

mysterious, virginal figure within the habit. Deckers struggled with debt and depression until, in 1985, she committed suicide with her female lover. The Catholic church's increasing co-operation with the mass media produced its own tensions, with male clerics supporting projects which sisters found demeaning. A chapter-long case study of *The Nun's Story*, based on a true account of a nun's abandonment of the convent, richly documents the different stakes in this production for entertainment executives and artists, Catholic officials, the Catholic press, and sisters on both sides of Atlantic.

Sullivan persuasively argues that the nun was a powerful and popular figure because she represented a middle way – 'between the sexually liberated single girl and the loving and lovable domestic goddess' – in the search for independent womanhood during 'the embryonic stages of second-wave feminism.' The convent offered unmatched educational and professional opportunities while containing female independence within patriarchal hierarchies and tropes of heterosexual domesticity. This was a transitional usefulness. By the early 1970s, 'new nuns' were relegated to the margins of an increasingly radicalized and sexualized women's movement while they were under attack from a Vatican having second thoughts. *The Flying Nun's* retreat to kitsch stereotypes and supernatural gimmicks signalled the increasing gap between nuns' politics and their popular image. Since then, films – such as *Dead Man Walking* (1995), in which Susan Sarandon portrays Sister Helen Prejean's campaign against capital punishment – have only intermittently revived the complex conjunction of gender, religion, and social justice.

This fascinating study answers questions which many of us didn't even think to ask. It weaves the pressures and possibilities of popular culture into the history of Catholic modernization. It excavates the ambivalence, alternatives, and cultural confusion which complicated the resurgence of women's search for equality and independence. And it respectfully returns to feminist analysis figures and struggles too easily trivialized and forgotten. (CHRISTINE BOLD)

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy. *Writing in Our Time:
Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957–2003)*
Wilfrid Laurier University Press. xvii, 290. \$37.95

Writing in Our Time makes a paradoxical yet persuasive case that 'radical' writing is not a margin of contemporary Canadian poetry but its centre, the site of its most characteristic concerns. Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy offer a remarkably encyclopedic history of the contemporary Canadian poetic avant-garde, including two detailed timelines spanning six decades; broad overviews of poetics, publishing, and literary communities; and

individual essays on ten authors, including bpNichol, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and Lisa Robertson. But the book's ambitions go far beyond that of a reference book. It advances three distinct arguments about contemporary poetry; the third, and most provocative, is the subject of the book's most revealing dialogue with itself.

The first argument is suggested by the book's title: that the most important poetry of 'our time' in Canada can be found not in the work of canonical authors, but rather in work variously labelled avant-garde, experimental, or innovative. Such writing, according to Butling and Rudy, 'emphasizes the construction rather than the reflection of self and world – the production of meaning over its consumption.' The term Butling and Rudy prefer for this poetry is 'radical,' suggesting that 'extreme changes' in poetic style can be linked to revolutionary political and social change. Apart from a single essay on landscape poetry and the dominance of 'British/central Canada aesthetics,' there is little mention of the 'mainstream' writing against which radical Canadian poetry ostensibly reacts.

The book's second argument can be found in its timelines, which depict literary history not as a catalogue of individual achievements but as a collective endeavour. Events in these chronologies are communal and institutional, from the founding of influential little magazines like *TISH* (1961) and publishers like Coach House Press (1965) to the establishment of the Writing in Our Time reading series (1979) and the Kootenay School of Writing (1984). Each entry includes invaluable information such as location, beginning and ending dates, publication details, and lengthy lists of participating poets. Borrowing Deleuze and Guatarri's concept of the 'rhizome,' Butling argues that readings, magazines, and small publishers form 'a network of multiple, asymmetrical, interconnected nodes' that offer a 'working ground' for 'investigative, experimental writing.' The book's dialogic structure, with alternating essays by Butling and Rudy, itself embodies this collaborative impulse, although there is a wide gap between Butling's well-argued, broad-based pieces and the close readings offered by Rudy.

Perhaps the book's most striking move, though, is to redefine avant-gardism – historically dominated by white male writers – to include the work of women, writers of colour, and gay and lesbian writers. In doing so it follows the work of scholars such as Ann Vickery, whose *Leaving Lines of Gender* traces a feminist genealogy for us experimental writing. Butling and Rudy's use of the term 'radical' thus includes 'the introduction of new subjects as well as new forms.' In contrast to the modernist pursuit of aesthetic novelty, Butling argues that 'late twentieth-century radicality is often signified as much by class, gender, sexuality, and race-based critiques of power relations as by "new" forms and countercultural positioning,' and the book pursues this claim by exploring the complexities of black subjectivities in the work of Claire Harris, the 'unfixed and variable erotics'

of Robin Blaser, and Erin Mouré's addresses to a female readership. But the book also testifies to the vexed relationship between radical form, content, and politics. Butling notes that it took 'many years' of work in the avant-garde for Daphne Marlatt to explore sexuality and feminism in her work or for Fred Wah to address questions of race directly. Butling's own compelling account of her life in literary communities is jolted by her realization that her own role was often 'peripheral' because of gender. The inclusiveness of *Writing in Our Time* is welcome and needed, but we may fairly wonder whether it relies on the same assumption Butling attributes to the old-fashioned, white-male-dominated avant-garde: that 'aesthetic innovation goes hand in hand with progressive social relations.' This volume offers as much evidence of friction between those goals as it does of a happy congruence. (TIMOTHY YU)

Méira Cook. *Writing Lovers: Reading Canadian Love Poetry by Women*
McGill-Queen's University Press. xiv, 258. \$75.00

At the heart of Méira Cook's newest book, *Writing Lovers*, is a quest to express the inexpressible: love. But how does one write 'a detached and lucid account of a subject that ... demands a passionate response?' Cook describes love, or love in writing, as an event that 'exceeds all categories of expression and signification while at the same time attempting – ceaselessly, repeatedly, ardently – to articulate itself.' In each chapter, then, Cook tests the limits of the language of love, exploring its possibilities in the writing of seven diverse Canadian women poets.

Cook focuses on metaphor as the central figure in writings about love. And the shock of metaphor, as it is used in 'breaching borders, conflating images, yoking opposites,' is key to Cook's own methodology; she, too, breaches borders and yokes together disparate entities. One of the book's greatest strengths is its sharp and creative connection of seemingly unrelated writers and their texts. The authors were chosen, Cook states, because of her 'having fallen in love with their work.' Which could, of course, cause some major critical shortcomings. Yet Cook assiduously addresses and contests these possible shortcomings in her opening chapter, which sets up the theoretical framework for the book. Drawing from sundry critical perspectives on the language of love, Cook situates her project first in the work of such varied Canadian writer-critics as Rosemary Sullivan, Anne Carson, and Steve McCaffery. Then, in a somewhat ahistorical discussion of work by Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, and Lacan, Cook highlights the failures of language in each of their texts. However, Cook's claim to an anti-thematic approach is not entirely persuasive, as her choice of texts – critical, theoretical, and literary – relies upon the writers' fundamental engagement with 'amorous discourse' and, consequently,