


# I Am a Truck

*Michelle Winters*

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## **I Am a Truck** Michelle Winters

A tender but lively debut novel about a man, a woman, and their Chevrolet dealer.

Agathe and Rejean Lapointe are about to celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary when Rejean's beloved Chevy Silverado is found abandoned at the side of the road - with no trace of Rejean. Agathe handles her grief by fondling the shirts in the Big and Tall department at Henderman's Family Apparel and carrying on a relationship with a cigarette survey. As her hope dwindles, Agathe falls in with her spirited coworker Debbie, who teaches Agathe about rock and roll, and with Martin Bureau, the one man who might just know the truth about Rejean's fate.

Reminiscent of 2015 Canada Reads finalist *And the Birds Rained Down* and *Gone Girl*, *I Am A Truck* is a funny and moving portrayal of Acadian love and loyalty.

## **I Am a Truck Details**

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Author : Michelle Winters

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## From Reader Review I Am a Truck for online ebook

### Kimbofo says

If the American filmmakers the Cohen brothers penned a novel it would be something like Michelle Winters' *I am a Truck*.

This book, shortlisted for the 2017 Giller Prize, is a quirky and unconventional tale about a married couple, living in rural Acadia, whose 20-year marriage falls apart in unusual circumstances.

Throw in the wife's forbidden obsession with rock and roll, a bat in a cage, a lonely Chevy salesman in need of a male friend, a former cheerleader who wants to study computer programming, and a military man who likes to sing out loud, and you'll come to understand that this novel really is a peculiar and offbeat one.

To read my review in full, please visit my blog.

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### Krista says

“Ben, je drive mon truck.”

Not long after they were married, French Canadians Agathe and Réjean moved to the mostly English-speaking village of Pinto – in rural Acadian country – and everything from their remote cabin in the woods to their refusal to speak anything but French bonded them as two against the rest of the world (“Il n'y a que nous.”). In the week before their twentieth anniversary, therefore, it's inconceivable to Agathe that when Réjean's beloved Silverado is found abandoned at the side of the road, he could be a “Voluntary Missing Adult” as the police insist. Switching between the aftermath of “Now” (in which Agathe is forced to get a job in town and mingle with Anglos, even as she insists that Réjean will eventually come home) and the recent past of “Then” (in which small secrets that both Agathe and Réjean guard grow into an unseen gap between them), *I Am a Truck* sketches a tragicomic narrative, with the two time streams converging on a present that explores the ideas of identity, love, and allegiance. This book is weirdly funny (not quite laugh out loud, but like a Coen Brothers movie), totally charming, unequivocally Canadian, and asks the all important question: Will the world ever see peace between those who drive Chevys and those who favour Fords? (Also: Why would anyone even be thinking about buying a Renault?)

The beginnings of a love story, which I am including at length to capture something of the tone of this book:

Agathe had been watching the eaves for birds while her mother examined potatoes. When Réjean suddenly appeared, his eyes already on her, he saturated her field of vision. Agathe's knees buckled and she slid to the ground. Édithe Thibeault was quick and sharp, tossing the bag of potatoes into the air and catching her daughter before she hit the ground. As the potatoes rained down, Édithe looked up and also set disbelieving eyes on Réjean. At only fifteen, he was close to seven feet tall, with a chest as big as a rain barrel and arms the size of a normal man's legs. His hands were like a bunch of bananas. He was already working on the downy beginnings of his moustache. For her part, Agathe had just the year before peeled her way out of a rind of unremarkability, emerging that summer a very pretty girl. Her mother's friends

would comment that Agathe was now pretty enough to be a newscaster or a figure skater and that perhaps, her beauty would be the thing to finally put P'tit Village on the map. For Réjean, she became existence itself. He broke from his brothers and swept in, hands extended, and, without a word, pulled up both Agathe and her mother so that their feet briefly left the ground. His eyes locked on Agathe's until he turned to join his brothers, gazing over his shoulder at her. When she had finally lost sight of his back in the crowd, Agathe began to cry.

On returning from the market, Réjean asked his mother for a haircut and presented himself at the Thibeault's door later that same afternoon, hair clippings still in his ears, asking if Agathe would like to go for a walk. He couldn't have expected that once they reached the woods at the end of the street, Agathe would grab him and pull him to her, knocking the breath out of them both. They had to wait three years to get married.

Twenty years later, Réjean goes to work in the woods every day while Agathe stays home to make date squares and rappie pie, they spend their evenings playing gin rummy, and look forward to acting out inventive role-playing scenarios in bed at night. Why would Réjean walk away from all that? And *how* could Réjean simply walk away from his Silverado; a new model of which he buys every year? The secrets they keep: Despite loving their time driving together in Réjean's pickup, Agathe has grown tired of the French folk songs her husband insists on listening to on the truck's radio; Agathe wouldn't mind turning to the English rock and roll station every now and then. As for Réjean, when he confides to an acquaintance that he feels something is missing in his life, and this friend recommends that Réjean find a hobby, the big man begins to fantasise about hurting men whom he imagines forcing themselves on his wife (strange hobby, n'est-ce pas?). Wherein these two secrets intersect lies both the tragedy and the comedy.

“C'est ne pas un crime, Martin,” he laughed, “driver un Ford.”

So much in this book is about identity: Chevy drivers vs Ford drivers (and what do you make of a Chevy salesman who drives a Ford?) seems an ironic substitute for the all-too-Canadian dichotomy of Anglos vs Frocophones (and what do you make of the English-speaking man who secretly learns French to better communicate with a man he admires? What of the French-speaking woman who tries out, *sotto voce*, the English phrases of the brash blonde who whirlwinds into her life?). I liked that in the town of Pinto, there are whole conversations with one person speaking English, the other responding in French, and the two of them understanding each other perfectly (and I also appreciated that the French is untranslated, but not beyond what I learned in school). I even liked the frequent descents into a bastardised Franglais as people sought deeper connections. Mostly, I liked the weirdly comic moments:

He was drinking from a brown bottle, singing, and nodding his head with the momentum of the song. He really approved of this song. There wasn't much to do with this one, except agree.

It's a little hard to pinpoint the timeframe of this book – a character gets a job in Computer Programming, but no one appears to have a cell phone – and the specific rock songs that get Agathe's motor running seem to point to the late Eighties/*maybe* early Nineties: *Agathe laughed and turned it up as Sheriff told her they'd never needed love like they needed her... Cheap Trick wanted her to want them... Trooper told her to see how it felt to raise a little hell of her own.* (Unless the radio and the clubs are only playing the “classics”, lol.) Perhaps author Michelle Winters needed to place her story a bit in the past to make it preglobalisation; perhaps it's no longer possible to imagine a French-speaking couple, outside of Quebec, successfully isolating themselves from the wider Anglo community, and there's something interesting to think about in

that.

I picked up *I Am a Truck* because it was longlisted for the 2017 Giller Prize, and while it doesn't feel as weighty as some of the other nominated titles that I've read, I'm really glad that I was introduced to this book; ah, therein lies the beauty of the longlist.

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### **Barbara McEwen says**

This was just fun. I liked the characters and could totally picture this quirky, almost ridiculous, Canadian story. It's short but action-packed like a rock song so why not give it a try?

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### **Nicole Beaudry says**

*I Am A Truck* tells the story of Agathe and Rejean, a Francophone couple in small-town Acadia, surrounded by Anglophones. They live in a small home in the woods, isolated as much geographically as they are linguistically. Shortly before their twentieth anniversary, Rejean disappears. Told in a clear, compelling voice with evocative prose and incredible dialogue, Michelle Winters examines loneliness, isolation, closeness, the way language and music create worlds, relationships, links, as well as how they create a "language" within a relationship. I really loved the role that language played within the book, both in terms of the actual writing as well as within the plot. A spare little book, it packs a huge emotional punch.

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### **Clare says**

This is a gem of a book, with some of my favourite things, like pop/rock music references, liberally sprinkled and not translated second language dialogue, quirky characters and great writing. I can always count on Invisible Publishing to deliver my next favourite book.

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### **Rachyl says**

When I first began reading this a month or so ago it was at the start of a reading slump, and for that reason I really wasn't enjoying it. However, when I recently tried picking it up again to finish it, I found much more that I liked about it.

I really loved the themes of identity and loss that are tackled in this book. Especially since there is so much revolving around characters finding their identity in relation to others and how that changes once those other people are absent. I found this element, paired with the setting and the mixture of French and English dialogue made this a really quintessentially Canadian novel. Often, when exploring the subject of Canadian literature the question of who we are as a country comes up; and a lot of our definitions are who we are in relation to others. The way this novel explores Canadian characters who have the same internal struggle, really felt to me to mirror our struggle for a cohesive national identity.

The writing I really grew to enjoy too. I felt that Winters created really vivid images of the various settings and characters. With minimal description I could really feel as though I was a part of the story.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the character of Debbie. When she first appeared, it seemed as though she was just going to be annoying and rely on her good looks and just be a source of pain for Agathe somehow.

But as she was revealed to be a really intelligent and driven though free-spirited woman and her friendship with Agathe developed it really opened up that other side of identity through the way others perceive you through first impressions, and how that can never be the whole story.

All in all I found this story to be really well constructed and that it seemed to do all that it set out to in a really short period. I thought it was a fantastic debut novel.

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## **Diane says**

Agathe and Réjean have been married for 20 years and seem to have a good relationship. They are French and isolate themselves from the English community where they live. "Just you and me forever" sounds romantic but there's always such a thing as too much togetherness. Then Réjean's pickup truck, a Ford Silverado, is found abandoned by the side of the road and Réjean is missing. It seems he might have just walked away from his life and Agathe, left behind, has no idea why.

Agathe struggles to build a new life and pursue interests that she was unable to previously, such as a love of rock and roll. Meanwhile, Martin, a salesman at the local Chevy dealer who sold Réjean his yearly Silverado upgrade model, may be the one person that knows what happened to Réjean. A lonely man, he seemed to have developed a man-crush on Réjean and after Réjean disappeared, becomes obsessed with watching over Agathe.

The story is told in chapters alternating before and after Réjean's disappearance, so we can see how Martin's dependence on Réjean's friendship grew and get a picture of the marriage and then how things proceed after his disappearance. The dialogue is sometimes French mixed with English but you can get the gist of it if you have no French at all. There are lots of references to rock songs of the era, late 70s going by the ones I recognized, and how they "speak" to Agathe.

It seems like this book is about identity, who you are individually, who you are in a relationship, and who you want to be. All three characters haven't had a chance to grow as a person because of their isolation. Both Agathe and Réjean are different apart than they were together. Réjean seems to have become an anchor in Martin's life and when that anchor is gone, Martin starts to sink. And yet, it's a love story, and it's quirky and unusual. A short and enjoyable read.

This novel is the author's first and is on the shortlist for this year's Giller prize. Quite an accomplishment!

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## **Jennifer says**

the jury for the 2017 giller prize announced their longlist this past week.

? David Chariandy for his novel Brother, published by McClelland & Stewart

? Rachel Cusk for her novel Transit, published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd

? David Demchuk for his novel The Bone Mother, published by ChiZine Publications

? Joel Thomas Hynes for his novel We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night: A Novel, published by HarperPerennial, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd

? Andrée A. Michaud for her novel Boundary, published by Biblioasis International Translation Series, translated by Donald Winkler

? Josip Novakovich for his story collection Tumbleweed, published by Esplanade Books/Véhicule Press

? Ed O'Loughlin for his novel Minds of Winter, published by House of Anansi Press

? Zoey Leigh Peterson for her novel Next Year, For Sure, published by Doubleday Canada  
? Michael Redhill for his novel Bellevue Square, published by Doubleday Canada  
? Eden Robinson for her novel Son of a Trickster, published by Alfred A. Knopf Canada  
? Deborah Willis for her story collection The Dark and Other Love Stories, published by Hamish Hamilton Canada  
? Michelle Winters for her novel I Am a Truck, published by Invisible Publishing

of the 12 books, i had only read one - Transit, so... i had some reading to do. i totally expected an eccentric list from this particular jury, but i am only interested in a few of the books nominated: robinson, redhill, o'loughlin, hynes, and chariandy. i had not even heard of winters' book, but once i became aware of it, i was keen to read it. so that's where i started.

unfortunately, it didn't do much for me. i did love the arcadian setting, and appreciated both the musical references and franglais sprinkled throughout. there was potential as i read, which kept me turning the pages... but it was just too peculiar for me. the writing was fine, but didn't WOW me as a giller nominee. (the way The Lonely Hearts Hotel did earlier this year, and for which i am gobsmacked over its lack of inclusion on this year's giller longlist. le sigh!)

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## Robin says

\*\*UPDATE: The Giller Prize short list was announced today and this delightful book made it to the top 5!\*\*

Recently, I read the long list for this year's Giller Prize, a Canadian award established in 1994. I was chagrined to see I didn't recognise a single name. I realised that recently, aside from internationally known Canadian authors (such as Margaret Atwood and Yann Martel), I have been neglecting my country when it comes to my reading choices. So, rather impulsively, I scanned a few titles and "I Am a Truck" stood out, both because of its stark, quirky title, and the publisher's description. I ordered it right away from Invisible Press.

Well, it was adorable.

I don't mean that in a condescending way, either. I just really enjoyed it, felt at home reading it, and was often amused by the understated, intelligent writing.

It's set in Acadia (Maritimes/Eastern Quebec) in a small town called Pinto, during an unnamed decade, but I would guess it's the 1980's. Réjean and Agathe are French Canadians who have a general dislike and mistrust of Anglophones, but for work purposes, move to English speaking Pinto. It's really funny that these two don't care for the English, but speak a wicked "franglais". A few examples:

*"Je drive mon truck."*

*"C'est un town full of losers."*

*"Mange, donc la. T'es starving."*

None of the French is translated, by the way, but I liked that, and also, I think it's fairly easy to follow even for a non speaker.

Agathe and Réjean have been married almost 20 years. They have a seemingly great marriage, but... well, they're pretty co-dependent, and there's no spreading wings and flying going on, despite some inventive sex. Agathe is like a stranger to the world in many ways, and Réjean feels keenly that something in his life is missing.

One day, his truck is found by the side of the road, and he is gone. The story alternates between before and after he goes missing, and slowly the mystery gap starts to close. It reminded me of a toned down Miranda July story with the odd assembly of characters, the humour mixed with poignancy. The character of Martin Bureau was one of these oddballs, a sweaty, neurotic loner who secretly learns French and drives a Ford on the sly, desperate to belong *somewhere*.

"Le rockandroll" is a central motif in this book, and Winters references groups like The Pretenders and glam rocker Marc Nolan among many others, which provides quite a soundtrack. The more music that Agathe listens to, the more the world grows around her.

The book deals with loss, the cages we impose on ourselves and the people we love, identity, and loneliness, to name a few. So much in few pages. What a hidden gem this novella is! O Canada!

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### **Magdelanye says**

Actually, I Am A Truck reminds me of that little car in the childrens tale. The big surprise there was that there was no end to the number of clowns that emerged from the tiny vehicle. Just when you thought they had reached their limit, another would emerge.

IAAT contains no end of surprises. Even before the reader has a chance to settle, another twist in this tale reveals a new permutation.

Which makes this a delightful, thoughtful book, much bigger than it seems.

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### **Allison ?hikes the bookwoods? says**

Wow...so much punch packed into such a short book! I think I need to ponder it some more, but at first brush, I was impacted by the way the characters found themselves once they were no longer wrapped up in each other. It's astonishing, but true, that relationships can sometimes bring about such isolation. In many ways, Agathe and Rejean were just as lonely as Martin, who had no one.

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### **Matthew Quann says**

This is an odd duck, that's for sure. Michelle Winters has carved out something that I'd describe as *Fargo* set in rural, acadian New Brunswick. There's some really interesting things going on in this novel shortlisted for the 2017 Giller Prize--Canada's biggest literary prize--and though I wanted to love it, I found it to be just okay.

Agathe and Réjean are a happily married couple, living an insular life in New Brunswick when Réjean disappears a few days before their anniversary. His Silverado is left by the roadside, door ajar, with no sign of foul play. In the chapters that follow this incident, the reader is tossed between Agathe struggling to understand where her husband has gone and flashbacks to Réjean and Agathe prior to his disappearance.

I had a lot of fun with Winters' colourful cast of characters and unlikely situations which populate the novel. The solution to the novel's central mystery is clued up with a quarter of the book left to go and was unexpected, hilarious, and tragic all at once. Though Agathe doesn't participate in any mystery solving herself, she does begin to spread her wings and discover more about herself in the months following Réjean's

disappearance. Part of that discovery seems to be a classic rock radio station as Agathe's developing independence is paralleled by her familiarity with 70s and 80s rock staples.

The quirky situations and bolstered by the unique decision to incorporate the unique french spoken by many francophones in New Brunswick. The language is a mixture of french and english, and was interesting to read having grown up amidst this dialect. I wondered throughout my reading whether or not the book would be approachable to a non-bilingual reader. On one hand, I'm comfortable saying that you'll be able to infer a great deal from the context and response to the language. On the other hand, I think the novel is best experienced with at least some basic french.

It was fun to read this short novel set in territory very familiar to me. Though I can point to a lot of things I really liked about the novel, it never came together into a cohesive whole for me. The contrast between familiarity and freedom that seems to run through the novel didn't click with me the way it has in other reads. So: lots of quirk, good characters, strange decisions, and awkward situations make for a mixed pot of a novel.

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### **Trin says**

It *is* like a Coen brothers movie, but like...not one of the very good ones.

I would much rather read the full story of Debbie, a minor character who disarms men with her former-cheerleader good looks, then uses her innate technical skill to steal their jobs.

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### **Mag says**

A great little book that I probably would not know about were it not a runner-up for the Giller Prize this year. Set in a small town in eastern Canada, it's a about a mystery concerning a woman, her husband and his truck dealer.

A great story, ditto characters, and all of it written with a lot of subtle humour that had me chuckling along. Took me a day and a half to read, and was the first fiction book in a long time that I couldn't really put down.

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### **Laura Frey (Reading in Bed) says**

Delightful. Filled with the kind of French that an Anglo Canadian can read and feel good about :)

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