Stone, the dominant motif of the collection, is introduced in the first poem, “Stone Age.” Here, a “daughter’s soft face / turning like a page / turning to stone” sets the tone for the volume. Sonik employs hard language and stark images to suggest absence, loss, and pain in poems about the failure of human relationships, physical and psychological trauma, and the lure of death. The familiar figures of husband, daughter, mother, father, aunt, uncle, and grandfather appear in a number of poems but they serve here to catalyze the speaker’s exploration of personal suffering. That heartbeat becomes palpable confirms Sonik’s spell-like ability to cast readers into her poetry.

The collection begins gently and moves gradually, though powerfully, toward despair. Several early poems about family lure the reader into a false sense of comfort. Here a daughter and mother dream of laying their heads in a common lap, “the soft fabric” of a thigh, and ask similar questions of one another. Too soon, however, that same daughter grows apart from her mother and no longer requires parental protection. Newly independent, the daughter feels liberated when her parents leave her at home alone. In contrast, her mother seeks “a way / to make her come back to me / like Persephone / in the Spring.” Mother acknowledges, however, that her “illicit plan”—a return of intimacy and connection—is not possible, that the future is one of separation.

The exploration of family ties deepens with poems about the speaker’s parents, each of whom is locked in a private hell: the obsessive and agoraphobic “merciless” mother who “is afraid to leave her house” and the black pin-striped suited father who “extends to the end / of a six-foot cracker,” his coffin. The speaker recalls a cheerless childhood when neither parent offered solace or support and she felt unloved and detached from family. That she would experience a personal crisis which “began with my body / dropping out from under me” does not come as a surprise.

Sonik’s rendering of depression and mental illness is especially compelling. “eye (i)” and “eye (ii)” evoke an initial descent into depression—when the speaker “examined my body / noticed the flesh growing thin / the arms and legs smooth / to bone, merging / to dust”—which distances her from husband and children and introduces the motif of death as an alluring way to end all need for communication. In three further poems, “Angel I,” “Angel II,” “Angel III,” death is personified and continues to have a frightening appeal for the speaker. Uriel, the seductive Angel of Death, has “lovely / eyes,” buys kiwi fruit in the local grocery store, and drinks beer in the pub. The speaker admits to having “fallen in love / with the angel of death” and wonders “How do I get him / to notice me / to want to drive me home / or even take me back to his place?”. Her desire for death, “the pain of wanting / just to lie beneath his wings,” is almost as tender as the pain she seeks to escape.

A broken marriage exacerbates the speaker’s emotional vulnerability and brings her to the brink of suicide. In several poems that record her sense of loss and complete despair, she recognizes that “absences / leave their mark” as scars on body and mind. In the end, through the decisive, daring act of writing, she finally rejects death. The anodyne of writing—“the light poem / hot and round / dressed in sound / carrying her skirts”—facilitates healing through the acceptance of pain. Brought to a place of “reckless wonder,” the speaker marvels that she is breathing still, “drinking the precious pleasure of / orange life” and full of the music of words. That words themselves, informed by the poetic muse, can so radically alter perspective is testimony to Sonik’s affirming belief in the therapeutic work of writing and her writerly gift.

Ruth Patafsky is Professor of English at Ryerson University where she specializes in Canadian literature and culture. Her most recent publication is At Odds in the World: Essays on Jewish Canadian Women Writers. Her volume of verse, Laike and Nahum: A Poem in Two Voices, received the 2008 Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Jewish Book Award for Poetry.

**MY GRANDMOTHER’S HAIR**

Ann Elizabeth Carson  
Toronto: Edgar Kent Publishers, 2006

**REVIEWED BY MAJERO BOUMAN**

*Brushing: Women’s Generation*  
Ann Elizabeth Carson’s 2006 book *My Grandmother’s Hair* combs through the knotting of women’s generation. En/Circling the stories that live us, but that can never be given voice, this life-narrative reflects on how trauma, and strength, inhabit...
the physical body to speak through
torsion and heal through expression.
Carson traces her generation back to
the symbolic erasure of her grand-
mother—the cutting of her hair after
marriage—to tease out lines/forms of
resistance and appearance instanti-
ated through gesture and community.
A work of creative nonfiction that
quite literally follows its own journey
by exploring the body as archive,
and art as its researcher, the book
opens relationships between memory,
remembering, experience, intellect,
embodiment, symptom, and expres-
sion. Its strength lies in its refusal
to cohere—its refusal of a journey
toward integration. It is, instead, a
journey about communion that seeks
and allows separate elemental voices
to engage in dialogic polyphony, each
with its own part.
Different voices weave through
each page: journal excerpts, paint-
ings, sculpture, poetry, and academic
research, as well as characterizations
of what might be superego and id that
question and interrupt the dominant
narrating “I.” The text refuses to settle
in any one of these, invested as it is
in re-membering a life lived by many
selves fragmented into, and some-
times lost to, the experiences that
make up a life. Through all of these
voices, Carson succeeds in holding
her story, a story of and dedicated
to generation, of which we are all a
part. The limits of the text are the
limits it places on its own potential
to speak. The perhaps inevitable
author/ity, “I,” writes doors into
opened textual thresholds to mediate
passage between the discursive fields
of different forms, discourses, and
voices. A memoir, My Grandmother’s
Hair negotiates the paradox of also
being an academic investigation into
aging and memory, and psychological
research into embodied symptoms of
repressed trauma and recuperation
through art therapy. The many
generic gestures of the text would
better cohere with more rigorous
editing of the explanatory passages
between and amongst them.
Nonetheless, Carson deals with
each of the text’s generic strains
with confidence and passion that
open the text’s appeal to a various
audience—I found the research on
memory and aging very intriguing,
while the narrative unfolding of the
process of sculpting, particularly the
final sculpture of the text, had me on
the edge of my seat. The narrative
seaming together of these disparate
discourses insinuates a reticence to
wholly trust them to open (to) one
another unmediated. The lacunae
otherwise between the discourses
ask the very questions the textual
arc responds to: how do personal
and generational trauma enter into
everyday and academic communities;
by what avenues can the body re-
member itself against and/or in spite
of ideologies that inscribe its repres-
sion and representation; is it possible
to break silent cycles of familial and
culturally inherited (self-)abuse; how
do the aporia between lived age and
ideologies of aging manifest in the
conception of memory loss; what
is the communion of mind, body,
and repressions; and how might
we address the power relations that
produce and transect each of these
investigations?
My Grandmother’s Hair answers the
patриarchal management of women’s
bodies and restriction of community
with wrinkles of synaesthesia through
which story is body, colour is freeing
violence, and everyday is a piece of
clay. I’ve always loved listening to
my grandmother’s stories. I wonder
now at her gestures and poems and
silences, the last of which are covered
up by three languages and lifetimes of
talk. In her body of work, the genera-
tions that grow up on shared gestures,
lies, and myths, is both the symptom
and expression of our potency.

Majero Bouman is an ABD Doctoral
candidate in English at York University.
Her research concerns nonsense in high
and low culture as paradoxical site of
sensory exclusion and overflow, and
totalitarian closure. She specializes in
texts of transgression to re-theorize the
modern-postmodern shift in twentieth
century literatures and criticism.

GRAVITY MATTERS
Sonja Greckol
Toronto: Inanna Publications and
Education, Inc., 2009

REVIEWED BY CAROLYNE
VAN DER MEER

In this cohesive work that is solid
in both form and content, Sonja
Greckol uses many approaches and
techniques that are both convincing
and arresting. It is easy to lose oneself
in the language and poetic voice in of
Gravity Matters and then be jolted by
the content of Greckol’s work.

In the first section of this slim
volume, there are some particularly
powerful pieces which stand apart
from the rest. She begins strongly
with “The always rising of the night,”
which sets the stage for a strong dias-
pora theme but also uses language that
draws the reader into her poetic world:
diaspora, despot, malted, sprout,
flaments, heartscab, keloid—all of
these words have forceful, aggressive
sounds that ring loud in the ear of
the reader. For this reviewer, there
was a nostalgic and very personal
connection to the second poem in the
collection, “Calliope,” because of the
relationship between horses and child-
hood. However, Greckol’s often-used
technique of finishing the poem with
a zinger of a last line—in this case,