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Posted on 01 September 2018 By Samuel Archibald

There s a reason Arvida has been sitting on my currently reading shelf for over two months. Most of these stories are, at best, mediocre It might have something to do with how little I can relate to life in a small town in rural Quebec but needless to say, good books should transcend things like that There are a couple of moments where it seems like the stories will intensify into something memorable A Mirror in a Mirror, Blood Sisters and maybe one or two others aren t super strong in themselves, but there s something in them that could have been worked into truly interesting stories And even in their current form, they at least give you something to think about as opposed to most of the others stories, which don t. The exception to the generally mundane vibes is Jigai which legitimately made me cringe In a better collection I might have appreciated it as a good moment of raw horror and I mean horror as in I was horrified As it is, it s just disturbing and I m not 100% sure what purpose it served other than just being disturbing though I guess given that Archibald thinks all women are terrifying and mysterious, you can see where he was going with it weird places I m still unsure whether its just shock value or whether there s something else going on in there Either way, it s pretty shaking. That s it, those are the only points at which I had any reactions worth mentioning. For me, the key to Arvida didn t appear until the final story in the collection, Madeleines Arvida III, when Samuel Archibald, describing his development as a writer, says, T here are always times when I get attached to stories that aren t stories really, that begin without ending and never get anywhere Possibilities, dreams, and missed

rendezvous Phantoms and absences..Nothing made writing difficult for me than this fundamental impossibility Like the anti madeleines of my father in which all memory is swallowed up, the stories I like are untellable, or suffer from being told, or self destruct in the very act of being formulated.I was frustrated by the first six of the 14 stories in Arvida for precisely this reason they didn t really feel like stories they didn t go anywhere I was sure that Arvida was shortlisted for the Best Translated Book Award BTBA for a reason, though, and once Archibald found his stride, in A Mirror in the Mirror, he took me to some very dark places indeed Arvida s unevenness led to its 3 star rating, but I am glad that I read it and grateful to Biblioasis and the BTBA for introducing me to Archibald s voice.I received a free copy of Arvida through Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review. Prix Des Libraires Dans La Cat Gorie Roman Qu B Cois L Autre Bout Du Monde Il Y A Arvida, Ville Mod Le Rig E Au D But Du Vingt Me Si Cle Par L Industriel Am Ricain Arthur Vining Davis Le Narrateur De Ce Livre Est N L , Dans La Capitale De L Aluminium, Construite En Cent Trente Cinq Jours Petite Utopie Nordique Peupl E De Braves Gens, De menteurs Compulsifs Et De Pures Crapules Dans Les Quatre Paroisses D Arvida, Le Long Du Saguenay Et Par Del L Horizon Bleut Des Monts Valin, On Se Raconte Des Histoires De Nuits En For T Et De Matins Difficiles Des Histoires De Jeunes Filles Innocentes Et De B Tes Sauvages, De Meurtre Rat Et De Mutilation Rituelle, De Roadtrip Vers Nulle Part Et De Maison Hant E Des Histoires Tant T Tristes, Tant T Dr Les, Tant T Horribles, Et Souvent Un Peu Tout A La Fois, M Morables Pour Leur Profonde Authenticit , M Me Si, Il Faut Bien Le Dire, Elles Sont Toutes Moiti Fausses Et Moiti Invent Es Digne Fils De Son Conteur De P Re, Samuel Archibald Se R V Le Dans Ces Pages Un Mule De Cormac McCarthy Obs D Par Proust, Un H Ritier D Anne H Bert Qui A Trop Lu Jim Thompson Et Stephen King Having now finished Samuel Archibald s Arvida I m a little torn in regard to how I feel about it My estimation of it certainly went up in the latter half, and the final story is forcing me to reassess my initial reactions to some of the earlier stories.The collection is framed by a sequence of three stories entitled Arvida , which all begin with variations on the line My Grandmother, mother of my father, often said There are no thieves in Arvida These three stories are narrated by

Sam Archibald and revolve around his grandmother, his father, uncles and neighbours in Arvida, a real town near the Sanguenay river in Quebec. The town is on its last legs, having been built around the aluminium smelting industry which is in decline. These stories tell of the exploits of his father and uncles in the town's heyday and feature copious footnotes that expand on stories and character backgrounds. They're very much in the vein of Roch Carrier's stories, so I'm guessing this is a typical Quebecois style. In between these three stories are eleven other tales, also set in and around Arvida, but this is a very different Arvida that bears little resemblance to the run-down municipality, despite the occasional appearance of names that suggest the two are the same place. This is an Arvida of folklore, of magical happenings, of ghosts and mythical creatures prowling the forests. Only one story takes place elsewhere: Jigai, which tells of a Canadian woman who arrives in Japan with stones in her pockets. She is employed as a governess to Reiko, the daughter of a wealthy businessman and looks after her in the family manor house whilst the uncle is away for long periods. One day she walks in on Reiko cutting herself, but instead of trying to stop her she allows it and even encourages it. Soon the two are cutting each other in an increasingly sexualised ritual that escalates to the point where they are carving sculptures from skin by preventing the wounds from healing and chopping off each other's lips, eyelids, fingers and toes. When the women in the village see the designs on their flesh a sadomasochistic cult builds up; all of the women flaunt their new body art; an unlucky few lose an eye or a limb; others find their way to a mass grave on the grounds of the manor house. That particular story is by far the most disturbing in the book but it gives a flavour of the kind of subjects the stories engage with interestingly. Stephen King is name-checked in two stories. My two favourite stories in the collection are also the longest: Cryptozoology, in which a boy fleetingly sees an unidentifiable creature that may be a wolf or a large cat; and House Bound, in which a building contractor's renovation of an old house full of ghosts coincides with the breakdown of his marriage. These two seem to exist in a sweet spot between the realism of the Arvida stories and the weirdness of stories like Jigai. My problem with all of them though is that Archibald has a tendency to start his stories

strongly but just when the stories should be reaching a climax his writing becomes increasingly opaque, poetic and dreamlike so that on a number of occasions I turned the final page only to be left scratching my head. But then, right at the end of the book, comes the final Arvida story in which Sam, now a young man, is on a fishing trip with his father. As a child Sam's grandmother has given him an old French language typewriter so that he can type up all the stories he is always coming up with. But Sam's problem, he confesses to his father, is not an inability to write, but a lack of stories to tell. He, unlike Proust, has no madeleine to bite into that will open the floodgates; he starts stories but doesn't know how to finish them. *aha, I'm thinking*, the endings interesting him less than the feeling the stories create. But, his father says, you do know your Grandmother's name was Madeleine, don't you? And suddenly Sam realises that the stories have been there all along, the folk tales and legends he grew up hearing, stories of road trips, little thieves, and people weak in the head. Stories of monsters and haunted houses. Terrible stories that I'd never tell except by removing them to the opposite end of the world. And so, there may be no thieves in Arvida, but Sam becomes a borrower or a chronicler of this wealth of tradition and legend. Which is why I am forced to rethink my reaction to the rest of the book, which suddenly looks a lot cleverer than it first seemed. I still think it is a mixed bag, but it is a mixed bag that I am coming to admire. Although well written, a few of these stories are very brittle, dark and hard to swallow. Some disturbing content here, folks. Just a heads up, for those who may have triggers from past abuse or trauma. *Pas du tout ce quoi je m'attendais*. Surprenant, parfois intense, mais toujours prenant. *view spoiler* Madeleines ARVIDA III. And so here the final story finally ENDS the book. Not a bad ending, although self-referential. In fact, it's great. If what was in between in this collection of linked stories about Arvida had some of this spirit and style, I might have liked it a lot better. It talks about writing, which is always a theme I appreciate. I can't rate this book high, even though it is on the short list for the Giller award. What's so hard I know thousands of stories. If I could write I'd write all the time. Yes, but you wouldn't know so much about it if you spent your time reading other people's books. People who know stories can't write them, and people who can write them don't

have enough stories It's not fair I know lots of stories It's not that that stops me What then It's telling them that's the problem I can never find a way to put what I want in the stories I don't understand You know Proust French author of In Search of Lost Time Six letters Right That thing there is an Everest Something like four thousand pages In it, the narrator tastes a madeleine at the beginning, and that brings back all his childhood memories Can you imagine The guy got a whole world out of a cookie A madeleine is not really a cookie I know But I don't have anything close to that I have no madeleine All we wanted, when we were kids, was McDonald's I remember The kids games outside and the smell of French fries in the car And McNuggets If feel like all our stories end at the table, rather than start there The only story that comes back to me from taking a bite of something has to do with a mouthful of McNugget I was ten years old, and we were celebrating my birthday in the basement of McDonald's in Jonqui re, in the children's room I took a bite out of a McNugget, and Julie Morin asked me to give her the rest At the age of ten, offering here the chewed up half of a McNugget was like offering her an engagement ring, or something like that I was head over heels in love with her I blushed, and held out the McNugget to her, and she smiled at me Did she eat it She didn't have time There were ladders on the ceiling, you remember Laurent Pierre Brassard was like a monkey on them There was something intoxicating about walking like that on the ceiling, but playing the monkey, he'd got tired He was just over us when his fingers slipped on the rung of a ladder Before Julie could take her McNugget, Laurent Pierre fell on top of us, and there was food everywhere, tables overturned, and pop on the floor Julie Morin cried, and our engagement was off Is that all true I'd be surprised Honestly, after a while you can't tell a real story from an invented one any, but I know that's all the literature I'll ever get out of a McNugget And that's where I always end up McNuggets aren't madeleines, forgetting trumps memory, and you can't write all your life about how hard it is to tell a story Why not I shrugged my shoulders My father sighed deeply, as if to say You're complicated, you young people He went to get us each a beer from the old Coke cooler, to wash down the scotch While he was shutting the door, his face lit up He began to tap on his temple with his fingers, which resonated on his

skull like on wood, a favourite ploy of his when he wanted you to know there was something going on inside. You forget one thing, Coco. What your grandmother liane No. My mother. What her name was Madeleine. For an instant, I thought about the Sophie cakes that Mado made with sugar and cream that never set, the banana bread, the little squares of white cake on which she poured boiling hot butterscotch and a dribble of cream. I thought of the hares my grandfather skinned himself in the garage, and that my grandmother cooked like an Indian. I thought of a million things, but above all of Mado herself, her smell, her voice, her smile and her tiny eyes behind thick lenses. With those memories came the memories of dozens of stories I could tell, one way or another, or any old way if necessary. Stories of Arvida and elsewhere. Horrible stories and funny stories and stories both horrible and funny. Stories of road trips, little thieves, and people weak in the head. Stories of monsters and haunted houses. Stories of bad men, as men often are, and mysteries and terrifying women, as women always are. True stories I'd tell without asking permission or changing any names, while giving dates and the names of streets. Terrible stories that I'd never tell except by removing them to the opposite end of the world, or disguising them in strange language. They all jostled together, taking their time, until I succumbed to the overwhelming fatigue of a day in the open air. There was no hurry. I hugged my father, I pissed outside, and I went to bed early for once, happy to know so many stories.

Beginning with that one hide spoiler *Histoire vraie j'ai perdu connaissance dans un wagon de métro l'heure de pointe après avoir essayé de finir une des nouvelles de ce recueil Jigai, pour ceux qui l'auraient lu. Même si je vais être franche avouer tout de suite que je n'ai pas eu de grand coup de cœur pour Arvida, faut dire que l'auteur a cette qualité particulière, un pouvoir de vocation assez fort pour faire oublier que les histoires qu'il choisit de raconter ne sont que ça, des histoires.*

Autre constat je suis vraiment petite nature j'ai beaucoup de misère avec les récits d'automutilation. Arvida, c'est le coin du Saguenay où se déroulent la plupart des histoires de Samuel Archibald où d'où elles partent. Histoires insolites qui jouent sur les codes propres aux récits surnaturels, aux romans d'horreur, aux contes du terroir, les nouvelles qui composent le recueil semblent toutes explorer des mystères pour le plaisir de

pouvoir laisser ceux ci en suspens Vieilles maisons qui craquent, jeux de miroirs, animaux tranges qui hantent les forêts, mais aussi mystères plus prosaïques issus de road trips mal planifiés de décisions garrochées, tout est pr textuellement pour creuser jusqu'au cœur complexe de ces situations y construire des atmosphères J'ai aimé que toutes ces histoires n'aient pas toujours de trame bien définie, qu'elles se terminent sans répondre aux questions qu'elles posent J'ai aimé que l'auteur parte le plus souvent d'anecdotes pour inventer des recoins de mythologie, s'améliorer des espaces entre la réalité la fiction Quand je suis arrivée la toute fin que j'ai lu les histoires que j'aime sont inracontables ou perdent tout en racontées ou s'autodétruisent dans l'exercice même de leur formulation quand j'ai lu ça je me suis dit, ah oui, c'est sûr, c'est ça Raconter l'inracontable, ou essayer En construisant des récits qui passent de l'irrévérencieux l'intolérable en dedans de quelques phrases, qui adoptent sans le caricaturer le rythme l'âme des histoires racontées tout haut Mais malgré ça, j'ai pas tellement accroché Même les nouvelles que j'ai le plus aimées Amica, L'animal, Chaque maison double duelle ne m'ont pas vraiment rejointe, ou touchée, ou branlé C'est comme ça J'ai apprécié la structure de ces histoires, les ficelles derrière, mais il y a quelque chose, un détail qui n'est jamais arrivé Pas tout fait un livre pour moi, donc, mais je peux comprendre le pourquoi des très très nombreuses critiques dithyrambiques vues ailleurs J'ai un peu hésité à digérer ceci, en fait, mais ça c'est autre chose Alors demain j'irai le rendre la bibliothèque, je laisserai le soin à quelqu'un d'autre de l'aimer mieux que moi. Working class literature is a rarity in Canada, despite excellent examples from Morley Callaghan during the Great Depression and the powerful 2013 Giller Prize nominee Cataract City by Craig Davidson The latter was set in Niagara Falls and offers a scathing commentary on the destruction of manufacturing jobs in central Canada and its impact on working people. Now Arvida, another fine book nominated for the 2015 Giller, portrays the hard scrabble life of Francophone working class men and women in the Anglo dominated resource town of Arvida in the Saguenay region of Quebec In a series of somewhat interlinked short stories, Archibald traces the tough efforts of people to keep food on the table, the difficulties of keeping young people in the community when opportunities seem brighter in Montreal or Quebec City

and the pressures on relationships that tear couples apart in a changing society. The rugged backdrop of Arvida itself, isolated and dependent on the ups and downs of the aluminum industry, becomes the texture that holds the book together. Yet it becomes clear as you read these stories that it was not its working class roots that led to this book being short listed for the Giller. Archibald writes vividly, with an energy and depth that gives these stories a graphic appeal and powerful impact that are rare. Especially stark is the Blood Sisters trilogy, with its mysterious combination of violence, repressed sexuality and familial intimacy all set in the frontier like context of surrounding forests and threatening wildlife. Equally striking are the three Arvida segments with their strands of hunger, suicide and humour keeping the reader intensely engaged. I am not usually able to connect strongly to sets of short stories, but this book is so sharply written and so ably translated from the original French and so evocative of a particular place and social position that I was fully captured. Arvida is published by a remarkable and innovative publisher, Biblioasis, located in my old home area Windsor. It is excellent to see such fine Quebecois writing being made accessible to English speaking readers and even better to see this recognition in a Giller Prize shortlisting. J'ai bien aimé ce livre, qui est en fait un recueil de nouvelles, particulièrement par son côté rural. Il décrit et raconte des histoires de chasses, de familles, de petits crimes qui ont tous en commun le village fictif en fin je crois d'Arvida, petit village loign de tout comme le Québec en contient tellement. Peut-être parce que j'ai grandi dans ce genre de village, ces histoires m'ont rejoint, m'ont fait rire, sourire, grimacer même parfois et revivre en moi une certaine nostalgie. Vraiment une belle surprise, comme c'est finalement toujours le cas lorsque je lis Archibald. Je devrais peut-être finir par considérer cet auteur de talent et arriver de me surprendre moi-même chaque fois.

SAMUEL  
ARCHIBALD

# ARVIDA

HISTOIRES

LE QUARTANIER



Polygraphe