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DETAMBEL, RÉGINE. *50 histoires fraîches*. Paris: Gallimard, 2010. ISBN 978-2-07-012673-6. Pp. 226. 17,90 €.

As a previously published poet and novelist, Régine Detambel brings her writing skills to the task of short fiction. These are not short stories but rather anecdotes of about four pages each. The conciseness of her poetic skills is striking as the "freshness" in the collection's title prepares the reader for the changes in narrator from one story to another. Detambel's story-telling ability as a novelist offers a repertoire of narratological situations precluding the reader from being bored. We have the perspectives of a mother, a father, a child, a lover, a partner, a daughter, a son among others alternating between the first or third person speaking. Since the mirror image provides a recurring theme in many of the stories, the anecdotes themselves appear to create a hall of mirrors that comments upon the nature of human identity, notably that of a woman as writer. Each story is entitled with a number relative to fifty without any other appellation. So the reader is engaged in a numerical sequence of stories whose singularity is found in the procession toward an increasingly apparent integrity, the cohesion of fifty complete anecdotes. But this unity is not found in the "freshness" of the collection's title. Instead, there is some irony in this title because of the consistency among the anecdotes. The rhythm of alternating themes brings familiarity to the new voices. What develops in this collection is the fine art of making the reader comfortable with new voices, settings, and complete stories within about four pages. Given the fragmentation of our hectic lives, these short, well-written glimpses can be appropriately picked up and put down at one's convenience and retrieved later if one is interrupted in the reading process.

The skill of Detambel's narration becomes obvious. Her voices collectively demonstrate that sometimes what we assume to be the most personal details about our lives are universal traits when portrayed in light of the roles we play in our relationships. For example, one male narrator speaks about how the woman-writer in his life closes him out once she begins her work. He reacts as if competing with another lover: "je suis jaloux de cette poésie qu'elle fait dans notre lit" (60). His emotion speaks to the living component of writing that exacts so much time from the writer, whether male or female. This woman-writer also insinuates herself into the struggle of writing by her testimonies in several other stories

about the ties between the rhythm of physical exercise and the writing process. In one of them, she speaks of overcoming writer's block through the exhilaration of walking. I must talk about my favorite narratives. In anecdote 21, Quentin has shared the woman-narrator's intimate e-mail message with his friends. The narrator is insulted and yet returns to him. She continues to define herself as "une épistolière de l'amour" (97) and states that "j'écris pour moi seule" (98) despite wondering whether "the Lord" would be pleased with a beautiful story about love and death. This ambivalence of whether she is writing for herself or her readers continues in stories about the writer's preference for nature as a source for modeling. Plants (anecdote 17) provide a natural rhythm to the writer's work and life. One elderly man (anecdote 48) is completely deaf and finds peace in his garden that appears to match his own innate calmness. Nevertheless, babies are born with their fists curled inward, suggesting the struggles of humanity. The mothers in these stories internalize their guilt for the struggles of their babies. Detambel's reader should not expect resolutions to the mothers' faults and the derivative human problems. Instead, the coherence of this collection of stories as a whole offers hope that writing itself may be a cathartic process for the writer and her readers.