

the work that remains to be done to achieve genuine equality. Or read it backwards by skipping from the index to the pages of particular interest to you. Either way, Mitchell's writing will pull you in. The end notes organized by chapter offer full references for the sources she used; in so doing, they provide the reader wanting more than this slim volume—it is just 206 pages—can offer.

Mitchell's book is like a well-presented and inspiring survey course in women's history: It dips the reader's toe into the vast collective of women who, individually and together, faced hardship, isolation and ridicule and yet kept working to improve women's lives by increasing the scope of their rights. *About Canada: Women's Rights* is a must-read as either introduction to, or reminder of, the vital contributions women have made to Canada through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

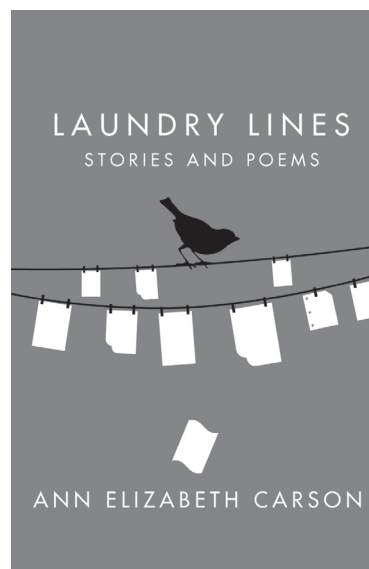
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## LAUNDRY LINES

Ann Elizabeth Carson  
Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2015

REVIEWED BY SONIA DI  
PLACIDO

*In his/her work, every memoirist leaves behind a better or worse likeness of the people he knew, alongside two self-portraits. The first of these two is painted intentionally, while the second is unplanned, accidental. It goes without saying that the first is more flattering than the second, and the second is more faithful than the first. The better the writer, the*



*more attention we should pay to this discrepancy.*

—Wisława Szymborska, Poet

“Laundry Life,” the opening of three sections in Ann Elizabeth Carson’s memoir, *Laundry Lines*, combines both poetry and prose. Beginning with poetry, the effect of two written genres makes for a dynamic and allows for a reader to approach memoir with varied narrative perceptions. Most effective, is the (song) poem prior to prose:

to speak  
before the light goes out...  
Hear the faint, waiting hums  
that heed  
disembodied stories strung juicy  
deep, ours to be born into  
when we gaze in wonder at the  
little we have come to know.

...pulley squeaks  
as my mother hangs clothes on  
two steel lines,  
strung garden-length;  
wooden pegs in a pouch on the  
line, the next peg  
in her mouth—she could even  
talk around it.

Socks line up just so, toes point  
in one direction

the days the heels and toes face  
each other is a sure sign of trouble  
brewing.

Beyond “Laundry Life,” the longest narrative poem in the book, Carson moves into prose. This sets up an emotive flow that allows for a gentler entry into one woman’s story. A succinct feminine approach? Rather, let’s engage feminism and how that exhibits itself in the book not only as Carson writes her memoir celebrating and questioning the women who have been and remain of influence to her life’s narrative. The feminism also manifests through intrinsic approaches to a combination of the two genres. A playful, yet, a birth-like approach, a duality that invites the blending into one. As the genre of two lovers melding to become one in a memoir of story and song.

It’s a supreme act of control to understand a life as a story that resonates with others. It’s not a diary. It’s taking this chaos and making a story out of it, attempting to make art out of it. When you’re a writer, what else is there to do? ...It’s like stitching together a quilt, creating order that isn’t chronological order—it’s emotional, psychological order.  
—Dani Shapiro, *Still Writing*

Shapiro’s image of the quilt fits in perfectly well with Carson’s own inclusion of specific memory to the women of her childhood and how they stitched, used, and kept quilts. A vital aspect of her upbringing, which through memoir she is able to shape into sharing its personal and culturally symbolic influence on her life. A fluid uncertainty moves moodily through the memoir as to whether the ‘quilting’ is both a memoir technique between two genres and something that Carson has conscientiously researched or

an intuitive understanding by way of her introduction to the reader. There's a comfort in discovering the assimilation of 'stitching,' Carson's weaving toward some reconciliation, her inclination [perhaps] toward mending the abstract mind over memory using two genres. The book is presented, both in its introduction and three sections with a clarity that is sometimes missed, unless the reader makes a strident effort to understand Carson's need to claim [her] memory as solid. There's a distinct record at a found attempt at presenting each section, rather than chapter by chapter. Could this be the effect of this [one] memoirist's passionate exposure to psychology as study and its relationship to bridge its formulaic with creative writing? She declares to her reader(s), in her introduction, "Perhaps you will hang out some of your own laundry one day."

Time is shelved in chronology in memories of hanging laundry—

Waitressing to earn my  
university fees  
between meals, I help the  
laundress string  
long rows of flopping sheets  
behind Monhegan's Inn.

Newly wed, our below ground  
city apartment boasts no green  
A tangle of ropes stretched on  
a wooden frame in the bathtub  
collapses...under the weight  
of dripping hand-wrung  
garments...

I learned to drive...baby buckled  
beside laundry heaped high  
in the back seat." I rattle up  
Spadina's red cobbles to new  
machines  
...wash three loads, hang out,  
take in, hang out, fold and fold  
and fold

A hot little house down-  
payment-boosted from parental

pockets,  
suburban women chat across  
fences, laundry placed neat  
on roundabouts

Always I write. Words are in  
spaces  
between soak and churn,  
laundry, tears  
laughter and weary bones,  
between  
hang out in every weather.  
Places found  
to dry, fold and sort once more...

What is dry memory? What is wet memory? Dry land, wet water—moving between the two elements constantly awash in memory. Among all the laundry of a 'certain' adult and new mother she moves briskly through time, fast and mobile. There's little emotion here, rather a brisk unending song so swift, longer than a sparrow's whistle and squeak. It's not a mating call. It's a sure song of knowing, without wonder, without despair, a descriptive matter of facts sorted and strung together like never-ending clothes gathered to 'come out' of the (a) wash that is Carson's memories, some dripping and some almost dry, is there a need for clipping all these pieces of wear along her laundry line? Here, the laundry is hard, sometimes difficult as insects appear, movement among space to hang out laundry beckons at more poems reminiscing with relief.

Carson's prose in this section reads fast, unflinching, specific. As she speaks about the death of her aunt,

Of course, I am crying, just as I  
am now. She turns at me, blue  
eyes clear and alive. 'I love you,  
Ann.' 'I love you too, Getty.' and  
I lean forward to tuck my head  
into her shoulder.

She describes road travel ac-

panied by family as repetitive dances—her polka-like skipping between Southern Ontario's Toronto and Cheltenham at a young vibrant age. The men in her youth, much like neighbours, are elusive, women, aunts, and mothers are a tone to be reckoned with, their voices clear, bossy, and strong. An undertow persists, a voice questioning what lies beneath these 'formed' women of Carson's before. Before war time, what exists? For the bigger women, the stern sensation of a youth that expects to keep them as role models. Carson's prose boasts of familial pride—tasks on a farm, cooking techniques, teaching women, men in the background. Fathers and uncles linger in darkened shadow—poverty, warning, doubt, and death. Is this the first hint of Carson's claim to 'feminism' or fear? The discovering of silence in the swift?

Where preparations for food are found, the languishing of eating, there's less apprehension. Carson offers lists of who shares their specialized dishes, both men and women, during seasons and celebrations in a prosaic chronology to each stage of her stories. She arrives to greet her own children at festive gatherings with gratitude. However, in the second section, the suggestive quality of her section title 'Border Lines,' Carson's voice seems to read less excitedly, the tone steps the reader in a more emotionally binary approach. Less fluid. The contents split apart decidedly. It lacks softness and persists in formality. The approaches to endings and beginnings are formal, unflinching. This central body of Carson's memoir is its most challenging. Here we are invited into her struggle by its most apparent view. The element of water becomes ice and her ground sways as the voice goes from fire to a sombre sobriety of visiting memory through disappointment, loss, struggle, un-

certainty, and a further stretch into solitude, “to get (a)head just enough to feel secure.” Her spirits move into a slower more awakened voice. She conscientiously continues a complex textile—her quilt full of description, a slow breeze of nuance where the familiar revisits familial personas, no longer the inquisitive child.

I own one, appliqued pink and  
mauve tulips  
cupped by green leaves.  
Different patterns  
for each of my children.  
Wedding gifts  
to last lifetimes and beyond.  
The quilts  
must be hand-stitched, no  
machine shortcuts allowed.

Carson shares her experience of the Second World War, the fragility of her sentiments is apparent among her dishevelled surroundings. Food and prose meet in the remembrance of rations. Prayer and a relationship to faith are expressed strung together in a prose description tight and compact. Knowledge is keen, the events of world news, family and relatives on the move is pointedly recorded in memory, an impressive disclosure of detail in prose. Carson eloquently sews her thoughts in a continuous manner here, makes her comparisons to the present, revisits the past and questions her thoughts of the future from a past point of view. She begins to offer an analysis with the reader of a life lived and living in clipped experiential words and phrases. “Looking back,” “Hope,” “We don’t see much of each other for many years,” “Serendipity,” “The war began for me with a personal marker event.” Here is place[s] of time found in markers, dates—the memoirist attempt to recall her experience of traumatic days, nights, years into prose. The poems uniquely fit into the section in a determined manner.

Ann strives to combine the two genres, which reveal her precise capacity for literary technique that struggles to reach for her “ought to” relish memory. Ironically, what is expected: parts and places become sparse.

In “Life Lines,” food, herbs, lush outdoor garden life among the laundry that hangs for all to share provides rhythms where Carson’s point of view by memoir, bubbles in poetry—songs at the finale of this section. There is a larger sense of combined poems and prose to express “Memoria” of glee, awe and wonder as her existing stasis among a surreal notion of time—asking what is Age or Aging?

In “Manitoulin Laundry lines,” the book presents precepts of writing, workshops, and ideas as these tasks circle among her outdoor hanging of laundry. An inner journey into the experience of writing, the excitement and wonder shuffles itself through a poem once again. Lakes, birds, minnows, disrupting the fauna. Nature’s subtle nuances with a human presence as if wanting to ghost one’s way through the island and its Manitou Spirit. There’s a distinct description of what it is to be home and away among these poems—skinny dipping, lake escape, foreplay—nature’s sexuality explored with the revival of Carson’s youth returns among poems, which are dominant here as she embodies *The World is Young*. “*How will she grow in summer heat?*” Though the question is literal, the effect lingers providing more of Carson’s own story as somewhat unfinished. She requires a continued growth among Island friends to discover herself further. As the woman within subscribes to “Bees move and hum, become fat before my eyes.” Again her story is grown, plumb, and fully rounded, “wide cradled in warm stone ravished by smooth silky folds of roseate granite old as time.”—The Fox Islands, Manitoulin.

water bubbles fur my skin  
Need I care for other than lake  
cover  
to caress my glistening  
folds?

Carson shares her seasons in Ontario’s north, differentiates rocks from stones, how to stay warm in Winter, managing Ice—a return to the familiar of Ice Storm that has melted into the return and growth of Goldenrod, Queen Anne’s Lace, crayfish crabs among the settling ice that melts to become a summer dock to the first days of geese beginning Autumn’s migration. Carson’s memories beckon to migrate in tandem flying—

A flock of geese circles the lake  
crying  
“One last look?” as I do, in stages,  
these last September days.

Ann’s consistent return to attempt understandings of a life lived, living and disembodied through her process of taking a highly personal approach to descriptive language among two literary genres of her poet’s song and the [never] forbidden tales, which she earnestly works to weave and mend through memoir, is a heartening yet heavy testament to a strong and proud Canadian woman’s inner story now ripened as she has [always] known. The narrator begins her beckoning both to herself and the reader, throughout the entire memoir toward a final female quest.

For years I’ve been waiting for  
old woman  
feeling lost and so alone, I’ve  
been watching.  
Now I find her weaving, gathering the colours  
Now I find her in myself.

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Writing at University of British Columbia. Sonia is a member of the League of Canadian Poets and Canadian Women in the Literary Arts. Published works such as chapbooks, poetry, essays, book reviews, and interviews can be found in various journals. Her first book of poetry, *Exaltation in Cadmium Red*, was published in 2012. Her second full-length book of poetry is forthcoming in 2018.

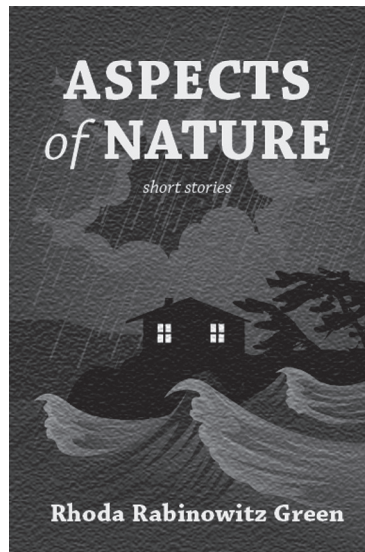
## ASPECTS OF NATURE

Rhoda Rabinowitz Green  
Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2016

### REVIEWED BY MATTHEW CORRIGAN

Though born in Philadelphia, the author of this volume speaks with an international and multi-cultural voice. Stories in this collection take place in California, England, Florida, the Warsaw Ghetto, Buchenwald, and, of course, Canada, where the author has resided for over forty years. The themes are timeless, human ones: the aggravations and humiliations of old age, memory loss, familial discord, the joys and tribulations of marriage, and man's inhuman treatment of man. These stories show a rare and sympathetic nature at work. Each carves out its own world in language—the mordant humour omnipresent but never intrusive, the imagery memorable, the dialogue at times pitch perfect (a rare gift), the rhythms finely tuned and seductive.

Many have a musical identity or musical theme at their centres, like the memoir of the renowned Polish pianist Maryan Filar, an immigrant to the United States after his incarceration at Buchenwald during the war. The author, an accomplished classical pianist herself, studied with



the maestro when he first arrived in America in the early fifties and tells his life story with poignancy and compassion. Filar, a child prodigy, had had his hand smashed by a cruel guard at Buchenwald, yet had gone on in the post war decades to become one of the world's great pianists.

Rhoda Rabinowitz Green captures poignantly the twenty-five year old pianist's ordeal when, returning to his home in the Warsaw Ghetto after living underground with the partisans, he finds the rest of his family gone, disappeared, never to be heard from again:

"Only imagine the anguish Maryan felt when he returned home, January 1943, to find his mother Ester, and Helen, his sister, vanished, like his father (two years before). Vanished: a faded space; a cupboard once cram-packed, now empty, a phantom presence, lingering odour of cigar, toilet water, shampoo. That day, the day that his mother and sister disappeared, he came home to the sound of hollow, all the human spiritual energy siphoned off from the home that had once vibrated with sounds from the piano, guitar, violin, singing and laughter, of family arguments and chastisements and tears."

But a deeper music at times permeates the prose, raising it to a

transcendent level. Consider this passage when the narrator recalls her decision to become a concert pianist:

One evening, no longer a child but a young woman of sixteen, she'd climbed, breathless, to the uppermost heights of Philadelphia's Academy of Music to hear the great Gieseking. *Schumann, Arabesque ...* a sound, simple, hushed, serene, floated upward, reached with, oh, such effortless clarity and resonance her insides trembled. *Debussy, Chopin ...* at the Steinway, he brushed the keys with fine, elongated fingers (spanning an octave), causing a spontaneous, unteachable thing to happen not simply to the notes, but *between*, something rhythmic and sonoric, moving forward and holding back, cheating and robbing, giving and adding, something called beauty and genius. All, liquid, each tone, phrase, shift in sentiment, flowed one from the other without jarring or angularity, the keyboard an orchestra. When he'd finished, gauzy tone-clusters lingered, cocooned in a profound silence no one was willing to break, dying their own death. She knew then what path she must take.

Stories are memorable for the insights, imaginative detail, beauty that they capture and convey in words—and for the memorability of their characters. These are human stories—the shadows of aging and the finality of death are never very far from any of the character's thoughts—with perhaps memory, mutability, mortality, the most central of their preoccupations. At times the language simply leaves the page and soars heavenward, such as in this closing section from the Filar memoir, after the author has visited