BOOK REVIEWS

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, *(Re)Generation*
Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2021
94 pages, $15.99, ISBN 9781771124713

(Re)Generation comprises an assortment of Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's poems selected and edited by Dallas Hunt. Rife with homages, the poems included in the collection weave in influences from a wide array of poetic genres. "a sweet taste to plum" reads like a spin on William Carlos Williams' famous poem "This Is Just to Say" (1934), featuring a softly apologetic fruit kleptomaniac, although Akiwenzie-Damm's poetic persona is much more sensuous, declaring at the poem's opening, "I am / a ripe plum." Meanwhile, "native sexuality 101" is almost audibly rhythmic, evoking hip-hop and spoken-word conventions in its beats. Akiwenzie-Damm's poetry flows seamlessly between these styles without losing its near-photorealistic attention to detail. In this way, it constantly "circles back" to older forms, reworking them into something new.

Akiwenzie-Damm's writing is kinetic, and each poem's voice is animated with emotion and yearning. Truly, the poems in *(Re)Generation* paint vivid, moving pictures. "Vision" is particularly visceral. Body parts ripple, roil, and explode, such as when the poetic persona's "lungs ignited burst through my skin." At the same time, many of the poems engage with multiple senses. "names" has its speaker notice the aural, "children's voices drifting in the wind," and the olfactory, with the "smell of cedar." These are tactile, aromatic, sightly poems that need to be chewed on, slowly and methodically, in order to take them in for all their complexity.

As Hunt notes in the introduction, Akiwenzie-Damm's poetry contains "non-hierarchical . . . sexual joy." Indeed, many of the poems are thick with ecstatic pleasure in the intimacy between the speaker and her partners. Her poetic personas revel in sexual encounters, in satiating a hearty appetite to devour and be devoured.

I am not using eating as a euphemism for sex without reason. Throughout the collection, sex is euphemistically paralleled with food. In "fish head soup," for example, the speaker compares her hunger for her paramour to "a lick of seaweed / stretched out in the sun." In "a sweet taste to plum," the juice of the fruit and the speaker's juices run down her lover's face. "the feast" frames the speaker's body like a sprawling gift offered willingly and enthusiastically to her partner. Relationships nourish the body just as much as a hearty meal.

What is striking in these poems is how successful they are in depicting sex as an experience shared between two willing agents. The poetic persona looks as much as she notices being looked at. She touches her paramour as often as she revels in being touched. These are visions of sex as a reciprocal experience that, while still complicated, does not permit the objectification of its participants.

Hunger is often interrupted or spoiled by ongoing colonial violence. For example, "the earth a burial ground" directly follows and precedes poems about sex, and it thus serves as a reflective pause that allows readers to consider the many Indigenous children killed by the Residential school system. There is no way to evade these traumatic contusions of Indigenous history while exploring Indigenous love and lust. No matter what experiences the persona gives voice to, she must circle back to her roots.

Akiwenzie-Damm's poetry also captures Indigenous peoples' ongoing resistance to colonialism and the sorts of healing, regenerative processes that begin even as a wound is being inflicted. At the same time, the poems grapple with love and heartbreak, violence against Indigenous women, and Indigenous women's strength in the face of that violence. Wounds never convalesce fully, but the people who endure them (re)generate something in the process.

Many poems in *(Re)Generation* play with concepts like perpetuity, infinity, and eternity—seemingly endless time frames—through the poetic persona's vivid and textured reminiscences. Endless expanses of time have no distinct ending or beginning. "love letter not sent," for example, is devoid of punctuation and capitalization, and it thus reads like one breathless utterance without a real opening or closing.

Infinity begins to look circular in these poems, as in "Slash n burn," which repeats the clause, "i love how you blame me for being a victim of your crazy grandfather." When the statement is repeated, though, it is al-

tered slightly. In circling back to where she starts, the poetic persona finds healing change through generative repetition, which ultimately leads to re-generation.

The title of the collection is poignant, not gesturing to perfect convalescence necessarily, as such a thing implies the process can be complete. Regeneration, meanwhile, is free of an endpoint. The word acknowledges that old wounds can be re-opened, new ones might be inflicted during the healing process, and moving forward requires building on material that came before.

The final poem, "Zombies," does not begin with a title but instead deteriorates into its title at the end. "eternity is a perfect gift when everything is for sale and we're all so afraid of death," Akiwenzie-Damm writes. Shortly after, the poem concludes with its title buried at the bottom of the page. *(Re)Generation* does not propose that it is possible to circle back forever. What is inevitable, in spite of all of this human cycling, is coming to an end.

—Jessie Krahn

Susan Glickman, *Artful Flight: Essays and Reviews 1985-2019*
Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2022
256 pages, $24.95, ISBN 9780889848795

Susan Glickman—poet, fiction writer, scholar, essayist, and visual artist—draws from a life in the arts, sharing with insight and honesty what she has garnered from that evolving practice. Multifaceted, she illuminates in her capacity as a literary scholar and engages the reader in a voice that leaps across the page with imagination, wit, and—that pivotal ingredient—the element of surprise. *Artful Flight*, a book of essays and reviews, presents a life-affirming model of the interdependence of the arts, as its author moves seamlessly from attuned critical appraisals of poetry to reflective essays on subjects as varied as the making of violins and the proliferation of opinions voiced without evidentiary support. And in her finale, she caps the book off by depicting the joy of immersing herself in the visual arts in her own continuum of learning.

At the heart of Glickman's dedication to and celebration of the arts is the inclusion of an informed, judicious reader/viewer/participant who con-

structs meaning that reflects partial truths, like a prism that refracts light in different directions. In the opening section, Glickman argues against theoretical frameworks of literary scholarship that categorize too rigidly, that are hierarchical and absolute, and that compel an either-or paradigm in lieu of a more complex, contextualized study of artful writing. That position, I propose, frames the book.

To introduce her argument against assuming a restraining formalist view, for instance, Glickman selects the impersonal use of the second-person pronoun, illustrating how related to other literary devices the pronoun is in any given work. She draws from Canada's literary past in Susanna Moodie's description of landscape, when the impersonal pronoun "joins reader and writer in a common experience," and then moves to the contemporary era in Canadian literature with Kim Maltman's poetic use of "you" as a "self-observed speaker." In her discussion of the poetic element of line, Glickman further advocates that we move away from a closed labelling to a re-examination of form that will enrich rather than impede. A "profound understanding of conventions" will serve a writer well when faced with a challenge. Glickman nevertheless maintains that the art of poetry is ultimately improvisatory since writers shape their lines as they "articulate a personal grammar" that tests the "limits of syntax to achieve more freedom." To that end, the "poetic line is where feeling and syntax meet." In providing pleasure to the ear through the chiming of sound, the poet attends carefully to language as a poem "conforms to its own internal principles of coherence." Theory and praxis meet in Glickman's enlightening interpretation of a translated Yehuda Amichai poem, "A Precise Woman," with the interplay of form, sound, meaning, and tone.

Glickman guides readers through a landscape of homegrown Canadian talent, her literary lantern foregrounding facets of the gifts of a host of Canadian poets, including Robyn Sarah, Patrick Lane, Don Coles, Michael Ondaatje, and Gwendolyn MacEwen. I'm grateful that she introduced me to the poet/fiction writer Bronwen Wallace, perhaps because I immediately recognized the world of women Wallace recreates in the slices of narrative poems selected—poems composed in a conversational language that addresses a wide range of readers. Glickman continues to strengthen her theoretical stance in this book by noting that it is the plurality of voice—the "polyphonic and experiential rather than the monophonic and absolute"—that propelled Wallace to move from poetry to fiction, where she

could reveal "the felt reality of lives lived through time affecting each other, of different people with different histories, agendas, feelings and needs accommodating each other."

In "Reading and Rereading," Glickman relays how she needs to reread texts that have shaped her life. Primo Levi, memoirist of the Holocaust, is one such writer, as is the poet/survivor Paul Celan, both of whom "transformed their pain into art" in different ways. Levi, a chemist trained in the science of observation, "recognize[d] his responsibility to record what he witnessed." Glickman highlights a few of Levi's poems, which are composed in pared-down language and communicated with the logic and clarity he deemed essential, even as he describes "hellish scenes" and shares his survivor guilt. On the other hand, Celan's use of imagery, Glickman points out, "doesn't so much say what things are as what they are like." The suffering evoked in his poetry is more spiritual than physical, Glickman asserts, as his poetry contains "musical refrains and exquisite turns of phrase that stand in stark contrast to the horror of the subject matter." Celan composed poems to process the trauma he endured, which is recalled and reconstructed at times in fragments. He "interrogates" the paradox of writing in the very language of those who murdered his parents, and he also wrestles with the potential meaninglessness of poems on the Holocaust, which will inevitably fall short of any expectation to heal or redeem.

But let us not forget, Glickman writes, that the arts have the "power to move, teach, and delight" across time. As a Shakespearean scholar and, I would add, linguist, Glickman reminds us that language is ever-changing in her astute analysis of the Bard's use of "let" both in the sonnet form and in *Hamlet*. In the hybrid piece "The Better Mother" she integrates a review inspired by Anne Enright's *Making Babies* (2004) with a touching personal narrative of her own transformative personal experience with motherhood. In her reflective essay on the benefits of travelling as a writer, "On Finding Oneself in Mexico," Glickman's evocation of the natural world is reminiscent of Annie's Dillard observational powers and prose. Her piece "Found Money" transported me to a "golden year" in Athens, when in almost a kind of magic realism she finds coins on the street with which she purchases honey-soaked gingerbread. She soon becomes addicted to finding coins, but relinquishing that compulsion leaves room for her to savour the "Seville oranges, shining in glossy trees . . . flower stalls spilling over with gardenias and jasmine . . . children flying kites and old ladies airing their caged birds."

Replete in the detail that conveys the sheer pleasure everyday life can offer, the only moral she leaves readers with is to pay it back from time to time, "infusing a little good fortune into a stranger's day."

Glickman invites us to heighten our awareness and appreciation of the arts as we explore our world so that we might make that world more livable and imbued with colour. And if we could only attend more closely to our world, as the arts demand, then we might also become more closely connected to one another.

—Carol Lipszyc

Phoebe Tsang, *Setting Fire to Water*
Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 2022
228 pages, $24.95, ISBN 9781771872294

"Hunger," the first story in Phoebe Tsang's collection *Setting Fire to Water*, is a true hook. It is the story of Fox and Hunger, who plagues her as she explores the dark river that forms the dangerous border to her world. It's a story in which everything has a voice or an opinion—from the hedgerows Fox slips through to the scents that beckon her. But Hunger speaks loudest of all, as "she hooks one crescent-moon claw into Fox's belly and moans into her ear."

"Hunger" and the collection's short prelude, "A Buddhist Nativity," are both something of an anomaly in the collection, which otherwise grounds itself in the mundane human psyche. But both stories promise a rich fictional world of heightened senses, where smell, sight, sound, and touch are always vivid and engrossing. It's a promise Tsang delivers on, with sensory scenes that linger. It's as difficult to forget the odours that hang around Tulene's home in "Parlour" as it is to forget the whispering flora that Fox passes in the night.

What's more, Fox's animalistic loneliness—her family lost to the dangers of the wilderness and human encroachment—is echoed in the many characters that succeed her. Tsang presents a cast of wanderers who, even when they have a house, cannot seem to settle into it like a home. Imogen, the artist of "Model Shown Is Actual Size," makes art of her living space with such determination that her apartment becomes almost unlivable, as does her more immediate home: "Her body had followed her around and some-

times helped, but mostly got in the way, during the merciless countdown to opening night." Her body, like the art supplies that surround her, becomes a physical material, until the moment when she spots a shadow version of herself. Imogen is one of the many characters who finds themselves disconcertingly doubled, like the starlet of "The Stain," or Fox herself. For the most part, Tsang handles these doppelganger moments well, the stories leaving a lingering curiosity behind.

There are moments when Tsang's writing becomes too slippery. In both "Legacy" and her longest story, "Quarter for a New Generation," perspective and third-person pronouns occasionally become too confusing. It's not entirely clear who is having which feelings or experiences. Yet I only found myself lost a few times. For the most part, the lack of direction is a part of the writing's power, and there is a strange pleasure in wandering in and out of the characters' memories and lives. Some of the wanderings lag, such as Coyote's journey in "Nights in Arcadia," when the shifts between past and present aren't quite so smooth, the interweaving not quite so fine.

Tsang is at her strongest when she is testing her characters. Many of them seem to trust in their detachment from the rest of the world. Tsang builds this detachment between people and their environments only to break it down in breathtaking ways, and it's fascinating to witness the moments when this detachment fails and consequences are revealed. There is just such a moment for Freeman, who crosses onto the subway tracks and halts the entire system—a result that his partner has to point out to him: "Until now, he hasn't had a moment to contemplate the magnitude of his transgression. Majestic waveforms of consequences rippling forth from one small act of defiance toward the outer limits of the dizzying galaxy, diverting the magnetic fields of unborn stars." It's a beautiful image, and it's completely impractical in the face of the very real danger and widespread delays related to Freeman's choice.

Tsang's imagery is memorable, particularly when she plays with contrast. The image of wicker chairs with red gingham cushions positioned alongside chrome and black bar stools is a perfect encapsulation of a marriage in peril—a pairing that no longer makes sense—and the co-owned café that bears the brunt of the relationship's confusion. Tsang is also funny, finding the unexpected humour in hyperspecific details, such as a musician "casting a mournful, craft-beer-worthy glance back at his half-full bottle of Corona Extra" or an artist "lying naked on her green velvet couch eating

Smartfood." These details also work because they are not used often enough to lose their charm.

"Hunger" may raise some high expectations going into this collection, but Tsang meets them easily. A week after reading the last page, I still find the images in my mind as compelling as they were when I first read them. I look forward to much more from such a skilled writer.

—Kaarina Mikalson

Dominique Bernier-Cormier, *Entre Rive and Shore*
Fredericton: Goose Lane, 2023
104 pages, $19.95, ISBN 9781773102870

At the launch of *Entre Rive and Shore*, a far corner of The Lido bar in Vancouver vibrated with bodies straining against the stage to hear Dominique Bernier-Cormier articulate between his two mother tongues, his voice amplified over the boisterous noise of a birthday party. Seamlessly navigating between French and English, one can truly appreciate both the poet's challenge and the complexities of identity when every other instant he becomes incomprehensible to half the room.

Bernier-Cormier describes his latest offering as "a book about translation." The title *Entre Rive and Shore* translates to "Between shore and shore," inviting the reader to dwell in the space between two languages—the deep subconscious unknowable place visually depicted on the book's cover by a filtered Polaroid of the sea. Translation extends to the poet's notion of identity, and themes of disguise, (un)intelligibility, and movement between spaces reinforce this notion. "Translation," Bernier-Cormier explains, "means to *carry across*. Presumably, a body of water."

But one cannot wonder whether *Entre Rive and Shore* is rather about that space between two languages that cannot be traversed or translated but only dwelled within—a manifest duality of the self. Code-mixing between French and English throughout, Bernier-Cormier gifts the reader an appreciation for this complex duality. We find here an early attempt at reconciling it: ". . . it could be dawn or dusk. // L'heure a laquelle une chose / becomes another." But time is not a good example of translation, being itself a fixed and objective measure of progress. More important is the indecipherability of a state between the rising or the setting of the sun. Mixing languages here

implies a stasis of idea rather than a transition.

In the essayic "On Young Thug, Mumble Rap, and the Future of Language," the poet suggests that "meaning is subordinate to sound" and explains that his father's native language, Chiac, is "unintelligible to the majority of both French and English speakers," even though Chiac is a variety of French with English borrowings. Here again we find not translation but a lack thereof, which might be described as a dissonance to others but implies a harmony within the self. In "Fugitif Chic," Bernier-Cormier slyly embraces untranslatability: "Can I help it if my favourite / translations are the ones // that don't make it across?" Throughout, Bernier-Cormier interrogates his own work via "notes on translation." He exposes his process, analyzes his choice of wording, and details the complexities of translating oneself for others. In one note on translation, Bernier-Cormier expresses, "Sometimes, I feel like I've left the shore of French but haven't reached the harbour of English yet."

If Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) is a memoir dripping with poetry, then *Entre Rive and Shore* is the opposite. Verses interspersed with essay-like passages, form-bending experiments such as "Courant | Stream" or "Tissu | Fabric," and emails between the poet and his father are seamlessly synergized in their dedication to the book's central theme.

This book is a leap for Bernier-Cormier. It extends his reach far beyond his previous work, *Englishing* (2017) and *Correspondent* (2018), in both his mastery of language and his freedom with form. Though much attention is paid here to problematizing the act of translation, he simultaneously harmonizes the dissonance between two languages, carrying the reader along into the depths of his person. Reading these words, we find ourselves in the murk of language, though with strange clarity. It will be a pleasure to see what this evolving poet gives us next.

—Caleb Harrison