Houlbrooke in the volume's *Afterword*. Houlbooke surveys Renaissance attitudes and approaches toward suffering to provide a context for the contributions of these various essays toward a better understanding of grief. After drawing several tentative conclusions from this collective study, he sets out a number of questions that deserve further investigation before ending with a plea for more cross-disciplinary work between history and literature. The best essays in this volume attest to the benefit of such an approach.

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Kathryn Carter, ed. *The Small Details of Life: 20 Diaries by Women in Canada, 1830–1990.* Toronto: UTP, 2002. Pp. 486.

With this collection of excerpted diaries by English speaking women in Canada before and after Confederation, Kathryn Carter makes an ambitious contribution to the ongoing project of women's history in this country. She writes that "the best history is biography and ... reading the details from lives of individual women can do much to broaden and challenge our understanding of Canadian history" (6). Although I do not agree with Carter about the necessary connection between biography and history, which for me still carries with it associations with Georg Misch and the liberal view of history as a record of exemplary individual achievement, I do agree with Carter's decision to present diary writing as a meeting ground of social conditions and the agency of individual women who wanted to make writing a part of their daily lives. To this end, Carter's collection brings together selections from twenty diaries by women from the early nineteenth century to 1996, with introductions to the life and times of each diarist provided by various contributors. Carter's decision to include diaries by women who were unknown alongside diaries by women who are public figures makes the publication of this collection important because much private writing by less-known women in Canada is unpublished and relatively inaccessible.

At its strongest, *The Small Details of Life* shows that "diary writing matters because it has the potential to trace threads of meaning in the

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fragmentation that characterizes human life" (19). In its weaker moments, what Carter sees as a strength—the endless record of minutiae—threatens to overwhelm *The Small Details of Life* with too many small details from too many lives. But as Carter points out in her introduction, this elliptical and laconic aspect of diary writing is part of what diary writing is about (9). Editing sections to make them more like a narrative and more "literary" in tone speaks more to the types of things readers want than to the special type of writing that is diary writing, since most diaries are not written with a readership in mind. This makes any reader of *The Small Details of Life* an eavesdropper on the writing lives of other people, and so at times it is inevitable that we will be, as Carter says, alienated from the texts and the lives of these writers (9).

In her clearly written introduction to the collection, Carter says that diaries are historical documents that exceed the boundaries of social history. She wisely avoids typologizing diary as a genre because that would lead her to differentiating between journal writing and diary writing, two types of private writing which she says have similar etymological roots and are difficult to classify in any case. However, Carter's decision to stress the importance of women's diaries for the historical record means that she leaves out important scholarship about diary writing in general and diary writing by women in particular which shows how diary writing is one of the discourses of self making (Culley 217–219). Diary writing, for instance, helps to show how private writing by women contributes to our evolving understanding of the growth of self-reflexivity in the west (Nussbaum 128–129). Diary writing by women was also part of complex developments of the public and private spheres before the Victorian period in England (Thompson 6-7), while later it was a way for nineteenth and twentieth century English women to resist social expectations about the need for girls to embody the virtues of silence and modesty (Simons 3-4). Although Carter seems to skirt most of the issues about self-reflexivity and diary composition, thankfully some of the contributors who introduce the excerpts do address the connections between gender, diary writing and self-reflexivity. Most noteworthy are the introductions of Rosalind Kerr, who situates her grandmother's diary in its social context through what her grandmother cannot bear to say, and the introduction of Janne Cleveland and Margaret Conrad to Mary Dulhanty's school diary, which has an excellent discussion of the conflict between traditional cultural practices and the burgeoning influence of mass society on young girls.

In keeping with her commitment to material history, Carter asked contributors to write in their introductions about the conditions under

which texts were written, and to foreground the material nature of the texts themselves. The results are often interesting discussions about the types of materials many writers used to make diaries which, as Carter points out, reveal much about the material lives of the writers. For example, we learn that Mary Dulhanty's diary was discovered sixty years later between the walls of a house that was being renovated. Sara Welch Hill's diary itself covers more than sixty years: some of it consists of scrap paper that was painstakingly sewn together, probably by Hill herself. Other diaries were carefully recorded in leather bound books that were promotional gifts from insurance companies.

Carter also highlights the social history of women's diary production in Canada before and after Confederation. She discusses diary writing as a tradition of sorts, although in her view it cannot be seen to be part of a literary tradition since most diaries are not meant to be published (11). The tradition of diary writing consists rather of sets of material conditions which influence who writes a diary, and how it is written. There were traditions of diary writing among middle class English Canadian women in the Victorian era that were based on the increased leisure time they had, the wider availability of cheap paper and the increase in literacy for certain women during the period (12–13). *The Small Details of Life* does make an attempt to include other writing by women who were not from this group. But diaries by non-Anglophone immigrant women, women of colour and Aboriginal women do not appear. This is partly due, Carter says, to what material has been thought to be collectable, and to the social conditions which generally need to be in place so that women have the time, the ability and the desire to write diaries. Although Carter is right that certain material factors must be in place to write diaries at all, her analysis here would be strengthened by a consideration of the kind of subjectivity diary writing presupposes. This would also help to explain how pioneer women sometimes construct who they are in writing when they record daily events such as chores and the weather, a kind of writing which has been discussed by Helen Buss (44–47; 77–82).

The diary excerpts themselves vary greatly in range and content. There are times when the excerpts in *The Small Details of Life* seem to be too brief, particularly when the subject matter is compelling. Sarah Welch Hill's diary, which documents her life as a homesteading woman married to a man with a violent temper, is powerful in its repeated evocation of her husband's explosive rage in just a few words: "Mr. Hills temper *very bad* today" (75). Sophie Alice Puckette, who in 1908 was twenty-two years old and working as a school teacher, writes that "I just think people haven't

any right to wet-blanket everything a girl does" to express her irritation (266). Marian Engel's diary excerpt from 1976 records her summer away from Toronto as she comes to terms with her separation from her husband: her descriptions of her situation and of the craft of writing are lyrical and sharp by turns.

Taken as a whole, *The Small Details of Life* provides readers with rare glimpses into the writing of women from many periods in Canadian history. This collection is interesting because it shows how complex the ordinary lives of many women across Canada have been, and how rich those experiences still can be for the unintended readers of these accounts. *The Small Details of Life* makes the diaries by these women widely available so that we too can see them in "a field of Canadian history newly enriched with their voices, arguing, cajoling, laughing, wondering, reflecting and grieving" (25).

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