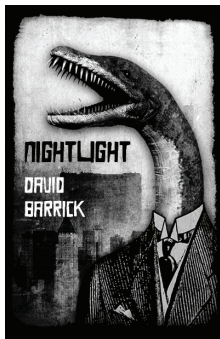


a few words, packed with more emotion than a novel with triple the pages. They convey the suffocation of dysphoria through emotion and physical feeling, the opposite of cold academic prose, yet Purcell's musical way of writing contains more information than any research journal on the subject.

Purcell creates a parallel between the sickness of the body, through illness and pain, and the sickness of the mind, caused by the damage of dysphoria and internalized homophobia. The vulnerability in *Swollening* is best described as teeth being pulled, leaving you "jaw detached and tooth emptied."

Not every poem has a clear meaning, allowing for interpretation through the bodily sensations Purcell describes on an intimate level that becomes a malleable experience for each reader. *Swollening* is a raw and inspiring book. I would recommend to anyone interested in poetry. (Collin Iu)



## Nightlight

David Barrick, 87 pgs, Palimpsest Press, [palimpsestpress.ca](http://palimpsestpress.ca), \$19.95

Like peanut butter and jelly, dream poems may not be the most innovative recipe, but the taste of the two together is often much richer than their reputation. Anchored by an uncomplicated attitude toward imagination and a singular vision of craft, *Nightlight* deploys a deep understanding of modern poetry's fundamentals to mind-blowing effect.

Many, if not all of *Nightlight's* poems spring straight from Barrick's dreamscape, with titles like "Recurrent Dream #79" implying just how much of that inner universe has been left unwritten. But the brief scenes Barrick did select for his collection are delightfully strange, achieving the classic surrealist balance of being both hauntingly precise and vertiginously ambiguous. Typically, their touchpoints are the pleasures and commonplaces of

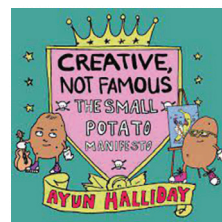
twentieth-century (North) American life, as Barrick crafts carnivals and barbeques, trains and buses, hunting trips to the bush and sepia-tinted suburbs into a gamut of both vivid likenesses and nightmarish allegories.

Stylistically, Barrick's technique is trained and tight, following a poetic tradition that leverages condensed metaphor to enflame sound and image. The resulting verse is meaty with assonance and alliteration and lightly seasoned with repetition and rhyme, as in "the chatter of coins on / the sidewalk, coins // and keys dropped / from sleep's deep / pockets." Amid a smattering of prose poems, most use fairly standard lineation, although the brilliant "Broken Watch Jazz" is exemplary of Barrick's strength in moulding language to his subject:

this sudden siren  
skronk  
  
of sax,  
  
a weird bird  
  
flying past  
megaphones,  
  
a syncopating  
Jenga tower  
of tempos; (30).

While a handful might veer too hard toward sentimentality or cliché, especially in those tricky final stanzas, countless more poems showcase Barrick at his best. On the whole, *Nightlight* is a collection flooded with finely tuned lines to make the mind's eye sing. (John Nyman)

## NON-FICTION



## Creative, Not Famous: The Small Potato Manifesto

Ayun Halliday, 288 pgs, Microcosm Publishing, [microcosmpublishing.com](http://microcosmpublishing.com), \$14.95 US

Google "self-publishing advice" and you'll quickly encounter a hall of mirrors, a never-ending strip of

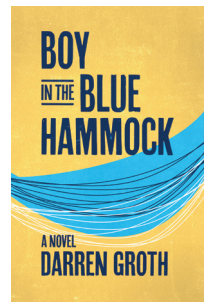
# READ NIGHTWOOD

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a novel

DARREN GROTH

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poems

TAWAHUM BIGE

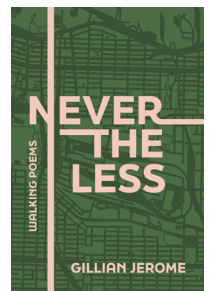
These poems consider the possibility of decolonization through a personal lens. \$19.95

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GILLIAN JEROME

Jerome roams into ordinary places to find beings and states of being to sing about. \$19.95



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## BOOK REVIEWS

snake-oil salesmen offering secrets to a publicity system that will eventually lead to the Genius Grant you so rightly deserve. With *Creative, Not Famous*, long-time artist, zinester, Off-Off-Broadway playwright and children's author, Ayun Halliday, swats this meritocratic fantasy aside, and instead offers a DIY manifesto for those of us mired in the attention economy: a sustainable, practical, but nevertheless *inspiring* guide focused on making the stuff we love.

As she puts it, the mantra of *doin' it*, painted inside her Vonnegut-inspired skull, is enough. "Who gets to do it?" Halliday asks. "I do." What is it? "Exploration. Going all the way. All the weird fun stuff the squares don't think we should tap into." Whatever "it" is, Halliday, along with 35 other artists who are quoted throughout the book, offer readers advice on everyday creative practice (binging, breaking, bribing, sustaining, collaborating, finishing), as well as the big picture — in other words, the hows, but also the existential whys, including the darker feelings (failure, jealousy, poverty).

In terms of form, the minimalist cartoons of potatoes, tee shirts, cats and flow charts sprinkled throughout *Creative, Not Famous* might remind readers of Halliday's decades-long comic-zine *The East Village Inky*, which just released Issue 66 (!). But it's Halliday's sharp writing, projected from the same parental ethos as her first book, *The Big Rumpus*, and her children's book, *Always Lots of Heines at the Zoo*, that makes her such a reliable narrator. There are adorable metaphors, sure — the aforementioned potatoes, as well as some bananas — but Halliday also asks us to check in with our internal fluffers, our mechanical shifters on our personal Dumbo rides, and even our own potential dickishness, language that is a testament to her enduring and charming humility. *Creative, Not Famous* feels like required reading for remembering why we're here in the first place and what's at stake because of it. (Jason Luther)



### Straggle: Adventures in Walking While Female

Tanis MacDonald, 218 pgs, Wolsak & Wynn, wolsakandwynn.ca, \$20

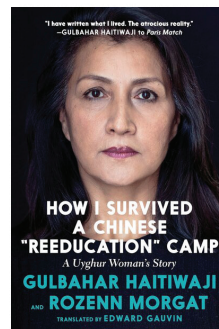
Have you ever been lulled by the old Western wisdom of *solvitur ambulando* — "it is solved by walking"? Are you sure-footed and able-bodied? A settler on Turtle Island? White and/or male? If you answered "yes" to any of the above, then Tanis MacDonald's collection of peripatetic essays may offer no less than a shameless middle finger to everything you thought you knew about that most unremarkable of activities: walking.

In narrow terms, *Straggle* predominantly seeks to position nature writing — at home along wooded trails and rural highways — in conversation with defiant strains of second-wave feminism and a vital reframing of the disabled female body. Meanwhile, the book's structure and style are uniquely successful at (dis)organizing these themes into a reading experience that skillfully mimics "imperfect walking in imperfect situations." Obstinate resistant to destination or solution, MacDonald instead scatters breadcrumbs of storytelling, observation, research and memoir with a courageous openness to losing her way.

Many of *Straggle*'s most memorable passages highlight MacDonald's poetic attentiveness to animal life, as in the surprising and experimental vignettes of "Come Into Animal Presence" or the laugh-out-loud misadventures of "A Card-Carrying Member of the Bad Birder's Club." Yet the book includes many heavier chapters as well, regularly centring a sobering and furious rebuke of misogynistic violence: "I walk in ugly shoes, jet-fuelled by the racing thoughts of a thousand women who can't leave the house or tread these sidewalks without being taunted, raped, killed."

Interspersed are readings in Indigenous, Black, and queer experience; however, the connections are sometimes

jarringly loose, relying on the reader's trust in MacDonald's understanding of perspectives not her own. Nevertheless, *Straggle*'s ambling, poetic approach to essay writing will satisfy readers hungry for a book less about questions and answers than finding one's voice — and helping us see our own familiar pathways anew. (John Nyman)



### How I Survived a Chinese "Reeducation" Camp: A Uyghur Woman's Story

Gulbahar Haitiwaji, Rozen Morgat, and Edward Gauvin, 240 pgs, Seven Stories Press, sevenstories.com, \$35.95

While the world has heard about the atrocities being carried out in Xinjiang, few have heard from the victims of so-called "reeducation." That's partly because there have been so few to re-emerge from these schools and even fewer who are willing to discuss the experience.

That's what makes Edward Gauvin's new translation of *How I Survived a Chinese "Reeducation" Camp: A Uyghur Woman's Story* so compelling and important. With the aid of journalist Rozen Morgat, Gulbahar Haitiwaji tells of her years spent in one of these camps. If you are the sort of reader who wishes to rubberneck at atrocities, however, you might be best steering clear of this book. Instead of a tell-all horror story, we are given a sober history of China's annexation of the Xinjiang region and the steady erosion of minority rights, wrapped up in the biography of Gulbahar and her husband as they navigated the bureaucratic machine until finally giving up and fleeing the country altogether in hopes of finding a better life and freedom in France. But even once they'd left, they were not safe from the Chinese government, who evidently makes it their business to track the movement of expats.

Haitiwaji's descriptions of the horrible treatment she received at the hands of the guards are somewhat banal in comparison.