

in pared-down language that cuts to the bone. Inspired by Adele Weisman's fictional female protagonist in *Crackpot*, in turn derived from an immigrant's lived experience, Hoda, affectionately called Hodaleh by her father in the Yiddish vernacular, is a young girl hungry for affection, scorned by her peers, negated by her teacher. To feed both herself and her father, she eventually becomes a sex worker, though Hoda attests to offering "more than sex," [that her] "girth loves/takes suffering." Ensuing wounds and affronts become "shards/of [her] being," as she sells her body to clientele in the Jewish neighborhood, their own satisfaction and grief, a "dirge for their small lives and [hers]." Is she "lewd, crude, and coarse?" she asks in a verse that reads like spoken word poetry. Her answer follows in a matter of fact voice with a rhetorical question: "I make my way/with my body/what else would I be?" That a woman of her socio-economic status had no alternative is part of her tragedy and that of her society.

At the foreground, then, is Hoda's first-person voice, which is double-edged: a narrator's voice that shares her storied life and the inner italicized voice which protests injustice. (At one point, Hoda joins a march for the working class, for seamstresses and their "piecework," physically assaulting a Mountie).

Other voices briefly emerge from backstage. For example, Seraphina, whose own mother "growls and whacks," encourages Hoda to "[meet] some classy meatballs/[make] a few extra bucks," which leads to Hoda's physical abuse as the men "romp about/ and roll off spent." Note the unadorned diction that lends an authenticity to this ethnographic and artful work, and the frequent use of monosyllabic words that amplify the writing with a direct, percussive beat. While Panofsky ushers in flashes of imagery, for instance, in the birth of

Hoda's son, as she "gnaw[s] the cord/knot[s] [her]self/into the fullness/of [that] black night," the poet judiciously chooses language that will not so much transcend Hoda's harsh world through a figurative lens but will keep us grounded *in* that world, clear-eyed and empathically listening.

One timeless motif that resonated with me was Hoda's "ample body," perceived as a source of derision ("big fat cow") on one hand and as a source of pleasure on the other, as men "climb atop/explore the folds/of [her] body/plunge cocooning flesh." Hoda declares: "but I know better/my body sparkles/my mind stirs." In her defiance, Hoda's voice sings.

If there is a distinct line between the lived and imagined life, that line merges in Ruth Panofsky's hands as she reconstructs the life of a woman from the past whose voice has been either historically erased, or most often, negligibly muffled and diminished of its humanity. If there is a touch of fatalism in Hoda's words, that "God made and/bound me/whore," Panofsky opens our eyes, minds, and hearts to the peril the impoverished female children of the world face so that we might see ourselves in their plight.

Carol Lipszyc's book of short stories on children and adolescents in the Holocaust, The Saviour Shoes and Other Stories, (2014) and her book of poetry, Singing Me Home, (2010) were published by Inanna. Her edited anthology of eighty poems on the heart, The Heart Is Improvisational, was published by Guernica Editions (2017). Integrating chants and narrative for ESL Literacy students, she authored People Express for Oxford University Press. A chapbook of poems, In the Absence of Sons, is slated for 2020 publication by Kelsay Books. Her web site can be found at www.carollipszyc.com.

NORTH: POEMS

Cecelia Frey
Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 2017

REVIEWED BY PHILIPPA JABOUIN

The Unbearable Heaviness of Being. The overwhelming weight of silence, stillness, passing days. The seeming eternity of time. Immutable yet passing. Cecelia Frey's collection of poems draws a portrait of life unhurriedly unfolding in a northern Alberta community during the first half of the twentieth century over a span of twenty years.

The narrator, a woman, a friend, a sister, a daughter, a mother, a homemaker, at times a student, and a spectator, relates her life in the spaced-out rhythm of time. The seasons, an autumn landscape, a drenched evening, a cold winter morning. In relating to the stories and experiencing this life through her eyes, the monotony of life in the countryside drags on into nothingness. Frey writes: we're neither heroes (sic) nor victims of fate says the one who teaches philosophy// our lives are not written in our bones// we have a choice

Long periods of nothingness drown out her days. She has chores. They do not fill up her days, but alone, in a few words, they fill up the narrative of her days, in her point form diary. Just a few words, often abbreviated, only what is necessary to describe the eternal passage of time. What she does, the silence, everything else is left off the page: the immensity of nothing to do. Today she washed. The following day she finished washing. One morning her father shot a deer in the snow and that was quite the event.

Another day the dog had puppies. The weight of things left unsaid. The

special occasions that punctuate daily life, offer the community a reason to dress up, step out and gossip. The bride who was forcefully carried into church on her brother's shoulders was lucky he did not slip and fall in the mud with her. The trip to see the Royal Train, hours under the sun to wave a few fleeting seconds to the King and Queen.

North reads like a novel and it also reads one poem at a time, in an undiscerning order. You read and fill in the blanks, like the lines in the book, spaced out, falling, irregular, pausing, partially incomplete. These stories are artistically reconstructed with memories, announcements, songs, entries from a diary, gossip, anecdotes, vagaries of the weather. Life just is. Contained by the immensity of the environment, each person an insignificant speck, relieved, content or silently unhappy with what is. We always had to have music, writes Frey, that was one thing we always had to have// like the birds we had to sing// against the silence

Whichever the times and however physically and culturally distant this reality may be from our own, we read these poems with silent resignation. Somewhere, at some time this was life for many women and for many more, it still is today. We may wonder what this must have been like, how these poems would metamorphosize in the flesh, how we would have reacted, how contrasted this world was from others. The material poverty and bareness of the surroundings in northern Alberta, circa 1920. The opulence and material comfort in Japan in those same years. The hopeful expectations of Irish immigrants arriving in the Americas at that time. The similarities and contrast with hopeful immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Americas of today. What a poignant contemplation to consider this country, built by immigrants, populated only by immigrants, on

land that was already inhabited, organized and holistically included in the natural cycle of life. A country that still today depends on immigration to sustain its economic and political structures. A hundred years later, how do we welcome immigrants regardless of their country of origin? What entitlement do we believe to hold as immigrants of earlier generations facing these newer waves of immigration, and what have we learnt from our errors of the past?

Philippa Jabouin is a ghostwriter and content creator living in the Ottawa/Gatineau region. In a past life she has worked as a journalist, lawyer, and communications specialist. She has published a few short stories under her own name.

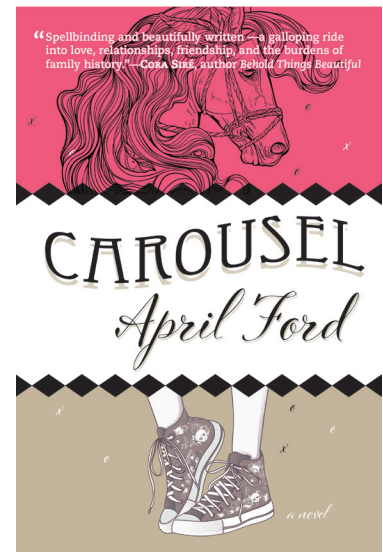
CAROUSEL: A NOVEL

April Ford
Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2020

REVIEWED BY JACK RUTTAN

Thank goodness, a book can take you on a vacation from the cares of current events. Whether you're marooned in a foreign country, hiding in a cabin in the woods, or sitting on the front deck of a second-floor apartment in a major Canadian city during a frightening epidemic, it will transport you to another world. Even your body, life history, and gender end up becoming barriers that are easily skipped over when you open the right novel.

Stories let you live inside someone else's skin for a while. A fictional character's experience can echo with your own, or you can venture into uncharted feelings, experiences, and desires. Many of these lives, up until now, haven't even broken into



the mainstream. You may only have witnessed them second-hand, read magazine articles, or wondered about them from a far remove.

Margot Anaïs Soucy-Wright-Coté is the protagonist in April Ford's new book, *Carousel*. She's coming into middle age, she's smart, stylish, and queer. She's also headed for rocky shoals, relationship-wise. Some might envy her footloose, arty lifestyle, while others (as they do in the book) will censure her and call her names.

But it's better not to describe Margot and her friends too much here. A good deal of the fun of reading *Carousel* is putting together the pieces of the story. Jumping forward and backward through time, via flashbacks and memories, it's the literary equivalent of a Quentin Tarantino movie. Portrait assemble bit by bit, emotions rise and fall, reminding the reader of the fairground rides Margot documents with her digital camera.

Carousel is ups and downs—"an emotional roller-coaster" for the protagonist. Her happiness, her relationship status, even her living situation changes from chapter to chapter. It's kind of an updated *Jane Eyre*, accelerated for the twenty-first century, with smartphones and texting.