

# Parasite Poetics

## Noise and Queer Hospitality in Erín Moure's *O Ciudadán*

### Introduction: Being-In-Question<sup>1</sup>

Subjectivity, noise, and hospitality are key themes spanning Erín Moure's oeuvre. There has been much critical attention paid to Moure's theories of citizenship and subjectivity (Carrière, Dowling, Fitzpatrick, MacDonald, Moyes, Rudy, Skibsrud), as well as recent articles drawing connections between Moure's poetics and queer affect theory (Moore, Williams and Marinkova). However, the only critical writing (other than Moure's own) that addresses her theories of noise in depth is Heather Fitzgerald's MA thesis, *Finesse into Mess: Entropy as Metaphor in the Queer Poetics of Erin Mouré* (1997). Published five years before *O Ciudadán*, Fitzgerald's study focuses on what she calls "entropic grammar" and explores the connection between asthma and sexual difference in Moure's earlier work through "a theory of asthma as entropic writing practice" (95). While my argument is conversant with Fitzgerald's theory of entropic grammar, it also diverges from hers. It is my purpose to show how processes of encounter such as hospitality, estrangement, and translation are thrown into relief by a reader's careful attunement to Moure's use of noise as both poetic medium and tool in *O Ciudadán*. In her exploration of vibrant relationships among the poet, translator, reader, and text, Moure crosses over and draws attention to the insufficiencies of the old paradigm of Western hospitality—with its host-guest-stranger-barbarian-hostage dispute over property and threshold—by setting the framework of recognition off-kilter.

In *O Ciudadán*, Moure offers an innovative staging of the question of estrangement: "What if we listen to the noise and not the signal?" (102).

This question forms the backbone of Moure's political and poetic inquiry, placing her poetry in dialogue with Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality. The question of hospitality is, for Derrida, focalized by what he calls "the question of the foreigner" (*Of Hospitality* 3). Derrida suggests that ethical responsibility—or the hospitable relation—is initiated by the stranger's unbearable proximity to the host, an intimacy that draws us towards limits of recognition and the limits of the law. It is, he suggests, "As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the very question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question. But also the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question" (*Of Hospitality* 3). In *O Ciudadán*, Moure casts the lesbian subject as a being-in-question, that is, as a basis for hospitality. To do so, she uses noise—that which is unwanted and unrecognized in any transmission (Kosko xviii)—as both a poetic medium and a crucible of hospitality.

Moure's formulation of the question of the stranger as a matter of noise over signal draws a parallel between queer subjectivity and noise as the process by which someone or something is rendered unintelligible and out-of-place. "What is noise? Noise is a nuisance . . . [i]t is a signal that does not belong there," explains Bart Kosko (3). For Moure, far from being a nuisance to be managed (cancelled, banished), noise has the potential to activate new senses of words and new orientations to the world because it marks the threshold of relation (*Wager* 110, 210-11). Roland Barthes glosses the hearth as "centre, guardian, refuge, light of truth" (7). Unsettling this central trope of Western thought, Moure substitutes the threshold of noise as decentralizing principle of hospitality. Moure engages with queer theory's turn toward negative affect when she asks her readers to be receptive to what is annoying, unwanted, and normally disregarded or actively suppressed in communication: noise. As Heather Love says, "Same-sex desire is marked by a long history of association with failure, impossibility, and loss . . . a historical reality . . . that has profound effects for contemporary queer subjects" (21). Moure demonstrates in *O Ciudadán* how desire, "our inner mode for the future tense" (*Wager* 36), when registered as an out-of-place signal, is inflected by the main themes of hospitality that Derrida identifies: "burial, the name, the madness that inhabits language, exile, and the threshold" (Dufourmantelle, "Invitation" 16). Moure works the limits of these themes by situating the process of reading within economies of social and linguistic exclusion. Using the re-placement of attention as a means of instigating literary and political reorientations—themselves entangled within

the “discourse of privilege [that] is infinitely absorptive” (*Wager* 34)—Moure destabilizes the conventional roles of hospitality and textuality.

The page, for Moure, acts as a threshold, an external and liminal space where reader and poet negotiate the roles of host and guest in the event of thinking. For Anne Dufourmantelle, “Hospitality describes a figure, a space that allows a gesture of invitation to take place. That is . . . the space of thinking itself. To think is to invite, to offer a shelter to the other within ourselves, the other as the possibility to be(come) ourselves” (“Under Compassion” 13-14). In this sense, hospitality occurs at the most intimate interstice between inside and outside—that libidinal band that organizes page, body, and geography into feedback loops of sensory perception and experience—that same crux that Moure foregrounds throughout her body of work. However, Moure refuses Dufourmantelle’s formulation of hospitality as “the experience of an encounter and a recognition” (14). Instead, Moure unbinds the encounter itself from the expectation of recognition by making noise—that shifting, threshold of relation—the subject of attention.

In Moure’s poetics of hospitality, noise is the precondition for poetry. Discussing her method, Moure insists that poetry is “an object that is first a noise, then a resonance of words that alters noise over and over in the head, breaking through the pallor of the image and the self” (*Wager* 17). Here, the construct of the self takes on the role of the host—a role that is very soon re-appropriated by noise. In his introduction to Michel Serres’ *The Parasite*, Cary Wolfe reminds us “that ‘noise’ (for the English reader) forms the third and unsuspected meaning of the French word *parasite*: 1. biological parasite; 2. social parasite; 3. static or interference” (xiii). In Moure’s work, all of these meanings, but especially the second and third, become contiguous shaping mechanisms for a queer orientation to the world based on interference of the dominant signal. In *The Parasite*, Serres adds a character to the *dramatis personae* of the hospitality scene. Significantly, this character—the parasite—(figured as many things from rats to gusting wind) invites the non-human to the host’s table in a central role. The parasite “intervenes, enters the system as an element of fluctuation. It excites or it incites it; it puts it into motion, or it paralyzes it. It changes its energetic state, its displacements and condensations” (Serres 191). Ultimately, however, Serres’ account of the parasite is limited by his valorization of information and the robustness of the hierarchical arrangement of systems that shores up the law and the status quo: “The parasitic series is an irreversible chain, going down the slope like the river. . . . We know the law of the series, of the chain. . . . We know the end of the

process—disorder, noise, chaos, the sea” (169). The old hierarchical binaries rear their heads in this description: Man/woman, Reason/chaos, Information/noise, River/sea. As discussed below, Moure appropriates some of Serres’ insights about the parasite and applies them to her poetics but does so from a very different angle, and toward a different end. For Moure:

Engaging poetry or poetic structure as enactment can help us defy the second law of thermodynamics, that is, disturb the organism and apply stress to the cells (for it is the tendency to the centre, to stasis or anæsthesia, that destroys the organism) even to those cells called feminism or feminist writing. (*Wager* 34).

For Moure, noise is a medium of desire, and is that which opens any system veering towards closure to the unforeseeable.

In an essay published in 1997 for the Toronto Photography Workshop exhibition of the work of Shonagh Adelman, Moure says: “For me, writing is an incorporated act. It is not signs for what goes on in the head but comes out of the hand, is mediated by the hand. The hand meeting / marking such a surface. I want to say, too, the hand is also a sex organ” (*Wager* 92). From the outset of her career, Moure’s focus has been on what Gilles Deleuze calls “the haptic gaze . . . the gaze that touches, rather than the optic gaze” (qtd. in *Wager* 92). In Moure’s poetics, noise is a queer object, an object of the haptic gaze. Noise is the shifting threshold between environment and system. It also represents the perceptual limit of any given person in any given context. As Fitzgerald points out, Moure “writes to expose the failure of signification” (*Finesse* 67). Moure’s use of failure as a generative poetic principal, combined with her eroticization of sound’s touch, produces a queer method of textual fabrication that resists the dominant modes of socio-cultural inheritance by joyfully reproducing the failure of communication itself within the frame of dominant discourse:

When “my language” fails, only then can we detect signals that harken to a porosity of borders or lability of zones . . . (across the entire electromagnetic spectrum, not just the visual, as in *planetary noise*)

But first we have to suspend our need to see “identity” itself as a saturate signal (obliterating all “noise”), following Lispector

into a “not-yet” — (*Ciudadán* 79)

In other words, when a reader is an active participant in turning towards, rather than away from noise, she is made aware of the ethical and political effects of the act of paying attention as such. For Moure, “poetry is not about creativity or uplifting people but about risk, great risk, hurtling oneself at the boundaries of language, ears pressed to the borders of the structure

and hearing its constraints, which also indicate openings” (*Wager* 148). By focusing her “haptic gaze” (Deleuze qtd. in *Wager* 92)—which includes sonic awareness—on the dynamics of welcoming that which is unwelcome in normative relations within the nation-state, Moure strikes at the very foundations of the act of welcoming, the foundational act of hospitality, and adds a critical queer perspective to the discourse of being-in-question.

### **The Name and the Queer Barbarian**

Derrida concludes *Of Hospitality* by exposing the violence that allows hospitality as such to reproduce itself in law and philosophy. By doing so, he challenges the basis for liberal human rights discourse, which is, after all, a discourse of hospitality, by analyzing the failure of ethics that makes possible the substitution of men’s bodies for women’s when it comes to “harm’s way” in two biblical stories often cited by the philosophical tradition of hospitality: that of Lot and his daughters, and the scene on Mount Ephraim in Judges (*Of Hospitality* 151-55). Importantly, Derrida recalls these stories in order to problematize the Kantian ideal of the constitution of (homo-)social bonds as well as the traditional paradigm of hospitality as universal regulator of rights (149). As Derrida underlines: “All the examples we have chosen up till now bring out the same *predominance* in the structure of the right to hospitality and of the relationship with the foreigner, be he or she guest or enemy. This is a conjugal model, paternal and phallogocentric” (149). It is in the context of this impasse that Moure responds by posing the question of the lesbian as noise in the system.

Moure’s preface to *O Ciudadán* has multiple resonances with Derrida’s opening to *Of Hospitality* but when she centers the “troubling” lesbian (invisible and inaudible even in Derrida’s account), who arrives speaking in “tongues,” she also takes up and redeploys the strategies of the parasite as articulated by Serres: “The new meaning spread everywhere starting from wind and noise. Not a single language translated in several languages, but several spoken and several heard at the same time” (Serres 41). Here is Moure’s opening gamble:

To intersect a word: citizen. To find out what could intend/distend it, today. *O ciudadán*. A word we recognize though we know not its language. It can’t be found in French, Spanish, Portuguese dictionaries. It seems inflected “masculine.” And, as such, it has a feminine supplement. Yet if I said “a ciudadá” I would only be speaking of 52% of the world. . . . How can a woman then inhabit the general (visibly and semantically skewing it)? How can she speak from the generic at all, without vanishing behind its screen of transcendent value? As if ‘citizen’ in our

time can only be dislodged when spoken from a 'minor' tongue, one historically persistent despite external and internal pressures, and by a woman who bears—as lesbian in a civic frame—a *policed sexuality*." (*Cidadán* n. pag.)

From the outset, sexuality is central in Moure's reframing of citizenship and the "minor-tongue" that she refers to is doubled, being lesbian (thus in the third position) as well as spoken in the space between dominant languages and from a "minor literature" (Galician literature) in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of "blurred words" (*Minor Literature* 21). By casting the lesbian question in terms of noise, Moure invokes not only Derrida's analysis of the link between "proper" relation and relation to property, the dynamic at the very threshold of the hospitality paradigm, but she shifts the paradigm itself by insisting on a structural link between noise, lesbian discourse, and "the citizen as enactment" (*Wager* 160), as bound together in a process of deterritorialization. We can hear the hints of this work in Moure's questions: "can the name be reinvested or infested, fenestrated . . . set in motion again? Unmoored? Her semblance? Upsetting the structure/stricture even momentarily. *To en(in)dure, perdure*" (*Cidadán* n. pag.).

Playfully disturbing her patrilineal affiliation by pointing to her father's surname "Mouré" but altering it to a verb, "unmoored," Moure casts her altered identity as one of the questions that the lesbian-in-question poses in her role as stranger. It is with a variation of this unmoored, queered name, "Moure," that she signs her book on the cover for the first time, changing the placement of the accent from surname to first name in all subsequent authorial signatures (at least to the present). Under this new name, she is able to demand a new term for, and new relations of citizenship; she is also able to "seek an ancestral cadence. A cadence of being and thought and harmony with trees" (*Insecession* 44) even while disrupting patriarchal structures. Her father's grandfather emigrated from Spanish Galicia in 1846, and Moure claims that "No one had spoken Galician in my family since the emigration, until I learned" (*Insecession* 68). Both Moure's paternal grandfather and her father changed their own names:

My father's second name was Benito, after his father Juan Benito's second name . . . during WWII he changed Benito to Benedict because he didn't want a name shared with Mussolini . . . Juan Benito Moure in Canada had become John B. Mouré. To appear more English or more French was an immigrant's necessity. (*Insecession* 68)

Moure's gesture of intersecting patrilineal inheritance with a demand for an altered concept of citizenship is what is at stake in *O Ciudadán*. Insisting that

the “interiority (subject-relation) of the citizen is a disturbance/turn, rather than a strict identity” (*Cidadán* 61), Moure posits her lesbian stranger “At the edge of that/ impetuous crossing” (*Cidadán* 60). As Ryan Fitzpatrick and Susan Rudy point out, “In fact, this proliferation of authorial identities began even earlier [than in *O Ciudadán*], in 2001, when the name ‘Eirin Moure’ appeared on the cover of *Sheep’s Vigil By A Fervent Person (2001)*” (61). Although she signs the book on the cover with accent shifted, the copyright page bears her father’s surname, complicating the economic and symbolic registers of her gesture. Interestingly, this is the last time that “Mouré” appears on any of her copyright pages: from *Little Theatres (2005)* onward, both cover and copyright are signed Moure.

Moreover, Moure seems to be making a pun by freighting “perdure” with its double, “perjure,” in her opening questions, which I quote again, “can the name be reinvested or infested, fenestrated . . . set in motion again? Unmoored? Her semblance? Upsetting the structure/stricture even momentarily. *To en(in)dure, perdure*” (*Cidadán* n. pag.). This pun becomes possible to hear only in the context of the preceding wordplay and Moure’s change of her name and the name of citizen itself. It also recalls the translator-traitor dynamic as well as the “trait or mark [that] must work with the haptic, which means provoking sensation in more than the eyes” (*Wager* 92). The gesture of endurance is cast as a renaming, but a renaming that provokes touch—textual and otherwise. “*To en(in)dure, perdure*” has an insert, a hand inside it, provoking change, disrupting the word “endure.” There is a haptic interiority being suggested, and the poet’s hand caught in the word. This precarious pun links Moure’s politics of noise-as-queer-signal-infestations to her politics of translation through the interrupting, unruly third and her parasitic appropriations of “the proper” and of property. The gesture of redeploying the (haptic) gaze leads Moure towards the structure of absolute hospitality in Derrida’s sense:

The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it, and it can on the contrary set and maintain it in a perpetual progressive movement; but it is as strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law to which it is yet so close, from which in truth it is indissociable. (*Of Hospitality* 25, 27)

Derrida contrasts the figure of the foreigner, the subject of “hospitality by right” (law), with that of the barbarian, the subject of justice. For Derrida, the barbarian is “someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor

social status” (25) and this is also true for Moure’s “deterritorialized” queer subject, o cidadán. Noise, in Moure’s poetics, becomes the catalyst for an oscillation between a discourse of lesbian rights as human rights (caught up in exclusionary practice) and a discourse of the queer barbarian as an absolute other. The lesbian subject of hospitality in *O Cidadán* cannot be separated from her “strangely heterogenous” queer barbarian alter ego (*Of Hospitality* 27). One figure represents the contingency of hospitality and the other fails to represent at all, and in so doing, embodies absolute hospitality in the guise of absolute noise. To perdure (continue, exist) as a being-in-question, that is as a lesbian, requires a radical translation of the civic frame, one that goes beyond mere recognition as a rights-bearing subject under phallogocentric law, but rather interrupts law itself to start anew with a different intensity and differently placed attention. This mark puts a nick in the law, allowing absolute hospitality, “the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor” (*Of Hospitality* 83), to parasite the law, becoming the point where the question of a radical outside (momentarily) breaks through. Noise, then, becomes Moure’s medium for “intersecting” the word citizen with lesbian porosity.

### **“Labiality” (Thresholds and the “Madness” of Language)**

Who is listening and what is heard is as much a matter of social space as it is generosity and respectful curiosity or willful ignorance and hostility: listening is a matter of hospitality. In *O Cidadán*, the reader is cast as the “host/guest” (105) and called upon to accommodate the stranger by making cultural and cognitive space for an open-ended encounter. The radical position taken up by Moure in every aspect of *O Cidadán*, from its typography to its thematics, demands that the dominant Western discourse through which the book is transmitted must be recognized as noise by the reader so that other, less pervasive signals might be heard. Because bodies themselves are produced through networks of biological and symbolic exchange, Moure reads them as “a kind of weak signal communication” (79) in order to develop a way of thinking through and addressing the problems and possibilities of citizenship and queer hospitality.

*O Cidadán* is heterogeneous in structure, consisting of “Georgettes” or lesbian love-poems; “documents”; “catalogues of harms”; as well as other “aleatory” poems—including a diversity of forms such as banners, calculations, film scripts, and photos—that are listed in the table of contents using lighter font, implying that they operate on a different frequency from the other poems. All of the poems are arranged into sections of “papers”



that are often grouped under the name of a location such as Yorkshire or Montréal, or statuses, such as “fugitive,” or directives, such as “no paraíso do sono” (in the paradise of sleep, in Galician). In *O Cidadán*, Moure uses every method at her disposal, including grey font, charts, graphics, and non-conventional spacing to mix discursive and linguistic codes, enacting the “lability of meaning” (83) as a mode of excessive *caritas* that stretches beyond the love of the neighbour, in Augustine’s formulation, to open outward toward strangers. At the same time, Moure refuses Augustine’s separation of sexuality from the “public relation” (63). In so doing, Moure queers Augustine’s act “tolle lege” (take up and read).

In “document41 (tidal)” Moure asks “Who plays out the complexity of the *hôte*. Where host/guest’s configural. . . . How to live this citizen, without transcendent pleas or Augustinian originary thinking, with Nancy’s present ‘sense of the world’—and, all this, out of a ‘melancholy ego,’ too, from the side of *féminité* constructed in another fashion” (105). On this page alone, Augustine, Serres (mentioned by name at the bottom of the page), Nancy, and Judith Butler (also mentioned by name), are folded into Moure’s wave patterns to form a wet and slippery libidinal textuality that develops her queer theory of noise. The centrality of noise to the kind of hospitality (and citizen) that Moure is theorizing is stated explicitly in “document19 (abrigar). “Abrigar” is the Galician word for the verb “to shelter.” In this poem, Moure argues,

Signal’s clamour cannot impede noise’s *aproximação*. Citizenship’s acts are rather acts of unrecognizable “fullness,” cathected under weak signal conditions

The face or ear that is also a terrain, the harbouring of

“l’autre homme”

without insiting he “make sense” according to *my* structures

Perhap it’s the structure itself that is empty and can’t bear such fullness? (51)

Moure turns structuralist thought on its head by proposing that the signifier is full—literally is the body (51)—while at the same time refusing Augustine’s version of the voice: “Can a report such as Augustine’s lead to totalities? And thus harms? For Augustine totalizes the voice: it is God. Authority and origin” (97). Throughout the book, “signal” stands in for a socio-political “dominant signal” that demands the impossible: to be cleansed of noise. Against this totalizing structure of communication, Moure posits noise. Noise is the structure of possibility (and futurity) and brings a message of hope. Noise tweaks the capacity of the human voice and of the human ear to admit fullness without reducing it to origins, as Augustine does, and is the threshold of recognition, beyond which shimmers the unrecognizable face of the queer citizen.

Moure makes use of intralingual as well as interlingual infections (linguistic parasites), creating new words by joining morphemes across languages and by code switching at the level of the line and even the word. These are only some of the linguistic strategies Moure employs to trouble the rules of linguistic morphology and the paradigm of the citizen as a stable identity composed of requisite documents signed in the “language of the republic” (*Cidadán* 78). Lianne Moyes aptly calls *O Ciudadán* “a field of conceptual inquiry into the epistemological limits of discourses and practices of citizenships” that “work with what might be called ‘a prosthesis of citizenship’” (113), flagging the word *Cidadán* as such an object. A prosthesis can be a “foreign” part that “allows a subject (or nation, text, or border) to function” (Moyes 113). Indeed, for Elizabeth Grosz, there are

two types of prosthesis: one which accommodates existing needs, which fits into the body’s current and recognized needs and desires; and another which introduces new aesthetic and practical possibilities not yet available, still awaiting prosthetic incorporation, yet to be incorporated into human need—the first in accordance with the actual and the already existing and the second welcoming and making space for that which cannot yet be imagined or lived. (152)

It is the second type of prosthesis that Moure’s poetry resembles. Johanna Skibsrud notes that it “is along the border, within the ‘becoming space’ of language, that Mouré’s [sic] *O Ciudadán* is constructed, emphasizing the continuous, active relation between one language and another, between thought and speech, speech and writing, and ultimately, self and other” (16). In this way, the allure of grand unifying theories breaks down with the signal and we are called “to suspend our need to see ‘identity’ itself as saturate signal / (obliterating all ‘noise’)” (*Cidadán* 79). In the channel of the poem, a “contact zone” as Mary Pratt calls it (qtd. in Skibsrud 16), is created, challenging the very structures of power. In this way the poems themselves can be seen as prosthetic devices composed of code-mixing (rather than language-mixing and/or code-switching) of multiple “natural” and “artificial” languages, as well as multiple discourses.

When Moure confirms that “integral to [her] search is a droll query that echoes a *kind* of queer laughter: *What if O Ciudadán were a girl?*” (Wager 155), she proposes a cross-coding of lexemes to form unheard-of-words that will carry us beyond the known (received) world. This reorientation depends upon the use of prosthesis in Grosz’s second sense of “welcoming and making space for that which cannot yet be imagined or lived” (152). The limit between artificial or cultural enhancement and so-called “natural” bodily

function, the border between “inside” and “outside,” is neither stable nor clear-cut, and this point is thematized in *O Ciudadán* through Moure’s use of noise as an epistemological horizon and libidinal band. Moure insists upon a queer hospitality, saying that “[b]oth citizenship and reading, like weak-signal communication, rise scarcely above the noise floor produced by the system itself and do not disjoin from that system. Rather, they enact a porosity, a differential and different relation of desire as it touches reality” (Wager 165).

The reader’s agency is based on the relations between signal and interruption. A reader works by and through interruption. As Moyes puts it, *O Ciudadán* is a lyric address to the reader-citizen “yet a song that is arguably looking for . . . interruptions in the interest of fostering the unruly public relation that is citizenship” (128). What this suggests is that in order for the work to operate as it sets out to do, that is, in order to act as a discursive site where citizenship with a difference is produced and where citizen-readers are challenged to exceed their limits and engage in an ongoing process of becoming-ciudadán, the reader must work as noise, as the third party that alters the relation. For Serres, the third person is noise itself. In his reading,

[t]he parasite has placed itself in the most profitable positions, at the intersection of relations. The elementary link of his individual activity was to relate to a relation; its performances are far better in spots where several relations cross or meet. It is at the knots of regulation, and suddenly it relates to the collective. (43)

Restraint and confinement are prevalent themes in Moure’s work, operating in linguistic, socio-political and sexual registers alike. While Serres searches for a network “without constraint of crossroads, interchanges, intersections with parasites” (44), Moure does the opposite and embraces the crossroads and parasites as the place beside the dominant signal where queer relations stand a chance of flourishing. Her poetics embrace the citation that is not a repetition but a reply; the page itself is where social justice and desire can be reconfigured. In one sense, the way that Moure as a writer re-inscribes the dominant signifying systems of the Western tradition is by taking up the parasite’s position in order to have her readers listen to the static in the line. In keeping with Derrida’s foreigner who calls the host into question, both poet and reader are cast as strangers to themselves and to each other.

It is not a coincidence that the first poem of *O Ciudadán* happens to be a “Georgette,” one of a set of apostrophes to a female lover that the reader intercepts or interrupts. Georgette fabric is sheer with a crinkly surface that is made from S and Z shaped torqued thread (Kadolph 268).<sup>2</sup> Besides acting as a metonym for the desired as a relation to language, the title also

reminds the reader of the structural aspects of the text(ile) and links lesbian lovers' discourse to the *ciudadán*.

The extent to which the reader hears (receives) the content of the *Georgettes* as noise depends upon the expectations that the reader successfully overcomes. Here the poem acts as a channel for a haptic gaze (Deleuze qtd. in *Wager* 92). The conventions of a love poem (the supposedly intimate relation that is made public) are recast, as the reader must labour to intercept the transmission. The conceit of distance that forces the bodies to face/hear each other in a way that might become visible/audible to others, exposing them to risk, is furthered by the demand to “*tender l'oreille*—literally to stretch the ear—an expression that evokes a singular mobility . . . an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety” (Nancy, *Listening* 5). Unlike traditional love poetry that assumes that any reader would be interested and receptive to the speaker's declarations of love, Moure's poem leaves the reader to grapple with choice. While the reader struggles with her curiosity or anxiety as she decides whether to listen to the noise of lesbian love, the speaker of the “*Georgettes*” positions the beloved as noise that has ceased to be noise. The poem begins: “*Georgette thou burstest my deafness*” (3). This move displaces the Aristotelian hierarchy of senses, which prioritizes vision, as sound is repositioned as the primary sense. Smell, taste, and touch follow in turn but vision comes last of all in Moure's poem.

Besides foregrounding the dangers and possibilities of social space, Moure's use of crossings and knots go beyond what Serres imagines for them and also signal queer sexuality, emblemizing the disruption of dominant power relations as well as the risks, limits and pleasures that the pursuit of non-hegemonic desires and sexual practices yield. Discipline and constraint are linked with creative production, pleasure and a process of epistemological and ontological opening out. Jean-Luc Nancy tells us that “[e]xistence tans its own hide” (*Sense* 58) and that “[t]he fragment, or ‘art,’ is the symbolic itself in the place and instant of its interruption. It is the secret—pleasure and/or pain—that interrupts the symbolization of the symbolic and thereby delivers the (n)evermore-of-sense [*plus-de-sens*], the infinitely-(n)evermore-of-sense by means of which existence is related and exposed to itself” (*Sense* 137). The relation of noise to a network is turned into an explicitly sexual metaphor that circulates along with social and political meanings. In this way, the poetic economy of noise is a creative force that operates at the level of the personal as well as the public. The borders so often addressed by critics of Moure's work include those of sex as

a “relation: to ‘extend’ the ‘boundaries’ of such interiority,” as Moure puts it in “document30 (viable risk)” (77). This sets us on a chain of language that flips bits and switches throughout the book, positioning queer hospitality and poetics in the overlap between the fields of kinky sex and Foucauldian sexual disciplinarity. The stakes here are the reorientation of object relations (queer phenomenology) and the alteration of the economy of inheritance and belonging (queer hospitality).

Consider these lines from “sovereign body39 (vis-à-vis)” (102): “visi (vis-à-vis) = a relation, also: isi- a certain symmetry of i’s around a / curved channel./ v = the hand” (102). Besides evoking lesbian sexuality, the hand in the channel also acts as a prosthesis in the sense of “an opening up of possibilities that may not have been possible before” (Grosz 147). In “visi (vis-à-vis)” we might hear face-to-life instead of face-to-face, if listening half in French. The “v” is a letter palindromically folded over itself. It is the first letter in the word visible. The politics of visibility and readability are evident in the erotic possibilities of the hand in the channel as it relates to the “one leg open in admission of caress” (101) of the preceding “Georgette.” But what of the “symmetry of i’s around a / curved channel”? They refer to Intersymbol Interference (ISI) in telecommunication, which is a form of noise. They also refer to the relation of first persons to second and third persons in communication. Finally “curved channel” is an “s” and the “s” marks the plural, at least in English. The v is the relation birthed in the channel, the “vie” or life that the titular sovereign body under erasure is bidding for and remaking in “fugitive papers.”

Intersymbol Interference in Moure’s hands becomes the basic strategy of her poetry of resistance. Intersymbol Interference might be described as a blurring of a set of symbols (message) by another set. One of the causes of Intersymbol Interference is multipath propagation or the noisiness of non-linear “frequency response” of the channel itself, making symbols smudge each other. A wireless signal might reach a receiver multiple times through various paths, for instance, by reflection, refraction and so forth. Different translations of the message might well have different temporalities. This polyvocality or “vocaís multiplicadas” (*Cidadán* 103) has potential to open new possibilities but it might also be grievously misread. In “document38 (empobrecido),” for example, the dangers of “stabilizing *the other*” (*Cidadán* 100) are related to a misinterpretation of both message and source:

In some sense, Augustine’s first hearing ‘tolle lege’ is reception under weak signal conditions, ambient production within the system itself, which he tears

from this ambience and constructs as a command from God: a kind of lateral concomitant speaking (t.l.) is thus invested by A both as binding authority and as “origin” (*Cidadán* 100)

“Tolle lege,” as noted, means to take up and read. In *Confessions*, Augustine reports that he was:

weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or girl I know not which—coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, “Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it” . . . So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. (8:12.29)

The passage that Augustine opens to is Romans 13:13, a passage that extols chastity and the refusal of the flesh. But Moure questions Augustine’s interpretive leap from neighbourhood children and aleatory reading practice to divine command. What Augustine interpreted as God’s voice calling him to take up the bible was much more simply the voices of neighbourhood children, Moure reminds us. In troubling Augustine’s interpretive practice, Moure also underscores the gender ambiguity of the children, noted by Augustine. Therefore, what Augustine read as the Great Outside, or Almighty Stranger, was in reality inside the channel, it was the “ambient production within the system itself” (*Cidadán* 100), as the poem suggests. In other words, Augustine ascribed a divine source to what in effect was Intersymbol Interference, which introduces “errors” or distortions, in this case, the error of origins. Moure contrasts this to the acts of

de Sousa Mendes, Portuguese consul in 1940 Bordeaux, [for him] the voice is enacted . . . the signature on a visa then put into the hands of another . . . 50 years later we have a “report” from his children of the voice he’d heard that made him act against his country’s express orders not to issue visas to Jews or others expelled from other countries. But their report is not *his*, as Augustine’s report of the voice *is* his. (*Cidadán* 97)

By siding with de Sousa Mendes, and insisting on human interrelations and terrestrial cascades of meaning production rather than extra-terrestrial (divine) sources, Moure takes a stand “against Augustine’s *caritas*, for it stabilizes zone disequilibriums: in embracing the neighbour, difference is ghosted over” (78). For Moure, the love of the stranger presents the foreclosure that the love of the neighbour reinforces.

Moure’s queer hospitality hinges on the substitution of a “voice of noise” in place of Augustine’s “voice of truth.” This instantiates what may be thought of as “deviational” morphology, where affixes create new meanings across

languages, and new lexical entries within each, rather than traditional derivational morphology wherein an affix creates a new word (lexical entry) in a particular language. It also opens the possibility of the exchange of non-linguistic “codes” between local participants that fail the test of “language” and thus detection. This complements her entropic grammar (as Fitzgerald calls it) to create a parasite pragmatics that interrupts grammar, lexicon, and context long enough for the reader to question the structures of relation. Moure’s text enacts an economy of folds (she calls this “the jewel,” *Wager* 22-24): signals overlap at the level of the clitic, morpheme, phoneme, lexical unit, line, text and intertext. The principle of “Carpe addendum” (*Cidadán* 29), or seize the addition/supplement, is instrumental in understanding how the multilingual morphology works within and through noise to produce a break from normative political, philosophical, and sexual acts, and to release bodies from pre-given sets of behaviours. If noise is “the system of detection in itself” (*Cidadán* 103), then the word is a prosthetic device that troubles the distinction between “inside” and “outside” and produces visibility and a site of action for those who have been traditionally *sans papiers* to varying degrees, such as those who have born the brunt of colonialism, racism, sexism, compulsory heterosexuality and other forms of discrimination and exclusion.

### **Conclusion**

For Moure, “A citizen uncorks uncertainty’s mien” (*Cidadán* 4) and the touch of the lover is intimately bound in the play of noise and language. She defines poetry as “speech with high [semantic] ambiguity” (Moure, *Insecession* 104) and unhinges it from more readily commodified forms of language. If the work of the poet is “to be all ears . . . to exist according to listening, for it and through it” as Nancy suggests is the work of the listener (*Listening* 5), then so too is this processual form of listening the work of the reader. For Moure, “We are all histories stopped in time. At every moment we have to *establish* ourselves: not *re-establish* ourselves, but establish anew” (*Wager* 122). This is the sound threshold (in both senses) of queer hospitality that Moure tests as the limit of radical subjectivity in *O Ciudadán*. Her emphasis on transformation rather than transcendence is critical to her desire to queer hospitality and structures of kinship. Instead of the host-stranger/guest-hostage dynamic, which resolves into hierarchies based on the dispute over private property, at least according to Serres (13), Moure proposes a reader-listener-translator/traitor-poet dynamic as a new

paradigm, one that refuses private property as the basis of hospitality and instead posits the threshold between language and noise as a movable “table” and the focal point of social and sexual relation.

## NOTES

- 1 Papers are the written trace of a wider conversation that nurtures a research practice. While the people involved in the wider conversation are too numerous to name, I would like to thank Dr. Smaro Kamboureli and Marcelle Kosman for reading and commenting on a very early draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Dr. Eleanor Ty and Dr. Jenny Kerber for providing valuable feedback on a much more recent draft. The anonymous readers, as well as Dr. Margery Fee and other editors of *Canadian Literature*, were most generous and astute with their critical midwifery, and I thank them warmly. Erin Moure graciously answered some questions I asked about her literary genealogy. The errors that remain herein are mine alone.
- 2 Regretfully, there is not enough space in this paper to explain the various ways that Moure intervenes in Barthes’ narrative theory as he sets it out in *S/Z*. I do want to mention that Moure has a long intertextual argument with Barthes’ theory from her feminist rewriting of “The Acts” in *Furious*, to *O Ciudadán*. It is therefore tempting to interpret this subtle detail as a structural pun, a hint that the love poems are connected to the fabric of narrative fissure and discursive opening.

## WORKS CITED

- Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. Ed. and trans. Albert C. Outler. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Blackwell, 1990. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Carrière, Marie. “Erin Mouré and the Spirit of Intersubjectivity.” *Essays in Canadian Writing* 70 (2000): 64-80. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1986. 16-27. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Print.
- Dowling, Sarah. *Remote Intimacies: Multilingualism in Contemporary Poetry*. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 2012. ProQuest. Web. 14 June 2015.
- Dufourmantelle, Anne. “Hospitality—Under Compassion and Violence.” *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible*. Ed. Thomas Calvez. New York: Fordham UP, 2013. 13-23. Print.
- . “Invitation.” *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Print.
- Fitzgerald, Heather. *Finesse into Mess: Entropy as Metaphor in the Queer Poetics of Erin Mouré*. MA Thesis. University of Calgary, 1997. ProQuest. Web. 9 Jun. 2015.
- Fitzpatrick, Ryan, and Susan Rudy. “‘These marked spaces lie beneath / the alphabet’: Readers, Borders, and Citizens in Erin Moure’s Recent Work.” *Canadian Literature* 210/211 (2011): 60-74. Web. 13 May 2015.



- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. I. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Time Travels*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Kadolph, Sara J. *Textiles*. 11th ed. Essex: Pearson, 2014. Print.
- Kosko, Bart. *Noise*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
- MacDonald, Tanis. *The Daughter's Way: Canadian Women's Paternal Elegies*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2012. Print.
- Moore, Isabel A. "Lyric Fever: Erin Mouré and the Queer Anatomy of Lyric Life." *Mosaic* 45.1 (2012): 35-53. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.
- Mouré, Erin. *Empire York Street*. Toronto: Anansi, 1979. Print.
- Moure, Erin. *Insecession*. In one volume with *Secession*. *Chus Pato*. Trans. Moure. Toronto: BookThug, 2014. Print.
- . *My Beloved Wager: Essays from a Writing Practice*. Ed. Smaro Kamboureli. Edmonton: NeWest, 2009. Print.
- . *O Ciudadán*. Toronto: Anansi, 2002. Print.
- Moyes, Lianne. "Acts of Citizenship: Erin Mouré's *O Ciudadán* and the Limits of Worldliness." *Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007. Print.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. Trans. Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham UP, 2007. Print.
- . *The Sense of the World*. Trans. Jeffery S. Librett. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. Print.
- Rudy, Susan. "'What can atmosphere with / vocabularies delight?': Excessively Reading Erin Mouré." *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)*. Ed. Pamela Bunting and Susan Rudy. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2005. Print.
- Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*. Trans. Lawrence R. Scheher. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. Print.
- Skibsrud, Johanna. "'If We Dare To': Border Crossings in Erin Mouré's *O Ciudadán*." *The Brock Review* 11.1 (2010). Web. 1 Sep. 2014.
- Williams, Dominic, and Milena Marinkova. "Affective Trans-scapes: Affect, Translation, and Landscape in Erin Mouré's *The Unmentionable*." *Contemporary Women's Writing* 9.1 (2015): 73-92. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.
- Wolfe, Cary. "Introduction to the New Edition: Bring The Noise: *The Parasite* and the Multiple Genealogies of Posthumanism." Serres. xi-xxviii. Print.

