

## Songs for the Cold of Heart

**Eric Dupont**

**Peter McCambridge, Translator**

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Eric Dupont's family saga *Songs for the Cold of Heart* resurrects ancient storytelling methods, recognizing the fact that if a family's history is to survive, its stories must be compelling enough to be retold to and by future generations. Eager listeners don't require that family tales be wholly true, even—only that they be too vivid and engaging to be doubted or forgotten.

The Lamontagne family's story begins in the village of Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec, with storyteller Papa Louis, or "The Horse," and his daughter at its hub. After traveling backward and forward in time, the story concludes several generations later in Rome.

The novel is as much a social and political study of the times and places it passes through as it is the story of the Lamontagnes. Fed more by rumors and conjecture than facts, the most engaging of their stories are initially nourished and steered by the teller's embellishments and intentions. Before long, the stories are telling themselves; the less verifiable they are, the more real and multidimensional they become.

The book serves as an experiment in different forms of storytelling. The ancient techniques employed in the first half of the book eventually give way to self-absorbed monologues posing as letters from one child to another. Arriving on the heels of such rich, vibrant, memorable prose, the letters don't stand a chance, especially since The Horse and his daughter Madeleine have relinquished their central positions to characters lacking the courage, charisma, and flair needed to fuel a journey of six hundred pages.

The letters ultimately shift the focus from their writers to stories told to their writers. Madeleine returns to the center; classic storytelling resumes. Loose ends are weaved into a saga well worth telling and retelling.

LINDA THORLAKSON (July/August 2018)

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