

For about 14 bucks you can buy yourself a literary ticket on any one of several satiating safaris, so why invest in these aphorisms? If only because a collection of aphorisms makes an excellent bathroom book for a sophisticated reader such as yourself, I implore you to give one of these a try. Once you crack the cover, you will find beauty and truth and even a smattering of goodness. And if you're looking for a more practical benefit, feel free to borrow aphorisms for use as epigraphs to your essays. I'm sure the authors wouldn't mind.



JAMES TREAT

Creative nonfiction may be an American genre distinction, but several recent anthologies demonstrate that creative *nonfiction* is alive and well beyond the border—even if most Canadians prefer to hyphenate the noun. Collectively, these three books offer a wonderful entrée into our cousins' world to the north.

Imagining Ourselves: Classics of Canadian Non-Fiction, edited by Daniel Francis. Arsenal Pulp Press, 1994. 353 pages, paper, Can. \$19.95.

Daniel Francis, an accomplished historian of the Canadian experience, was accustomed to reading nonfiction “for information, and not for any imaginative experience.” Struck by the growing popularity of nonfiction by writers such as Michael Ondaatje and Eva Hoffman, he set out to uncover the historical precedents for this modern trend. What he found was “a long tradition of excellent writing—literary writing—in the non-fiction genre.” *Imagining Ourselves* surveys three centuries of Canadian writing, from Pierre-Esprit Radisson's 1668 travel narrative to David Macfarlane's 1991 family history. Francis selected each work as illustrating an “interesting moment” in the history of Canadian nonfiction; excerpts from 33 English-language books are arranged chronologically to document the evolution of national identity.

“No matter what they sit down to write about, our writers invariably end up writing about the kind of place they think Canada is, was, or ought to be,” Francis concludes. “And by describing it, they imagine it into being for the rest of us.”

Going Some Place: Creative Non-Fiction Across Canada, edited by Lynne Van Luven. Coteau Books, 2000. ix + 285 pages, paper, Can. \$19.95.

“If similes were to be stretched whimsically and the form of writing known as creative non-fiction were to be likened to a bird,” writes Lynne Van Luven, “it would surely be deemed a magpie. Like the distinctive, fractious, black-and-white bird with the iridescent feathers and the raucous voice, creative non-fiction operates with audacity and curiosity.” And like that ubiquitous scavenger of western Canada, Van Luven’s call for submissions yielded a colorful mix of contemporary work by some of the leading writers in Canada.

This anthology features 24 pieces “centered loosely on the theme of location/dislocation.” All the familiar forms are here—memoir, personal essay, travelogue, nature writing, cultural criticism, literary journalism, narrative history—arranged in three thematic sections exploring memories at home and abroad, dilemmas of personal and collective identity, and matters of life and death. Several contributions offer particularly adventurous flights of magpie prose: an impressionistic autobiography in 14 episodes by Ven Begamudré; Daniel Coleman’s lyric-full memoir of a missionary boarding school in Ethiopia; a cross-cultural, dialogical meditation on death coauthored by Rita Moir and Shirley Scott—Bruised Head.

Going Some Place offers a bird’s-eye view of creative nonfiction in contemporary Canada, and of human diversity in the land that coined the term “multiculturalism.”

Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction, edited by Rasunah Marsden. Theytus Books, 2000. 219 pages, paper, Can. \$18.95.

In 1998 the En’owkin Centre sponsored the Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction Forum, inviting eight prominent writers to participate in a roundtable discussion of the genre and to read from their work in progress. En’owkin leaders then expanded the circle of conversation by calling for submissions from other indigenous writers. *Crisp Blue Edges* is the product of this collaborative process.

Part 1, “Speaking in the Round,” is a transcript of the roundtable discussion interspersed by excerpts from the eight readings. Part 2, “Writing at Large,” embraces 17 selections by accomplished authors and unpublished novices alike. A variety of literary forms are represented, including some

that many Western critics may not recognize as creative nonfiction: contemporary reworking of trickster tales and other mythic traditions, for example, and personal narratives featuring supernatural elements typically glossed as magic realism.

Indigenous expressive culture is “grounded in orality, and meant to be spoken or performed,” says En’owkin executive director Jeannette Armstrong. The struggle to translate oral tradition into literary convention, to bridge the gap between indigenous realities and the English language, is the unifying theme of this provocative anthology. ■