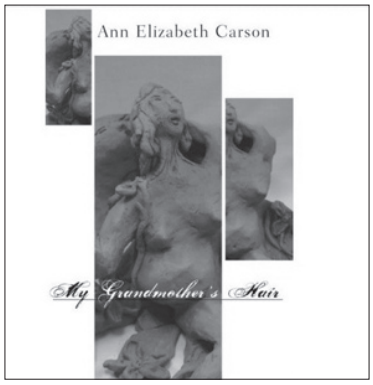
the physical body to speak through torsion and heal through expression. Carson traces her generation back to the symbolic erasure of her grandmother—the cutting of her hair after marriage—to tease out lines/forms of resistance and appearance instantiated through gesture and community. A work of creative 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 expression. 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, paintings, 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 sometimes 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 remember itself against and/or in spite of ideologies that inscribe its repression 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 patriarchal 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 generations that grow up on shared gestures, lies, and myths, is both the symptom and expression of our potency.

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GRAVITY MATTERS

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

REVIEWED BY CAROLYNE VAN DER MEER

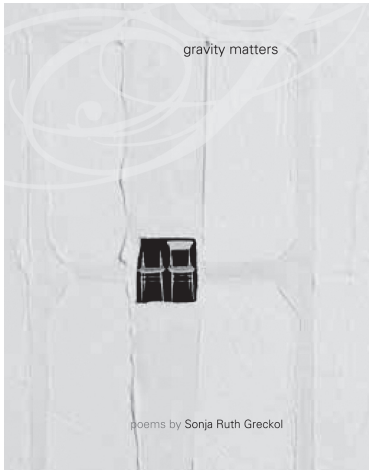
In this cohesive work that is solid in both form and content, Sonja Greckol uses many approaches and techniques that are both convincing and arresting. It is easy to lose oneself in the language and poetic voice in of *Gravity Matters* and then be jolted by the content of Greckol's work.

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 diaspora 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 childhood. However, Greckol's often-used technique of finishing the poem with a zinger of a last line—in this case,

"the horse without/ wings cannot be saved by naming"—gives the poem a power that went well beyond that personal connection.

Her earlier introduction of the diaspora is a good segue into a solid series of poems on genocide and in particular, the Rwandan genocide. This series begins with "A Girl Studies Genocide," which is a intense exploration of the killing in Rwanda. The italicized single lines that punctuate the poem give it all the more clout. "What She Learned," the second poem in this series, shows that Greckol has some knowledge of the literature surrounding the politics of the Rwandan crisis: she lists several titles, including Courtemanche's novel, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, which, even among the non-fiction titles about Rwanda is probably one of the most moving discussions of the subject; Greckol achieves a similar power here. Nevertheless, there is work for the reader to do in deciphering some of her references and technique—but this does not make the poems inaccessible or esoteric, merely all the more interesting. Her challenges to go beyond the surface make it all the more satisfying and certainly ensure that the work is not given a superficial interpretation. Her term "alphabullet broth" is stark and gets to the heart of the ineffectiveness of all the attempted political action in the Rwandan region. "What She Decided" explores ethnic cleansing from a mother's point of view, making the concept all the more jolting for the readers who are also mothers. "Inbox Citizen—6 a.m. 13 Messages 05.07" is less accessible as a poem and can even be considered somewhat confusing, but it is completely fascinating to try to decode it—and not in a frustrating way. It suggests how large the world is, how far a message can travel—and ultimately then, how small the world really is.

In the poems that follow, Greckol moves away from the genocide theme somewhat, and while she continues to explore history, there is a stronger emphasis on family history and connections. "Skin of the Universe," the first poem following the genocide series, does this—in a brief six lines, it manages to capture the link between three generations of women. "Orlando Comes to Our Seder" is a fascinating exploration of a moment in a family history that is enhanced by pre-meal conversation that is interwoven with her own thoughts on family in the final stanza. The notion of family is further explored in "Bits Fall Off," which, though a very challenging read, expertly and innovatively explores the demise of a mother's health in old age. In the final poem in this section, "The Mother Line," she pays tribute to her grandmother's history and traces out her immigrant journey from the homeland.



Part II is clearly inspired by Cuban-American artist, Ana Mendieta, whose work focused on the female body—and particularly, violence against the female body. Two of the poems make specific reference to Mendieta and explore the process of going back to the earth and of being objectified as woman. Certainly, they are designed to make commentary on Mendieta's own return to the earth—she fell to her death from a 34th-story window, and her husband was tried and acquitted for her murder. The other poems in the section address other aspects of the body and yet employ elements of humour and irony. "Advice on the Arts of Seduction" looks at beauty's flaws—and humourously addresses woman's greatest enemy: cellulite. "This Body" is one of the most potent poems in the sequence, exploring the female experience of orgasm, fertility, miscarriage and pregnancy—the sensual energies of the female form.

The third sequence addresses, in a range of forms, the title of the first poem: "The Mind-Body Problem." As in the poem itself, Greckol speculates through verse on the seemingly disparate movements of the physical self and emotions. In effect, the body seems often to be on autopilot, just doing what needs to be done, what is socially acceptable—while the mind rages and feels intensely.

"To be looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour," Greckol explains, in the notes following the collection, refers to a Marcel Duchamp work. It is a fascinating exploration of the progress of industrialization and the "ant work" of society during and following Duchamp's career. This poem is one of this reviewer's favourites as it succinctly wonders how art would and could interpret this progress. Greckol is expert at swiftly, with few words, studying a profound concept.

"Cassandra's Other Other Brother," takes its title, Greckol explains in the endnotes, from the Greek myth of Hecuba and King Priam and their many children (but I could not help but be humorously reminded of the Newhart Show's "Hello, this is my brother Darryl and this is my other brother Darryl"—it's possible that Greckol was playing on this as well). While the poem can be read as a study of that myth, it can also be read as a study of society, and given Greckol's political sensitivities, it is likely that this was her intention. This poem is also about people, based on their abilities and disabilities, being relegated to certain castes, certain jobs, and certain rungs on the social ladder. Yet, Greckol's perspective is one of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.

"Joy Riding" is an extremely com-

pelling poem in its exploration of how things get lost in the telling—and how every story's hearer infuses it with something personal. Greckol's last line, "Why's this story about you?" is a full punch and drives her point home. But the subject matter is already jarring—we all have a story like this, one we heard in our childhoods. If one considers this possibility, the final line offers yet another layer of meaning.

Another poem in the sequence that stands apart is "When Authority Lies. Regarding Stanley Milgram, 1933-1984." This poem treats social psychologist Stanley Milgram's obedience to authority experiments in the 1960s and '70s. The premise of Milgram's research was that subjects will commit acts that are against their moral code if they have been told to do so by an authority figure; they will transfer the responsibility for these acts to the authority figure and in this way, will be able to follow through with them and still absolve themselves. Through his experiments, Milgram discovered that only a few subjects would refuse to commit the act. Greckol suggests that now that Milgram is dead, we are forgetting him, forgetting the power of the authority figure, and thus, horrible acts are being committed and justified. She makes reference to recently politicized issues in Canada. She focuses on Dudley George, the Objibwa protester shot by police in the Ipperwash Crisis in 1995; Shidone Arone, the teenager who was tortured by the Airborne Regiment in Somalia in 1993; and Corporal Sandra Perron, an infantry captain who in 1992 was tied to a tree for hours as part of a training exercise—an act that was probably meant to break her down in the face of her male colleagues and subordinates. Greckol asks the question, "Who is watching, after Stanley?"—in other words, who will bring this to the public arena, who will ensure that we are aware of how authority works? Clearly, no one, she indicates, in light of these three incidents. What is interesting is that Milgram's work was highly controversial—Greckol manages to pit this against the alternative: that there is no watchdog.

Part IV, "Emilie Explains Newton to Voltaire" is Greckol's *pièce de resistance*, and the foundation on which the entire collection rests. While the other poems are indeed solid, this 15-poem sequence is technically brilliant and its content fascinating. As she explains in her Prologue, Greckol explores the relationship Emilie du Châtelet had with Voltaire, and studies her work as a mathematician, and particularly, her work translating Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, which she managed to complete just before her death after giving birth to a child at the age of 42. It is important to note that in this era, taking lovers was commonplace, and both Emilie and her husband, the Marquis, did so. Emilie was lovers with Voltaire for several years, but the child born to her at the end of her life was fathered by a young poet soldier with whom she had become involved.

The poem sequence explores Emilie's research into the science of fire, her meeting Voltaire and their entwined passion and intellectual respect for one another. Greckol even explores it from Voltaire's side in No. 5. The sequence moves on to her relationship with the poet soldier in No. 6, in which Emilie discusses her body's project: her pregnancy at 42. This reference to the body's project is particularly interesting given Greckol's earlier focus on the body versus the emotions, and therefore ties in well with the preceding poems. The project, as we see in Nos. 8 and 9, refers not just to the pregnancy, but also to Emilie's certainty that the pregnancy will kill her and that she must therefore complete her body of work, her project, before she dies: the translation of Newton. The project of childbearing theme continues in No. 10 but Greckol adeptly adds a modern-day reference to Prudence Lemokouno, the 24-year-old woman in Cameroon who died in 2006 because proper obstetric care was not available to her. *New York Times* op-ed columnist Nicholas D. Kristof wrote about her in his column to widespread reaction—and the lack of such care in developing countries was suddenly under the microscope. Greckol's reference brings a modern-day element to the poem and indicates that in some places, there has been little progress and the woman's body project is still a risky one.

On a technical level, the poetry is intricate. As of No. 2, all of the poems begin with the final line of the previous poem—or elements of it. There are 14 such poems, which is significant: given that the fifteenth is written in the form of a Spenserian sonnet, it is likely that the 14 preceding poems represent the notion of a sonnet (which have 14 lines), with the fifteenth a culmination that is therefore written in proper sonnet form. The fifteenth poem is Spenserian, with three quatrains and a couplet, but like the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, introduces a problem in the first two quatrains, and with a clear-cut change of tone, resolves that problem in the remaining six lines. The problem for Emilie is the pregnancy at 42, with the resolution of completing her life's work and returning to earth in death. This sonnet finale is brilliant and secures any assessment that Greckol's work is not only filled with solid content, but is technically near-flawless.

The final six poems in Part V pale in comparison to the collection's earlier pieces. There is a strong focus on birds and snakes, solidly rendered and consistent. Particularly strong is No. 2 of the Egg Girl sequence—the final line, "I'm othered" has real force. "More Self Portraits In The Mother Line" draws the collection together in its consideration of motherhood once again, but this time in the bird world. The title hearkens back to the last poem in the first section, entitled "The Mother Line," in which the grandmother's immigrant journey from the motherland is privileged; in this poem, it is a bird's return from her winter retreat to her home

of origin—this creates a feeling of having come (flown) full circle.

Greckol's layers of meanings are manifold and it is clear that her work is informed by a sensitive worldview. Ultimately, they are for the reader to discover—but their plentifulness makes for rich reading.

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AMERICAN BLOOMSBURY: LOUISA MAY ALCOTT, RALPH WALDO EMERSON, MARGARET FULLER, NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, AND HENRY DAVID THOREAU: THEIR LIVES, THEIR LOVES, THEIR WORK

Susan Cheever
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006

REVIEWED BY GISELA ARGYLE

The anachronistic allusion to Bloomsbury in Susan Cheever's title announces her intent to transform the "daguerreotypes" of the Concord Transcendentalists into a group portrait of rebels and innovators in their lives and their works who are as captivating as the attention-rich English modernists. The author of five novels and two memoirs, Cheever adopts the current feminist practice of including herself autobiographically in this biography. She enlivens the places and events of her narrative with descriptions of her own visits with her children, accounts of her family's roots in Concord, and of an ancestor's guilty participation in the Salem witch trial. She also dramatizes her narrative by focalizing episodes through the journals and letters of one or several of her subjects.

Cheever shows that the three aspects in her subtitle, "Their Lives, Their Loves, Their Work," were powerfully, both fruitfully and disastrously, interconnected. Focusing nearly exclusively on the period from 1840 to 1868 and on Concord, Massachusetts, where "the shot heard around the world" (Emerson) had begun the American Revolutionary War and still echoed, she finds in these interconnections an answer to her question why there, in a cluster of three houses, was "caused this sudden outbreak of genius." Cheever understands the period as analogous to the 1960s and the Concord Transcendentalists as "the original hippies"; "the battle for survival had been won…. It was time to kick up our heels."

Ralph Waldo Emerson's "transcendentalist" beliefs in the divinity of nature and the individual and consequently in liberty motivated his desire for a utopian rural community based on intellectual friendship. And the money inherited from his first wife and earned from his incessant lecturing enabled him to be "the sugar daddy of American literature," supporting and housing several friends when their often self-righteous idealism excused them from earning a livelihood and owning property. In several instances the bonds of friendship and of marriage were both enriched and endangered by transcendentalist "free" love. For instance, Emerson and Hawthorne, both married, competed for Margaret Fuller's romantic attachment; Hawthorne, a "rat" in love, also caused Melville great suffering. Besides her near-voyeuristic portrayal of these entanglements, Cheever celebrates the resultant literary creations, such as Emerson's essay "Friendship" addressed to Margaret Fuller; Hawthorne's "sexy feminine outcasts" starting with Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, also based on Fuller, "the sexy muse" (title of chapter 8); and Melville's story of Ishmael and Queequeg's homoerotic friendship in *Moby Dick*.

The group's work, the third aspect in the book's subtitle, receives an indirect and cursory treatment, owing on the one hand to the organization of the book in terms of episodes as they are experienced and recorded by the main figures, and on the other hand owing to the author's explicit assumption of a shared general familiarity with these foundational American works. Unlike, for instance, Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001) about the next generation of American thinkers, the Pragmatists, this is not a work of intellectual history. Cheever's genealogy of Emerson's "transcendentalism" lacks critical, and it seems, first-hand understanding of the permutations that Kant's "reason" incurred when anglicized via Schelling by Coleridge and Carlyle. Particularly the translation of Kant's "Anschauung," an introspective analysis, as "intuition," facilitated Emerson's emotional philosophizing. Besides her subjects' writings, Cheever narrates their "transcendentalist" rebellions against many of their society's traditions and institutions, such as Puritanism, Unitarianism, academe, slavery, and marriage, and their work as alternative school-teachers and public lecturers. She severely censures them when their help for fugitive slaves, en route on the Underground Railroad to Canada, climaxes in their fanatical support of the murderer Captain John Brown as martyr and saint. In this as in other instances, she stresses the impracticability of their ideas, which nevertheless had the "power to form a national identity."

Cheever shows clearly under what social and personal conditions her