to think ourselves masters over beings for whom our controlling-vocabulary is much more limited than we realize.

In a poem whose title "Dwelling in Possibility" McCaslin likely borrows from Emily Dickinson, the speaker draws near to aspects of nature for a moment with vivid and memorable language, then has the good sense to let go:

> Cedars rise from duff
> their green names
> wide-open cadenzas
>
> Concatenation of crows—
> nothing is as it is
> for long

These two lines "nothing is as it is / for long" summarize the life's work of First Nations artist Norval Morrisseau where human and animal forms morph in and out of each other at will.

Quite often in McCaslin language rubs up against that which has no language, or at least no language recognizable by human beings. In a longish poem "Wilderness/Poetry" she explores how poetry engages wilderness by attempting to call it into speech:

> *the abyss is a roiling cauldron*
> *spewing up forms so lovely*
> *they silence speech.*

The speaker humbly recognizes that "There is a syllabus we cannot master / and it has no name." She is surer of language's limitations than she is of language's potential for control and mastery.

In his very fine Introduction to *Into the Open*, Russell Thornton takes note of how frequently magnolia, flower and tree, have presence in McCaslin's poetry. He writes: "Botanists believe that the magnolia has existed since the beginning of time, and may be the first flower." In "Writing to Magnolia," McCaslin speaks directly to her subject, "and you, Magnolia, / casting your fleshy dress / like snow at my feet." Along with the whiteness of the flower and of snow, one pictures an Agnes Martin painting where a white grid seems to dissolve into invisibility. As in a Martin painting, there is more in a McCaslin poem than the eye is first able to discern.

White is the central colour in *Into the Open*—"white meditation," "white flutter," "white dolphin," "white lion," "white arms," "muslin's white," "white stone," "white door," "*beurres blanc*," "white shirt," "white nun," etc. If only a rich patron, in recognition of Susan McCaslin's nearly score of books and chapbooks of poetry and her one-of-a-kind contribution to Canadian letters, would fund the cost of lavish reproductions of Agnes Martin's paintings to accompany the poems. Seldom does linkage between poet and painting seem so right.

If white is the key colour of the book, *flow* is the key word. In "Omega Suite" the speaker suggests that one of the duties of the poet is "attending the flow." In her poem to Wisdom, "Dear Sophia," McCaslin writes, "one body / bowing / not as to a king / but to what flows." The lines bring back to mind an earlier poem, "Mindfulness," which concludes with these lines: "But be in your place / as the globed magnolia."

> *You are not the first or the last*
> *to change.*

Flow, change, metamorphosis: these are the ways of nature, and of the world. How could it be otherwise within "wind-born" creation?

For a long time now, Susan McCaslin has been moving towards greater and greater openness, inclusiveness, wholeness. She has partaken in her work of the "big fruit salad of the Spirit." She has drawn inspiration in particular from "the Galilean poet" whose gospel of mercy and forgiveness still resounds throughout the world. She has come to know the importance of being generous, as "The rainbow doesn't stint." She has come to know this hard-won shattering truth:

> *Nothing divine charges a fee*
> *Everything is charged with love*

The poet Eva Tihanyi says if you only read one book of poetry this year, read Susan McCaslin's *Into the Open*.

J.S. Porter reads and writes in Hamilton. His most recent book is Lightness and Soul: Musings on Eight Jewish Writers. *His review first appeared in* Dialogue Magazine, *Winter, 2018.*

WRITING MENOPAUSE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF FICTION, POETRY, AND CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Jane Cawthorne and E.D. Morin, eds. Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, 2017

REVIEWED BY LAURA WERSHLER

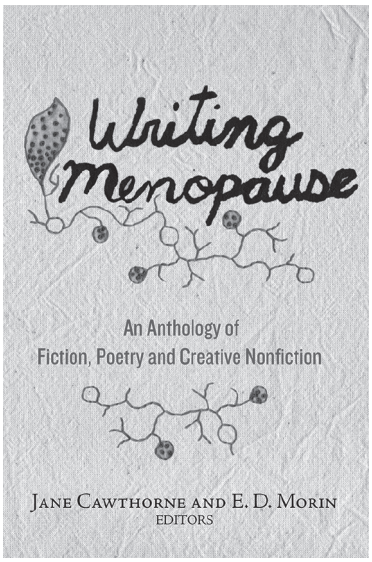
If Chrissie Hynde becomes mentor and muse to a perimenopausal woman who wants a barber to shave her head; an artist takes a pair of much-younger brothers as lovers; a couple take their well-worn, no-longer needed pram to the dump; an aging mother struggling to breathe shares menopausal wisdom with her midlife daughters; a man with a vagina talks about menopausal stigma; a women loses her womb and the fruit of her womb in short succession; a daughter becomes her mother; blood flows, sweat drenches, curves develop;

and, beneath all, relationships drift, shift, and realign.

At the root of the poems and stories—both fiction and non—in *Writing Menopause* are the transitioning relationships of women at various stages in the transition to menopause. Almost every piece can be deconstructed to reveal a relationship in flux. Characters—real, imagined, and metaphoric—are in the midst of renegotiating, reinventing, reimagining their relationships with partners, lovers, friends, children, mothers, nature and, mostly, themselves. Family life, partnered life, friendship, and sexuality are boldly exposed. Points of view expand and shrink, reaching beyond these women's everyday lives and deeply within their changing bodies and evolving psyches. It's this exploration that editors Jane Cawthorne and E. D. Morin were seeking when they put out the call for submissions to *Writing Menopause*, wisely knowing "that there are different ways of seeing and reading experience."

The anthology is arranged in three sections titled to represent the yes and no contradiction of each theme. Selections in UN/DONE explore menopause as both the end and the beginning of something. IN/FERTILE includes pieces that celebrate and mourn the end of reproductive function, and explore new forms of fertility that arise in women's lives. In the last section, UN/KNOWN, characters are revising what "they thought they knew," with most acquiring a new—bold and/or tender—sense of self.

If there is one menopausal cliché readers can expect to find in this collection, it is "night sweats and hot flashes." References to either or both are found in at least twenty-five of the anthology's fifty-four poems and stories. Whether mentioned in passing or the focus of a paragraph or two; whether as observation by a



young boy about his mother ("Or I would find her in the kitchen mopping her face with the hem of her apron…") or as title ("The Hot Women, Drenched"); whether as metaphor ("We unattended candles lie radiant as glowing ash.") or call to action ("Maybe these night sweats are my body's battle cry. Rise up, she calls."), such references suggest that far from being clichéd, night sweats and hot flashes are noteworthy phenomena with mysterious alchemical power.

Writing Menopause is not the book you read to find medical explanations or treatment suggestions for night sweats. It's the book you read when you want to know how menopause feels, how it is experienced by women like you and not like you. It's the book men should read if they want to better understand the women in their lives. It's the book health-care practitioners should read to help them see beyond the symptoms presented by women advancing towards or already in menopause.

Menopause may be the destination but it is the scenic road trip all women take to get there that makes for the compelling writing in this anthology. Some voices are missing, as the editors themselves lament in "On Mountains and Menopause." Where are the stories of women facing poverty or taking on challenging physical or creative pursuits? Some pieces are stronger than others, but collectively they offer something for every reader. I was struck particularly by the opening to "My Mother's Skin" by Kate Austin:

I'm wearing my
mother's skin
and since I've passed my
best-before date,
her hands fit as if they were
made
for me.

And in Jane Silcott's "Threshold" I recognized the contradictions and confusions, the whirls of circuitous thinking, and the arguments we have with ourselves as we meander or crash our way into menopause. Sometimes we feel hapless, sometimes we feel fierce, and sometimes we are perfectly at peace with ourselves. Silcott writes: "No one cheers you on through menopause." They do now. *Writing Menopause* is one big cheering section, led by Silcott's last words on hot flashes: "People used to call hot flashes 'blooms.' How apt. We flushing, heated women blooming out everywhere."

Laura Wershler is a veteran sexual and reproductive health advocate, writer and commentator whose work has appeared in various newspapers, journals, online venues, and the anthology Without Apology: Writings on Abortion in Canada. A longtime member of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, she served as editor-in-chief of its blog, Menstruation Matters, from 2015-2017.