



# REVIEWS

## THE LAST YEAR OF CONFUSION

Reviewed by Rhonda Dynes

Janet Turpin Myers; \$19.95 paper  
978-1-927079-35-5, 205 pp., Seraphim Editions.

Prepare to turn on your “Geezer Positioning System (GPS)” and meet Villis and Bipin, two struggling nonagenarians, at Ontario’s ultra-private destination, The Pearl. If you are lucky, you may even glimpse the ever-elusive Frog. Now that you have arrived, consider this your (as Bipin would say) “load-down” on Janet Turpin Myers’ simultaneously hilarious and humbling second novel, *The Last Year of Confusion*. Her first novel, *Nightswimming* (2014), was shortlisted for the Hamilton Literary Awards Fiction Prize.

The story focuses on retired Latvian anthropologist and GULAG survivor Mr. Villis Krastin, and friend of the late Gandhi and stage-hand to the stars Mr. Bipin Patel. Villis and Bipin are two long time friends headed on a crash course toward enlightenment. Darkly funny, at times pedantic, always thoughtful, Villis and Bipin are, most of all, two lovers of Canada’s green space. They spend their deep-retirement days philosophizing as they guard The Pearl, an area of wood, hill, and water clearly based on Turpin Myer’s own geographic home in Cedar Springs, Ontario.

After an Elvis-impersonator on a red ATV invades The Pearl, Villis and Bipin devise as many ways as possible to get him off “their land”—which they don’t actually own. This is in addition to working on a reality television show contest application, which promises them a fat cheque should they prevail. They plan to use the winnings on a trip to Easter Island, where the guardian moai, who have enraptured Villis, are at rest. As the two men work on their synchronous problems, they let us in on their thirty-five year conversation on death, anger, peace, and memory. Of course, the gravel and maple-keyed path of true friendship never did run smooth, and disaster strikes Villis, Bipin, and The

Pearl. Only a band of impersonators, a white-sneakered reality show crew, and a disgruntled cop named Bigcanoe can help Villis and Bipin navigate the past and the uncertain reality of their predicament.

For those looking to situate *The Last Year of Confusion*’s place in the Canadian canon, think Stephen Leacock wrapped in a Hudson’s Bay blanket with Joseph Boyden and the late Paul Quarrington. If this jumble of comparisons is a bit confusing to you, rest assured that Myers works hard to position her readers with her clear plot progressions and convincing relationships: stories of friendship won, maintained, and lost are thread throughout the narrative.

To really experience *The Last Year of Confusion*—a historical reference Bipin would tell you to look up on the “World Wise Web”—you must read it “in a whirling, weaving, everlasting, madcap, icewine, no limits, bellyflopping, deep-diving, sunbeaming, Bollywood dancing kind of way.” Regardless, or perhaps because of, this novel’s madcap and roving nature, Turpin Myers’ book really is a pearl.

## UNDERCURRENT

Reviewed by Claire Caldwell

Rita Wong; \$18.95 paper 978-0-88971-308-6,  
95 pp., Nightwood Editions.

Rita Wong begins *undercurrent* with the declaration, “water has a syntax,” setting the tone for a collection that seeks to restore power and voice to an element we’ve taken for granted and willfully, recklessly—and perhaps ineluctably—destroyed.

This is a book with a message, reminding us that “both the ferned & the furry, the herbaceous &/ the human, can call the ocean our ancestor.” Wong uses poignant imagery and clever turns of phrase throughout to catalogue the many ways we’ve dishonoured that shared ancestor, from the “scar sands” to “tweeting up