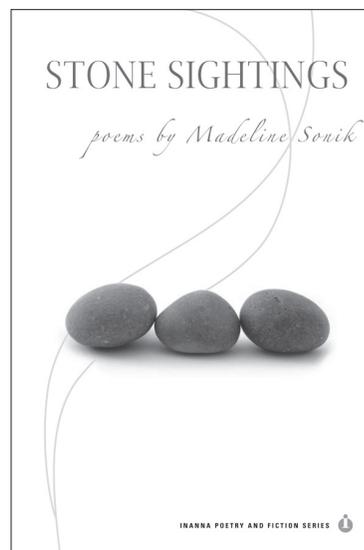


her searing vision as they admire her meticulous craft. If there is any sign of hope in *Stone Sightings*, it is tentative and fleeting.

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 heartbreak 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 smoothing / 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 Panofsky 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

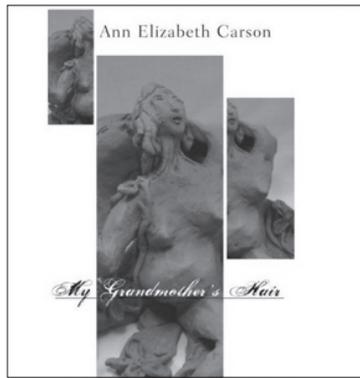
Brushing: Women’s Generation

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 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.

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 diaspora theme but also uses language that draws the reader into her poetic world: diaspora, despot, malted, sprout, filaments, 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,