

the tale told without embellishment, simile or metaphor. (I noticed one and it felt discordant.) The voice feels consistent throughout even as it changes from first to third person, female to male, dialogue to Personal Ads to description. This versatility helps to keep the stories interesting and engaging, as varied as the subject matter. This is the work of a mature writer who has mastered her craft as she observes and experiences the world around her. Landscapes she inhabits or visits become characters in the stories as well: the North, rural France, Toronto, an apartment with a child's drawings on the ceiling and her dying father in a bed beneath them.

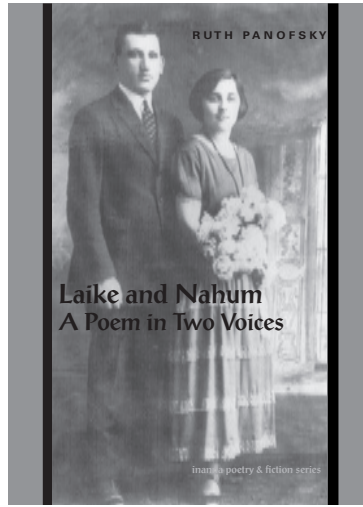
The cumulative effect of this collection will leave the reader with an increased understanding of a variety of states of mind, human interactions and experience. If fiction can transport us into worlds others inhabit, these stories succeed brilliantly. The book is entitled, *One Day it Happens*, but it could also be called, *What We All Long For*—safety and a connection with others—and it should be read.

Lee Gold grew up outside Boston surrounded with books and married a reader. They raised two readers who spawned more readers. Books, ideas, politics, especially anti-violence work from war to intimate femicide and women's safety has fueled her life so far. She longs for the chance to collapse into an easy chair with my latest mountain of unread books and imagine the contours of a more peaceful and equitable world.

LAIKE AND NAHUM: A POEM IN TWO VOICES

Ruth Panofsky
Toronto: Inanna Publications and
Education Inc., 2007

REVIEWED BY CAROL
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In *Laike and Nahum, A Poem in Two Voices*, Ruth Panofsky unfolds the joined life narratives of Laike and Nahum, her familial and imaginatively configured subjects. Weaving past and present together in a lyrical and unstinting voice, the poet re-enacts transitional moments in her grandparents' married lives, which come to signify the core of those lives. We recognize the universal from the distinct historical legacy the poet evokes in three parts: the hesitant, hungry dance of young love; the immigrant experience and its recriminations; and, in a circle of small blessings, the couple's ultimate reserve of love.

Laike and Nahum's voices are like a dance of dialogue. In Part I, we first greet, through the eyes of sixteen-year-old Laike, the transplanted suitor who arrives "with the hardened mud/of Russia" on his boots. Laike sees and identifies with the contradictions inherent in

Nahum: his foreign awkwardness and steady stature, his harsh past and gentle nature. A mingling of intimate dialects and voices emanate from the pair too: the homespun Jewish vernacular (originating point for both characters), and through reported speech, the cautionary, judgmental voices of Laike's parents who do not approve of the match. As Nahum begins to toil in the garment sweatshops, Laike acknowledges the severe limits and inequities of their small world, inadvertently speaking for teeming immigrants who landed on Canadian shores. She asks of her future husband, "did you cross oceans/for so little?" In *Nahum*, we feel empathy for the newly-landed immigrant caught in spirit and body between the haunting memories of an unforgiving Russia motherland and a less-than-welcoming new land, *ile Montreal*, upon which he has pinned his hopes and dreams. Only through his tender and passionate love for Laike can he temporarily escape the "haze of heat and steam" and be made "whole."

In Part II, Laike's roles as mother, wife, and subsistence co-provider soon consume her. With the succession of children and unrelenting poverty, comes shame. In a poignant moment, when Laike attests to the scrubbing of flats for strangers, and concedes to her daughter's shunning of her, she asks Nahum: "what pride have I?" Ruth Panofsky affords her grandmother these words; Laike is given this small space to voice her self-sacrifice. Greater trials await the couple. With the tragic death of a child from a fall onto the pavement, Laike is temporarily hospitalized. The poet paints images on a surreal palate to chronicle trauma and its devastating effects. Laike "dreams of children/plummeting/through pitch of night/buried by dawn." Nahum, who lives under his own "arc of loss," is compelled to relay to the reader the coroner's detached report of his son's graphic injuries. However, Nahum goes on to reveal, in stark language laced with a strychnine dose of irony,

the vulnerability Laike first admired in him: “a boy of two/breaks easily on concrete/the weight of suffering/crushes/a man of forty”. Ruth Panofsky doesn’t polarize husband and wife here; rather, she wisely reveals how the two respond in different shades and with varying nuance to trauma, even as that trauma all but breaks them.

Part III moves the reader to spawned suburban angst with the abusive marriage of the couple’s daughter, Hannah. In this last segment, Laike finds some healing when she finally acknowledges her daughter’s pain and her own past inability as a mother to breach the silence between them. Laike and Nahum quietly yield to their hard-won knowledge of the inevitability of loss, and in doing so, become open to renewal in a future that lies waiting. Panofsky closes the book with Nahum’s voice as he reclaims his deep love for Laike. In the following brief lines, Nahum fervently wishes his family will again be bonded. His words are a prayer and plea, supported by resolve and underlying faith: “I will/the pardoning of souls.” His words can not help but resonate with readers.

I enter the world of this delicate book and discover its humanity, uncovering new meanings with a ripple effect, which is all or more than I can hope a book of poetry will do.

Carol Lipszyc (Lipson) is a published author of poetry and prose whose work has appeared in journals like Parchment and Midstream. Her Literacy/ESL Reader, People Express, with accompanying chants and songs was published by Oxford University Press in Canada. Carol earned her doctorate in education at OISE, University of Toronto and currently teaches expressive writing in a private school in Toronto.

NOBODY’S MOTHER: LIFE WITHOUT KIDS

Lynne Van Luven, Ed.
Vancouver: Touch Wood Editions,
2006

REVIEWED BY BETH PENTNEY

On my long flight from Vancouver to Northern Ontario during the holiday break, I devoured the new collection of essays *Nobody’s Mother: Life Without Kids*, edited by Lynne Van Luven. First and foremost, this book wants sharing. Second, it would do well on a Women’s Studies syllabus. That it can accommodate both a popular and an academic audience is significant, since feminist literature about mothering (and non-mothering) rarely extends beyond narrow academic circles. The twenty-one authors who contribute to the collection provide a diverse terrain of voices on the subject of (biological) childlessness within a mostly-Canadian context. They earnestly explore the emotions, experiences, and ideological baggage associated with not bearing children, and they challenge well-worn gender norms in the process.

Recognizing the need for literature by women who do not have children, rather than literature about women who do not have children, Lynne Van Luven has compiled a range of essays that are poignant, direct, and witty. What emerges most clearly from the collection is the unified insistence that one need not birth a child in order to be motherly, and one need not be a mother in order to be a woman fulfilled. While this is hardly earth-shattering for many, as a PhD student in Women’s Studies struggling with the choices available to me as a female academic (children or career, rarely positioned within a “both/and” structure of thought), I see this collection as a welcome ally. In a pro-natalist culture that rewards women’s allegiance to the domestic and maternal as it simultaneously

brands the childless narcissistic or neurotic, *Nobody’s Mother* offers women and men an intelligent and insightful discussion about life without kids.

Several of the authors are successful creative writers and teachers; this makes for a smooth read and touching moments of insight that are often missing from more clinical studies of childless women. As well, the essays reflect a variety of political and personal subject positions, including contributions from Aboriginal women, lesbian women, immigrant women, women of colour, academic women, rural women, working class women, young women, and old women. The collection is heavily inflected by a West Coast authorship, which I perceive to be a strength. It would be exciting to compare a similar anthology by women from the East Coast, Northern or Central Canada. Since most of the authors call British Columbia home, *Nobody’s Mother* can be read for its regional nuances in interesting ways. Notably, the landscape factors into the essays more than one might think upon consideration of the topic at hand.

Highlights of the collection include contributions from writer Katherine Gordon, journalist Mary Jane Copps, professor Jennifer Wise, Canada Research Chair Smaro Kamboureli, writer and carpenter Kate Braid, and writer Sarah Leavitt. Katherine Gordon’s “No Child of Mine” is composed as a dialogue between herself and the voice of the typical nosy stranger, who asks all-too-familiar questions like: “Who’s going to look after you in your old age?” and “Don’t you realize how much children make you part of a community?” While some of the essays move towards sentimentalism, Gordon is direct in this mock conversation: she has never wanted kids and doesn’t think there is anything wrong with her. She is happy. She thinks that people who call non-parents “selfish” do so as a way to displace their own frustration with the “negative consequences of having children.” Her essay will