

By Alison Smith, ATLIS editor 2008

In her ATLIS conference keynote address, Gráinne Ryder talked about two of the biggest issues facing Canadians: foreign aid and the environment. While the environment may at first glance seem the bigger of the two issues, as Ryder explains, in many cases, the two are actually inseparable.

This year's journal was originally to be focussed exclusively on the environment, as was this year's ATLIS conference. It became apparent in looking for papers, however, that a better approach would be to have an environmental emphasis and include papers that cover a wide range of topics such as post-colonialism, multinational corporations, and the Indian diaspora in film. There is no common theme to the papers, but as you will see, they go together quite nicely, especially when considered within the context of Ryder's keynote address.

In addition to the books that are reviewed by Dara MacDonald at the end of this year's journal, two books that also complement Ryder's topic are John Perkins's *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* and *An Imperfect Offering* by James Orbinski.

Perkins, like Ryder, discusses projects such as dams and energy generators. He takes a different approach from that of Ryder — Ryder notes that these projects are often bad for the environment and local communities whereas Perkins explains that contracts for such projects are often hugely beneficial to foreign companies and governments. In a sense they discuss the two different sides to the foreign aid coin — those receiving aid (Ryder) and those giving the aid (Perkins). While parts of Perkins' book does seem to have been sensationalized a bit (his use of terms such as "global empire" and "world domination" seem a bit too conspiracy-theory to me at times), he provides an important perspective on projects that are being encouraged by foreign developers (many American but many also Canadian) and funded by international corporations. It is important to read *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* with a grain of salt, but Parsons provides some important insights into how projects such as those described above benefit the governments that encourage them and the corporations that build them.

James Orbinski was president of doctors without borders when the organization won the Nobel Peace Prize. A Canadian doctor, Orbinski has worked in Afghanistan, Rwanda (both before and during the genocide), Kosovo, and Somalia. If for no other reason, his account of the situations in which he was working is immensely important for anyone interested in humanitarianism and especially for anyone with a passion for medicine. On top of that, Orbinski is hugely important to the study of Canadian foreign policy because of his argument that humanitarianism is by nature political. His account of history is tremendously personal and emotional, and his rhetoric is powerful and nothing short of a call to action.

While the environment is perhaps the single most important issue facing today's leaders, citizens, and governments, this year's journal has attempted to demonstrate that it must not be forgotten that there are many other issues — many of which are tied to the environment — that must also be studied and discussed.

Works cited:

Orbinski, James. 2008. *An Imperfect Offering*. USA: Random House.

Perkins, John. 2004. *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. New York: Penguin Group.