



Spring 2008 vol¹⁰ no³

A Writer in the CEGEPs

BY CLAIRE HOLDEN ROTHMAN

My favourite moment as a visiting writer at CEGEP comes after the reading is over and everyone is filing out of the auditorium. A couple of students always linger—the shy ones, those who didn't or couldn't speak out before. They sort of sidle up, and after a few words it comes out. *They write*. Poems, stories, plays—genre doesn't seem to matter much. What matters is that they're doing it, and that I am, too. There is this link.

The Writers in CEGEPs program does much more, of course, than allow writers the chance to hook up. Funded by the Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications, and administered by the *Union des écrivaines et des écrivains québécois* (UNEQ) with help from QWF, it aims to “promote language-arts skills by introducing students to English-language writing in Quebec.”

I've been involved in the program since it started in 1999. At that time, I was still teaching literature and creative writing at Marianopolis College in Montreal, and I immediately plunged in and invited local writers to my classes. During the program's first three years, I served on the jury that selected eligible writers, and I also got involved as a writer.

Because of my day job, I was already familiar with the English CEGEPs. I visited a couple of them, including my own *alma mater* Vanier College. When I was a student there in the late seventies, the system was still in its infancy. I loved it

because most of my teachers were students themselves, reading and exploring material for their PhDs. I remember feeling surrounded by minds that were alive and curious, on both sides of the podium.

After visits to Vanier and John Abbott (I couldn't visit Marianopolis because I was teaching there), I decided to branch out into new territory—the French sector. I sent my CV and a cover letter. A couple phoned right back, inviting me to give readings and fiction workshops. I worried about the workshops, although there was no need. English proficiency in the French CEGEPs in downtown Montreal is impressive. At CEGEP du Vieux Montreal, for instance, upper-level students

did wonderfully in a workshop on writing from the five senses.

One of my best experiences in the program has been with St. Lawrence College, a small English-language institution in Quebec City.

THE CEGEP ISSUE

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QWF PRESIDENT

Marianne Ackerman

It doesn't take a Martian or even an out-of-towner to notice that Montreal is in the grip of a serious makeover. On a recent Sunday afternoon, I headed down St. Laurent Blvd., past a hungry lineup outside Schwartz' deli and into an ever-thickening crowd at the intersection of Prince Arthur St., where the level of activity suggested a sidewalk sale in progress. Sure, it was the first voluptuous, snowbank-melting burst of spring, but I swear the energy resembled a work day.

Statistics back up this impression that, collectively, we're busier now than we were in the 90s: Quebec's employment rate is higher than it has been for many years. The 2006 census confirmed that the decades-long exodus of young Anglophones has turned around. Twenty- and thirty-year-olds are our new visible minority. Audible too—they're fully equipped with new technology, pathologically dedicated to staying in touch.

One of my guilty pleasures is eavesdropping in public places, which is a good hobby to have these days. Otherwise cellphone non-etiquette would be just plain annoying. On the evidence, hyper-communication isn't just a generational phenomenon. A dizzying number of people are caught up in projects, schemes, issues and plans that need to be talked about. Public space has become a noisy marketplace. Technology has shattered the rhythm of a day, a week. Timelines and even geographical boundaries between work, leisure and the rest of life are getting blurry.

The pros and cons of social change tend to stack up according to one's personal level of optimism or its opposite, so any judgment I might render would inevitably be contested. Instead, I'll concentrate on the evidence. Anglophone Quebec's cultural life is showing signs of strength and renewal. The Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival will mark its 10th anniversary April 30 to May 4 with a staggering array of writers and events. A multilingual festival, Blue Met's many achievements surely include giving Anglo Montreal's cultural image a boost. On the performance scene, Centaur Theatre has a new artistic director in Roy Surette. His 2008-09 season looks tantalizing.




GWYN CAMPBELL

Increased prosperity, a dash of optimism, way more coffee—whatever the causes, there's a crackle in the air. For these reasons among others, I'm excited to be taking on the challenge of serving as president of the Quebec Writers' Federation, an organization with a great record and plenty of potential.

Founded 10 years ago by a fusion of The Federation of English Writers of Quebec (FEWQ) and the Quebec Society for the Promotion of English-Language Literature (QSPELL), QWF has been growing and expanding its activities for several seasons running. With some 550 members, this organisation is clearly tapping into a community committed to the cause of writing. Over the next year, I'd like to find out more about who joins, why you join, and something of the longings, unanswered questions and curiosities that lurk behind the act of scratching out a cheque for twenty dollars.

Most of all, I hope all QWF board members will find many occasions to meet members personally. Stay tuned for invitations to meet, and meanwhile, please keep in touch. ☎

 <p>THE NEWSLETTER OF THE QUEBEC WRITERS' FEDERATION</p> <p>Spring 2008 vol¹⁰ no³</p> <p>Editor in Chief: Byron Rempel Issue Editors: Elise Moser & Raquel Rivera QWrite Editorial Board: Kate Orland Bere, Mélanie Grondin, Elise Moser, Raquel Rivera, Claire Holden Rothman, Aparna Sanyal, Morton Trier, Lori Schubert ISSN: 1499-7797 ISBN/ISSN: 1195-0323</p>	<p>QWF STAFF AND BOARD Executive Director: Lori Schubert Office Assistant: Julia Kater</p> <p>QWF Board of Directors Executive: Marianne Ackerman, President Allan Mass, Vice-President Leonard Eichel, Treasurer John Ayles, Secretary Ami Sands Brodoff, Ian Ferrier, Members at Large Peter Dubé, Past President</p>	<p>La Quebec Writers' Federation remercie le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, et le Conseil des arts de Montréal, de leur appui financier. The QWF also thanks the Canada Council for the Arts and Canadian Heritage for their financial support, as well as QWF members for their generosity.</p>
<p>www.qwf.org (514) 933.0878 • admin@qwf.org 1200 Atwater Avenue, Suite 3 Montreal, Quebec H3Z 1X4</p>	<p>Directors: Louise Abbott, Licia Canton, Bryan Demchinsky, Jon Paul Fiorentino, Angela Leuck, Linda Leith, Elise Moser, Louis Rastelli, H. Nigel Thomas, Sherwin Tjia, Merrily Weisbord</p>	 <p>Canadian Patrimoine Heritage canadien</p>

A Writer in the CEGEPs

CONTINUED FROM COVER PAGE

A number of years ago I hooked up with teacher Bob McBryde (see interview below). St. Lawrence is a friendly place, and I have loved traveling to Quebec City, but what really sets it apart for me is Bob's innovative teaching style. On one visit, he requested that I adapt scenes from my short stories for the stage, which his theatre students then performed. Another time, he had his business-English students draw up literary marketing pamphlets to sell my talents. And his journalism students conducted live interviews with me, onstage. No mean feat, as for many of them, English is a second language.

In case you hadn't guessed, I am a fan of the program. It's given me exposure and cash, two things which are always welcome, but more importantly, it's introduced me to readers and writers I would not otherwise have met. ∞

Claire Holden Rothman has published two collections of stories. The Heart Specialist, a novel, is due out in 2009.

A teacher in CEGEP: Bob McBryde explains it all for you

BY CLAIRE HOLDEN ROTHMAN

CHR: *Can you tell us a bit about your CEGEP?*

Bob McBryde: CEGEP Champlain St. Lawrence in Quebec City is the only English CEGEP east of Montreal and Sherbrooke. It was formerly a private boys' college, and has a traditional character that is still maintained despite changing demographics.

CHR: *What changes have you seen in the course of your career?*

BM: Well, our 800-strong student body has become much more Francophone (around 80 to 85 percent). We've managed to keep pace by developing support projects to help these students survive and flourish in an English school. For instance, I coordinate the English Writing Workshop, which helps students with written English. I also run the English peer tutor program that emerged for the same reason.

CHR: *What do you teach?*

BM: Depending on the year, I teach core courses such as Composition and Literature, Drama, Poetry and Long Fiction for both business and academic stream students. I also teach option courses such as Acting and Theatre, Journalism and Creative Writing. I'm finishing my 30th year of teaching and am moving into retirement mode.

CHR: *What are some highlights from the Writers in CEGEPs (WiC) visits?*

BM: I've organized eight or nine visits by WiC writers over the last six years. Three writers, Claire Holden Rothman, Ami Sands Brodoff and Aurian Haller have come to our school, the first two several times. Each has managed to establish close contact with the students through high-

ly interactive workshops tailored to the needs and demographics of our students. The students have been involved in group creative endeavours and have been encouraged to ask questions. I would say that the extraordinary level of student participation has stood out as a highlight along with the many super questions and issues the students have raised. Each time the writers come, they meet with around 70 kids—that's a lot of contact!

CHR: *How do the students react?*

BM: They're knocked out by meeting "real live writers" and come away with a lot of prejudices dispelled. Some even want to buy the authors' books. They have found our guests fun—not at all stiff.

CHR: *What does this program bring your CEGEP?*

BM: Here in Quebec City there are few opportunities to meet with Anglophone artists, so the WiC program meets an important need in our little community. Also, people of CEGEP age are impressionable and this contact can powerfully affect their reading and writing habits and level of motivation.

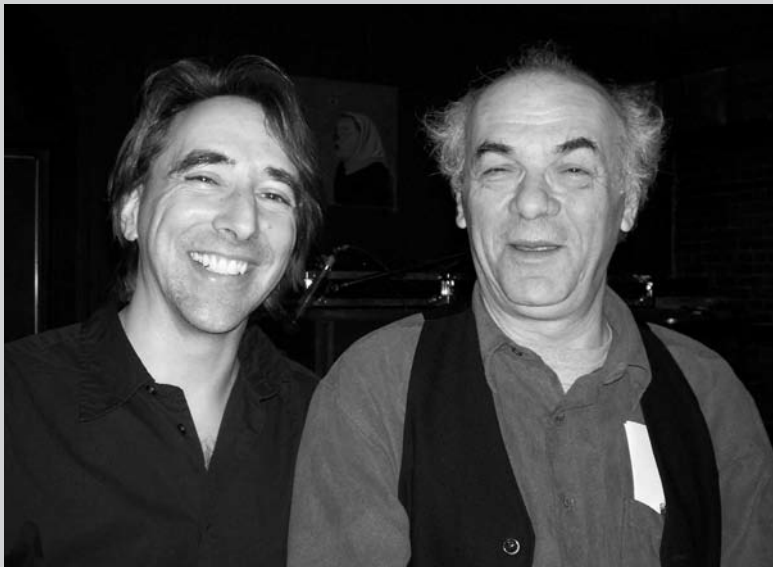
CHR: *Any suggestions for improvement?*

BM: I would suggest raising the program's profile in French and English CEGEPs both within and outside of Montreal. French CEGEPs offer many advanced English courses which focus on fiction. This is a perfect target clientele. ∞



CHRIS BROSSEAU

LYTA ODELLIA FIREBIRD




WRITERS OUT LOUD

On March 25 an enthusiastic Writers Out Loud crowd gathered at the Casa del Popolo to hear **Andre Farkas** (right) interviewed by fellow poet **Jason Camlot** (left). Andre seduced the audience with his humour-filled poetry, blending social critique and clever wordplay with the many flavours of bilingual Montreal.

WHAT IS THIS **CEGEP** YOU SPEAK OF?

“A CEGEP (French: *Cégep*) is a post-secondary education institution exclusive to the province of Quebec in Canada. CEGEP is a French acronym for *Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel*, meaning ‘College of General and Vocational Education.’

The purpose of CEGEPs is to make post-secondary education more accessible in Quebec, as well as to provide proper academic preparation for university. There are both public and private subsidized CEGEPs with the public CEGEPs having little or no tuition fee. The CEGEP system was started in 1967 by the Quebec provincial government and originally had 12 CEGEPs. Today there are 48 CEGEPs in Quebec, of which 5 are English-language CEGEPs. There are also 50 private colleges, including 6 English-language colleges.” 

From Wikipedia, “the free encyclopedia.”

ELISE MOSER



BACK ROW: MAYA MERRICK, DAVE MCGIMPSEY, JOE VILLAVERDE, SALEEMA NAWAZ, IAN MCGILLIS, NIKI PAQUIN, ROBYN SARAH. **FRONT ROW:** ALEXANDRIA HABER, JULIA AINSWORTH, KATHARINE O’FLYNN, SHELAGH PLUNKETT, MICHAEL LITHGOW, ELAINE KALMAN NAVES, LINDA KAY

SEVEN “REAL DEALS” IN MENTORED WRITING

April 7 saw nearly a hundred people packed into the back room at Café Cine Express to hear the 2008 Mentorship Program protégés read from the work they have done over the last four months. Each reader was introduced by his or her mentor, and without exception the mentors were eloquent in praise of their protégés and of the program. The protégés, for their parts, revealed a succession of consistently high-quality texts, well read. Saleema Nawaz and Katharine O’Flynn read from novels-in-progress. Joe Villaverde read from a story that will appear in his new collection. Shelagh Plunkett and Niki Paquin both read from moving works of creative non-fiction; both had Himalayan themes and were touchingly personal, yet they were also strikingly different. Michael Lithgow read poems and an excerpt from Julia Ainsworth’s gritty drama set in Kingston’s “P4W” was read by a team of actors. Every one of these writers is, as mentor Ian McGillis put it, “the real deal.”

Writers in
CEGEPs – 2008-2009
CALL FOR
APPLICATIONS

WRITERS WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN APPROVED FOR THE WRITERS IN CEGEPS PROGRAM DO NOT NEED TO REAPPLY.

This summer, a selection committee will be convened by the Quebec Writers' Federation to evaluate applications from **published** English-language writers to participate in the Writers in CEGEPs program of Quebec's Ministry of Culture and Communication. Detailed information about the program is on the QWF Web site, at www.qwf.org/programs.

Participating writers receive an honorarium of \$500 per day for a day of readings and lectures, or a day of writing workshops, and \$400 per day for a day of meetings and discussions. To participate, you must be entered in the current repertoire. **If you are not currently on the list and you wish to participate, you must submit the application form (available at qwf.org) and five copies of a sample of your published work to the QWF office by June 30, 2008.** This work can be in the form of books, or photocopied excerpts and articles (please submit a minimum of 25 pages.) A three-person selection committee composed of writers and teachers familiar with the CEGEP milieu will review the material. You should note that this application requires a brief outline of what activity you propose to do in the classroom.

In the fall, CEGEPs will receive information about the program. We recommend that writers who have been approved for the project make their own efforts to get bookings.

Visits will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and CEGEPs are eligible for only two visits a year.

For more information, contact the QWF office.

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



The second floor of the Atwater Library was the setting for what will likely be the simplest electoral proceeding we'll see in 2008. On Monday March 31, the QWF Annual General Meeting saw Peter Dubé, President for the last two years, graciously transferring the position over to our new President Marianne Ackerman. Three new directors were also elected: Leonard Eichel, Angela Leuck and Elise Moser.

QWF Board of Directors

Executive:

Marianne Ackerman	President
Allan Mass	Vice-President
Leonard Eichel	Treasurer
John Ayles	Secretary
Ami Sands Brodoff, Ian Ferrier	Members at Large
Peter Dubé	Past President

Directors:

Louise Abbott, Licia Canton, Bryan Demchinsky, Jon Paul Fiorentino, Angela Leuck, Linda Leith, Elise Moser, Louis Rastelli, H. Nigel Thomas, Sherwin Tjia, Merrily Weisbord. ☎

LEFT, BOARD MEMBER LINDA LEITH AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER AT LARGE AMI SANDS BRODOFF AT THE AGM; RIGHT, NEW QWF PRESIDENT MARIANNE ACKERMAN ACCEPTS THE HONOUR.



Do we gotta spell it out for ya?

Here's how it works: every issue, four times a year, you send us your literary news. Anything. Story or poem in a magazine, radio dramas, produced plays, your most recent award or contest win, grant acceptance, residency. Your book sale, the subsequent auction for world rights, and that Man Booker thing. We print it, and you are automatically eligible to win a book. Check your QWF Electronic Newsletter for updates on which book is currently in our spotlight.

Send your news to info@qwf.com, with "Member News" in the subject line.

For this issue, QWrite has a beautiful photography book, *Nocturnes*, by Christ Faust. The winner, drawn out of a straw pork-pie hat, was Jeffrey Moore, no stranger to prizes (see below).

Members of the QWrite Editorial Board and staff are not eligible for the quarterly prizes.

MEMBER NEWS

DRAW WINNER:

Translation rights for **Jeffrey Moore's** novel *The Memory Artists* have been recently acquired by publishers in Brazil (Record), Denmark (Tiderne Skifter) and Korea (Prunsoop), bringing the total to 16 countries. In addition, film rights have been renewed by Little Bird / Working Title (*Bridget Jones Diary*, *Elizabeth*, etc.) in the UK, with production scheduled to begin in 2009.

Anne Renaud's third historical non-fiction book for 9–12 year olds, entitled *Pier 21: Stories from Near and Far*, released by Montreal children's publisher Lobster Press, has been nominated for the 2008–09 Hackmatack Children's Choice Book Award. The official launch of the book will take place at Pier 21 on Canada Day. Anne's previous work has been nominated for the Silver Birch Award, the Hackmatack Children's Choice Award and the Red Cedar Book Award.

Lise Weil, who participated in our 2003–2004 mentorship program under Elaine Kalman Naves, recently wrote in to the office: "...this is to let you know that I've just been awarded a Canada Council Grant to continue (and I hope complete) work on [a] memoir, and that I won a fellowship at VCCA (Virginia Center for the Creative Arts) for the month of April, also for that purpose. I continue to be enormously grateful to the mentorship program for getting me started."

Tuk and The Whale, **Raquel Rivera's** historic fiction for early readers, was released this spring by Groundwood Books, who say: "Scrupulously researched, this beautifully told story will inspire extremely topical discussion about communication between two groups of people with entirely different world views."

Montreal author **Ami Sands Brodoff** has a new novel, *The White Space Between*, which will be published this fall. The story centres on a mother and daughter grappling with the impact of the Holocaust and is a love song to Montreal, Ami's adopted home city.

Beverly Akerman was recently awarded a Fellowship to Summer Fishtrap, a week-long writer's workshop in Enterprise, Oregon. She will attend in July. She was also named a Finalist in the 2007 Writers' Union of Canada Short Prose Competition for Developing Writers, the second time she has received this honour. Her story "Paternity" will appear this month in *Descant*; in mid-April, Beverly read the story at the launch party for *Descant's* 140th issue, *Improvisations*. She was also recently awarded a Honourable Mention for the Writers' Federation of New Brunswick's David Adams Richards Prize for an unpublished manuscript of short stories, judged by Joel Thomas Hynes. In June, she'll be returning to the Kenyon Review's fiction writers' workshop with novelist Brad Kessler.

Room Magazine (volume 31.1) has published two poems by **Mélanie Grondin**, "Embrace" and "Head."

Rae Marie Taylor, **Peter Richardson** and **Norm Sibum** are the three Quebec poets included in *Crossing Lines*, an anthology of poets who immigrated to Canada during the Vietnam era. The first launch was in Toronto on April 27 at The Revival, 783 College Street, from 2:00–4:00 pm. British Columbian launchings in Victoria, Vancouver, Nanaimo, Nelson will follow in May.

Joshua Levy recently received Honourable Mention in the 2008 CBC literary competition. He also had a story in the April 17th edition of the *Canadian Jewish News*, in their annual literary supplement.

Carolyn Van Der Meer has had one poem and two short prose pieces accepted for publication in *Helios*—the call for which she saw in QWF's monthly e-news.

Ilna Martonfi's poems and non-fiction memoir have recently appeared in: *Vallum* 5:2 Spirit Poems, Spring 2008; and in *Accenti Magazine*, Spring 2008. Her work received a Honourable Mention in

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MORE MEMBER NEWS

the 2007 Quebec Writing Competition. She has most recently had a story published in the CBC Story Anthology III, *In Other Words: New English Writing from Quebec* (Véhicule Press, 2008).

Licia Canton's *Almond Wine and Fertility*, a collection of short stories, will be launched at the 10th Blue Metropolis Montreal International Literary Festival. Set in Canada and in Italy, *Almond Wine and Fertility* explores the subtleties, the humour and the complexity of modern life.

Heather O'Neill's *Lullabies for Little Criminals*, having won the Canada Reads competition and the Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction, has now been shortlisted for the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction.

Rawi Hage's *De Niro's Game*, which won both QWF's McAuslan First Book Prize and the Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction in 2006, is now on the short list for The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

Muriel Gold has had three publications in the past year. Her book, *A Gift for their Mother. The Saidye Bronfman Centre. A History*, published in October, 2007 by MIRI Productions, Montreal, and launched at the Segal Centre for the Performing Arts, has received rave reviews in the Montreal papers such as the *Gazette*. The book, well researched and "spiced with backstage anecdotes," tells the story of the Centre's 40-year history from its beginnings in 1967 under Marion André up until its recent transition to the Segal Centre. Her chapter "Unrestricted Dream" appeared in *Living Legacies: A Collection of Inspirational Contemporary Canadian Jewish Women* (ed. Liz Pearl, PK Press, Toronto, 2007), and her chapter "The Fictional Family in the Drama Class and Across the Curriculum" is included in *Interactive and Improvisational Drama: Varieties of Applied Theatre and Performance* (ed. Adam Blatner, New York, iUniverse, Inc., 2007). Muriel gives talks and readings from her books in Canada and the US. She has recently been invested into the Order of Canada for her lifetime achievement in theatre and drama.

Mark Abley's *The Prodigal Tongue: Dispatches From the Future of English* will be launched at Paragraphe Bookstore (2220 McGill College Ave.) on Tuesday, May 13, 6:30 p.m. Admission is free. The book is Mark Abley's first non-fiction since the internationally celebrated *Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages*. It investigates and makes sense of everything from hip-hop language to Asian English, Spanglish to text-messaging. Mark's research took him as far afield as Singapore, Los Angeles, Tokyo and Oxford, but the book also draws on interviews with Montreal writers, bloggers, videogamers, rappers and high-school students. It will appear in June in both the United States and Britain. ☸

2007 Quebec Writing Competition

TEN YEARS OF SHORTS

It's what you need

The Quebec Writing Competition celebrated its 10th anniversary at Blue Metropolis this year, and not only awarded journalist and Richler appreciator Joel Yanofsky first prize, but also honoured Simon Dardick and Nancy Marrelli of Véhicule Press. The pair have contributed to the literary community and also published three books of winners and finalists from the competition.

The complete list of winners and finalists is below (six of the eleven are QWF members). This year's jurors were Matthew Fox, Lee Maracle and Sherry Simon. The competition is sponsored by CBC Radio One, Véhicule Press, Maisonneuve magazine and QWF, which administers the contest.

First Prize Winner:

"What You Need," by Joel Yanofsky (pictured)

Second Prize Winners:

"The Mistake," by Jennifer Neri
"Common Gull," by Jessica Block

Honourable Mentions (alphabetical order by author):

"A Poem for Caroline," by Bassel Atallah
"The Counterfeit City," by Tony France
"Going Home," by Maya Khankhoje
"They Sat on Carol's L-Shaped Couch," by Joshua Levy
"My Daughter, Annika," by Ilona Martonfi
"Les Jaseurs des cèdres," by Annie Potter
"A Remarkable Event," by Colin Robertson
"Misguidelines," by Patricia Srigley



TERRY BYRNES

New QWrite Editorial Board Named

NEWSLETTER NEWS

All the news that fits to print

This issue of QWrite has been created by the new QWrite editorial board. As of March, seven QWF members have joined Lori Schubert and editor Byron Rempel to produce the newsletter, lending a wider range of ideas and skills to this quarterly communication, as well as lightening the load as more of us share the work. The members of the editorial board are: Kate Orland Bere, Mélanie Grondin, Elise Moser, Byron Rempel (our editor/designer), Raquel Rivera, Claire Holden Rothman, Aparna Sanyal, Lori Schubert and Morton Trier.

You'll notice a few changes already: more articles about writing and writers; a "Q-munity" column about writers in the community; and the news-for-books exchange! ☸

THE Q-MUNITY COLUMN

They told me “You don’t have a history”

Aparna Sanyal talks with **Dorothy Williams** about a neglected past.

Dr. Dorothy W. Williams, Program Director of the Black Community Resource Centre, is the author of two groundbreaking books and numerous articles on the history of Blacks in Montreal. Her first book, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986: Essay on Urban Demographics* (Éditions Yvon Blais), was commissioned by the Quebec Human Rights Commission. *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Véhicule Press), Dr. Williams’ second book, remains the only chronological study of Blacks on the island.

AS: *What made you start researching the history of Blacks in Montreal?*

Dorothy Williams: My family lived in a community where we talked about Black history and our roots in Africa. I grew up in the 60s and 70s when there was a lot of ferment in Montreal. You’d see some demonstration every night. All of this fed into the question: where do I fit in? When I found out from my grandmother that her grandmother was a slave in Nova Scotia, there was an understanding that I—Dorothy Williams, growing up in Little Burgundy—was rooted in this narrative called Canada. Except that, as a Black person, I was invisible. Why? Articles and books told me that we had a long history in this country. But the history had been erased. When I asked my teachers, I was told there was nothing written about Blacks.

AS: *The accounts of slavery in The Road to Now shocked me. Please explain the ‘silent historical record’ on this subject.*

DW: The example I use is François Garneau, who wrote the first official history of the Quebecois nation, in 1845. He made a sweeping statement that slavery didn’t exist in Quebec. But slavery in Quebec had just ended in 1834. Any student who used his book as a reference went on to perpetuate that myth. The mythology became part of what we are as a nation. It has been used to say “see, look how good we are.”

AS: *Tell me about the Southbound Underground Railroad.*

DW: This occurred before the U.S. federal government applied slave laws right across the United States. The northern states banned slavery. Slaves (in Canada) got wind and found resourceful ways into those states.

AS: *In chapter one of The Road to Now, you mention that Black Montrealers morally and financially championed the anti-slavery cause. Did Montreal figure as a base for the abolitionist movement in the 19th century?*

DW: Yes, for the abolition of American slavery. In the mid-19th century, the prominent Blacks here were either the children of escaped slaves, or had fled the States themselves. They were agitating with Whites in Montreal. One of the reasons Montreal would have been a base was that it was a summer vacation spot for American slave owners. So the Montreal elite supported the southern states during the war of secession. But another group (of Whites) said “we are not going to support the southern states in their efforts to keep Africans enslaved.” Anti-slavery sentiment eventually propelled institutions like the City of Montreal and the YMCA to take a stand with international repercussions.



AS: *Your work inspiringly depicts Black Montrealers, during the Depression, developing community initiatives like the Negro Theatre Guild (now the Black Theatre Workshop) and the Excelsior Debating and Dramatic Club.*

DW: Blacks could only work in certain jobs then. When the jobs dried up, it was very difficult. People found a way to survive by pooling what little they had. The things that emboldened them were their love for the church and their love for the arts. It was also a time when they wanted to be accepted by the larger community. Most saw themselves as British subjects. It was important to have a British air, know how to talk well and present an argument, especially when they were living with prevalent stereotypes that Blacks were ignorant and uncouth. They wanted to create a sense of pride. Culture was part of that.

AS: *There can’t have been a lot of resource materials for certain periods. How did you work with the lack of materials?*

DW: I think there’s a lot of material. One of the kindest things ever written in a review (of my first book) was that there was more information in the footnotes than in the text. I decided when I started the research that I was going to refute all those teachers who told me over the years “there’s nothing written about Blacks, you don’t have a history.” That is why when I wrote *Blacks in Montreal*, which was supposed to be 30 pages, it became so voluminous. I was trying to show that there was a body of work out there.

AS: *You write about the first Black female lawyer from Montreal having to go elsewhere to be permitted to study and work. What challenges do English-speaking Black Montrealers still face?*

DW: We have three times the level of unemployment as the general population. People do all the right things, give their kids a good work ethic, teach them the value of education, take pride in their accomplishments, only to find them floundering because doors close. The highly educated leave for Ontario or the States. People ask me: what are you doing here? I stay because I love this place. I write about it. I’m passionate about my roots. I’m a sixth-generation Canadian. Montreal’s my home. ☎

Aparna Sanyal has published articles in the Montreal Review of Books, Books in Canada and alt.theatre. She is currently at work on a novel entitled The Guest in Room 51.