

tions to highlight and bridge the characters' cultural divides. In one story, a grown-up Jane dreads hosting her overbearing Auntie Li-Ting and her smelly medicinal bandages. Jane resigns herself to her aunt's presence with the appealing prospect of a Chinese cooking lesson, but Li-Ting subverts Jane's expectations with an entirely different meal. In another story, Jane begins to reconcile her fraught relationship to religion and language by recalling the commensal experience of a feast at the Chinese United Church.

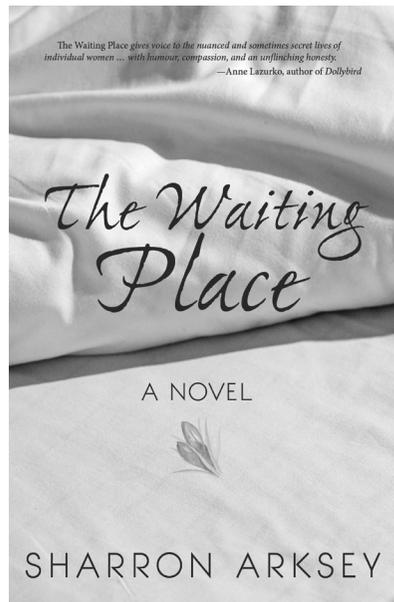
Linked short stories present a unique challenge. While the format frees Chow from the narrative cohesion required by novels, the irregular structure works against her collection as well. While we get fairly rounded portraits of Jane, Lizzie, and their parents, the scant exploration of the other characters feel less like strategic omissions and more like lost opportunities. Yet by homing in on the domestic eccentricities of the Lee family, Chow manages to tell a rich story, however uneven, through small moments. With unique humour and style, *Paper Teeth* introduces us to a fresh voice in Canadian short fiction.

## Alissa McArthur

---

***The Waiting Place* by Sharron Arksey, Turnstone Press, 172 pages, \$19.00**

The women who occupy Sharron Arksey's novel, *The Waiting Place*, navigate a rugged landscape that is dotted with cattle and sewn with wildflowers. Arksey, who comes from a proud family of Manitoban farmers, wrote the column Rural Routes for twenty-five years, letting readers into a world that she says, "exists not so far from home and yet may feel every bit as foreign as more distant destinations." With a protagonist who is "tied to the land



and its rituals,” and lives “in the thick of it, birth and death and everything in between,” *The Waiting Place* pauses in the intense moments of Susan’s childbirth to explore what it means to be a woman in the “in between.”

As she counts the ten centimetres to the birth of her first child—each centimetre representing a new chapter—the women in her family share their stories of rural life on a Manitoba cattle ranch. The novel itself becomes a place for waiting, where the voices of wives and mothers converge to take Susan to the final moments of her labour. And as a new child is born, Arksey’s landscape becomes the backdrop upon which female narratives weave together, bound by family, secrets, and the ushering in of a new generation.

Yet Susan comes across as achingly alone, lost in a pinwheel of her own thoughts. Life and death, the passing of time, the push and pull of marriage, and the emerging shape of the modern farm come together. While Susan prepares for motherhood, Lynne, her sister-in-law, grapples with the tangles of her own infidelity, and Joan, her mother-in-law, contemplates the long shadows of those who have passed before her. A middle-aged Sandra, Susan’s mother, looks to her own slowing cycle and thoughtfully asks, “How does a woman measure time without the cycle of her body to guide her?” These mothers and daughters each claim the other, yet their voices are isolated, the imminent expansion of their family at times lost amidst their own stories. “Life is not one big circle with me at its centre,” Susan herself acknowledges. “It is many circles, encroaching on each other like in those Venn diagrams . . . So many black lines, crossing through that white space, until all you see is grey.” The result is that the connections between them seem rather hollow; each woman exists in her own passing world, considering her identity in relation to her family, her ranch, and her own past.

However, this is also what makes Arksey’s text compelling, whose success is in capturing the poetic ruggedness of Manitoba’s farmland in her portrayal of the day-to-day lives of the cattle ranchers. *The Waiting Place* transports its readers to a changing world that not many of us know much about, and Arksey casts over it a moody, ethereal quality, which showcases hardworking women’s stories as the place where female stewardship, animal, and land intersect.

**Tanya Rohrmoser**