

drawn from the industrial revolution up to the present day, while we get insight from such diverse founts of wisdom as Karl Marx, *Office Space*, Douglas Coupland and 2Pac. While the book's overarching aim is to explore that ongoing disillusionment with capitalism, the authors maintain a tongue-in-cheek tone by hopping from

discrimination against internationally trained immigrants to cheeky terms for office flatulence (see "crop dusting").

All this goes to contextualize an understanding of what it means to be a "wage slave" in a larger historical context. Certainly, conditions of labour are greatly improved over the last 100 years: shorter working

hours, anti-discrimination laws, and protection against worker exploitation. But the 21st century has also ushered in a new set of issues, from increased worker surveillance to work-life imbalance. *The Wage Slave's Glossary* offers its own insight into what the past, present and future means for wage earners of all collars. (Melissa Hergott)

# GRAPHIC NOVELS



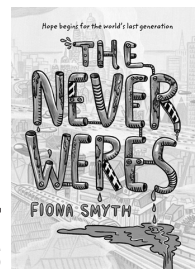
Kate Beaton, 168 pgs, Drawn & Quarterly, drawnandquarterly.com, \$20

The Bronte sisters, Canadian history, Batman and the Bible: Kate Beaton's interests intersect at such an odd nexus of culture and history and yet I could recommend her comics to practically anyone. My mom would enjoy this collection, as would my Victorian lit-obsessed co-worker. Beaton's trademark is the three-panel strip that sets up a recognizable scene from history or literature (Queen Elizabeth I exhorting her army at the cliffs of Tilbury) then makes it ridiculous (of Bess flies off the cliffs with a pair of albatross wings). While Beaton is obviously very funny, her real genius for me lies in those hilarious touches to Javert's grimace, Diefenbaker's jowly bark, Aquaman's beady stare or sexy Batman's pert bum.

Beaton's background as a librarian and history major comes out in her pedagogic introduction to *Hark!*: "If you learn or look up a thing or two after these comics... then I will be more than pleased." And her handy descriptions under each comic really do facilitate this: I have since discovered who Lucrezia Borgias and Rosalind Franklin are and laughed harder for it. But this book is not all one-liners for smart people (or those with access to Google). Beaton has sharp criticism for the literature, history

and Canadian identity she both loves and sees problems with. Her wit has that rare ability to point out the sexism, racism and cultural stereotypes that are so deeply engrained in our culture.

Like many a book that has come of age on the Internet (harkavagrant.com, where all, if not most, of these comics have already appeared, grew to 1.2 million monthly hits in just four years), the focus is scatter-shot. This both ensures Beaton's success and might hinder it. With so many interests on the go, her work appeals to a wide range of fans, but it also cuts short ideas with plenty of juice still in them. Whatever happens with the peasant love stories? Or the mystery-solving teens? Although I would sorely miss Beaton's prodigious posting and tweeting online, a prolonged absence just might yield her next step in the story. (Laura Trethewey)



## The Never Weres

Fiona Smyth, 256 pgs, Annick Press, annickpress.com, \$13-\$22

Set at an undisclosed date in dystopian Toronto, *The Never Weres* imagines a future where humanity is on the ropes. A virus has taken hold, rendering the population infertile, while hope for the next generation centers on three teenaged friends who just may have the

key to a more hopeful future. There's Xian, an orphan, robotics genius and anti-authority type; Jesse, who chooses to follow in his mother's footsteps by becoming a geneticist and cloning the human race; and finally Mia, with the most stable home life of the three, who would rather devote herself to art despite her parents imploring her to take survivalist training instead.

*The Never Weres* is a more whimsical take on what could be pretty heavy material (ahem, *Children of Men*). Instead, Smyth gives credit to youthful optimism, ingenuity and the power of art. But even more credit should be paid to the artist's own ability, to pull off such a solid first graphic novel. Her lush artwork, with its loose organic shapes, adds a softer dimension to an often hard-edged and overly mechanical genre. Her hyper stylized and active backgrounds are also noteworthy, telling their own little stories and giving scattered nods to the work of fellow cartoonists, such as Seth and Mark Connery. Despite the apocalyptic theme, Smyth tells a story that is breezy, quick paced and a fun read for all ages. (Matthew Daley)



## Nova Cartabrigiensis

John Devlin, 34 pgs, Island Editions, islandeditions.co.uk, \$22

In 1979, John Devlin was studying at Cambridge University on his way to becoming a priest when mental illness forced him home to Canada. Once back

in Nova Scotia, Devlin began to envision the spaces he'd seen abroad in a fantasy reconstruction of Cambridge. Fledgling British publisher Island Editions has printed a selection of the over 300 drawings and collages he produced all those years ago in one beautifully bound volume of artwork.

Through these colourful, child-like drawings, Devlin appears to chase a sort of perfect cohesion of nostalgic

time and space. His images obsess over finding a mathematical truth to the architecture of the European city. The utopia he creates for himself is called the island of Nova Cantabrigiensis, located in the Minas Basin of Nova Scotia and also perfect palace to unify a discordant mind.

There has always been a certain romance to the unhinged creative genius (Van Gogh, Woolf, Plath, Rothko),

but other creators, such as musician Daniel Johnston, link their work more explicitly to mental instability. *Nova Cantabrigiensis* also does this and, in doing so, links a beautiful fantasy to a more obvious sadness. The reader holds an individual's fragile dreams in her hand, each drawing a testament to that shared struggle to make sense of things. (Michael Doyle)

# P O E T R Y

## Dance, Monster

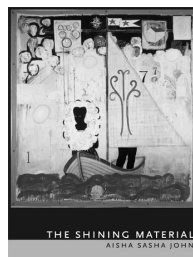
Stan Rogal, 110 pgs, *Insomniac Press*, [insomniacpress.com](http://insomniacpress.com), \$15

Drawn from standalone works published between 1992 and 2005, *Dance, Monster* presents a diverse selection of poems from Toronto writer Stan Rogal. In the foreword, fellow poet Paul Vermeesch dubs the selection his "fifty best poems," a label I find disconcerting. What constitutes the "best" poem? Can a "best of" really capture 13 years of a poet's already 30-year career? Ottawa author Rob McLennan's description of the selection as a "sampler" is a more apt, but perhaps less marketable, term for the book.

Organized chronologically, each section is headed by the publication's original title. This creates a tidy overview of the writer's progress and career, but it also isolates the works from each other. An ideal compilation of Rogal's work would present his writing in a more fluid manner, showing how his ideas talk to themselves and the reader.

All that aside, *Dance, Monster* succeeds at its purpose: to invigorate discussion around a poet whose work is "largely (but not entirely) overlooked." And this certainly needs amending. Rogal has a unique ability amongst poets to revitalize free verse using convention as his playground, rather than his crutch. What struck me anew reading his work is how consistent, confident and flexible his writing has always been. Every poem is precise, skillfully pairing long, enjambed sentences with short, effective bursts. He can

do undecorated, but thoughtful imagery or turn toward the elusive and abstract. He draws inspiration from Nietzsche, Arbus, Beckett, Einstein and Niedecker, and talks back to those who have helped shape our cultural, social, mythical and artistic worlds. *Dance, Monster* could indeed be successful in pulling Rogal's work out of the margins of Can Lit. It is, after all, an enjoyable collection that asks readers to discover (or rediscover) his work. For now, however, we'll just have to wait and see. (Eric Schmaltz)



## The Shining Material

Aisha Sasha John, 61 pgs, *BookThug*, [bookthug.ca](http://bookthug.ca), \$18

I admire Aisha Sasha John's new book of poems for perhaps the wrong reasons. Not for its intimacy, which the back cover so enticingly promises with a likening of John's poetry to the interior of her home. Nor do I admire *The Shining Material* for its experimental nature, implied by publisher BookThug's mandate for "publishing the future of literature." No, I admire this book for its straightforward, contemporary verse delivered in a clear, loud and, sometimes, brash voice.

The majority of the book's 37 poems are part of two interspersed series, "Self-Portrait" and "Cahiers." Though each installment of "Cahiers" is a finished piece, most evoke the style of quick notebook jottings on places, people and half-captured ideas. Much of what's interesting in this section lies in the poet's coy omissions and subtle implications. There are points, though, at which the sublimely enigmatic becomes opaque or, at worst, silly.

That aside, there is well-crafted poetry here worth reading. John's imagery is fresh and sexy. Using the body as its starting point, her poetry connects the writer and the reader in poems such as "And I'll Be a Button of Hard Brightness Moving Across the Horizon." She writes, "oh to reach / my hand and cloud, a scoop of you inside me." This, and most of the poems that fall outside the two series, are playful and harrowing. Notably, the antiphonal title poem falls flat on the page, though I suspect it lives more fully on stage.

It is in the self-portraits that John really shines. Her opener, "Self-Portrait Self-Hugging" is a triumph. Here is a poem that tackles ideas at the same time big and small, by revolving around the words "elegance" and "grace." The poem circles around these two words, deftly repetitive and rhythmic, and then expands what might have been intimate to the universal. The series continues, becoming more and more meta, as "Self-Portrait Portrait" is followed by "Self-Portrait at a Poetry Reading," until the book finally closes with a one-line portrait that challenges as much as delights. (Andrew Woodrow-Butcher)