

Panel 9: Embodying Affect in Graphic Lives

1. Heidi Bollinger, Eugenio María de Hostos Community College
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Loss Made Visible: Picturing Grief in the Graphic Memoirs of Roz Chast and Alison Bechdel

In *Navigating Loss in Contemporary Women's Memoirs* (2015), Amy-Katerini Prodromou reflects on the ways that “death-denying” industrial Western societies avoid reckoning with loss and demonstrates how this denial gives rise to prescriptive and formulaic narratives of grieving. The step-by-step narrative of grieving that is promulgated in popular psychology, she argues, is inadequate in the face of loss, which persistently and insidiously exceeds all boundaries. In response to a culture that seeks to contain death and obscure loss, American graphic memoirists Alison Bechdel and Roz Chast have rendered loss powerfully visible.

Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) explores her identity in relation to that of her father Bruce, a closeted gay man whose death may have been a suicide. Her graphic memoir thus renders visible the taboo subjects of suicide and homosexuality. In *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (2014), Roz Chast depicts the decline and death of her aging parents. The deterioration of the elderly is often invisible in American, contained within nursing home facilities, but Chast reveals with dark humor the terror of watching one's parents fall apart. While Bechdel is known for her precise, restrained drawing style and Chast for her loose, scrawling cartoons, both artists embody the anxieties of the mourner on the page.

As visual texts, Bechdel and Chast's graphic memoirs represent the ways in which mourning exceeds narrative, emotional, and cultural boundaries. Through the achronological narrative structure of their memoirs, they explore the ways in which grief is a messy, recursive, unpredictable, and open-ended process. In addition, their graphic memoirs engage in self-questioning about the usefulness of writing and art for reckoning with grief. In a closed-casket society, Bechdel and Chast have felt compelled to understand their parents' deaths by drawing them in their dying moments. Their rendering and exposure of death has generated acclaim as well as some criticism among readers.

Ultimately, the status of Bechdel and Chast's graphic memoirs as bestselling, award-winning books of the past decade suggests that their narratives have resonated powerfully with readers who seek a “guide book” to experiences of loss that American culture denies. Their graphic memoirs may help prepare readers for the complex and deeply unsettling experience of mourning and may resonate with readers who have gone through the experience without a guidebook. Thus, graphic memoirs such as Chast and Bechdel's, which make death and loss visible, function to create communities of mourners among readers.

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Perda visibilizada: a imagem do luto nas memórias em quadrinhos de Roz Chast e Alison Bechdel

Em ‘Navigating Loss in Contemporary Women’s Memoirs’ [Superação da perda nas memórias de escritoras contemporâneas, em tradução livre], Amy-Katerini Prodromou reflete sobre como as sociedades ocidentais industriais evitam enfrentar a perda, em “negação da morte”, e demonstra como essa negação abre espaço para narrativas prescritivas e formulaicas do luto. A narrativa dos "estágios do luto" propagada pela psicologia popular, argumenta, é inadequada em face da perda, que ultrapassa todos os limites de maneira persistente e insidiosa. Em resposta a uma cultura que busca conter a morte e obscurecer a perda, as cartunistas americanas Alison Bechdel e Roz Chast tornaram-na poderosamente visível.

‘Fun Home’ [lançado no Brasil como ‘Lar da Graça’] (2006), de Alison Bechdel, explora a identidade da autora em relação à de seu pai, Bruce, um homossexual não assumido cuja morte pode ter sido suicídio. As memórias em quadrinhos de Alison tornam visível, dessa forma, os temas tabus do suicídio e da homossexualidade. Em ‘Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant’ [Podemos falar sobre algo mais agradável?, em tradução livre] (2014), Roz Chast retrata o envelhecimento e a morte de seus pais. Nos Estados Unidos, pouco se vê da decadência dos idosos, fechados nos asilos, mas Chast revela, com humor negro, o terror de assistir ao fim dos próprios pais. Apesar de Bechdel ser conhecida por seu traço preciso e contido, e Chast, por seus desenhos frouxos, irregulares, ambas as artistas incorporam as ansiedades do luto no papel.

Como textos visuais, as memórias em quadrinhos de Bechdel e Chast representam as maneiras em que o luto ultrapassa limites narrativos, emocionais e culturais. Através de uma estrutura narrativa acronológica, elas exploram as maneiras em que o luto se mostra um processo confuso, repetitivo, imprevisível e inconstante. As memórias também fazem um autoquestionamento sobre a utilidade da escrita e da arte na preparação para o luto. Em uma sociedade de caixões fechados, Bechdel e Chast sentiram-se compelidas a compreender a morte de seus pais desenhando seus últimos suspiros. Essa exibição da morte gerou aplausos bem como críticas de leitores.

As memórias em quadrinhos de Bechdel e Chast ganharam prêmios e ficaram entre as mais vendidas da última década, o que, no fim das contas, sugere que suas narrativas tiveram um efeito poderoso em leitores que procuram um “manual” para a experiência da morte, negada pela cultura americana. As memórias em quadrinhos podem ajudar a preparar os leitores para a experiência do luto, complexa e perturbadora, e podem ter um significado especial para leitores que tiveram que passar por isso sem um manual. Assim, memórias em quadrinhos como as de Chast e Bechdel, que tornam a morte e a perda visíveis, funcionam para criar comunidades de enlutados entre seus leitores.

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2. Candida Rifkind, U of Winnipeg [c.rifkind@uwinnipeg.ca]

The Affective Topographies of Geneviève Castrée’s Graphic Life Narratives

This paper studies two autographics by the late Québécoise cartoonist Geneviève Castrée (Susceptible and “Blankets Are Always Sleeping”) and their mobilization online by a bereaved comics community. I begin with her autographic *Susceptible* (2012), a memoir of coming-of-age in a dysfunctional family in 1980s Quebec. Through an avatar, Goglu, Castrée recalls memories from her early childhood to late adolescence that dwell on emotional abuse in the Montreal home of her francophone mother and stepfather, and her attempts to re-unite with her anglophone father in British Columbia. I examine what Kathy Mezei calls the “domestic effects” of women’s autobiographical practices, the significance of interior spaces to the shaping of memory and the construction of an emergent self. Castrée draws Goglu in domestic spaces that are at once punitive and protective to convey the disjunction between a desire for home and its often brutal reality.

My reading of *Susceptible* takes Smith and Watson’s image of “the rumpled bed” of contemporary female autobiography literally to explore how beds and blankets are braided throughout Castrée’s work as material, metaphoric, and metonymic sites of memory. I argue that Castrée depicts her childhood bed as an ambivalent topos of security and anxiety. The bed becomes the privileged signifier of the domestic effects that form Goglu’s subjective memories, which are filtered through cultural memories particular to the political locations of her 1980s post-Quiet Revolution, pro-separatist Québécoise childhood. Goglu’s emergence as a speaking subject is shaped by the national traumas of the 1989 Montreal Massacre and the movement for Quebec sovereignty as well as the historical effects of outmigration, the Catholic Church, and the regulation of women’s bodies on modern Québécoise identity.

The paper concludes by extending this analysis to Castrée’s 2015 series of self-portraits, “Blankets Are Always Sleeping”, in order to reflect on how images of the sleeping cartoonist were mobilized on social media after her untimely death in June 2016. I conclude that the phenomenon of online collective mourning expanded the visual braiding of beds throughout her autobiographical comics to the collective biographical work of memorialization in ways that sometimes sentimentalize and depoliticize her complex relationship to the domestic effects of beds.

A topografia afetiva das autografias de Geneviève Castrée

Este artigo estuda duas autografias da recente cartunista do Quebec Geneviève Castrée (‘Susceptible’ e ‘Blankets Are Always Sleeping’) e suas mobilizações on-line por uma comunidade de quadrinhos enlutada. Começo por sua autografia ‘Susceptible’ (2012), memórias de amadurecimento numa família disfuncional no Quebec dos anos 1980. Através de um avatar, Goglu, Castrée traz lembranças de desde sua infância até adolescência tardia que relembram o abuso emocional passado na casa de sua mãe francófona e seu padrasto, em Montreal, e suas tentativas de reunião com seu pai anglófono na Colúmbia Britânica. Examinoo que Kathy Mezei chama de “efeitos domésticos” da práticas autobiográficas de mulheres, a significância de espaços internos na modelagem de memórias e a construção de um eu emergente. Castrée desenha Goglu em espaços domésticos que são, ao mesmo tempo, punitivos e protetores, para transmitir a disjunção entre desejo pelo lar e sua frequente realidade brutal.

Minha leitura de ‘Susceptible’ toma a imagem de Smith e Watson da “cama bagunçada” da autobiografia feminina contemporânea literalmente para explorar como as camas e lençóis são trançados por toda a obra de Castrée como lugares materiais, metafóricos e metonímicos de segurança e ansiedade. A cama se torna o significante privilegiado dos efeitos domésticos que formam as memórias subjetivas de Goglu, as quais são filtradas através de memórias culturais particulares à colocação política de sua infância quebequense pró-separatista, pós-Revolução Tranquila dos anos 1980. A emergência de Goglu como sujeito falante é moldada pelos traumas nacionais do Massacre de Montreal de 1989 e pelo movimento em favor da soberania do Quebec, assim como os efeitos históricos da emigração, da Igreja Católica e da regulamentação dos corpos das mulheres na identidade da quebequense moderna.

O artigo conclui estendendo esta análise à série de autorretratos de Castrée em 2015, ‘Blankets Are Always Sleeping’, para refletir sobre como imagens da cartunista adormecida foram mobilizadas nas mídias sociais após sua morte prematura em junho de 2016. Concluo que o fenômeno do luto coletivo on-line expandiu o entrançamento visual das camas por toda a sua autobiografia quadrinizada até seu trabalho biográfico coletivo de memorializar, de modo que, algumas vezes, sentimentalize e despolitize sua complexa relação com os efeitos domésticos das camas.

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Candida Rifkind is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Winnipeg, Canada. She specializes in graphic narratives and Canadian literature and culture. In addition to numerous articles, she has published *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada* (UTP, 2009) and co-edited a scholarly collection with Linda Warley, *Canadian Graphic: Picturing Life Narratives* (WLUP, 2016). She currently holds a SSHRC Insight Grant to research contemporary graphic biographies (www.projectgraphicbio.com) and is planning a future project on Canadian women’s graphic life narratives.

3. Eleanor Ty, Wilfrid Laurier U ety@wlu.ca

The Un-erotic Dancer: Sylvie Rancourt’s *Melody*

Sylvie Rancourt’s *Melody: Story of a Nude Dancer* is a collection of seven graphic narratives that chronicles the author’s experience as a stripper in Montreal in the 1980s. In his introduction to the English edition, Chris Ware observes, “Though the situations in the book are frequently tawdry, horrible, and even cruel, the effect over-all is one of detached innocence” (8). The simplicity of her drawings, in contrast to the scientific and detailed illustrations found in Phoebe Gloeckner, for example, hides and belies the difficulties of working in the adult entertainment industry. Rancourt’s naïve protagonist encounters a lecherous boss, lewd customers, lives with a criminal and lazy husband, and was even charged by the police for possession of drugs at one point. Yet the stories are humorous and optimistic. Reviewer Sarah Mirk says, “The writing feels honest and personal. Though *Melody* gets vulnerable about her problems, the stories have an upbeat, comedic tone to them, always ending on a high note.”

In this paper, I want to explore the visual and narrative techniques used by Rancourt to give this seemingly innocent perspective. It is possible that she was just not an accomplished illustrator, but I want to suggest that the style is a deliberate kind of minimalism, to match her matter-of-fact view of her life. By the time Rancourt started writing, she had been working as a stripper for four years, so she was remembering or re-imagining many of the scenes in how “Melody Gets Started,” for example. One reviewer notes, “Her cartooning is scrubbed of all ornament and artifice, untroubled with niceties of anatomy, perspective, and proportion” (Rogers). They are not sanitized but purposefully cartoon-like, lacking in bodily details, in facial expressions, and in naturalistic descriptions. The result is idiosyncratic and child-like, rather than sinful and salacious. If, as Hilary Chute says, Gloeckner’s images, “informed by trauma” with “their combination of meticulous, painstaking realism and their non-realism... carries an intense foreboding” (61), Rancourt’s work, which is also about sexuality and the taboo, conveys the opposite feeling, a weird kind of lightness. She is able to depict a strong female character without deploying the conventional positions of the angry feminist or the helpless victim.

Though the narrative is linear and chronological, its switch between first person and omniscient point of view shows a more mature writer recounting and reflecting upon her past experiences. From the perspective of the narrative present, she shows an understanding of her past situation, her guileless nature, yet she presents her memories without recrimination. What Chute says of women authors in *Graphic Women* applies to Rancourt’s work: “Unsettling fixed subjectivity, these texts present life narratives with doubled narration that visually and verbally represents the self, often in conflicting registers and different temporalities” (5). Rancourt’s protagonist shows resilience, female agency, yet reveals her vulnerability and susceptibility to the will of the male figures around her.

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Gloeckner, Phoebe. *A Child’s Life and Other Stories*. Rev. ed. Introduction and Illustrations by R. Crumb. San Antonio, FL: Frog, 2000.

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<https://bitchmedia.org/post/long-lost-comics-about-working-as-a-nude-dancer-are-now-a-book>

Rancourt, Sylvie. *Melody: Story of Nude Dancer*. Trans. Helge Dascher. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2015.

Rogers, Sean. “Melody cements Sylvie Rancourt’s legacy as one of Canada’s first, and most important, graphic memoirists.” *The Globe and Mail Friday* 19 June 2015. Accessed 26 August 2016. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/book-reviews/review-melody-cements-sylvie-rancourts-legacy-as-one-of-canadas-first-and-most-important-graphic-memoirists/article25038651/>

Ware, Chris. *Introduction to Melody: Story of a Nude Dancer* by Sylvie Rancourt. Trans. Helge Dascher. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2015. 5-9.

A dançarina não-erótica: a ‘Melody’ de Sylvie Rancourt

‘Melody: Story of a Nude Dancer’ de Sylvie Rancourt é uma coleção de sete narrativas gráficas que descrevem a experiência da autora como uma stripper em Montreal na década de 1980. Na sua introdução para a edição em inglês, Chris Ware observa que, “apesar das situações no livro serem frequentemente de mau gosto, horríveis e até cruéis, o efeito final é de uma inocência desaparegada” (8). A simplicidade dos seus desenhos em contraste com as ilustrações científicas e detalhadas encontradas em Phoebe Gloeckner, por exemplo, esconde e desmente as dificuldades de trabalhar na indústria de entretenimento adulto. A protagonista inocente de Rancourt encontra um chefe lascivo, clientes libidinosos, esposas com maridos criminosos e preguiçosos e, em um momento, até chegou a ser acusada por posse de drogas pela polícia. Ainda assim, as histórias são humoradas e otimistas. A crítica Sarah Mirk afirma que “a escrita parece honesta e pessoal. Apesar de Melody ficar vulnerável com seus problemas, as histórias têm um tom otimista, cômico e sempre acabam muito bem”.

Neste artigo quero explorar as técnicas visuais e de narrativa usadas por Rancourt para dar esta perspectiva aparentemente inocente. É possível que ela apenas não fosse uma excelente ilustradora, porém quero sugerir que o estilo é um tipo de minimalismo deliberado para combinar com sua visão da realidade. Quando Rancourt começou a escrever, já estava trabalhando como stripper havia quatro anos, então ela lembrava ou reimaginava muitas das cenas em como “Melody Começa”, por exemplo. Um dos críticos nota que “seu modo de desenhar é lavado de todo o ornamento e artifício, despreocupado com sutilezas de anatomia, perspectiva e proporção” (Rogers). Eles não são higienizados, mas sim propositadamente parecidos com cartoon, deficientes de detalhes corporais, expressões faciais e descrições naturalistas. O resultado é idiossincrático e meio infantil, ao invés de pecaminoso e salaz. Se, como Hilary Chute diz, as imagens de Gloeckner “informadas com um trauma” com “suas combinações de realismo meticuloso e escrupuloso e seu não-realismo... carregam um agouro intenso” (61), o trabalho de Rancourt, que também é sobre sexualidade e o tabu, transmite um sentimento oposto, um tipo estranho de leveza. Ela é capaz de retratar uma personagem feminina forte sem colocar as posições convencionais da feminista zangada ou da vítima indefesa.

Embora a narrativa seja linear e cronológica, sua troca entre o ponto de vista em primeira pessoa e o onisciente mostra uma escritora mais madura, recontando e refletindo sobre suas experiências passadas. Da perspectiva da narrativa presente, ela mostra um entendimento da sua situação passada, sua natureza sem mácula, e mesmo assim apresenta as memórias dela sem recriminações. O que Chute fala sobre autoras femininas em ‘Graphic Women’ se aplica ao trabalho de Rancourt: “desordenando a subjetividade fixa, esses textos apresentam narrativas de vida com narrações dobradas que visualmente e verbalmente representam o eu, muitas vezes em registros conflitantes e em temporalidades diferentes” (5). A protagonista de Rancourt mostra resiliência, atuação feminina, e ainda assim revela sua vulnerabilidade e susceptibilidade à vontade das figuras masculinas ao seu redor.

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Eleanor Ty is Professor of English & Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario. She has published on cultural memory, Asian North American, and on 18th Century literature.

Author of *Asianfail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority* (U of Illinois P, 2017); *Unfastened: Globality and Asian North American Narratives* (U of Minnesota P, 2010), *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (U Toronto P 2004), *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812* (U Toronto P 1998), and *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (U Toronto P 1993), she has co-edited two volumes on cultural memory. With Cynthia Sugars, she co-edited *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2014); with Russell J.A. Kilbourn, *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film* (Wilfrid Laurier UP 2013). Other works include a collection of essays, *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, co-edited with Christl Verduyn (Wilfrid Laurier UP 2008), and with Donald Goellnicht *Asian North American Identities Beyond the Hyphen* (Indiana UP 2004). Her edited paperbacks, still in use in classrooms include *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Oxford 1996; rev. ed 2000) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (Broadview 1994, 2nd ed 1998) by Mary Hays.

4. Kathleen Venema, U of Winnipeg [k.venema@uwinnipeg.ca]

Lives at the End of the Line: Aging, Elegy, Comics, and Care

In her introduction to *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson adds, to a long list of the different forms disability might take, the observation that “**everyone** is subject to the gradually disabling process of aging,” a fact, she notes, that “many people who consider themselves able-bodied are reluctant to admit” (13-14; my emphasis). My presentation proposes to examine four recent North American visual memoirs of aging, each of which deploys a range of graphic resources to i) grapple with the facts of parents’ disintegrating bodies and, especially, their disintegrating minds; ii) witness the increasingly complex demands these deteriorations make on available forms and economies of care; and iii) specifically shape comics’ aesthetics to the frequent uncanniness of dementia’s incursions. If, as Amelia DeFalco claims, aging is a vastly under-theorized site of cultural difference (xii-xvi), comics – until recently associated almost exclusively with youth- and counter-cultures – stubbornly keeps the sight and the sights of aging front-and-centre.

Joyce Farmer in *Special Exits: A Graphic Memoir* (2010); Sarah Leavitt in *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer’s, My Mother and Me* (2010); Roz Chast in *Can’t We Talk about Something More Pleasant* (2014); and Dana Walrath in *Aliceheimer’s: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass* (2016) channel their own and their subjects’ creative energy in visual narratives that document their parents’ physical and mental deterioration. I focus on the artists’ deployment of comics’ resources – including its resistance to coherence (Hatfield xiii), its formal and metaphoric mimicking of “the procedures of memory” (Chute 4), and especially its capacity to represent hybrid subjectivities (5) – for their affective potential. My particular interest is the tricky territory where visualizing the increasingly “complex embodiment” (Siebers 25-6) of aging selves potentially defuses the sometimes ugly emotions that care-giving prompts, refining and re-storying those emotions as empathy and compassion.

Chast, Roz. *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?* New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Chute, Hillary L. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.

DeFalco, Amelia. *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010.

Farmer, Joyce. *Special Exits: A Graphic Memoir*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2010.

Hatfield, Charles. *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Jackson: UP Mississippi, 2005. Print.

Leavitt, Sarah. *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me*. Calgary: Freehand Books, 2010.

Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2008.

Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.

Walrath, Dana. *Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass. Graphic Medicine Series*. University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2016.

Desenhando vidas fora de linha: idade, envelhecimento, quadrinhos e cuidado

Em sua introdução para 'Extraordinary Bodies', Rosemary Garland Thompson soma, à longa lista de diferentes formas que a deficiência pode ter, a observação de que "cada pessoa está sujeita ao processo de deficiência gradual do envelhecimento," um fato, ela nota, que "muitas pessoas que se consideram capacitadas são relutantes a admitir" (13-14; minha ênfase). Minha apresentação propõe examinar quatro memórias visuais norte-americanas recentes de envelhecimento, cada uma implementando uma gama de recursos gráficos para i) lidar com os fatos dos corpos desintegrados dos pais e, especialmente, com suas mentes desintegradas; ii) testemunhar as crescentes demandas complexas que essas deteriorações fazem nas formas e economias de cuidado disponíveis; iii) moldar especificamente as estéticas de quadrinhos para a frequente estranheza da inclusão da demência. Se, como Amelia DeFalco afirma, envelhecer é um local de diferença cultural completamente pouco teorizado (xii-xvi), quadrinhos — até recentemente associados quase exclusivamente com cultura jovem e contraculturas — teimosamente deixam em destaque a visão e as visões sobre envelhecer.

Joyce Farmer em 'Special Exits: A Graphic Memoir' (2010); Sarah Leavitt em 'Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer's', 'My Mother and Me' (2010); Roz Chast em *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant* (2014); e Dana Walrath em 'Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass' (2016) canalizam energias criativas próprias e de seus sujeitos em narrativas visuais que documentam a deterioração física e mental de seus pais. Eu foco na implementação dos recursos de quadrinhos dos artistas — incluindo sua resistência à coerência (Hatfield xiii), suas mímicas formais e metafóricas de "procedimentos de memória" (Chute 4) e especialmente sua capacidade de representar subjetividades híbridas (5) — por seu potencial de afetar. Meu

interesse particular é o difícil território onde visualizar a crescente "corporificação complexa" (Siebers 25-6) dos eus envelhecidos potencialmente neutraliza as emoções por vezes feias que cuidados incitam, refinando e recontando essas emoções em forma de empatia e compaixão.

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Biographical statement: Kathleen Venema is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Winnipeg, where she teaches and publishes on Canadian literature and narratives of illness, aging, disability, and care. Dr. Venema's recently-completed manuscript – *Bird-Bent Grass: A Memoir, in Pieces* – is an interdisciplinary critical memoir that integrates creative, critical, and theoretical perspectives on the ways in which issues related to international development; spiritually-grounded commitments to social justice; war; trauma; loss; and loss associated with dementia's devastations are negotiated in epistolary discourse. *Bird-Bent Grass* is forthcoming with Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017.