

inside out. The central characters in Lord's stories run the gamut of age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and even species: in addition to the dog in "Recall of the Wild" and the bear-groom in "The Woman Who Would Marry a Bear," we get God-as-narrator in "Behold," a story about a crew of fundamentalist American fishermen who wander into Soviet waters in 1984 and are released from a farcical incarceration in the mistaken belief that they have converted their translator. Several of the human narrators either are crazy or appear crazy because they reject mainstream American values, and one virtue of those particular stories is that they make us think about the difference between the two. While there are plenty of happy endings, there is no sentimentality or political correctness. One of Lord's point-of-view characters is an Athabaskan woman whose half-white son has become a Native activist: "Frank always said, Native people know how to keep in balance with the environment, but she thought Native people would shoot the last whale just as surely as they'd drink themselves to death, and she didn't know whose fault any of that was." Fault, of course, is not the point.

As brief and character-driven as Lord's stories are, they also exhibit the same broad sense of history and culture that informs her nonfiction. The former crusading journalist in the last story almost gives up on connecting with her grandson, whose values are everything she has fought against all her life, but ends up meeting him halfway, concluding that she can "remake the world . . . one thought and one action at a time" by being open to change. Lord's writing invites us to look very closely at both natural and human-made aspects of our world, and to think in fresh ways about what endures and what can be remade.

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*Lost Girls* by Andrew Pyper. Toronto: HarperPerennial, 1999. 349pp. ISBN 0-00-648076-4 (pb), \$18.95. Reviewed by Jerome Stueart.

Andrew Pyper's first novel, *Lost Girls*, is a fair thriller set in northern Ontario. It deftly blends together genres of mystery and horror with a literary style that explores character as much as it unfolds plot. I can't say enough good things about novels that are seeking to bridge the gulf between the "literary" novels that we are told are good for us—like vitamins and vegetables, but where little happens—and "genre" fiction where everything happens, quickly and dramatically, but few characters are explored. A great cheer goes up

whenever someone combines them! Pyper seeks to reunite the former partners of good storytelling: plot and character.

In northern Ontario, an English teacher is accused of murdering two girls. A green defense lawyer, Bartholomew Crane from Toronto, who has never tried a murder, is given his big chance to shine. The case is a potential career-maker for the young attorney. Crane finds out that there is a history of young women drowning in a lake near the town, and the deaths have a supernatural spin, complete with ghosts, legends and devouring women. It's Stephen King meets John Grisham. Our lawyer is a thoroughly unreliable, detestable character who wins cases through perjury, coercion, or any means possible. He is a cocaine and porn addict. He is also running from a great secret in his life, a secret that will be uncovered slowly by the ghosts he finds in the small town of Murdoch.

There is a lot to love about Pyper's first novel. The writing style is fast-paced but meaty. So you get a lot quickly, yet I never felt like I was getting too much. The creepiness and darkness of small-town Northern Ontario is palpable, murky even. Pyper is funny, sometimes over the top, but certainly entertaining. I liked that we were never far from the darker elements of the story, and that we had a puzzling and interesting character to work through. It is obvious that Pyper knows how to write (although every once in awhile he would drop the subject part of the sentence and I would look around trying to find it.). Most of the time, he moves you seamlessly through narrative and dialogue and action. The writing keeps you reading. Unfortunately—because the writing is so good—the novel's few drawbacks might drive a reader insane.

The main character, though interesting, is fairly unlikable, with so many addictions and opinions about Northern folk that many will be turned off just by the character's voice. He is jealous and critical of everyone he meets and that gets old. The narrator is proved unreliable in his assessments of others, and that's a big chance—and a *good* twist—to take with a main character. But he's not an innocent led astray like the unnamed narrator of McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*. Crane's made himself into a fast-living, amoral snob—so it's hard to feel sympathy when he is haunted by strippers and ghostly teens. His redemption later is even harder to believe.

The premise of the ghosts and the legend—a *great* premise—for as much page-time as it is given, proves to be an unresolved issue. Pyper drops the whole thing near the end. The final chapters are a muddle where all Pyper had been banking on is supposed to come together in a brilliant weave of discovery, drama and death. The "lady of the lake"—an incredible creation—is abandoned, thereby calling into question not only the earlier scenes where she is a probable murderer, but also making us believe that all of Crane's library research was a waste. It's likely that Pyper realized that he couldn't keep

all the plates spinning. But one might conclude that the ghost elements were merely a ruse to keep you reading. Some readers (more than just me) were left feeling tricked.

Two other premises are hard to swallow. Pyper makes memory repression a huge factor in this novel. I can believe the psychological reasons for repressing one's memories, but it stretches my willing suspension of disbelief for a person to be confronted by many, many places, objects and people that should jar that memory, at least call this person to question, falter, something—and these things don't. When a whole town forgets too, the memory repression just seems like a convenient plot device, more like the writer withholding evidence for a surprise ending. Mystery thrillers work best when we know what our main character knows, when we learn as he learns, but when he doesn't react to resurfacing memories—what can we believe? So much information was withheld from us even though we were in a first person narrator. Near the end he makes some startling discoveries that startle the reader at least, but don't seem to faze Crane at all. I could have understood if the writer had at least had the character as shocked and surprised as I was. Then I could have felt for him. But it's like your best friend finds out he's an alien and he turns to you and says, "Um, didn't you know?"

The other premise is that Tripp, the accused, tries to tell our narrator at the beginning what crime he has committed, but our lawyer doesn't want to know, thereby denying *us* the truth. The lawyer spends the rest of the novel trying to create a false case that will win the trial. Pyper has to do that in order for his mystery to work, and that's amusing to follow for a while, but later on it only annoys us more and more. Having the narrator push away the truth creates a false tension in the novel—and I feel little sympathy for the character later when he *does* want to know the truth. I certainly can't blame Tripp for withholding at the end, and the beating Crane gives him is unjustified.

Pyper reaches out to encompass so much in his first novel that the absence of some key elements in the end—most of them linked to his main character—just impairs a relatively good thriller. Crane is an incredible character who might have been less a mouthpiece for biting criticism of northern hicks and urban-centrism and more a man I could have sympathized and grown with. His redemption at the end of the novel seems paper-thin because I felt betrayed by the character who left me out in the northern cold at important moments.

Before you think this is a worthless read, let me put this into a larger context. Pyper's novel has been getting rave reviews all across Canada—*The Globe and Mail*, *Booklist*, *Quill and Quire*, and *Publishers Weekly* all give it glowing praise. Many, many people have said lovely things about *Lost Girls*. Lots of readers I have talked to thoroughly enjoyed the novel. Until the last quarter

of the novel, I was riveted. I mean, think about it: all of these drawbacks are just things we haven't seen in a mystery/thriller/ghost story before. A lawyer that is as corrupt as the accused; a main character fighting not to know the truth; a whole town that forgets. Those are pretty interesting in themselves. Maybe the interest in the novel should come from the fact that it is so different than others: literary, character-driven, a mixture of genres, exciting, funny. This novel does what I wish others did—reach for more than has been reached for before. I just wish the reader could have grabbed all of it too.

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*Music of the Alaska-Klondike Gold Rush: Songs and History* by Jean A. Murray. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1999. xvii, 440pp., maps, photographs, illustrations, bibliography. ISBN 1-889963-13-5 (hc), \$54.95 US or ISBN 1-889963-14-3 (coil), \$35.95 US. Reviewed by Rachel Grantham.

Is there anything left to know about the great Klondike Gold Rush? Simply by asking the right questions and putting in ten years of dedicated research to answer them, Jeanne A. Murray has filled at least one gaping hole in the history.

A sociologist, amateur musician, and longtime Alaskan, Murray has compiled a fascinating, focused compendium representing stamper musical life in the Yukon and Alaska at the time of the Klondike Gold Rush. *Music of the Alaska-Klondike Gold Rush: Songs and History*, is a collection and re-publication of almost one hundred Rush-related songs, properly placed within the context of personal and community history and culture.

In her preface, Murray describes her project as having begun with the simple question "What was the typical gold-miner singing at camp?" She soon found herself asking who that miner might have been, why he remembered the song, and how he might have thought to pack an instrument up the Chilkoot trail. From there, the reader discovers more than the music of the typical gold miner, but that of an entire society of newcomers, from the child singer Margie Newman performing at the Dawson Monte Carlo to Chechako Lil, living on the banks of the Tanana River, immortalized in a song parody.

Murray draws upon song references in published and unpublished accounts of the day—letters, memoirs, poems and newspaper articles—to create a popular song spectrum that covers the period of the mid-1800s to 1905. She