

Book Review: *Auxiliary Skins: A Collection of Stories*

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Maria Moschioni is an Master's student in the School of Languages and Literatures at the University of Guelph.
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Book Under Review

Miscione, Christine. 2013. *Auxiliary Skins: A Collection of Stories*. Toronto, ON: Exile Editions.

In her debut collection of short-stories *Auxiliary Skins*, Canadian author Christine Miscione explores the human body, drawing an enthralling collection of stories out of its surfaces and its hidden mysteries.

Each of Miscione's short-stories moves, very differently, unexpectedly, and sometimes disturbingly or shockingly, between the insides and the outsides of the realm of the body, going across and beyond the un-definable boundaries of corporeal and psychological *feeling*. *Auxiliary Skins* is, in fact, about *feeling* in all of its shades of meaning, from the physical to the profoundly emotional. For example, in "Skin Just," the simple marks on the protagonist's skin are turned into obsessively growing, cancerous thoughts, which cannot be eradicated; in "Breached Heredity," on the other hand, a young woman's pregnancy hides, and at the same time exposes, the twisted tangles of her family life; and the second-hand clothes in a vintage shop, with stories of their own, are the triggers of cause-effect chains ending in tragedy—with hints of irony—in "Plungers, Porcelain, and Paltry Things."

Miscione experiments audaciously in her writing: some of her stories choose eccentric points of view that completely disorient and estrange the reader. In "Uterine Kisses," for example, the narrating voice comes from within the deforming glass walls of an incubator. Many of the tales in the collection are almost cinematographic in their narration, which slowly zooms out from the initial frame to gradually reveal the wider picture to its audience. However, Miscione's writing is carefully detached in doing this, and leaves blank spaces of silence for the reader's imagination to fill. Her multifiform style plays with unusual forms of storytelling as well: in "Roidal Conundrum," for instance, we end up looking for a narrative (and perceiving all of its suspense) in the posts of an online forum, almost as if we were eagerly scrolling through it to get to the end.

Every one of the stories in the anthology has its markedly individual features: the result is a collection of fascinating and grotesque specimens, whose outer skins

we are invited to observe and to gradually peel off, to explore what they hide, and what they reveal.