

# Annotated Bibliography of Canadian Lesbian Literature



by Nairne Holtz

# **Annotated Bibliography of Canadian Lesbian Literature (1931-2010)**

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## **An Introductory Manifesto (2001)**

When the U.S.-based activist group Queer Nation formed in the late 1980s, the gay community debated the merits of reclaiming the word “queer” from its pejorative origins. More than simply acknowledging the legitimacy of deviation, the word “queer” was intended to signify a more inclusive approach to issues of sexual orientation by embracing within a singular term a multiplicity of sexual identities. At the time, I wrote to an American friend, Sarah Schulman, that I had no problem with the word “queer” but disliked the use of the word “nation.” Unlike the open-ended “queer,” the singular form “nation” seemed less a reference to solidarity than insularity. Use of the word, with its evocative overtones of nation-building, seemed to me to erase from the American field of vision all of the differences and singularities of queer culture as it has developed over time and in other countries. The cultural insularity of queer identity in the United States is of particular concern to Canadian lesbian and bisexual women, given that we live in close geographic and economic proximity to the world’s biggest exporter of queer culture. We tend to adopt U.S. lesbian and bisexual women’s culture not simply as our own, but as our only alternative.

That Americans might be unaware of our quiet presence is unfortunate; that we are ourselves unaware of the richness and diversity of our own cultural heritage is unacceptable. Our sense of identity is imperfectly formed, based as it is on the occasional and limited reflections of our own images on the surface of American culture. The result is that there is more to us than we, or others, know. Out queer Canadian writers such as Marie-Claire Blais, Nicole Brossard, Dionne Brand, Ivan Coyote, Nalo Hopkinson, Helen Humphreys, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Shani Mootoo, Kathleen Oliver, Jane Rule, and Karen Tulchinsky have all won mainstream literary awards. Despite this critical success, they have barely been read, reviewed or noticed by the American queer community. Some of these names are also far less familiar to Canadian readers than those of their American or British counterparts.

As a writer creating fiction dealing with lesbian characters and themes, the lack of recognition for Canadian artists is particularly troubling to me. Cultural protectionism, however, is not an appropriate response. Instead, by creating this annotated bibliography, I am encouraging both Canadians and Americans to take a greater interest in Canadian literary talent. Exporting this work is critical; the Canadian publishing industry is by necessity heavily subsidized, and Canadian lesbians in the arts cannot survive economically without some support from American audiences, given our respective population sizes. More importantly, however, Canadian queers need to be aware of the immense talent available within our own artistic communities, and to find creative ways to stay informed of their work. We do not comprise a sufficiently large circulation base to support Canadian queer magazines with high production values as are found in the

American market. As this project demonstrates, however, Internet technology is an effective tool for overcoming these limitations.

A few words about the scope of this project are in order. The bibliography results from a concerted effort on my part to identify an authoritative and comprehensive list of literature from Canada with lesbian content. My criteria for a Canadian author is an individual who has roots here as reflected in the content of his or her work, or who has chosen to be published in Canada. This definition includes some people who others might not think of Canadian, but also excludes others who, on the basis of their place of birth or other factors, are indeed Canadians in the conventional sense of the word. For example, I did not include lesbian mystery writer Katherine V. Forrest who was born and grew up in Windsor, but moved to the United States and has set all of her work in the United States.

I began this project as a list of lesbian and bisexual women writers but soon recognized that for a significant minority of the writers, sexual or gender identity has been a shifting or ambiguous category. Rather than attempting to keep abreast of who has decided that they are a man or are only sexually interested in men, I have chosen to focus on lesbian content. I have not included Canadian authors generally thought to be lesbian or bisexual if they have not published at least one work with overt lesbian content, as I am more interested in the production of lesbian culture than the particular sexual identity of any given author. I have, however, included Susan Swan's *The Wives of Bath* because it has a central lesbian theme and characters, although Swan herself identifies as heterosexual. But works by heterosexuals in which lesbians or bisexual women are portrayed as nothing more than foils to the more significant heterosexual main characters, or in which descriptions of lesbian sexual experiences are set out for the purposes of titillation do not form part of lesbian or bisexual women's culture and thus are not included in this bibliography.

As to the intended audience, I have designed this bibliography to be a useful reference for a number of different groups, including:

1. Collection Development Librarians. Canadian literature with lesbian content has been published by a variety of presses in Canada, almost none of which are known as gay or lesbian publishers. This makes it difficult to search for appropriate works for collection development. This bibliography provides an authoritative source on what I would describe as a Canadian lesbian genre.
2. Academics. The works listed in this bibliography represent an explosion of high quality literature in Canada that merits critical attention from the academic community. Those working in the fields of Canadian literature, Women's Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies can use this bibliography to locate appropriate titles for course reading lists.
3. Gay Community Groups, Gay Student Groups, Pride Committees. Why not invite some of these terrific writers to read at a Queer Literary night or a Lesbian Mystery Night?

4. Readers. Whether you have a particular interest in Canadian literature or queer literature, or you just want to discover some exciting new writers, this bibliography is for your browsing pleasure.

In a country as small as Canada, with a publishing industry that survives on government funding, even mainstream authors have difficulty publishing their work. Publishing work with explicitly queer content can seem an impossible task by comparison. While lesbians and bisexual women are less likely to face overt homophobia from publishers, the gap in understanding between mainstream and marginal communities presents a far more insidious problem. Canadian literary journals, the route by which most Canadian writers attract the attention of publishers and agents, are filled with stories by white, middle-class heterosexuals about being white, middle-class, and heterosexual. The editors of literary journals are flooded with submissions, and they choose stories that have a personal emotional resonance. Activism can never overcome the ineluctable reality that generally speaking, like likes like.

Heterosexual publishers seem unable to appreciate the purpose or appeal of particular cultural references in lesbian stories, such as Drag Kings, transmen, butch, femme, top, bottom, fag hags, compulsory heterosexuality, gender-fuck, alternative insemination, camp, closet case, outing, chosen family, and hasbian. If the publisher fails to understand the relevant queer terms of art, the author's metaphors will seem equally unintelligible. In addition, heterosexual publishers and journal editors remain hostile to work that addresses power differentials between homosexuals and heterosexuals and that exposes heterosexual complicity or responsibility in relation to homophobia.

Some lesbian writers respond by writing books featuring a lesbian protagonist and her love interest as the lone lesbians living amongst a large number of heterosexual characters. Many lesbian writers decide to pursue more mainstream topics rather than write about lesbians or lesbian communities, in some cases after having been punished with neglect or scorn by critics, publishers, editors, and agents.

Given the difficulties involved, everyone who has managed to persuade a publisher to put out work with lesbian content should be proud of that accomplishment. In annotating this bibliography I have provided a brief review of one work by each writer. As is to be expected, not all of the comments amount to unconditional acceptance or uncritical reflection of a writer's work. I would hope, however, that these comments will be received by all in the spirit in which they were intended, i.e., as giving each writer their due by providing a close reading and considered appraisal of their work.

## Alexander, Zhauna, 1973-

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Novel

*Love is an Octopus*. Slipstream, 2003. Amelia Blue, the first-person narrator, has an uncomfortable relationship with her self and with other people. As the title suggests, love in this book has the tentacled grip of obsession and need. Amelia Blue compares herself to a fish. She's a mama's girl still swimming in her mother's womb, a manic-depressive whose illness threatens to pull her under, and a bisexually active woman who does not identify with the normative heterosexuality of her family yet is panicked by the possibility of being a lesbian. Chapters are given the names of the people who have had the most significance upon the narrator's life: her mother, a relative who molested her, a female lover, a gay male friend she attempted to seduce, and various jerky boyfriends. Constructed like a personal journal with self-conscious references to being edited, reading *Love is an Octopus* is like stumbling upon a roommate's diary—there's too much information, and the perspective feels lopsided. The book's exclusive focus on Amelia Blue's thoughts and feelings, including her rather tedious obsession with her weight, the lack of dialogue beyond people's opinions of the narrator, and the absence of any details of place and setting make for a thin work with seemingly no distinction between the voice of the narrator and the author. The writing, however, with its occasional flashes of humour, might be effective if performed as a monologue.

## Alguire, Judith, d.o.b. unknown

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Novel

*Iced*. Women's Press, 1995. In *Iced*, protagonist Alison Guthrie, a former hockey star, accepts a coaching position with a Toronto team playing in the premier season of Canada's first women's professional hockey league. She soon learns that coaching the team to peak performance on the ice is a much simpler task than helping them cope with issues in their personal lives. These issues include stalker ex-husbands, coming out, drug use, and inter-team romances and rivalries. Another difficult challenge for Alison is Phil Tweddell, the lacklustre franchise owner, who regards the team as a mere stepping stone for his own ambitions. Finally, Alison must deal with her attractions to both a suave, sexy coach on an opposing team, and to a troubled member of her own team. As Canada's first lesbian hockey novel, *Iced* is an entertaining sports soap opera and romance that succeeds beyond its genre. Alguire addresses issues of gender equality, sexism, and homophobia in sports with both intelligence and humour.

Awards

*Zeta Base* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 1990.

## **Alonzo, Anne-Marie, 1951-2005**

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### Novel

*Galia que'elle nommait amour*. Trois, 1995. In Alonzo's experimental tale, the narrator lives alone in the desert and ekes out an unlikely living gathering rare orchids. The metaphors of desert (solitude, desolation), orchid (woman, rarity, beauty), and storm (conflict, resolution) lack subtlety, but Alonzo employs them with a light touch. The story arc is simple: the orchid-gatherer falls in love with Galia, they come together, they encounter a point of conflict ("tu me voudrais un homme pour te séduire, tu voudrais autre que moi, c'est pourtant moi que tu supplies," or "you would like me to be a man to seduce you, you would like something other than me, but I'm still the one you're calling out to"), then find resolution and reunite. The experimental style of the narrative alternately enhances and undermines the story. The single-paragraph sentences written in both the third and the second person are mildly clichéd, but the language is mercifully lucid and the imagery strong. While the chronology is frankly confusing and the insertion of technology into this desert world is jarring, Alonzo's blurring of temporal boundaries has a poignant effect. When the orchid-gatherer speaks simultaneously to Love, to Galia, and to Galia as Love, the deft blend feels clean and natural. While *Galia qu'elle nommait amour* is hardly told as a straightforward story, it nonetheless stands as a forceful portrait of the intensity of love between women. *Review by Andrea Zanin*.

### Awards

*Bleus de mine* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1985.

## **Anderson, Debra, 1974-**

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### Novel

*Code White*. McGilligan, 2005. *Code White*, which reads more like a memoir than a novel, is a lyrical and sharply observed account of time spent in a psychiatric hospital. While the novel is structured as a journey from insanity to sanity, the protagonist, Alex, manages to retain her essential self throughout, that of a critical-minded, flirtatious, and sociable queer femme. The title refers to a term used by hospital staff to signify "disruptive behaviour," a theme Anderson smartly addresses. Alex, whose urban queer life is about sexual rebellion and gender nonconformity, finds it difficult to draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The actions of the staff and the hospital routines can be oppressive and authoritarian, yet Alex recognizes their value as she herself is wary of some of the patients. She is also frightened by her own psychiatric condition, and doesn't have any easy answers for how to cope. Picking up a sexy, bad-ass butch in the outside world is one thing. To do so on a psych ward, however, where she has no escape from the homophobic responses of staff and patients, not to mention the troubled girl herself, is something else altogether. Although the book meanders at times, ultimately Alex triumphs in this gritty narrative of mental illness.

## **Ann, Kathryn, 1950-**

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### Short Fiction

*Snakes and Ladders: Stories*. Impertinent, 1993. *Snakes and Ladders* is a collection of slow-paced short stories that balances serious issues with an amusing skewering of political correctness. Written in the first person, the narrator is typically a butch lesbian struggling with alcoholism as well as issues around being an adult child of an alcoholic. The title, *Snakes and Ladders*, is a reference to a children's board game in which the players are subject to unexpected advances and retreats. This provides an apt metaphor for the topsy-turvy way in which Ann's protagonists learn about themselves in games of love fraught with emotional danger. Particularly powerful is "Michigan," a story exploring the darker undercurrents of an intense erotic encounter between two lesbian strangers.

## **Anthony, Trey, d.o.b. unknown**

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### Play

*'da Kink in my hair*. Playwrights Canada, 2005. *'da Kink in my hair* is set in a black hair salon, a venue that tends to be segregated by sex and largely closed to white people. This creates an empowering social space for black women to express themselves, which is exactly what the characters do. As their hairdresser, Novelette, searches for kinks in their hair, the women reveal their secrets. The search for kinks becomes a fertile metaphor for individual quirks and twists in one's life that act as obstacles to personal growth and happiness. The poignant stories address a range of political issues: homophobia, sexual abuse, violence, class, and racial pride. While these themes may sound heavy-handed, the play is written with a deft comic touch. The dialogue uses light repartee to advantage, such as when one of the characters comments, "Darling, even I have kissed a woman before myself when I used to live in Paris. It's a very chic and classy thing to do while in Europe."

## **Armstrong, Luanne, 1949-**

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### Novel

*Bordering*. Gynergy, 1995. Armstrong, Luanne. 1949--. *Bordering*. Gynergy, 1995. Set in rural British Columbia in a small town close to the American border, *Bordering* examines the literal and metaphorical ways the inhabitants of the community cross boundaries. The novel unfolds through the eyes of Louise McDonald, an unsophisticated woman coping with the aftermath of her first lesbian affair. She is newly divorced from the town lawyer, a man who has hidden as much from Louise as she has from him. Refusing his financial assistance, Louise moves to the farm where she grew up, where she struggles to support herself by working in an orchard. Her newly discovered desire makes her feel lonely and isolated, even though her closest friends, Becky and Celeste, have equally difficult issues with which to contend. Becky, who is both white and native, does not feel as though she belongs in any one place. She bounces between jobs, living

arrangements, and romances while maintaining fierce family ties. Conventional homemaker Celeste's world has abruptly capsized with the arrest of her thirteen-year-old daughter Celia, who is caught smuggling drugs. Paralyzed by her inability to shape her own life, Louise, who loves Celia like an aunt, takes action on her behalf. In a town full of open but unacknowledged secrets, Louise challenges those in authority. In doing so, she puts herself and her loved ones at risk, leading to unexpected losses but also to gains. This gentle novel written in spare, simple language skillfully evokes rural community and creates flawed yet wholly sympathetic characters. *Bordering* is a quiet pleasure.

Awards

*Annie* won a Canadian Children's Book Centre Award in 1995-1996.

### **Auger, Louise, 1949-**

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Novel

*Ev Anckert*. Trois, 1994. When Isabelle Coache, a Quebec psychologist on tour to promote her new book in France, meets Ev Anckert for the first time in a Paris bar, Isabelle somehow finds the courage to proposition Ev outright. What follows is a cross-cultural romance: dinner in the finest restaurants, trips to meet Ev's friends in the countryside, and long nights of sweet lovemaking. Of course, nothing is perfect; Ev soon finds out that Isabelle is more fiercely independent than any of her past conquests—or is that cold and inconsiderate? And Isabelle soon discovers that Ev's seductive take-charge attitude can boil over into violence when she's provoked. Is this an example of jealous abuse or a sign that Ev and Isabelle are more serious than a vacation fling? Regardless, neither woman is ready to give an inch. The story plays out against the racially charged background of hostilities between French and Arab citizens that serves as an ugly mirror for the cultural and class-based misunderstandings between Ev, a wealthy editor from old money, and Isabelle, a *Québécoise de souche* and a self-made career woman with no delusions of grandeur. Nonetheless, the story thankfully does not cross the line from thoughtful fiction to a mere vehicle for political angst. Written in smooth, flowing language, with beautiful imagery and snappy but realistic dialogue, Auger's narrative makes for an engaging and refreshing read, in which two strong women try to love each other while each remaining fully themselves. *Review by Andrea Zanin*.

### **Azel, Ann, d.o.b. unknown**

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Novel

*Gold Mountain*. PD, 2006. *Gold Mountain* is a romance featuring two women living in the suburbs of Toronto: Kelly, a lawyer and first generation Chinese-Canadian immigrant, and Jane, a "white bread and mayonnaise" cop. Soon after they meet, however, and before their relationship has a chance to develop, Kelly's half-brother is murdered. Kelly's first instinct, although she works as a prosecutor, is to destroy all evidence at the crime scene that might incriminate members of her family. Although Azel deserves credit for portraying an interracial relationship, given that such relationships are

under-represented in lesbian fiction, this novel is poorly executed and, as such, offers little to readers. A copyedit fixing grammar and continuity errors might have helped this work, but there is no getting around the pedantic writing, stilted dialogue, and awkward metaphors, such as: “Prison is like a black pearl. We cherish it as valuable, but not so much that we think it is a [sic] pure as gold. Prison is black layers of walls and within, the irritants of society.” Problems also exist with character development. The book begins with Kelly’s adolescence in which she experiences incestuous rape and is portrayed as shy and studious. Nonetheless, she fearlessly embarks upon a lesbian relationship at the age of sixteen. Both her background and the time period (1966) strain credibility as readers are asked to accept Kelly’s raunchy reflections on her first lesbian lover: “The sex was good, but the dominance battle was the usual lesbian problem.” The passages describing Chinese culture read for the most part as if they have been cut and pasted from the Internet. Also, in a book that goes out of its way to include extreme examples of misogyny and homophobia, racism is virtually ignored.

### **Banerji, Anurima, d.o.b. unknown**

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Poetry

*Night Artillery*. TSAR, 2000. Banerji weaves personal experience and identity politics with Hindu mythology and Persian mysticism to create romantic poems grounded in lavish, potent imagery. Her poems focus on loss and on nostalgia for people and places. She renders her experiences and feelings with an attention to detail that is both feminine and South Asian. In “Raga Malkauns,” Banerji follows the sequence of a raga, a classical form of Indian music. She writes, “alap. / her skin unfurls like a scroll of papyrus / intimately she whispers her prayers into my skin / inscribing the secrets of sanskrit on my hips.” When Banerji addresses politics, however, her work has more of a sting. In “Summer, or, I Want the Rage of Poets to Bleed Guns Speechless with Words,” she writes, “It has been this way for a long time, since they put a restraining order against my breasts and called it a bra.”

### **Bannerji, Kaushalya, d.o.b. unknown**

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Poetry

*The Faces of Five O'clock : Poems*. Sister Vision, 1996. Journey, the organizing theme of Bannerji’s poetry, includes both literal journeys to far away places and the more symbolic journey of her identity as a lesbian of colour. The thematic connections between these poems, however, are not always readily apparent. Bannerji adopts an economical language to deliver attractive haikus, political messages, and layered commentary on relationships. In a volume of poems of rather uneven quality, this latter category contains her best work. For example, in “What Does It Take To Become the Romeo and Juliet of Lesbian Subculture,” Banerji invokes both beauty and irony to express the failure and necessity of language to communicate love: “we repeat ourselves / to a new face, search for consonants / in new angle of hip / for vowels in the wet moss / i learned grammar in your movement / learn to distrust your meaning / in my eyes.”

## **Beaulieu, Germaine, 1949-**

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### Poetry

*Textures en textes*. Noroît, 1986. In *Textures en textes*, Beaulieu's free-verse poetry is clean, lucid, and richly lesbian in theme. Her poems, while both implicitly and explicitly political, never descend into rants. Rather, she creates lush, clear images of sensuality while making strong statements about women, desire, strength, and text: "Le désir s'inscrit / me fait accéder au politique / d'un orgasme / où les lieux d'intolérance se neutralisent. / Procréation inédite." Beaulieu's work is beautifully set off by her own black and white photographs interspersed among the text. The photographs are as clear and focused as her poetry, and each one is a reverent close up of one area of a nude body—the fine spiral of an ear, the intimacy of a nipple, or the folds of an imperfect belly. The accessibility of her work makes it easy for the reader to see simple but significant links between women's words and women's textures, and conveys a warm eroticism that's both refreshing and meaningful. "Elle devine le parcours et se recourbe / en saisissant l'effet proper au jeu des mots. / Dans les langues sans discourse / les conjugaisons reprennent l'acte commencé." *Review by Andrea Zanin*.

## **Belleau, Janick, 1946-**

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### Poetry

*Humeur... Sensibility... Alma : haiku et tanka*. Carte Blanche, 2003. Belleau's collection can be summed up as tradition with a twist. She explores conventional poetic themes of desire, sensuality, love, fidelity, and nature but from a lesbian perspective. She uses ancient Japanese forms of poetry, the haiku and tanka models that convey a moment, an emotion or an impression in only a few lines, while bending their rules a bit. She writes in French but translates some poems into English and Spanish. Although sex and nature are central to her work and seen as sacred, Belleau does not shy away from humour, serving up the occasional absurd visual, thus avoiding the trappings of stereotypical mother goddess poetry. She writes: "Nue dans la Nature / Sous la pluie torrentielle / Fumant un Ashton." *Review by Julie Suprenant*.

## **Bennett, Catherine, 1959-**

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### Short Fiction

*Sub-Rosa and Other Fiction*. Anvil, 1997. Plot, dialogue, and character are jettisoned in this collection of short fiction; instead, readers are presented with a first person narrator who dips into theoretical musings and language play. The works of Nicole Brossard, the language of post modernism, and *l'écriture féminine* are obvious influences, albeit in terms of style rather than content. Bennett does not offer philosophical discourse but rather descriptions of emotional states in her themes of yearning, love triangles, and lesbian rewrites of literary history. There's the odd pearl, such as the witty "Four Postcards on a Theme," about an unavailable lover, but mostly, the reader has to plough through such impenetrable sentences as "suggestion of speed and sexual activity, but

nothing here stop looking. Why leap this now? Once I had a sorrel mare, but her leg and over. That speed. That think where devils me still. French horses.”

### **Blackbridge, Persimmon, 1951-**

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Novel

*Prozac Highway*. Press Gang, 1997. *Prozac Highway*. Press Gang, 1997. *Prozac Highway* is a wry, sad, engaging novel written in a realist style. The title is a nod to Elizabeth Wurtzel's 1994 memoir, *Prozac Nation: Young and Depressed in America*, and both works feature a female protagonist coping with chronic depressive disorder. In *Prozac Highway*, Jam, a middle-aged lesbian performance artist, who works part-time as a cleaning lady has a destructive affair with a university professor, retreats from what she calls the “meat” world, and spends her time online either gaming or corresponding on a listserv with other people diagnosed with mental illnesses. But the virtual world turns out not to be so different from Jam's real world: there is drama, political activism, lovers who come and go, and friends who stick around. Jam still has to deal with her mental illness, which she is reluctant to treat, as well as her fear of aging and lack of self-esteem. While in the end Jam accepts help from friends, this novel doesn't offer much in the way of resolution.

Awards

*Prozac Highway* was short-listed for a Stonewall Book Award in 1998. *Sunnybrook: A True Story With Lies* won the Ferro-Grumley Award in 1997. *Her Tongue on My Theory: Images, Essays and Fantasies*, written with Lizard Jones, was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 1994.

### **Blais, Marie-Claire, 1939-**

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Novel

*Nights in the Underground*. Musson, 1979. Translation of: *Les nuits de l'underground*. Stanké, 1978. In one of the first lesbian novels published in Canada, Blais explores the relationship between art and love, and the necessity for lesbians to create an open place for themselves in their own hearts and in the world. The season is winter and the setting is the Underground, a lesbian bar where an eclectic group of women play out the dramas of their lives. At the centre is Blais' protagonist, Geneviève, a sculptor who conflates her lovers with paintings, her desire with art, and who, in the process of various literal and metaphorical journeys, recreates herself. She travels from Montreal to Paris, from heterosexuality to lesbianism, and from a sexual obsession with alcoholic seductress Lali to a more mature love with an older aristocrat, Françoise. Blais, an internationally acclaimed author, has written a darkly humorous novel in a raw, evocative style, moving seamlessly from the interior mind of an artist to the exterior world of a wild, noisy bar filled with patrons from all walks of life.

## Awards

For her body of work, Blais received the W.O. Mitchell Literary Prize in 2000. *Soifs* won a Governor General's Award in 1996. *Visions d'Anna* won the Prix de l'Académie Française and the Prix France-Quebec in 1983. *Le Sourd dans la ville* won the Governor General's Award in 1979. *Manuscrits de Pauline Archange* won a Governor General's Award in 1969. *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* won the Prix Médicis in 1966 and the Prix France-Canada in 1965. *Belle bête* won the Prix de la Langue Française in 1961.

## **Bociurkiw, Marusya, 1958-**

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### Short Fiction

*The Woman Who Loved Airports: Stories and Narratives*. Press Gang, 1994. In this uneven collection of essays and short fiction, Bociurkiw addresses the conflicts of being a lesbian and Ukrainian in contemporary Canada and the difficulty of finding a place to belong. Many pieces feature the same narrator, a woman who is in constant motion—traveling, demonstrating, eating, cruising—while she searches for something or someone to hold onto. In “Here Nor There,” Katya travels between her at-home lover in Montreal and a new lover in Berlin. Her German lover, reflecting on the recent fall of the Wall, remarks, “Sometimes freedom is not as important or as valuable as we had imagined, but we never know this until it’s too late.” This dialogue works nicely as foreshadowing while also capturing the ambivalence and irony at the heart of so many of these tales. In “Familia,” Ruta struggles to build community while never feeling as though she is part of one. In different ways she is connected to and alienated from her biological family, her friends, and her lover, and Bociurkiw shows this in a wry and unsentimental manner. The final section of the book is made up of anecdotal essays that map the same engaging territory as the stories while being too short to pull in the reader. In addition, some of the references to real people in the queer community with whom the author has apparently been in conflict are self-indulgent. Nonetheless, there is plenty of humour and intelligent writing in *The Woman Who Loved Airports*, and it is refreshing to read lesbian stories set within lesbian communities.

### Awards

*Comfort Food for Breakups* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2007.

## **Brand, Dionne, 1953-**

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### Novel

*In Another Place, Not Here*. Vintage, 1997. From the very first page of this novel, Brand mesmerizes readers with her evocative use of language. Elizete, an uneducated worker on a sugar cane plantation, falls in love with Verlia, a Toronto woman who has returned to her Caribbean home to join the revolution: “The four o’clock light thinning she dress, she back good and strong, the sweat raining off in that moment when I look and she snap she head around, that wide mouth blowing a wave of tiredness away, pulling in one big breath of air, them big white teeth, she, falling to the work again, she, falling into the four

o'clock sunlight. I see she. Hot, cool and wet." Thus begins a bittersweet romance between two women who are both lovers and foils to one another. Elizete, who is convinced that Verlia is her grace, conjures a luxuriant dream world capable of propelling her to and through Toronto's mean streets, surviving as an illegal immigrant. Verlia, a woman in constant flight from her dreams and emotions, came to Toronto as a middle-class teenager in the 1970s looking for the Black Power Movement as a place to redirect her anger into meaningful change. Writing in both Caribbean dialect and Canadian English, Brand skillfully explores place, culture, and belonging in relation to race and sexuality.

#### Awards

*Inventory* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2007 and nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2006. *What We All Long For* won the Toronto Book Award in 2006. *Thirsty* was short-listed for the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2003 and won the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2002. *In Another Place, Not Here* was short-listed for a Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1997. *Land to Light On* won both a Governor General's Award and the Trillium Award in 1997. *No Language is Neutral* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1990.

### **Brett, Catherine, d.o.b. unknown**

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#### Juvenile Fiction

*S.P. Likes A.D.* Women's Press, 1989. With a ninth grade girl named Stephanie as the protagonist, *S.P. Likes A.D.* is written for a young adult audience. Stephanie seems remarkably well-adjusted and perceptive as she deals with not only her leadership role in building a dinosaur sculpture for her school but also on her first crush on another girl. To a certain extent, the teenage protagonist is too precocious to be believable, as Brett has provided her character with measured and restrained dialogue unlikely to be articulated by a typical teenager. Brett does create in Stephanie a positive portrayal of a young gay person with a fairly supportive family and likeable friends, including an older lesbian couple. The story is less successful, however, in presenting an authentic or interesting narrative of teenage life.

### **Brossard, Nicole, 1943-**

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#### Novel

*Baroque at Dawn*. McClelland & Stewart, 1997. Translation of *Baroque d'aube*. L'Hexagone, 1995. Brossard is an avant-garde writer who was part of the first wave of lesbian-feminist writing that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s in Canada. Brossard is an innovative formalist who blends poetry with theory. She uses techniques such as puns and experiments with syntax and grammar as a way of challenging notions of subjectivity and meaning. While much of her work addresses feminism, sexuality, and desire, Brossard's method of destabilizing narrative often obscures the lesbian content of these texts. *Baroque at Dawn* emphasizes character, thus allowing for a more explicit treatment

of lesbianism. The novel is framed throughout with images of water as Brossard explores connections between physical and sensory experiences of immersion, particularly the immersive states of virtual reality, language, and the act of creation. The novel's protagonist, Cybil Noland, is a writer whose efforts to write are not always successful. The novel begins with Noland immersed in a state of desire for a young, female stranger who picks her up in a hotel bar. Following their erotic encounter, Noland is invited by a female oceanographer, Occident, to come aboard a ship with a somewhat sinister all-male crew in order to participate in an unusual creative project. Noland, along with a female photographer, is to take advantage of virtual reality technology to experience and then write about life under water. But Noland winds up rejecting the technology created by the male programmers who use it to produce their fantasies of women. Brossard then disrupts the narrative to introduce herself as a character who has written the book that we find ourselves reading, and who is assisting the translator with its translation. She uses these techniques to involve the reader in the act of creating the text, making the novel a form of virtual reality for her audience.

#### Awards

*Cahier de roses & de civilization* was short-listed for the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2008 and was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2003. *Musée de l'os et de l'eau* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1999. *Vertige de l'avant scene* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1997. *Double Impression* won a Governor General's Award in 1984. *Amantes* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1980. *Mécanique Jongleuse* won a Governor General's Award in 1974. Brossard has also won the Prix Athanase David in 1991 for a lifetime of literary achievement.

#### **Bugg, Liz, 1949-**

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#### Mystery

*Red Rover*. Insomniac, 2010. Bugg's debut mystery featuring a middle-aged lesbian detective moves at a jaunty pace. Private investigator Calli Burrow is approached by a conservative businessman to find his missing lesbian daughter. Despite disliking the man's homophobic and authoritarian attitude, Calli agrees to take the case. To find the girl, she enlists the help of her best friend Dewey, a black drag queen, and the two canvass Toronto's gaybourhood, where they soon track down the girl's friends. When one of them turns up dead, the missing girl becomes a suspect, and Calli wonders if she is looking for a victim or a murderer. Complicating the search are memories of her own estrangement from her late father as well as her attraction to the missing girl's friend, Lisa. While the plot of *Red Rover* reaches a dramatic climax, the identity of the murderer is all too readily apparent. Less obvious and potentially more interesting is Calli's relationship with her Chinese-Canadian lover, who unfortunately is off-stage for almost the entire novel. Other characters in the book are insufficiently drawn, and Bugg does not fill this gap with sufficient plot twists to hold the reader's attention. The ingredients of *Red Rover*, such as the Toronto setting and the diverse cast of characters, are appealing, but the result could be better.

## **Butler, Audrey, 1959-**

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### Play

*Radical Perversions: Two Dyke Plays*. Women's Press, 1990. *Radical Perversions* includes the plays "Black Friday" and "Claposis." "Black Friday" is a play about family secrets and loyalty. Drawing upon her Cape Breton roots, Butler creates a lesbian protagonist, Terry, who travels back to her hometown with her black lover, Spike. Terry's purpose in making the trip is to come out to her family and to discover the truth about her father, an alcoholic unionist who may have been unjustly blamed for the shutdown of the mining company with devastating economic effects on the town. Terry's mother and aunt have their own secrets as well, and in the process of revelation stronger bonds and new definitions of family are created. In "Claposis," Butler writes of three women who become romantically involved with one another. Butler opts to tell her story in reverse chronological order, a device she uses to express the shifting nature of love, intimacy, and power in romantic relationships. "Claposis" allegedly means "two waves meeting" and is an apt metaphor for her portrayal of the cyclical emotional dynamics among the women. Although both plays succeed in engaging the reader with their humour and affectionately drawn characters, "Black Friday" is the weightier of the two works.

### Awards

*Black Friday* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1990.

## **Callaghan, Morley, 1903-1990**

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### Novella

*No Man's Meat*. E. W. Titus, 1931. One of Canada's best known and most prolific writers, Callaghan made literary history when he squared off with Ernest Hemmingway in a boxing ring in 1929 and knocked him to the ground. Callaghan went to Paris in 1929 where he spent a few years hanging out in the Left Bank with a veritable who's who of writers that included F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein. One can only speculate whether his encounters with the famous expatriate community of literary and artistic lesbians influenced his work in this novel. In *No Man's Meat*, the unruffled existence of the Beddoes, wealthy artists living in the idyllic northern Ontario countryside, is disrupted by the arrival of their friend Jean Allen, a reckless gambler. Like the sun on the face of the rock that the Beddoes watch each day, Jean brings colour and excitement to their lives. But when she gambles away her virtue to Mr. Beddoes in a game of craps, Mrs. Beddoes responds in an unexpected manner. Callaghan, known for his tales of men trapped in personal and moral dilemmas, has written a strange and at times comic tale, rich in descriptions of Canadian geography.

### Awards

*Our Lady of the Snows* won the Toronto Book Award in 1986, and *The Loved and the Lost* won a Governor General's Award in 1951.

## **Cameron, Anne, 1938-**

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Novel

*Deejay and Betty: A Novel*. Harbour, 1994. *Deejay and Betty*, a fast-paced novel written in idiomatic English, tells the story of two women with extremely dysfunctional family backgrounds. As adults, both women develop relationships with men while still managing to find ways to support themselves and retain a certain amount of independence, if not fulfillment. Cameron devises an unusual triggering event to change the course of their lives by having them meet and fall in love during the course of a sexual assault trial in which they both are involved. Cameron has a great ear for working class dialogue, but she includes so little interior monologue that the characters seem to visit rather than inhabit the shattering events of their childhood and adolescence. The protagonists' personalities are indistinguishable from one another, and their late blooming lesbianism and ability to be fully emotionally intact in light of their histories might make sense if their characters were more fully developed.

Awards

Cameron's wrote the script for *Dreamspeaker* (1979), an award-winning film directed by Claude Jutra.

## **Camilleri, Anna, d.o.b. unknown**

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Creative Non-fiction

*I am a Red Dress: Incantations on a Grandmother, a Mother and a Daughter*. Arsenal Pulp, 2004. *I am a Red Dress* is a series of essays and performance pieces fused into a memoir of familial sexual abuse. Since the 1980s, popular culture has been oversaturated with accounts of sexual violence that range from the trite and voyeuristic to startlingly original literary work. *I am a Red Dress* avoids the most common deficiencies of this genre but does not stake out any new territory. By taking the reader through her acts of bravery and resistance, such as her involvement in feminist causes, her leaving home and coming out as a lesbian, and the charges she eventually lays against her grandfather, Camilleri offers the reader much more than a simple narrative of victimization. She attempts to steer the focus of her work away from her grandfather by exploring her relationships with her mother and grandmother, but unfortunately the personalities of these women never emerge. Authenticity of experience doesn't necessarily add up to authenticity in terms of artistic expression, and too often Camilleri transcribes rather than translates her experience. She tells rather than shows and neglects to flesh out her metaphors, most significantly her central motif of a red dress. By providing more background material about her family, Camilleri could have drawn the reader into a more artful and poignant memoir of working class Italian and Maltese immigrant experience.

## **Charest, Danielle, 1951-**

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Mystery

*L'entrave*. Éditions du Masque, 2002. *L'entrave* follows the adventures of a group of seven radical feminist lesbian detectives, who call themselves quite simply “le Groupe.” Their mission? To fight injustice against women. For pay, no less! In this case, the Groupe is hired by the wife of an ambitious Quebec politician to track down their missing daughter. The plot soon thickens, and our heroines find themselves investigating whether the politician might not have some dirty secrets of his own. Charest writes in an action-verb style replete with Québécois flavour, but unfortunately, the novel fails to hook the reader; the narration switches point of view too frequently, and we’re taken through too many of the characters’ personal digressions, which confuse and slow down the story. The author also makes some strange stylistic choices, such as writing a lengthy chapter from the point of view of a squirrel. It’s refreshing to see dyke sleuths take on “the man” and satisfying to see them win, but despite the protagonists’ pluck, the story itself remains a mildly entertaining but awkward attempt at translating Nancy Drew and friends into a queer Québécois framework. *Review by Andrea Zanin.*

## **Chase, Gillean, 1946-**

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Novel

*Triad Moon*. Gynergy, 1993. While ostensibly dealing with polyamory, the real theme of *Triad Moon* is the healing power of New Age spirituality. Brook, an androgynous and idealistic lesbian witch, falls for Lila, an unhappily married woman and incest survivor struggling with both her sexuality and ill health. The attraction is mutual but when Lila has difficulty acting on her own desires, Brook loses patience and pursues Lila’s sexy best friend, Helen. Filled with scenes from past lives, ceremonial magic, experiences of extrasensory perception, and clairvoyance as well as relationships guided by notions of transcendent perfection, *Triad Moon* is a utopian lesbian feminist tract disguised as a realist novel. Many lines from the novel, while no doubt not intended as parody, would make strong contenders in the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest, e.g., “unpleasant as enemas, the months of their separation had come and gone.”

## **Christakos, Margaret, 1962-**

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Novel

*Charisma*. Pedlar, 2000. *Charisma* is a Dionysian soap opera of desire run amok. Set in the Greek neighbourhood of the Danforth area in Toronto, and including a chorus that comments on the main action in the manner of Greek tragedy, the novel also features a half-Greek protagonist, Cameo, who ironically is the central character. The novel begins when Cameo picks up a young Greek man by asking him to give her Greek lessons. In one sense he does, as he turns out to be gay and she learns to service him sexually as if she were a man. But her sexual encounters are complicated by the fact that she is pregnant and in love with her best friend Mae. While the plot of this novel makes it sound

as though the book is a quirky romantic comedy, *Charisma* is written in a challenging experimental style. The narrative is largely composed of a poetic interior monologue that is simultaneously erudite and chatty, with frequent references to pop culture, as in this description of an acquaintance: “The pastoral fogs up and loses its colour when she remembers Keanu [Reeves] went to the same high school as an ex-lover’s sister, Korona, the mesmerically sirenic just-past-teenagehood dyke who moves like a rock stud at the Marzipan room. Same eyes. She considers herself curled up in a wet tongue licking those eyelids.”

Awards

*What Stirs* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2009. *Sooner* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2006. *Excessive Love Prostheses* won the ReLit Award for Poetry in 2003.

### **Coyote, Ivan, 1969-**

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Creative Non-fiction

*The Slow Fix*. Arsenal Pulp, 2008. Written in the first person, Coyote’s spare and concise autobiographical tales shift effortlessly in tone from tender to cranky to comical. In “To Whom It May Concern,” Coyote writes an open letter to a cousin struggling with addiction, conveying both concern and exasperation. After pleading with her cousin to keep in touch, Coyote dryly remarks: “It’s not like you’re backpacking in Europe and just forgot to send a postcard.” Other pieces, particularly those dealing with people who misread Coyote’s gender and sexual orientation, are more overtly humorous, sometimes downright hilarious. No single theme unites the collection, but several tales address female masculinity. In “Imagine a Pair of Boots,” Coyote compares her uneasy relationship to her gender to having different sized feet in a world where all boots come in pairs, each the same size. With this comparison, she demonstrates how both gender pronouns chafe. Equally uncomfortable are other people’s reactions to her ambiguity. When she responds to a young man who asks her if she’s a boy or a girl by posing the question to him, he is shocked and alarmed. Coyote concludes: “I thought about it all later, how the guy’s ego had crumpled right in front of us, just because a stranger had questioned his masculinity. How scared he was of not being a real man. It dawned on me that if you’ve never had a blister, then you’ll never have a callous, either.” Alongside her wit, Coyote usually has a sharp point to make.

Awards

*The Slow Fix* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award for 2008. *Bow Grip* won the ReLit Award in 2008 and was short-listed for both the Stonewall Book Award and the Ferro-Grumley Award in 2008. *Loose End* was short-listed for the Ferro-Grumley Award in 2005. *Close to Spider Man* won the Danuta Gleed Award in 2000.

## **Cullen, Nancy, d.o.b. unknown**

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### Poetry

*Untitled Child*. Frontenac, 2009. In her third book of poetry, Cullen explores a very personal subject: the suicide of her partner who struggled with addiction and mental illness. With such a tabloid topic, readers might expect sensationalism and sentiment, but Cullen's lean, brittle poems eschew both. In the first of three sections, 'Surburbian,' Cullen beads together images and common expressions to produce darkly witty commentary on domestic life. The second section, 'Perilous Child,' is a series of elegies that movingly capture rage, grief, humour, and tenderness, often all in the same poem. A good example is "Why, in the Dream that You are Alive, I am not Happy to See You," in which she writes: "First: Everyone thinks you're dead we had a funeral for Christ's sake / Second: Here I am counting drinks / Third: That knot in my stomach / Fourth: Your fucking nerve / Fifth: To act like nothing / Sixth: You asshole / Seventh: I am sick of crying over you." In the final section, 'Love Story,' she shifts gears, borrowing words and phrases from unlikely sources to offer playful deconstruction. In "Math Words for Year 5," she provides fake definitions for words such as 'value': "Is there a cultural logic to late capitalism / Perhaps it's somewhere over the rainbow." Cullen revels in contrast, and the result is poems that have the dexterity and trickery of sleight of hand.

## **D'anna, Lynette, 1955-**

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### Novel

*RagTimeBone: A Novel*. New Star, 1994. A prairie Gothic of sex, violence, and dysfunctional families, this novel stars two queer female protagonists, Rita and Sage. Aspiring student journalist Rita has a crazy mother, a cruel brother, and a philandering father who provides financial rather than emotional support to his family. Adding to Rita's unhappiness is her incipient lesbianism in a narrow-minded community, as well as her penchant for female lovers who hurt her. Her adventures in unreciprocated passion begin with her best friend, Sage, a wild child with her own family dramas. Sage's father, an addict, disappeared early on from her life, and her loving, indulgent mother cannot let go of him. This trait seems to be inherited by Sage, who longs for her first girlfriend Pearce, while flitting in and out of bed with Rita and a slew of loser guys. As a lesser narrative thread, Pearce's story is also included, as is that of Pearce's schizophrenic, homeless mother. The grimness of these multiple stories is somewhat leavened by the book's many scenes of unabashed sexual pleasure and discovery, as well as the fact that the likable-but-flawed characters do move forward as they lurch from one dark drama to the next. The pace of this novel is also brisk and forward-moving. Dialogue-driven with short, snappy sentences and almost no description, *RagTimeBone's* unusually stripped-down prose makes for a quick if not altogether rich read.

## **Dartt, Gina, d.o.b. unknown**

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Mystery

*Unexpected Ties*. Bold Stroke Books, 2006. Ostensibly a mystery, *Unexpected Ties* is mostly a romance that explores how ties are created, broken, and mended. A sequel to *Unexpected Sparks*, Dartt explores the complications of a new romance. At forty, Kate Shannon is accustomed to the approval which comes from running a successful small business and having been married to a man. Her much younger lover, Nikki Harris, having experienced homophobic rejection from her family, is more inclined towards discretion than the newly out-and-proud Kate. Where Nikki is willing to take risks, much to the consternation of her lover, is in an unofficial investigation into the murder of leading town citizen, Stephen Elliot. As a dispatcher at the police station, Nikki has some professional experience but does not put it to use. Instead, her investigation is propelled forward by gossip and coincidence and is so far in the background of the story as to have no dramatic impact. The reader does not care who the killer is or even if the murder is solved. Much more interesting is the Truro lesbian community's annual canoe trip, and Kate and Nikki's hot and heavy sexual explorations. In her attempt to examine community, familial, and romantic relationships, Dartt has created too many storylines and characters, which is a shame because the ones she has more successfully developed make for an entertaining poolside read.

## **Decter, Ann, 1956-**

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Novel

*Honour: A Novel*. Press Gang, 1996. *Honour*, a novel grounded in Canadian feminist culture and history, is told from the perspectives of three thirtyish lesbian and bisexual women: Jane Cammen, her uncertain lover, Marie Latouche, and their mutual friend, Shulamit Weiss. The novel begins with Shulamit, a doctor, attending to an elderly woman having a stroke on a beach in Victoria. The woman has no identification and is unable to talk, but various visual cues lead Shulamit to suspect she is a lesbian. The mystery of the woman's identity and history unravels over the course of the novel as each of the main characters grapples with her own history and origins. Jane is writing a thesis about her politically active, alcoholic mother whose death has resulted in her own emotional withdrawal from everyone around her. Marie questions her mother's explanation for her absent father after a series of disturbing visions, and Shulamit confronts the effects of the holocaust on her family. In this quiet novel, Decter effortlessly captures the complex interpersonal relationships among three women as she accurately depicts urban and rural Canadian landscapes.

## **Dempsey, Shawna, 1963-**

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Satire

*Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America*. By Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan. Illustrations by Daniel Barrow. Pedlar, 2002. The fun began

as a performance art piece at the Banff Centre for the Arts where long time collaborators Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan dressed in uniform as “lesbian rangers” to interact with the public. This experience was developed into a series of multimedia projects, including this satirical field guide. Dedicated with a nod and a wink to Anne Murray, the *Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America* covers survival skills, descriptions of flora and fauna, and information on the ersatz Lesbian National Parks and Services. Much of the charm of this guide lies in its packaging. Beautifully designed and illustrated by Daniel Barrow and Zab, this book evokes a 1950s field guide with its hand-drawn illustrations, tan font, and rounded cover. However, this nostalgia for the past is subverted by the content that satirizes traditional homophobic attitudes. Dempsey and Millan appropriate the language and imagery of scouting and armed forces recruitment ads to create the spiffily dressed, well-prepared Junior Lesbian Ranger whose mandate is the stewardship of the “fragile lesbian ecosystem.” This association of lesbianism with the natural world is also a gentle mocking of essentialist lesbian feminist politics. Filled with double entendres and tongue-in-cheek earnestness, Dempsey and Millan celebrate sexuality and diversity while criticizing heterosexist assumptions of so-called natural sexuality and gender roles, as well as internalized homophobia within the lesbian community. The book, clocking in at 264 pages, is long for what is basically a joke, and the relentless faux quotes attributed to their actual friends may annoy anyone out of the loop. Nonetheless, Dempsey and Millan’s work is certainly a unique piece of lesbian Canadiana.

### **Doctor, Farzana, 1970-**

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Novel

*Stealing Nasreen*. Inanna, 2007. *Stealing Nasreen* examines the lives of three people who are trapped by both their circumstances and their own choices: Shaffiq and Salma, a married Indian couple who have just emigrated to Toronto, and Nasreen, a lesbian who is second generation Indo-Canadian. Nasreen, who works as a psychologist, counsels others while her own life is a mess. She binges on food and lies to her friends while trying to cope with being dumped by her girlfriend and the recent death of her mother. Shaffiq, who worked as an accountant back in Mumbai and secretly wonders if coming to Canada was a mistake, is a cleaner at the hospital where Nasreen is employed. He becomes increasingly curious about Nasreen, who seems both familiar and alien to him. He pieces together bits of her life from her trash, which he takes home and squirrels away. When, by coincidence, Salma meets Nasreen, she, like her husband, is drawn to the psychologist, leading Salma to also engage in strangely compulsive and risky behavior. The characters, all of whom are constrained in different ways, deny their feelings, opting instead to project them onto objects: food, garbage, and in the case of Salma, a painting she hangs in her house, the meaning of which is hidden in plain sight. The dénouement, unfortunately, is less powerful than it might have been, taking the form of an awkwardly executed group therapy session. Nonetheless the characters in this debut novel are well drawn and sympathetic.

## **Donald, Christine, 1950-**

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### Poetry

*The Fat Woman Measures Up*. Gynergy, 1986. While body size is an issue that affects lesbians as much as homophobia, literature on this theme is sparse, particularly in terms of the relationship between desire and accepted standards of body size and weight within the lesbian community. Donald's poems on this topic veer from prose manifesto in which she simply describes her feelings and experiences to more subtle and penetrating pieces that force her audience to confront one of the most unacknowledged prejudices standing in the way of desire. One of the more successful poems includes the lines: "she suggests to me / that my fat body / is a barrier between us. / though she herself / wears glasses, / being shortsighted."

## **Donoghue, Emma, 1969-**

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### Novel

*Landing*. Harcourt, 2007. When Jude, a twenty-five-year-old archivist from southern Ontario gets on an airplane for the first time, she meets Síle, a forty-year-old Indo-Irish flight attendant. The two are immediately attracted, and thus begins the love story at the heart of this contemporary novel. But can desire at a high altitude survive the landing? Síle's trendy, cosmopolitan lifestyle seems at odds with Jude's more grounded existence as a woman rooted to the small town in which she has lived all of her life. This literary romance, which is written from the point of view of both women, explores the pleasures and challenges of a long distance relationship over the course of a year. The writing is fluent and engaging. Lines such as "I love you...pretended to be in the present tense, but it had a future hidden inside it" alert the reader that they are in the hands of a seasoned writer. This is also clear in the witty treatment of sexual politics and the clashes between urban and rural life, such as when stylish high femme Síle experiences her first Canadian snowstorm or the dubious charms of a Summer Squash Fair. Other aspects of this novel are unfortunately glib. At the beginning of the book Jude is living with her mother, who dies, and this significant relationship is barely mentioned again. Similarly glossed over is the age difference between the lovers. But such weaknesses are overridden by the novel's charms.

### Awards

*Room* won the Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and was short-listed for the Booker Award in 2010. The *Sealed Letter* was tied for a Lambda Literary Award in 2008. *Landing* won a Golden Crown Award in 2007. *Life Mask* was short-listed for both a Lambda Literary Award and the Ferro-Grumley Award in 2004. *Slammerkin* won the Ferro-Grumley Award in 2002. *Hood* won the Stonewall Award in 1997. *Stir Fry* was shortlisted for a Lambda Literary Award in 1994.

## **Douglas, Lauren Wright, 1947-**

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Mystery

*The Always Anonymous Beast*. Naiad, 1987. Douglas' debut mystery features Caitlin Reese, a jaded crown prosecutor turned outlaw investigator. Caitlin is hired by a married, closeted television anchorwoman to find out who is blackmailing her, and her lesbian lover, an antiviolence feminist. Not only does Caitlin have less than a week to track down the blackmailer, but she must also deal with her attraction to the frosty and uncooperative lover who is quite dismissive of Caitlin's profession and refers to her in no uncertain terms as a "thug." The mystery series, set in Victoria but de-Canadianized with references to U.S. politicians, follows the Naiad formula of emphasizing sex and romance over plot. The book is, nonetheless, competently written and features as an entertaining and likeable supporting cast an enigmatic animal trainer, a male computer geek, and a hippie dippy straight couple.

Awards

*Ninth Life* won a Lambda Literary Award in 1990.

## **Douglas, Marion, 1952-**

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Novel

*Magic Eight Ball*. Polestar, 2000. Calgary writer Marion Douglas' strength is her ability to observe the ordinary lives of her characters with compassion and deadpan humour. *Magic Eight Ball* is a quirky literary novel about a young girl growing up in southwestern Ontario in the imaginary farming town of Flax. The novel, which appears to be a coming of age story, is more a study of a woman who is anxious about intimacy of any kind. As an adult, the protagonist studies sociology in university and becomes pregnant after a single, fleeting encounter with a man whose name she can't really recall with any accuracy. She then leaves Ontario for Alberta to live with an elderly aunt, and finally, painstakingly, falls in love with another woman. Douglas' protagonist views the world with a thoroughly entertaining hyper self-consciousness, including amusing references to how her personal life would be classified in sociological terms.

Awards

*Bending at the Bow* won the Writers Guild of Alberta Award in 1995.

## **Dunnion, Kristyn, 1969-**

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Juvenile Literature

*Mosh Pit*. Red Deer, 2004. Dunnion's *Mosh Pit* harkens back to "social problem" young adult novels of the 1970s in which the youth of the protagonist did not compromise the seriousness of the themes or the grace of the writing. Dunnion successfully updates the genre with blogging, crack cocaine, and a heroine who identifies as a lesbian from the

opening page. Simone is a teenage dyke torn between loyalty to her destructive best friend and her own need to carve out a different kind of life for herself as she navigates her way through a grungy urban landscape of punk bars, booze cans, crack houses, and the sex trade. The plot is far from original, but Dunnion manages to adroitly twist stock characters and situations into fresh configurations. She focuses on Simone's budding identity as a young butch rather than her coming out and does not relegate Cherry, the wayward best friend, to either victim or mean girl status. Instead, Cherry's irreverent blogs show her to be simultaneously vulnerable, exploited, and a frighteningly resourceful criminal. Simone is rescued, naturally, but her support system comes from young queer sex workers and punk musicians. Sexy Carol, the love interest, comes close to the hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold stereotype, but her refusal to offer Simone an easy ride into the sunset provides necessary complexity for both the character and the novel. *Mosh Pit* is not a short novel, but there is more than enough plot to sustain interest, and Dunnion effectively captures the sassy speech of contemporary teenagers.

### **Elwin, Rosamund, 1955-**

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Juvenile Literature

*Asha's Mums*. Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paulse; illustrated by Dawn Lee. Women's Press, 1990. *Asha's Mums* is written for the four- to six-year-old age group in language that kids can use and easily understand, and is attractively illustrated with watercolours. The book tells the story of Asha, a young black girl who is going on a school trip to the Science Centre. Asha is afraid she will not be able to go with her classmates because her teacher insists that Asha did not fill out the permission form correctly when she listed two mothers as her parents. Asha describes her family during show and tell, and the children in her class argue about whether a person can have two mothers. Fortunately, some children think you can, and Asha's lesbian mothers, both of whom are women of colour, show up at the school to convince the remaining students, not to mention the clueless teacher. This rather low-key book, which reflects a not uncommon dilemma for same-sex parents as well as the multiracial demographics of the city of Toronto has been the subject of controversy. The Surrey, British Columbia School Board of Trustees passed a resolution stating that *Asha's Mums* and other books depicting children with same-sex parents are not appropriate as learning resources for young students. This resolution was challenged in court and in 2002, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against the school board on the grounds that provincial legislation in British Columbia states that the public school system is secular and non-sectarian.

### **Émond, Johanne, 1951-**

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Novel

*D'une femme à propos d'une autre*. La Plume d'Oie, 2003. In *D'une femme à propos d'une autre*, the narrator recounts her personal journey, focusing on the private world. The narrator has known that she is a lesbian since the age of ten, but it will take her another three decades to fully come to terms with this. At forty, she leaves her husband and children to go and live with a woman for whom she had felt love at first sight upon

meeting her fifteen years earlier. Émond skillfully blends lyrical anecdotes and poetry in her exploration of the phases and painful aftermath of the intense and exuberant relationship between the two women. Émond's work is exquisitely rendered; the language is precise and daring, the tone tender and incisive. *D'une femme à propos d'une autre* is not so much a coming out story as a mature meditation on the greater meaning and significance of ordinary life events. *Review by Julie Suprenant.*

### **Fleming, Anne, 1964-**

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Short Fiction

*Pool-hopping and Other Stories.* Polestar, 1998. Fleming has written a series of stories capturing pivotal moments when circumstances compel people to take decisive action to change the course of their lives in ways both dramatic and ordinary. A child takes her albino sister to show and tell, a woman musician reveals the betrayal of her lover and fellow band member, teenagers dare each other to plunge into neighbours' pools on hot summer nights, and an older man robs a bank to win the love of his estranged gay son. Fleming's characters, be they members of suburban families or urban lesbians, are well drawn with intelligence and self-deprecating humour. The characters' lives are engaging and their personalities tend to linger in the mind of the reader for some time after the volume has been read and put aside.

Awards

*Pool-hopping and Other Stories* was nominated for a Governor General's Award and short-listed for the Danuta Gleed Award in 1999.

### **Follett, Beth, d.o.b. unknown**

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Novel

*Tell it Slant.* Coach House, 2001. *Tell it Slant* borrows the obsessive lovers from Djuna Barnes *Nightwood* and places them in Canada's most European city, Montreal, to tell a fragmented and experimental Bildungsroman. The past and present of the novel are framed by two deaths in the family of Nora Flood, the twenty-two-year-old protagonist. Threaded throughout is the story of Nora's passionate friendship with a gay man and her doomed affair with a feckless woman. Follett focuses on Nora's interior life rather than on character development or plot. As a result, *Tell It Slant* is in essence a textual film of Nora's brain. Follett's elegant use of language, apparent on the first page when she writes "I wake into damp rumpled cotton sheets, black silk strangling my breasts, the light unfolding—grey and dim" should attract any lover of poetic fiction.

### **Foster, Marion, 1963-**

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Mystery

*The Monarchs Are Flying.* Women's Press, 1987. Media personality and closeted lesbian, Leslie Taylor, finds herself in a Kafkaesque nightmare when her ex-lover, Marcie, the

wife of a prominent architect, is found dead in a motel room. Although innocent, circumstantial evidence points to Taylor, and she only makes things worse when she makes the mistake of lying to the cops about the nature of her relationship to the victim. One of the detectives is a local redneck who disapproves of Taylor's documentary series on domestic violence, and the other is a slick Toronto import who has made a career out of entrapping gay men for sexual solicitation. Not surprisingly, they gun for Leslie. In a northern Ontario mining community where lesbianism itself is tantamount to a crime, who can save Leslie Taylor? Enter lawyer Harriet Fordham Croft, a poised, intelligent, and slender beauty. The legal and romantic outcomes of this brisk-paced courtroom drama are predictable, yet *The Monarchs Are Flying* is solidly constructed, lesbian-feminist entertainment.

Note

Marion Foster is a pseudonym for Shirley Shea. Foster also wrote, with Kent Murray, *A Not So Gay World: Homosexuality in Canada* (McLelland & Stewart, 1972), a fascinating portrait of Canadian gay subculture as it existed prior to the beginning of the modern gay liberation movement.

### **Franson, Leanne, 1963-**

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Graphic Fiction

*Assume Nothing: Evolution of a Bi-Dyke: Comics*. Slab-O-Concrete, 1997. In what started as an effort to woo a particular woman, Franson self-published mini comics about her life as represented by her alter ego, Liliane, and in the process, developed an underground following. *Assume Nothing* is a selection of these comics with stories ranging from the inexplicable occurrences of everyday life, such as finding a patch of skin on a shelf in a new apartment, to the unpredictable terrain of sexual discovery as Liliane makes the transition from fag hag to bisexual dyke. In the unlikely event that Franson's loose, expressive drawing style fails to beguile, the intelligence, self-deprecating humour, and loving depiction of "la belle province" will succeed in captivating readers with both the dramatic and quieter moments in the life of the well-intentioned protagonist.

Awards

Franson is best known as an illustrator of children's books. *L'Ourson qui volait une Juliette* was nominated for a Governor General's Aware in 1997.

### **Fredette, Nathalie, 1963-**

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Mystery

*Le bain d'Amélie*. Québec Amérique, 2001. Craving rest and relaxation, Sophie and Geneviève, a young couple from Québec, rent a flat close to Amélie-les-Bains, the famous thermal springs in the south of France. Their plans for a quiet summer vacation change drastically following the murder of five couples at Amélie-les-Bains. Upon

finding out that their new friends and neighbours, the Frédériques, are among the victims, our two heroines begin to look for answers and find themselves at the centre of an intrigue that will lead them all the way to Spain. Billed as a combination travel story and mystery, *Le bain d'Amélie* doesn't hit the mark with either genre. Superficial and abundant descriptions of tourist attractions and the ingredients comprising various regional culinary specialties bog down the plot and fail to provide insight into the characters whose personalities are undeveloped. The landscape, art, and architecture of the Pyrenees does not appear to touch or affect change in the protagonists, nor does the locale represent any sort of symbolic journey for the heroines. *Le bain d'Amélie* lacks suspense, drama, and urgency; the protagonists solve the crime and neatly wrap things up in the last few pages of the novel. There is no queer specificity to this couple; the incidental lesbians have very middle-class tastes and aspirations and are culturally quite mainstream. Homophobia is mentioned often but is never addressed with any depth. Fredette's novel is, however, written in a very accessible style and as such, may make for a light holiday read. *Review by Julie Suprenant.*

### **Gagnon, Isabelle, 1970-**

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Novel

*Marie Mirage*. Remue-Ménage, 2000. As its title suggests, *Marie mirage* is a novel about the illusory quality of passion. Set in the queer ghettos of Montreal—among the lesbian bars and the urban street life—the novel vividly captures the relationship between the high energy, frantic, and sometimes desperate qualities of the city, and the intense and all-consuming experience of passion. The narrator, Dominique, a young woman stuck working in lesbian bars for the last eight years, gets picked up by the charming and alluring Marie. The next few weeks are spent in a haze of sexual passion, until Dominique discovers the truth that lies behind Marie's often strange and secretive behaviour. This novel is fast-paced, compelling, and well-written, and it captures the lesbian *zeitgeist* of 1990s Montreal. *Review by Chris Roulston.*

### **Gammon, Carolyn, 1959-**

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Poetry

*Lesbians Ignited*. Gynergy, 1992. Carolyn Gammon attracted national news coverage when she demanded that Concordia University provide her with a Mistress of Arts. Not surprisingly, her poetry collection, *Lesbians Ignited*, is concerned with lesbian feminist politics, homophobia, and sexism. With intimate personal stories told in a fierce, blunt style, Gammon examines what binds and divides people. Her serious tone occasionally becomes playful, such as in "Butch Fem Identity Crisis," where she writes, "I'm a fem / I have long red hair / and chatty wrists / that pump a hundred-fifty pound bench press / I'm a butch / make no mistake / I pack a slim two-fingered / pale lavender dildo / I like to take it in the ass / with lots of cream." *Lesbians Ignited* is not subtle in either its themes or use of language, but Gammon is unflinchingly honest, examining without hesitation problems she has experienced in her lesbian relationships, including unsatisfying sex,

violence, and a sexually transmitted disease. Her willingness to tackle issues within her own community keeps *Lesbians Ignited* from simply being a pedantic read.

### **Gibb, Camilla, 1968-**

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Novel

*The Petty Details of So-and-So's Life*. Doubleday, 2002. In her second novel, award-winning author Camilla Gibb leaves behind her grim humour and experimental style in favour of a more subdued realism. *The Petty Details of So-and-so's Life* nonetheless succeeds as a subtle, stylishly written exploration of a dysfunctional family. The burden of contending with a sadistic, mentally ill father and an alcoholic, barely capable mother leads siblings Emma and Blue Taylor to choose aggressively different life paths. Emma seemingly plays the role of good girl to Blue's bad boy—she heads off to university while he drops out of school. They are both engaged, however, in the same act of escape. Emma's ability to daydream, to imagine alternate possibilities, leads her to try on identities as if they are disguises: Russian princess, academic, archaeologist, ice cream shop worker, straight girl, and lesbian. Blue, as his name suggests, is a depressive living a precarious blue collar existence as a drug-dealing tattoo artist. Neither Emma nor Blue are able to leave their past behind; their work metaphorically reflects their need to dig beneath surfaces, which in turn leads to their most damaging personal disasters. Gibb rejects therapeutic notions of closure in favour of acceptance: acceptance of love, of failure, and of one's self, thereby offering her characters hope in place of anger and culpability.

Awards

*Sweetness in the Belly* won a Trillium Award in 2006 and was short-listed for the Giller Prize in 2005. *Mouthing the Words* won the City of Toronto Book Award in 2000.

### **Gidlow, Elsa, 1898-1986**

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Autobiography

*Elsa: I Come with My Songs*. Booklegger, 1986. Elsa Gidlow may have been the first woman in North America to publish literature with lesbian content. In 1923, a small American press published *On a Grey Thread*, her debut collection of love poetry addressed to women. Gidlow was twenty-five years old and had just moved to New York City from Quebec. Gidlow never returned to Canada, but her autobiography is nonetheless of interest to Canadians because of her description of her early life as a lesbian poet living in Montreal.

Gidlow grew up outside of Montreal with six siblings in a three-room house that did not include plumbing. From a young age, she was fascinated with books but received little formal education and began clerical work at age sixteen. Around this time, she fell in love with a woman. When their friendship ended, Gidlow organized a writers' group as a way to meet other "outsiders," and she became part of a bohemian group of men and

women who introduced her to literature, aesthetics, theosophy, and pacifism. Roswell Mills, a gay man in the group joined Gidlow in creating a tiny independent magazine, *Les Mouches Fantastiques*. It included poetry, translations of Verlaine, articles on “the intermediate sex,” and one-act plays sympathetically depicting same-sex love along with editorials condemning World War I. In 1920, Gidlow moved to New York to earn a living as a writer and to meet lesbians.

Gidlow never became successful. Her chapbooks of poetry were mostly self-published, but she supported herself financially as an editor and freelance journalist. Her writing style and themes were conventional, but her autobiography reveals a woman whose politics were ahead of her time (in California, she was part of an early back-to-the-land commune). She was passionate and lived her life on her own terms, even at the price of poverty and rejection.

### **Goliger, Gabrielle, 1949-**

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Novel

*Girl Unwrapped*. Arsenal Pulp, 2010. Set in Montreal and Jerusalem during the 1960s, *Girl Unwrapped* is a portrait of a girl who doesn't feel like one. While playing Double Dutch, protagonist Toni Goldblatt “whirls [the ropes] in fast-moving arcs, standing with legs slightly apart like a cowboy who rustles steers.” She prefers the company of a tough gang of boys, but their adventures together press an inconvenient awareness on Toni of the burdens of being female and Jewish. Adolescence increases Toni's problems with identity. At 5'9”, she towers over the other girls and has no friends, a matter her mother tries to solve by sending her daughter to Jewish summer camp. At camp Toni falls violently in love with Janet, the guitar-playing camp counselor. Toni's attempt to court Janet leads to disaster, and at home Toni is forced to reinvent herself as a good girl, a model student so immersed in her favourite subject, biology, that she can ignore her own sexual drives. But at the age of eighteen in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Toni abandons her studies for Israel, where she once again encounters Janet, now a pot-smoking hippie. Toni views both Janet and Israel with a starry-eyed idealism that is rapidly shattered. Only back in Montreal, both in the underground lesbian bar scene and in the wake of family tragedy, is Toni able to see herself with the clarity and understanding the author has already provided the reader. The power of this novel lies in the empathetic intelligence with which Golliger portrays the conflicts between her vibrantly drawn characters. Whether she is describing the blundering protagonist or a casually encountered Palestinian man who objects to pubic hair, each character is memorable. *Girl Unwrapped* is a satisfying and well-crafted bildungsroman.

### **Goobie, Beth, 1959-**

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Juvenile Fiction

*Hello, Groin*. Orca, 2006. *Hello Groin* is a coming out story aimed at middle school readers. Sixteen-year-old Dylan has the perfect boyfriend: a sensitive, handsome, popular jock who genuinely cares for her. His friends, however, are pressuring him to have sex,

which Dylan doesn't want because she's in love with her best friend, another girl. In the character of Dylan, Goobie effectively captures the self-consciousness and emotional turmoil of adolescence, but the secondary characters are much less richly imagined—Dylan's peers are stereotypes, and her parents are too good to be true. This book succeeds on some levels and misses the mark on others. The narration is skilful and the writing stylish, but in the present day setting of the novel, the complete absence of modern communications technology as part of teenage life is jarring. None of the characters appear to have or use a computer, a cell phone, or portable media player; they communicate by late night phone calls from home, and entertainment consists of going out to the movies and the local video arcade. Equally inauthentic is Dylan's lack of knowledge or interest in queer culture that even the most closeted teenager could glean from the web or popular culture.

Awards

*Hello, Groin* was short-listed for the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2007. Both *The Lottery* and *Sticks and Stones* were short-listed for the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2003. *Before Wings* won the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award and was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2001. *Mission Impossible* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1995. *Scars of Light* won the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 1995.

### **Graham, Candis, 1949-2005**

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Short Fiction

*Imperfect Moments*. Polestar, 1993. Each of these unvarnished stories, set in the domestic sphere, is told from a female perspective. Second wave feminism argued that the inner workings of women's family and daily life is no less significant or powerful a subject for literature than the masculine world of war or commerce. This is a maxim that some of these stories in their banality and minutiae challenge. In "Without Regrets," a story with almost no dialogue or plot, a narrator gets her period and contemplates menopause. More successful is the gently ironic, "Freedom Fighter," in which a woman, after waiting for a late bus in the winter cold, cuts the headphone cord of a rude young man unwilling to turn down his music. The longest story, "Little Scraps and Nothingnesses," is a portrait of an artist as young lesbian government worker who, inspired by Emily Carr, gradually finds the courage to take her painting seriously. A few stories deal more with issues such as domestic violence, familial homophobia, and coming out, but they always unfold in a placid, understated manner. Some readers may find these stories dull; others will appreciate the warm voice of the author and her always amiable lesbian characters.

### **Hale, Amanda, d.o.b. unknown**

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Novel

*The Reddening Path*. Thistledown, 2007. *The Reddening Path* weaves the history of the conquest of Mexico with a contemporary story of a young woman who returns to

Guatemala to search for her biological mother. Paméla has been raised in Toronto by a white lesbian couple, but mysterious dreams and research for a term paper awaken her desire to seek her heritage. Once in Guatemala, Paméla finds her biological mother, Fabiana, a Mayan woman. Fabiana's family was murdered by the government, yet now she is the mistress of an army general. A murky parallel is drawn between Fabiana's circumstances and the historical figure of La Malinche, interpreter and mistress to Hernando Cortés, the man who overthrew the Aztec empire. La Malinche gave birth to the first mestizo child, but was forced to give him to Cortés. While the novel focuses on the similar fates of La Malinche and Fabiana, a more interesting parallel could have been made between their adopted children. One of the United Nation's definitions of genocide is the forcible transfer of children from one group to another, but *The Reddening Path* never explores this, or even suggests Paméla's experience growing up with white lesbian parents might have been alienating. This, however, is only one of the book's problems. History is dumped wholesale into the story, leaving the reader to drown in a sea of names and facts. Lengthy quotes from actual history books appear, suggesting the author was unwilling to restate the information in a more digestible form. The overall writing is clunky with stilted dialogue. A smaller annoyance is the absence of lesbian sexuality. Many passionate erotic scenes occur between heterosexual Guatemalans, but the relationship between the lesbian mothers is lukewarm. Paméla's own lesbian relationship merits a single paragraph, and her friendship with a nun hints at a sensuality that never emerges.

### **Hamilton, Jane Eaton, 1954-**

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#### Short Fiction

*Hunger*. Oberon, 2002. The back cover of *Hunger* states that these stories are about longing and loss, which is too dainty a description for this collection: "derailment" would be more appropriate. White, middle-class Canadians face typical crises: infidelity, illness, pregnancy, and a child leaving home. But the manner in which these stories are executed is quirky and accomplished. In "A Drosophila's Wings," a man finds himself repelled by his newborn son and resentful of the bond between his wife and child. In this story Hamilton employs bleak humour and lyricism to great effect. What is even more skillful, however, is her ability to evoke sympathy in the reader towards both husband and wife. Many stories in this collection deal with infidelity, which is examined from multiple points of view—the betrayer, the betrayed, a man, a woman, a heterosexual, a lesbian. The final story, "Hunger," is a bit of a departure. More surrealistic in style, "Hunger" explores power and victimization in a lesbian relationship. But in this story, as in the others, pathos and comedy is combined in a graceful style.

#### Awards

*Hunger* was short-listed for the Ferro-Grumley Award in 2003. *Body Rain* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 1991.

## Harou, Lise, 1950-

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Novel

*À propos de Maude*. VLB, 1986. In *À propos de Maude*, written in the first-person style of the *récit littéraire*, Harou recounts the tale of Élisabeth's obsession with a woman named Maude. Élisabeth lives in Montreal, while Maude lives in Europe and is married, albeit unconventionally, to Edvard. In the first of four parts, Élisabeth provides an excruciatingly detailed rendition of the times she spent with Maude; she describes the colour of Maude's shoes, names the English-language pop tunes that were playing on the radio at the restaurants where they dined, and catalogues the intersections they crossed while strolling downtown. Harou's writing is often awkward and flat but the combination of quasi-documentary realism and melodrama creates the uncanny sense, at times, of watching someone's real-life experiences unfold exactly as they are burned into memory. In the second section, Edvard speaks up. He and Élisabeth have fallen into a long-distance love affair of their own, seemingly as a sublimated outlet for their excess passion for Maude, but their mild romance pales in comparison to their mutual adoration of her. The object of their affections then takes her turn in the spotlight in the form of letters to Élisabeth—chatty and affectionate, but lacking even the barest hint of Élisabeth's profound emotional attachment. Maude, kind and thoughtlessly cruel by turns, is increasingly preoccupied with her mother's suicide. Unfortunately, as a character, Maude is so bland that it is difficult to understand how she has inspired such devotion from the other two. *Review by Andrea Zanin.*

## Hart, C.L., d.ob. unknown

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Novel

*Facing Evil*. PD Publishing, 2005. The plot, if incredulous, at least keeps moving forward in this unremarkable lesbian genre novel. Abby Stanfield, a hot-tempered cop with a drinking problem, has worked hard to bring serial killer Billy Ward to justice, but the case is thrown out of court on a technicality. Afterwards Abby responds to a taunt from Billy by threatening to kill him and is forced to take a leave from her job. Cooling her heels in a mountain resort, Abby meets Sarah, a mysterious stranger with a secret agenda. In fact, everyone in this novel seems to have something to hide. Only by facing buried truths is Abby able to find her way out of a jail cell when she is arrested for what appears to be a vigilante murder of Billy Ward. (Note, that the author, while Canadian, has set this work in the United States.)

## Hart, Lois Cloarec, 1956-

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Short Fiction

*Assorted Flavours: A Collection of Lesbian Short Stories*. PD Publishing, 2005. The unsubtle title does a disservice to these fine stories and novella. Hart's writing style is unadorned and her characters, mostly middle-aged and older women, are conveyed with warmth and intelligence. She switches genres, shifting from realist literary fiction to

speculative fiction to romance. An example of the latter is her deliciously trashy final novella, “The Lion and the Lamb,” in which Jac, bored with sleeping with every girl in the bar, accepts a wager from her best friend to seduce a straight woman engaged to be married in three months. If Jac loses, she has to sleep with her best friend, but after Jac meets Christi, her compelling prey, losing a bet soon becomes the least of Jac’s problems.

### **Holbrook, Susan, 1967-**

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#### Poetry

*Misled*. Red Deer, 1999. Holbrook blends autobiographical anecdotes and philosophy into a maze of word play. She strings together word associations, naughty puns, deliberately twisted clichés, and reworked fairy tales to explore the multiple, mistaken, and shifting meaning of language and experience. In “Crush,” a searing examination of her youthful queer crushes, she writes: “Crush. That’s a tame one. That’s a word you can have over for Sunday dinner. ... What about all the hearts that have been garbage compacted, steel-toe ground, 18-wheeler run over; grand piano dropped, record pressed, rockslide into bloody rubble?” Holbrook pursues forms that challenge her audience, yet her lively sense of humour offers entertainment.

#### Awards

*Misled* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 1999.

### **Holden-Lawrence, Monica, 1950-**

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#### Novel

*Mad About the Crazy Lady*. Air, 1977. *Mad About the Crazy Lady* is an acid trip of a book. The first of three sections, ‘Stills,’ introduces the Crazy Lady, who may be an imaginary werewolf, and the less fantastical Mon, a child who observes “I am not a boy or a girl yet. I think I will get a choice.” But Mon, who attends convent school and falls in love with a girl, experiences repression, not choice. In ‘Film,’ the second and most accessible portion of the book, Mon describes trying to find a place amidst the role playing of a rough-edged gay bar culture circa 1970. She has affairs with a transsexual woman and a musician named Zoa and drinks a lot. At one point, after Mon announces she’s drunk and typing, the font shifts to mimic a manual typewriter, and Holden-Lawrence produces a progressively more error-filled and senseless text. In the final section, ‘Fender,’ there are more examples of this self-conscious narration. Zoa and Mon go on a surreal road trip through America to find out if the Crazy Lady character exists. They are unable to find her but do have gender-bending sex and make a film about the book. What Lawrence-Holden is trying to say about either identity or sanity is deliberately ambiguous. The author regularly derails her own narrative to point out the weakness of her character development and her inability to decide upon a plot. If these assessments were less accurate, the technique could be used to comic effect, but as it is most readers will do little besides nod their heads. Many will find *Mad About the Crazy Lady* dated and pretentious, but a few will enjoy its queer madcap fluidity.

## **Hopkinson, Nalo, d.o.b. unknown**

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Novel

*The Salt Roads*. Warner Brothers, 2003. *The Salt Roads*. Warner Brothers, 2003. In a story spanning the lives of three different women, *The Salt Roads* addresses the theme of black women's bid for sexual, spiritual, and economic freedom. Mer, a midwife and healer, is an African slave on a sugar plantation in Santa Domingue (later known as Haiti). Jeanne Duval is a bisexual Afro-French dancer and mistress to nineteenth century poet Charles Baudelaire, a man who shocked his contemporaries with his morbidity and explicit sexual poems on lesbians and vampires. Thais is a Greek-Nubian prostitute living in fourth century Egypt who makes a pilgrimage to the desert. When Mer and two other women on the plantation bury a stillborn child, their prayer unleashes Ezili, a goddess or loa of love in the voodoo pantheon. Ezili moves through time and space, possessing humans so that she can interact with the natural world. As Ezili comes into consciousness by occupying the bodies of her hosts, Duval, Mer and Thais, she represents the diasporic history of black women scattered across continents. Hopkinson sprinkles the characteristics ascribed to the Haitian goddess among her female characters who are in turn possessed by the loa. In matching the women's dissimilar stories, the author creates a brilliant literary conceit of possession in all its facets: sexual, economic, and spiritual. Hopkinson fearlessly honours female sexual pleasure and creates strong female characters, but unfortunately equal attention is not given to the women's stories with the bulk of the novel concentrating on Duval and Baudelaire at the expense of Mer's romantic relationship with another woman and her conflicts with Makandal, a shape-shifting slave who is fomenting a revolution.

Awards

*The New Moon's Arms* won an Aurora Award and a Sunburst Award and was short-listed for the Nebula Award in 2008. *The Salt Roads* won the Gaylactic Spectrum Award in 2004. *Skin Folk* won a Sunburst Award in 2003 and the World Fantasy Award in 2002. *Brown Girl in the Ring* won a Locus Science Fiction Award in 1999.

## **Humphreys, Helen, 1961-**

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Novel

*Afterimage*. HarperFlamingo, 2000. Inspired by a series of works by Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, the exquisitely written *Afterimage* tells the story of a love triangle between Annie Phelan, an impoverished Irish-born maid who arrives to work at the estate of Isabelle Dashell, a single-minded photographer struggling to break into the late nineteenth century male-dominated art world, and her dreamy husband Eldon, a cartographer whose health prevents him from exploring the world he charts. By shifting interior monologue from the female artist to her muse, from the privileged man with liberal ideals to his servant, Humphreys delves into themes of subjectivity, class, the oppression of women, and the silencing of lesbianism. The reader is left with the task of distinguishing between that which art merely objectively records and that which it leaves

to the subjective imagination. Humphreys' background as an award-winning poet is evident in the seamless manner in which she weaves metaphor and simile throughout her text, providing the reader with a vibrant portrait of Victorian-era England.

#### Awards

*Wild Dogs* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2005. *After Image* won the Writer's Trust Fiction Prize 2001. *Anthem* won the Canadian Author's Association Award for Poetry and was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2000. *Leaving Earth* won the Toronto Book Award in 1998.

### **Jiménez-Pendleton, Karleen, 1971-**

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#### Juvenile Literature

*Are You a Boy or a Girl?* Green Dragon, 2000. *Are You a Boy or a Girl?*, written in language readily accessible to six- to eight-year-old children, asserts, contrary to societal images and expectations, that the child in the various photographs presented throughout the book is indeed a girl. Pendleton-Jiménez has included personal photographs and drawings presumably made by her as a child to lovingly create a short book intended to empower the alienated girl child whose identity and self-expression inadvertently transgress societal gender norms. *Are You a Boy or a Girl?* provides a necessary positive portrayal but is not unrealistic in that the author also alerts such children to the responses they can expect from peers and adults.

#### Awards

*Are You a Boy or a Girl?* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2000.

### **Jones, Lizard, 1961-**

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#### Novel

*Two Ends of Sleep: A Novel*. Press Gang, 1997. Witty, entertaining, and thoughtful may not seem like the most appropriate words to describe a novel about a downwardly-mobile lesbian activist recently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, but *Two Ends of Sleep* eschews drama and sentimentality. The effect of MS on the protagonist, Rusty, is to place her in a perpetually drowsy state between waking and sleeping. As her sense of what is real and what is fantasy begins to blur, Jones creates a similar ambiguity in the text itself. The reader is left to decide the reality of infidelities and criminal behaviour in this affectionate portrayal of lesbian love, desire, and community.

#### Awards

*Her Tongue on My Theory: Images, Essays and Fantasies*, written with Persimmon Blackbridge, won a Lambda Literary Award in 1995.

## **Jutras, Jeanne-d’Arc, 1927-1992**

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Novel

*Délira Cannelle*. Québec/Amérique, 1983. Jutras has written a series of autobiographical novels featuring her alter-ego, Georgie. In *Délira Cannelle*, Georgie is working as a grocery store clerk, and her recent public coming out has caused many of her customers to shun her. One rainy day, she falls into conversation with one of the last remaining friendly clients, Mme Lalande, who decides to wait out the storm and chat. Mme Lalande reveals her own past—the story of a troubled marriage to a gay man and their scandal-ridden split—and that of her neighbours: *Délira Cannelle* is an obese woman obsessed with winning the church bingo and travelling to the Vatican, and her husband is a grumpy, wheelchair-bound war vet who spends his time filling in crossword puzzles. Georgie herself reminisces about her teenage beer-bottle runs to pay for dates with her sweetheart, Irène, when they could escape from Irène’s mother’s watchful eye. The stories of these three women are only minimally intertwined, but each is facing the realization that life hasn’t turned out as they would have expected, with the storm serving as a metaphor for troubled endings and new beginnings. The true pleasure of reading *Délira Cannelle* arises less from the characters, however, than from immersing oneself in Jutras’ vibrant and evocative writing style—a perfect rendition of working-class Québécois slang, peppered with colourful expressions and beautifully misspelled to convey accurate pronunciation. Partly a rich and meandering triple portrait of *la petite vie*, partly a tale of unlikely connection across the heavily drawn lines of sexual orientation in early ’80s Quebec, Jutras’ simple story is full of humour and hope. *Review by Andrea Zanin.*

## **King, Moynan, 1963-**

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Play

*Bathory*. Broken Jaw, 1996. *Bathory* is based upon the life of seventeenth century sadist and mass murderer Elizabeth Bathory of Hungary, a theme that begs to be treated either seriously or with the ghoulish camp of a John Waters movie. Unfortunately, King opts for light comedy that escalates to middle-brow feminist drama. *Bathory* features a tight cast of three characters: Elizabeth Bathory, the power hungry countess; Dorka, her devoted, cross-dressing servant and strong silent type; and Katarina, a ditzy lesbian herbalist who makes the error of sharing a bit of old school sorcery that says bathing in the blood of virgins can give a woman the look of eternal youth. King amusingly skewers contemporary lesbian sexual mores and New Age philosophy in her fast-paced drama, but her characters don’t linger in the mind off-stage. Moreover, she fails to treat issues of power and violence with any kind of complexity.

## **Kobayashi, Tamai, 1965-**

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### Short Fiction

*Quiotixic Erotic*. Arsenal Pulp, 2003. Kobayashi's collection is divided into two parts: the self-explanatory, 'Erotic,' and 'Quixotic,' consisting of erotic folktales. The lesbian erotica covers fairly standard scenarios in a crisp, delicate style. The sentences have a tight rhythm balanced with precise, sensuous detail. Unfortunately, less consideration is given to the characters or dialogue, and the result is an absence of erotic tension. More successful is the latter half of the book, 'Quixotic,' which, despite the title, deals more with the pursuit of desire than ideals. Particularly appealing is "The Island of Earthly Delights," an unusual tripartite tale of an all-female paradise in which the reader meets in turn a succubus, a trickster, and a demon. The succubus is a peaceful being who is indistinguishable from the natural world: the dreamer finds herself caressed by the wind, the water, even the bark of a tree. The trickster, who is female, wanders along the beach seducing women by asking them if they have seen her missing pearl, which she then claims to spot between their legs. In the final segment a murderous *yuki onna*, or snow demon, melts literally and metaphorically from the heat of her sexual encounter with a beautiful village girl. The snow demon then appears to the girl in human form, offering her a choice between desire and immortality, a choice the girl is unwilling to make. This tale in particular suggests the underlying message of the stories: desire must always be honoured.

## **Kwa, Lydia, 1959-**

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### Novel

*This Place Called Absence*. Turnstone, 2000. In her debut novel, Kwa deftly weaves together the voices of four women living in different places and times. In present day Vancouver, Wu Lan is coping with her father's recent suicide and the end of a relationship. Meanwhile in Singapore, Wu Lan's mother, Mahmee, is haunted by the ghost of her dead husband. Moving from the present to the past, to Singapore at the beginning of the century, brothel prostitutes Au Choi and Chat Mui have fallen in love. As the title suggests, the theme of this novel is absence, which, paradoxically, is experienced as a type of presence. Yen, Wu Lan's father and Mahmee's husband, remains as a haunting phantom in their lives. On the streets of Vancouver Wu Lan glimpses her former lover and encounters traces of her homeland in grocery stores, in a temple, in a library book, and in a Chinese medicine shop. Au Choi and Chat Mui, who may be figments of Wu Lan's imagination, represent a more metaphorical absence, the shadowy existence of lesbians in Singapore, and the personal histories of sex workers whose lives were considered disposable. Each character in the narrative tries, without success, to escape her grief and longing: Wu Lan seeks diversion through sexual encounters with strangers, Mahmee's response is to repress and deny her feelings, while Au Choi and Chat Mui rely on opium. Liberation, however, is ultimately found through language, both written and spoken, a message that is all the more forceful delivered in a novel with such a richly atmospheric and poetic style.

## Awards

*This Place Called Absence* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2002 and short-listed for Books in Canada First Novel Award in 2001.

## **Lai, Larissa, 1967-**

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### Novel

*Salt Fish Girl*. Thomas Allen, 2002. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Lai has created a sophisticated dystopia by plundering and subverting creation stories, Chinese cultural lore, Greek mythology, fairy tales, pop culture, and current events. Crafting a picture of brooding dysfunction rather than a tale of apocalyptic prophecy, Lai effectively critiques both the disguised brutality of post-industrial capitalism and the looming threat posed by the indiscriminate application of biotechnology in the name of human progress. The female narrator, by turns a girl, a woman, and a fish, is the connecting thread weaving together two distinct narratives in the novel, one unfolding in nineteenth century China and the other set in the twenty-first century in the Pacific Northwest. In China, protagonist Nu Wa's desires for other women and a life beyond mere subsistence lead her to make violent, criminal choices. In a futuristic British Columbia, the protagonist Miranda is born into a society where corporations govern cities, factory workers are genetically engineered, corporate jobs are virtual reality video games, and people are at risk from an epidemic known as the dreaming disease, where victims cannot escape the unfiltered horror of our collective memory of past events. Miranda, an outcast born with an inexplicable scent about her of durian fruit, perpetual, sensual, and malodorous, eventually separates from her family and rebels against her society in ways that allow her to uncover devastating truths about her own origins and the world around her. In crafting this paranoid and bleakly comic novel, Lai demonstrates that she is both a gifted storyteller and incisive social critic.

## Awards

*When Fox is a Thousand* was short-listed for the Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1996.

## **Lee, Sky, d.o.b. unknown**

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### Short Fiction

*Bellydancer: Stories*. Press Gang, 1994. This collection of stories is a theatrical, tongue-in-cheek exploration of violence and eroticism. Lee rewrites the world from the point of view of those rendered exotic by mainstream characterizations and caricatures, including belly dancers, sex workers, single mothers, lesbians of colour, and not-so-dutiful Chinese daughters. Lee romps across history, genre, and popular culture to create tales of female survivors. In "Nancy Drew Mysteries," she explores the intersection of pleasure, risk, and danger through the memories of a young Asian woman who survives various brutalities prior to fleecing her white drug dealer boyfriend and picking up a woman in a bar.

“Winter Tan Too,” the title a sarcastic nod to the Genie award winning 1987 Canadian film, *A Winter Tan*, is about an act of feminist protest in a strip club in Mexico and its effect on an eroding interracial lesbian relationship. In “Pompei,” Lee makes use of both myth and allegory to explore the choices made by village girls living in first century Rome. Veering in style from realism to magical realism, Lee’s work is complex and enchanting.

Awards

*Disappearing Moon Café* won the Vancouver Book Award and was nominated for a Governor General’s Award in 1990.

### **Lee, Suki, 1969-**

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Short Fiction

*Sapphic Traffic*. Conundrum, 2003. As the title suggests, lesbianism is the main theme of these stories. Told in the first person and often confessional, the narrators reveal secrets that range from trivial to tremendous. A “beauty” secret provides one narrator with confidence while a hidden competitiveness threatens a passionate love affair between an opera star and a wannabe. *Sapphic Traffic* is Romantic, the capital letter intentional, with characters who smuggle drugs, roll with bikers, get locked into psych wards, wander the cobblestone streets of Paris drunk on absinthe, and drown their lovers in transcendental acts of euthanasia. This is pulp fiction with little grit and no irony. Lee has a gift for capturing interior emotion, but the characters outside of the narrator remain faint and indistinct.

### **Levine, Elise, 1959-**

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Novel

*Requests & Dedications*. McClelland & Stewart, 2003. Set in both the artsy core of Toronto and a grimy boarding stable in an outlying area of the city where farms are being swallowed by subdivisions, Levine’s book peels back the skin of a family of sorts whose failed intentions to one another beget dark consequences. *Requests & Dedications* is a character-driven novel with the pacing of a summer storm, a swampy humidity that implodes in a final crackle. At the center of the story is Tanis, a young butch dyke in continual conflict with her ironically named mother, Joy. Joy is wedged between her brother, Walker, and his lover, Mimi, an alcoholic charmer to whom Joy plays consort. Jena, Walker’s spoiled daughter, is at once vacuous and the pivot on which events turn. The characters’ love and tenderness are continually thwarted by their tangled loyalties and empathetically conveyed human failings. Levine’s emotional logic is flawless and clear, but the structure of the novel and her style are dense and challenging. The more literary minded reader will admire her ability to wring originality and cool from a vernacular that would seem to have been worn smooth as Levine glides from layered, visceral imagery to a defensive dialogue that perfectly captures the class background of her characters.

## **Lieberman, Leanne. 1974-**

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Juvenile Fiction

*Gravity*. Orca, 2009. The complex characters in *Gravity* make this young adult title appropriate for high school students. Set in Toronto in the late 80s, *Gravity* introduces the reader to protagonist Ellie Gold, a young woman who has always embraced her family's Orthodox Judaism. That is, until the summer she turns fifteen when she meets Lindsay, a rebellious and unhappy private school girl. Ellie, a studious science nerd, and Lindsay, a pretty thrill-seeker, could not be more unlike, but they are physically attracted to each other. Their eventual intimacy forces Ellie to question the prescriptions of her religion and to look to others for answers. Her older sister Neshama openly challenges the school rabbi and plots an escape to a more material world with help from their liberal grandmother, but Ellie cannot bring herself to abandon her faith. It is not until Ellie's devout mother unexpectedly finds herself in conflict with the family synagogue that Ellie is able to chart her own path—a path broad enough to embrace both her beliefs and her heart. The intelligence and engaging style of Ellie's story make it much more than a simple coming out tale.

## **Luke, Pearl, 1958-**

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Novel

*Burning Ground*. HarperFlamingo, 2000. *Burning Ground*, a powerfully written debut, is a quintessentially Canadian novel with poetic writing, heavy use of landscape as a metaphor, and themes of isolation and the struggle between human beings and nature. The title of the novel is a reference to underground fires, which in this book operates as a metaphor for hidden desire. The protagonist, Percy Turner, spends her summers working in an isolated fire tower in northern Alberta scanning for smoke. She spends much of her time alone reflecting upon her troubled childhood, growing up in a trailer park, and her relationship with Marlea, her best friend and sometime lover. For companionship, she relies on an intense online correspondence with a man in a nearby tower. In the climax of the book, Percy discovers an underground fire and sets off to assess its destructive potential. The extensive damage appears to represent the danger of Percy's illicit desire, experienced not only in an affair with a married man, but also in her on-again, off-again lesbian relationship and in her lingering emotional response to her mother's infidelity.

Awards

*Burning Ground* won a Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 2001 and was short-listed for the Books in Canada First Novel Award in 2000.

## **Maart, Rozena, 1962-**

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Novel

*Rosa's District 6*. TSAR, 2004. Set in 1970 in Capetown's District 6, a working-class, segregated neighbourhood of Moslems and non-white Christians, this series of

interconnected stories addresses themes of sexual repression. In each story Rosa, a precocious eight-year-old girl, is the observer of the secret lives of the members of her community. In the opening story, she hides under a bed and sees two older, respected women, who are thought to be cousins, engage in a sexual act as tender as it is prohibited. The remaining four stories address similar territory, including incest, mental illness, violence perpetuated by a woman, male homosexuality, and racial shame. The geography is deftly drawn as is the fertile symbolism. A green chair represents a family member whose existence has been hidden, while a bracelet weaves together different segments of a community. Other aspects of the stories, however, are less skillfully crafted. The insertion of Rosa into each story appears contrived, numerous characters and plot lines are introduced only to disappear, and the tone veers erratically from magical realism to Gothic to warm-hearted community saga. While this writer has something of substance to say, she hasn't quite learned how to say it.

### **Mac, Carrie, 1975-**

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#### Juvenile Literature

*Crush*. Orca, 2006. In this brief novel, Mac pays homage to alternative families, queer culture, and the city of Brooklyn. With a nice eye for detail, Mac introduces the reader to seventeen-year-old Hope, the adventurous yet responsible daughter of loving hippie parents who do rather embarrassing hippie things, like group hugs in public places. Hope has been shipped away from the family commune in British Columbia to go live in Brooklyn, New York for the summer, where she stays with her unpleasant, cocaine-sniffing older sister, Joy. Hope despairs of having any fun with her sister, but her summer improves when she finds first a dog, and then the dog's owner, Nat, a brash young lesbian bicycle mechanic with dreads, tattoos, and piercings. After a bit of angst, the two embark upon a relationship. What is remarkable about the book is how unremarkable it is: the tone is perky and upbeat throughout and the characters (with the exception of Joy) are wholesome and appealing. It isn't entirely clear whether *Crush* is a young adult or middle grade novel; the large font and short length are appropriate for readers who are still in elementary school, but the teenage protagonist, language, and themes may be more appealing for students in junior high.

#### Awards

*The Gryphon Project* won the British Columbia Children's Book Prize and was short-listed for the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2010. *Storm* was short-listed for the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2009. *Retribution* was short-listed for a Sunburst Award and the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2008. *Droughtlanders* won the Stellar Book Award and was short-listed for a Sunburst Award and the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2007. *The Beckoners* won the British Columbia Stellar Award in 2006, an Arthur Ellis Award in 2005, and was short-listed for the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2005.

## **MacDonald, Ann-Marie, 1958-**

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### Play

*Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*. Coach House, 1990. Many Canadians have read *Fall on Your Knees*, Ann-Marie MacDonald's debut novel that managed to be both critically acclaimed and a best-seller despite the fact that an interracial lesbian relationship is the centrepiece of the story. But prior to MacDonald's successful novel, she wrote *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, a frothy play that satirizes academia and endows Shakespearean classics with a queer, feminist sensibility. Constance Leadbelly, a young, timid academic, is dumped by Professor Night, her boss whose work she has written for years. She falls into an alternate universe of the Shakespearean plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. Constance attempts to save the heroines by changing the endings of the plays, which turns out to be quite challenging when she discovers that Desdemona is a bloodthirsty adventurer rather than a passive victim, and Juliet, far from being pure and devoted, is a lively seductress. The changer becomes the changed, as the Shakespearean female characters function as archetypes of Constance's unconscious mind while the male characters are permutations of Professor Night. MacDonald not only amuses her audience but also displays a high degree of technical skill in setting the Shakespearean characters' dialogue in blank verse.

### Awards

*The Way the Crow Flies* was short-listed for a Giller Prize and a Lambda Literary Award in 2003. *Fall on Your Knees* received Oprah's Book Club Selection #45 in February 2002 and won a Commonwealth Writer's Prize, the Canadian Author's Association Literary Award, and the Dartmouth Book Award in 1997. *Fall on Your Knees* was also short-listed for the Orange Prize and Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1997 as well as for the Giller Prize in 1996. *Goodnight Desdemona, Good morning Juliet* won a Canadian Authors' Association Award in 1991, a Governor General's Award in 1990, and the Chalmers Award in 1989.

## **MacDonald, Ingrid, 1960-**

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### Short Fiction

*Catherine, Catherine: Lesbian Short Stories*. Women's Press, 1991. The eight stories in this collection are written in a deceptively simple style. Three stories, "Catherine Catherine," "True Natures," and "Seven Miracles," might very well be Canada's first works of transgender fiction. They form the Catherine Trilogy, a compelling series of interlocking stories, which was adapted into an award-winning stage production in Toronto. The trilogy is based upon the life of Catherina Margaretha Linck, an eighteenth century German woman who cross-dressed as a man. She was eventually exposed as a biological female and executed for engaging in sodomy, among other crimes. These stories are bawdy, witty, and passionate imaginings of three principal characters: the rash, hot-headed, cross-dressing Catherine; her lover, also named Catherine, who both blooms and suffers for her unquestioning faith in their relationship; and the brutal man of God

who takes their fate into his own hands. The other stories in the collection are appealing contemporary tales of girls and women coming into their own as they cope with divorced parents, the loss of a best friend, and doomed romances.

### **Maheux-Forcier, Louise, 1929-2015**

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Novel

*A Forest for Zoe*. Translated by David Lobdell. Oberon, 1986. Translation of: *Une forêt pour Zoé*. Le Cercle du Livre du France, 1969. Although virtually unknown outside of her home province, Maheux-Forcier is a well-regarded Quebec literary figure. Her first novel, *Amadou*, published in 1963, is Canada's first lesbian novel. Her third novel, *Une forêt pour Zoé*, is one of Canada's best lesbian novels. Both novels feature lesbians in primary relationships with men while longing for their lost female lovers. *Amadou* is lesbian pulp fiction: a humourless style is wedded to a kitschy plot filled with murder and mayhem that serves to affirm the impossibility for women to live outside of compulsory heterosexuality. *A Forest for Zoe*, in contrast, is a sophisticated literary novel that thrives upon paradox and dissonance. The narrator, Thérèse, is obsessed with Zoe, her childhood friend whom she experiences as a Doppelgänger or ghostly alterego. Zoe, a reckless, courageous heathen, acts as interrogator and confessor to Thérèse as she examines the significant relationships in her life. But Thérèse is not an entirely reliable narrator; her most dangerous revelations are often conveyed by metaphor, and Zoe may be real or a fantasy or even a version of Thérèse. What is certain, however, is the timeless appeal of this work. Maheux-Forcier has a splendid poetic style, and her grimly comic descriptions of betrayals between adults and children are a sly and devastating critique of oppression.

Awards

*Une forêt pour Zoé* won a Governor General's Award in 1969. *Amadou* won le Prix du Cercle du Livre de France in 1963.

### **Manthorne, Jackie, 1946-**

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Short Fiction

*Fascination and Other Bar Stories*. Gynergy, 1991. These tales of hookups in Montreal lesbian bars are so raw one can imagine the author scribbling notes on a cocktail napkin between rounds of drinks. The benefit of this lack of polish is hot, no-holds-barred sexual description while the downside is amateurish writing. Each story is narrated in the first person by different characters that all appear to be the same type, namely bottoms who quickly surrender to whichever woman, naughty or nice, comes their way. Repetition also abounds in the plots, which deal with infidelity, the meeting of innocence with experience, and love triangles that become three-way relationships. A story featuring a breast cancer survivor might be unusual in heterosexual erotic fiction, but in this lesbian feminist context is earnest and pedantic. The characters themselves are also predictable and include a baby dyke, an aging butch Casanova, a rebellious punk, and a wise, older femme. The lack of complexity would not be a problem were titillation the author's sole

purpose, but Manthorne aims higher when she has her characters awkwardly grapple with such back-in-the-day issues as dildos, S/M, and sex workers. Unfortunately, the stories are often left unresolved in a manner that suggests the author herself simply did not know how to proceed.

Awards

*Final Take* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 1996.

### **Marchessault, Jovette, 1938-2012**

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Novel

*Lesbian Triptych*. Translated by Yvonne Klein. Women's Press, 1985. Translation of: *Triptyque lesbien*. Éditions de la Pleine Lune, 1980. Contents include: *A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec*, *Night Cows*, and *The Angel Makers*. Marchessault was a rising star in the Quebec literary scene when she outed herself with the publication of *Lesbian Triptych*, a dramatic monologue in three parts. In the first part, "A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec," which has the brutal satirical style of Valerie Solanis' *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*, Marchessault inverts the teachings of the Catholic Church to denounce the sexual oppression of lesbians. The word "Medieval" in the title refers not to the historical period of the Middle Ages but is instead a sarcastic reference to the "backwardness" of Quebec prior to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s when the election of the Liberal Party of Jean Lesage ushered in a period of liberalisation and a corresponding decrease in the power of the Catholic Church. Dazzling the reader with puns and metaphors linking various forms of oppression, Marchessault takes the reader on a journey through her Catholic childhood, the love she experiences for her vivacious country cousin who is made catatonic by heterosexuality, and the constrictions imposed by her family who reject Marchessault when she comes out. The second part of the triptych, "Night Cows," which was later adapted for the stage, is a utopian celebration of mother love and a myth of origins wherein women are cows, docile breeders by day that at night soar freely through the Milky Way entwined in erotic embraces. The final part of the triptych is titled "The Angel-Makers," a Québécois expression for women who perform illegal abortions. Marchessault riffs on the meanings of left, right, knitting, and stitching as the speaker watches her mother knit to strengthen her hands for the task of taking foetuses from the womb and returning rights to women.

Awards

*Le voyage magnifique d'Emily Carr* won a Governor General's Award in 1990. *Demande de travail sur les nébuleuses* won the Grand Prix Littéraire de la Ville de Sherbrooke in 1988. *Anaïs, dans la queue de la comète* won the Grand Prix Littéraire Journal de Montréal in 1985. *La terre est trop court*, *Violet Leduc* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1982. *Comme un enfant de la terre* won the Prix France-Quebec in 1976.

## **Marlatt, Daphne, 1942-**

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### Poetry

*Touch To My Tongue*. Illustrations by Cheryl Sourkes. Longspoon, 1984. Betsy Warland and Daphne Marlatt have dedicated their respective books, *Open is Broken* and *Touch to My Tongue*, to each other. Engaged in the task of deconstructing patriarchal language, both authors have created sensuous and cerebral collections of poetry. *Touch to my Tongue* includes both poetry and an essay, "Musing with Mothertongue." In the essay Marlatt examines the relationship between language and meaning in a patriarchal culture and recommends using the female body and female experiences, such as miscarriage and breastfeeding, to create new images, symbols, and meaning. Marlatt's rhythmic poems use images of nature and uninhabited, wild space to explore the dynamics of long-distance relationships and to invoke the passion of lesbian eroticism. In "eating," she writes, "a kiwi at four a.m. among the sheets green slice of cool going down easy on the tongue extended with desire for you and you in me it isn't us we suck those other lips tongue flesh wet wall that gives and gives whole fountains inner mountains moving out resistances."

### Awards

Marlatt received a Member of the Order of Canada in 2006. *The Given* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2009. *This Tremor Love Is* was short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2002.

## **Mavrikakis, Catherine, 1961-**

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### Creative Non-fiction

*A Cannibal and Melancholy Mourning*. Coach House, 2004. Translated by Nathalie Stephens. Translation of *Deuils cannibales et mélancoliques*. Trois, 2000. Ostensibly a novel, *A Cannibal and Melancholy Mourning* is a fragmented essay in which the author blurs identities and genres. In this métissage, academic writing and seemingly accurate personal details of the author's life as a French/Greek lesbian writer teaching literature at a Montreal university are combined with anecdotes which, having the preposterous quality of fiction, are used to bolster arguments. With cranky wit, the narrator/author confronts the death of her friends and acquaintances, all named Hervé. Mavrikakis chooses the name Hervé as an allusion to French artist and writer Hervé Guibert whose work, the narrator states, "absorbed into me like a sponge, I spent too long marinating in his books." In particular, Mavrikakis references *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*, Guibert's autobiographical novel about coping with AIDS in the 1980s and witnessing the illness and death of his famous friend and mentor, Michel Foucault. Mavrikakis examines the complex emotions of the living that attend death. Whether recounting her "discreet" hairdresser's death by AIDS or a tale of a pedophile neighbour who defenestrated himself, Mavrikakis addresses hypocrisy, false sentimentality, homophobia, and the futility of denial. The narrator/author's stories are poisoned arrows piercing the survivor's relief that hovers at the edges of bereavement.

Awards

*Le Ciel de Bay City* won the Grand Prix du livre de Montréal in 2009. *Omaha Beach* was nominated for a Governor General's Award for Drama in 2008.

### **Mayor, Chandra, 1973-**

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Short Fiction

*All the Pretty Girls*. Conundrum, 2008. The delightfully campy cover of this book, featuring a colourful painting by Bonnie Marin of 1950s bathing beauties exchanging appreciative glances, evokes the lurid covers of lesbian pulp novels. The design, however, as well as the title is misleading: boy-girl tales outnumber by far the few stories dealing with lesbian relationships. A more appropriate title for this tour of girls who can't get out of bed, girls who have obsessive bad thoughts, girls who got pregnant too young, and girls who have abusive boyfriends might be *All the Angry and Depressed Girls*. These stories, all drenched in *nostalgie de la boue*, detail relationships that lack desire or erotic pleasure. None of this is to say, however, that the writing is bad. On the contrary, Mayor delicately, unpretentiously, and with occasional humour, captures the grit of Winnipeg's young, white urban underclass. Of particular note is "Suicide Bombers," a story about an encounter between two women, formerly lovers, with the title an apt metaphor for the aftermath of their relationship.

Awards

*All the Pretty Girls* was tied for the Lambda Literary Award in 2008.

### **Mayr, Suzette, 1961-**

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Novel

*Venous Hum*. Arsenal Pulp, 2004. *Venous Hum* is a comic novel with a serious problem: it isn't funny. Protagonist Lai Fun Kugelheim is pregnant and cheating on her same-sex partner with the guy next door who also happens to be her best friend's husband. Guilt over the affair makes Lai Fun agree to help her best friend plan a high school reunion, even though she loathes everyone she went to school with. This sounds like a lively plot, but the pace is slow, and the characters are undeveloped and unappealing. Lai Fun is in a perpetual state of huffiness—she's neither likeable enough to be sympathetic nor a sufficiently over-the-top bitch whose scheming antics and inevitable humbling offer gratifying schadenfreude. What precisely Mayr is trying to satirise is never clear. If she's mocking the banality of suburban life, she fails because reading chapter after chapter of the protagonist's detailed descriptions of house chores is simply boring. If she's mocking a lesbian relationship for being conventional and duplicitous, it is done in such a flat manner that the reader doesn't care. Mayr also addresses racism and the failure of Trudeau's vision of multiculturalism to take root in the Prairies, but this is dished up as an unsettled score rather than as dark and incisive comedy. Then, three-quarters of the way in, *Venous Hum* abruptly shifts tone from realism to surrealism. A carnival ride of death, disorder, and the inevitable miserable high school reunion lubricates the plot, adds

meaning to the hitherto mysterious references to veins and at last offers kooky, acerbic humour in the form of immigrant vampires. Unfortunately, the change of pace and of narrative style arrive too late to save the novel.

Awards

*The Widows* was short-listed for a Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1998.

### **Meigs, Mary, 1917-2002**

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Autobiography

*The Medusa Head*. Talonbooks, 1983. *The Medusa Head* is the second volume in the series of Meigs' memoirs that read like self-contained novels. *The Medusa Head* takes place in France in 1972 when Meigs and her long-time lover and friend, well-known writer Marie-Claire Blais, lived in a ménage à trois with "Andrée," a closeted French writer who was married to a gay man. The three of them moved to La Salle in Brittany, where Meigs, who was independently wealthy, purchased a house. Andrée was initially compelling to both Meigs and Blais, but soon each woman's desire deteriorated into an unrequited pattern of wanting the one they could not have. Andrée, as described by Meigs, was charismatic but her "morality lay in niceties of taste rather than those of behaviour." With irony and anguish, Meigs recounts incidents demonstrating Andrée's callous, self-centred, attention-seeking behaviour; Andrée responded to gentle criticism from Meigs by hurling herself into a gorse bush, and reacted to the news of Blais' rape in Paris with denial and prurience. *The Medusa Head* concludes with the aftermath of the affair in which Blais and Meigs rebuilt their friendship, and all three women wrote about the experience (see Marie-Claire Blais' *A Literary Affair*).

Awards

*In the Company of Strangers* won the QSPELL Award for non-fiction in 1992.

### **Meisner, Natalie, 1972-**

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Play

*Growing Up Salty and Other Plays*. Roseway, 1997. *Growing Up Salty*, a collection of four plays set in Atlantic Canada, challenges the viewer to examine the role of performance in everyday life. In "The Attic," a lesbian and a married woman have an illicit affair, with the attic where they meet functioning as a metaphor for the more familiar image of the closet where undisclosed sexuality resides. "The Greatest Show on Earth" juxtaposes fantasy scenes of circus performers with the realist drama of a man and woman involved in a passionate long-distance relationship. In the process of uniting real and imagined experiences, Meisner explores the connections between romantic love and performance. "The Family Wax Museum, or Growing Up Salty" also addresses the fine line between performance and reality in its examination of familial denial and silencing. The play's setting is a family dinner in which the participants freeze into an unreceptive tableau whenever Amelia, a young woman in her twenties, reveals family secrets or more

simple truths, such as her sexuality and her rejection of a traditional feminine role. When the family members do speak, it is to comment on the absence of the very present Amelia. Meisner's fourth play, "Frank Plummer, You Ain't Dead" features dying matriarch Margie Plummer, a woman who like Charles Dicken's Miss Havisham, refuses to accept the loss of her lover. But for Margie, a working class retired waitress living in rural Nova Scotia, her denial has been neither an act of stupidity nor vengeance but rather a spectacular performance crucial for both her and her children's survival.

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**Millan, Lori, 1965-**

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Note

See entry under Dempsey, Shawna.

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**Mootoo, Shani, 1957-**

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Short Fiction

*Out on Main Street and Other Stories*. Press Gang, 1993. Born in Ireland and raised in Trinidad, Mootoo moved to Canada at the age of nineteen and began a career as a visual artist and videographer. In *Out on Main Street*, her first collection of fiction, she draws upon her hybrid identity to examine feminist, racial, and lesbian issues using a variety of voices and styles. "Lemon Scent," is a sensual and elegiac tale exploring the hidden emotions of a married woman and her lesbian lover who make love beneath a samaan tree, unobserved by the woman's husband. "Out on Main Street," written in Indo-Caribbean patois, explores different axes of privilege and discrimination as experienced by a butch/femme couple that both have East Indian backgrounds. In the deliciously ironic "The Upside-Downness of the World," Mootoo juxtaposes the Indo-Trinidadian lesbian narrator's childhood experience of being "anglicized" by a retired British tutor to her adult friendship with a pair of white lesbian Indian buffs who take her to a Hare Krishna temple.

Awards

*Cereus Blooms at Night* won the Books in Canada First Novel Award and was short-listed for the Giller Prize in 1997.

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**Moser, Elise, 1962-**

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Novel

*Because I Have Loved and Hidden It*. Cormorant, 2009. Moser's debut novel introduces us to forty-year-old Julia, who manages a gardening store in Montreal's artsy Plateau neighbourhood. Julia's married lover, Nicholas, disappears while he's away in Morocco, and Julia finds unexpected comfort in a budding friendship with his wife Deepa that, more unexpectedly still, turns into a romance. Meanwhile, following her mother's recent death, Julia discovers she has an older sister who was given up for adoption, and begins to search for her with the grudging help of her aging aunt and uncle. The novel is slowly

paced and permeated with a sense of waiting—which is both its strength and its failing. Julia is a frustrating mix of insightful and self-absorbed; her weepiness and insecurity are tiresome, and her ruminations about the past only thinly disguise the emptiness and fear that characterize her present. Still, *Because I Have Loved and Hidden It* is a seductive read. Moser’s writing is evocative and sensual; she describes both the city and her complex, highly believable characters with the eye of one who appreciates their beauty but sees past their glamour to what’s falling apart underneath. *Review by Andrea Zanin.*

## **Mouré, Erin, 1955-**

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### Poetry

*Because I Have Loved and Hidden It. Pillage Laud: cauterizations, vocabularies, cantigas, topiary, prose.* Moveable Type, 1999. In this collection, Mouré uses a software program that generates syntactically correct sentences to produce what she calls “lesbian sex poems.” Her unlikely juxtaposition of computer technology with lesbian sexuality is absurd and campy, but what precisely she is undermining is as unclear as her poems. The book’s title, which combines two transitive verbs minus their corresponding objects, lets readers know what to expect: fridge magnet compositions. With lines such as “Mustard was suffering” and “Don’t violas count as vulva zombies,” these poems are ridiculous and nonsensical. Occasionally, there are interesting sequences of sound, rhythm, and association, such as “Her wet pulse of impudence, careening” or “A fast tryst could flay me.” But as to whether the aforementioned wetness or tryst is of a lesbian sexual nature is an open question. By selecting particular phrases for inclusion, Mouré did make decisions about what constitutes a “lesbian sex poem.” With frequent references to female body parts and feminine gender pronouns, she did not altogether dispense with intentionality, but it is insufficient. She does not hearken back to a modernist tradition of coded words and images being used to represent lesbian sexuality, but rather has a thoroughly postmodern preoccupation with what constitutes meaning. Unfortunately, in exploring the outer limits of poetry and technology, she also tests the limits of readers’ patience. *Pillage Laud* is an interesting failure.

### Awards

*Little Theatres* was short-listed for the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Pat Lowther Award for Poetry in 2006, and won a Quebec Writers’ Federation Award and was nominated for a Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 2005. *O Ciudadán* was nominated for a Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 2002. *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person* was short-listed for the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2002. *Search Procedures* was nominated for a Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1996. *Furious* won the Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1988. *Domestic Fuel* won the Pat Lowther Award for Poetry in 1986.

## **Murphy, Sarah, 1946-**

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Novel

*Lilac in Leather: A Tale of Forsythia, Bedbugs, Faded Cotton and Time*. Pedlar, 1999. Set in the New York art world of the 1970s and written as an interior monologue, *Lilac in Leather* is slow-paced and often opaque. The novel critiques the sexism, slumming, and pretensions of the performance art scene, but the minimal plot also seems homophobic: two “straight” women have an intense, competitive, and covertly erotic friendship that ends with the arrival of a sexually compelling man. The protagonist falls safely into his arms while her disturbed friend descends into madness. Murphy departs slightly from this trajectory by slipping in an incongruous lesbian ending within the final ten pages of this otherwise, utterly unnecessarily long four-hundred-and-fifty page book.

## **Mykals, Alex, d.o.b. unknown**

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Speculative Fiction

*Adeptus Major*. PD, 2005. *Adeptus Major* opens and closes with a bang but otherwise not a lot happens in this long novel printed in an oddly tiny font. Ally, a timid Canadian with psychic and telekinetic powers, uses her body to shield Evelynne, crown princess of the Island Nation of Atlanta, from an assassin’s bullets. A grateful Evelynne whisks Ally off to her palace to recover, and the two become lovers. While the ostensible conflicts keeping the princess and Ally apart are Ally’s fear of having her powers discovered and the unprecedented situation of a crown heir choosing a same-sex partner, the novel mostly focuses on Ally’s issues of low self-esteem, poor body-image, and acute shyness. This emphasis, along with modern day references to Angelina Jolie and gay-marriage laws, makes it difficult for the reader to feel as though they are delving into an alternate universe. In addition, virtually every fantasy element—from sword-fighting to the Lantlan-English dictionary included at the end—is highly derivative. The writing itself, however, is proficient.

## **Oikawa, Mona, 1955-**

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Short Fiction

*All Names Spoken: Poetry and Prose*. Tamai Kobayashi and Mona Oikawa. Sister Vision, 1992. The self-described aim of *All Names Spoken* is to break the silence of Asian lesbian experience in a racist and heterosexist world, and in particular, to recover the histories and memories of two Japanese-Canadian lesbians. Oikawa, a third generation Japanese-Canadian lesbian feminist, presents poems, short personal essays, and erotica in her portion of this work. Some of the issues she address include coming out to a homophobic sister, dealing with her mother’s breast cancer, practicing safer sex, being a taiko drummer groupie, and becoming empowered by the writing of other women of colour. Throughout, her style is straightforward and decidedly earnest. In “Origins,” she writes about meeting another Asian dyke: “When I think of you / I become a geisha / waiting to serve you / o-cha and nori / wrapped morsels / on a cold winter day / When my

eye catches / your beauty / after long days absence, / your laughter is like / the first  
bursting sakura– / sweet fragrant colour– / swelling rivers in me / to rise deep with /  
ancient memory.”

### **Oliver, Kathleen, 1964-**

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Play

*Swollen Tongues*. Playwrights Canada, 1999. Oliver queers the plot of Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergeac* and the conventions of Shakespearean comedy to create a play written for the most part in heroic couplets and iambic pentameter. While Cyrano is tongue-tied in the presence of Roxanne’s beauty, the heroine of *Swollen Tongues* is rendered mute by “the love that dare not speak its name.” The plot involves a brother and sister, Thomas and Catharine, being tutored by the enigmatic Dr. Wise in the art of writing poetry. Both Thomas and Catharine share the same muse and love object, Sonya, but as Catharine is fearful of revealing her lesbian desire, she reworks her brother’s dreadful poems using the pseudonym Overripe. When Thomas discovers he is being plagiarized, Dr. Wise steps in to propose a duel in the form of a poetry slam. From there, the plot twists in a series of tricks, disguises, and cross-dressing as the characters discover the power of poetry and theatrical gender-bending to unearth unexpected desire. Oliver seamlessly blends contemporary queer cultural references with classic literary language. For example, when Thomas stumbles into a Sapphic hideaway, he says, “What’s this decaying floor on which I stand? / What means this sign? / This ‘Women only land?’ / Only land where? The thought seems incomplete.” *Swollen Tongues* is a hilarious marvel written by a terrific wordsmith.

Awards

*Swollen Tongues* won the Jessie Richardson Award in 1998.

### **Paulse, Michele, 1958-**

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Note

See entry under Elwin, Rosamund.

### **Payne, Kathryn, 1970-**

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Poetry

*Longing at Least is Constant*. Broken Jaw, 1998. Payne writes with poignant humour about being a skinny femme slut who wants big butch studs “too sure of themselves, blunt and accidentally cruel” and straight boy Marxists with “fuzzy fashionable sweater(s).” She has her finger on the pulse (or some other quivering body part) of queer urban desire but also heads to the backcountry of emotion. Her sex-drenched prose is written in plain language, but she usually offers a twist or a contradiction, such as the lie told to oneself, the signpost of danger ignored. In “Drive Thru,” she writes, “I’m tired of rambling about my conquests. / I’m sick of trotting out my sexual stripes / ‘And I got a

purple cross for fisting a stone butch.’ / or maybe it was a purple heart / I have no sense of responsibility. Everything’s about sex / a kind of skewed romance / that doesn’t stick around for the morning.”

### **Queyras, Sina, 1963-**

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#### Poetry

*Slip*. ECW, 2001. To slip is to move away, to fall down, to fall below a standard, and the female narrator/poet of *Slip* engages in all of these actions in Queyras’ examination of the nature of love. *Slip* begins with the narrator’s arrival in Montreal where she falls in love with both the city and a woman, even though she has left behind a girlfriend on the West Coast. Before long, the narrator is in Toronto, then Banff, recovering from her affair. The narrator is an unabashed romantic who is drawn simultaneously to the girl, to her calves, to the cafés of Montreal, and to the language of desire. Queyras’ poems have the intimacy and detail of a private journal. Her loose prose style almost disguises the poet’s taut, carefully chosen words and the narrator’s slow recognition that “at thirty-five it occurs to me I will not become someone else.” The one weakness of *Slip* is the relentless specificity of her references that leave far too much unexplained and thus lacking in meaning for those not in the know. The poems that leave out the names of French feminists and Montreal lesbian bars are stronger and more tightly focused as when Queyras writes, “She arcs moonward, sorrow jet fuel, after burn / a trail of pastel flowers, and I know memory is not a template. / Sometimes love is too complicated for family. It’s better spent / on hitchhikers or gardens full of beans and day lilies.”

#### Awards

*Expressway* was nominated for a Governor General’s Award in 2009 and short-listed for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2010. *Lemonhound* won the Pat Lowther Memorial Award in 2007 and a Lambda Literary Award in 2006.

### **Ravel, Edeet, 1955-**

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#### Novel

*Your Sad Eyes and Unforgettable Mouth*. Penguin, 2008. In this beautifully written novel, Ravel traces the effects of the holocaust on the children of survivors. One of these is Maya, now a middle-aged woman. A funeral leads Maya to reflect upon her adolescence and the events that led her to engage in a bizarre cover-up with other young people. As a teenager growing up in the late 1960s, Maya is mortified by her mother, Fanya. Fanya, who works at a local dry cleaner in the Montreal neighbourhood of Côte-des-Neiges, discusses her wartime experiences with practically everyone she meets while expecting her daughter to live a carefree existence. Brainy Maya tries to keep her suffocating mother and everyone else at bay, but then she meets Rosie “whose household was as mad as my own. Even the form of madness was the same. Like my mother, Rosie’s parents were both holy and unappeasable.” Maya soon falls in love with Rosie, who is generous in her affections. Less generous are a pair of brothers, Patrick and Anthony. Patrick and

Anthony are also members of the looseknit Montreal Jewish community and the children of a Holocaust survivor. Like most young people, Maya, Rosie, Patrick, and Anthony are searching for freedom (or at least oblivion) in rock music, drugs, rebellion, and sexual liberation. Unable to find what they are looking for, they instead recreate on a smaller scale the tragedy and burdens of their families. *Your Sad Eyes and Unforgettable Mouth* stands out for its fascinating characters, dry humour, and ability to capture an era.

Awards

*Wall of Light* won the Canadian Jewish Book Award in 2006 and was short-listed for the Giller Prize in 2005. *Look For Me* won the Hugh McLennan Prize in 2004. *Ten Thousand Lovers* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2003.

### **Richardson, Tracey, 1964-**

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Mystery

*Double Take Out*. Naiad, 1999. In *Double Take Out*, Toronto homicide detective Stevie Houston and her forensic pathologist lover, Jade Agawa-Garneau, are searching for the killer of a sleazy, coke-snorting businessman. The chief suspect is the man's estranged wife who just happened to be lovers with Jade when both attended medical school. The real suspense in this romance (thinly disguised as a mystery) is not "who done it" but rather, can Stevie and Jade's relationship survive jealousy and miscommunication? *Double Take Out* is typical Naiad escapist fiction where the lesbians are beautiful and in charge of everything, and the homophobic villains are easily quelled. Entertaining as the genre may be, however, this particular entry is marred by Richardson's ethnic stereotyping. Jade is described as "half Indian, half French and Stevie loved the hot-blooded combination," and referred to in rather colonialist terms as Stevie's "personal Indian goddess."

Awards

*No Rules of Engagement* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2009.

### **Richler, Nancy, 1957-**

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Mystery

*Throwaway Angels*. Press Gang, 1996. *Throwaway Angels* does not succeed as a mystery: there is no suspense, little in the way of a plot, and an unsatisfying climax. The book triumphs, however, as a literary novel exploring the willful blindness of people unable to see what is front of them, beginning with the "throwaway angels" of the title, Vancouver sex workers who disappeared for almost two decades before the arrest of serial killer Robert Pickton in 2002. Tova, the protagonist and unlikely detective of *Throwaway Angels*, manages a laundromat and eats at the same diner every day. She is awash in self-pity over having been dumped by her girlfriend, and her daily rituals buffer her not so much from grief but from feeling anything at all. When her bold friend Gina, a nude dancer and chronic liar, disappears, Tova finally begins to act. As she investigates her

friend's disappearance, she begins to comprehend the people in both her and Gina's life and to lose her detachment. Richler's evocation of urban life is acute and satisfying whether she is describing a Portuguese janitor or the gentrification which led to the displacement of Vancouver sex workers into anonymous, industrial areas.

Awards

*Your Mouth is Lovely* won the Canadian Jewish Book Award in 2003. *Throwaway Angels* was short-listed for an Arthur Ellis Award.

### **Roberta, Jean, 1951-**

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Short Fiction

*Secrets of the Invisible World: Lesbian Short Stories*. Lilith, 1987. Before her prolific production of lesbian erotica, Jean Roberta published this collection of literary short stories. They are less overtly sexual than her later work but just as readily confront taboos. In *Secrets of the Invisible World*, Roberta unflinchingly examines women's divided loyalties. Dramatic tension readily emerges from each page, as do the different personalities of the characters. In "Winter Break," she addresses the shifting power dynamics between a nerdy femme university student and her Métis lover. In "Magnet and a Nail," readers meet a teenage girl stalker, a self-deluded narrator who manages to be both creepy and sympathetic. Happier long-time companions appear in "Lizards," a tale of older country dykes meeting young lesbian feminists from the city. In the hands of a less skilful writer, this story could be treacle, but Roberta's exploration of the sexual attention paid by one of the older women to her daughter's friend takes the piece in an unexpected yet believable direction. Most of these stories are in a realist mode, but Roberta strays into genre with two stories, the more successful of which is "The Renegades," where Amazon myth is blended with Western films and biker movies. This is an engaging collection about women who just happen to be lesbians.

### **Rodriguez, Nice, d.o.b. unknown**

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Short Fiction

*Throw It to The River*. Women's Press, 1993. Dark, wicked, bawdy, and original, Rodriguez' stories address butch identity and desire in the Philippines and the inescapable reality of global economic disparity as evidenced in the mixed emotions involved in the process of emigrating to Canada. While significant as the first Filipina lesbian collection to be published in Canada, these engaging, satirical, and at times disturbing stories stand on their own merit. "Stone Butch," easily the most chilling tale, illustrates how ostensibly universal sentiments such as internalized homophobia can have vastly different consequences when living in a political dictatorship. Rodriguez has a lighter side as well, though, as when one of her protagonists compares Canada to a hospital: "My health was taken care of. There was food. The environment was clean. The people cared but were detached. But who wanted to live in a hospital?" Tough, vulgar, and unabashedly sexual, Rodriguez' characters win the reader's affection with their ability to perform the almost impossible task of being heroic in an everyday world.

## **Ross, M.E., d.o.b. unknown**

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Novel

*The Best Laid Plans*. Second Story, 1995. The plot of this novel, which is set in London, Ontario, revolves around the lives of successful, white, out-and-proud professional lesbians who drive sports cars and meet compelling women in bars. All of the characters have “intimacy issues” that create a lot of chaos in their romantic relationships. But how these thinly drawn characters developed their fear of commitment is unclear: no one seems to have experienced homophobia, parental rejection, or violence. Even more inexplicable, however, is the sudden switch in genre from romantic comedy to serious breast cancer drama midway through the novel. Those unconcerned with such inconsistencies, however, may enjoy *The Best Laid Plans* as a fast-paced, light book.

## **Rule, Jane, 1931-2007**

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Novel

*Contract with the World*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980. Rule is best known for her novel *Desert of the Heart*, which in 1986 was made into the successful lesbian movie, *Desert Hearts*. Those familiar with the rest of Rule’s work, however, will know that *Contract with the World* is her masterpiece. The “contract” in the title represents the choices and bargains individuals make with regards to the intersection of their public and private lives. Rule uses this theme to explore such diverse topics as mental illness, homophobia, intergenerational relationships, outing, class privilege, the myth and reality of being an artist and, perhaps most poignantly, the choices individuals make in terms of personal loyalties. Set in Vancouver, Rule’s novel progresses using the voices of six very different men and women, gay and straight, whose “agitated” lives are interconnected in complex ways. The characters are extremely well drawn and the writing style, while plain, is effective.

Awards

Rule became a member of the Order of Canada in 2007 and won the Bill Whitehead Award for Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002. *After the Fire* won the Canadian Institute of the Blind Talking Book of the Year Award in 1991. *The Young in One Another’s Arms* won a Canadian Authors Association Award in 1978.

## **Ruth, Elizabeth, 1968-**

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Novel

*Smoke*. Penguin, 2005. When a young man growing up during the 1950s on a tobacco farm in southwestern Ontario is severely burned in a fire, his sense of self is as damaged as his face. Buster McFiddie’s disfigurement in an era of conformity makes him a social outcast and he is consumed with self-pity. Doc John, the town doctor, recognizing that Buster needs to be healed in spirit as well as body, reaches out to him by recounting wild tales of infamous Detroit mobsters and bootleggers, the Purple Gang. The stories

gradually guide Buster into a deeper understanding of risk, responsibility, and who or what is a true outlaw. In this warm, smart, character-driven novel, Doc John serves as Buster's foil. While Buster rebuilds his life and prepares for the future, Doc John attempts to reconcile his past with his present. Doc John and his wife Alice appear to be the perfect upstanding citizens in the village of Smoke, but they are co-conspirators who hide, even from themselves to some extent, the reality that Doc John began life as a biological female. As Doc John "straddles this equator called sex," Buster and the other residents of the town address their own conflicts between their perceptions and that of their community with smoke serving as an apt metaphor for both imminent danger and that which can be obscured.

Awards

*Ten Good Seconds of Silence* was short-listed for the Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and for the Books in Canada First Novel Award.

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### **Salah, Trish, 1968-**

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Poetry

*Wanting in Arabic: Poems*. TSAR, 2002. Salah, a transsexual lesbian with a Lebanese immigrant father, blends cultural theory with Urdu poetic traditions and queer experience. *Wanting in Arabic* is a compact examination of gender and race identity with a tone that slides easily between serious and humorous. Salah's poems are wrapped in metaphors of mythology and pop culture and sprinkled with parody and profanity. Her poems tackle exile, political demonstrations, and transitioning as well as larger themes of love and sexuality; throughout, she's as attentive to rhythm and imagery as she is to content. In "Where Skin Breaks," she writes, "where skin breaks / your stockings are white lace from Valenciennes / I hitched through there once / and your garter belt too / that was where I first thought / 'you can't hitch in to love / love is closed / like a sign, saying "Closed" / but you can hitch in to Valenciennes / into desire or its hook / & hitching in stockings / can teach a boy things / & once upon a time I was."

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### **Santana, Assar-Mary, 1952-**

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Novel

*Boléro*. Translated by Louise Hinton and Suzanne Grenier. Women's Press, 1997. Translation of: *Boléro*. Remue-Ménage, 1994. Better known as a musician and performer, Assar-Mary Santana has produced an impressive debut novel of a daughter's sensual love for her mother. Written in Portuguese, translated into French and then English, *Boléro*, which is set in a South American village and steeped in African spirituality and ritual, creates a world of lush magical realism. The protagonist, a young girl named Tari, gradually realizes that her mother is abandoning her to be raised by her grandmother in a village where people turn into birds and evil and disharmony must be actively vanquished. Tari grows up alongside another young woman, Rosaura, who

seduces Tari with stories both fantastical and grotesque and later draws her into an erotic relationship.

### **Scott, Gail, 1945-**

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Novel

*Main Brides: Against Ochre Pediment and Aztec Sky*. Coach House, 1993.

Although steeped in the haunting residue of the massacre of fourteen women at Université de Montréal's École Polytechnique, *Main Brides* is also a tribute to the city of Montreal that lovingly captures its texture and essence. The novel opens with Lydia, the protagonist, coming upon the police standing beside a dead female body in the park. After this disturbing encounter, Lydia heads to her usual haunt, a bar on Montreal's Boulevard St. Laurent, commonly known as the Main. The novel unfolds over the course of the day she spends there drinking and fabricating stories about the lives of the other women in the bar, her "Main Brides." These include a young junkie who has left home, a woman vacationing in Cuba with her sister, two incompatible lesbian lovers who are like "Canada and Quebec," a slumming Anglophone from Toronto who resembles Marilyn Monroe, and a fierce trio of young lesbian artists. The action in *Main Brides* takes place in Lydia's head and may or may not be projections from her own life. Lydia's own identity is never revealed; the reader is provided at most with suggestive glimpses in the form of Lydia's dreams of incest and her attractions to her "Main Brides," despite her assertion of her own heterosexuality. With this technique, Scott leads readers to question the assumptions and fantasies they bring to their interpretation of a narrator and to contemplate the process of creating female characters.

### **Shields, Trish, d.o.b. unknown**

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Poetry

*Spirit Harvest*. Blue Feather, 2002. *Spirit Harvest* is a passionate collection of personal expression that awkwardly marries blog entries to English Romanticism. Divided into five sections, "Fields of Promise," "The Killing Fields," "Tree of Life," "Fields of Bounty," and "Fallow Fields," *Spirit Harvest* addresses love in the first section, war in the second, and a variety of themes in the remaining sections from physical pain to regret to motherhood. From the title and subtitles, one might expect the collection to focus on imagery and metaphors from the natural world, and to some extent Shields does do this, but she also includes poems with no imagery whatsoever that read like newspaper editorials. The language she uses is mostly plain English, but she also inserts more obscure, archaic words, such as "reliquary," to rather jarring effect. Most successful are her rhythmic, rhyming poems: "Running / ever railing / as fast as I can go / falling / ever failing, / it's you I'm trying to find / Chasing / never catching / that thing I used to know / Seeking / never seeing, / your love has made me blind / Finding / ever feeling, / where keening truths will blow."

## **Silvera, Makeda, 1955-**

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Novel

*The Heart Does Not Bend*. Random House, 2002. *The Heart Does Not Bend* explores family loyalty and the ties that bind in the Jamaican-born Galloway clan. The novel begins with the reading of the family matriarch Maria Galloway's last will, in which she has bequeathed her entire estate to a seemingly undeserving great-grandson. Narrator Molly Galloway is left to contemplate this legacy and her bittersweet relationship with Maria, the grandmother who raised her. Molly remembers the intense bond she shared with her grandmother during her childhood in Jamaica, a sensuous paradise of food, beauty, and good times socializing with an extended family that included a gay uncle, her grandmother's married boyfriend, and the albino girl next door. Maria was the center of Molly's childhood world but is also the source of her biggest heartbreak as Molly enters adolescence and learns more of her grandmother's vulnerabilities. Molly contrives a plan to leave Jamaica and join other family members in Canada where she is certain life will be better for both her and her grandmother. Instead, Molly must deal with the effects of teen pregnancy, alcoholism, domestic violence, familial homophobia, and sexism, as well as the longing for one's homeland. Silvera has created a gracefully written, moving portrayal of a loving yet flawed Caribbean family in Canada.

## **Stephens, Nathalie, 1970-**

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Poetry

*Somewhere Running*. Arsenal Pulp, 2000. In *Somewhere Running* Stephens examines the gap between what people see and what they perceive. Men see a pair of lesbian lovers living in the city and regard them as a threat while mistaking them for "faggots," fundamentalists see the lesbians as sinners while missing their joy and laughter, and an artist intuitively captures the couples' beauty in a photograph while refusing to recognize the nature of the relationship. A concoction of blurred photographs and cerebral prose-poetry, *Somewhere Running* examines the nature of reality and difference, and the way in which urban space offers both danger and freedom. Stephens unwinds her poems like a yo-yo. She produces the same taut groupings of words and images with slightly different inflections. In "Plate No. 29," Stephens writes, "they will laugh / laugh at the artist / the cyclops who sees with limited vision / who takes two women and renders them mute / in the image / the woman are mute / they say nothing / only later do they speak and earlier."

Awards

*Touch to Affliction* was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2006.

## **Stevenson, Robin, 1968-**

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Novel

*Inferno*. Orca, 2009. Sixteen-year-old Emily has legally changed her name to Dante: her birth name is too girly, and she is living in the realms of hell. Her family has moved from

the city to the suburbs, and her ex-girlfriend, according to her Facebook status, has a new boyfriend. At school, a teacher bullies Dante, and at home, her mother, dismayed by her daughter's lack of interest in dating and socializing, has signed up Dante for a counseling group for teenage girls with low self-esteem. At the counseling group Dante befriends Parker, a problem child who has dropped out of school and lives in an apartment with her abusive punk boyfriend. When Parker and her friends invite Dante to participate in activism against authority, Dante has to decide how far she is willing to go for the sake of both her beliefs and a new crush. The many conflicts in Dante's life make for a fast read, but too much happens too quickly in this book. Potentially interesting characters such as the young women being counseled, and a stoner chick who wants to start a queer support group at school are not developed. Dante and Parker are engaging and credible, but their stories are wrapped up before the two have a chance to really live in the minds of the reader. Nonetheless, Stevenson authentically conveys contemporary queer teenage life in a straightforward writing style that would be suitable for middle school readers.

Awards

*A Thousand Shades of Blue* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2009.

### **Swan, Susan, 1945-**

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Novel

*The Wives of Bath*. Knopf, 1993. Mary "Mouse" Bathford, is a teenage girl on the margins of her peer group because she possesses a hump and her mother is dead. The time is 1963, shortly before the assassination of President Kennedy, and Mouse has been sent to an all-girl boarding school run by one of her relatives, an eccentric, benevolent spinster who is involved with another female teacher. Mouse is obsessed with her distant father and disdainful of other women and her own emerging female body because she observes, in her family life, the lack of power associated with the female role. She becomes friends with the beautiful popular Tory and her besotted girlfriend Paulie. Paulie, a cross-dressing delinquent from the wrong side of the tracks, shares her private religion with Mouse in which King Kong is a deity to whom girls can perform rites to become boys. Intimidated by Paulie yet drawn to her imagination, Mouse follows Paulie's lead in a series of adventures and tests until she recognizes her friend's capacity for violence. Paulie's desire to transcend rigid gender roles causes her to repeatedly make the metaphorical literal, culminating in a startling act of brutality. This gothic coming of age novel is both original and well written, yet the portrait of the sole transgender character as a psychopath is a bit problematic.

Awards

*The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 1983.

Note

The film, *Lost and Delirious* (2001), a passionate tale of doomed lesbian love, made by Québécois director Lia Pool was loosely based upon *The Wives of Bath*.

### **Tamaki, Mariko, d.o.b. unknown**

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Creative Non-fiction

*True Lies: The Book of Bad Advice*. Women's Press, 2002. Spoken word rarely translates well to paper, depending as it does upon the personal charisma and comic timing of an individual, but *True Lies* is an exception to that rule. Tamaki's intelligent, cheeky, and sometimes self-deprecating collection of satirical pieces never fails to amuse. She vapourizes psychics, bad jobs, friends who love cats too much, and sexual politics. Instead of aiming predictable darts at political correctness and the granola culture of lesbian feminism, Tamaki grinds her heels on pomposity and weirdness within sexual outlaw communities when she compares a friend's sexual awakening under the hairbrush of a dominatrix to a born-again Christian conversion, or in her entertaining description of an encounter with a woman who invites her to participate in an orgy, than recants on the basis that Tamaki, while a "beautiful and exotic Asian," is too hairy.

Awards

*Skim* was short-listed for the Canadian Library Association's Young Adult Book Award in 2009 and was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2008.

### **Tulchinsky, Karen, d.o.b. unknown**

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Novel

*Love Ruins Everything*. Press Gang, 1998. *Love Ruins Everything* skids from one genre to the next: romantic comedy to family drama to political thriller. Nomi, a Canadian lesbian, is working illegally in a bar in San Francisco when her lover dumps her for a man. Given that Nomi's experience as a single lesbian consists of a string of bad dates, she contemplates buying a gun and ending it all. Fortunately, she decides instead to return to Toronto to attend her widowed mother's upcoming wedding and reunite with her extended Jewish family. In Toronto, she meets a gorgeous Asian femme activist and spends time with her gay cousin Henry, who is in the hospital following a gay bashing that may or may not be connected to work he has done to uncover a government AIDS conspiracy. Tulchinsky's comic dialogue is entertaining, and she is particularly adept at describing the bittersweet relationships between her gay characters and their families, but the femme love interests are disappointingly one-dimensional. Nonetheless, *Love Ruins Everything* is a quick and engaging read.

Awards

*In Her Nature* won the Vancouver Book Award in 1996.

## **Warland, Betsy, 1946-**

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### Poetry

*Open is Broken*. Longspoon, 1984. Betsy Warland and Daphne Marlatt have dedicated their respective books, *Open is Broken* and *Touch to my Tongue*, to each other. Engaged in the task of deconstructing patriarchal language, both authors have created sensuous and cerebral collections of poetry. Warland dismantles the rules of syntax, the etymological meanings of words, and the taboo of expressing lesbian desire in order to reclaim and celebrate what she characterizes in rather essentialist terms as “women’s sensual experience.” Although she uses traditional symbols of femininity such as nature, water, the moon, and circular shapes, the result is as subversive as it is conventional, both in terms of scope and trope. In “Receiving the Seed,” Warland writes: “I want her evident in me / her seed / ring in my ring / I have never desired it before / before was not her / we enter, inter-/ course: ‘intercurrere, to run between’ / ring’s turning boundary to become / vortex (inner course) / her seed in me rolls.”

## **Webb, Phyllis, 1927-**

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### Poetry

*The Naked Poems*. Periwinkle, 1965. As an early example of Canadian literature with lesbian content, *The Naked Poems* created controversy when it was published. *The Naked Poems* is a slender volume of verse and paradox. Webb’s subject is the progression and dissolution of a love affair between two women. Her writing style is cool and philosophical, and the book ends with a mock interrogation of the poet. Purporting to be confessional, *The Naked Poems* is marked by its sparseness; the poems are rarely longer than a haiku. Webb reveals that the object of her love is a woman while deflecting attention from this fact by avoiding pronouns and using codes such as in this savoury erotic description—“Hieratic sounds emerge / from the Priestess of / Motion / a new alphabet / gasps for air. / We disappear in the musk of her coming.” Webb uses simple language in a remarkably subtle and allusive style. She captures the lover’s absence in a single sentence when she writes, “The room that held you is still here.” She intimates a reason for the loss of her lover when she writes, “the way of what fell / the lies / like the petals / falling drop / delicately,” but as in all of her poems, with restraint and reticence, she withholds as much as she tells.

### Awards

*Selected Poems: the Vision Tree* won a Governor General’s Award in 1982.

## **Whiteford, Jennifer, d.o.b. unknown**

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### Juvenile Literature

*Grrrl: a novel*. Gorsky, 2006. Written in the form of diary entries, *Grrrl* traces the sexual and emotional development of Marlie, a teenage female music geek. Marlie faces the standard adolescent conflicts of conformity and emerging sexuality, but Whiteford

improves upon this formula with her ability to perfectly capture the atmosphere of her heroine's life. From an inspiring riot girl conference in Seattle to the vintage clothing stores of Kensington Market to mosh pits and cross-border shopping in Buffalo, the reader follows Marlie as she navigates work, school, family, friendships, and the trials of starting her own band. She also begins two romantic relationships, both of which she feels she must hide: one with another girl, and another with a much older indie male rocker. While Marlie observes and questions the integrity of the decisions made by the musicians she meets and the extent to which they "sell out" or remain true to their indie or feminist subculture, she also learns to sort out the soundness of her own actions. Neither the appeal of the young heroine nor the plot flags in this novel.

### **Whittall, Zoe, 1976-**

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Novel

*Bottle Rocket Hearts*. Cormorant, 2007. It's the eve of the Quebec referendum and Eve, a young Anglophone from the suburbs of Montreal, falls fiercely in love with Della, an older woman and French separatist. When Eve asks, "Do I care that I haven't been alone in six days? Is love supposed to feel like needing another lung?", Whittall casually demonstrates her subtle and ironic use of language, which guides this tale of contrasts in innocence and experience. At first Eve allows Della to define their relationship and other people to define her, so uncertain is she of her own identity and what she should expect from others. But as she does the sorts of things young counterculture people do—moves into a queer household in the city, gets a job at a health food store, attends school and political demonstrations—she learns more about herself while at the same time learning that Della isn't whom she seems to be. The structure of this novel feels like an overstuffed garage: the book isn't well organized and too much happens to too many characters, any one of whom could justify a full-length narrative. In addition, a large number of themes are tackled in this short work: language politics, homophobia, violence, addiction, illness, sex work, jealousy, and love. But what Whittall has to say—especially regarding the explosion and fizzle of love—and how she says it, is perfect.

Awards

*Holding Still for as Long as Possible* was short-listed for the ReLit Award in 2010.

### **Woodrow, Marnie, 1969-**

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Novel

*Spelling Mississippi*. Knopf, 2002. In *Spelling Mississippi*, Woodrow has enriched lesbian fiction by offering up a steamy love story with complex characters and a literary sensibility. Cleo, a shy Canadian on holiday in New Orleans, witnesses a woman in an evening gown hurl herself into the Mississippi River. Cleo stands by, unable to act but equally unable to put the woman out of her mind. Had the woman intended suicide? Did she succeed? And why was Cleo, who can't swim and is fearful of boats, drawn to the river? She tries to find answers as she wanders through the French Quarter, a neighbourhood Woodrow conveys with rich detail. Meanwhile, the object of Cleo's

obsession, Madelaine, leaps into the river for a second and third time. She is an expert swimmer who is not seeking death so much as rebirth or baptism. On the brink of forty and with a floundering marriage, Madelaine is a hostage to an unhappy past: a father who deserted her, and a narcissistic mother, who destroyed her daughter's first love affair, which crossed the boundaries of race, sex, and class. When Cleo finally tracks Madelaine down to a tiny studio filled with stolen lawn ornaments, the two feel an undeniable yet credible connection. Cleo's quest, it turns out, has not just been about finding or saving the girl, but about discovering the mystery at the center of her own life. The plot of *Spelling Mississippi* unwinds at a slow, Southern pace, drifting across continents and decades, but much pleasure is to be found in the quirky characters and loving homage Woodrow pays to New Orleans, with her descriptions of its boisterous, eccentric inhabitants and the cafés and bars serving bourbon, chicory-infused coffee, and turtle soup.

Awards

*Spelling Mississippi* was short-listed for the Books in Canada First Novel Award in 2003.

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### **Yeo, Marg, 1946-**

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Poetry

*Getting Wise*. Gynergy, 1990. The backdrop for this book of poetry is late 80s feminist communities in Canada and the UK, whose concerns were peace, sexism, and anti-racism, but Yeo offers only tantalizing glimpses of this world, its citizens, and its debates. Instead, she focuses on her own feelings of tenderness, admiration, longing, sorrow, and frustration. By dedicating many of these poems to individual women, some of whom are public figures, others of whom are former lovers, Yeo has fused personal feelings with political sentiment. In "the hard truth," she confronts her sense of helplessness, her inability to distinguish "my own grief from the vast universal shout of sorrow endlessly circling the globe." In "so beautiful," Yeo watches a woman all night at a party, compelled as much by this woman's physical attractiveness as her rhetoric: "odd / how things come around again / but with variations / this time the theme corruption and hardly a shred of new cloth on it except the light you shed." The style of these poems is conversational, yet each word is carefully chosen. Images and metaphors, when they appear, are less judiciously selected; women are compared to flowers and worn stones, emotional angst to wounds. *Getting Wise*, a warm, rueful portrait of relationships between women, could have more powerful.

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### **Yvon, Josée, 1950-1994**

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Novel

*Maîtresses-Cherokees*. VLB, 1986. An indulgent vehicle for '80s counterculture angst, Josée Yvon's *Maîtresses-Cherokees* recounts a world of drugs, violence, and homelessness as experienced by four lesbians—Mitchell, Laurie, Bobby la Cherokee and Berta—and the two transsexuals who serve as their "guides." The narrative is written in

free-verse poetry, which helps the author convey strong images but prevents the reader from having a clear sense of what's going on. The result is a muddy trip through a dimly lit world of addiction and pain in which it is so difficult to engage with the protagonists that the unfortunate circumstances of their existence become banal. Yvon succeeds in breaking free from Quebec's prior literary traditions, but her escape is more noteworthy as a point of history than as a mark of success. *Review submitted by Andrea Zanin.*

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**Zarben, SB, d.o.b. unknown**

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Speculative Fiction

*Amicus Humani Generis*. PD, 2005. While a United Space Coalition crew is on a routine tour of an infamous prison, they come across an unidentifiable ship. When they make contact, they discover the ship has been attacked by Ebokras, stinky bat-like creatures who ooze slime. A rescue team finds three survivors on the ship, one of whom, Janus is a member of an alien race, the Platinum People. Dark-skinned with an inexplicable Cockney accent and silver markings tattooed on her body, she's a warrior with healing and telekinetic powers. Her abilities come in handy when the rescue ship is suddenly catapulted across the universe and into a war with the Ebokras. Janus is also drawn into a relationship with an attractive young blonde woman, Barker, an ensign on the USC crew. While there is a great deal of action in this novel, there is little in the way of romantic tension as Janus and Barker almost immediately recognize that they are destined for one another. The characterization is thin, the romance is chaste, and the writing needs copyediting (the opening sentence with its reference to a prison "squatting like a sentinel" lets readers know what to expect).

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**Zaremba, Eve, d.o.b. unknown**

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Mystery

*A Reason to Kill*. Paperjacks, 1978. *A Reason to Kill*, the first lesbian mystery to be published in Canada, features private investigator Helen Keremos, a woman Margaret Atwood described as a cross between Philip Marlowe and Lily Tomlin. Zaremba writes convincingly about a range of crime and characters. *A Reason to Kill*, written and set in the 1970s, deals not unexpectedly with homophobia and coming out, and the classic reenactment of the crime becomes an exercise in collective decision-making. Written in a timeless hard-boiled style with dry, terse dialogue, Zaremba's work, unlike most lesbian mysteries, focuses on plot rather than romance. This is satisfying to mystery lovers as is Keremos, a quintessential loner who likes to travel, drink beer, and enjoy brief sexual encounters with women.

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**Zolf, Rachel, 1968-**

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Poetry

*Her Absence, This Wanderer*. BuschekBooks, 1999. This autobiographical collection of poems addresses a wide range of subjects, including childhood sexual abuse, the effects of the Holocaust upon descendants of survivors, and, to a lesser degree, the experience of

coming out as a lesbian. Zolf travels to Poland and the Czech Republic to bear witness to the experiences of her Jewish relatives. Alongside poems capturing the small and ironic details of her journey, Zolf includes black and white snapshots of her relatives, Jewish cemeteries, and the sites of former death camps. In contrast to the harrowing subject matter, the photographs are formal and attractive. The photographs show that shadows and nature are gradually taking over; plants block gravestones and trees cover the ground where death camps were built. The overall effect is to remind the viewer of what is absent, of what is hidden and denied. Zolf's poems have the confessional scrapbook quality of the photographs. She scrawls graffiti lines and plays with the physical placement of the text on the page, and, in a poem that is both delicate and furious, she reveals her feelings over the end of an illicit relationship. "Long after she took me / under her wing, into her office, into her house, into her bed, called me friend, called me employee, called me fuck buddy, called me too much, too intense, when / I asked her why, why do i not feel / loved, called me crazy."

#### Awards

*Human Resources* won the Trillium Book Award for Poetry in 2008 and was short-listed for a Lambda Literary Award in 2007.