

QWrite

the newsletter of the quebec writers' federation

INSIDE:
Dishing the
QWF Awards
Free! Spring
Workshop
insert



February 2006 vol⁸ no³

Mothering the Muse

by Jennifer Boire

It's a common view that all mothers are selfless, compassionate and hard-working. Although far from selfless myself, I admit the mother in me has taken precedence over the writer these past few months. When a deadline is approaching, I only wish I could leave the dishes unwashed, let moldy t-shirts lie on the floor, leave the teens to fend for themselves for supper. In fact, the central conflict in my life right now is how to leave the mother side behind and nurture the writer. How to mother the muse?



Scheherazade told her stories each night to avoid having her head chopped off. Mothers know a lot about sleepless nights, endless stories and little tyrants demanding, "just one more" or off with your head. Inherent to mothering and writing is this conflict of roles that resist merging. In my mind, I can be either a good mother or a good poet. The poet in me hates schedules, discipline and regular habits. She is moody and rebellious and she doesn't like to be disturbed. She equates creativity with messiness. Sometimes the Muse is hard to grab onto, so I spend days writing myself reminders to write in my notebook. Sometimes I actually do it.

continued on page 6...

**JUST \$20 TO IMPROVE YOUR
WRITING CAREER?**

**RENEW YOUR
QWF MEMBERSHIP TODAY!**

If you haven't already sent in your membership dues for 2006, please take the time to do so today. We wouldn't want you to miss any important information about the unique and vibrant Quebec English literary community to which you belong.

A bright green membership form is enclosed with this issue of QWrite, so you can update us on your whereabouts, physical or virtual, your daytime and evening or cell phone numbers, and your membership status.

A cheque for \$20 will get you a shiny new bright green card, along with an updated list of the benefits to which it entitles you. And a cheque that includes a little something extra as a donation will get you a warm feeling in your heart (and a tax deduction).

Thank you!

[www.qwf.org]

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IAN FERRIER

From the President's Desk

I'm missing Irving Layton tonight, thinking of his photo on a 1980s issue of *Matrix* magazine, looking like a beatific cherub. Nothing of the anguished poet in this man! Instead, the fiery poet, the delighted poet, the poet creating himself with language.

I miss Irving Layton because when I open his books he is so alive in his poems, it's hard to imagine he's not around.

So I really appreciated finding that he *is* around: walking into The Word Bookstore to see that Adrian Edwards had blown up that delightful picture of Mr. Layton, and posted it on one of the bookcases. And then walking into the Atwater Library and seeing half a dozen of his books lining the top of a bookcase, where you could open them and read them.

I was born in the decade when Layton was at the height of his career, and while I didn't know him then, I did experience the small-town culture of Canada at the time: sexist and afraid of sex, walking in lock-step with authority whenever there was a clash between an institution and a person.

Irving Layton did his best to blow all of that wide open. He was combative, sure of himself...and exciting! There are few literary figures in this town I felt to be larger than life. Mordecai Richler is one; Layton is another.

Layton turned poetry into a sexy profession in Canada, and now that he's gone, I feel his absence like a call to the rest of the poets in this town: to

attack, engage and reshape our culture with words, to make our poems matter, not just to poets, but to the country, the world, and especially (Mr. Layton's addendum) to attractive members of the opposite sex! That particular persona didn't wear so well after the 1970s, but Layton was more than a persona. His absence has reinforced one of the great things about poetry, which is that if you work at the craft and you're good at it, your words outlive you, and continue to inform and engage a new audience with all the temper and energy of the time in which they were formed.

I'm still running into good poems of his I've never seen before, and I hope to sense his presence around town for a long time to come.

PS: The performance poets' festival, Voix d'Americas, starts on February 10th and runs until the 17th. On Valentine's Day the evening show at the Sala Rossa will present some of the excellent work coming from the West Coast of Canada. Among the featured performances are stories by Ivan Coyote, the hip hop of Kinnie Starr, and the spoken and sung words of a poetry group called The Fugitives. Vancouver is one of the few places in the country with a performance scene as active as Montreal's, and this is a good chance to catch what some of the excitement is about.

And on February 19th the QWF's Words & Music Show will feature a true representative of the African Griot tradition, the great Senegalese musician and poet Sadio Sissokho. That show takes place at the Casa del Popolo, 4873 boul. St-Laurent. The doors open at 8PM, and admission is \$5 (free to QWF members). ☒

PHOTO: MONIQUE DYKSTRA

Calling all QWF members in the greater Sherbrooke area

Interested in starting a regular informal meeting of QWF members from the greater Sherbrooke area?

Most QWF activities are organized in the greater Montreal area, where most members live. Those of us living further east cannot always make it to these functions. Aside from meeting closer to home, starting this informal group could also help us organize carpools whenever we wish to attend a Montreal activity.

Objectives: pool our resources, give each other ideas and tips, invite guest speakers, organize workshops, or just meet with like-minded people. We can take turns meeting in our own homes, at a restaurant, or always in the same member's house, whichever the majority decides. If an activity requires finances, we will divide the cost among those who sign up for it; QWF will help to sponsor activities where possible.

If interested, contact: Toni Bos, tonibos@videotron.ca, or call 819-864-4348. ☒

member news

In his new chapbook, *How Did I Get Here: a tale for the middle-aged*, **Philip Amstel** uses a pastiche of medieval verse forms to express the continuity of the present and the past. It is the most recent publication in a series which explores literary genres as a way to express contemporary problems. It can be purchased at Footnotes.

Erato Sahapoglu's short story "Melek" was included in Spinetingler Magazine's "Short Story Anthology 2005," edited by K. Robert Einarson. The anthology is available at Amazon.ca.

A few recent and imminent fiction publications by **Claude Lalumière**: "Different Flesh" at *SciFiction*; "Anew Day" at *The Virtuous Medlar Circle*; "Secretly Wishing for Rain" in *The Mammoth Book of Best New Erotica 5*; "Motherfucker" in *Red Scream #0.2*; "This Is the Ice Age" in *Mythspring*.

Elise Moser has recently had stories published in *Prairie Fire*, *The Dalhousie Review* and *Descant*, and she received a "Highly Commended" in the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association Short Story Competition; her story "Or Be Killed" has been recorded for broadcast by CBA member stations around the world.

Matthew Anderson's story "Charity in Her Flesh" appears in *Lust for Life: Tales of Sex and Love* (Véhicule Press), a new short story anthology edited by **Elise Moser** and **Claude Lalumière**. The book, which features nine Montreal writers, will be launched in Montreal on February 13 at the Sergeant Recruteur.

A Bloom of Friendship: The Story of the Canadian Tulip Festival (Lobster Press), written by **Anne Renaud**, has been short-listed for the 2006 Silver Birch Award for children's non-fiction. Using authentic photographs, timelines, maps and newspaper clippings, it tells how Canadian troops in WWII helped to develop a special friendship between Canada and The Netherlands. Anne's next children's book, entitled *How the Sea Came to Marissa*, will be published in April by Oregon-based publisher, Beyond Words Publishing.

Poet **Rae Marie Taylor** presented a new solo Spoken Word show, *An Earthly Hour, A Human Time* at the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe, New Mexico in May 2005. David Gossage, Montreal composer and musician, and Carl Bernstein, New Mexican guitarist, performed with her in the two-hour show. Bernstein accompanied her for a shorter version of the show in Denver, Colorado.

Michael Blair's newest book, *Overexposed, A Granville Island Mystery* (Dundurn Press) will be launched on Thursday, February 16, 2006, 7:00-9:00 PM at Nicholas Hoare, 1366 Greene Ave., Westmount, QC (514-933-4201). *Overexposed* is a sequel to *If Looks Could Kill*, which was a finalist in the 1999 Chapters/Robertson Davies Prize and shortlisted for the 2001 Quebec Writers' Federation First Book Award. ☒

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE ATWATER LIBRARY

ATWATER BOOK CLUB

Led by Montreal Author Mary Soderstrom
FREE ADMISSION

February 15 at 7:30 pm

All the King's Men by Robert Penn Warren
An American classic, now a movie with Sean Penn

March 15 at 7:30 pm

Runaway by Alice Munro
Short stories by the Canadian master

April 12 at 7:30 pm

The Extraordinary Garden by François Gravel
A love story of marriage, temptation and fidelity

May 10 at 7:30 pm

Crow Lake by Mary Lawson
Shortlisted for Amazon/Books in Canada First Novel Award

June 14 at 7:30 pm

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho
A shepherd seeks his destiny, by the Brazilian writer

ATWATER POETRY PROJECT

Wine & Cheese at 6:30 pm, Reading at 7 pm
Organized by Oana Avasilichioaei

FREE ADMISSION

Thurs., Feb. 16: rob mclennan, Boris Kletinich & Anne Cimon

Thurs., March 30: Erin Moure & Nicole Brossard

Thurs., April 13: Richard Harrison & Meredith Quartermain

Mon., May 29: Stephen Humphrey and Raymond Hsu

ATWATER AUTHOR READING

Wednesday, April 19 at 7 pm

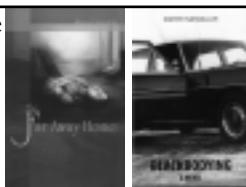
Featuring *George Elliott Clarke*
Wine & Cheese at 6:30 pm
Sponsored by Canada Council for the Arts

The 2005 QWF Award Winners

McAuslan First Book Prize

MARCI DENESIUK
The Far Away Home
NeWest Press

DIMITRI NASRALLAH
Blackbodying
DC Books



Translation Prize



FRED A. REED
Truth or Death: The Quest for Immortality in the Western
Narrative Tradition
Talonbooks
(From Raconter et mourir, by Thierry Hentsch)

Mavis Gallant Prize for Non-Fiction

FRED BRUEMMER
Survival: A Refugee Life
Key Porter Books



A. M. Klein Prize for Poetry

ERIN MOURE
Little Theatres
House of Anansi Press



Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction

NEIL BISSOONDATH
The Unyielding Clamour of the Night
Cormorant Books



Community Award



GUY RODGERS
Director, English-Language Arts Network (ELAN)

The QWF Gala is looking more and more like the Gillers – except with more heart

This year's version of the QWF Awards was one of the slickest and most well-orchestrated of recent memory. That may have been partially due to the professionalism host **Tracy McKee** brought to the stage (**photo 1**). She confessed that normally at this time of the evening she's already in bed, since she's got an early morning talk show on Global TV in Montreal. A great fan of books and authors, she's forced many local writers to get up much earlier than they can imagine. Not that **Guy Rodgers (with wife Louise, photo 2)** would have a problem with that. This year's Community Award winner shatters all myths of writers as vain, selfish and lazy. The judges were working overtime this year as well, apparently. Echoing a recent Giller Prize toss-up, the McAuslan First Book Prize was shared by **Marci Densiuk**, left, and **Dimitri Nasrallah**, right (**photo 3**). Actually, we'd like to give prizes to everyone, including each audience member in the jam-packed cabaret, but finding the sponsors might be a little more than we could handle. **William Weintraub (with wife Magda, photo 4)** was a finalist who graciously conceded the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction to the unstoppable **Neil Bissoondath**, who was too dedicated to teaching his students to collect his prize in person. But survivor **Fred Bruemmer (photo 5, left)** was there, receiving accolades and the Mavis Gallant Prize for Non-Fiction from **Peter Ross**, Academic Dean of Vanier College. And what's a Gala without a little light jazz? Three-piece band Jazz-a-licious (**photo 6**) returned for a second year to set the mood and try and calm finalists' nerves. It didn't look like **Matthew Fox (photo 7)** needed to relax, however. A finalist for the McAuslan First Book Prize, he's such a cutie we just had to put his picture in. Thanks to the Royal Bank Financial Group, as well as the individual prize sponsors, for their support of this year's Gala Awards Ceremony.

- Byron Rempel

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ALL PHOTOS: MONIQUE DYKSTRA

mothering the muse... cont.

Maybe the trouble I have is with my *image* of writers and mothers: mothers are supposed to love their offspring unconditionally, drop their own projects to sew elastics on ballet shoes or drive someone to the video store. Mothers don't say "go away," when their daughters come bugging them for help with French homework. They don't put up a sign on their office door that says DO NOT DISTURB. In my mind, a "real" writer is a cranky old man with a pipe and beard who works in his study and never lets any children or noise in. Children tiptoe around him and never dare hug him. At his door stands a wife, ready to shoo the young ones away and answer the phone, deal with the plumber and cook the meals. Ah, the wife... well, that would be me.

It feels like the "real writers" are cooped up like hermits behind closed doors or in mountain retreats communing with the Muse. And the "real mothers" are baking brownies, washing floors and carpooling hockey teams. But I am a hybrid: a writing mother, and I manage to do both, with some compromise.

If I don't mother the Muse, i.e., make time to write, my inner Hemingway comes alive. Then watch out! Mothering the Muse sometimes means answering her call in the middle of the night, or finding the tiny cracks in the day's schedule where inspiration wafts up, in between breakfast dishes and homework and chauffeur service to after-school activities. It can also mean

absolute stillness and silence. But in the past 10 years I have somehow managed to publish a book and a chapbook, and to teach a course in journal writing, all while raising two kids.

Mothering has become a theme, a puzzle I am trying to figure out in my writing. My first book, *Little Mother*, explored in prose and poetry my first pregnancy, childbirth and nursing, as well as the earlier drama of living with an alcoholic mother. My latest creative project is a play about Eve's mother. Mothering the Muse, musing on mothering, it has all become one. Ideally, with a little help to manage household duties – cleaning ladies are true angels – and a little support from the Muse, a new manuscript will soon be in the mail to publishing houses. So, Muse, I am making an appointment with you for 9:00 a.m. tomorrow morning – whoops, I forgot, school is out tomorrow. How about next week? ☒

Fourth QWF Mentorship Program Knowledge, experience, and a good time

Still waiting for those non-fiction mentors...

The 2005-2006 mentorship program was launched in December, with six new pairs of emerging and established writers in three genres working together for four months. Applications to the program were up overall, with a slight decline in numbers of potential mentors. In fact, no non-fiction mentors applied, so there are no partnerships in that area. We expect that this was a fluke, and hope to see some non-fiction writers enter the field next fall, so that we can help pass their knowledge and experience to deserving protégés!

We are particularly pleased to have two Quebec-city writers—Madeleine Thien and Aurian Haller—participating in the program this year.

The successful applicants in this year's competition, with mentors listed first, are:

Fiction

Claire Rothman and Elise Moser
Ian McGillis and Faustus Salvador
Madeleine Thien and Daniel Taylor

Playwriting/Screenwriting

Bryden MacDonald and Jeff Achtem

Poetry:

Aurian Haller and Sarah Shaughnessy
Maxianne Berger and Elena Johnson ☒

*All writers are vain,
selfish, and lazy.*
- Orson Welles

leaving the house to write in a café, waking up 15 minutes earlier to write a few morning pages, or spending the day at a friend's cottage, where the octopus of household tasks does not live. I have to check my "mother guilt" at the door, though; it's only one more block to my creativity.

Self-discipline and summoning up the courage to value my work above all other tasks are the biggest part of the challenge. Like most writers, I find that the trick is the *doing* of it, not the thinking about it. Maybe I can't lock myself away in a cabin in

did we mention that you should renew?

New Quebec Writers Out Loud

The ones to watch – and hear

The last time we picked a winner was some guy named Pi

While QWF has presented many great writers through our ongoing Writers Out Loud series, this season two special evenings will feature some of the newest and best voices emerging from Quebec. All six writers have already won prizes or been shortlisted for major awards, so these evenings are really a peek into the future of Quebec writing.

The first New Quebec Writers Out Loud on February 22 will feature **Matthew Fox**, **Ibi Kaslik** and **Dimitri Nasrallah**.

Nasrallah, a native of Beirut, Lebanon, has seen his first novel *Blackbodying* (DC Books) capture two awards and a number of nominations. He shared the 2005 QWF McAuslan First Book Prize (with Marci Denesiuk, who will be featured in the second New Writers series), and won the David McKeen Award, as well as being a finalist for the Grand prix du livre de Montréal and the Independent Publishers' Book Prize.

Matthew Fox, Associate Editor of *Maisonneuve Magazine*, saw his *Cities of Weather* (Cormorant Books) shortlisted for the QWF McAuslan First Book Prize, while Ibi Kaslik's debut novel *Skinny* was shortlisted for Amazon.ca/Books in Canada's Best First Novel Award. *Skinny* is also being translated into several languages for foreign releases.

The evening will be hosted by Jon Paul Fiorentino, QWF board member and author of *Asthmatica*.

QWF's second evening of new Quebec writers, takes place on April 12 of this year – watch your emails and the QWF website for details. ☒

NEW QUEBEC WRITERS OUT LOUD

Join us for the first of two special evenings
featuring emerging Quebec writers
Wednesday, February 22, 2006, 8:00 p.m.

Casa del Popolo
(4873 St. Laurent in Montreal)
\$5 entry fee

QWF is grateful for the support of *Montreal, World Book Capital*, which made this event possible.



A Quebec English Literature Database

100s of books for your reading pleasure

And that's just the beginning

For more than 10 years every book submitted for the QWF Awards has become part of the QWF Collection, a list of over 500 books that have found a nice warm home on the shelves of the Atwater Library.

We've been trying to bring this collection online for quite a few years, and this year—with the help of a generous donation from one of our most supportive members, Judith Mappin—we'll do just that.

On February 28th at 6pm at the Atwater Library we'll launch the QWF Literary Database, an online database of Quebec English authors and their works.

With the support of the Montreal World Book Capital committee, at the same time we'll also bring you a photo exhibit of Quebec English authors. The exhibit is a special treat, as it represents the work of Mr. Terence Byrnes—a writer himself, and a man who has been creating portraits of the Quebec English writing community for almost a decade. If you've read the *Montreal Review of Books*, you've seen his work on its cover. Fourteen of his portraits are framed for the vernissage on the 28th. In addition, the database itself contains many more of his photos as part of the info pages on Quebec English authors.

It should be noted that the database does not contain all of Quebec's great English authors. Until the mid '90s our book collection was fragmentary. What the exhibit does present—through portraits, books and information—is a picture of the authors who are making an impact on our current literary scene.

The database is a living project. In the future we hope to extend its reach to include all the people we think of first whenever we assess the great English writers of Quebec. It will also grow with the inclusion of the books submitted for the QWF Awards each year. One of my personal ambitions is to ensure that we translate its contents into French.

It's a remarkable project already, and on behalf of the QWF I would like to invite you to join our partners—the Atwater Library, the Montreal World Book Capital Committee and Canadian Heritage—in taking a first look at the QWF Literary Database.

So please be our guests as we open the collection at the library on the 28th at 6PM. We'll serve refreshments, meet authors, and take an interesting tour through our community as represented by its books, its authors, and its new presence on the internet. ☒

This is your board

In order to give all our members an idea of who is behind the direction of QWF, we're starting a new feature to introduce you to our Board of Directors. This issue, we spotlight our two newest members, Jennifer Boire and Marianne Ackerman, and pay tribute to Past President Julie Keith.

Jennifer Boire is a Montreal writer who has published poetry and short stories across Canada and on the net. She has also been known to write book reviews for *Prairie Fire*, and lead journal-writing workshops for women on the theme of Writing the Body. In 2003, she published the chapbook *A Place of Trees* with Over the Moon press, a series of poems based on a re-imagining of Eve. *Little Mother*, a book of poems and pregnancy journal was published by Hochelaga Press in 1997. A mini-CD of recorded poems, *Holding the Song*, came out in 2005 with Wiredonwords and can be found in the cigarette machine at the Casa del Popolo.

Some of her poetry was translated into French and performed with Kim Gosselin on cello for the Maison de la Poésie festival last June and again at the 5th annual Words & Music Gala in October. Jennifer says that the most exciting poetry event she has read at was the Festival de la Poésie in Trois Rivières.

Jennifer's love of writing came later in life, awakened by a creative writing workshop in London, Ontario with Marianne Micros. Back in Montreal in 1986, she earned a BA and an MA in Creative Writing at Concordia over the next 10 years (during which time two children were born, one in the back seat of her father-in-law's car, but that's another story). Among other professors, she remembers with fondness poet Irving Layton, whose most memorable line was "a poem should have the life of a mosquito."

Jennifer is not new to serving her literary community: she was the League of Canadian Poets rep for Quebec and Nunavut from 2003 to 2005. She is pleased to join the board of the Quebec Writers' Federation.

After a seven-year absence, **Marianne Ackerman** has moved back to Montreal and says she's thrilled to be part of the cultural scene again as board member at QWF. A journalist, playwright and long-time artistic director of Theatre 1774, she published her first novel in 2000 while living in the south of France.

The critically-acclaimed *Jump* recounted the story of free-spirited Myra Grant, who flees Montreal after the 1995 referendum to escape the burdens of doing theatre and freelancing on the Plateau Mont-Royal.

Ms. Ackerman's new novel is *Matters of Hart*, a picaresque tale of a 50-something man-about-town who goes underground in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Hart's eventual return to Montreal—where everyone thinks he's dead—is a scene of great

mirth and humiliation. She's currently working on a new novel about Ranavalona, the tyrant Queen of Madagascar. As for the south of France, Marianne and playwright Kent Stetson will keep those home fires burning with a series of writers' workshops in La Roque Alric this May and June. For more information, see the website:

www.marianneackerman.com.

Past President Julie Keith *will be stepping down from the QWF board after many years of dedicated service. QWrite asked Guy Rodgers, a longtime friend and collaborator, to help us pay tribute to Julie.*

I first got to know **Julie Keith** on the board of QSPELL when the awards system was being revamped. Although it was agreed that changes needed to be made, there was little consensus about exactly what they should be. To complicate matters, a new board was elected in April and we had less than eight weeks to poll QSPELL members, propose changes, debate them and put them to a vote so that they could be implemented in time for the 1996 submissions deadlines. It is impossible to make such major changes in extreme haste without a great deal of confidence from all concerned. Julie Keith was someone that both long-standing QSPELL board members and the literary community trusted. Her unwavering support for the changes was instrumental in getting them adopted.

The proposed merger of QSPELL and FEWQ in 1998 was another volatile proposition. Most people agreed that a merger was a good idea in theory but one fraught with potential risks for both organizations. Julie was trusted by both the writers of FEWQ and the founders of QSPELL. Her support of the merger played a key role in both organizations voting to join forces to create the Quebec Writers' Federation.

Julie has worked tirelessly on behalf of the literary community for more than a decade. Her accomplishments are many. She initiated the campaign to fund the QSPELL (now QWF) awards and personally negotiated the first sponsorships. Julie has served as president of QWF, which was a natural role for her, and as treasurer, which was a stretch, but one which she handled with customary deftness and professionalism. For more than a decade Julie Keith has been a pillar of the QSPELL/QWF board. Her good judgment, team spirit, civility and unwavering commitment have been a constant inspiration and will be sorely missed. ☒



Photo: Monique Dykstra