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Roughing It in Bermuda

Mary Prince, Susanna Strickland Moodie, Dionne Brand, and the Black Diaspora

Canadian literature has, since its inception, been overwhelmingly preoccupied with geography. Susanna Moodie's narrative, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), is recognized as one of the first canonical texts of the English Canadian settler tradition, and has been used to narrate the Canadian nation-space as an "empty wilderness" and a place of "peaceful settlement." While Moodie is seen as one of the inaugural figures of Canadian literature, few critics consider her literary career in England or the diasporic history of transatlantic slavery that haunts her writing.[1] Before marrying John Dunbar Moodie and emigrating to Upper Canada in 1832, Susanna Strickland was involved in the abolitionist movement in England, transcribing two slave narratives: *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), and *The Narrative of Ashton Warner* (1831). Mary Prince's is also a significant first text. Moira Ferguson, in her introduction to the critical edition, describes Prince as "an intrepid woman narrating a pioneering history: the first British black woman to write an autobiography and a polemic against slavery" (28). The language of "pioneering" has significant resonances in the context of this article, enabling possibilities for exploring the uneasy relationship between Mary Prince and Susanna Strickland Moodie in the various geographic spaces they inhabit, and the ways both of their writings resonate in contemporary black Canadian literatures.

By considering Strickland's role as Prince's amanuensis, this paper focuses on both literary and geographic concerns. In the first half, by tracing such a trajectory for Canadian letters, I explore the intertextual conversations

that might be staged when reading Moodie's narrative in conjunction with Prince's. In the second half, I consider the ways their intertwined literary legacies echo in contemporary Canadian writers such as Dionne Brand, whose work is perhaps best understood in conversation with *both* Prince and Moodie. By foregrounding such connections, we might then use Moodie's canonical text to rearticulate Canada as a black geography, and to "better understand the racialization that has long formed the underpinning for the production of space" (McKittrick and Woods 5). Rather than framing Moodie as a settler writer, how might the dominant discourse of English Canadian literature be revised if we understand her instead in a diasporic context? While racialized Canadian writers such as Brand are often framed as diasporic, there are profound implications for thinking about canonical white writers in a similar fashion. Canada's national narrative of peaceful settlement, of "roughing it in the bush," is dependent on the erasure of its violent colonial history, revealing the ways "geographic desires [are] bound up in conquest" (McKittrick and Woods 5). Reading Moodie's narrative through Prince's, however, suggests a different starting point for Canadian literature, one which frames this nation within the Americas rather than emphasizing only its historical ties to Britain and France. Thinking about these earliest connections between Canadian and black diasporic writing foregrounds the histories of violence, colonization, and transatlantic slavery on which this hemisphere has been built.

As such, this paper is a "conceptual exercise" (Walcott 30), not unlike the one Rinaldo Walcott engages in when he uses the figure of nineteenth-century black journalist Mary Ann Shadd Cary to "elaborate a sustainable place in Canadian Studies for blackness" (30). My questions for the academic discourse of CanLit are inspired by Walcott's concerns. I ask: What happens if, instead of seeing Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* as one of the significant starting points for Canadian literature, we instead trace this literary tradition back to *The History of Mary Prince*? What does it mean for Moodie, and for subsequent Canadian writers, to write in the wake of a slave narrative? What are the implications for a literary tradition to have emerged out of bondage? Henry Louis Gates has considered this question regarding the African-American, and by extension the American, literary tradition. But this question has perhaps never been asked of the Canadian literary tradition. Moira Ferguson argues that, in order to fully understand the brutal impacts of slavery we must pay attention to the "conspicuous gaps in [Prince's] narrative" (1). So too might we better understand the discursive legacies

of slavery and colonization if we read against the grain and explore the silences—some notable, others less conspicuous—in and around Moodie's narrative. *Roughing It in the Bush* is most often understood within the tradition of the "settlement journal," situated alongside those written by her sister, Catharine Parr Traill, and eighteenth-century Hudson's Bay Company officials such as Samuel Hearne and David Thompson. By turning to Mary Prince as a different literary antecedent for Susanna Moodie, I suggest that the very notion of the "settlement journal" must be rethought. What are the implications of reading Moodie's text through what might aptly be articulated as the "un-settlement journal" of Prince's slave narrative?

This line of inquiry necessitates a different articulation of the Canadian nation-space as well. In order to illuminate new and more productive spatial practices than those enabled by existing geographic and literary constructs, Katherine McKittrick, in *Demonic Grounds*, suggests that we "have to enter the material landscape from a different location" (15). This is why I turn to Bermuda, Turks Island, and Antigua, the Caribbean locations inhabited by an enslaved Mary Prince, as an alternate point from which to enter the Canadian landscape. I also come to the Canadian landscape via the England Prince inhabited as an escaped slave. The England she negotiates via these "new world" geographies is very different from the ostensibly homogenous "originary" England to which a Canadian settler history is usually traced, elaborating the diasporic connections between Prince and Moodie, whose lives collide in the home of abolitionist Thomas Pringle. I suggest that Moodie's literal emigration to Canada is therefore coloured (pun intended) by the earlier migrations she narrates and vicariously experiences when transcribing Prince's first-person narrative in Pringle's home. The result is a geographic confluence between Canada, the Caribbean, and England that might be best understood through Paul Gilroy's now-famous articulation of the black Atlantic, or Stuart Hall's "re-staged narrative of the post-colonial" (249), both of which foreground the diasporic migrations resulting from four centuries of "expansion, exploration, conquest, colonization and imperial hegemonisation which constituted the 'outer face,' the constitutive outside, of European and then Western capitalist modernity after 1492" (Hall 249). While this is not the symbolic historical moment to which the Canadian settler narrative is normally traced, doing so enables alternate possibilities, both literary and geographical.

Within the dominant cultural discourses of English Canada, spatial metaphors emanating from the settler tradition have been a sustained

critical tool for critics to articulate Canadian literary culture. In 1971, Northrop Frye famously argued that the most significant task facing Canadian cultural producers was to liberate themselves from the "garrison mentality" of colonial days, claiming that the nation "is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?'" (12). Margaret Atwood, a year later in *Survival*, similarly utilizes a language of exploration and wilderness that can be traced directly back to writers like Moodie, calling for "a map of the territory" of CanLit (18). The questions Frye and Atwood raise about mapping and location might resonate very differently if they were examined not through Susanna Moodie but through Mary Prince, and through a diasporic framework rather than a strictly national one. Paul Gilroy, for example, in exploring the liberatory political possibilities of black Atlantic autobiographies, suggests that slave narratives offer trenchant examples of self-creation and self-emancipation by "seeking to answer the metaphysical questions 'Who am I?' and 'When am I most myself?'" (70). These questions, although phrased in the same language, sit uneasily next to Frye's, forcing us to consider that "Where is here?" is a very different and much more highly charged concern for enslaved peoples than those who, like Moodie, emigrate to Canada by choice and / or economic necessity. Further, McKittrick reminds us that black peoples in Canada are "presumed surprises because they are 'not here' and 'here' simultaneously: they are, like blackness… concealed in a landscape of systemic blacklessness" (93). Thus, the "here" to which Frye and Atwood refer becomes an even more complicated geography when such racial erasures are articulated in specifically spatial terms.

These erasures are evident from the opening pages of Moodie's narrative, one of the earliest literary texts to articulate slavery as, in McKittrick's words, "a denied and deniable Canadian institution" (91). *Roughing It* begins with the Moodies' arrival in 1832, two years before the abolition of slavery in Canada and the British Empire. Nonetheless, Moodie erroneously describes Canada as a place in which the emigrant can be "no more oppressed, no more a slave / here freedom dwells beyond the wave" (10). Such an appropriation of the language of bondage is perhaps surprising coming from a writer who worked actively for the abolitionist cause.[2] In an early expression of the dominant national narrative of the last two centuries, Moodie positions Canada as the land of freedom, relegating North American slavery only to the southern United States which she describes as "the far-distant land of the exile and the slave" (489).

The hauntings of slavery, and of Mary Prince, are nonetheless evident from Moodie's earliest pages—if we choose to read them in this way. The epigraph of *Roughing It* includes a poem in which she states: "I sketch from Nature, and the picture's true / Whate'er the subject, whether grave or gay, / Painful experience in a distant land / Made it mine own."[3] Despite Moodie's invocation of transparent space ("the picture's true"),[4] these lines resonate very differently if we consider the "painful experiences" in "distant lands" experienced by Prince, which might be buried in this articulation of migration. While Moodie is able to lay claim to the land, to make it her own, Prince never had this option, neither in the Caribbean locations in which she was enslaved, nor in England, where her freedom is provisional upon her not returning to Antigua, since her last owners refuse to emancipate her. Moodie's opening lines might also reveal further hauntings. The first sentence, "In most instances, emigration is a matter of necessity, not of choice" (3), is situated within an opening paragraph describing her family's arrival to the "new world" on a crowded ship, on which many passengers had been ill and/or were starving. Upon landing, the ship is "emptied of all her live cargo" (16). Without looking to make the suffering of emigration commensurable to that of slavery, I do think that Moodie's gestures to the middle passage make this a provocative choice of opening imagery. Regardless of whether these discursive intersections between the settler and the slave are intentional or accidental, they suggest to me that Mary Prince is *not* "to all intents and purposes left behind" (43) after John and Susanna Moodie marry and leave England, as Gillian Whitlock argues in her study of postcolonial women's autobiography. While there has been substantial critical discussion about the ways slave narratives are mediated, and often expressively limited, by white abolitionist discourse, perhaps the obverse is also at play here: that Prince's narrative also mediates Moodie's. Although I would not go so far as George Elliott Clarke, who argues that Moodie's memoir is "really—audaciously—a displaced slave narrative" (Kyser 863), I think it is important to ponder the multidirectional influence of these two writers, and to explore the possibility that Prince has, in some capacity, shaped Moodie's text just as Moodie/Strickland has shaped Prince's.

Although rarely discussed by CanLit critics, a number of black characters appear in *Roughing It*, making palpable a black presence in Upper Canada from the earliest waves of settlement.[5] Moodie's narrative includes references to a Caribbean-descended, mixed-race neighbour, to a black neighbour and family servant, Mollineaux, and a long story about an escaped American

slave who marries a white Irishwoman and is subsequently killed by rowdy young men in an act of charivari—although lynching might be a more accurate label for this act of social and racial discipline.[6] But the most substantial and significant black presence in Moodie's text is, arguably, the H— family, who arrived in Canada in the early 1790s. The first member of the family to which readers are introduced is "Old Joe," described initially in racially neutral terms as having "a jolly red face, twinkling black eyes and a rubicund nose" (136). The rest of his family, however, is consistently racialized. Joe refers to his father, "a New England Loyalist… of doubtful attachment to the British government" (136), as "an old coon" (137). Moodie describes his children as a "brown brood of seven girls" (138) and his mother, Mrs. H— , is blatantly referred to by Captain Moodie and his business associate as an "old nigger" (140). Moodie also describes Mrs. H—'s red head scarf, harsh demeanour regarding her daughter-in-law, and Captain Moodie's attempts to bribe her with a black silk dress. These images invoke the "Mammy" stereotype. Although, as readers soon learn, however, Mrs. H— is nowhere near as obsequious as this stereotype conventionally suggests. In an argument with Susanna, Old Joe's wife defiantly tells her, "I'm a *free-born* American" (149, italics mine), a designation which resonates all the more powerfully given the family's racialization, and is a notable contrast to escaped slave Tom Smith, the "runaway nigger" (224) who is lynched in a subsequent chapter.

After living on a rented farm for their first years, the Moodies purchase a homestead from Old Joe, for what his family perceives to be an unfairly low price. This purchase, largely ignored by CanLit critics, belies the pioneering title of Moodie's narrative. She and her family do not "rough it in the bush"; rather, they engage in a profitable real estate transaction. The Moodies' displacement of the H— family is, literally and symbolically, an early manifestation of centuries of black marginalization—geographical, historical, and literary. Nonetheless, even after the sale of the property is finalized, Mrs. H— stubbornly refuses to leave the house the Moodies will soon occupy. Her persistence speaks to her unwillingness to be "rendered ungeographic" (McKittrick x) by white settlement. When she is finally forced to move, Mrs. H— expresses tremendous regret at having to leave her home of nearly four decades. She tells Susanna:

> I have lived here six-and-thirty years; 'tis a pretty place and it vexes me to leave it. . . . There is not an acre in cultivation but I helped to clear it, not a tree in yonder orchard but I held it while my poor man, who is dead and gone, planted it; and I

> have watched the trees bud from year to year, until their boughs overshadowed the hut where all my children, but Joe, were born. (144)

In buying land that has been cultivated by black labour, the Moodies have revealed the ways that blackness is implicated in the literal production of space, while simultaneously displacing that blackness from the landscape. This moment indirectly evokes the erasures of enslaved black labour that are foundational to plantation economies and geographies. Evoking a history of slavery also contextualizes the position of the settler within a wider colonial history. W. H. New draws attention to "the term settler as a (tendentious) discursive phenomenon" and "foregrounds the slippage from invader to peaceful settler within the project of imperialism" (158). New also points out that for the settler, land is "an impediment to commerce, valuable only when reconstructed or rearranged" (74).[7] It is this labour, performed by Mr. and Mrs. H— for nearly half a century, through skills possibly acquired as a result of their slave ancestry, which has given the land its value. In *Roughing It,* the only impediments to commerce are Captain Moodie's failed financial dealings in land speculation, and his family's inability to clear it. But in this instance, the H—family's presence on the land, which predates that of the Moodies by a full generation, illustrates that Canadian settlement was neither peaceful nor benign. While the myth of the empty lands usually speaks to the erasure of Canada's Native inhabitants, colonial hegemonisation is revealed, in this instance of black displacement, to be an even more complex process.

The implications of hegemonisation are also revealed in the critical reception of such a reading of Moodie's text. While scholars who work on black Canadian literature consider Moodie's ample textual references as evidence enough to support an interpretation of the H— family as black, "in the field of early CanLit the presence of blackness constitutes difficult knowledge for many critics" who are resistant to such interventions into hegemonic discourses (Antwi 2). Some scholars read the H— family as white and see the racial slur "nigger" as a derogatory, but deracialized, epithet the Moodies use to express their displeasure about squatters. Yet nowhere else in *Roughing It*, or in *Life in the Clearings*, does Moodie use this slur to refer to people who are not black, so I am left to wonder why this particular reference would be an exception. While I have found no historical evidence that proves definitively that the Harris family is black, I have also found no historical evidence to prove that they are not. Yet their whiteness is presumed. In order to make such a presumption, certain

historical evidence must be disregarded such as the fact that the first census in 1731 of Dutchess County, New York, from which the Harrises originate, states a population of 1,727, "of whom 112 were 'blacks'" (Hasbruck 50). The 1790 census cites 440 free blacks and 1856 slaves. Two important settlers of the county, William Coe and Peter Enigh, who settled in 1740, both had a sizeable number of slaves. Moreover, Dutchess County has had more congregations of the Religious Society of Friends than any other in the state (Hasbruck 651), and Oswego, from which Boltus Harris (Old Joe's father) originates, was once referred to as "Quaker City" (Hasbruck 464). The Quakers were active participants in antislavery movements and openly accepted black congregants. Among the influx of Loyalist migration to Upper Canada in the 1780-90s were a number of both enslaved blacks and freed men who "lived side by side" (Winks 28). All of these factors, as well as the tangled, untraceable genealogies of slavery, suggest that it is problematic to automatically assume the Harris family's whiteness.

A debate about the Harris family's racialization must also be understood within the context of long-standing debates regarding the generic classification of Moodie's narrative. While some critics read *Roughing It* as a factual autobiography (Peterman), others have considered the text's various and sometimes contradictory literary influences and the ways in which it defies any straightforward categorization (Thomas; Glickman). Susan Glickman chooses a provocative, racially charged language to describe *Roughing It* as "a miscegenous work, resisting generic classification" (22). Some critics have suggested that we read the text as a novel (Klinck; Fowler). Even those scholars who read it eyas autobiography acknowledge that the collation of multiple editions and manuscripts of Moodie's text "reveals telling manipulations of phrase and detail" (Peterman 40). My point is that, regardless of the Harris family's "actual" racial identity, Moodie repeatedly "blackens" them, racializing them when she talks about their unwanted presence on the land. This speaks volumes about blackness as an unwanted, undesirable, and erasable presence in nineteenth century Upper Canada. Moreover, a reluctance to consider the blackness, and / or the racial implications of the "blackening" of the H— family enacts the very kinds of erasures this paper seeks to illuminate and write against.

Whether literal or discursive, the removal of a black woman such as Mrs H— from the landscape to make room for white middle-class English settlement has profound symbolic resonances. Speaking again of Shadd Cary, Walcott observes that "when gender is raced, the disruption is massive.

When it is a black woman we must consider, national formation is thrown into chaos" (38). In Moodie's narrative, to consider the racialization and displacement of Mrs. H— is to throw the dominant discourses of CanLit, and its presumed origins in a white settler tradition, into chaos. In the interest of imposing order, the settlement narrative relies on the most violent erasures and acts of spatial marginalization. According to Alan Lawson, "[f]or the settler . . . the land has to be empty. Empty land can be settled, but occupied land can only be invaded. So the land must be emptied so that it can be filled, in turn, with both discourse and cattle" (155). While he, like most critics who explore postcolonial settler societies, refers to the evacuation of the indigene, his observations hold true for other racialized subjects, like the H— family. His reference to "discourse and cattle" resonates ominously in Moodie's pronouncement that Canada got its name from the first explorers who exclaimed "'Aca nada'—there is nothing here" (519), and also humorously given that Moodie speaks recurrently of her fear of cows, asking Mrs. H— to do her milking. Moodie's narrative also enacts a discursive "neatness" as well, in its attenuation of this family's story. Readers never learn what becomes of Old Joe or his family. Since their fate is deemed narratively unimportant in comparison to that of the Moodies, they are simply made to disappear.

The H— family's narrative attenuation, however, does not resolve so easily the contradictory refusal *and* longing which their presence invokes. Richard Almonte, in one of the few studies to account for the pervasive presence of blackness in early Canadian literature, observes that "Blackness signals not so much what whites might be, but what they do not want to be" (24). In Moodie's narrative a similar contradiction arises, in that the H— family's blackness represents what the Moodies don't want to be at the same time as it represents what they aspire to: they too long for the knowledge and ability to run a good homestead, clear fields, and plant orchards (even though they never do so with much success). Yet despite this, the final chapter of *Roughing It* includes an extended correlation between geography and white supremacy. Moodie speaks about "the progress of the Northern races of mankind," whose labour in inhospitable climates "has endowed them with an unconquerable energy of character, which has enabled them to become the masters of the world" (519). By contrast, the peoples of "more favoured climates" have, according to Moodie, "remained comparatively feeble and inactive, or have sunk into sloth and luxury" (519-20). In order to reinforce this colonialist mentality, not only does the labour

of the H— family have to be erased, so too must Moodie strategically forget the years of toil, deprivation, violence, and hard labour that Mary Prince (and Ashton Warner) endured in the "favoured climates" of the Caribbean. Moodie reveals this contradictory premise when she acknowledges that the supposedly "desirable," genteel and civilized immigrants, British middle-class officers and their families, are "a class perfectly unfitted by their previous habits and education for contending with the stern realities of emigrant life" (6). But these dissonances, while troubling in their illumination of racial / spatial concealment, also create opportunities for finding alternate geographic and conceptual possibilities within this discursive slippage.

McKittrick argues that "[s]ociospatial reordering moves blackness away from nonexistence and into the nation, wherein the nation is asked to be held accountable for the ways in which domination reproduces different forms of black invisibility" (101). Her argument brings much to bear on this discussion of canon-formation, nation-formation, and spatial-formation. By asking us to read Susanna Moodie, and also the rest of CanLit, through Mary Prince, I am also asking Canada to be held accountable for the ways blackness was and continues to be displaced and rendered either invisible or irrelevant to the nation. As McKittrick further points out, "absence and elsewhere are, in fact, critical sites of nation" (103), insisting on the need to "make plausible a new terrain—a different material and imaginative geography—of Canada and the black diaspora" (118). Reading CanLit via a Caribbean / British slave narrative may not be "plausible" within dominant understandings of this field of study or dominant discourses of Canadianness. But if we make it plausible, both literary and geographic possibilities may arise.

Possibilities for thinking differently about both space and literature can also be explored through an analysis of the ways contemporary black Canadian writers such as Dionne Brand grapple with the historical legacies of Susanna Moodie and the "(un)settlement journal." Just as Moodie's writing is not usually traced to the slave narrative, Brand's writing is not often traced to the English Canadian settler tradition, despite her repeated invocation of some of the literary tropes established by Moodie and subsequent canonical writers. While the Canadian landscape and her place in it have been a sustained preoccupation in Brand's corpus, these moments are not often considered by critics who have focused largely on the migratory, postcolonial, and diasporic elements of her writing. In my attempts to articulate a different way into literary and material geographies,

I explore how blackness and whiteness, nation and diaspora have been mutually constitutive in Brand's work. I suggest that her writing is most intelligible when it is understood as engaged with the literary legacies of (among others) both Mary Prince and Susanna Moodie. While Brand's Caribbeanness is often foregrounded, there are also important ways of thinking about her in a specifically Canadian context, that insist on a decoupling of race and nation and stretch the boundaries of what "CanLit" is and looks like, and the questions it asks of the nation.

Brand's own auto/biographical narrative *A Map to the Door of No Return*, might be read as a complex intertextual conversation with both *Mary Prince* and *Roughing It*. Also defying simple generic categorization, Brand's text is a first-person memoir of sorts. In its meditations on contemporary and historical struggles of African-descended peoples in the diaspora, the corporeal legacies of the transatlantic slave trade, and the Middle Passage and its ensuing ruptures of subjectivity that continue to haunt African-descended peoples, the text is clearly in conversation with some of the major themes explored in slave narratives. But *A Map to the Door* also engages with the predominant discourses of Canadianness. Some sections of Brand's narrative explore the northern Canadian landscape, and in these moments the interplay between Brand and Moodie is significant. For Brand, like Moodie, roughing it in the bush is a matter of necessity not of choice: she moves to Burnt River, three hours north of Toronto, because she "had no money" (150), and, like her literary antecedent, has "ended up writing a few books" (150) during her time there. Brand is immediately disillusioned by the language of "mystery and wilderness" (67) attached to the landscape which she describes as "a crypto-fascist romance" (67). Her concerns, however, extend beyond those of Moodie, whose anxieties are directed largely at a hostile landscape. Brand says, "I have been living out here in the bush for two years now. This place fills me with a sense of dread but also of mystery. I fear the people more than the elements, which are themselves brutal" (143). In foregrounding the way she perceives the racism of the people who inhabit this northern landscape, Brand reveals the manner in which this space is historicized and socially produced, and critiques the powerful processes through which black geographic and social displacement have been, and continue to be, accepted in an ostensibly peaceful settler context. She also draws attention to other processes of colonization through which she has arrived in this place. Recounting a rare visit from a group of friends, one of them, who is from the Six Nations, asks "Whose land is this, I wonder" (151).

It is a profound query that was never made by the largely silent and silenced Indigenous people who appear in Moodie's narrative.

Like Moodie, Brand does not socialize with her neighbours; with uncharacteristic obsequiousness she states that she is "much more eager to please or not to cause offence here in this town, which is all white, except for the Chinese people who took over the restaurant in my last year in the bush" (147). Her reluctance to enter social life, however, is quite differently motivated. While Moodie keeps her distance from her neighbours out of classism and a perceived sense of her own British superiority, Brand's fear drives her into a social isolation that has even greater impact than does her geographic isolation. In "Pinery Road and Concession 11," she tells of an episode in which her car breaks down on a rural road and she sits in it, "wondering how I can get the car to move without going for help" (144). The incident gestures to Moodie's chapter on "The Borrowing System," in which she recounts the many ways neighbours swindle her by borrowing her goods. Brand, however, is reluctant to ask anyone for help, even in a time of need, as she is so afraid of the hostility that will be directed at her. Recalling the classism and colourism she faced growing up in rural Trinidad, she recalls, "[h]elp exposes you to peoples' disdain was how my grandmother saw it" (144). This sentiment, while differently motivated, is not unlike Moodie's, who also does not want to ask her neighbours for anything, despite their constant requests of her: "so averse have I ever been to this practice that I would at all times quietly submit to a temporary inconvenience than obtain anything I wanted in this manner" (84).[8] As Brand sits in her car considering what to do her fear of judgment brings on suicidal thoughts, a sort of death by landscape: "I contemplate leaving the car there in the middle of the road and walking deliberately into the snow and the forest" (144). Instead, she thinks repeatedly of her grandmother. These references and memories gesture to a different place, bringing Trinidad, its epistemologies, and her grandmother's matriarchal wisdom, into the Canadian landscape. Memory becomes a necessary antidote for the harshness the narrator encounters from people who are "treacherous," and "as cold and forbidding as the landscape" (145).

Brand's memories of her grandmother are a coping mechanism for dealing with spatial and social hostility. For Moodie, memories of England are a nostalgic form of sustenance, and she often contrasts her perception of its refined and cultivated gentility to the harsh Canadian wilderness. Nonetheless, like Moodie, whose excitement upon receiving letters from friends and relatives is palpable, Brand is similarly "delighted" when the flag on her

mailbox is up since "it means that there is news from away" (147). But for Brand, the geographical boundaries between "here" and "away" are not as straightforward or compartmentalized as Moodie's. As she moves back and forth between narrating her life in the bush and reminiscing about her childhood, she intertwines the northern Canadian landscape with that of the Caribbean. Burnt River sits alongside specific streets, buildings and villages in Trinidad; the snow and trees of the Canadian North are reflected through the waves of the sea; the forty-fifth parallel collides with the tenth (143-52). In this regard, her narrative might be read as a twenty-first century manifestation of the ways Susanna Moodie's Canadian landscape is haunted by Mary Prince's Caribbean one. Such is one of the many, indirect routes through which Brand offers a "map to the door of no return" in her memoir. Brand's notion of mapping, however, is profoundly different from that invoked by Atwood thirty years before to explain some singular notion of Canadian identity. For Brand, "[c]artography is description not journey" (96) and she insists that "[p]laces and those who inhabit them are indeed fictions. This news has cemented the idea that in order to draw a map only the skill of listening may be necessary. And the mystery of interpretation" (18).

Brand also explored mapping at length in her previous volume, *Land To Light On*, a text that, in its very refusal of some of the dominant discourses of Canadianness, in particular the white settler tradition and its preoccupation with the Canadian landscape, becomes deeply implicated in them. In her first poems to consider the northern Canadian landscape in detail, Brand introduces some of the concerns she subsequently pursues in *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Although large sections of this volume are set in the bush, Brand claims that "I did not want to write poems / about stacking cords of wood, as if the world / is that simple" (7). These lines are striking for a number of reasons. First, Brand cannot easily extract herself from a literary tradition built upon such images. Second, thinking about the ways Mary Prince haunts Susanna Moodie's writing, as well as Brand's own poetic reflections about the landscape in this volume, reveals that the world is not that simple at all. In the opening lines, the rural Canadian and Caribbean landscapes again intertwine: "Out here I am like someone without a sheet / without a branch but not even as safe as the sea / . . . if I am peaceful in this discomfort, is not peace / is getting used to harm" (3). Gesturing indirectly to the settlement narrative, Brand immediately calls attention to her *un*settlement in this space, foreshadowing the violence she will encounter here. As in *A Map to the Door*, the people pose a greater threat to

her than the frozen landscape. When a white man in a red truck threatens her on a snowy road, "screaming his exact hatred" (4), his racist and sexist comments haunt Brand for the entire volume. This moment is a frightening contemporary echo of Tom Smith's lynching in Moodie's narrative for his perceived racial and sexual transgressions. The man in the red truck, in the bluntest way, wants to erase Brand from the landscape, just as Mrs. H— was erased by Moodie over the course of her narrative. Despite the simplicity of how he expresses his prejudices, Brand struggles to respond and to come to terms with her own fear. She says, "I lift my head in the cold and I get confuse" (5). She also states that her "mouth could not find a language" (5) to articulate her fear. These notable shifts to Trinidadian English to try to write the Canadian landscape, and her place in it, operate in much the same way that her reminiscences of her grandmother do in *Map*—they serve to intertwine Canada and the Caribbean, providing her with a necessary vehicle through which to explore the racism that has been directed at her.

Brand's inability to speak the Canadian landscape is a major preoccupation in these poems, even prior to her well-known proclamation that she "don't want no fucking country, here / or there and all the way back" (48). The section entitled "Land To Light On" opens with an extended examination of the mythic Canadian wilderness:

> Maybe this wide country just stretches your life to a thinness just trying to take it in, trying to calculate in it what you must do, the airy bay at its head scatters your thoughts like someone going mad from science and birds pulling your hair, ice invades your nostrils in chunks, land fills your throat, you are so busy with collecting the north, scrambling to the arctic so willfully, so busy getting a handle to steady you to this place you get blown into bays and lakes and fissures. (43)

In an unsettling shift to second person, the speaker makes a direct address to the reader. Depending on who "you" are, this move either invites readers to recognize, share and perhaps commiserate with her experiences of marginalization, or forces them to inhabit this space, to feel what it is like to be "stretched" "to a thinness." The landscape is personified; rather than a passive presence it becomes an active agent oppressing the speaker. Forcing herself into nature takes its psychological toll, provoking madness, while images of corporeal violence abound as the natural elements invade the speaker's body, filling her nose and throat, and preventing her from speaking. In her willful collection of Northern images, the speaker recognizes her complicity, however reluctant, in nature and its discourse

even as it has been forced upon her. This realization speaks to the hegemonic power of the nation and the ways the speaker seems to have become a self-disciplining subject in an attempt to manufacture some sense of belonging.

For the speaker, it "always takes long to come to what you have to say" because she has to "sweep this stretch of land up around your feet and point to the / signs, pleat whole histories with pins in your mouth and guess / at the fall of words" (43). This image of pleating from dressmaking is significant, revealing the ways some narratives are concealed, placed behind others, in order to provide structure and substance to a narrative of peaceful Canadian settlement. The speaker's struggles to speak about, embody, or inhabit these natural images is contrasted sharply to that of white Canadians in her poems. When Brand, her lover, and a friend, all racialized subjects, are stopped by a police officer on their way to Buxton and Chatham—important geographic locations when thinking about blackness in Canada because of their history as black settlements in the nineteenth century—the speaker notes the contrast: "That cop's face has it . . . / something there, written as / wilderness, wood, nickel, water, coal, rock, prairie" (77). While this representative of masculine hegemonic whiteness and the repressive state apparatus is seamlessly integrated into the landscape, so *settled* in the comfortable way he inhabits this space, Brand struggles throughout the volume, contorting herself, forcing herself into a landscape that has no place for her. She draws attention to the erasures she, and by extension Mary Prince, have experienced, pointing out that "in this country . . . islands vanish" (73).

Brand's intertextual conversation with the settler narrative also continues in her subsequent volumes. Although their thematic preoccupations are different, exploring political upheavals, violences, and social and environmental degradation in the current global capitalist conjuncture, both *Inventory* (2006) and *Ossuaries* (2010) include traces of her earlier literary dialogues with Moodie. This ongoing confluence speaks to the pervasive ways Brand's literary corpus is woven into the fabric of the dominant discourses of Canadian literature. In *Inventory*, the speaker bears witness, as she catalogues the wars, killings, environmental devastation, political instabilities, and neocolonialism that have shaped her contemporary moment. Leaving "that ravaged world" (47), she travels into the Canadian wilderness for what she perceives will be some solace from the thoughts that haunt her. This geography, however, does not provide her with the refuge she desires. Unable to familiarize herself with it, she hears "the various last calls of day birds she cannot / name" (49). The images of war that haunt

the speaker also pervade her descriptions of the ostensibly benign natural surroundings. "Hard bodied ants" are described as "border guards" who "leav[e] their radioactive / shells strewn on the floor" (51). Spiders are seen "patrolling the windowpanes" (51); "the path to the lake, / furiously / modernizing their barbed wire every breached hour" (51). Echoing the violent characterizations of the landscape in *Land to Light On*, these images of battle and militarization suggest that the Canadian landscape cannot be a depoliticized space of escape and beauty and nothing more. While the episode speaks to the despairing state of the speaker's mind, it also resonates with the underlying and unspoken conquest that informs the Canadian settler narrative as it illuminates the power dynamics and erasures involved in the production of space.

After various global travels, the speaker again contemplates the natural landscape in the final section:

> but let's leave nature for a while
> how can we, yes, let's not essentialize the only
> essential thing, it doesn't work, it fails often,
> fails, fails whom (96)

Brand's refusal to see "nature" as essentialized suggests that she rejects the notion of transparent space; the picture Brand sketches from nature is not "true" the way it is in Moodie's epigraph. This rejection of essentialism also means rejecting the notion that space is fixed and static; rather, it is an insistence that, to echo McKittrick, geographies are alterable. They are shifting and fluid. They can and must be historicized. Embedded in these lines is also an important question: "fails whom"? The suggestion that nature fails some subjects—but perhaps not others—also draws attention to the ways not everyone has equal access to "nature" and the discourses that inform it. "Nature," particularly as a socially constructed concept, "doesn't work"; it has perhaps failed black and other racialized peoples in a Canadian context. This point is more clearly illustrated when we consider Neil Smith's notion of "the production of nature," which, he argues, "jars our traditional acceptance of what had hitherto seemed self-evident" (7). "What jars us so much about this idea," he claims, "is that it defies the conventional, sacrosanct separation of nature and society, and it does so with such abandon and without shame" (7). Emphasizing that "the concept of nature is extremely complex and often contradictory" (11), Smith's arguments (and Brand's poems) reveal that nature is not universal, nor is it devoid of the social processes that shape other aspects of culture. While he argues

that understandings of nature have historically been informed by Western epistemological legacies and the rise of industrial capitalism, I argue that they have also been informed by legacies of racist discourse, and these are the processes to which Brand draws our attention in the above lines.

Like *Inventory*, *Ossuaries* is a poetic narration of various border crossings, literal and imagined, legal and illegalized, made by the central character, Yasmine. As she journeys, she takes sustenance from "this genealogy she's made by hand, this good silk lace, / Engels plaited to Bird, Claudia Jones edgestitched / to Monk, Rosa Luxembourg braids Coltrane" (52). The image of plaiting her own genealogy, of drawing connections between seemingly disparate philosophers, musicians, and political activists, resonates in the context of my project, which similarly stitches together the historical and discursive continuities between Mary Prince, Susanna Moodie, and Dionne Brand in ways that are not often considered. Braiding together canonical white Canadian literatures with slave narratives and contemporary black Canadian literatures can help reshape how we might view these supposedly different literary traditions in relation to one another, and help us understand them as mutually constitutive.

Yasmine arrives in Canada on a forged passport originally belonging to a deceased Caucasian woman. The photograph of Yasmine's racialized body on an official government document displaces, however tenuously, the historical correlation between whiteness and citizenship on which dominant national narratives have been built. Looking out at the landscape from the window of the train as it crosses the Niagara River, Yasmine feels a "brief relief" (116) from her disillusionment:

> the only thing that amazes her now is the earth,
> its ubiquitous snows and lights,
> and waters, its combustible air, its nocturnal
> screeches and beeps, its miraculous
> colours,
> what to say about that, everything (116-17)

There is "everything" to say about this moment when it is read in the wake of the writings of Susanna Moodie. Yasmine's unexpected amazement is, for me, reminiscent of the wonder Moodie feels at Gros Isle when she similarly takes her first "sublime view" (17) of the Canadian landscape from the ship's deck. Yasmine's fascination similarly continues as the train stops, and her arrival is heralded by a quintessential image of Canadianness: "call it heron, great blue, long-legged migrating alone / north, it broke off, it took air, /

flew into an apostrophe, / heading to the wet marsh of another lake" (120). But, just as Moodie's image of the sublime landscape is undercut upon landing and witnessing the "barbarians" (21), the noisy, partially clothed Irish emigrants doing laundry, Yasmine's fascination is undercut by the harsh realities she faces as an undocumented migrant. While Moodie is unprepared for the drudgery of Canadian pioneering, Yasmine, in the very next lines, reveals that she must "reset her compass" (120) to the drudgery of slaughtering chickens in the Maple Leaf Farms factory. This textual correlation between Yasmine's and Moodie's arrival in Canada may not be immediately obvious to readers, but drawing this connection is one of the ways we can heed McKittrick's request to "make plausible a new terrain—a different material and imaginative geography—of Canada and the black diaspora" (118). How might we, in drawing correlations between twenty-first-century undocumented migration and nineteenth-century emigration, be asked to think about the haunting legacy of black displacement? Yasmine's illegalized border crossing into Canada also reveals a contemporary manifestation of Frye's "garrison mentality," speaking to the ways Canada's borders are slowly being closed to refugees and migrant workers by recent government policy. Canada's long history of racist immigration policy, which has made concerted efforts to restrict racialized others while actively enabling British and northern European immigration, might, in a symbolic sense, be reflective of Moodie's insistence that middle-class English immigrants are the most desirable entrants to Canada.

Thinking about the relationship between Mary Prince and Susanna Moodie illuminates some disruptive moments in Canadian literature. In *Roughing It,* Moodie claims that "there are no ghosts in Canada" (286). But the hauntings of Mary Prince revealed in her writing, and both of their subsequent legacies within Brand's writing, suggest otherwise. In considering literary and material geographies, McKittrick emphasizes that "we make concealment happen" (xi). This is important to foreground. Moodie's narrative does not conceal the fact that her family displaces a racialized family from their homestead—but the academic discourses of CanLit have effectively concealed it by not fully examining this moment. We have also made concealment happen by not thinking enough about the ways Dionne Brand is deeply engaged with dominant discourses of Canadianness, relegating her instead to a "postcolonial" or "diasporic" writer. In many ways, then, this paper has come to rest on a fairly simple premise: that "black Canadian literature" is "Canadian literature" and needs to be

analyzed as such. In *Survival*, Atwood points out that "the answers you get from literature depend on the questions you pose" (14). Rather than trying to come up with answers, I have posed different questions that disrupt any simple division between "white" "settler" writing and "black" "diasporic" writing. In proposing a different entry point from which to explore the geographical concerns that are intertwined with Canadian settler writing, I have endeavoured a constitutive project rather than an oppositional one, to consider the ways blackness and whiteness have always been deeply and inextricably implicated in each other.

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NOTES

1 A notable exception is Whitlock.
2 I also wonder how Moodie, a former abolitionist, can assert in *Life in the Clearings* (1853), that: "The consistent influx of runaway slaves from the States has added greatly to the criminal lists on the frontier. The addition of these people to our population is not much to be coveted. . . . The slave, from his previous habits and education, does not always make a good citizen" (157).
3 She also repeats this verse as the epigraph to *Life in the Clearings*, suggesting a particular investment to this presumed notion of verisimilitude.
4 A term coined by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, which is now widely used by social geographers. In contrast to the notion that space is socially produced, transparent space rests on the belief that space is something fixed, concrete, factual, and easily understood.
5 The few scholars who do explore black characters in early Canadian letters similarly argue that blackness in nineteenth-century Canada is not a marginal presence, but a substantive one. See, in particular, Almonte and Antwi.
6 For an extended examination of this episode see Antwi.
7 John Dunbar Moodie acknowledges as much in his sections of *Roughing It* when he states that "uncleared land in a remote situation from markets possesses, properly speaking, no intrinsic value, like cleared land, for a great deal of labour or money must be expended before it can be made to produce anything to sell" (268-9). He further observes that land is "only rendered valuable by the labour of the settler" (364).
8 Nonetheless, Moodie does ask Mrs. H— for assistance more than once, from the aforementioned requests to milk her cows, to tasks as menial as asking her to sew a button onto one of her servants' shirts.

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