1940s. These literary aspects—as well as the book’s unique conclusion, which I won’t spoil here—move *Little Resilience* closer to the realm of physically oriented studies and artistic celebrations of the book form and its variants, like Amaranth Borsuk’s *The Book* (2018) and its companion collection of statements on the format, *The Book: 101 Definitions* (2021). Still, MacLaren’s metaphorical tack reads like a more conventionally literary celebration appended to a work of traditional scholarship.

These moments, along with the book’s uneven structure, are quirks that might seem at odds with MacLaren’s airtight scholarship and lucid writing. Yet the messiness matches the open-ended quality of the book’s central set of arguments: specifically, the strange dynamic in which a reader might

chase multiple resonances with the current small-press, chapbook, and little (or online) magazine culture in Canadian poetry. It's as if these varied phenomena are at once contained within the book's thesis yet also somehow outside the purview of the argument, not developed to their full potential precisely because potential is the point. It's a dynamic that's nicely—maybe too nicely—reinforced by the book's stylized exploration and inhabitation of a vast textual ecosystem that seems coextensive with a gently expanding, ever-more inclusive conception of CanLit.

—Carl Watts, Huazhong University of Science and Technology

Emily St. John Mandel, *The Glass Hotel*
 New York: Penguin Random House, 2020
 301 pages, \$16.95, ISBN 9780525562948

The Glass Hotel, shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and one of Barack Obama's favourite books of 2020, is Emily St. John Mandel's fifth novel and follows the success of *Station Eleven* (2014), an eerily prophetic novel about a mercifully fictional pandemic. *The Glass Hotel* follows several different characters through the 2008 financial crisis, moving from Vancouver Island to Toronto to New York to chart the rise and fall of a far-reaching Ponzi scheme and the lives that it directly or indirectly impacts. The novel opens with Paul, a failing finance student whose tenacious drug habit sends him away from the University of Toronto and back to his native Vancouver where his estranged half-sister Vincent gets him a job at the five-star Hotel Caiette on the remote northern tip of Vancouver Island. On the night that the hotel's owner, Jonathan Alkaitis, is scheduled to visit, a mysterious figure writes a threatening message on the hotel window in acid marker: "Why don't you swallow broken glass?" In the next two days, Paul is fired from Alkaitis' hotel while Vincent disappears from the hotel and reappears on Alkaitis' arm in tabloid photos, ostensibly as his wife. The story spiderwebs out from the unsettling graffiti at the hotel, following multiple characters and plot threads that seem only tangentially related until Mandel masterfully regathers them through a devastating Ponzi scheme and international trade.

If Mandel's newest book has a weakness, it is that very little actually happens. Whole sections of narrative exist purely in characters' memory or

imagination, and it is sometimes hard to tell which. Vincent's life as Alkaitis' wife is luxurious and leisurely—to the point of boredom. Her only real hobby is taking daily videos exactly five-minutes long of anything nearby, no matter how uneventful or mundane. Until the discovery of the Ponzi scheme, Jonathan and his investors live seemingly untroubled and prosperous lives that consist largely of travel, dinner parties, and office routine. However, while very little physically happens, this seems part of a deliberate strategy that accomplishes two things. First, it demonstrates how extreme wealth elevates people so much that they live in their own universe. Mirella, Vincent's only real friend in Jonathan's lofty world, has lived in London, Singapore, and New York with Faisal, a Saudi prince, but she confesses to Vincent, "My life wasn't really different in those places . . . it was just a change in background scenery." Vincent thinks about money as a country and the other wealthy people whom Jonathan knows as "citizens" because money allows them to rise above geographical variety. Secondly, the rise and fall of a Ponzi scheme and the 2008 financial crash surrounding it are both non-physical, psychological dramas. The story moves along by intrigue, not action. Jonathan's scheme involves not physical violence but rather the slow and invisible siphoning off of the retirement savings of the upper and middle classes.

One of *The Glass Hotel's* key strengths is the intricate interconnectedness of the various plotlines that make the world of the story seem at once vast and tiny. Conversations or meetings between characters that at first seem inconsequential later reveal a web of human connections that can only exist in a globalized world, linked by trade and investment. Paul is mysteriously connected to the one woman who is convinced that Alkaitis is a conman, while his half-sister, Vincent, becomes Jonathan's pretend wife. A young artist who paints Lucas Alkaitis' portrait too accurately for his tastes eventually becomes his younger brother Jonathan's favourite investor. A shipping executive who has a chance conversation with Jonathan at the Hotel Caiette invests in the Ponzi scheme, loses his retirement savings, and, in a twist of fate, is the one sent to investigate the fate of a familiar young woman on a cargo ship at the end of the story. The novel elaborately and subtly demonstrates globalization and the inevitable rise and fall of Jonathan's investors with him through the metaphor of shipping. As executive Leon Pravant explains to Alkaitis, "[shipping is] a largely invisible industry, but nearly everything you've ever bought travelled over the water . . . I re-

ally mean almost everything. Everything on and around us. Your socks. Our shoes. My aftershave. This glass in my hand. I could keep going.” Alkaitis, perhaps foreshadowing the direct and indirect impact of his prolonged Ponzi scheme, responds, “I’m embarrassed to admit that I never thought about it.”

The novel exposes the untold consequences of taking advantage of others, but it also reveals the mundane ways in which people exploit each other every day. Both Vincent and Jonathan use each other in their pretend marriage, as she gets access to his wealth and he gets a trophy wife. A young painter exposes a fellow artist’s drug dependency for short-lived artistic fame. Paul plagiarizes his sister’s forgotten intellectual property for musical success. Alkaitis’ enemy drags a young Paul into petty crime for personal revenge. The novel juxtaposes these small ways of using others with the much larger Ponzi scheme that pervades every aspect of the plot. When Alkaitis’ lawyer asks, “who among us has never made a mistake?” former investor Olivia, who has lost all of her retirement savings, thinks, “sure, yes, everyone makes mistakes, but those mistakes are typically more on the order of forgetting to pay a phone bill, or leaving the oven on for a couple hours after dinner, or entering the wrong number into a spreadsheet. Perpetuating a multibillion-dollar fraud over a period of decades is something entirely different.” Mandel’s novel, however, questions whether it really is “something entirely different” by deftly exposing how small, everyday actions can spiral into unforeseen consequences that affect untold people. With artfully entangled plotlines and timelines, often inscrutable characters, and an ominous inevitability, *The Glass Hotel* is a brilliant read that demands rereading.

—Sharon Vogel, Dalhousie University