Book Reviews

WRITING AGAINST TIME.
BY MICHAEL W. CLUNE.
STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013. 200 PAGES. $22.95.

Sometimes there is a serendipitous alignment between what we read and the circumstances in which we read it. I recently experienced this while reading Michael W. Clune's *Writing Against Time* on a trip to Rome. In the introduction, Clune discusses why novelty is such an important element in artistic creation. He argues that when we first encounter something new we are more alert to it and register it in greater detail. Over time, however, we become habituated: what was once fresh and new becomes dull and prosaic. Walking the streets of Rome with an Italian friend who has lived there for many years, brought this powerfully home to me. The fountains, sculptures, and piazzas that enchanted me were, for her, simply background. While the inevitability of this habituation is attested to by neuroscience, and borne out by everyday experience, Clune delineates a tradition of literature that revolts against this neurobiological experience of time and instead seeks to imagine objects or artworks that would always be novel, to which one would never become habituated.

Beginning with the speaker of Keats' "Bright Star," who desires to be "Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast / To feel for ever its soft fall and swell," Clune explores the Romantic desire for an immortal present, the freezing of a single moment of heightened awareness within time. He studies a body of writing that pursues this desire by trying to imagine objects or works of art that would be immune to time's dulling effects. While he considers this tradition to be a Romantic one, he includes within it writers as diverse as Keats, Proust, Nabokov, De Quincey, Orwell, and Ashbury, arguing that all attempt to create virtual images that never lose their vivacity. Keats and Proust do this by imagining music that would never grow familiar; Nabokov and De Quincey see in the addictive object (be it opium or the nymphet) something that always draws them back to the shock of their first experience of it; for Orwell, the totalitarian state of *1984* achieves this same freezing of time by using prohibitions against the

obvious to keep citizens in a constant state of surprise at their surroundings; Ashbury's poetry manages a similar effect by using syntax to make strange things seem familiar.

Motivating Clune's engagement with these writers "against time" is a more ambitious programme. By investigating how they attempt to do the impossible—escape neurobiological time—Clune addresses larger problems of how we are to think about the relationship between art and life. He suggests that most literary criticism assumes art to be primarily representative: art returns our experience of life to us, whether through realist descriptions of things and events or avant-garde attempts to mirror psychological states and processes. For this reason, criticism often finds itself in a parasitic relationship to other disciplines, adopting outdated models to theorize the phenomena literature describes. While many scholars have recently attempted updated versions of this approach—employing recent theories, particularly from the physical sciences—the very ongoing nature of scientific research illustrates the problem; by the time a theory has been adapted, it is often already out of date.

But these issues of interdisciplinarity point to a larger problem. While literary scholars borrow widely from other fields, they seem to contribute little that is of interest to the broader academic community. Clune argues that this problem arises from a lack of attention to the imaginative dimensions of literature. Rather than mirroring the objects and experiences that constitute our lives, the writers against time are interested in imagining things as they do *not* exist. Clune suggests that instead of showing how literature serves to illustrate economic and social theories imported from other fields, literary scholars should argue for literature's unique ability to imagine new experiences and ways of experiencing; this is how it will add something new to such theories.

This is an ambitious claim, and Clune is able to argue more strongly for it in some chapters than others. While he is a subtle reader of literature and criticism, and his writing is admirably clear throughout (especially given the complex and diverse terrain he covers), the book is most persuasive in its examination of the addictive object. This is, perhaps, unsurprising: Clune is a former heroin addict whose powerful addiction memoir, *White Out*, explores a number of the excellent observations raised in *Writing Against Time*. The relationship between addiction literature and the psychology of

addiction, and the ways in which the former can inform the latter, is Clune's most concrete example of how literature's imaginative abilities may be of value to other disciplines. However, whether or not other scholars will attend to his critique of interdisciplinarity remains to be seen—his theory about the wider value of literature, compelling as it is, may in the end only apply to a select group of literary works—and the real test of the book's ambitious methodological claims will be in the work they inspire. Even so, *Writing Against Time* manages the more modest task to which every good work of criticism should aspire: to return us to the works themselves with a new appreciation.

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NOTEBOOK M.
BY GILLIAN SAVIGNY.
LONDON, ON: INSOMNIAC P, 2012. 93 PAGES. $16.95.

A RELIQUARY AND OTHER POEMS.
BY DARYL HINE.
MARKHAM, ON: FITZHENRY AND WHITESIDE, 2013. 79 PAGES. $14.95.

LIQUIDITIES: VANCOUVER POEMS THEN AND NOW.
BY DAPHNE MARLATT.
VANCOUVER: TALONBOOKS, 2013. XIII, 73 PAGES. $16.95.

In spite of the generational and stylistic differences between Gillian Savigny, Daryl Hine and Daphne Marlatt, these three Canadian poets share a sense of poetry as a deeply ethical endeavor. Whether as a filter for scientific discourse, a channel for the deeply personal, or a mapping for a psychogeographic experience, they demonstrate how poetry remains a discourse essential for taking responsibility in the world.

The title of Gillian Savigny's *Notebook M* arises out of her playful engagement with Charles Darwin's notebook of the same name—a notebook, as Savigny mentions in her introduction, in which Darwin considers "Metaphysics on Morals & Speculations on Expression." While "M" suggests "Metaphor," "Morality," "Metaphysics," "Materialism," "Mania," or "Monkeys"—as various titles in the collection indicate—the poems also demonstrate the uncertain, informal mind-set that accompanies a verbal placeholder like

"Umm." In the epigraph that opens the book, Darwin states how "castles in the air"—unfounded speculations or intuitions—"are highly advantageous "because they represent the beginning of true discovery. So Savigny takes Darwin's suggestion as a point of departure, reimagining his observations from one of the turrets in a "castle in the air." In the first poem, "Darwin," she even includes his experience while sailing in South America, where his "ship sailed into a storm / of butterflies so thick the sky was lost behind them."

Savigny's book consists of three sections, each of which operates in a different conceptual mode. The first section, "Journal of Researches—Patagonia," works like a palimpsest, utilizing a method of plundering in which Savigny distills key words floating within Darwin's own notebook page. In one of the poems, Savigny discovers "these particles / have remained so long alive / my notes / scintillate with / bright /doubt." These "torn and irregular particles" act like the white spectral images of fossils overlaying the black images of fossils on the cover of the book. The second section, "An Autobiographical Fragment," includes lyric-style pieces that open with epigraphs from Darwin's notebooks, but that also appropriate material from Darwin in order to recast his early scientific proclivities as poetic affinities. One of the most compelling poems from the collection opens this section. "Theatre of Memory, an Inventory" catalogs a series of "curiosities" discovered under the organs of the "author's [presumably Darwin's]" body. Under the "Liver," for example: "a vase, a penguin's egg, a letter dated February 1839, wild lilies, and other mild aphrodisiacs." The last section, "Notebook M," includes similar studies/inventories/catalogs (even an abecedarian poem), as well as the meditations on "M." In these last poems, Savigny drives home the unsung relation of science and poetry: "[M]etaphor [as] a form of experiment." Here Savigny falls easily in line with fellow Canadian poets, Christopher Dewdney and Jan Zwicky, who also explore the ethics and poetics of this relation.

The real joy of reading Daryl Hine's newest and final book *A Reliquary and Other Poems*, arises from his reliance on the types of obscure words that drive a reader like me into the wispy, yellowing pages of the dictionary— the kind of hard bound book that comes in a box with a small cloth bound drawer holding a magnifying glass, and the kind of book with a gilded foreedge and a notched thumb index, where prying open the pages one inevitably discovers the exotic. Not ironically, I am describing the dictionary as both a kind of relic and a kind of reliquary, where the words within are relics themselves—words like "umbrageous" and "plangent." As an award-winning translator

of ancient Greek, Hine obligates himself to care for our evolving language. Moreover, he, in the greater part of his work, preserves language in rhyme, observing the songy potential of the poetic line as a touchstone for poetry's elevated status. Such a pervasive formal decision seems in itself a relic these days, but Hine's rhymes do not distract. In "The Road Nowhere," Hine ends with a beautiful (dare I use a word like profound) tercet:

> The self you were not swift enough to save
> Still broods on the horizon, a nest egg
> Imperfect and perforated as a sieve.

Such lines evince what critics so often recognize (and dismiss) as 'traditionally' lyrical—that brand of poetry that either comforts or overawes the general public. But these lines also demonstrate a mature, practiced poetic sensibility—rich with pathos, irony, and wisdom.

Most of the poems from *A Reliquary* touch on classic themes: Death, and the end of life, for example, preoccupy Hine in this book, mostly because the book was written in the year that he died from a terminal blood disorder. Many of the poems ruminate on the difficult morning after sleeplessness due to illness, and they often explore the inherent shift in weather and nature as metaphors for the "stormy vectors" that characterize all life. Hine's last poem, "Climate Change" does not offer a political statement on our "polluted atmosphere," but acts a kind of "*culmen*" to the book and a life in poetry. "Although the weather changes every day," he writes, "this fascinating picture does not change."

Daphne Marlatt's most recent book *Liquidities: Vancouver Poems Then and Now* presents a "resuscitation" and "re-vision" of some poems from her 1972 collection *Vancouver Poems*, along with some of her *Uncollected Poems* and newer work, all of which provide a kind of psychogeographic vision of Vancouver over the last forty years:

> [A] metro built on labour's back on brick or woods slats glitz
> 'n bling now wallow in stock collapse concrete drips snow
> line no-show line down blue shopping or shipping out all
> water under the bridge.

In the introduction, Marlatt describes how Vancouver "surfaced to her gaze" as a young woman, and the metaphor proves apt for two reasons: On

the one hand, water imagery, from the sea, rain and sewers of Vancouver, pervade the works; on the other hand, an impressionistic flow, drawing from description, transcription and conversation, characterizes the pieces. The book also depicts Vancouver on the brink of two different economic realities. The Granville Street Bridge divides these realities—one blending lumber, earth and sea and the other raising concrete, glass and commerce. As with much of Marlatt's work, these poems rely on historical documents filtered through fiction, memory and sensation—all of which act as liquefacients in delivering a portrait of the city, its history, weather, and people.

Between the two major sections of the book, "Vancouver Poems," and "Liquidities," Marlatt inserts a shorter section, "Some Open Doors." This section offers a formal transition between the older and newer poems. In other words, "Some Open Doors" operates as littoral, existing "in the crack between two dawns." It also utilizes a spontaneous, conversational tone, like that of Jack Kerouac's "October in the Railroad Earth." Like Kerouac's engagement with San Francisco, Marlatt interprets Vancouver's geography, culture and economy, by "flâneuring" freely and fluidly. In fact, in the epigraph to "Liquidities," Marlatt cites Italo Calvino, where he compares "cities" to "dreams." The newer work inevitably avoids the slackening effect of punctuation in an effort to reflect the hastened pace of contemporary life, characterized by a "wifi access urban unconscious" and a "Suezmax tanker traffic liquid asset runoff." Ultimately, Marlatt's work participates in the growing, though heterogeneous, genre of poetry known as eco-poetics—a discipline that far exceeds a neo-pastoralism or urban pastoralism in favour of using poetic technique to investigate ecological anthropology, the way we humans interact with our very delicate environment.

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THE COMPLETE JOURNALS OF L.M. MONTGOMERY: THE PEI YEARS, 1889–1900.
EDITED BY MARY HENLEY RUBIO AND ELIZABETH HILLMAN WATERSTON.
DON MILLS: OXFORD U PRESS CANADA, 2012. XI, 484 PAGES. $39.95.

Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston are professors emeriti whose names are synonymous with L.M. Montgomery's in Canadian literary criticism. But

their five-volume *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* (1985) trimmed some 50% of the original text, so here they present in full "one of the great journals of our literature" (vii). Is it? There are several valuable narratives. There is the emergent writer, her successes with publishers, reading preferences and literary influences, reflections on human psychology and spirituality. This perspective, however, is rarely detached from the external life of a young woman in rural Victorian Canada, with its familial and community networks (and obligations). The foreword characterizes nineteenth-century Prince Edward Island as "a cramped, obscure environment" (viii), but this ostensibly limited place remained the wellspring for Montgomery's writing throughout her life; she would move to Ontario in 1911 and yet never really leave, or wish to leave, this place. That makes this period of her life particularly significant.

Montgomery is surprisingly well-connected: her paternal grandfather was a member of both the colonial assembly and the Canadian Senate, and arranges for the teenager to meet Prime Minister John A. Macdonald (36). Her father, too, embodies the frequently overlooked cosmopolitanism of the Maritime provinces at this time: sailing to England, the West Indies, and South Africa; then a merchant in Boston and government clerk in Saskatchewan (70). Montgomery goes to live with him in the summer of 1890, providing wonderful descriptions of the new settler landscape of the Canadian prairie. Despite or perhaps because of her homesickness for Cavendish, her view of the prairie is vivid and detailed: from the "wild, yet beautiful wilderness" (87) to a condescending (and typical) attitude toward aboriginal peoples.

With grudging permission from her maternal grandparents, she moves to Charlottetown to study for her teacher's license at Prince of Wales College. (Whether or not all writing is autobiography, passages from the journal appear in Montgomery's novels. Her description of taking the entrance exams for PWC is exactly Anne's own; her earliest attempts at writing are precisely Emily's.) She returns to college life two years later—again despite "somewhat contemptuous disapproval" (282) from Cavendish neighbours—for a year of study at Dalhousie College in Halifax. (She will give Anne the full four years of study that she could not have.) It is fascinating to see Montgomery embrace wider intellectual and social horizons, and to read about life for an ambitious woman at the time: the educational curricula, especially coming from one-room schoolhouses; numerous social events; quasi-independent life in boarding, privately and at the Halifax Ladies' College. Montgomery

can be caustic (of a matron at HLC, "Nature must have meant Miss Ker for a man and got the labels mixed" [299])—but it is clear she loves these years and their opportunities.

At home on the Island, in contrast, are close friendships with cousins, and church and literary socials (some more interesting than others). In this period she teaches in three different communities, showing another side of rural life: one-room schoolhouses with up to sixty students; boarding with strangers; trekking through snow and slush; "a sedate Bideford 'schoolmarm' well versed in the mysteries of rod and rule!" (252). Her experience varies a great deal – she delights in teaching at Bideford, and is miserable in Belmont—but she chafes against less lively, less youthful company. This sense of limits was no doubt exacerbated by the contrast with her growing success as a writer further afield. From local newspapers to American magazines, Montgomery matures from self-doubt to quiet confidence, "slowly but I think surely, climbing up the ladder" (414).

She herself attributes this new skill partly to the traumatic experience that dominates the second part of the volume. She had had "boy friends"—to paraphrase Sheldon Cooper, boys that were friends but not boyfriends—and a few unfortunate and unwanted suitors; but in a few entries we learn 1897 was "a century of suffering and horror" (368): the making and breaking of an engagement to a man she does not love (Edwin Simpson), and a simultaneous, passionate affair with another (Herman Leard) she considers unsuitable for marriage but with whom she came (from the sounds of it) perilously close to intimacy and which provokes lengthy emotional outbursts.

In 2008, Montgomery's granddaughter revealed to *The Globe and Mail* that she believes Montgomery committed suicide; Rubio has disputed this, and she and Waterston prefer to present Montgomery as a frustrated protofeminist perhaps beginning to exhibit signs of depression. Whatever the case, there are few references to psychological gloom before 1897. Montgomery has her difficulties: an unloving stepmother and grandparents; the isolation of a single female schoolteacher who occasionally feels "fagged out, hopeless, and dispirited" (339). But she also "bubbles over" with joy about socializing (159). One of the more interesting moments of self-reflection—which again evokes Emily—is her observation that she possesses both "the passionate Montgomery blood and the Puritan Macneill conscience" (401). However, there is a significant change in the wake of the romantic crisis, exacerbated by the mundane, close routine with her grandmother, and the sudden deaths of Leard and her father. She begins to mention loneliness

repeatedly, and sees a marked difference in herself, from a "happy, light-hearted girl with any amount of ideals and illusions," to a woman who "has a 'past' and its shadow falls ever across her path" (417–18).

But there is also a very Presbyterian "pangless resignation to my lot" (419), assuaged by three sustaining pleasures: books, "those unfailing keys to a world of enchantment" (413); nature, particularly woods, a site of spiritual communion; and her writing. "How I love my work. I seem to grow more and more wrapped up in it as the days pass and other hopes and interests fail me," she writes as 1898 comes to a close (425). There is a notable change in tone by this point: the writing feels self-consciously addressed to anticipated readers, rather an unscripted confidence. Her description of Cavendish (420-24) reads like a memoir or tourbook, rather than a journal – but is a wonderful resource for Montgomery scholars and fans (though with only the briefest mention of the house that inspires Green Gables). Throughout the book are photographs of people and, especially, places, a wonderful addition for imagining Victorian décor and the rural landscape.

The annotations are frequently interesting from an historical perspective, but some are a bit obvious and I hoped for more on what places and people inspire Montgomery's fiction (her uncle's home at Park Corner becomes Silver Bush, etc.). Since we know Montgomery recopied her journals after 1918, the editors might speak to their process of creation and revision, and her desire to see them published. Did we need *The Complete Journals*? For the colour of Victorian Canada, the seeds of some of the most-loved work in Canadian literature, and the texture of a writer's "inner life" (468), these early years are worth reading.

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