

Read, Robyn. *A Stadium of Small Things: Collecting Contemporary Canadian Fiction*. Thesis (PhD [English]), University of Calgary. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 2010. (Publication No. NR64133)

### Abstract

This dissertation examines the figure of the collector and the trope of collecting in recent Canadian fiction in order to propose new theoretical and thematic strategies of reading critically within the field. "A Stadium of Small Things" takes the form of a collection itself; it gathers together dreams, memoir, architecture, archives, cultural studies, and literary theory in its reconsideration of the desires of fictional and real Can Lit collectors, and the narrative possibilities born of their collections as objects, representations, and allusions.

Taking its major theoretical lead from Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, the thesis begins by proposing a theory of collecting as a means of constructing, recreating, or continuing narratives that aim to resist their own conclusion and closure. It reads objects for the subjectivity they acquire as part of collections, and it treats those collections, variously, as presence, absence, and arcade. Collections, though, are examined not merely as thematic constructions, but as structural and narratological strategies functioning in distinctive ways within several recent Canadian fictions as both products and ongoing processes of reading and writing.

This project finds its title and its inspiration in Michael Ondaatje's attempt to collect his father's past in the memoir *Running in the Family*, and it undertakes critical readings of the collectors and collections in fictions by Robert Kroetsch, Timothy Findley, Thomas King, Alice Munro, Alissa York, Margaret Laurence, Dionne Brand, Timothy Taylor, Jane Urquhart, Kyo Maclear, Robert Majzels, and C. S. Richardson. It argues, ultimately, that Can Lit collections – both *in* and *as* narratives – can be endlessly reordered and reinvented in order to proffer fantastical processes of resistance to the monological national, historical, political, and social master-narratives that purport to order our everyday lives.