

# Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

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Number 256, 2024

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Editor: Christine Kim

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GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by The University of British Columbia, the Faculty of Arts (UBC), and SSHRC.

*Canadian Literature* is indexed in Canadian Magazine Index, Canadian Periodical Index, European Reference Index for the Humanities, Humanities International Complete, and the MLA International Bibliography, among numerous others. The journal is indexed and abstracted by EBSCO, ProQuest, and ABES. The full text of articles and reviews from 1997 onwards is available from ProQuest, Gale, and EBSCO Publishing. The journal is available in microfilm from University Microfilm International.

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Publications Mail Agreement NO. 40592543  
Registration NO. 08647

**Return Undeliverable  
Canadian Addresses to:**

*Canadian Literature*  
The University of British Columbia  
Mary Bollert Hall, Room 111  
6253 NW Marine Drive  
Vancouver, BC  
Canada V6T 1Z1

Telephone: (604) 822-2780  
Email: [Can.Lit@ubc.ca](mailto:Can.Lit@ubc.ca)  
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**Subscription for Issues 256–259**

*Within Canada* (GST included):  
Individual \$76.65; Institution \$351.75

*Outside Canada* (shipping included):  
Individual \$112.00 USD;  
Institution \$374.00 USD

ISSN 0008-4360

*Print Design & Layout:* Clint Hutzulak,  
Rayola Creative Inc.

*Printing:* Hignell Printing Limited

*Paper:* recycled and acid-free

Christine Kim

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## *Entangled Environments*

In a recent special issue of *Canadian Literature* on the theme of poetics and extraction, editors Max Karpinski and Melanie Unrau draw attention to “Canada as referring, always problematically, to the land on and with which we live, the settler-colonial nation-state, and an ideological cultural project” (5). Considering Canada as an ongoing colonial and ideological environment, they ask: “[I]n what ways might cultural production and scholarship in the field of ‘Canadian literature’ address the unfolding, intensifying, and deeply entangled environmental and social crises that mark the present moment?” (5). They approach environment through a focus on extractivism, which perceives “not only so-called inanimate resources such as furs and oil but also Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour as extractible” (7). To counter extractivism, which they deem tied to racial capitalism and colonialism, Karpinski and Unrau engage with the pieces in their special issue for how they “contribute to envisioning good, non-extractive ways of living and being in relation” (8). The five articles in this general issue take up the particularities of environment quite differently, addressing place in terms of labour newspaper circulation, rural homosocial community, labour protests, mediated nature, and transnational poetic networks. And yet, each article also engages with the question of what it means to “live and be in relation” in these particular environments.

Our first two articles explore the new relationships of labour and care that can emerge despite hostile social or imaginative environments. Billy Johnson’s “*The Maritime Labor Herald* (1921–1926) and the Genealogy of Socialist Feminism in Canada” turns to a communist labour newspaper from the 1920s to trace a feminist

genealogy of socialism in Canada. Contending that the paper's Women's Column speaks to a translocal, heterosocial history of radical organizing in North America, Johnson provides valuable insights into the kinds of literary, publishing, and editing contributions by women in this period, and the ways these contributions highlight the importance of feminist, socialist textual communities that thrived—however briefly—in spite of the hostile environment of patriarchal capitalism. Gemma Marr's "'we'se'll stick togedder always': Male Desire in Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound*" also attends to the interwar Maritimes. Examining the novel *Rockbound* (1928) for its depictions of the intimacies between male characters in a rural fishing village, Marr strives to read the novel in terms of queer desire without resorting either to a language of authenticity or to the cultural scripts that marry authenticity with established, culturally legible codes of homosexuality. Paying careful attention to the romantic friendship at the novel's core, Marr argues that the story's generic, heterosexual marriage plots are less signs that such communities were unwilling to accept queer relations, and more signs that "Day worried his readers [might] judge these interactions harshly" (20).

In "'Bloody Sore': Eugenic Rhetoric and the Production of the Universal Worker in Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*," Valerie Uher reads Baird's *Waste Heritage* (1939) for its depictions of labour struggles in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island. In contrast to Johnson and Marr, Uher invites us to consider the ethics and consequences of an author who neither resists nor anticipates but creates a hostile imaginative environment and projects it onto a radical history of left labour organization in Western Canada. Noting that Baird strove to write her subjects objectively and authentically, Uher nevertheless argues that the novel ultimately offers a eugenic logic of labour, with Baird critiquing striking and malcontent workers as falling short of an ableist ideal of productivity. Although *Waste Heritage* has enjoyed a (sometimes ambivalent) reputation for sympathy and even-handedness, Uher concludes that Baird finally envisions society as best served not by justice, but by a cure.

Our fourth and fifth articles turn to the fostering of creative and natural environments across boundaries. Zane Koss's "Margaret Randall and Transnational Domestic Space: Translating George Bowering in *El corno emplumado*" examines the publication and translation of George Bowering's poetry in Margaret Randall and

Sergio Mondragón's magazine, *El corno emplumado*. Operating out of Randall and Mondragón's home in Mexico City, the magazine sought to foster a transnational, bilingual community of artists and writers in the 1960s. While this network operated in the private, domestic sphere rather than the normative, public one, it was still shaped by the patriarchal order. The Randall-Mondragón home's porous boundary between masculinized publicity and feminized domesticity reveals that, as Koss argues, "[t]he very conditions for such poetic communities are precisely this—the invisible and unacknowledged labour of often racialized women working in the ongoing wake of colonial, racial, sexual, and other forms of violence and exploitation" (17).

In our fifth article, "The Media of Environmental Listening in Don McKay's *Songs for the Songs of Birds*," Joel Deshayé considers Don McKay's audiobook, *Songs for the Songs of Birds* (2008), in relation to Murray Schafer's *Patria Cycle* for what they illuminate about the politics of environmentalism and the media of listening. The boundaries in question ostensibly divide both species and nature-culture, as McKay plays with recordings and imitations of birdsong at the intersection of natural soundscape and technological artifice. By drawing on Dylan Robinson's critique of emplacement and concept of "guest listening," Deshayé reads McKay's idea of poetic attention as offering a "critical listening positionality" that encourages the reader to consider the artistic affordances of more-than-human nature in the age of digital reproduction (11).

Finally, we return to the Maritimes with Sarah Dorward's Opinions & Notes contribution, "A Working Bibliography of Texts by May Agnes Fleming." Expanding upon earlier accounts of Fleming's prodigious textual output, Dorward traces the intracontinental and transatlantic distribution of licit and illicit editions of Fleming's work. The resulting updated bibliography and accompanying short essay resonate with many of the larger themes across this issue: Fleming's literary and commercial success as a female author arose both from her own creativity, productivity, and market savvy, and from publishers' and printers' exploitation of legal loopholes that left Fleming without remuneration but not, Dorward argues, without long-term gain.

Read together, Billy Johnson, Gemma Marr, Valerie Uher, Zane Koss, Joel Deshayé, and Sarah Dorward move us through not only nearly a century of Canadian literature, but also take us from one

coast of Canada to the other and beyond, to Mexico City and London. Within this broad geographical and temporal expanse, the contributors in this general issue focus on writers and texts that have had major impacts on the Canadian literary landscape, whether by generating debates among literary and cultural critics or helping to grow writing communities. Canadian scholars, institutions, and publics have occasionally recognized these works and their writers: by bestowing the Governor General's Award for Poetry on George Bowering and Don McKay, crowning Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound* the winner of the *Canada Reads* competition in 2005, creating courses and research clusters on women's print culture, and making Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* the subject of much scrutiny within scholarly discussions of Canadian modernism and labour struggles. But at other times, as these articles remind us, these same texts and authors have experienced fallow periods in which much less attention was devoted to them. The authors in this issue return to these texts with a shared preoccupation with environments—newsprint, rural, labour, domestic, and natural—and the legibility of bodies within them. In considering the interactions between bodies and environments, the articles draw attention to different forms of power, systems of representations, and multiple forms of engagement.

In navigating these diverse socio-geographical and natural/simulated environments, our contributors also examine dynamics of imbalanced relation through the lenses of socialist feminism, queer desire, eugenics, gender, and technology. To borrow Mel Chen's language, we can see these relations in terms of "deep mutual entanglement" (3). In *Intoxicated*, Chen's focus is directed towards the relations between race and disability, noting that "the nexus" is one that "vibrates, has vibrated, quite resoundingly" (3). I turn to Chen's work in part because I'm interested in how they frame relations to environments, and also in part because of how they write about these framings. Chen offers a model for approaching histories without seeking to clearly define and encapsulate thoughts, instead reflecting on intimacies and how sites and systems are affected and rearranged. Honouring this desire to hold onto the slipperiness of concepts requires resisting scholarly tendencies to pin down ideas and offer them up to readers as discrete definitions. And while I find this sometimes frustrating as a reader, I also appreciate the honesty of this scholarship that lays out the complexity of ideas and encounters as it

engages with their instability. This honesty extends to what is referred to as a method of encounter; Chen shares memories of an awkward, racially tinged encounter with an archivist that occurred before they entered an archive central to the writing of *Intoxicated* and reflects on how this encounter influenced the research that they were conducting. Such encounters within institutional, let alone colonial archives, are far from rare, but it is rare for such impressions to become part of the scholarship that is produced from these spaces. Instead of sharing this experience only with a handful of friends and colleagues, Chen writes the affective conditions of research into *Intoxicated*, and thus illustrates the “difference between editing and editing out” (21).

I find *Intoxicated* provocative for how it makes transparent the processes of writing and thinking as it brings to light the autobiographical traces of how we arrive at our research and the questions we encounter on the way to writing and editing a piece of work. This transparency includes moments in *Intoxicated* when Chen explains that they know the reader may hold certain expectations at a particular moment in the book, but that they have deliberately decided not to fulfill these expectations and chosen instead to take a different path (23). By reflecting on the writing process and also the decisions made throughout, Chen offers a method of writing useful for reflecting upon the changing shape of literary and cultural criticism. In addition to tracing the shifting shape of scholarly fields, such a method of writing makes visible the investments, intentions, and resistances of a writer as they ask particular questions or refrain from following conventions. For the field of Canadian literature, being more open with our own conditions of scholarly writing could help as we think through the constant reshaping of Canadian literary production and understand why certain texts draw readers at particular moments in time, only to be discarded as uninteresting or irrelevant at others.

#### Works Cited

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- Karpinski, Max, and Melanie Unrau. “Editorial: Poetics and Extraction.” *Poetics and Extraction*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, no. 251, 2022, pp. 5–12.

Billy Johnson

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## The Maritime Labor Herald (1921–1926) and the Genealogy of Socialist Feminism in Canada

From the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, the labour paper formed the primary medium through which labour leaders, intellectuals, and writers on the left reached and influenced diffuse working-class readerships. In the decades before the “heyday of proletarian literature and arts beginning in the 1930s” (Buchanan 134), Canadian labour papers helped sustain a rich leftist literary culture. And in the women’s columns of those papers, prominent socialists and local women alike adapted the pre-established format of the “Woman’s Page” to advance new modes of literature and social criticism in counterpoint to the literary traditionalism and political liberalism of mainstream Canadian newspapers. But, though the literary significance of Canada’s leftist magazines of the 1930s has been well documented, studies of literature in Canadian labour newspapers from all periods have been comparatively few.<sup>1</sup> Studies treating labour papers as a distinct genre—as significant literary and print-cultural objects in their own right—are almost non-existent. In light of this relative neglect, it is worth asking: What might a sustained consideration of the labour newspaper—more transitory, but also more widely distributed than the leftist magazine—contribute to the effort to delineate a feminist “genealogy in Canadian letters” before the 1930s (Brandt 8)?

One route into such a genealogy can be sighted in the “Women’s Column” of the Nova Scotian weekly *The Maritime Labor Herald*. Published in the mining town of Glace Bay on Cape Breton Island, the

*Herald* was among the most militant<sup>3</sup> periodicals of the Canadian left during its five-year run from 1921 to 1926. A self-styled “journal of opinion” (“Our Position” 2), the *Herald* advanced a multifaceted program aimed at educating and organizing the working class towards the overthrow of capitalism. By its second year, the paper had well over six thousand paid subscriptions, rivalling that of many dailies and substantially exceeding the circulation of forty-five hundred subscribers achieved by the Communist Party of Canada’s (CPC) official paper, *The Worker*, in its first year (Frank 215; Rodney 68). Appearing well before the Depression, the *Herald* helped initiate a new form of radical, avowedly communist journalism in which working-class resistance at local and regional scales was articulated as an aspect of proletarian internationalism. The paper was consciously translocal and transnational in scope, while the region formed the practical scale at which global class conflict manifested as proximal, individual battles between labour and capital. As the expression of a proletarian culture that exceeded the bounds of locale, region, and nation, the journalism and poetry in the *Herald* helped consolidate shared meanings and common reference points. In this way, the *Herald* exploited the mass mediation of proletarian literature to foster and politicize a collective class identity that was not so much deterritorialized as it was translocal.

Bound to the orthodoxies of the Old Left,<sup>4</sup> this class consciousness did not incorporate a broad-based identity politics. Prioritizing class, the *Herald* largely ignored forms of identification that might complicate the universalist dogma of international socialism. The exception to this exclusive focus on an abstract (but tacitly white, anglophone) working-class identity was the journal’s attention to women’s issues. To be sure, the paper consistently articulated a masculinist ideal of the working class. The “worker” was rarely an unfractured, universal political category, but a historically specific and gendered ideal. However, the paper also dedicated ample space to prominent women on the left, many of whom were members of the CPC, and instituted a Women’s Column before anything similar appeared in *The Worker*. Moreover, the column’s contributors—Rose Henderson, Lucy Woodsworth, Florence Custance, and Becky Buhay—dealt directly with the “woman question,” offering sophisticated analyses of the role of women in industrial capitalism and class conflict.

The *Herald* merits recovery both as a key document in the history of radical labour and for its publication of leftist women's writing in the 1920s. By invoking a "genealogy" of socialist feminism in Canada, however, I mean to suggest more than straightforward recovery. As a particularly salient example of the critical neglect accorded Canada's labour press, the *Herald's* Women's Column also alerts us to the revisionary possibilities to be sighted in the archives of Canada's labour newspapers. The column thus intervenes in a genealogy of socialist feminism in three significant ways. First, the *Herald's* Women's Column constitutes a juncture of the radical left, feminism, and modern literature within what Karina Vernon terms "a critical genealogy" of Canadian literature: "a genealogy of struggle *as* CanLit" and "Canadian literature *as a critical discourse*" (14–15). As such, it challenges persistent critical assumptions about the location and forms of leftist culture in Canada. The omission of these writers from both dominant and critical literary histories may suggest their relative isolation from the more thoroughly documented modernist left of the 1930s, but it is precisely this perceived disjunction that situates them beyond "unitary formations" and within a "discontinuous genealogy" of the literature in Canada (Vernon 14, 15). This should not imply, however, that they were solitary writers of a fragmented cultural formation. During its run, the column constituted a discursive site in which the juxtaposition of polemical articles, poetry, and letters to the editor allowed prominent women on the left to enter into dialogue with local women in Nova Scotia. As such, the *Herald* can be understood to have fostered what Danielle Fuller terms a "textual community" (10), one that cut across local, regional, and national geographies and whose existence outlived the paper itself.

Second, the Marxist-feminist history contributed to the column by Becky Buhay can be read as an example of what Kate Eichhorn, following Wendy Brown, terms "genealogical politics" (7), whereby "genealogy is not only a historical methodology but also a powerful political intervention into the present" (8). By turning to history to demystify the circumscription of women's lives under capitalism, Buhay developed a radical revisionism that was less concerned with narrating the past than with forging a politics of the present. And third, working against its apparent isolation, women's poetry in the *Herald* looks forward by anticipating the intersection of modernism and leftist politics in the 1930s. Indeed, a comparison of Becky Buhay's "The

Machine Awakens" (1924) and Dorothy Livesay's "Day and Night" (1936) suggests greater literary-political continuity between the 1920s and 1930s than critics have heretofore acknowledged. Recognizing that continuity is important not only for what it reveals about the temporality of women's writing on the left, but also for revealing the significance of local, marginal, and nonmetropolitan sites of cultural production to the discursive formation of interwar feminisms.

The wholesale omission of the *Herald* from Canada's literary history is particularly acute given the renewed attention to women's cultural production, interwar periodicals, and the left in modernist scholarship of the past two decades. Writing in 2009, Candida Rifkind articulated the precarious position that women writers of the so-called Depression decade occupied in the literary history of Canada. At issue, argued Rifkind, were the period's "masculinist literary culture" (9) and "a widespread assumption of stagnation" whereby the 1930s were "often invoked in English Canadian literary criticism to describe a time of perceived cultural drought" (6). By thoroughly excavating women's writing and editorial work in periodicals of the Depression, critics since Rifkind have worked to repudiate what Di Brandt calls the "standard masculinist genealogy" of modern literature in Canada (4). Today, it is the 1930s, rather than the 1920s, that are frequently deemed to have been the crucible of proletarian culture in Canada. But though this substantial body of scholarship has corrected the "wholesale omission of the 1930s from little-magazine-based histories" and its "marginalization of women's literary and editorial activities" (Irvine 13), a similar effort to study and document leftist women's writing of the 1920s remains incomplete. The *Herald's* Women's Column is but one site at which this archival work might begin, but its significant contribution to the literary and discursive formation of interwar socialist feminism suggests that any genealogical investigation into leftist women's writing must account for the archives of Canada's labour newspapers.

I take my cue from Rifkind in my analysis, and my approach is also informed by Cary Nelson's foundational work on the poetry of the American left. Nelson's *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* has had a major influence on the direction of Canadian modernist criticism over the past two decades. My own focus on women's writing from the 1920s begins with a premise similar to Nelson's: that in Canada, as in the United States, "[b]y far the largest

gaps in our knowledge [of Left poetry] . . . are not from the Red decade of the 1930s . . . but rather from the half-century that leads up to the 1930s" (Nelson 2). Unlike the poets studied by Rifkind, Irvine, and others—many of whom are in fact now canonical Canadian writers—the contributors to the *Herald's* Women's Column are entirely absent from extant literary histories. Recovering their writing requires accepting Nelson's dictum that "[r]ecovery alone . . . is incomplete without a serious interpretive effort" (2), but it also demands attention to texts and genres that do not comfortably fit within the conventional boundaries of the literary. In part, this demand results from the material realities of cultural production, for "literary work," Fuller reminds us, "takes place within a series of interconnected textual communities" (5), and "[d]ifferent kinds of texts are created within these networks and these, in turn, enable the production of other types of writing" (5). Yet this need to read beyond the genres of poetry and fiction also has much to do with what Nelson calls the "interpretive effort" of recovery. Editorials, polemical essays, and letters to the editor not only helped constitute the broader discursive field of leftist women's writing of the 1920s; they also helped shape the meaning of poetry proper. As such, the discursive context in which leftist poetry appeared, its adjacency with other genres and accompanying materials, is inseparable from its total signification. In this, the poetry of the *Herald*, like the poetry of the 1930s American left, was defined by "an aesthetic of the differential field, through which we read poems not only as discrete objects but as varied contributions to collective discourses" (2–3). My focus here is on the "collective discourse" developed over several years within the pages of one paper, but that discourse was not discrete from the broader context of women's cultural production in Canada.

The *Herald's* Women's Column constitutes one component of the extensive literary, publishing, and editorial work of women in Canadian periodicals of the 1920s. This work was part of what Victoria Kuttainen describes as the "larger universe of Canadian print culture" that was then "expanding, stimulated by a growing reading public, modernizing media, and emerging middlebrow tastes" (145). A broader genealogy of women's journalism also predates and runs parallel to the emergence of socialist feminist journalism in the interwar period. Moreover, as Janice Fiamengo documents in *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada* (2008),

women's contributions to mainstream newspapers were neither uncritical nor apolitical, but evidenced "the intellectual ferment, questioning spirit, rhetorical assertiveness, and moral confidence that marked women's reformist writing in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth" (4). It was in the weekend editions of such newspapers that the "Woman's Page" emerged, responding, in part, to the unprecedented popularity of daily newspapers in an era of growing literacy and rapid urbanization (Kay 9). Such pages did not feature revolutionary rhetoric of the sort that distinguishes women's writing in the *Herald*, but nor were they free of social criticism or literary nuance. As Linda Kay argues in her history of the Canadian Women's Press Club, Canada's "first female journalists aspired to be serious writers," and though they were expected to "[maintain] conventional societal norms," they also "worked hard to transcend the boundaries imposed on them by editors who thought women were only interested in reading about the domestic realm" (4). Women's mainstream journalism was thus, from its inception, a medium for feminist thought, animated by such agonistic struggles as women's suffrage, imperialism and nationalism, temperance and reform movements, and what Fiamengo identifies as the woman writer's "endeavour[], within certain discursive constraints, to create her public self" (20). The history of women's pages and columns in labour newspapers is inseparable from this parallel history of mainstream women's journalism in Canada, a history that has been well documented in the work of scholars like Fiamengo, Kay, and Barbara Freeman.

Far from an anomaly, then, the *Herald's* Women's Column was typical of women's literary and publishing activities both within and beyond the Maritimes in the 1920s. Yet agonism also defines the relationship between these intersecting histories: the women's page of the mainstream daily was at once progenitor and antagonist to that of the labour paper, precedent for its format but anathema to its interests. What separates the texts appearing in the *Herald's* Women's Column from those of mainstream dailies and commercial magazines is the primacy the former accords to the everyday experiences of working-class women. This generally meant antipathy towards interwar liberalism and the "middlebrow," in the sense theorized by Faye Hamill and Michelle Smith: "as a mode of circulation, reception, and consumption of cultural products . . . where art encounters

consumerism" (10). In opposition to what they perceived to be the preoccupations of bourgeois femininity and "the aspirational culture of the middlebrow" (Hamill and Smith 14), readers and contributors to the *Herald's* Women's Column prioritized working-class education and economic justice over upward mobility. They organized educational meetings, gave readings, and held socials, reflecting what Fuller describes as "the construction and articulation of women's everyday experience not only as an intra-textual phenomenon but also as an extra-textual practice" (8). And their literary work was not principally confined to the genres of poetry and fiction: though poetry appeared in every issue, it was dwarfed by editorials, news items, and polemical essays. Recovering this writing is valuable not primarily for its literary merit, then, but because, like the writing of late-twentieth-century textual communities studied by Fuller, "[i]t lends words to lives that are felt, known, and remembered as social realities by particular groups of people" (4). And the social realities articulated in the pages of the *Herald* would take on greater salience for many more women in the Depression decade that followed.

For the few scholars who have given it any notice, however, the paper was symptomatic of the indifference of the regional left to women's issues. In "The Maritimes: Expanding the Circle of Resistance," for instance, Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton argue that the decline of the left in the Maritime Provinces after 1925 owed, in large part, to the "inability of the region's labour movement to reach out and truly incorporate women" (78). Notably, they point to the *Herald's* lack of "interest in women" as evidence for this claim (83n72). "[W]omen played a very limited role" in the *Herald*, they suggest, because there was no financial incentive for the editors to appeal to women readers until "the UMW's withdrawal of financial support" (83n72). This line of argument has some merit insofar as appeals to miners' wives became more frequent after the withdrawal of United Mine Workers of America (UMW) support in February 1924. However, McKay and Morton ignore entirely the significant contributions women made to the paper prior to that date. Furthermore, by reducing the later involvement of women in the paper to financial exigencies and the decisions of men, they elide those women who helped shape the paper and developed a critical strain of feminist thought within its pages. Recovering that countervailing discourse requires a willingness to read women's writing in the *Herald* as a form

of radical dissent that not only critiqued the masculinist logics of interwar liberalism, but also fostered a textual community in defiance of the misogynist rhetoric of the left.

### **The Labour Paper as Site of Tension**

Within the mixed assemblage of the newspaper, the “worker” became a sign riven by contradiction. The sense of a collective and transnational working-class identity in the *Herald* depended on the mingling of local news, items of analysis, socialist symbolism, and poetry. But though the juxtaposition of letters, ads, and articles on collage-like pages suggested the imbrication of the cultural, the political, and the everyday, it could also generate tension. Poetry, for instance, helped consolidate meanings among disparate news items by suggesting to readers their own stake in a global proletarian culture. At the same time, the identification of poetry with “transcendentalizing (or at least transhistorical) idealization,” argues Cary Nelson, could result in a “real tension” when it appeared in the “transitory medium of newsprint” (145). Editors might attempt to resolve this tension by visually marking poetry’s difference, separating it from surrounding content by placing it in boxes (Nelson 145). Such demarcation, however, rarely implied discrete meanings, but rather called attention to points of intersection, especially when boxed poems appeared adjacent to boxed articles and advertisements.

These intersections helped produce meanings in excess of the poems themselves. Such is the case with Halifax-based poet Joe Wallace’s short poem “Voice of the Worker.” According to James Doyle, Wallace was “the most successful, durable, and prolific of the writers associated with the Communist Party of Canada” (66). Though he would later achieve acclaim in the USSR and China, it was in the *Herald* that Wallace published most of his early poetry. This is significant not for what it reveals about Wallace or his poetry per se, but for what it reveals about the function of poetry within the *Herald*. “Voice of the Workers” generates meaning not only in isolation, but also in tension with adjacent advertisements for grocery and department stores. For the titular worker—who must “count” every gulp of “pig’s feet and tripe” and don a “dollar lid” and “shoddy suit” (ll. 2, 7, 9)—the sixty cents that P. Coady’s was charging for a pound of

tea would have been exorbitant; fourteen dollars for a satin-covered comforter at Hinchey's would have been out of reach entirely ("Tea" 3). The poem alerts readers to a profound irony: many of the goods and services advertised in the *Herald* were unaffordable for the paper's readers at a time when wages were subject to repeated cuts (Mellor 137). More than giving humorous expression to working-class desperation, then, Wallace's "Voice" produces meaning across the visually and textually fragmented newspaper page, inviting reflection on the medium of newsprint itself and its relation to commodity culture. In this way, poems could expose contradictions as well as connections, not only shedding their claims to "transhistorical" values—their appeal to an ostensibly timeless working class—but also assimilating the non-literary to the affective field of poetry by making visible deprivations, inequities, and sites of resistance that were relatable to the workers the paper hailed as its readers.

A yet deeper tension, however, affected the reader and subject being addressed: namely, who constituted the working-class readers of the paper. The collective class identity constructed in the *Herald* depended upon a left discourse that championed social equality and challenged bourgeois chauvinism. But during the first two years of publication, the paper's editors rarely explicitly addressed issues of gender. In fact, for many contributors, the reader, like the worker, was white and male by default. As Stephen Penfold observes, in working-class Cape Breton, and in the *Herald* in particular, the "worker" was crystallized in the image of the wage-earning man, and "working-class grievances on a whole array of issues were defined in terms of the miner's concern for family and his role in it as sole breadwinner" (25). Articles often opposed class ideology to womanhood, as when, in early 1923, an editorial warned that wives were a liability for radical leaders, vulnerable as they were to the enticements of "social events, dances, and exclusive affairs" ("Social" 2). And the same misogyny surfaced in poetry, as in Dawn Fraser's "The Wearing of the Red," in which a miner's daughter "with ambitions / To shine in 'sassiety'" becomes the emblem of class collaboration and ungratefulness, a "poor, simple, little pin-head" and a "silly mental infant" (ll. 13–14, 17, 33). Women were not only excluded from identification with the working class in such poems and articles, but also cast as a threat to its interests. Far from challenging existing gender relations and the tacit androcentrism of interwar liberalism, then, the discourse of the radical left appeared to

be all the more invested in idealizing working-class masculinity and policing the boundaries of the political. In this context, the conclusion of Wallace's "Awake!" seems to suggest much more than the masculine generic: "Masters are nothing! Men are all" (28).

### **The Women's Column and Buhay's Critical Genealogy**

But men did not represent "all" of the *Herald's* readers and contributors, and the contributions of several key women marked a critical intervention into the androcentric analyses and masculinist literary culture that predominated during the paper's first year. One year after the publication of Wallace's "Awake!," as if in response to that poem, Becky Buhay's "Daughters Awake!" appeared in the *Herald*. In rhymed couplets, Buhay called on the "Daughters of the world" to "awake" and "demand the rights of humankind / The rights of body and of mind" (ll. 1, 7–8). The poem advances a socialist vision of the world rebuilt, but it is as much a call for women to remake the program of the political left as it is an expression of anticapitalism; gender is not imagined to be subsidiary to class, but works with it, the poem suggests, to produce distinct forms of oppression. Too long "the thralls of men / In kitchen, factory, and den," the women of the poem have been excluded from multiple publics: "without a voice," the absence of women from "history's page" implies both their exclusion from the broader bourgeois public sphere and their illegibility within the masculinist discourses of the left (ll. 14–15, 17, 19). In the *Herald*, the poem reads as an incisive critique of the paper itself, a call to the paper's women readers to "demand the right to have your say" (l. 20). Increasingly, women *were* demanding to have a say in the *Herald*.

In May 1924, the first Women's Column appeared, marking a decisive shift towards more nuanced gender politics in the paper. However, women had in fact played key roles in the paper from its inception. The feminist politician and social reformer Rose Henderson served as a special correspondent and was among the leading contributors of signed articles throughout the paper's run. Social democrat Lucy Woodsworth was a regular contributor of articles on parliamentary politics and women's issues from 1921 onward. From 1921 to 1922, American journalist and communist Anna Louise Strong, whose poems the paper obtained through the Federated Press,

constituted one of the most prominent poetic voices in the paper. And Florence Custance, whom Joan Sangster identifies as “the driving force behind the organization of the Communist women’s movement” (*Dreams* 28), began contributing articles to the *Herald* in 1923. The organization of Women’s Labour Leagues (WLL) beginning in 1923 also appears to have been a decisive factor in the creation of the *Herald’s* Women’s Column. The *Herald* reported faithfully on the organization and activities of these leagues, and in an article in the March 15, 1924 issue, Custance declared that “all true revolutionary workers” would support the mobilization of women who were being “confronted with a condition of extreme exploitation” (“International” 6). Custance thus made workers’ support for gender equality a measure of their commitment to the revolutionary cause, a measure by which workers in Cape Breton apparently fared well. “In the recent struggles in Nova Scotia,” asked Custance, “has the spirit of struggle been found wanting in the women of the working class? Indeed not” (6). For Custance, the organization of working-class women was not peripheral to the objectives of radical left in Nova Scotia, but central to the “elementary struggles in light of preparation for final victory” (6). Ultimately, the contributions of women intellectuals like Custance to the *Herald* prior to 1924 and the growing participation of local working-class women must be recognized as determining factors in the institution of a women’s column.

The first Women’s Column appeared in the May 23, 1924 issue. It appeared a year before anything similar was instituted in the CPC’s official organ, *The Worker*, which at that time only “sporadically carried news of the Women’s Bureau and women’s struggles” (Sangster, “The Communist” 29), and for a short time from 1924 until its demise in 1926, the *Herald* served as the primary forum for socialist-feminist intellectuals associated with the CPC. Their contributions were not confined to the Women’s Column, but it was there that the “woman question” was analyzed and debated at length. This was not to be a column for bourgeois femininity and emergent consumer culture. Rather, as Mrs. McKinnon of Glace Bay put it in an address to the Dominion Women’s Club, quoted in the inaugural column, “politically it [is] now just as important that the women should be organized” in order to expose “the real meaning” of class conflict and “take an active part in working for working-class control” (“Women’s Club” 3). Maternalist rhetoric remained a common point of entry for many

local contributors, but an acute awareness of the need for political action was the overriding theme of the column.

A month after the first Women's Column appeared, Becky Buhay's "Women and Capitalism" outlined the conditions necessitating women's involvement in labour militancy. Buhay insisted that recognition of the multiple oppressions of women was prerequisite to an effective communist politics, for "[t]he woman of the working class feels even more keenly than the working man the struggles and trials of modern capitalism; for the proletarian woman is doubly cursed, she is a slave of a slave!" (3). For Buhay, opposing this double marginalization required the destruction of traditional and bourgeois feminine ideals, a project coextensive with the Marxist assault on false consciousness:

The old picture of woman the gentle, sweet, modest creature (a creature halfway between an idiot and an angel) drawn so ably by the old-school novelists and even present day upholders of the corrupt social system, is fast fading in spite of all efforts of these gentlemen to keep the fantasy alive. (3)

Against such constructions, Buhay called for a modern form of militant femininity, women who could "*hate* as well as love" (3). The system she indicts is at once capitalist and patriarchal, and its overthrow would follow the "awakening" of political consciousness among proletarian women: "a spirit of revolt that must be created within the hearts and minds of the proletarian sisterhood" (3). But such an awakening was not inevitable, and Buhay's analyses were consistently pedagogical as well as polemical. Only by understanding the social transformations wrought by changes in the productive forces of society could proletarian women be liberated from the conditions of "slavery" and the confines of bourgeois morality.

Over the next year, Buhay composed a series of eight articles specially for the *Herald* titled "Women's Place in History," in which she offered a historical perspective on the inextricability of gender oppression and class exploitation. More than a woman-centred historiography, however, Buhay's approach in these articles is best understood as engaging in what Brown terms "genealogical politics" (Brown 119). In her examination of late-twentieth-century feminist

zine archives, Eichhorn builds on Brown's theorization to argue that "genealogy first and foremost defamiliarizes the very assumed order of things" and "reveals that such things are by no means historical norms and thereby not uncontestable features of our everyday lives" (7–8). Rather than a means of accurately chronicling the past, "genealogy is a way to change the present through a turn to the past" (8). Notwithstanding what Brown sees as genealogy's resistance to "necessary political entailments" (119), Eichhorn's description of genealogy here is particularly relevant to Buhay's polemics in the *Herald*. In "Women and Capitalism," Buhay describes her own project in strikingly similar terms, arguing that "history gives to our accepted ideas and codes a rude awakening" (3). It was precisely such an awakening—a radical intervention in the present through a reorientation to the past—that Buhay sought to achieve in her series "Women's Place in History."

Across eight articles, Buhay offered a sweeping history of gender relations from "primitive communism" in "the earliest times," through ancient Rome, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation, up to the rise of industrial capitalism ("History—1" 3). Buhay's final three articles dealt with marriage, the social roles of women, and women's working conditions. To develop her analysis, Buhay drew on foundational Marxist texts. She refers in passing to Friedrich Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* (1879; trans. 1910). In her attempt to synthesize Marxism and feminism into a coherent historical narrative and a concrete political program, Buhay accepted the economic determinism of Marxist orthodoxy. In so doing, however, she validated gender as a legitimate subject of left analysis, and as an axis of oppression that required special attention. More than this, her revisionist appeal to matriarchal prehistory situated feminism as the necessary counterpart to anticapitalism. Beyond its obvious materialist approach to the history of gender and familial relations, Buhay's genealogy accepts as its starting point the "myth of matriarchal prehistory" (Eller 2), first articulated by Engels but later expanded upon by other key communists like the German Marxist theorist and feminist Clara Zetkin (3). Buhay argued that the rise of class society and private property entailed a shift from primarily matrilineal and matrilineal forms of social organization, in which gender oppression was non-existent, to a patriarchy under which women were excluded from

social production (Buhay, “History—1” 3). For Buhay, there was much to be gained from Engels’ argument that “the first class oppression [coincided] with that of the female sex by the male” (739), but the focus on matriarchal prehistory was less significant for its claim to historical veracity than as a model for future emancipation.

Buhay’s engagement in a “genealogical politics” consists, in an attenuated sense, in this critical deployment of history. More than an alternative to dominant, teleological explanations of conventional gender divisions, Buhay takes as her subject the origins of the present conditions of women’s oppression in “the modern form of family life” (“History—1” 3). Insofar as those conditions are reducible to changes in the productive forces of society, Buhay’s feminist historiography does not radically innovate upon its sources. Certainly, Buhay sustains a sense of contingency and variability in her analyses. For Buhay, the matriarchal myth is proof that gender oppression was neither timeless nor unchangeable, and that women’s liberation was not only possible but strictly necessary within the broader context of class struggle. Yet when read at its original site of publication—in its interplay with local news, correspondence, and the total signification of the newspaper—Buhay’s history obtains the immediacy of critique. Combined with her collective mode of address, Buhay’s insertion of local struggles into a global history of gender relations interpellated the *Herald’s* women readers as subjects in and of that history. Not simply in Buhay’s historiography, but across the articles, poems, local and international news items, working-class women encountered a history of their becoming subjects in the struggle against gender oppression. The newspaper page itself became a discursive field for genealogy, in a Foucauldian sense, as “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish historical knowledge of struggles” (83). The creation of a translocal textual community in the *Herald’s* Women’s Column, then, was also a process of subjectification, hailing women as subjects in and of working-class history.

### **The Textual Community of Interwar Socialist Feminism**

In the pages of the *Herald*, Buhay provided the paper’s most sustained and sophisticated socialist-feminist analyses. Her articles would appear there until the paper’s demise in 1926. But Buhay’s were not the

only contributions from leading women in the CPC. Florence Custance continued to contribute articles. Annie Buller offered cultural commentary on “Working Class Movies” and, in “Women and War,” called on women to “become fighter[s]” in the “only war” that “women should and must support . . . the final war for the liberation of the working class from capitalism” (3). Alongside these original contributions were articles by both international Marxist intellectuals and more moderate voices on the Canadian left. The most notable among the latter was Rose Henderson, an Irish Canadian journalist, social worker, and socialist feminist, who served as special correspondent for the *Herald* from 1922 to its demise. From England, Scotland, and Ireland, Henderson contributed articles on topics ranging from “The Irish Question” and British parliamentary politics to “England’s Surplus Women.” More journalistic than Buhay’s analyses, Henderson’s articles helped to localize transnational proletarian culture for readers and, in turn, to cast local struggles within a broader vision of global solidarity.

In “Capital Internationalism,” for example, Henderson compared the situation of Welsh miners to that of miners in Nova Scotia, America, and Europe. She argued that miners everywhere had been “pitted” against one another and must become “as class conscious as their exploiters and recognize their international solidarity and interdependence” (1). Elsewhere, Henderson wrote extensively on the Irish Civil War. In articles like “Civil War in Ireland,” as Peter Campbell points out, Henderson offered direct analyses of the Irish situation, but “her real purpose was to use that situation to communicate . . . international significance” (93). Henderson drew on the “Canadian working-class reality of the unemployment of the postwar period,” explains Campbell, to attack militarism and military spending in Canada and Ireland alike (93). Henderson’s journalism certainly drew parallels between Irish workers and their Canadian counterparts generally, but it is also important to recognize the urgency and relevance that Henderson’s anti-militarism would have had in Nova Scotia when it appeared in the September 16, 1922 issue of the *Herald*. The article was published exactly one month after more than twelve hundred soldiers—a quarter of Canada’s standing army in 1922—were sent to Glace Bay in response to a one-hundred per cent strike by the miners of District 26. It was these sorts of resonances that most effectively fostered a sense of transnational solidarity and

identity. Writers like Henderson thus interpreted to working-class readers the transnational linkages that not only brought the relevance of foreign class conflicts into focus, but also imbued local struggles with national and global significance.

It is the *Herald's* publication of articles and letters by local women, however, that evidences the emergence of a translocal textual community. If, as Fuller argues, "the creation of a textual community is an essential means of putting group-based experiences (of gender, social class, and/or race) into words" (10), then the textual community of socialist feminism in the *Herald* is best gleaned in the dialogic interplay among contributions from local and national women. Annie Whitfield, a CPC member and leading activist in the militant New Aberdeen WLL, wrote letters to the *Herald* attacking Besco executives and reactionary union officials by name (Penfold 38; Whitfield 3). In "Anti-Lenin Lies," Glace-Bay resident Blanche Carter assails public schools for inculcating children in liberal ideology—"can you blame the present generation," she asks, "if they prefer yellow to Red, after such teaching?" (4). Carter's communist zeal matched that of any other contributor to the paper and she concludes her letter with an apostrophe to the spirit of Lenin, whose immortality was her "most earnest prayer" (4). In "Women Should Organize," Bert Boone appealed to a maternal sense of justice, insisting that women should be "organized and fighting shoulder to shoulder with our men" (5). Other letters were less overtly political, describing instead the deplorable living conditions in the colliery towns and the mistreatment of women and children by company stores and police. These local contributions lent immediacy to the theoretical and the historical by articulating personal experiences of exploitation and resistance, while Buhay's conception of history as "accumulated experience" validated those personal narratives as legitimate and profoundly political expressions ("History—1" 3). Encouraged by the appearance of their letters and articles alongside those of leading communist women, women in Nova Scotia responded to what they read, and they articulated their own experiences as part of a shared textual community.

Together, these local, national, and international contributions redirected the *Herald* towards a more nuanced gender politics even as they entered into tension with the paper's masculinist rhetoric and the broader androcentrism of the Canadian left. And like other letters,

news items, articles, and poems, the paper's socialist-feminist discourse transcended the nexus of local and national political affiliations. Women writers such as Henderson were already central to the paper's international scope, but the activities of the WLLs, reported on in the *Herald* and often providing financial support to the paper, added an institutional dimension to the internationalism of the communist women's movement. The CPC's women's department had been formed on the advice of the International Women's Secretariat, an auxiliary body of the Comintern Executive. Custance herself attended the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern, and WLLs in Nova Scotia, though enjoying "some local autonomy," were "guided by the general goals of the larger Federation of WLLs" under the direction of Custance (Sangster, *Dreams* 30). In this way, the formal channels of communist internationalism had tangible if oblique consequences for organization at the local scale. More importantly, the *Herald* was a medium for transnational exchange, putting the voices of women at local and national scales into dialogue with contemporary intellectual currents across North America, Europe, and Russia.

If the paper's appeals to "workers" tacitly hailed men as the principal subjects of class struggle, then the introduction of gender-conscious and socialist-feminist discourse within and beyond the Women's Column marked a significant renovation to the collective class identity promoted in its pages. Increasingly, working-class women were called upon *as women* to participate in a common proletarian culture, to imagine their own struggles in solidarity with working-class women globally. This was not only accomplished through analyses by writers like Henderson, Custance, and Buhay, which situated the plight of working-class women within the context of international capitalism, but also through the identification of local women with proletarian internationalism. Accordingly, Boone's invitation to local women to join the WLLs in the struggle against Besco became an invitation to partake in global revolution against the "capitalist class": "We workers are going to own [the means of production] and the organized working women of the world are going to help bring this about. Come join us!" (5). Boone positions herself not as a wife supporting her "worker" husband, but as a working woman "of the world," a subject in a transnational movement for working-class liberation. If Buhay's "Daughters Awake!" signalled a call to the *Herald's* women readers for an awakening political

consciousness, then women like Boone, Carter, and Whitfield were proof that that call had been answered. In this respect, the poetry published in the *Herald*, both within and beyond the Women's Column, was not extraneous but central to the affective dimensions of working-class subjectivity.

### Proletarian Modernism in Becky Buhay's "The Machine Awakens"

It is of no small significance that the only original poems besides Joe Wallace's to exhibit formal experimentation came from the pen of Buhay. Unlike Wallace's, however, Buhay's poems were never reprinted in the CPC's national paper, *The Worker*, and her poetry has been entirely forgotten. Though she only contributed a few poems, one is particularly noteworthy for its decisive move towards formal innovation and modernist sensibility. "The Machine Awakes," published in the *Herald's* July 19, 1924 issue, presents a dystopic montage of physical degradation and confinement in fifty-three lines of free verse. Unlike "Daughters Awake!," the poem is not addressed strictly to working-class women, but Buhay casts her embodied, working-class subjects in terms that reject the tacit coding of gender evident in the masculinist and sometimes misogynist poems of Wallace and Fraser. The resulting poem re-inserts working-class women into the immediate space of class struggle and moves beyond the conventions of formal traditionalism.

"The Machine Awakens" confronts the alienating conditions of capitalist modernity directly and in an unmistakably modern poetic idiom. Its title and denouement, suggestive as they are of political awakening and impending revolution, uphold Proletkult dicta to avoid "bourgeois" pessimism, but its several paratactic tableaux are distinctly imagistic:

Pale blood-sapped faces of the men bent over their  
ironing boards,  
Yellow, unhealthy puffed cheeks of the operators,  
Elderly women work-worn. (ll. 15–17)

Here, and through the first half of the poem, Buhay broadly eschews sentiment and discursiveness in order to register the toll factory labour

takes on the bodies of workers who appear as pallid, “weary eyed,” “living corpses” (ll. 19, 39). If the poem finally fails aesthetically, abandoning the objective correlative for profuse zeal in its concluding lines, it is only to meet the political imperative to revolutionary inspiration. On the whole, the poem reads as a forgotten precursor to the canonical “prototype of the Canadian documentary poem” (Vellino 46), Dorothy Livesay’s “Day and Night.” Both poems deploy choreography and acoustics to figure the factory as a site of confinement and resistance, and Buhay’s poem, like Livesay’s, depends upon the juxtaposition of “contradictory concepts”: “arduous, exhausting, repetitive labour and the exhilarating instant of historical change” (McCallum 192). Livesay’s workers “[turn] the other way” (162); Buhay’s “automatons” are literally transformed into human agents as “the air becomes electric with new life” (53). The remarkable resonance between the two poems is suggestive not so much of direct poetic influence but of their poetics’ location within a common genealogy of Canadian proletarian modernism that begins before the 1930s.

A more direct poetic influence is possible, however, and deserves further investigation. Buhay was certainly known to Livesay. The two were among several communist women to attend the founding convention of the Canadian League against War and Fascism in 1934, during which the women in attendance “met separately one evening and formed a National Women’s Council” (Sangster, *Dreams* 144). In Livesay’s retrospective of the 1930s, *Right Hand Left Hand* (1977), she includes Elizabeth Morton’s “Report of the Women’s Committee,” which lists Buhay as a delegate, and both Livesay and Buhay were appointed to the Women’s Committee (Morton 91). In the years that followed, Livesay reported on several rallies and demonstrations at which Buhay spoke, and Livesay was a friend of Buhay’s close comrade Joe Wallace, whose poems appeared alongside Buhay’s in the *Herald*. Of course, acquaintance does not suggest poetic influence. Livesay’s poem is longer and adopts more regular metres and rhythms. The broad setting and subject of the poems—both poems register the violent inscription of labour upon the bodies of workers with emphasis on the tactile and sonic space of the factory—is not unique to these poets.

Nevertheless, the similarities are striking. In Buhay’s poem, “living automatons” move in “rhythm” “backwards and forwards” to the “tumult of the machines” (ll. 2, 15); in Livesay’s, workers take “One step

forward / Two steps back” to the “Smashing rhythm” of “machines” and a “roaring voice” (ll. 9–10, 19, 8). In both poems, this industrial choreography figures as a dance: Livesay’s workers “dance in time to the machines” (l. 8), while in Buhay’s poem, the “rhythm of their feet and hands” quickens as “the roar of machines breaks into song” (ll. 31, 35). Buhay’s workers are literally suffocating within their factory jail, as they “puff and blow, trying to inhale the air” (l. 6); meanwhile, Livesay’s workers “Blow [their] breath” and are “smothered” (ll. 79, 80). And yet, unlike Livesay, Buhay was not responding to “the specific historical conjuncture of the mid-1930s” (McCallum 192). Buhay’s poem prefigures the poetic preoccupation of later modernists on the left, but it was in the context of working-class struggle in Nova Scotia and in the pages of the paper in which it was published, that it lends affective weight to the cultural-political program of the left. Buhay offered an affectively charged poetic that suggested to the paper’s working-class readers that their struggles were not only historical—events worthy of analysis—but also monumental, worthy of art and posterity. What we gain from a comparison of Buhay’s poetry with Livesay’s, then, is not simply a revised timeline that extends the genealogy of women’s left-modernism backward, but a historical sense of poetic value: an appreciation for how locally situated material realities inflected the meaning of ostensibly transcontinental poetics. In the 1920s, few readers in Canada would have been as attuned to the revolutionary poetics of “The Machine Awakens” as the readers who encountered it in the pages of the *Herald*.

## Conclusion

The dynamism and militancy that characterized the *Herald* through its first four years never abated while it survived, but publishing the paper became increasingly unviable in the face of deteriorating working conditions, intensifying labour action, and repeated attacks by local authorities and company police. When, in March 1925, District 26 began its fourth major strike in four years, the *Herald* had to cut its issues down to just four pages. By mid-March, more than twelve thousand workers were on relief in the mining towns of Cape Breton (Forbes 60). A month later, Agnes McPhail spoke to Parliament of the desperate conditions she had found there during a recent visit. The

*Herald*, McPhail conceded, “prints wild things,” but “we too would print just as wild things if we had suffered what they had suffered” (Government of Canada 1731). Two weeks after her address, the *Herald*’s offices and printing plant were burned to the ground. The paper would eventually be revived at four pages per issue and run from January to July 1926, but it never regained the support it had enjoyed prior to the 1925 strike. The textual community forged in the pages of the Women’s Column would endure, however, when, one month after the *Herald*’s demise, *The Woman Worker* (1926–29), the official newspaper of the Canadian Federation of WLLS, began publication under the editorial direction of Custance. Its first issue featured an article by Whitfield on “Housing Conditions” as well as a letter on workers’ compensation in Cape Breton.

None of the contributors to the *Herald*’s Women’s Column, be they Nova Scotian women or CPC leaders, be they Whitfield, Henderson, or Buhay, have been remembered for their writing. As with the writerly activities of most leftist women of the 1920s—often published in the pages of ephemeral labour papers like the *Herald*—they remain largely absent from the history of early-twentieth-century women’s writing in Canada, obscured by a prevailing narrative of cultural conservatism and “1920s literary nationalism” (Rifkind 6). Of course, the advantage of rectifying that critical neglect is not to recuperate these writers for a progressivist, forward-marching history of the feminist left, much less as models for contemporary resistance. The *Herald*, in itself, did not inaugurate a genealogy of socialist feminism in Canada. Reading it, however, does suggest what such a genealogy should include. A more sustained engagement with the labour press is necessary, in the first instance, for such serious archival research is part of the “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary” work of genealogy (Foucault 139). But by providing us with alternative routes into the past, the archives of women’s writing in the labour press also challenge us to rethink persistent critical assumptions about the locations and forms of culture in Canada. Papers like the *Herald*—published in a small, industrial town on Cape Breton Island—unsettle the metropolitan bias of literary and print culture studies by revealing that local, marginal locations are productive of, and not merely receptive to, innovative literature, culture, and politics. Similarly, the form of the newspaper itself—both in its blurring of the boundaries between the literary and journalistic and in its demand for historicity—resists the generic

assumptions of literary studies, in which newspapers and periodicals continue to be read merely as repositories for isolated texts. And, in line with the “critical and creative practices of writers and scholars” identified by Vernon (15), attending to the work of interwar socialist feminists also lends added historical sense to “our own moment of struggle” (13), checking the critical impulse to read our own contemporaneity against a purportedly less sophisticated past.

If, as Rifkind suggests, the 1930s “shimmer with the allure of a precise beginning and end” (5), then the socialist-feminist formation of the *Herald* might best be understood as one among multiple beginnings. Their influence on those who followed is tenuous and partial, but the women who contributed to the paper consciously responded to the contradictions of twentieth-century capitalism, the masculinist dictates and misogyny of the radical left, and the alienating, degrading conditions of modern industrial life. Their writing was often ideologically dogmatic, but it was always anathema to the economic liberalism and social conservatism that formed the ideological core of interwar Canadian nationalism. If only rarely modernist in aesthetics and form, their writing nevertheless achieved a modern sensibility by taking a stance of uncompromising critique. In so doing, they embraced a collective past to imagine different ways of being in the future, to excavate “the ruins” of history, as Buhay puts it, and “upon those ruins create a newer and better world” (“History—2,” 3).

#### Notes

1. For a study of the nineteenth-century labour press, see Ron Verzuh’s *Radical Rag: The Pioneer Labour Press in Canada* (1988). For studies of individual papers, see Joan Sangster and Margaret Hobbs’ *The Woman Worker* (1999), David Buchanan’s “‘Yours for the Revolution’: Communication and Identity in the *Western Clarion*” (2015), and chapter four of Dean Irvine’s *Editing Modernity in Canada* (2008). In her 2019 PhD thesis, Andrea Hasenbank summarizes the state of scholarship on “print materials from the radical and Communist-affiliated Left” (ii), writing that, though “similar texts have been studied in the context of legal evidence or political propaganda, they have rarely been considered as print objects in themselves” (ii).
2. Though some archives, including the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia, index the paper under the title *The Maritime Labour Herald*, using the Canadian spelling “Labour,” the paper used the American spelling “Labor” throughout its run. The choice of spelling may have resulted from the editors’ desire to appeal to

- other radical left districts of the United Mine Workers of America in the United States.
3. Though 1919 alone saw the demise of eight labour papers across Canada, at least ten were still publishing in cities and industrial towns in the early 1920s. For directories of early labour papers in Canada, see Robbins Elliot's "The Canadian Labour Press from 1867: A Chronological Annotated Directory" (1948) and Buchanan's "Early Labour Newspapers." McKay and Morton deem the *Maritime Labor Herald* "ultra-radical" (74), while CPC secretary Tim Buck cites the *Herald*—along with *New Democracy* (Hamilton, 1919–23) and the *BC Federationist* (Vancouver, 1911–25)—as a model for the CPC's *The Worker* (26).
  4. The "Old Left" refers broadly to those Marxist-Leninist and Social Democratic movements in North America and Europe prior to the 1960s that favoured economic explanations of historical change and prioritized class struggle over issues of social justice. The term was developed to distinguish those early movements from the "New Left," a movement that emerged out of the countercultural revolution of 1960s and placed far greater emphasis on feminism, identity politics, and intersectionality to advocate for "local control of the political process, accessibility to political and social institutions and participatory democracy" (Kostash).

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## *“we’s’ll stick togedder always”: Male Desire in Frank Parker Day’s Rockbound*

Set on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, Frank Parker Day’s 1928 novel *Rockbound* offers a complicated depiction of class and social hierarchies, patriarchal oppression, and the constraint of tradition. The narrative follows David Jung as he arrives in the small island community and establishes a sense of home and self-worth. The landscape is harsh, and the social customs and hierarchies of the community are well established. Uriah Jung, David’s uncle and owner of the local fishery, is a greedy patriarch who controls the island until tensions flare in the wider community. Despite the brutal conditions of the fishery and scrutiny from his uncle and others, David is hopeful and self-reflective as he works to understand his new life. David reflects in particular detail on his relationship with young Gershom Born. Though, initially, Gershom is a mentor to David, as their relationship develops, it becomes marked by a mutual desire to maintain close ties despite changing circumstances.

As the novel advances, David and Gershom’s mutual longing becomes central. This connection is romantic, passionate, and intimate, and is marked by an ambiguity that allows for thinking differently about relations between men in working-class, rural environments at the turn of the twentieth century. To discuss their relationship, I turn to four key moments in the novel that offer insight into male relations in this period. Each plot point—the introduction of Gershom Born, David’s marriage to Tamar, the arrival of Mary Dauphiny, and Gershom’s death—shifts the flow of the narrative and, to differing degrees of effectiveness, exposes the intimate connection between the men. I also use historical context to outline the parameters of male relation in rural Atlantic Canada alongside Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concept of the erotic triangle. Because little

attention has been paid to such male dynamics in Atlantic Canadian literature and history, following how David and Gershom's relationship parallels and even surpasses heterosexual connection complicates how *Rockbound* has been discussed and troubles simplified histories of desire in the Atlantic region. Ultimately, their relationship suggests that intense connection between men in rural Nova Scotia can be a powerful marker of self-actualization and belonging, while also raising questions about why this connection cannot be fully articulated or recognized in the narrative.

There are competing factors to consider when reading *Rockbound* queerly, as navigating male desire in the rural past can be a difficult practice. First, it is important to consider Day's methodology, as well as responses to the novel over time. It is well documented that Day took detailed notes on and held a longstanding connection to rural Nova Scotia (Davies, Afterword 301). Not only is the novel's setting based on the real island of Ironbound, which he visited for inspiration as an adult, but Day also spent much of his young life exploring the province with his father and with teams of fishermen. Day eventually left to attend and then teach at various universities; he spent time at Mount Allison University, was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford in 1905, and spent a year in Berlin before returning to Canada in 1909. Later, while holding an academic position in Pittsburgh, Day entered the military, after which he returned to teach in the United States (Davies, Afterword 298–99). Despite long absences from the region, Gwendolyn Davies writes of Day's "ongoing relationship with his native Nova Scotia throughout this period, often making summer visits or fishing expeditions to the province" (300). These connections to the province deeply influenced his use of "stark realism," which was lauded by early readers and critics as part of the novel's power (Davies, *Studies* 186). In short, many readers appreciated the text as a window into the world of a rural, Nova Scotian fishing village.

Importantly, this interest continues into the current moment. An overview of the novel's *Goodreads* page shows that twenty-three per cent of reviewers were drawn to or would recommend *Rockbound* explicitly because of its 2005 appearance on the CBC program *Canada Reads*. As an early mandate explains, *Canada Reads* aims to "reflect Canadians to themselves through literature; [t]o unify the country; [t]o support the literacy movement; . . . [t]o provide an escape from the realities of everyday life; [t]o help the publishers of Canadian

books” (Peter Kavanagh and Talin Vartanian qtd. in Fuller and Rehberg Sedo).<sup>1</sup> This mandate seems to have been met when it comes to *Rockbound*, which was out of print until 1973, with a small reprinting by the University of Toronto Press in 1989. Until 2005, per the press’ website, the reprinted edition sold “around 200 copies of the book per year”; however, after “the Canada Reads debates . . . UTP has sold over 35,000 copies and it has been reprinted three times.” As an underdog competitor on the CBC program, *Rockbound* procured a narrow victory over works by Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen, Jacques Poulin, and Mairuth Sarsfield. The “wave of nostalgia and idealism about regional cultures whipped up by the celebrity panelists” reached a large audience on both radio and television broadcasts and became the focus for many book clubs and reading competitions (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 21).

A perusal of recent reviews of *Rockbound* on the website *Goodreads* underscores how a sense of accuracy continues to impact reader reception.<sup>2</sup> In her 2017 *Goodreads* review, Diane Tvor writes: “I think the depiction of the life of an early-twentieth-century fisherman is accurate and the main characters and dialogue are both true, real.”<sup>3</sup> Paula Dembeck would agree, stating that *Rockbound* “is now considered a classic of maritime fiction, especially lauded for its detail and authenticity in its descriptions of life on the sea.” While these comments situate *Rockbound* as a realistic representation of life in the region at the turn of the century, other reviews take this focus on authenticity even further. Reviewer Yvonne states, “*Rockbound* by Frank Parker Day helped me to understand the culture of Eastern Canada. When speaking to recent residents of Newfoundland I discovered that the book, altho’ written over 70 years ago is still true to form.” Though she does not reference *Canada Reads* in her review, Bonny notes, “This book was recommended to me by an East coast inhabitant before my visit there later this month. After reading this book I understand the lifestyle on the opposite coast to mine better than before.”

In these and other reviews, the languages of authenticity, truth, revelation, and reality abound; in so doing, they suggest a readerly desire for depictions of a simple rural life, which superimposes a one-dimensional representation onto the region’s complex history. Indeed, even when reviewers recognize that aspects of the narrative are contentious representations of a real place, that does not seem to

dampen the informative impact. Joanne Seitz succinctly remarks: “In 1929, a spokesperson for Tancook gave an outraged comment, saying the author basically smeared the local population—that they were neither as uneducated nor as nasty as the book suggested. Anyway, great read about the Atlantic and a life that’s hard to imagine now.” While this review does concede that the novel represents a past way of life, the reviewer also evokes a series of letters that appeared in newspapers across Nova Scotia after *Rockbound* was published. The people of Ironbound were angered by their portrayal as “ignorant, immoral and superstitious” (qtd. in Davies 295). They called the portrayal “unjustified” and “belittling” and wondered why “Mr. Day put such a ridiculous book on the market” (qtd. in Davies 295). In this pushback, the people of the actual island of Ironbound trouble Day’s representation of place, underscoring a disjuncture between ideas of accuracy and *Rockbound* as a fictional work. Despite this troubling, Seitz’s comment highlights an interest in the novel as a “great read” about life in Atlantic Canada and sets aside the experiences of the local population.

Susanne Marshall emphasizes the slipperiness of praising *Rockbound* as an authentic Maritime story by placing Day’s work within broader literary and cultural trends. She notes that, within a broader yearning for a unified Canadian identity, “the Atlantic region performs the typecast role of benign, dependent elder and repository of culture, conventional morality and memory” (82). Though many readers, both past and present, situate the novel as a window into life in rural Nova Scotia, Marshall emphasizes that Day was “a liminal ‘translator’ figure, raised among various rural communities as the son of a peripatetic Methodist minister, but remaining a relatively privileged observer of those communities” (88). Moreover, David Creelman explains that Day’s rendering of the South Shore celebrates the “pre-industrial culture of the region” through a “restoration/return to a stable traditional world after a period of crisis and instability” (28). There is, therefore, both a knowledge and a distance in Day’s understanding of place and, “despite or because of” this distance, “Day admired the heroic aspects of what he considered lives lived close to nature, and mourned the onslaught of modernity which was transforming them” (Marshall 88). Ultimately, Marshall asserts that “Day’s ‘realism’ is a heavily adulterated project” (89), phrasing which raises questions about what Day chooses to centre or set aside.

Understood this way, Day's narrative offers a potential respite from overwhelming change and upholds for present readers—as it upheld for past ones—a singular, idealized, and preserved sense of Atlantic Canadian people and their culture.

Brief attention to the reception of *Rockbound* underscores the longevity of traditionalist readings of the novel. Because heterosexuality and ideas of domesticity tend to be foregrounded in understandings of tradition, rusticity, and “conventional morality,” to return to Marshall's phrasing, the intimate connection that develops between David and Gershom does not appear to fit accepted understandings of the region. Critical reception of the text helps to expand this point. Though critics gesture to sexuality in some analyses of the novel, they have either, on the one hand, focused on the heterosexual romance as a simplifying tactic to ensure acceptance from urban, middle-class audiences, or, on the other, as a universalizing feature that has allowed the novel to become a classic. For Ian McKay, *Rockbound* is the “perfect regional expression” of simplified narratives of Nova Scotia (244); McKay reads Day's setting as “stripped of civilization” and his characters as distilled to their supposed “inherent nature” (244). McKay situates Day's anthropological process of recording details from his trips to Ironbound within the wider cultivation of the idea of “the Folk” by Helen Creighton and other “urban cultural producers” of the early twentieth century, who “constructed the Folk of the [Nova Scotian] countryside as the romantic antithesis to everything they disliked about modern urban and industrial life” (4). Though he concedes that *Rockbound* does not idealize life on the South Shore, McKay still takes issue with the novel's problematic essentialization of rural life.<sup>4</sup> In making this argument, McKay refers to Day's depiction of “reckless” or “primitive” sexuality in *Rockbound* (245, 254), noting that “casual sex is seen as part of the daily life of at least some of the islanders” (254); yet McKay does not explore the significance of this representation, instead placing such moments within what he sees as the nature-based essentialism at work in constructions of the Folk.

In response to this reading, Davies proposes a more optimistic view. She argues that Day's message is “a celebration of humankind's potential for courage and selflessness” (“Revisiting” 15), which offers a universal ideal that has continually resonated with readers. Although she situates *Rockbound* as a “therapeutic release from a society of

conspicuous consumption and rapid urbanization” (18–19) and notes that, at the time of its publication, the novel “immediately evoked archetypal images of Atlantic offshore ruggedness” (16), Davies asserts that *Rockbound* “resonates with hope, a sense of the future, and a commitment to the wider social good” (28). Davies’ desire to counter McKay leads her to focus on the marriage plot in the latter half of the text. She argues that “David’s kingdom at the end of the novel is no outpost of civilization but its symbolic centre” (28), and she contends that “*Rockbound* . . . conveys in its resolution Day’s tribute to the triumph of the human spirit” (28). Ultimately, Davies believes readers are drawn to the universal aspects of the novel, rather than any simplified specifics of place the novel evokes.

Despite complex domestic relationships or the exploration of female sexuality in the novel’s depictions of Fanny the potato girl or Jennie Run-over,<sup>5</sup> scholarship on Day’s work tends to sidestep discussions of unconventional sexuality. When it comes to possible queer sexualities, this oversight may stem from the difficulty of recognizing queer desire in the past, as such desire was deemed immoral and thus often coded or secreted to avoid public detection. In *Len and Cub: A Queer History* (2022), Meredith J. Batt and Dusty Green underscore the complexity of navigating historical understandings of sexuality. Batt and Green discuss Joseph “Cub” Austen Coates and his “boyfriend,” Leonard “Len” Olive Keith,<sup>6</sup> moving through a series of photos, archival material, and historical context to situate Len and Cub’s relationship within its moment and milieu. As an early record of a queer relationship in New Brunswick (from the 1910s into the late 1920s), the visual archive left by Len, who was an amateur photographer, offers a glimpse into the complex and uneven development of normative codes of relation in rural space. Indeed, for my purposes, this glimpse into male relations offers an important historical and cultural template for re-reading *Rockbound* through a queer lens.

It is clear from the photos that Len and Cub spent significant time together and that some people in the community knew of their connection. While the full parameters of this relationship were and remain unknown, there are photos of the men in close embrace surrounded by other men from the community. Likewise, the photos were taken in multiple locations and many include Len and Cub cuddling in bed, holding each other while exploring the countryside,

or in varying stages of undress. Despite these photos, it is hard to know how Len or Cub would have described their sexuality or their relationship, particularly after Len was outed and fled the community in 1931. This example underscores the difficulty in establishing understandings of same-sex relationships in this period and of discussing their parameters in the current moment. As Batt and Green explain, "Same-sex desire has always existed. In the case of Len and Cub, their photos use subtle and not-so-subtle (but deniable) cues and clues as to what is present within them. What could be passed off as a friendly embrace was in fact a love language of its own, spoken by Len and Cub, with the camera there to capture it all" (25).

This sense of ambiguity also partly develops from the logistical trickiness of accessibility rooted in geographic location. The flow of information regarding sexuality to rural areas tends to be slower and works its way through various communities in different ways depending on educational, religious, and ethnic background. Likewise, the behaviours and relations deemed normal or deviant in a rural setting differ from those in an urban one, making it difficult to know how particular relationships will be perceived. Moreover, the successful regulation of behaviour positioned as immoral depends on the level of religious and legal accessibility and engagement; the policing of sodomy or gross indecency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, was much higher in urban areas with a dedicated police force than in rural areas such as Amherst, Nova Scotia, where the municipal police force had only two constables in 1880 (Strange and Loo 27).<sup>7</sup>

The implicit link between the Maritime provinces and notions of traditional moral values, as outlined above, exacerbates this ambiguity, as readers are primed to read *Rockbound* through the heterosexual marriage plot(s) and may therefore miss the "cues and clues," to use Batt and Green's phrasing, that emerge between David and Gershom. This context is important when considering *Rockbound*, as what the novel centres or celebrates, as well as what is moved into the narrative shadows, can elucidate different configurations of love in rural, working-class environments at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of the central spaces of the island community are predominantly occupied by men. Although Day references domestic spaces, much of the action happens in Uriah's fish house, on the boats, or in the lighthouse on Barren Island. Uriah's fishery, a predominantly male

production, is of central importance. Uriah, his sons, Gershom Born, David, and other men spend six days a week together, from dawn until dusk. The fish house is where David is inculcated into the homosocial norms of his fellow fishermen. He picks up the rules of engagement between men, learns how to interact with the men's wives and other women, and acquires the pace and flow of the lifestyle. The fish house is a liminal space between the dangers of the sea and the comforts of home, and some of the novel's most affective scenes occur over barrels of gutted fish. It is also a space between life and death—for both the men themselves returning from the sea and for the fish who wait to be gutted, salted, and stored.

As Peter Boag details, fishing communities, agricultural hubs, mines, logging camps, and shipyards all complicate ideas of heterosexual activity as constitutive of regional history. In *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*, Boag studies the regulation of sexuality in rural labour communities in the early twentieth century, arguing these hyper-male spaces generated “a complex culture that included a system of sex and sexuality revolving around male participants” (7). Movement between communities, the intermingling of diverse male populations, and long stints spent in isolation are all aspects of the male worlds Boag discusses. Though focused on a different socio-spatial context, many of the central spaces in *Rockbound* align with Boag's observations. For example, the fish house is the space from which the men leave for stints with other men at sea and the space to which they come home to deal with their catch, both competing and joining together over their lot.

The fish house is also the space where David first meets Gershom Born. David describes Gershom as “the most powerful oarsmen,” a “great blond sharesman,” and a “blue-eyed Viking” (35–37).<sup>8</sup> He is an imposing figure who is ten years David's senior, and David is drawn to and impressed by him. David and Gershom not only work together, but also come to spend much of their leisure time exploring the island and discussing their futures. When they are apart, the narrator details the difficulty both men feel because of this separation. Despite the centrality of David and Gershom's relationship, there is a continual sense of narrative redirection in depictions of their time together. By chapter 5, for example, the narrator notes: “When David was twenty-four and had been six years on Rockbound, he was still Uriah's

sharesman. Things had changed but little" (79). Though stagnation is foregrounded here, readers quickly learn that not all areas of David's life fit this description. David has cleaned up his home, made a place for himself in the community, and, importantly, developed a strong relationship with Gershom. The pair are described as "inseparable" and readers are told that Gershom transferred to David "all the wickedness he knew" (81). There is an emphasis in their relationship on guidance, situating Gershom as a mentor figure who often shows David how to usurp or play within the social codes of the community (81).<sup>9</sup>

Though their friendship is initially set up as secondary to the monotony of the fishery, it is clear that Gershom is the central force in David's life. This connection makes Day's initial relegation of David and Gershom's relationship to the background of the narrative worth pausing over. The rhetorical move to centralize David's lack of movement in Uriah's company draws the focus towards the fishery and turns attention towards traditional labour practices and the hardscrabble life David endures. Yet, only three pages later, the narrator notes: "In his six years on the island his friendship for Gershom had steadily grown. Now he went everywhere with the blue-eyed giant, who, though ten years older than he, was a dashing and lively companion" (83). Despite what is offered to readers in the opening chapters, *Rockbound* no longer seems to be a simple story about the hardworking Folk of the South Shore. Instead, this positioning introduces the central storyline of a complicated affection between men working within the confines of their social and historical moment.

As the relationship between the two men becomes more emotionally charged, Day infuses descriptions of their activities with references to women. This becomes a pattern, as the reader will be privy to a story of their shared lunch on a beach or a Sunday spent exploring the island before being briefly reminded of Gershom's or David's desire for the opposite sex. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick explores the homosocial continuum, and her concept of the "erotic triangle" offers a useful means of thinking about how David and Gershom's interactions are rendered acceptable.<sup>10</sup>

For Sedgwick, the homosocial is a culturally contingent description of the "social bonds between persons of the same sex" (1). "To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially

erotic,” Sedgwick asserts, “is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (1–2). Because codes of acceptability govern male-male relations under different constraints than female-female relations,<sup>11</sup> Sedgwick focuses on erotic triangles configured through two men and a woman. This structure offers “a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (27). In a heteropatriarchal society, “[m]ale homosexual bonds may have a subsumed and marginalized relation to male heterosexuality similar to the relation of femaleness to maleness, but different because carried out within an already dominantly male-homosocial sphere” (47); therefore, an erotic triangle can allow for male-male desire to run as an undercurrent beneath and through the socially acceptable female-male bond, thus making visible the structures of power regulating relations between men in their specific context.

To date, the erotic triangle has rarely been used to discuss works of Atlantic Canadian fiction<sup>12</sup> and therefore offers a new means of understanding the developing relationship between Gershom and David within the homosocial parameters of the fish house and the wider Rockbound community. As a novel deeply ingrained in the social and cultural contingencies of both time and place, central narrative events, such as David and Gershom’s meeting and the relationships they foster with women, highlight the potential slippage of male relations in rural, resource-based labour environments while also showing how heterosexual regulation can be implicit within a text. These moments not only allow for reflection on David and Gershom’s relationship, but also raise questions about why their companionship can never be fully articulated. At key moments when David and Gershom’s relationship takes up the most narrative space or is depicted in its full intensity, the focus is redirected onto David’s work or heterosexual attraction.

While at first these redirections turn to a random assortment of women (the buxom lass or the girls at the dances), a triangular balance is briefly struck through David’s marriage to Uriah’s daughter, Tamar. The close and playful connection that has developed between Gershom and David is a stark contrast to life with his new wife.

Though David comes to recognize that “it [is] indeed a grand thing to come home to a house and wife of your own” (Day 128), his relationship with Tamar is relatively underdeveloped. Tamar may “love[] her man” (128), but for David theirs is a marriage of self-preservation. Because Tamar is pregnant, David must marry her to ensure that he remains in the good graces of Uriah and the wider community. Moreover, David uses the pregnancy as a negotiation tactic, bettering his own position within the fishery and securing domestic comfort. When Uriah directs him to marry Tamar, David responds: “Take me in de firm if ye wants me to marry Tamar, or raise a Jung bastard” (90). Ultimately, David leverages Tamar against her father: “A bargain was a bargain, both knew, and though there was no written agreement, for neither could read or write, the contract was sure and binding” (93). Tamar has no voice in this patriarchal contract, nor does romantic love factor into David’s attraction to Tamar. Instead, the prospect of a heterosexual union functions to maintain, and even to better, David’s social and economic standing in the community.

This function is an important consideration, given the narrative space allotted to David and Tamar’s relationship. Over a mere ten pages, Tamar starts to “cast eyes upon David and to follow him about” (87); she is quickly “ruin[ed]” (89); and she and David are wed in a “rather gloomy ceremony” (95), during which he does “not feel right in his heart” (94). Two months later, David goes with Gershom to the lighthouse on Barren Island (99). There are nods to David and Tamar’s developing affections, and the narrator outright states that David “grew fonder of her as the days went by” (96), yet these moments are fleeting and are often followed by a reflection on how the marriage solidifies social or economic gains for David. In contrast, David’s connection to Gershom offers mutual sustenance. It is not about what Gershom can do for David, but instead there is a focus on the pleasure derived from what they offer each other. Theirs is a reciprocal union. David thinks to himself, “I’se happy now; . . . my gettin’ married was nuttin’ much, but I’se a partner in de Rockbound firm, an’ Gershom’s my friend, an’ we’s’ll stick togedder always” (112). Here, David casts aside his marriage to Tamar to instead situate his greatest accomplishments as economic success and his relationship with Gershom.

Tamar dies quickly and is afforded almost no narrative growth or depth. Moreover, her and David’s child, Ralph, goes to live with David’s

Aunt Anapest and is relegated to the background of the narrative until the novel's close. With both Tamar and Ralph functioning as brief props of heterosexuality, David's status as a husband and father is established without taking away from the connection he feels with his closest companion. Even when David later develops romantic interest in schoolteacher Mary Dauphiny, his connection with Gershom remains central. While Tamar, as well as various other women throughout the narrative, provide a tenuous balance for the developing focus on David and Gershom, Mary Dauphiny's arrival offers the "explicit . . . assertion of symmetry between genders and between homo- and hetero-social or- sexual bonds" (Sedgwick 47). When Mary Dauphiny arrives, the narrative shifts from a tender depiction of David and Gershom's shared experiences into a heightened tale of rivalry, love, desire, loss, and reclamation.<sup>13</sup>

"[I]n any erotic rivalry," Sedgwick asserts, "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (21). In David and Gershom's rivalry for Mary, this is certainly the case. Thinking of Gershom in his "lonely tower" appears to move David as much as the "aching love" he feels for Mary (Day 168). When David lists Gershom's characteristics as a rival, he is upset by the realization that he appears outmatched. He laments:

Gershom as a rival! Gershom was another matter!  
 Gershom, keeper of the great light; Gershom, son of old  
 Gershom Born, wise man of the islands; Gershom, who  
 read poetry books and could himself make and sing  
 ballads; Gershom who never needed marriage, since he  
 carried women off their feet and won whom he chose;  
 Gershom, the giant with ready wit, handsome face, and  
 great booming voice. Above all, Gershom was his friend,  
 his sworn ally, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with  
 him in a dozen fights. He could hardly enter the race  
 against Gershom, and if he did, what would be his  
 chances? (169)

While this statement is a reflection on Gershom's upper hand, David also reminisces on the aspects of Gershom he is drawn to. He not only lists Gershom's physical prowess and intellectual capacity, but also focuses on their relationship as central to his feelings of loss and

sadness. It seems that David recognizes that in losing Mary to Gershom, he will also will lose Gershom to Mary. As David's "eyes cross[] the sea to the stark loneliness of Barren Island," he thinks that "his intense affection for his friend . . . could not lessen his love for Mary Dauphiny nor lay the sorrow in his heart" (169–70). Though a different kind of desire than his love for Mary, what David feels towards Gershom is no less powerful.

By the end of the novel, this trickiness around David and Gershom's connection is seemingly rectified through Gershom's death. This section of the narrative takes a Gothic turn, as Gershom slips into madness, tricking Uriah and Casper onto his boat under the guise of duck hunting and steering them all into rough waters to drown. While Gershom's death allows David to reconnect with Mary, the spectre of Gershom's importance to David remains. When David is asked to be the keeper of the Barren Island light, he agrees and works tirelessly to reconfigure the ecological footprint of the island. The aspects of the island that plagued Gershom's short stint as keeper are eradicated, until "one day the inspector of lights . . . [says] to David: 'Barren Island's a fit name for this island no more . . . [W]hat shall we name this island on the new chart?'" (289). David responds, "Name it Gershom's Island, arter de great mens dat once kep' dis light" (290).

Three years after David renames the island, he and Mary are rather suddenly married. Given even less narrative space than his marriage to Tamar, David and Mary's union occurs two pages before the novel closes with an image of Ralph, Mary, and David looking out over the sea. No longer barren, Gershom's Island is made fruitful by David and Mary's heterosexual union. The "romance of quest, ordeal, and triumph" for David is complete (Davies, "Revisiting" 26), despite the unsettling changes that occurred around the community throughout the novel. Crucially, though, David and Mary's union is only made possible by Gershom's death, by David's reconfiguration of Gershom's previous home, and through the renaming of the island in loving tribute to his intimate companion. While readers are left with an idyllic picture of David's family at peace in their new home, the domestic and economic stability that David achieves is a testament to the power of Gershom's influence and memory.

While there comes a tipping point which results in Mary Dauphiny's arrival and eventually Gershom's death, even these events are marked by David's consideration of how Gershom would feel, what might happen

or would have happened to their friendship, how their bond can be or might have deepened, how to make space for Gershom's happiness or memory in the face of David's own suffering, and how to honour his companion in life or in death. In these key moments, David's affection for Gershom is made explicit, only to then be balanced out and neutralized through a redirection towards his work or his heterosexual desire. These key plot points—the development of Gershom and David's friendship, Tamar and David's marriage, Mary Dauphiny's arrival, and Gershom's death—all register “relationships of power and meaning” (Sedgwick 27). These instances pose a brief possibility for something outside compulsory heterosexuality, something that could trouble stereotypes of “conventional morality” that so many readers, particularly after *Canada Reads*, have assumed are “authentic” to the rural Maritimes (Marshall 82, 85).

Although their “snug and warm” evenings spent drinking and acting like “great overgrown boys” in the Barren Island lighthouse certainly invite some interesting readings (Day 112–13), there are no overtly sexual moments between David and Gershom. I do not make the claim that *Rockbound* details an illicit affair between these men; however, David and Gershom's connection is at the heart of this novel. This connection is romantic, passionate, and intimate, and its ambiguous parameters are a strength, rather than a limitation, when reflecting on the queer possibilities of regional narratives. Both what is said and what is left unsaid allow readers to reflect on how this relationship grows in intensity, parallels or surpasses moments of heterosexual desire, and complicates blanket understandings of the rural past as devoid of desire between men.

It is important to note that desire and sexuality are nuanced and complicated concepts and experiences; as Sedgwick's explanation underscores, reading for male-male connection often involves attention to *potential* rather than a turn towards certainty. Much like the photos in *Len and Cub*, my use of the erotic triangle acts as a means of making legible the potential of reading David and Gershom's relationship as queer desire. The goal is not to read secret trysts between these men, but rather to push beyond straightforward understandings of sexuality as a line between gendered bodies (here, male-male) and sex and to explore the varied possibilities that exist between the binary construction of heterosexuality and

homosexuality. In this way, reading queerly offers a way of questioning “the predictability that society places on sexuality” (Detamore 60).

Moreover, as Kelly Baker argues, “rural nonheterosexuality works to challenge dominant notions of sexual identity, community, and rural space” (25). Speaking to the specifics of rural Nova Scotia in the early 2000s, Baker considers how queer sexuality has been constructed over time and understood in rural space in ways that are often illegible within “the prevalent assumption that LGBT communities are inherently urban . . . [and] rural areas [are] ultimately homophobic and hostile to LGBT difference” (25). Thus, attention to the ways that Gershom and David connect to each other, how they move through space together, and how David describes his feelings towards his companion in ways that may trouble heterosexual-versus-homosexual constructions of normative relation help to complicate both temporal and spatial understandings of male relation. It is exactly these “in-between, liminal spaces—the rural, small-town terrains,” which Detamore sees as “constitut[ing] the destabilizing of hegemonic sexuality,” that make space for thinking otherwise about desire, connection, and place (165).

Ultimately, Day’s positioning of David and Gershom suggests that romantic love between men in fishing villages like Rockbound is a powerful marker of connection and belonging; and yet, his continual redirection of narrative focus away from the intensity of their relationship raises questions about the influence of heteronormative discourse at the time. In the years before and during Day’s research and writing of *Rockbound*, Canada saw a rise in regulations targeting “immorality,” a nebulous concept that shifted throughout the decades to fit different religious, provincial, and national needs (Strange and Loo, *Making Good*). Despite the rising significance of heteronormativity, it is hard to know when and how normative understandings of sexuality spread throughout the rural areas in the underdeveloped Maritimes.<sup>14</sup> While the circulation of information in medical and religious pamphlets, as well as pop culture and art, certainly shaped understandings of sexuality in rural areas, it is unlikely that this dissemination was an even process. The parameters of life in the Maritimes were vastly different from life in urban centres such as Toronto, and, as Colin Johnson argues in *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America*, “heteronormalization was neither a particularly smooth [process] in rural areas and small towns,

nor uncontested" (3). Though Johnson is writing about rural America, Duder points to similar, class-based discrepancies in Canada, noting, "The rapid expansion in published works on sexuality does not necessarily indicate a public well educated on the subject" (34). It is this unknown that makes the possibilities at work in *Rockbound* so tantalizing, as readers cannot know whether Day developed Gershom and David's relationship out of relations he witnessed and recorded, but knew not to name, or whether their connection was crafted as a result of Day's own knowledge of sexuality from his travels and educational experiences abroad.

One could argue that the novel shows the complexity of desire at work within the region while at the same time gesturing to the kinds of expectations that readers may have for representations of the region. I read key moments of emphasis and redirection in *Rockbound* not as signals that the island community condemns passion between men, which may be expected at the turn of the century, but instead as an indication that Day worried his readers might judge David and Gershom's relationship harshly. To some degree, Davies, McKay, and Marshall agree that Day's work fits within a wider network of cultural producers from the region who emphasize "aspects of Nova Scotian society and history which they knew would succeed in the international cultural marketplace" (McKay 31). Because the "reading public" in the early decades of the twentieth century was "happy to accept [Day's] representation of a rustic folk culture" (Marshall 89), are the "subtle and not-so-subtle (but deniable) cues and clues," to quote Batt and Green again, part of upholding ideas of rusticity and tradition, despite Day's methods for recording the experiences he witnessed in *Ironbound*?

The origins of David and Gershom's relationship and Day's objectives in crafting it are, of course, impossible to know; however, a contextual close reading of the narrative as a cultural artifact offers insight into the complexity of male-male relationships in the early twentieth century. Rather than centre heterosexual relations and conventional familial constructions as core aspects of the "authentic" region, an attentive reading of *Rockbound* highlights the shifting status of normative structures and underscores the disruptive potential in reading the novel queerly. Paying attention to how romantic connection develops for and between the men raises questions about the legibility of non-conforming desire in rural

spaces, and the connection between David and Gershom complicates ideas of rural authenticity that began circulating in the early twentieth century and continue, through programs like *Canada Reads*, into our present moment.

#### Notes

1. In the last decade, *Canada Reads* has come under criticism from a variety of angles. The damage enacted by the show's central claim underscores many of these analyses. For example, Danielle Fuller and Julie Rak (2015) offer a critique of the 2012 season, mapping the ways the borders of the nation and national identity are upheld through the panelists' dialogue and the conversations that continue after the season concludes.
2. To get a sense of how *Rockbound* was positioned on *Canada Reads* and how this positioning influenced reader responses to the novel, I analyzed the eighty-four reviews available on *Goodreads*, "the world's largest site for readers and book recommendations." I focused primarily on reviews that explicitly referenced *Canada Reads*. Phrases such as "as defended on *Canada Reads*" or "*Canada Reads* Winner" appeared in roughly twenty-five per cent of the reviews. Information was also gathered from reviews that did not explicitly centre *Canada Reads* to map wider responses to the novel. Reviews that do not cite *Canada Reads* often use similar language, highlighting the prevalence of a cultural infrastructure that has positioned the region in this vein. *Goodreads* reviews underscore that *Canada Reads* played a role in the novel's popular resurgence and offer a unique lens into reader engagement with the text.
3. All reviews from *Goodreads* have been transcribed without corrections.
4. McKay notes the slipperiness of Day's novel, stating that *Rockbound* is "no pastoral haven" (243). Unlike the scenes and stories at the heart of campaigns by Helen Creighton and others, McKay concedes that Day was "*attempting to marry realistic description . . . to a conventional romance*" (243, emphasis mine). In the end, however, McKay still believes Day's work fits the parameters of the Folk producers he discusses throughout the monograph.
5. Much work remains to be done regarding the role of women in *Rockbound*. While the novel's central spaces are male-dominated, women do play roles throughout; both wives and daughters are key to daily work and life, as they engage in both domestic labour and in aspects of the fishing industry. Moreover, Anapest Kraus, though less central than Uriah Jung in the text, complicates overarching perceptions of male power through her caregiving and midwifery roles. She acts as a guiding figure for David and offers support in crucial moments throughout the novel.
6. Batt and Green explain that John Corey, who donated the photos of Len and Cub to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick in 2011, used the term "boyfriends" during the intake process; likewise, the term is "noted by the archivist in the collections' finding aid" (18).
7. The assumptions of rural conservatism and bigotry within sexualities discourse has been discussed through the lens of metronormativity, which assumes that

rural space is always already heterosexual and highlights the processes through which heteronormative discourse was falsely inscribed as a marker of traditional rural life (Halberstam 61–68). Understanding the spread of sexualities discourse in this way also suggests that much of what was happening in rural spaces has been lost to history through a glossing-over of how different spaces negotiated sexual norms, relations, and regulations in different ways.

8. A reading of gender and sexuality in *Rockbound* could be furthered through the consideration of race and ethnicity. The novel emphasizes the German background of Rockbound inhabitants, while also including characters from other backgrounds and cultures. For example, Joseph Levy is described as a descendent of “German Jews” and as having “a strange Turkish or Oriental caste” (46). Because Gershom’s appearance and whiteness is emphasized throughout David’s reflections, future work on the novel could reflect on categories of desire as intersected by questions of race, ethnicity, and belonging.
9. Boag’s research finds that affairs between older and younger men were common; “especially among the working classes, such relationships were commonplace and not necessarily coercive.” He notes that many working-class youths and young men “regularly sought out men for economic, emotional, and sexual fulfilment” (9). This is an important consideration for *Rockbound*, as Gershom Born is ten years older than David and acts as a mentor figure for David during his first years on the island.
10. Sedgwick’s concept has been used in a variety of contexts. In Canadian literary criticism, settler fictions such as John Richardson’s 1832 novel *Wacousta; Or, the Prophecy. Life in the Canadas* (Dickinson 11–16; Goldie 17–38) and Frances Harrison’s 1898 gothic novel *The Forest of Bourg-Marie* (Hulan 31–49) have been analyzed with attention to how national allegories intersect with categories of race and sexuality. In a prairie context, Peter Dickinson and Terry Goldie have applied the erotic triangle to the isolated and religious parameters at work in Sinclair Ross’ *As for Me and My House* (1941), focusing on what remains hidden in the novel as a way to understand the effects of compulsory heterosexuality (Dickinson 17–21; Goldie 39–56).
11. Cameron Duder details that “[t]he deviant, for most of the period under study [1900–1965], was generally thought of as male, but over the period the amount of commentary on female sexual deviancy did increase. It was still the case, however, that many Canadians had little to no knowledge of lesbianism” (9). Because women were thought to be devoid of sexual interest, lust, or erotic attraction, the fears of sexual interaction between women were muted.
12. Both Goldie and Dickinson discuss Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley* as a queer text, with Goldie rooting his reading in the triangular relationship between David Canaan, Toby Richmond, and Anna (David’s sister and Toby’s wife).
13. There are many angles to *Rockbound* that could add depth to this reading: a discussion of the similarities noted between David and Mary, for instance, as both are figured as outsiders and garner interest from the community. There is also something interesting in Uriah’s son Casper as a third rival for Mary. Casper almost bifurcates the narrative, allowing for the focus to be split between

- Casper's wooing of Mary, on the one hand, and David and Gershom's shared feelings for Mary, on the other. This allows for a more intense focus on David and Gershom, rather than on the entire group.
14. Compared to Britain and the United States, there has been less attention paid to the historical development of sexualities discourse in Canada: work by Gary Kinsman (1987), Mary Louise Adams (1997), Cameron Duder (2010), Valerie Korinek (2018), and others offers insight into the dissemination of information on sex and sexuality in Canada throughout the twentieth century, as well as responses to the normalizing impacts of this diffusion.

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## “Bloody Sore”: Eugenic Rhetoric and the Production of the Universal Worker in Irene Baird’s *Waste Heritage*

As the moon cleared the sheds the mess of empty barrels and junk on the opposite sidewalk showed up like sores.

—Irene Baird, *Waste Heritage*

Set in Vancouver and Vancouver Island in 1938, Irene Baird’s 1939 novel *Waste Heritage* depicts labour struggles at the close of the Depression era. Awash with detailed imagery of urban decay, poverty, police violence, and the injustices of class, race, and gender disparities, the book portrays attempts to organize for change and the labour unrest occurring in 1930s British Columbia. One of Canada’s few strike novels, *Waste Heritage* emerges from a cultural-political moment characterized by artists and writers using their crafts to directly intervene against the injustices wrought by the Great Depression and the government’s choice to ignore the unemployed poor amid the crisis. As noted by Jody Mason in her study of this era and its cultural-political stalwarts, “cultural producers such as Irene Baird were actively involved in negotiating the emerging fault lines between concepts of class and nascent, liberal ideas about citizenship” (*Writing Unemployment* 11). At times hailed as an epic of socialist realism, Baird’s novel was also famously derided by Dorothy Livesay for its weak commitment to revolutionary change (Doyle 119). Both an important historical document and an original and impressive work of literary artistry, Baird’s novel and its fraught political stance in the face of Depression-era labour strife has been of interest both to literary scholars and those in the field of Canadian labour history.

By far the most pressing debate about *Waste Heritage* among literary scholars has been how “red” Baird is in her depiction of the strikers and whether the book is sympathetic to their plight. Overall, from the period of its critical reassessment in the 1970s until the present, there has been a gradual move from considering the book a

justification for socialism to a more nuanced view where most scholars do not consider it a particularly radical text. In the introduction to the 2007 critical edition of the novel, Colin Hill offers the following view of its politics:

Baird's novel . . . resists the "leftist" label that critics often apply to it. While *Waste Heritage* is generally sympathetic to the cause of the unemployed, it is not fundamentally a radical or revolutionary text, and in some ways it is overtly critical of leftist politics of the 1930s. To be sure, Baird admired some of the leading leftist writers of her day, including Steinbeck and agitprop playwright Clifford Odets, and her personal sympathies were certainly with the sit-downers and their cause, but she did not consider *Waste Heritage* to be a radical novel. As she later wrote, "I have never been connected with Communism and I have never thought of myself as a radical if being a radical means wanting to overthrow the system we live in in favour of another political system. . . . [But] I don't praise or condemn some of the most important people in the novel who are obviously connected with radical politics." (xxv)

Baird's remarks, quoted by Hill, are from "Sidown, Brothers, Sidown," her 1976 reflection on *Waste Heritage* following its reissue in 1973. There, Baird crafts her ethos as a wily journalist-observer eager to objectively represent the story, "colour," and "talk" of the strikers, striving to "do it right" in her depiction of these men, whom she raised up from "non-persons" to "the special status of characters who are the first to speak in chapter one of the novel" (83). As she notes, "The living of the novel, the writing of it, was an adventure" that involved following the jobless men through many of the scenes depicted in the novel, including into their lodgings in Victoria in the company of her family doctor and disguised as a nurse (83). Baird's self-representation as a swashbuckling adventurer-writer eager to communicate the plight of the unemployed from an impartial, though "angry," position should be read in light of her career in journalism, public writing, and the Canadian civil service following the publication of *Waste Heritage*, where her skills in journalism and reportage-style narration were put to use (Sangster, "Irene Baird's 'North and South'" 287–90; Candela).

Whether considering her creative works or output during her time in the civil service, most critics of Baird note that a quest for objectivity and authenticity was a key feature of her artistic practice. Knotted into this quest is an implicit assumption that it might be possible to produce a cultural object that does not in any way “praise or condemn” its subjects, but rather presents them in a form disarticulated from cultural and political dispositions and biases. But where does a reading of *Waste Heritage* go when we reject this premise and, in fact, assert its impossibility in our own critical response to the novel?

Baird may understand, or want her readers to understand, her narrative gaze as perspicuously objective and lucidly disinterested, but does *Waste Heritage* really provide an even-handed depiction of labour unrest, or, instead, does it downright “condemn” it? While attention to the historical archive, especially with regard to the editing and publishing of *Waste Heritage* in the 1938 to 1939 period, has yielded important insights about the novel and the influences that constrained Baird’s depiction of labour strife, this article offers a re-assessment of the book’s portrayal of its central characters and the spectrum of praise and blame the narrative navigates with regard to their plight. Specifically, I explore *how* they are embodied, what vision they are accorded, and how they are constituted by the novel’s narrative gaze. In this exploration, I attend to the book’s *literary thinking* in its depictions of labour unrest and embodied worker subjectivity, which I argue evinces a tendency to *think eugenically* with regard to Depression-era unemployment and the strife concerning labour conditions.

Literary critic Anna Kornbluh insists on the necessity of considering how a novel “thinks,” or the “contemplative agency leveraged by literature” (15). What kind of *thinking* does this novel perform in its creative figuration of unrest against labour conditions in 1930s Canada, and in what ways does this thinking understand Depression-era worker subjectivity eugenically? Rather than simply enumerating how this book evinces eugenic tropes, I hope instead to deduce how this novel’s eugenically tinged representation of unemployment reframes the problem of the ideal Canadian worker-subject more generally, by suggesting how all bodies narrated in this book (and all bodies in general) fall short of this ideal. My focus is therefore on the novel’s *eugenic rhetoric*, or the language and narrative strategies that indicate a worldview defined by biological determinism,

reliant upon carcerality, and indicating a social strategy that aims to “heal” what “ails” society. Drawing from the work of disability theorists Lennard J. Davis and Jay Dolmage, as well as historian of eugenics Angus McLaren, I attend to how the concept of the “universal worker” and the bodily “norm” come to structure how race, ability, and labour are represented in the book. Critics of *Waste Heritage* have pointed to its naturalism and reportage style (Hill, Introduction xxviii–xl); its representation of mobile unemployment and hesitancy towards organized challenges to the dominant social order (Mason, *Writing Unemployment* 113–29); and to its ambivalence regarding 1930s socialism in the context of women’s Depression-era literary activity and documentary fiction (Rifkind 162–202). Building upon their contributions, I argue that the novel employs a eugenic gaze in its depiction of the Depression-era unemployed, pathologizing them as a sickness in need of a cure. This article aims to broaden the critical conversation about *Waste Heritage* by situating its problematic depictions of disabled, racialized, and other marginalized workers within a new critical context: disability studies. In turn, this article contributes to a larger conversation in the field of Canadian labour studies that contends with how unemployment and labour activism are pathologized within Canadian culture and society.

### **“Almost Anti-Red”: Recent Critical Responses to *Waste Heritage***

Much of the criticism of *Waste Heritage* in the latter part of the twentieth century was geared towards raising the novel out of critical disregard, with the novel being “resurrected in the 1970s as part of the ‘canon’ of great Canadian literature” (Sangster, “North and South” 284). This is reflected in the titles of essays addressing the novel from this era, such as Roger Leslie Hyman’s 1983 article “Wasted Heritage and *Waste Heritage*: The Critical Disregard of an Important Canadian Novel” or Robin Mathews’ 1997 article “Canada’s Hidden Working-Class Literature.” Both interpret Baird’s depiction of class inequality as necessarily a broad challenge against prevailing class structure, with the novel advocating for what Mathews terms, in an earlier essay on the novel, “a significant change in the social order” (Mathews, “*Waste Heritage*” 66). More recent criticism attempts to differentiate between the apparently opaque politics of *Waste Heritage* and more overtly

partisan works, with a focus on genre and a sustained attention to Baird's literary historical archive, the novel's publication and reception history, the context of left radical bibliography, and comparison with other works depicting Depression-era poverty and labour strife.<sup>1</sup>

Colin Hill's 2007 critical edition of the novel and his 2012 monograph *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction* situate Baird's depiction of labour strife within the generic confines of Canadian "modern realism," a genre with similarities to modernism proper that is characterized by the use of "idiomatically correct language" and a tone of "narrative objectivism," as well as the tendency to depict technological innovation, urban and industrial life, and a myriad of social and political themes including the great wars and the Great Depression (Hill, *Modern Realism* 7). Hill understands Baird's political ambivalence as an effect of the tradition within which she writes: modern realists, in contrast to socialist realists, "appear convinced that a kind of moral and spiritual ambiguity is a defining feature of the modern human condition. The modern realist neither sees this state of affairs as a problem nor seeks to analyze it in an endeavour to find 'solutions'" (172). In his introduction to *Waste Heritage*, Hill notes the novel's naturalism, particularly its "social, environmental, and biological determinism," writing that "Matt's 'rage blindness' and Eddy's mental deficiencies are innate faults, arising from hereditary and environmental factors, that cannot be overcome through the exercise of free will. These deterministic forces lead to the tragic and inevitable conclusion of the novel" (xxix). Hill's conclusion, which he arrives at from a discussion of the novel's generic tendencies, is similar to my own; however, I explore the novel's hereditarian fatalism through the lens of disability theory and with reference to the tropes of eugenic rhetoric.

As this article will explore, the novel's biological determinism appears to condemn the men to their fate, and this bias against the communist organizers depicted in the book was noted when the novel was first published. As Hill notes, "Carl Eayrs, who prepared a reader's report on *Waste Heritage* for Macmillan, reassured his brother Hugh that the book could safely be published in Canada as it is 'almost anti-red'" (xxvi). While the significance of the latter might be tempered by considering how Baird's depiction of communist political activity was constrained by censorship in the highly fraught pre-war period, a fact amply demonstrated by Mason ("Sidown, Brother" 147–60), that the

book was perceived as “almost anti-red” suggests its more overtly anti-worker inclinations. Candida Rifkind’s analysis of the novel hints at something similar, noting that while other Depression-era works by women often resist traditional gender roles, *Waste Heritage* superficially performs such a resistance but, in the end, re-inscribes gender, racial, and settler-colonial hierarchies. In sum, the most recent critical turn in the novel’s reception has been to interpret it as more and more “anti-red,” ascribing a deceptive quality to its ambivalence.

What are the stakes of Baird’s depiction of unemployed workers in *Waste Heritage*? Mason has illuminated how interwar literatures helped carve out the categories of the Canadian citizen and Canadian worker, oftentimes in conjunction (see Mason, *Writing Unemployment* 12; 45–129). Mason argues that these works, their authors, and the cultural milieus surrounding them may have indirectly influenced then-Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King’s establishment of unemployment insurance in 1940 and definitely mediated cultural thinking regarding who was understood as an “unemployed Canadian” and what subsequent protections and rights such people should be provided via citizenship, which emerged as a legal concept in Canada in 1947 (68). As Mason points out, activist artists and writers in the interwar period produced works that called for state protection for unemployed workers, and in so doing helped set up the binary of individuals “inside” and “outside the state,” with state protections eventually afforded by citizenship (68). Mason shows how these creative works were pivotal in constructing notions of citizenship and the state, solidifying Canadian national imaginaries by arguing for more enduring notions of citizenship that would bind together all “native sons” who might not be tied to fixed residences or employment.

The argument that follows takes up Mason’s claim that Canadian literatures shaped and mediated the evolving national conversation about which workers were deemed worthy of state protections: *How* does this novel categorize and sort workers to ascertain said worthiness? Attending to this question, I find in *Waste Heritage*’s depiction of the transient unemployed the suggestion that their failure to advance their aims is more rooted in aspects of embodiment, biology, and heredity than has been previously examined by critics. I explore this question by employing disability studies theory and considering the historical presence of eugenics in Canada, which I argue inflects Baird’s rhetoric and the discursive framing of her

depiction of the 1938 sit-down strike in British Columbia. My analysis focuses on how an ideal worker subject is abstracted and given a spectral bodily form in the negative space surrounding the flawed and suffering victims of Depression-era unemployment depicted in *Waste Heritage*. In this, I explore how proximity to an idealized, abstracted Canadian worker-subject functions as a metric for empathy and the meriting of rights and state protections, and link this ideal worker figure to a larger discourse of eugenics in Canada at the time. By investigating this, I hope to illuminate how attitudes about embodiment infuse hierarchical labour relations in Canada and undermine visions of redress and repair.

### **Irene Baird and the Unemployed in Depression-Era British Columbia**

Baird wrote her novel during a time of Depression-era destitution, rapid settler expansion in the Canadian West, and surging labour militancy. She was born in a middle-class family in Cumberland County, England, in 1901, and with her family immigrated to Qualicum Beach, Vancouver Island, in 1919 (Hill, Introduction xiii). Shortly after, she married and moved to Vancouver, but resettled again on Vancouver Island in 1936 or 1937 and at this point dedicated herself fully to working as a novelist (before, she had been a teacher) (xiii). *Waste Heritage* is her second novel and documents a historical event that took place immediately before it was written and published: the 1938 Vancouver sit-down strike. A labour tactic now uncommon and in most cases illegal, the sit-down strike massed unemployed workers from across Western Canada in Vancouver to protest the lack of a meaningful strategy by federal and provincial governments to grapple with widespread unemployment during the Depression years. Upwards of one thousand unemployed men occupied the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery in May 1938 for one month, after which they were forced to leave, in a brutal and bloody manner, by the RCMP. The strike had the backing of the Communist Party of Canada, which helped organize the strikers through the Relief Project Workers' Union.

A key factor in understanding the unemployed workers Baird depicts is the impact and legacy of the relief camps that sprang up in Western Canada during this period. The camps were set up in 1931 and were administered by provincial governments under emergency

federal legislation (Griffin 23). Beginning in 1932, the camps were administered by the Department of Defence and overseen by General A. G. L. McNaughton with the aim of “breaking up . . . congestion of single homeless men in the principal centres of population” to preemptively “suppress disorder” (McNaughton qtd. in Griffin 24). Essentially work camps, these sites saw the men work eight-hour days preparing road grade, clearing brush, and digging up roots for airstrips (Griffin 24). Describing their situation as “tragic,” Bryan Palmer notes that one of the only groups who “courted” the single unemployed in work camps were the communists,<sup>2</sup> who formed the Single Unemployed Workers’ Association to assist them directly, organizing Relief Camp Workers’ Unions for individual camps and the Workers’ Unity League (Palmer 210, 253). Essentially protests, or “working against not working” (Palmer 206) tactics such as strikes, blockades, and the occupations of businesses and circulation routes, were intended to provoke the *provision* of employment, rather than to better working conditions. Riots, parades, occupations of public and private buildings, pickets, and other protests resulted in concessions and victories on a regional level and often brought together workers of various political stripes, especially in work camp agitations (see Palmer 210–12).

British Columbia, in the 1930s, was the site of some of the most aggressive outbursts of resistance from the unemployed and drew on a tradition of labour militancy among organized workers. While not unique to this region, numerous strikes and labour actions arose in BC at this time, especially among resource workers in lumber, milling, and mining. While the federal work camps were shut down in 1935, provincial camps remained in BC until 1938 and became feeder sites for transient unemployed people from all provinces at the time of the sit-down strikes, in part because of Vancouver’s clement weather. These men were unwelcome to the point of being offered free train fare back home by the BC provincial government (Hill, Introduction xi). While the government might have wanted these men “home,” many of them, like Matt Striker in *Waste Heritage*, did not have such a place to return to.

*Waste Heritage* begins shortly after the men have been evicted, and follows Matt, who arrives in Vancouver after riding the rails from Regina, or “Gath” (Baird uses invented, biblical names for the major locations). Matt joins other characters, including Eddy, a man badly

beaten during the Vancouver eviction and disabled by this experience.<sup>3</sup> Together with the other strikers, Matt and his companions travel across the Georgia Strait to Vancouver Island, where they endeavour to initiate another sit-down strike in Victoria. This effort ends in failure and the dispersal of the men and, finally, to the violent arrest of Matt and the death, in an apparent suicide, of Eddy.

### **Eugenic Thinking in *Waste Heritage***

While peaking in popularity closer to the start of the century, eugenic theories were pervasive during Baird's formative years. This next section first presents an instance of eugenic rhetoric in the novel, and then examines the pre-war popularity of eugenic thinking as it relates to Depression-era unemployment in Western Canada. *Waste Heritage* initiates the eugenic gaze in this novel in the opening description of Matt Striker. In this initial character sketch, readers are encouraged to link Matt's physical comportment to his character, with details of bodily description corresponding to innate behaviours and personality traits:

His skin and his wiry blond hair were dull with track dirt and his black shirt and jeans were grey with blown grit. The frayed cuffs of his jeans bellied down over his dusty shoes but higher up they fitted tight across his narrow hips and neat bottom. He walked back down on his heels with his pack slung over his shoulder and his hands hooked into the two front pockets of his jeans. He moved mechanically as though he had got so used to moving around that he could go on and do it in his sleep. His face wore a curiously dead look, giving the impression that he was either doped or not properly awake. His eyes were grey and narrowed by sun and between them a crude scar dug deep into his freckled nose bridge, extending towards the left eye. Beneath the air of superficial immobility there was wary, half-animal watchfulness. (3-4)

Matt's skin, clothing, and hair are covered in dirt, and yet he walks forcefully and confidently "back down on his heels," suggesting normative masculine traits like fortitude and perseverance; the

placement of his hands “hooked into the two front pockets of his jeans” implies the swagger and nonchalance of the hero in a cowboy Western. But the framing of Matt’s vagrancy imparts a lack of agency: his “moving around” is so innate and mechanized that he “could go on and do it in his sleep.” This seemingly programmatic behaviour connotes a lack of self-consciousness, rational thought, and autonomy, which is also projected into his face, with its “curiously dead look, giving the impression that he was either doped or not properly awake.” In this way, while Matt might figure to some degree a worker whose virility is being “wasted” as a result of Depression-era conditions and unemployment, he also exhibits traits associated with the eugenicist category of a “defective,” in that his body appears broken, or not working properly. Another eugenicist category, degeneracy, is signalled via a “crude scar dug deep into his freckled nose bridge,” suggesting a violent past which may have produced his “wary half-animal watchfulness.” Throughout the book, Baird uses animal metaphors when limning human behaviours like violence, promiscuity, or lack of empathy, a classic trope of eugenic rhetoric where certain bodies and behaviours are ranked below the human inasmuch as they resemble the animal.<sup>4</sup> This introductory passage, then, initiates the novel’s continued use of the rhetoric of physical appraisal for characterization, ranking and sorting characters according to their degrees of mental and physical fitness. Beyond its status as a stylistic tool for characterization, the motif of physical appraisal positions the reader to read eugenically, as they are encouraged to link each character’s deviation from the bodily norm with their plot trajectory and ability to achieve their particular goals in the book.

Eugenics, or the pursuit of “good genes,” is a pseudoscience aimed at, among other things, producing good workers for state and empire. Francis Galton, who coined the term in 1883, defined it as “the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally” (qtd. in McLaren 15). “[T]he aim of Eugenics,” he later elaborated, “is to bring as many influences as can be reasonable employed, to cause the useful classes in the community to contribute more than their proportion to the next generation” (Galton 38). The promotion of “good genes” extends to the workplace and influenced eugenicists’ beliefs about the kinds of workers who would be advantageous to the state.

Disability theorist Lennard Davis uses the term “universal worker” to designate the ideal worker subject from the eugenicist perspective, which he links to industrialization, and the quest for the “average human” who could perform the tasks required in an industrial setting (4–9). Reflecting the influence of statistical concepts in the development of eugenics in nineteenth-century Europe, eugenicists believed that “a population can be normed” and divided into “standard” and “substandard groups,” with “the aim of eugenics” being for the state “to norm the nonstandard” (6). The universal worker possesses what eugenicists deemed to be a statistically average body, with uniform capacities making them “interchangeable” and therefore ideal (5–9). Those not meeting this average included not only the physically disabled but also the eugenicist category of the “feeble-minded.” This group subsumed racial, class-based, and criminalized identities, and formed the “defective class,” which Davis calls “a conflation of depravity and disability” and included such categories as those labelled with “low intelligence, mental illness, and even ‘pauperism,’ since low income was equated with relative inefficiency” (9–10). Davis shows how eugenic world-making in the context of the modern novel involves sorting various categories of people hierarchically away from the norm, designating them as inferior humans whose presence would lead to a lack of “fitness” in the state (8–12). A key idea in eugenic movements is that populations can be “normed” through manipulation of genes (including negative eugenic practices like sterilization) (Kevles 435–36). It is therefore a belief in the supremacy of “the norm” that justifies the monolithic and hegemonic eugenic movements of the first half of the twentieth century, movements that infamously performed the sterilization, institutionalization, and murder of “defective” classes.

As Angus McLaren and other have shown, social reformers in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century advocated for eugenic practices as a solution to what were considered the problems of the era, poverty and inequality, by locating their causes in genetic factors and “defective” classes. In practice, this meant the incarceration and inhumane treatment of Indigenous people, people with disabilities, poor people, and racialized populations, as well as discriminatory immigration practices.<sup>5</sup> Proponents included notable left-wing social reformers in Western Canada such as Tommy Douglas, the renowned socialist and co-founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth

Federation (CCF), himself an avowed eugenicist who wrote his 1933 master's thesis on "social hygiene and public health" (McLaren 7–9). As McLaren explains, Douglas' thesis asserted "the popular hereditarian argument that the mentally and physically subnormal were not so much the victims but rather the causes of a good deal of the distress of the depression" (8). They could be identified, Douglas argued, "as the low achievers on IQ tests, the delinquent, the venereally diseased, and the improvident"—in sum, what he deemed "the defective" (8).

Several characters in *Waste Heritage* fall into the categories of "defective" described here. Although the novel depicts some as relatively harmless, such as the unmarried and sexually active character Hazel, or the so-called delinquent characters Jim and Ted, others are treated as completely outside the bounds of sympathy and derided or abused, such as the "promiscuous" Widow Bannerman, or a sex worker with venereal disease who is beaten by Matt Striker. There is also the suggestion that Matt inherited his violent and unruly behaviour by way of a mother who abandoned him and a father who was a "dirty radical" that neglected his family in favour of his political activities (94). Although the novel never directly mentions eugenics, genes, or practices like sterilization, *Waste Heritage* is peopled by characters emerging from a eugenics-inflected imaginary, where the difficulties these characters encounter appear linked to their status as "defectives" or, to use Douglas' language, "subnormals."

In its rendering of these characters, *Waste Heritage* situates readers in the perspectival position of its physiognomically minded narrator, whose eugenic gaze takes in, ranks, and sorts each character according to their deviance from the norm. The novel's omniscient third-person narration, whereby the reader is given a detailed view of both external reality and the thoughts and motivations of the characters, plays a major role in affording this eugenic gaze (see Hill, Introduction xxxvi–xxxvii). The narrator's roving view is evident soon after Matt meets his friend, the barkeep Harry: "Harry . . . stared at Matt. Matt never forgot that first look Harry gave him, measuring him, sizing him up. He felt there was something between himself and Harry right from that first day" (4). This use of the third person to jump between each character's inner world provides an air of objective certainty to subjective psychological experience, an aspect of the novel which Hill links to the novel's modernist reportage and its "simplicity, directness,

omniscience, and objectivist tone” (Introduction xxxv). Indeed, indicative of the novel’s nimble naturalism, the roving narrator of *Waste Heritage* enacts a scientific cataloging of the physical and emotional life of the characters, at the same time attuning their gaze to, like Harry, “measure” and “size up” others.

The eugenic gaze is itself an act of sizing up, but what the narrator observes is often less important than what they do not apprehend. In *Disability Rhetoric*, Jay Dolmage explains that normality is often understood as a “negative capacity,” in that normalcy isn’t explicitly defined or even embodied by an isolated body, but becomes known by strategies that “mark out what it is not” (9). In this sense, the “measuring” and “sizing up” that characterizes the narrative point-of-view in *Waste Heritage* suggests an invisible ideal or “negative capacity” against which these measurements are compared. The faulty human body is measured against an idealized universal worker—a ghostly labourer by whom others are sized up through his negative presence. In a novel where all characters are represented as in some way defective, the universal worker ideal appears unattainable, as if to reach it would be to shed character and subjectivity. While “enforced mobility” and worklessness may be the ostensible problems of this novel (Mason, “Sidown, Brother” 150), it is the characters’ physical and mental lack of fitness that constitutes the main causal force impacting the characters’ lack of success, and this paradigm supplies the metric with which the reader is led to comprehend the roots of Depression-era labour inequality.

Eugenic logics presuppose a hierarchy of bodies ranked according to their fitness. Harry, a character whose amputated arm is repeatedly highlighted, provides a foil for Matt, positioning Matt as a more able-bodied and mobile agent in the text. More strikingly, however, the contrast between Matt and Harry prompts readers to grade and assess bodily fitness, etching the contours of normality that become more defined as the novel progresses. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Synder explain that disabled characters often serve to negatively define the normal, ideal body in a text. They argue that “the deficient body, by virtue of its insufficiency, serves as baseline for the articulation of the normal body” (7). In other words, disabled characters are instrumentalized as tools through which normality is reified and given expression, and even what might be seen as sympathetic renderings of disabled bodies actually further reinforce oppressive versions of

normativity. This occurs in the initial depiction of Harry, where his fat body makes his effort as a cook more apparent: “Small bright eyes peered out from the rolling flesh and sweat glistened among his broken features and along the line of his shiny black hair. When Harry fried hamburger, all the grease seemed to rise to his head. He looked around fifty and the build that would feel the heat a lot” (4). While readers might be positioned to feel sympathy for Harry as his fatness appears to cause him more visible effort and strain in performing his work in front of the restaurant grill, his depiction also indirectly manifests an ideal worker-body able to perform said tasks with ease. Harry’s amputated arm cuts “off about three inches below the shoulder” and, with his heavy frame, he is depicted as surprisingly agile; he has a “quickness of movement not usually associated with so heavy a man” and also used to be “good in the ring” prior to his accident and weight gain (4–5). Harry’s sedentary lifestyle and impediments to mobility serve as a foil to Matt’s agility and strength and, in so doing, mark out the contours of an ideal worker’s body—what Harry exemplified prior to several physical changes. At the same time, Baird sets up a parallel between Matt and Harry by signalling their shared predicament as embodiments of fallen masculinity. In this way, while Matt is depicted as superior to Harry with regard to his physical fitness, they are also lumped together in that they fall below an ideal level of physical and mental vigour.

The rhetorical framing of Harry in *Waste Heritage* can be read as an instance of what Dolmage terms “physical deformity as sign of internal flaw,” in that Harry’s bodily abnormality connotes “lack” (41), a further reinforcement of the ranking and sorting rhetoric so prominent in the book. The narrative frequently draws attention to Harry’s amputated arm and even mocks it for comic effect, with many instances of Harry “scratching his stump” (44; see also 6, 7, 85, 89, 258) or, in one instance, demonstrating his dexterity: “He had a neat trick of doing a half-dozen things at once with his left hand” (6). As mentioned, Harry’s body is described as fat: “Harry’s heavy head swung up and down, his chins concertinaed into one another” (6). These depictions are often followed by comparisons with Matt, including one case where Harry himself appraises Matt: “Harry considered Matt in silence. He studied the drawn, dirt-grained features, the powerful shoulders, the hard mouth, the narrow eyes” (6). As Rifkind notes, “the world of *Waste Heritage* is haunted by the physically and psychically maimed veterans of the First

World War” (169), and such appraisals and comparisons signal the war’s enduring impact. In addition to gesturing to the fallout of military violence in historical British Columbia, Harry’s depiction works to foment the book’s eugenic logic, whereby perceived deviance from a normative body, including its cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, is a key metric used to explain the successes and failures of the book’s characters.

A similar dynamic is apparent between Matt and Eddy. Eddy is introduced as a “bundle of waste with a head on it” being attacked by plain-clothed police officer (10), and is generally represented as a prototypical “feeble-minded” person: a “poor half-wit dope” (255) with “childlike and sinister eyes” (105) who, in Matt’s words, “took a terrible beatin’ an’ it’s left him kind of rum-dum” (43). Frequently threatened with institutionalization, Eddy attracts the attention of police after multiple violent incidents; Matt is framed as his protector, whom Eddy follows “obediently” (89). But Matt’s position as protector is sporadic, and his own “rage-blindness” is frequently invoked (54; see also 115, 273), coming over him with a pathological or “brain-splitting fury” (54). Indeed, Baird uses rhetoric that emphasizes his and Eddy’s uncontrollable animal violence and signals their shared inferior status, situating their bodies below a normative human given shadowy shape by the text. When Matt appears to save Eddy from a violent outburst against a woman in a protest crowd, both men are figured as snake-like: Eddy’s belt “coil[s] . . . like a thick red snake” while Matt “hisse[s]” at Eddy to run (18). Here, as with the depictions of Matt and Eddy throughout the book, both characters are touched by a hereditary taint of animality, a mark of their shared “heritage.”

In the case of these central characters, their “deviance” appears to be caused by social ills—family neglect, war, and police violence, respectively—but innate traits and tendencies aren’t ruled out, especially in the case of Eddy’s apparent “feeble-mindedness.” As McLaren notes concerning so-called defectives, “If their degeneration was due to environmental causes it could be cured by social programs; if heredity was the cause the state could only limit the problem by restricting their breeding” (19). Read in this light, Eddy’s death appears as a narrative solution to the problem posed by his erratic behaviour and mental incapacities—a eugenic finale that secures an effective restriction of his “breeding” and suggests that social programs might not be adequate to his implicit unfitness. In the case

of Matt, the harshest societal reforms for social deviancy are enacted, arrest and imprisonment, penalties suiting his less ingrained but still significant degeneracy. These narrative resolutions indicate the book's eugenic thinking, where the success or failure of the movement the book depicts rests on the very bodies of the men involved, and cures or punishments are meted out accordingly.

The novel's much harsher portrayal of racialized characters and sex workers, in comparison to the already harshly depicted unemployed strikers, serves to render the figure of the universal worker as not only able-bodied, but also as a white, Canada-born male. Rifkind notes that, "[t]hrough constructing the central characters as neither immigrant nor colonial, *Waste Heritage* draws a picture of the Canadian working-class male as racially and ethnically unmarked" (191), and the idea of the mark, or the sign of otherness and inferiority linked to eugenic rhetoric, is very much evident in Baird's depictions. Race and sexual deviancy mark the racialized characters and sex workers in the book, in that these one-dimensional caricatures become symbols of lack of moral fitness, abjection, and inhumanity. In one signal example, Eddy and Matt join the other strikers on Vancouver Island in a town called Cutlake (Nanaimo). Eddy disappears and Matt finds him with a woman who hits Eddy, after which Matt brutally beats her. The woman is framed as a grisly abuser: her "animal hardness" suggests a lack of compassion (113), and she is later described as possessing a "tail" and "clawing" and striking Matt brutally (115). This animality, and the suggestion that she has venereal disease (113), mark her as a "deviant" or "degenerate," but the fact that she is not portrayed herself as a victim of circumstances, like Matt and Eddy are, situates her outside the realm of sympathy. In this same episode, a Chinese man is witness to the attack, but does nothing to intervene, and this depiction is in keeping with other racist references to Chinese people and neighbourhoods in the book, which are uniformly negative (see Hill, xxxix–xl). Baird marks the Chinese man in a similar way to the sex worker via animal metaphors: the Chinese man is said to have "trotted to the open door" (115), and his "hardness," or indifference to the attack, mirrors the "animal hardness" in the sex worker's eyes. Importantly, depictions of inertia, unproductive torpor, and animal metaphors extend to the portrayals of Matt and Eddy here, as before: Eddy is "staring helplessly, his face stupid with horror" while Matt shakes him

“savagely” and “hisse[s]” out a warning (115). This rhetorical seepage insinuates that, while Matt and Eddy may be recuperable as white men, the judgment of the novel’s title still obtains: hereditary traits in combination with societal degeneracy have wasted their potential to be productive members of society.

As Mason points out, the Cutlake episode portrays the Chinese laundry owners, along with many racialized peripheral characters, as members of what she terms, drawing from Michael Denning, the novel’s “petit-bourgeois sublime” (*Writing Unemployment* 118). Only the white characters of the book can truly be portrayed as “workers”; all other racially marked characters are assigned the classification of small-business owner, leaving the category of worker only habitable by someone racially and ethnically unmarked.<sup>6</sup> Mason writes:

The so-called foreigners in *Waste Heritage*—the “Chinks,” the “kike” junk dealer, the Greek café owner, the “shrivelled old Chinaman” who “looked like death”—constitute the panoply of workers who are, in Denning’s terms, the novel’s “Other.” These figures are not labourers but rather small-business owners, and their avaricious, self-interested financial success stands as a counterpoint to the plight of the unemployed. (118)

In addition to this eviction of racialized characters from the category of *worker*, as I have argued, even within the ranks of the white unemployed a hierarchy of worker bodies is produced, where Matt Striker, Eddy, and the whole “organization” of striking workers are imagined as falling short of the worker ideal, as a *waste*. But in completely evicting racialized people and sex workers from the category of worker, readers are led to reject these groups as potential recipients of benefits should a favourable state intervention occur. In this way, the narrative framing of racialized and marginalized people, and their ideological exclusion from the category of worker, mirrors trends in Canadian labour law and thinking with regard to immigrant, racialized, and sex workers that continue to this day.<sup>7</sup>

As representatives of the unemployed strikers, Eddy’s failure to survive the events of the book, Matt’s inability to prevent Eddy’s death, and the larger failure of the striking men to implement political change and attain adequate government aid can be understood as an

inevitable outcome of the eugenic thinking that structures the book—a thinking in which collective organizing among “unfit” characters couldn’t possibly remedy what ails society. Close to the end of the novel, after the organizers of the strike make a deal with the government, Matt becomes disillusioned with them. Shortly after, he finds Eddy in a trance-like state being beaten by a policeman. In a rage, Matt starts to beat the policeman himself and ends up getting arrested. Following this, Eddy wanders aimlessly until he is killed by a passing train. It is unclear to the reader whether this is a suicide or an accident. By ending this novel where it began, in what Mason refers to as its “cyclical form” (*Writing Unemployment* 120), with the departure of a train whose steam “[comes] on and on” (275), Baird suggests the lack of progress made by the strikers throughout the course of the novel, with the train symbolizing the inexorable and dominant position of systems and infrastructures of society, economics, and the Canadian nation. In this sense, far from showing sympathy to the strikers, the conclusion to this book reveals Baird’s disparaging and fatalistic view of them, communicating pessimism towards the possibility of the strikers pulling themselves up and out of their abject position in society. As I have argued, this pessimism stems from the novel’s eugenic thinking with regard to human betterment: it will not be communist organizers who figure out a solution to unemployment, because the flaws that cause these problems are innate and biological. The evident fatalism present in the book’s conclusion, then, can be read as an element of its eugenic rhetoric, or the structures of style and language this novel uses to think through the problem of Depression-era unemployment.

The title of this article includes the phrase “Bloody Sore,” and the word “sore” is used repeatedly by many characters. This specific reference is to the title of an in-progress manuscript by Kenny Hughes, a writer documenting the strike while travelling with the men. The phrase indicates the resentment, disappointment, and impatience for change among the strikers, and points to the pain and exhaustion caused by the trauma of their experience as itinerant, jobless outcasts. As a figure of speech, “bloody sore” is typical of the eugenic rhetoric rife in *Waste Heritage*—the biological determinism that identifies the roots of social unrest in the bodily ailment, the physical defect, and the biological lack. Many readings of *Waste Heritage* have understood Baird’s indictment of Canadian society as implicitly suggesting that

only the institution of unemployment insurance or increased aid could help these men, that it is the sole remedy to “heal” the “bloody sore” on the Canadian nation they represent in the book.<sup>8</sup> The evidence I’ve provided regarding the book’s eugenic rhetoric complicates this reading: while Baird is clearly influenced by the social progressivism of her time, her depiction of Depression-era unemployment does not imply that increased aid would easily remedy what afflicts the body politic as imagined in this novel. Of course, neither would the organization, cooperation, and mutual sympathies developed among the marginalized people Baird depicts as intrinsically flawed. Further attention to Baird’s earlier writings and early life in England and Vancouver<sup>9</sup> may lead to more definitive answers as to how deeply enmeshed her views were with the eugenic theories popular throughout her career and life.<sup>10</sup>

#### Notes

1. See Mason (2013); Hill (2007; 2012) and Rifkind (2009). Hill and Doyle attend to the novel’s genre, as does Wylie.
2. Mason notes the pointed absence of the word “communist” or mention of these specific groups in *Waste Heritage* (2013, 116). Instead, Baird refers to it as “The Organization.”
3. Early reviews of *Waste Heritage* compared it to John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* and Mason (“Sidown, Brother!” 120) discusses the similarities between Eddy and Steinbeck’s character Lennie. A comparative study of the novels using a mad studies approach would be generative.
4. These metaphors often apply to the crowd of strikers, whom Baird describes as insects (105), trained seals (123), or monkeys and rats.
5. See Grekul et al. 358–65, 375; McLaren 46–67, 160; Kevles 435–38; Revie 120, 135–37; Dowbiggin 600, 603–24; and Wahlsten 187–96.
6. Indigenous people in the book, referred to with the Chinook jargon term “Siwash” or the racial slur “Breeds,” also are never depicted as workers or unemployed, but only as passing figures and in racist terms (see Baird, *Waste Heritage* 149).
7. See, for example, Lenard and Straehle or Maynard 44–47.
8. And Baird made comments to this effect, as Hill notes (Introduction xxv).
9. For example, it is worth paying further attention to her education in England, the reasons for her mill-owning family to immigrate in 1919 to Vancouver Island beyond her father’s love of fly-fishing (Hill, Introduction xiii), and her teaching work before writing *Waste Heritage*.
10. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their generative feedback and the *Canadian Literature* copy-editor for their illuminating suggestions. Much

gratitude to Jay Dolmage, Heather Smyth, and Imre Szeman for feedback on earlier iterations of this article.

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## *Margaret Randall and Transnational Domestic Space: Translating George Bowering in El corno emplumado*

On December 6, 1964, Margaret Randall wrote to George Bowering about a selection of his poetry that she would publish the following year as the sixteenth issue of *El corno emplumado/The Plumed Horn*, the Mexico City-based bilingual literary magazine that Randall co-edited with her husband, Sergio Mondragón.<sup>1</sup> In the letter, Randall shares her enthusiasm for the poems that would become Bowering's third full-length book, *The Man in Yellow Boots/El hombre de las botas amarillas*, when it was published in October 1965, as one of *El corno's* annual issues dedicated to the work of a single poet.<sup>2</sup> Randall voices her excitement through an image typical of Cold War-era rhetoric: "the book as I see it is a tight-knit volume covering your incredible range and shooting you out to north/south america like a tactile rocket" (letter, 6 Dec. 1964). For Randall, Bowering's work represents an opportunity for contact across the cultural, linguistic, and political divides between anglophone North America and Latin America. The arc that Bowering's "tactile rocket" would follow, in Randall's analogy, re-iterates the mandate articulated in the editorial note of the magazine's inaugural issue, published in January 1962: "now, when relations between the Americas have never been worse, we hope EL CORNO EMPLUMADO will be a showcase (*outside politics*) for the fact that WE ARE ALL BROTHERS" (Mondragón, Randall, and Wolin 5). The editors of *El corno* saw the magazine as a crucial means of connecting writers working throughout the Americas, joining avant-garde poetry and little magazine communities in anglophone North America and Latin America with the aim of cultivating a broad transnational coalition in pursuit of literary and spiritual openness outside the

context of Cold War political manoeuvring. Randall sees Bowering's book as another instantiation of this mission, joining "north/south america" in a poetic dialogue that would transcend these political boundaries. If Bowering's poetry offered Randall and Mondragón another opportunity for hemispheric literary relations, the publication similarly offered Bowering an escape from what he saw as Canada's conservative and parochial literary culture. As he wrote to Randall and Mondragón in a letter from January 26, 1965, "What a good thing this will be for me, allow me to move myself away from trap of being a Canadian Poet!!!!" Bowering saw the publication of his work with *El corno* as an opportunity for non-national literary affiliation and access to a broader audience beyond Canada's borders.

The "tactile rocket" that Randall envisions shooting out across the Americas and the declaration of an all-caps "BROTHERHOOD" code her hemispheric vision with the masculine homosociality typical of poetry circles in this era that belies the gendered labour that made the magazine possible. Writing about the inter-American brotherhood proclaimed by *El corno*'s first editorial, Harris Feinsod argues that the magazine "proposed a semi-autonomous counterpublic" (220). In the editorial, Randall and Mondragón, along with early collaborator Harvey Wolin, project themselves as harnessing a world-historical energy on par with and opposed to the institutional forms of inter-American political relations and cultural diplomacy. As with most accounts of the magazine, Feinsod privileges the public-oriented instantiations of this mission, such as *El Primer Encuentro Americano de Poetas* [The First Encounter of American Poets], which took place in February 1964 in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park and brought together poets from across the Americas for a week of readings and social happenings. Yet the day-to-day functioning of the magazine—and the potential it bore for building a transnational community—revolved much more closely around the spaces and rhythms of Randall and Mondragón's home. By offering their home as a meeting place for artists and writers from across the magazine's global circulation, Randall and Mondragón also embedded their guests in the rhythms and ruptures of a home filled with three small children and the editorial apparatus of a literary magazine. Rather than understanding the home as a feminized, non-political space closed off from the masculine power structures of international politics and literary institutions, reading Randall and Mondragón's collaborations

with Bowering requires understanding the space of their home as the necessary grounds for a transnational literary community that grew more politically engaged as the sixties—and Randall's post-sixties career—unfolded.<sup>3</sup>

This embrace of the private space of the home as a site for cultivating transnational relations enables another vision of the inter-American poetics that Feinsod's work brings into focus. Yet, rather than ignoring domestic space as a non-historical site reserved for narrowly reproducing the nation—that is, rather than demand that women ally themselves with masculine power structures in order to stake out space for themselves in transnational poetic community, as Randall's signing of the declaration that "WE ARE ALL BROTHERS" does—these collaborations claim domestic space as a site in which Canadian and Mexican poets were able to enter into dialogue with a hemispheric poetic counterculture outside normative models of publics or even counterpublics. In making this claim, I build not only on Feinsod's work, but also on the work of Lytle Shaw, whose *Narrowcast* (2018) traces out a series of non-monumental counter-temporalities that "contest[ed] administered versions of national time" during the 1960s (Shaw 1). By operating beneath the surface of what typically counted as a public or as a historical event, Randall, Mondragón, and Bowering's subversive deployments of domestic space allow for the unfolding of a North American poetics not synchronized with the demands of national, institutional time—or international geopolitics, for that matter—not only a counterpublic, but perhaps a counterprivate, too. Rather than seeing the home as an insular and secure sphere in which the nation reproduces itself, quarantined from the ravages of a threatening modernity and international (dis)order, Randall, Mondragón, and Bowering's approach to mid-century domestic space offers distinctly different possibilities, even as this work unfolded within and against the patriarchal structures that defined life in both normative and countercultural contexts. If, as Randall claims in a 2014 interview with Stephanie Anderson, before 1969 "feminist ideas had not yet touched [their] consciousness" (103), then this attention to the home as a scene of hemispheric contact offers a nascent politics, as yet un-glimpsed by Randall and her peers in the 1960s, but which nonetheless manifests as a glimmering possibility in their work. Poised between Betty Friedan's identification of "the problem that has no name" in 1963 and Kate

Millett's formulation of a more radical "sexual politics" by 1970, Randall and Mondragón cultivated a domestic space and quotidian temporality that eschewed both the nationalism typically associated with the mid-century private sphere and forms of transnationalist connection that rely on the monumental temporality of capital-*H* history or the spatiality of official, institutional publics.<sup>4</sup>

In one of the few articles to address literary connections between Canada and Mexico from a Mexican perspective, Claudia Lucotti critiques the politics of representation in twentieth-century Canadian texts that take place in Mexico. In reference to two short stories from George Bowering's 1974 prose collection, *Flycatcher and Other Stories*, Lucotti notes that

la relación que establecen los personajes canadienses con la realidad de nuestro país se caracteriza por ser una típica relación de un turista que está de paso por un lugar y que se interesa básicamente por registrar lo más pintoresco que encuentra en su camino sin jamás establecer una relación profunda con el entorno. (539)

the relation that the Canadian characters establish with the reality of our country can be characterized as the typical relation of a tourist passing through a place only interested in recording the most picturesque scenes without ever establishing a deep relation with the site.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than focusing on the stakes of representation in Bowering's writing on Mexico—which Lucotti finds at times redeemable, at others less so—I am interested in the unanswered question of "a deep[er] relation" that Lucotti raises: What other forms of relation with Mexico would have been possible for a Canadian poet during this period? In order to do so, I centre my account on Bowering's correspondence with Randall and Mondragón. My argument begins with the correspondence between Bowering and the editors of *El corno emplumado*, which I draw from archival materials held across three separate institutional collections. In addition to *The Man in Yellow Boots*, Randall and Mondragón published a substantial amount of Bowering's writing over the course of *El corno*'s seven-year run. For his part, Bowering acted as *El corno*'s most active Canadian

representative, soliciting work, editing a portfolio of Canadian poets for the magazine's nineteenth issue, and acting as the conduit through which other Canadian poets contacted the journal. As the correspondence attests, Bowering, Randall, and Mondragón's relationship stretched beyond the literary and into their personal lives. Bowering and his wife Angela twice visited Mexico City during this period, staying for two months in the summer of 1964 and several weeks in August and September 1965, in both cases living near Randall and Mondragón. Though both Bowering and Mondragón were capable readers and translators in each other's languages—and each translated the other's poetry—the epistolary relationship proceeds primarily through Bowering and Randall, largely because work on the Spanish and English portions of the magazine was divided between Mondragón and Randall, respectively.

Though Bowering's poetry frequently falls into the sort of picturesque gazing that Lucotti critiques, his work—especially when read against this rich correspondence—offers new modes of thinking through the ways in which literary affiliation unfolds outside the boundaries of national literary cultures. Despite occupying more space in either archive than the letters of almost any other interlocutor, the correspondence between Bowering and Randall remains unexamined, while their relationship has received only passing reference in criticism of either author's work. The lack of interest in their voluminous exchange likely derives from the fact that Bowering's writing tends to be situated in relation to US poetry from the same period when read outside a Canadian national context; similarly, most scholarship on *El corno* tends to focus on connections with either US-based poets or poets writing elsewhere in Latin America. I aim here both to expand on and short-circuit these more established routes of contact between anglophone North American and Latin American poets during the 1960s. Reading Bowering and Randall's letters brings into greater visibility how the Randall-Mondragón home enabled this hemispheric contact. Rather than occurring against a background of public, historical events or through more explicitly institutional channels, *El corno* supported forms of inter-American relation that proceeded according to the temporalities of everyday life and within quotidian domestic interiors.

Between 1962 and 1969, Randall and Mondragón edited and published thirty-one quarterly issues of *El corno* that included art,

poetry and prose in English and Spanish drawn from an impressive network of writers and artists across the Americas and beyond. Early in the magazine's history, Randall and Mondragón married and began a family, and Randall received Mexican citizenship. Despite the aim of the inaugural issue to operate "outside politics," the magazine became increasingly political as the turbulence of the decade unfolded, especially under the influence of Randall's developing leftist political consciousness. In the summer and fall of 1968, *El corno* published expressions of solidarity with the massive, student-led protests that culminated in the government massacre of unarmed protestors on the night of October 2, 1968, in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco, Mexico City. As a result of the magazine's support for the protests, the Mexican government pulled funding for the magazine and began a campaign of intimidation.<sup>6</sup> Defiantly, the magazine carried on for three further issues before ultimately ceasing in the face of increasing threats and harassment. By this point, Randall and Mondragón's marriage had ended. After a brief period in hiding, Randall fled to Cuba with her children.

Epistolary correspondence was a constitutive foundation of the relationship between Randall and Bowering, as well as a key to the larger success of their different literary projects. As scholars like Alan Davison and Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda have argued, *El corno's* ability to cultivate a sense of hemispheric community relied on Randall's and Mondragón's international correspondence, which they reproduced, often without permission, in the magazine's back pages. Similarly, Eva-Marie Kröller emphasizes the centrality of Bowering's participation in postal exchanges, provocatively suggesting that "[h]is correspondence is clearly also part of his *oeuvre*, or better yet, in competition with it" (24). In emphasizing the centrality of *El corno's* correspondence, Aceves Sepúlveda draws a parallel between Randall and Mondragón's mail and their home:

The intimate tone of some of the letters provides insight into the interpersonal relationships forged through the pages of the magazine and that manifested in physical encounters in Randall and Mondragón's home. These meetings provided a space where relationships forged through mail correspondence were strengthened and projects cemented. (203)

Aceves Sepúlveda stakes out an equivalence between the magazine's correspondence and Randall and Mondragón's home, which they offered as a meeting place for the artists and writers. Aceves Sepúlveda also calls attention to Bowering's relationship with Randall and Mondragón in making this claim, noting that "Bowering fondly recalls his visits to the Randall-Mondragón residence in Mexico City with his wife" (203). Yet they were more than simply pleasant encounters; Aceves Sepúlveda raises the stakes of these visits, noting that "Bowering's work became known and published in several Latin American magazines as a result of these meetings" in Randall and Mondragón's home (203). Domestic space enabled the magazine to function as a site of hemispheric contact, with Bowering gaining a Latin American readership on the basis of his presence in Randall and Mondragón's home during two consecutive summers as much as through his publication in the magazine.

In the letters that Randall sent to Bowering, she makes frequent reference to the fact that she and Sergio worked on the translations together and that this process was woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. In a letter from April 11, 1965, Randall notes that "tonight, sergio and i worked about an hour on your book . . . we completed four translations" (letter, 11 Apr. 1965). The formulation here, that Randall and Mondragón, in working on the translations, constitute a collective subject, is standard for the correspondence, where Randall often refers to translation as an act either "we" or "sergio and i" undertook. Moreover, this work proceeds within the quotidian temporality and domestic space of Randall and Mondragón's shared lives. At one point in the correspondence, Randall sketches the family's afternoon:

now it is after lunch. sarita has just had her mangy hair cut by sergio, me and elena by turns, one holding her down while the other cuts. very fetching. goyo is drawing pictures of a gas station and the gas is going into the roof of a conveniently located car. sergio is sprawled on the bed giving it to the translation. (letter, 3 Dec. 1964)<sup>7</sup>

Randall describes their translational practice as embedded in the rhythms of their domestic routines, no different from the other activities that take place within their home. Indeed, the

correspondence suggests that their bedroom was an important site for such editorial activities; in an April 14, 1973, letter reminiscing on the Bowerings' 1965 visit to their home, Randall recalls George's "long body across the bed in one of the upstairs bedrooms laying out the idea for *THE MAN IN YELLOW BOOTS*" (letter, 14 Apr. 1973). Elsewhere in the correspondence, Randall relates that "we have just finished translating eight of your poems . . . in first draft, that is. then sergio spends a week or so in the parks, with that first draft, putting in the music" (letter, 2 Aug. 1965). Randall elaborates on this claim in the next letter by noting that "sergio took four poems into town yesterday and in parks and whatnot (also in office waiting rooms!) put them in perfect form!" (letter, 4 Aug. 1965). Bowering responds to Randall with the comment: "So strange to sit here, Calgary and imagine you in bedrooms and parks fixing up my poems" (letter, 11 Aug. 1965). Randall and Mondragón's daily orbit so fascinated Bowering that he expresses interest in "the idea of making a film about Sergio and his household—all the things he does in a day in Mexico City" (letter, 8 Nov. 1964). As Randall maintained the household and performed publishing and editorial tasks tied to their home, Mondragón also multitasked: translating poems in the public sphere while out stumping for funding in government offices and working as a yoga instructor in public parks to make up household and magazine budget deficits.

While Bowering's comment establishes the Randall-Mondragón home as the site of poetic production, that Bowering's idea for a film reinscribes a masculine ownership of the household is apt, even if Mondragón's contributions tended to occur in the public sphere. Even as Randall and Mondragón cultivated a home that skirted the normative pressures of the nation-state and offered a porous domestic space counter to the insular dictates of nationalist paranoia, it remained a site for the patriarchal division of labour—a keen irony, given that Randall had initially moved to Mexico to enable herself to live more easily as an artist and single mother. In later years, when questioned about the end of their marriage, Randall would relate that "Sergio still expected me to be his 'wife' in every domestic sense. I always rebelled, and eventually this was one of the things that ended our marriage" (Randall and Anderson 94). Despite the persistence of patriarchal power structures in the Randall-Mondragón home, I nonetheless want to retain some value here: through her efforts, Randall was able to cultivate their home as a space in which a dynamic

transnational community convened and to stake out space for herself as an artist, editor, translator, and activist. Just as the possibility of the hemispheric counterpublic that Feinsod identifies relies on male homosocial structures, so too does Randall and Mondragón's counterprivate operate within the context of an obstinate climate of patriarchal violence even as Randall's work reframes and revalues what a poetics of the Americas would mean in this context.

The collaborative effort required to edit and translate Bowering's book, unfolding across the quotidian temporalities and domestic spaces of Randall and Mondragón's shared lives, encompasses yet further collaborators. Referring to Bowering and his wife Angela in one letter, Randall exudes excitement for the undertaking: "your book is going to be the best damned bi-lingual book to make an appearance in '65, so i want all the poems to be up to the best best of your work we've seen . . . and i want us and you (that means all four of us) to agree on it all" (letter, 17 Oct. 1964). Elsewhere, Randall wishes that "you both would go over this thing as soon as you can" (letter, 6 Dec. 1964). Throughout the correspondence, Randall repeatedly makes clear Angela's investment in the work—that *Yellow Boots* involves both of the two couples writing letters to each other across the gap between them. George also comments on Angela's involvement. He relates: "I'm busy typing out angela's choice of what poems shd be sent you for the buk. She pickt out a lot of them" (letter, 16 Nov. 1964). Even as Randall collaborates on the translations with Sergio, Angela makes editorial selections for George. During the Bowerings' second visit to Mexico City, George and Angela helped prepare the book for publication. After they'd left, Randall wrote to them that, during a day of stuffing envelopes, "all we did was talk about you and think about you both the whole time, wishing you were here, wishing that you, too, were raising blisters on your hands and singing work songs with us!!!" (letter, 19 Sept. 1965). Randall depicts the Randall-Mondragón domestic space as the scene of the collaborative and collective labour through which they created Bowering's book with both George and Angela.

The complex editorial and publishing process underlying *Yellow Boots* suggests that the title page—which lists three authorial figures, "george bowering," "traducción [translation]: sergio mondragón," and "collages: roy kiyooka"—fails to adequately represent the full scope of collaboration involved in the text's creation. Though on the surface it makes sense that Mondragón would have contributed most to the

translations, the archival record demonstrates that the process of translating and editing Bowering's work involved a much more collaborative effort, enlisting not only Randall but Angela as well. Randall and Mondragón have both recounted that they typically worked on each half of the magazine relatively independently, especially as their editorial goals and private lives diverged through the later issues, though each translated for the other when time and effort permitted. Yet comparing the manner in which credit was given in the three previous single-author volumes of *El corno* complicates this claim, as they offer either no or joint credit for the translations. In other earlier issues, translations are credited to Randall and Mondragón together, regardless of source and target language. Bowering's *Yellow Boots* is the first single-author issue to feature the translator's name on the title page, and of the two that give credit to the translators at all, the only one to give credit to Mondragón alone. Given the collaborative nature of the translation process outlined in Randall's correspondence with Bowering and the trend of giving both editors credit for translations in previous issues, this shift is conspicuous and speaks to a larger pattern of unacknowledged labour performed by women in literary communities during this period, even as this collaborative translation process linked together artists and writers working in Mexico City, Calgary, and Montreal, where Kiyooka then resided.

Arguably, then, *Yellow Boots* could have credited Randall for the translations, counted Kiyooka, whose collages punctuate the text at its centre, as a co-author, and acknowledged Angela for how her contributions shaped the text. Yet even this collective attribution would fail to include a sixth, more transient member of the text's contributors: David Oberwiser. Randall mentions Oberwiser in three letters to Bowering, stating in one that "a friend passing through, david oberwiser, who knows perfect spanish and is a good poet, is putting your poems into rough spanish to make things easier for sergio and me" (letter, 23 Mar. 1965). Elsewhere, Randall notes that "our friend finished the entire book in loose translation, which makes our job easier" (letter, 11 Apr. 1965). As the published book makes no mention of Oberwiser, his contribution is only visible through these archival traces. Yet these traces are important for helping to establish the degree to which Randall and Mondragón's home provided a site for such hemispheric collaboration. Oberwiser's unacknowledged

drafts of the translations for *Yellow Boots* demonstrate how the Randall-Mondragón household operated as a transnational domestic space—without opening their home to a transnational community of writers and artists passing north and south through the hemisphere, the magazine would not have functioned how it did. *The Man in Yellow Boots* is the product of the imbrication of the Randall-Mondragón home in the transnational circuits that the magazine helped sustain.<sup>8</sup>

Oberwiser and the Bowerings were, of course, far from the only figures within *El corno*'s orbit to stay with Randall and Mondragón in Mexico City; the Randall-Mondragón household was a well-known Mexico City venue for hosting literary and artistic visitors from across the Americas and Europe. In an August 1964 letter from the US poet Carol Bergé, which marks the climax of her falling out with Randall, Bergé complains about just how fully such visitors were absorbed into the daily lives of the Mondragón-Randall family: "Your handling of our being in yr home was often trying and ugly. To beg us to stay there, and then to insist we stay in midst of livingroom, covered with people + noise + magazines + activities—not conducive to peace for us, not considerate of you." Setting aside the bad blood that existed between Bergé and Randall—Bergé critiques other elements of Randall and Mondragón's lifestyle, while Randall criticizes Bergé for her difficult personality and odd behaviour—what emerges from Bergé's letter is a portrait of the household that largely aligns with Randall's recounting of the afternoon in which Sara "had her mangy hair cut" while Sergio "gave it to the poems" in the bedroom. The interpenetration of life and art in their house on Calle Triangulo supported a transnational literary community, enabling the hemispheric migrations of their friends and peers and a creative practice grounded in border-crossing, translation, and transnational contact. Though George and Angela Bowering never stayed in their home, for the Bowerings' second visit in August and September 1965, Randall and Mondragón helped secure an apartment just half a block from their home so that they could spend more time with each other and work on *Yellow Boots*. In addition to hosting Oberwiser and Bergé, Randall reports, "Our house was always full of US or Canadian poets on their way south, Latin poets going north, or poets from Europe or some other part of the world who were drawn to Mexico as if by a magnet" ("Remembering"). A letter to Bowering from July 30,

1966, counts at least eighteen guests—most notably Brazilian concrete poet Haroldo de Campos—who had passed through their household in that month alone, which Randall ends lamenting that the Bowerings were “missing” from this already torrential stream of visitors. The Randall-Mondragón household anchored a network of transnational contacts and offered a physical space in which people could congregate. Moreover, it’s not Mondragón’s movements through the masculine public sphere—the parks and waiting rooms where Mondragón refined the translations of Bowering’s poem while trying to solicit often erratic government funding for the magazine—that are the primary support for these transnational contacts; rather, this sense of hemispheric connection emerges from within the domestic, female-gendered space and labour of the home. In doing so, *El corno* provides an instance in which the home—the Randall-Mondragón home, specifically—represents not a microcosm of the nation, but a more porous, non-national space in which artists from different jurisdictions crossed paths. And it is precisely the gendered labour of housekeeping through which these transnational contacts are sustained, notwithstanding Bergé’s rather messy account of Randall’s style of homemaking, which seems a signature of—rather than a contradiction to—her and Mondragón’s creative hospitality.

The poems in Bowering’s 1969 chapbook, *Sitting in Mexico*, support such a claim. Collecting all of Bowering’s Mexico-themed poems from this period, Bowering published *Sitting in Mexico* as the twelfth issue of his little magazine, *Imago*. Dedicating the work to “Sergio Mondragón and Margaret Randall, who were largely responsible for the chances” (2), Bowering titles several poems in tribute to time spent with Randall, Mondragón, and their children, including “To Margaret Randall de Mondragon” (29), “Written at Margaret’s Desk” (34), and “Calle Triangulo” (35). “Written at Margaret’s Desk” offers one conceptualization of how Randall and Mondragón’s home bridged the gap between Canada and Mexico. Written on August 23, 1965, during the second visit to Mexico City, Bowering sketches out a vision of hemispheric belonging centred on the Randall-Mondragón household. In the second stanza, Bowering relates: “Moctezuma beer in my veins again / I think of Aztec ashtrays, the earth / of Mexico, here again, mosquitos on my face” (34), beginning the final stanza by reaching out to a “dry sand-dollar / I found on Veracruz beach a year ago, my hand / reaches here again, as my eyes, we are just / come to

Mexico again” (34). Through a habitual acquaintance with the quotidian objects of Randall’s study—the ashtray, the sand dollar, the desk, the typewriter—Bowering builds a sense of quotidian routine that joins Canada and Mexico, finding himself “here again” in the porous, transnational space of the Randall-Mondragón home. At the end of the second stanza, Bowering takes this sense of familiarity a step further: “I lie in darkness & hear the guitar song / from the barrio across the street, we’re home” (34). Bowering’s claim signals doubly: for a poet eager to shed associations with the nervously nationalist Canadian poetry scene, Mexico is an alternative home, a site of transnational affiliation outside the nation, an elsewhere to the undesirable *here* of 1960s Canada. At the same time, these transnational affiliations are created through domestic space, through Margaret and Sergio’s open-bordered home. Bowering formulates a sense of a transnational belonging that relies on domestic space and the quotidian temporality of repetition and habituation.

Randall shares these sentiments in “Mexico Over Again,” a poem included in her 1965 chapbook *October*, published by *Ediciones El Corno Emplumado*. In the poem, which follows sequentially after “Veracruz,” a poem dedicated to George and Angela, Randall describes the view from her desk that appears in Bowering’s poem:

flowers growing in outsized powdered milk cans . . .  
 .....  
 :what makes each day, spoken, eaten, babies  
 and underwear. tin-backed mirrors and  
 the ruled notebook. moctezuma in wet red,  
 agrarian reform in white, a row of letters  
 on another wall. (50, idiosyncrasies in original)

In this poem, “what makes each day” includes both the activities of artmaking and the detritus of everyday life—the same detritus that Carol Bergé complains about in her letter to Randall. Randall’s desk, a site for the production of both Bowering’s “Canadian” poetry and her own migratory writing practice, is located in the midst of the domestic interior’s day-to-day functioning. If an awareness of the gender politics of domestic space were, as Randall herself claims, unavailable to her in 1965, then the poem nonetheless encodes the larger possibilities of the space.

Invoking Bergé's rift with Randall again can help to add another layer to this contextualization, as one of her primary lines of attack against Randall and Mondragón was what Bergé had seen as the contradiction between *El corno's* constant solicitations for cash, necessary to keep the magazine independent and operational, with what Bergé viewed as the extravagance of their employment of domestic workers. Like many middle-class, Mexican homes, Randall and Mondragón's household included live-in domestic workers, typically women from rural Indigenous communities on the edges of Mexico City during its rapid mid-century expansion. One of these women, Elena, appears in Randall's above-mentioned account of a typical afternoon, helping cut Sara's hair. Randall names each of these women in her 2020 memoir, *I Never Left Home*: "Antonia and then Ermelinda and then Juanita and then Concha, her sister Helena and their mother, Serafina" (123). While Randall defended the use of domestic workers in her quarrel with Bergé at the time, in her memoir, Randall reflects more critically on the exploitative nature of these economic relationships, reflecting, "I was guilty of such behavior" (123). This additional layer of gendered exploitation in the Randall-Mondragón home cuts to the heart of my argument here and adds another layer of complexity to the project of a poetry or poetics of the Americas, identified variously by Harris Feinsod, Charles Bernstein, Ernesto Livon-Grosman, Roland Greene, and others. The very conditions for such poetic connections are precisely this—the invisible and unacknowledged labour of often racialized women working in the ongoing wake of colonial, racial, sexual, and other forms of violence and exploitation. Reading Bowering's book in the context of his correspondence with Randall helps to sharpen this background into foreground, into the very stakes at play, which will shortly become clear in my account of the first poem of the volume, "To Cleave," and its translation, "Penetrar."

*The Man in Yellow Boots* offers a panorama of Bowering's diverse 1960s aesthetics. Aside from "For wcw" and "The Descent," two longer poems in more open forms that gesture to the directions Bowering's writing would take later in the sixties and seventies, most of the work in *Yellow Boots* falls into the category that Bowering's *Tish* peer Frank Davey dismisses as "magazine poetry" in a comment on Bowering's early writing (Davey 164). But Bowering also shows range throughout *Yellow Boots*, including poems driven by disjunctive

juxtapositions (“The Day Before the Chinese A-Bomb,” “Her Act Was a Bomb”), ekphrasis (“The Swing”), political satire (“Vox Crapulous”), and elegy (“The Descent,” “The Shifting Air”). Randall herself praises the book as “a tight-knit volume covering your incredible range” (letter, 6 Dec. 1964). In one of the few scholarly accounts of *Yellow Boots*, Eva-Marie Kröller describes this plurality of poetic forms as a “collage” that juxtaposes the political and the personal, reading the book’s overall form through Kiyooka’s visual contributions: a series of twelve oval-shaped collages that punctuate the text at its midpoint, and which Kiyooka saw as complements to, rather than illustrations of, the poems (Kröller 35–6; Randall, letter, 25 Apr. 1965). Kröller’s invocation of collage is useful to my account here for understanding how the intertwining of the private and public in the collage forms offered by Kiyooka and Bowering contributes to the forms of contact and relation that Bowering and Randall cultivated, even if Kröller’s claim makes more sense in anticipation of her reading of Bowering’s *Rocky Mountain Foot* (1968)—which more literally collages newspaper clippings with Bowering’s lyric meditations—than it does for *Yellow Boots*, where each poem operates as a discrete, singular text. While I’m interested in the figures of connection and contact that such a reading generates, I focus here on another aspect of *Yellow Boots* that generates relation across difference and warrants only a passing mention in Kröller’s account, despite taking up fully one-half of the book’s page count: the Spanish translations of each poem.

*Yellow Boots* opens with a cluster of what Randall refers to as the book’s “love poems,” which ground the text in a poetics of intimacy that unfolds within the domestic spaces and quotidian routines of George and Angela’s home (letter, 6 Dec. 1964). These five poems—“To Cleave,” “After Breakfast,” “The Typewriter,” “Poem for My Wife Angela,” and “What Is It”—each situates the reader within domestic space or a daily routine. Setting aside “To Cleave,” for a moment, as it becomes the focus of the rest of my account here, “After Breakfast” takes place “under the kitchen light” (8), while George gazes at Angela “across the room” typing on his typewriter in “The Typewriter” (10) and awakens next to “her head / of yellow hair / on the pillow” in “What Is It” (14). In “Poem for My Wife Angela,” Bowering recalls their wedding day, noting that “The gold ring / minted for your finger // is fitted there now / as part of your / household hours” (12). If the first three examples focus on constructing their shared domestic

space, “Poem for My Wife Angela” calls attention to the temporal dimensions of domestic space in the invocation of “household hours” and to the routinization of gendered labour in the heteronormative mid-century home.

“To Cleave” meditates on erotic intersubjective contact that I read, within the context provided by Bowering and Randall’s correspondence, as a means of understanding collaboration and translation, ironically anticipating the conditions of the text’s publication, even as the poem gestures to the patriarchal power structures within which this work unfolded—a combination that comes into yet sharper relief in the poem’s translation. Bowering theorizes the dissolution of subjective boundaries that occurs during sexual pleasure through a meditation on the double-meaning of the titular verb. The poem, in full, reads as follows:

When I enter you  
you enter me.

That is to cleave,

to cling,  
cut,

penetrate  
& love.

I love you inside  
& offer my inside to you.

To cleave is to separate  
& join,

to open  
& fill.

And I am filled with you  
even as I place myself  
in our cleft  
my love. (6)

Formally, the poem enacts the erotic dialectical joining/splitting that the poem describes, building on the contradictory meanings of the verb “to cleave,” as each of the middle stanzas, composed of opposed line pairs, enacts a paradoxical whole greater than either part. The poem thus points to the blurring of the lines between self and other typical in poetic expressions of ecstatic sexual experience. Kröller observes that “To Cleave” operates via a formal principle similar to the poem that closes the volume, “Breaking Up, Breaking Out,” which “puns on a central word, revealing it to be an oxymoronic combination of fusion and separation” (29). Instead of following Kröller in reading this ecstatic experience as spiritual, I use the publication history of *Yellow Boots* to offer a new means of understanding how Bowering’s writing theorizes the fusion and dissolution of subjectivity—as collaboration and translation—that Kröller sees in his work. While the poems contained in *Yellow Boots* don’t directly invoke the inter-American context I foreground, the book’s form—a bilingual English-Spanish book of Canadian poetry published in Mexico—allows such hemispheric valences to enter the poems retroactively, especially given the complex, transnational collaborations involved in this text’s creation.

This context enables a reading of “To Cleave” as anticipating Randall, Mondragón, and Oberwiser’s collaborative work on the book, a process supported by and nurtured within the transnational domestic space of the Randall-Mondragón home. Read this way, the poem can support an understanding of translation and collaboration that underlines how each participant undergoes a mutual penetration, merging together in order to produce a contradictory and dialectical whole—the bilingual poem—that exceeds either version as discrete texts. In the claim that “When I enter you / you enter me,” the speaker and addressee alternate between being translator and translated, as the act of inhabiting the other’s words or having one’s words inhabited blurs the boundaries between who speaks and who is addressed. This process appears as an act of interpenetration—the original text penetrates the translator, which in turn allows the translator to penetrate the original as each speaks through the other. Appropriately, even as this process is multidirectional and mutual, it nonetheless relies on and reinforces a masculine logic of sexual penetration, rather than, say, of surface play. Yet such an understanding of translation pushes back on another male-centred, mid-century theory of

translation: George Steiner's four-stage hermeneutic motion, contemporary with *Yellow Boots*, which outlines a masculine, colonialist logic in which the translator penetrates the original text to extract and transmit its value.<sup>9</sup> Rather than a unidirectional and exploitative penetrative violation, here penetration takes on a more polyamorous, orgiastic valence. Through the act of translation, Sergio Mondragón, Margaret Randall, George and Angela Bowering, David Oberwiser, and Roy Kiyooka are brought into a slippery, permeable interpenetration, mirroring the model of a transnational counterprivate offered by the Randall-Mondragón home and reflecting both the sense of fluid and permeable possibility and the structures of patriarchal domination that inhered in the era.<sup>10</sup>

Usefully for an argument focused on translation and transnational contact, this dual-faceted aspect emerges with greater clarity in the Spanish translation of the poem. In the Spanish poem's more aggressively masculine-coded "penetrar" ("to penetrate"), the reduced ambiguity of the central term of the poem allows the more violent, invasive resonance to overwhelm the more protective, enclosing one. In full, the Spanish version reads:

Al entrar en ti  
entras en mí.

Es que nos abrimos,

nos adherimos,  
nos rompemos,

nos penetramos  
& nos amamos.

Te amo adentro  
& te ofrezco mis adentros.

Penetrarse es separar  
& juntar,

es abrir  
& llenar.

Y estoy saturado de ti  
mientras penetro  
nuestra hendidura  
mi amor. (7)

In the Spanish version, the dual cutting and joining of “cleave” collapses into a less ambiguous penetration, even as the lines of the poem nonetheless attempt to re-enact the dialectical process of the English poem. Though, like cleaving, penetration can involve both insertion and envelopment, the former valence almost completely overwhelms the latter in “penetration.” Whereas the grammatical subject that cleaves can both cling and cut, “penetrate” lacks this subject-object dualism. Even if the shift from English infinitive (“to cleave”) to Spanish third-person plural reflexive (“nos penetramos”) achieves blurring of the boundaries between I/you or yo/tú earlier in the Spanish poem, affording another sort of ambiguity and interpenetration, the gendered violence implicit in “penetrar” colours any reading of the poem performed in the context of translation. The shift in the poem’s central verb thus brings into sharper focus how the poetry community, gathered by the editorial labours of *El corno*, relies on a gendered division of labour and the maintenance of patriarchal structures, even as these poets attempted to create an alternative space in opposition to hegemonic mid-century nationalism and Cold War militarism. While in either version of the poem, the possibilities of penetration are always mutual and multidirectional, they are both nonetheless premised on phallic violence that threatens to unravel the promise of transnational community through the exploitation that persists in the division of domestic labour. This moment of untranslatability—how the “cleft” of the English poem becomes the “penetration” of the Spanish—is worth holding onto, as it provides a moment of friction through which to understand how gender violence cuts across this moment of striving towards a hemispheric ideal. The untranslatable ambiguity of the verb “to cleave” instead reappears in the guise of gendered violence particularly apt for complicating any sense of the transnational domestic as a space of possibility and pointing to the structures of patriarchal domination that underlie the project of a utopic hemispheric poetry community.<sup>11</sup>

By the mid-1970s, Randall's work began to embody the inchoate feminist possibilities I have traced through her deployment of domestic space as a site for transnational contact. In these years, her writing shifted towards a more engaged feminist form of hemispheric solidarity, represented by the publication of books like *Cuban Women Now* (1974), *No se puede hacer la revolución sin nosotras* [*You cannot make the revolution without us*] (1980), and *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (1981), which Randall wrote as she transited from Cuba to Nicaragua and beyond in the years after her exile from Mexico. Aptly, many of Randall's books from the mid-seventies to mid-eighties were published with feminist Canadian presses: New Star Books and Pulp Press in Vancouver and The Women's Press and Participatory Research Group in Toronto. Harris Feinsod locates Randall's shift towards a feminist consciousness as a part of her broader sixties' movement towards revolutionary leftist solidarity, evident in *El corno's* later issues and *So Many Rooms Has a House but One Roof* (1968), a chapbook that Randall wrote following a 1967 visit to Havana. Feinsod claims that this latter, book-length poem instantiates "a 'new language' of fleeting revolutionary domesticity" (228). If Randall's writing begins to take on a more noticeably revolutionary tenor around this time, the idea that domesticity could offer space for other political formations—beyond the expected heteronormative, nationalist, capitalist patriarchy of mid-century—was already evident in her earlier work. This potential becomes more apparent when reading Randall and Mondragón's co-editorship of *El corno* through their correspondence and collaborations with George and Angela Bowering. In her home, Randall created a space in which a transnational poetry community could cohere, a place where Canadian and Mexican (and Peruvian, Nicaraguan, Brazilian, US, Finnish, etc.) poets could meet and collaborate, share new writing, and build a network of like-minded peers beyond their national borders. Crucially, this work was carried out not through official bureaucratic channels or in the public eye, but within a private domestic space, alongside the ruptures provided by Randall and Mondragón's young children, following the quotidian rhythms of the everyday.

#### Notes

1. I follow convention by referring to the magazine by its Spanish title or as *El corno* for short.

2. I shorten this collection's title to *The Man in Yellow Boots* or *Yellow Boots*.
3. Domestic space remains a topic of ongoing debate in feminist and queer theory as a contradictory site of both oppression and empowerment. While a thorough engagement with these ideas lies outside the scope of the current paper, my own understanding of domestic space arises primarily through an engagement with the feminist phenomenology of Sara Ahmed, especially in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), and Rita Felski, especially in her key 1999 essay "The Invention of Everyday Life," as well as the writing of poets Bernadette Mayer and Daphne Marlatt.
4. Ironically, Friedan repeatedly identifies "poet" as one of the fulfilling occupations that postwar expectations about women's temperament and the requirements of domestic labour kept women from pursuing. I borrow the term "monumental temporality" from Lytle Shaw. In *Narrowcast*, Shaw suggests that one particular feature of postwar US poetry was a dedication to working within "nonmonumental temporality," that is writing outside of the timescale of a national public—the type of timescale signified by historic monuments and national days of celebration or mourning (38–39).
5. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.
6. Importantly, these government contributions had been, to this point, provided irregularly and without strings attached, allowing Randall and Mondragón to maintain their editorial independence (see "Stormy" 14).
7. Bowering and Randall both wrote with the idiosyncratic punctuation and spelling typical of sixties countercultural writing. All text drawn from the correspondence is reproduced exactly as it appeared in the original documents. Here, Randall refers to her children by nicknames: "Goyo" (Gregory) and "Sarita" (Sara). A second daughter, Ximena, was born during the Bowerings' 1964 visit to Mexico City, as recounted in Bowering's poem "To Margaret Randall de Mondragón." A fourth child, Ana, was born in 1969, shortly before Randall fled to Cuba.
8. There's a larger question here as to why Randall and Mondragón fail to credit Oberwiser anywhere outside their private correspondence with the Bowerings, given his foundational role in drafting rough translations of the text. Though such a discussion lies outside this paper's scope, my hope is that a discussion of his contributions in this article will help to mend this omission. Perhaps in the future, a longer engagement with these archival materials will be able to address suppression of the credit due to Oberwiser.
9. While a more complete engagement with feminist translation theory remains outside the scope of this paper, Sherry Simon's influential critique of Steiner can serve to point readers in that direction: "Steiner's translator is never explicitly defined as masculine, never inserted into a specific historical context. The model that Steiner provides is presented as gender-free, and yet the whole 'thrust' of Steiner's argument supposes the perspective of masculine sexuality" (27).
10. Adding one further vector of movement, Bowering translated some of Mondragón's poetry at the same time that Oberwiser was completing the rough translations of Bowering's book. The flow of translations, like most everything else in the Randall-Bowering correspondence, moves in every direction. Two of

- Bowering's translations of Mondragón, "The Spring" and "Moaning of The Cow," appeared in the December 1965 issue of *Chicago Review*. Bowering's translation "Little Sarah Dhyana" appeared in Mondragón's bilingual collection of poetry *Yo soy el otro/I Am the Other*, published by Ediciones El Corno Emplumado in 1965.
11. My understanding of "untranslatability" here draws on the work of Emily Apter in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013). Apter sees in "untranslatability" a means of resisting the imperialist drive of a universalist World Literature that steamrolls difference (2–4).

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## *The Media of Environmental Listening in Don McKay's Songs for the Songs of Birds*

In the 1960s and 1970s, when Marshall McLuhan and a growing chorus in media ecology were singing and playing the fanfares of new media, the composer and musicologist R. Murray Schafer was teaching people how to listen. Although Schafer's contributions to ecocriticism are tainted by a neoclassical, imperial nationalism that was in vogue when he started his work in the sixties, and his opinions of some of his Indigenous sources of sound are now retrograde to say the least (Robinson 1, 5), he remains important for helping to redirect settler-scholarly attention—which was so visual in midcentury, when television had just arrived—from the eye to the ear.<sup>1</sup>

Schafer and his colleagues were formative in the development of soundscape ecology, or acoustic ecology, in sound studies. (Walter Ong and other contemporaries of McLuhan also focused on orality and aurality, but they had less interest than Schafer in listening to, and in, natural environments.) Over the course of four decades, Schafer was involved in a long-running project of musical performances, the *Patria Cycle*, that tended to be staged in natural environments.<sup>2</sup> These performances included *And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon*, which was informally known as the Wolf Project (Quarrie). The project had a rule: no recordings of any of the performances. But there was at least one exception: a week-later reprise whose recording was authorized (Quarrie). On that occasion, which involved listening to an opera singer perform an aria of howling vocalizations from across a lake, a strange sound carried over the water. “Timber wolf,” said Schafer on the recording. It apparently *was* a wolf, but it could have been the singer. The strangeness of a sound that should have been perfectly at

home in the environment was ironic; it was an uncanny effect created by human interlopers and their wolfish ventriloquism of other animals.<sup>3</sup>

The naming of the wolf is one inspiration for this essay, a piece of “audiotextual criticism” (Jason Camlot and Christine Mitchell qtd. in Moffatt, Sharren, and Levy 142) that is primarily concerned with how Don McKay’s audiobook, *Songs for the Songs of Birds* (2008), is in dialogue with soundscape ecology and a more overtly political, contemporary sound studies.<sup>4</sup> As a format, the audiobook can be physical media, such as the compact disc from which I transferred files in the MP3 format to my smartphone for convenient listening in more natural environments outside my home. This mediation itself is political, partly because my becoming acquainted with so many new bird names and bird songs depended on multiple electronic devices that will soon be obsolete, soon be waste.

One of the politics here is obviously environmentalism; when I was drafting this essay, *The Guardian* reported that half of the world’s bird species are in decline as a consequence of human activity (Weston). We so often neglect the birds; meanwhile, in *Canadian Primal* (2021), Mark Dickinson points to McKay’s *Lependu* (1978) as his “most critically neglected work” (65). Yet *Songs for the Songs of Birds* has also been mostly ignored, except insofar as it is a collection of poems whose individual texts have been critiqued in other contexts. In the “Field Marks” poems and elsewhere, McKay’s implication that he was in the field to record birdsong, which is actually a feint, relates to a recent essay by Jason Wiens, who argues that voice appropriations—and I would extend those to recordings of birdsong—should be contextualized by the history of found poetry.<sup>5</sup> Wiens claims that much of found poetry should also be called “appropriative poetry” to emphasize “agency rather than serendipity on the part of the writer who appropriates and recognizes the ethical issues of appropriation” (102). Indeed, McKay did not simply happen upon the birds. Unlike Schafer and his on-site recording of the wolf in its natural environment, McKay did not bring recording equipment into such an environment to record birds. He and his publisher, Rattling Books, used an ornithologist’s audio files and superimposed McKay’s voice over them from their studio in Tors Cove, Newfoundland.<sup>6</sup> His emplacement among the birds is therefore an auditory deception made possible by the creative use of recording technologies.

Emplacement is an issue in the decolonial sound studies of Dylan Robinson (xwélmexw or Stó:lō) in *Hungry Listening* (2020), where he contends that one of the problems of the colonial mentality is a tendency to take the land and then box yourself out of it via the built environment. McKay seems concerned with this problem, especially in calling attention to media and metaphor, which are by definition interstitial: they obviate immediacy; they connect things, but not directly. The format of the audiobook of *Songs for the Songs of Birds* also demands that we specifically consider the media of listening, such as microphones and headphones, that can mediate our experiences of even the most natural environments. Although McKay's treatment of the absent, technologically conjured birds seems intentionally and even problematically unnatural, it also calls attention to listening in natural environments and to the technological illusion of being in nature. If such a thesis seems obvious to readers who are already familiar with McKay's meditations upon technology in the context of his better-known meditations on ornithology and geopoetry, it gains relevance because of McKay's role in making an audiobook, which is not so much a repackaging of his poems as an experiment with intermediality and with juxtapositions of his audible voice alongside audible birdsong. Epistemologically, it is an inflection point in McKay's career: an audiobook, yes, but also a media study.

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How much McKay intended his work to prompt such reflection, I am not sure, but the packaging of the audiobook—the paratext, if not exactly the “paraphonotext” that Al Filreis describes in theorizing additional audible elements in a recording (Moffatt, Sharren, and Levy 146; see 145–46)—suggests a degree of ecocritical self-consciousness about the technological illusion that the format produces. Crucially, the packaging of the audiobook labels the birdsong as “Sfx,” or sound effects, a fascinating parallel with Schafer's “timber wolf,” which was supposedly real but could have been a sound effect of the remarkably imitative human voice. According to Dickinson in *Canadian Primal*, it was James Reaney who impressed upon McKay that it was important to know the names of local trees (60); later, other birders “impressed upon him the need to get [the birds'] names right” (66; see also 68–69). “Swamp sparrow” (0:09–10), says McKay on track 14 of his

audiobook, naming a bird and introducing its song as he later does with the magnolia warbler, the bald eagle, and others. The fact that the birds are not actually there with him, or he with them, underscores the theme of extinction that bookends (*audiobookends*) the collection. Track 1 of *Songs for the Songs of Birds* introduces the credits; the collection really begins with “In Aornis,” track 2, and it much later concludes with “[Sfx] Great Auk Et Al.,” track 39. In “Great Auk Et Al.,” the “Sfx” are ironic, because the extinct birds cannot be heard, and thus their calls cannot be effected. Instead of offering (impossibly) a clip of their birdsong, McKay intones the names of extinct birds over silence, an implicitly environmentalist statement not completely different from John Cage’s infamous performance of silence in 4’33” (1952).<sup>7</sup> As Cage and Schafer do, McKay demands that we reflect on listening; more than that, McKay’s speaking of the names—the only interruption of the silence—is an implication, even a lament, that human voices have supplanted birdsong.

McKay is exposing some of the ways in which naming mediates reality, and, as I suggested above, mediation has a literary parallel in metaphor. Schafer’s naming of a specific wolf in the *Patria Cycle* evokes a recurring metaphor in media ecology: that of introducing a wolf into the forest. (A simple definition of media ecology would be the study of electronic arts and communications as systems. As I will explain, it is not particularly ecological.) Attributed to Neil Postman, a leading media ecologist in the generation after McLuhan, the metaphor suggests that “[i]t’s not the previous forest plus a wolf.” Instead, “the whole forest is simply a different thing” (David Gordon qtd. in Cali xxii). This metaphor—however insightful—has various problems, mainly that it neglects the role of wolves as predators in contrast with other species that could have been introduced; and it almost proudly suggests that our media are wolfishly powerful, able to transform an ecosystem. More relevant here is that the metaphor reflects the fact that media ecology—more so than acoustic ecology (Truax and Barrett 1202–03)—has tended to treat “environment” as a metaphor (Heise 157; Postman 10), instead of treating it as a real or actual natural environment.

For McKay, as for McLuhan, metaphor is a powerful concept. McKay, “a virtuosic metaphoriste” (Cook xiv), wrote about metaphor explicitly in texts such as *Vis à Vis* (2001) and *The Speaker’s Chair* (2013); he had benefited from his romantic partnership and sharing of interests

with the poet, philosopher, and musician Jan Zwicky, author of *Wisdom and Metaphor* (2003). In *The Speaker's Chair*, McKay discusses metaphor in the context of its Greek etymology, which defines metaphor as a ferry that carries meaning. As a vessel for communication, it is in effect a medium (Deshaye 50–51). Indeed, McKay thinks of media analogously in his preamble to “Ravens at Play over Mount Work” when he describes ravens who are “improvising extravagantly in both media, both flight and voice” (0:27–31). In his earlier essay, “Baler Twine” (1993), nature is ironically understood through media: “‘Nature,’ with its secular term, ‘the environment,’ constitutes that portion of television that is not news, weather, serial drama, sports, or sitcoms, a sort of documentary melodrama which fuses spectacle with sentimentality” (134).<sup>8</sup> His tongue-in-cheek suggestion that “nature” is a “portion of television” echoes various statements by McLuhan since the 1960s, including his commentary on photographs of Earth from outer space (e.g., from Apollo 8 in 1968) as a transformation of all terrestrial nature not into a whole, an ecosystem, but into a picture, art, or medium (see, for example, McLuhan 49).

Such transformation is metaphorical; it is also a “deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 87–88, 122, 126, 134; Canclini 228–29, 239–41; Tomlinson 106–40), one that is all the more literal when the specifics of territoriality are shrunk by distance in outer space, eventually to the point where the oceans occlude land and Earth appears as a blue dot, landless. Of course, when Apollo 8’s photographs of Earth in the total darkness of space appear on television (and from close enough that land is still visible), they are often accompanied by a soundtrack or a voiceover, whereas the vacuum beyond Earth’s atmosphere is silent. Sound cannot travel (as sound) in outer space, so it can only be metaphorical there; meanwhile, outer space easily inspires visual metaphors, such as the one that McLuhan ascribes to the picture from Apollo 8. For a poet such as McKay, metaphors are linguistic first, so they are audible in language, and for him they also provide some methods of figuratively speaking a language of the wilderness. They enable us to attend to “what [literal] language can’t do” by “gestur[ing] outside . . . language in a way that flirts with its destruction” (McKay, “Baler Twine,” 137–38). I have never seen McKay attempt to write a whole poem in transcribed chirps and squawks, but that too would be a “destruction” of human language.<sup>9</sup> His use of metaphor remains vital because it

refrains from navigating to polarities, the points of departure and arrival of the ferry.

A similar dynamic occurs between points of intimacy and distance in his interactions with natural environments. In *Songs for the Songs of Birds*, the birdsong is abstracted from where it is recorded, with ramifications that I am already considering—one more being a give-and-take, a serious compromise, that limits most of our representations of natural environments. There is a manufactured convenience of hearing a particular bird, and there is the loss that we have to accept in exchange for the affordances of the medium. Although McKay urges people to go into natural environments “to engage directly with our surroundings” (Dickinson 80), he also once said that we need “a way of inserting ourselves into the world in a flash” (qtd. in Dickinson 80). So, in the audiobook, just push “Play.” Listen to a pine grosbeak on a track simply entitled “[Sfx] Pine Grosbeak.” It’s simple. Relatedly, as Travis V. Mason observes in reference to “Limestone” (from *Deactivated West 100*, 2005), in which McKay’s speaker listens to a waterfall from inside his tent, you don’t have to see something to hear it and appreciate it (139)—though trekking to the waterfall might require a lot of effort. There can be proximity but imperfect immediacy when not all the senses are invoked or engaged. In *Ornithologies of Desire* (2013), Mason asserts that, “[g]enerally, McKay’s soundscapes, like his poems about specific birds, compel a closer proximity to the outdoors” (140); *Songs for the Songs of Birds* is something of an exception—not completely, because the poems do “compel” that “closer proximity” (at least for me, as I will explain below). As a format or medium, the audiobook constructs a more complete illusion of the natural environments than the “Songs” can do in their various books in print; however, I agree with Mason that any desire “to retain the integrity of represented soundscapes” must fail (140): “To expect a literary soundscape to include all ambient noise is a bit like expecting a painted landscape to include all that lies beyond the frame as well” (140).

The exclusion that Mason is considering is also arguably a process in the colonial part-and-parcelling of the land and landscape. It is, like abstraction, a deterritorialization that has obvious colonial implications. Schafer’s and the wolf’s unequally shared moment of emplacement and naming can be interpreted as unreflectively colonial. Non-Indigenous people like Schafer or McKay or me might

leave our urban settlements and come to a natural but colonized environment to stake a claim by naming it and the beings that live there, without regard for, or ears for, Indigenous names.<sup>10</sup> As only one example from the area around Vancouver where Schafer's World Soundscape Project was and is based, the Tsleil-Waututh (səlilwətaʔ) word for wolf is "takaya" ("Takaya"). For Robinson, listening to an Indigenous transmission of oral tradition and history should involve "the literal emplacement of the listener back among sensual experience of place" (45). Relatedly, the ideal way to listen to a wolf is to do so where it lives; "[l]istening is perhaps always a listening through, or in relation with land" (Robinson 53; see also Schafer 205). Schafer's on-location recordings partly recognize this importance, because the more problematic alternatives could have been to record a wolf in a zoo or play a recording of a wolf from one geographical environment in a totally different one. McKay's recordings do not emplace McKay as a listener alongside the birds, but his emphasis on extinct, absent birds suggests that he is aware of dislocation as a problem. Dickinson meditates on what he calls an "ecological grief" or "solastalgia" that has added to "the gloom evident in McKay's poetry from the beginning, shaping a poetics that is open to the earth, blistered by what it finds there, and defaults to a sense of humility in the face of the atrocities visited upon otherness by humankind" (69).<sup>11</sup> The loss of a species of bird is a loss to the place of those birds, and the details matter: what bird (what wolf), what place (what forest).<sup>12</sup>

McKay does not name places in titles where he names birds in *Songs for the Songs of Birds*, but some of the geographies could be inferred very generally from known nesting grounds and migratory patterns, and even (again, very generally) from ambient sounds on the recordings, such as rushing water.<sup>13</sup> I could learn more about the birds introduced on the audiobook so that I know whether their songs could be expected where I am as I write this. The pine grosbeak appears in Newfoundland ("Pine Grosbeak"). The varied thrush is rare ("Varied Thrush"). The wood thrush is apparently not found here ("Wood Thrush"). Regardless, I did listen to the recordings of relevant poems and bird calls (e.g., of ravens and eagles) in locations in and around St. John's, NL, where I have seen and heard some of those birds (crows, if not ravens, in this case; I might also have heard birds whose names I don't know and haven't recognized by ear). I did not see or hear those birds while listening to *Songs for the Songs of Birds* on those

occasions, and usually the recorded birdsong was mixed in with real ambient noises, from the banalities of road traffic and construction to the sublimely reassuring sound of a foghorn. Once, I couldn't be sure if dogs barking were on the recording or in the real world. My own experience of the absence of the birds from the limited confines of the city—which McKay may reflect on in his “song” about extinct birds (“[Sfx] Great Auk Et Al.”)—is an example of the problem of decontextualized, deterritorialized listening that Robinson criticizes through his concept of colonial, greedy, “hungry listening.”<sup>14</sup>

Robinson also asserts, however, that a better mode of listening is not possible with only the ears. Drawing on the teachings of Stó:lō siyám (“respected leader”) Jo-ann Archibald and Stó:lō Elders, Robinson contends that listening requires three ears: the left, the right, and the one in our hearts (51).<sup>15</sup> McKay seems to agree that the ears are not compassionate enough on their own. In the chapter on McKay's poems about listening in *Ornithologies of Desire*, Mason associates listening with intimacy, in the close-far dynamic that I considered above: “What the listening ear wants is to get closer” (148). In an essay that comments on McKay's “Meditation on a Small Bird's Skull” (from *Night Field*, 1991), Mason shows that McKay's imagination of “[sticking] the sharp end' of a bird's skull into his ear functions as a reminder to check poetic symbolism with a modicum of humility” (“Naming” 26). Here, associating himself indirectly with Robinson's focus on care, McKay suggests that people can listen quite stupidly and harmfully, perhaps especially when symbol, metaphor, or other abstractions are involved. Indeed, Susan Fisher argues that such abstraction, when animals are the vehicle of the metaphor, is “not . . . terribly reprehensible” but might be a “dangerous mental habit” (qtd. in Mason, *Ornithologies* xv). In McKay's poem, the speaker could fill his ear with sound if the bird were still alive to sing through its “sharp end,” but the bird is dead, so plugging the ear is just that.<sup>16</sup> We listen badly, too, when we take up space by projecting unnatural sounds, sounds inappropriate to the space—and this includes cultural spaces to which Robinson's work is especially sensitive. Kit Dobson adds in *Field Notes on Listening* (2022) that listening-related idioms such as “listen up,” “hear hear,” and “you know what I'm saying” play a role in social inclusion or exclusion by negotiating discourse, by influencing who can speak and who must—or may—listen (14). When people add sound by speaking over silence, people can also listen

badly or, more generally, pay attention badly, or with bad results that often detrimentally affect their environments.

This potential makes sense in a reading environment that involves media besides print. In his book *Ecomedia Literacy* (2021), Antonio López refers to Maryanne Wolf's research on "continuous partial attention" (81), which diminishes our ability to feel for others, appreciate what others bring to the table, and respect each other's voices. The critique of short attention spans is a cliché and even a canard of cultural studies, because it often neglects the different types of attention and their nuances, but, to me, a digital environment of memes and clickbait has obvious ramifications for both social and natural environments. These problems are caused in part by our lack of attention to environmental subtleties and distant environments, such as the dramatic decline of biodiversity and the agglomerations of pollution in oceanic gyres and on island beaches. In this mediated environment, McKay considers an alternative to the notion of our diminished capacity for attention. Without addressing the attention-related clichés or framing his idea in those terms, and with self-conscious concern about naming the idea, he proposes in "Baler Twine" a "poetic attention," "a sort of readiness, a species of longing which is without the desire to possess" (134). The qualification about possession at the end of his definition aligns McKay's concept of poetic attention with Robinson's concept of "guest listening," an offering of a "critical listening positionality" to challenge settler-scholars and creatives (53). Markedly, when McKay invokes the taxonomic ranks of biology with the words "sort" and "species," he relates attention to longing as if they were in the same genus or family. He thereby also implies that attention is multifarious and that it is a category of beings, of living things. It is something to which we have to commit, as if it were a relationship with a companion or a companion species; we need to attend to it fully, at least some of the time, but without the implications of having "to possess" it personally or colonially. Relatedly, we might have to accept that attention might not reveal something to hear, and that we have to respect the silence.

The first poem in *Songs for the Songs of Birds*, "In Aornis," meditates upon what McKay describes, in his spoken introduction, as the "thought experiment" of a world without birds—the silencing of birdsong (0:32). The next poem, "Alibi," continues the experiment. In a series of propositions followed by "because" that never resolve into an

independent clause, McKay describes the imagined consequences of not seeing or hearing swallows. The opening proposition is that the swallows are gone, and “with the air free of their chatter we could hear ourselves think” (o:17–21). More than only “think,” however, the people could write; McKay tells us that, faced with empty nests, “we” filled them with “notes . . . full of love, envy, and lament” (o:22–27). The implication is that writing can be done when “chatter” doesn’t interfere. Curiously, the lack of birdsong doesn’t inspire the people in the poem to sing; they couldn’t “leave” that kind of “note.” They write. An intermedial shift or a translation is at work, but when McKay refers to the nests as “holes,” he implies that the “notes” are merely filler. Human “love, envy, and lament” are immaterial and unimportant to swallows. But humans feel the loss, possibly, as McKay writes, “because we need an earth with ears to hear the long dread carpentry of history” (o:29–35). How can the earth “hear”? McKay could be arguing for the personification or anthropomorphization of “earth” and “Earth,” a view that has lost some currency in light of posthumanism and posthuman philosophy. But he might simply be suggesting that humans are not well equipped, physically or psychologically, to listen as well as we should.

Listening thus becomes equipped with technology in McKay’s “Song for the Song of the Common Loon.” The loon’s cry is so brief that “the song is already gone before it’s uttered, so the ear is left full of its emptiness, bereft” (o:28–35). As with “In Aornis” and “Alibi,” McKay imagines a relative silence in the absence of birdsong. But the attitude of lamentation is not the only one, because sometimes the sound is annoying. When the loon does speak, the speaker of the poem says, “Jesus, what perilous music. Surely, like Odysseus, we ought to stop our ears against this feral MRI, with its dreadful diagnostic reverb” (o:47–57).<sup>17</sup> Without having been subject to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and its “reverb,” as far as I recall, I don’t know if the loon sounds like an MRI machine.<sup>18</sup> Regardless, the implication in “Song for the Song of the Common Loon” is that the technology and its “spectre of diagnosis” have ruined the pleasure of listening to natural music in whatever natural environment McKay had in mind (Mason, *Ornithologies* 158). For instance, the speaker and listener might not like the sound of a common loon because of a mnemonic association of the sound with MRI machines and the unpleasantness of hospitals. There is also a transgression of natural

and technological boundaries at issue, a cyberneticism, which parallels the fact that MRI enables us to both listen in and see in to a body, because magnetic resonance is effectively sonic, and its imaging is visual. As Don Ihde observes in *Acoustic Technics* (2017), our cultural predisposition to the image can lead us to forget that sound can leave a visual trace that technology can help us understand.<sup>19</sup>

In effect, the MRI machine imitates the common loon, and sonic imitation is a major theme of *Songs for the Songs of Birds* that raises questions about similarities between birds and humans, and how their lives are intertwined. Dickinson suggests that, for the poems in this series, McKay's "task was to go beyond the field guide and fashion his own idiosyncratic responses to the beings that inspired him, without resorting to description or imitation" (81). Listening closely, however, to *Songs for the Songs of Birds* does reveal some descriptions and imitations. In "Field Marks (2)" (which is mislabelled as "(2)" and is actually the first "Field Marks" that appears in *Birding, or Desire* in 1983 and later in *Angular Unconformity* in 2014), we first hear some ambient sounds—footsteps through brush, perhaps, and then water running in a stream—before we hear birdsong. To me (not a birdwatcher), it sounded like birdsong on first listen, but also like human vocalizations that recalled Schafer's *Patria Cycle*. The first example is a hissing, swishing call; the second a two-note whistle; the third a low melody with a brief ostinato. Immediately, McKay's voice ends the sequence by asking, "How can you identify [pause] a totally addicted birdwatcher?" (0:45–49). The joke is that listeners would be trying to identify a bird when it is a person, probably McKay, imitating a bird. He isn't quite in the territory of the uncanny valley, Masahiro Mori's concept for describing dolls, robots, or artificial intelligences that can uncertainly and uncomfortably resemble or imitate humans and their behaviours. But it's helpful to think about the weirdness of interspecies imitations. Once, at a lake in north-central Saskatchewan, in a tent at night, I heard coyotes that sounded like human babies crying; I have been told that cats are at least as convincing.<sup>20</sup> The credibility derives in part from the context: I'm at the edge of a lake without babies in the vicinity, so how perplexing that babies seem to be here. It would be less perplexing, and less weird, if babies were around and a coyote's strange wail could be attributed to them.

In the case of "Field Marks (2)" on the audiobook the context is established by the ambient sounds on the recording, sounds that

situate the listeners in a sonic space in which we might expect birds. This sonic space is ludic and comic; one of the ambient sounds seems to be footsteps through tall grass, followed by the sound of someone (presumably McKay) urinating on the ground while whistling a birdsong. This is also a sonic space made possible by recording technologies such as microphones and a storage medium,<sup>21</sup> plus the affordances of recording multiple takes and choosing from them an especially convincing performance. McKay alludes again to imitation when he jokes that birdwatchers are “just like you and me, but cageless” (0:56–58). The symbolic cage is the printed book or the audiobook. When birds or humans are recorded, the distinction is somewhat less salient, because we are all in the “cage” of a recording; however, the people controlling the technology have freedoms and abilities that birds do not. When McKay ends the poem by stating that the birdwatcher “wings it” (1:57–58), or improvises, I think he’s joking again, because the poem that we’re hearing was written and then recorded, not improvised or ad-libbed as if it were the jazz in “Ravens at Play over Mount Work.”<sup>22</sup> The comedy at play here is amplified later in the audiobook, in his preamble (or preflight announcement) on “Song for the Song of the Varied Thrush,” when he says, “[I]t’s said if you want to imitate it [the varied thrush], you try to whistle and hum at the same time, a sort of vvvjjjt—God!” (0:11–17). As Kate Moffatt, Kandice Sharren, and Michelle Levy note, an “audible format” is required to appreciate such performative gestures (145). McKay’s tone of voice when he says “God” implies the embarrassment of imitating the bird badly, but it also implies that in this case he was improvising, willing to leave an imperfect performance as-is. Indeed, as Méira Cook states, “McKay’s watcher never ‘becomes’ bird” and might not, because of interspecies difference, be attuned to the complexities of actual birdsong and its physics and embodiments (x).

Elsewhere, McKay performs an imitation not of a bird but of a human voice from an Audubon film about birds. In “But Nature Has Her Darker Side,” a multi-section poem about owls that is partly a script for a live-commented screening of an Audubon film that McKay once saw, he is also placing listening in juxtaposition with (bird) watching. McKay describes “a phenomenon that used to be common in Audubon films. The film would come around, but it would be accompanied by a live speaker who would provide commentary while the film was playing” (0:09–19). He attributes the title of the poem to

the “occasion” of that Audubon film (0:32). In a voice more clipped and affected than his usual one, McKay imitates the Audubon narrator and imagines the script (here in my italics and parentheses) from which the commentary derives: “To film this nest of great-horned owls, we had to erect a scaffold for our blind close to the tree. (*Shots of scaffolding and floodlights being carried through the bush.*) Then we set up spotlights on three sides. By this time the owls have too much invested in the youngsters to object to an audience . . . or to demand a contract” (1:37–2:00). The parenthetical commentary, as in a script, explains what is being seen on the film, but it also creates an immediate contrast between McKay’s normal tone of voice and his imitation of the Audubon narrator. The revelation here is that the very same animal need not always sound the same. Although the result is comic in this poem, in the case of the MRI machine, there could well be a “darker side” of invisible illness that might be brought to light.

The “darker side” of nature also comes from the Audubon commentator’s remark about how newborn owls eat other animals provided by their mother; however, the risk in “But Nature Has Her Darker Side” is not only to non-human animals. After remarking on the still-too-young future predators, McKay imagines an owl eating a man, first by reversing the gaze: “two huge eyes devour his image. As we know, owls eat their prey entire, including jeans, boots, wallet, watch, and delicate intelligence” (3:00–11), which are regurgitated later as “neat pellets” for use in building “the Parthenon of nature’s ‘darker side’” (3:14–15; 3:17–19). By including “intelligence” along with objects made by people, including wearable tech—the watch, of course, but even the boots and jeans—McKay implies that our intelligence is constructed too, and maybe not much more important than the materials that we produce and later typically discard. McKay then links the imagined killing of the person by the owl to missing-persons cases (to be echoed in the audiobook’s final poem by the “songs” of absent, extinct birds). While he could have ruminated on the sociological, criminological phenomena of humans abducting and killing other humans, he imagines people disappearing through their transformations into owls: “Moonlight, radiant and cold as X-ray, saturates his skin. *Who-who* surrounds him” (3:52–58). Curiously, X-rays—the definitive spectral technology—appear in the simile to suggest that light does not stop at surfaces but both “saturates” and “surrounds” people and their identities (the who). They are affected on the inside and outside. Here, the

imagined prey becomes a predator: he “creeps” (4:02), “his toes clutch” (4:06–07), and “he soars off into night” (4:12–13). The human becomes an owl, and “his victims have no warning except the sense that—something’s missing into which they fall” (4:34–39). Again, something is “missing.” What “something,” what hole? The lack of answers is uncanny: we know something is missing, but we don’t know what; and we (I assume) can intuit that the “fall” is a death or disappearance, but we may not quite be able to admit it to ourselves.

The X-rays and MRIs in these two poems foreshadow the penultimate track on the audiobook and its quintessentially unnatural environment of a modern hospital. In “Gynaecology,” McKay chooses the setting of a hospital to reflect, in part, on ancient, gendered notions of natural environments. His speaker is observing a man (gendered “he,” possibly the speaker’s past self) whose male anatomy precludes him from embodying the medical condition that his female partner is experiencing. Cryptically, the condition is explained as “the sadness of undone beginnings,” possibly a reference to miscarriage, which would partly explain the title, “Gynaecology.” The speaker observes around the man the hospitalized “women” (0:10; a term that is presumably restricted to cisgender women in this context) who are “flourishing clear bags of plasma, emblems of the perfect womb” (0:14–18). The “bags of plasma” are not McLuhanist extensions of “man,” but (highly reductively) of woman: technological “improvements” on human bodies. They corroborate Alanna Bondar’s claim that McKay’s ecopoetics is unconventional in resisting the cliché of gendering the natural environment feminine (65); here, the unnatural environment is feminine, or at least associated by metonym (or “emblem”) with femininity. In this medicalized environment, the speaker reports the man’s thoughts: “here, he thinks, we’re earlier than virgin, nakeder than nude. Sex, a pair of shoes, is left beside the elevator” (0:26–34). These references to virginity, nakedness, a sexless or anti-sexual space, and the elevator’s vertical way in and out (up and down, heaven and hell) seem to allude to the garden myth in Christianity, wherein the need for carnal knowledge drives Adam and Eve from a near-perfect nature, the Garden of Eden, into a world that they and their spawn will gradually spoil with sin and technological development.

“Here” in the hospital, however, McKay orchestrates a reversal of the postlapsarian medicalized environment. “Gynaecology” is an uncannily appropriate inversion of my ongoing study on media in

natural environments in Canadian poetry, which I designed before reading the poem (and of which this essay is a part). Whereas I have been seeking poems about green spaces such as forests in which the speaker uses or contemplates electronic devices and other media (and please let me know if you have examples to share), McKay brings signs of nature into a denaturalized space. Partly through the track's ambient sounds of birds that would not normally be present inside a hospital, he transforms a hospital into a symbolically natural space. When the man in the poem departs from the site, "he will leave some tapes of poetry to pour through headphones into her ears, thinking plasma, matter, feather, energy, chickadee" (0:43–55). As McKay performs the list at the end of this poem, his voice quietens—the "energy" lessens—so that the birds become more noticeable. (Does "matter" correspondingly shrink—or expand?) All four items at the beginning of the list can be understood as components of the chickadee, which McKay has effectively introduced or reintroduced into the hospital, ironically "naturalizing" the environment through "tapes of poetry" and "headphones," more wearable tech.<sup>23</sup> McKay's final words on the track, in a voice now even more distant (or at least more distant from the microphone, the effect being a voice of unregistered low frequencies), announce the boreal chickadee that he mentioned after "energy" in the list (1:04–05). Because we've been hearing the background noise of chickadees (I presume) throughout the poem, we are in effect wearing the same headphones, listening to the same chickadee poem, as the woman in "Gynaecology" is. We are all thereby gendered "woman," and we are helped in understanding an experience that might never be a problem for our anatomies or in our experiences (if "we" either have not experienced or can never experience pregnancy). This understanding appears to depend on imagining environments as other than they are: natural and not (so) technologized. It also depends on poetic attention and a different kind of guest listening, the imagined experience of being a guest in someone else's body, attending to what they hear.

From the acoustic simulation of a natural environment in a modern hospital to the actual natural environments wherein we can hear birds, McKay's audiobook is never itself "natural," nor can it be.<sup>24</sup> The built environment of the hospital is a space of absent nature, possibly natural death (and unnatural death), that segues "naturally" through a poem called "UFO" (which is not capitalized on the track

listing) into “Great Auk Et Al.” and its roll call of absent, extinct birds. He thereby calls attention not only to their absence but also to the changing liveability of their natural environments. In these spaces, our biological and human limitations have inspired us to extend our capabilities medically and, more generally, technologically, so that we can see and listen to even the interiors of closed spaces and bodies. As an inversion of the technological extensions of humans, however, he also considers the birdlike extensions of humans. Through the motif of imitation of birdsong, McKay draws parallels between the existential threats to birds and to humans, what might be termed our teleological and eschatological similarities. Life on Earth has an endgame, and, somewhat musically, we play it with birds.

#### Notes

1. By using the phrase “neoclassical, imperial nationalism,” I mean the Eurocentric adaptation of Greek mythological characters such as Ariadne and Hermes in the *Patria Cycle*, whose title refers in Latin to “homeland” but whose staging is on Canadian lands that are more legitimately Indigenous lands. Elements of cultural appropriation with the Egyptian sun god Ra also appear in the *Patria Cycle*. See the online overview, “Patria Design Project” (J. and D. Smith, 2006).
2. Perhaps surprisingly, John Cage’s 4’33” (1952), his “composition” of silence, “was first performed in an outdoor setting” (Dobson 19), too, meaning that ambient natural sounds would have affected the event.
3. We would also be justified in wondering whether Schafer was correct in identifying the wolf as a timber wolf, partly because other species of wolf might have lived in the area. He might well have known; in *The Soundscape* (1977), Schafer asserts that “a composer owes it to the [other animal] to know such things” (206). Cynthia Quarrie’s purpose in her talk on Schafer was partly to complicate such matters by revealing “the tension between nature sounds, sounds that are made to sound ‘like nature,’ and sounds that are clearly composed in a way that could only be human.”
4. After this essay was first submitted for peer review, *English Studies in Canada* published a special issue on sound studies (Camlot and McLeod; dated 2020 but released early in 2023). Due to time constraints, I have not joined this essay in a major dialogue with the special issue, but I have cited it where possible.
5. Appropriation is not a far-fetched concept to describe our use of birdsong; in fact, there is evidence to support the assertion that “humans copied music from birds” (Temple Grandin qtd. in Mason 132).
6. In a conversation on July 25, 2022, McKay told me that the recordings of birds are not his, but were obtained through Rattling Books, the publisher of the audiobook. By email, Janet Russell of Rattling Books corroborated on February 19, 2023, that the recordings were those of Dave Fifield, with whom she had worked at the Alder Institute, their non-profit ecological science organization.

7. It also evokes a precursor closer to home, Al Purdy's "Say the Names," from his final book, *Beyond Remembering* (2000). A later echo, still on the extinction theme, is Jan Zwicky's "Consummatum Est" in *The Long Walk* (2016). I thank the second peer reviewer for mentioning Zwicky here; both reviewers were selflessly helpful and much appreciated.
8. Notably, "Baler Twine" reflects McKay's encounter with a dead raven that a person had killed and crudely mounted outside. Similarly, Dobson reflects on Margaret Avison's "Butterfly Bones" (1960), a sonnet about what she calls the "fierce listening" of a dead, mounted butterfly (qtd. in Dobson 29).
9. For a study of non-linguistic poems, see Kristin Smith.
10. Travis V. Mason offers a settler scholar's rationalization of naming and the limitations of its power: "The world exists without human language or understanding. We did not construct that yellow poplar or that barn swallow. We named them, and in having named them we measure their existence in relation to us; we have interpreted, but we have not defined them" (*Ornithologies* 149).
11. Indeed, as a teenager, he witnessed forced relocations during the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, which destroyed 36,000 acres of forest and almost as much farmland (Dickinson 55–56).
12. Consider, for example, the naming of wolves and their habitat—Lobo Township—in McKay's "Nocturnal Animals," from *Birding, or Desire* (1983), which Mason interprets in *Ornithologies of Desire* "as an acknowledgement that human culture is natural and as a way of decrying the extent of our destructive talents and tendencies" (6–7). Mason points out that McKay is not always consistent in identifying the non-human species that populate his poems (8).
13. Dickinson states that "McKay pushes against the impulse to ownership by reversing the colonial practice of naming places after people. 'Is it possible,' he asks, 'to imagine being named by a place?'" (86). It almost happens—no, not really—when humans name a bird for one of its habitats, e.g., the Canada goose. But, yes, what would *the land* call this "goose"?
14. For Robinson, hungry listening is colonial; the concept emerges from tales of white settlers arriving in the West in a condition of hunger or starvation, thereby establishing a basis for later hoarding of resources. In contrast, Robinson offers the concept of "guest listening," a more ethical practice for settled people that I will reflect on a little further at the end of this essay.
15. For a settler scholar's view, see Kit Dobson: "listening, or a lack thereof, has become a social and environmental problem" (6), "one of the key political crises of our time" (30). Dobson adds that not only ears but "fresh ears" are needed (11); they "allow us to feel for one another" (30).
16. Mason also refers to McKay's "The Bellies of Fallen Breathing Sparrows" (from *Birding, or Desire* [1983] and recorded for *Songs for the Songs of Birds*), which exhibits a "distrust of metaphor" (29), specifically the gendered and sexist metaphors of women or girls as birds, which are easy to find in English poetry. McKay's title and its sexualized content allude to a poem by Leonard Cohen.
17. Notably, in the printed version of this poem in *Paradoxides* (2012), McKay invokes "ultrasound" and not MRI (10); it seems that he might be updating the

science with a newer kind of imaging technology. On another note, the invocation of Odysseus in the poem signals nationality, as does the loon itself, a symbol of Canada that has appeared on the one-dollar coin since 1987. Ironically, “Song for the Song of the Common Loon” is track 21 of the audiobook, while track 20 is “[Sfx] Bald Eagle,” a thirty-second sample of bald-eagle birdsong. The bald eagle, of course, is a symbol of the US, but it doesn’t have the strong, piercing shriek that we often hear on American film and television. Rather, we usually hear an overdub of the red-tailed hawk, a more impressive sound than the bald eagle’s squeaking cackle (J. Robinson). McKay does not remark upon this irony, but the juxtaposition implies critique.

18. Schafer suggests that “[t]he radio has actually become the bird-song of modern life, the ‘natural’ soundscape” (93), and, of course, today streaming services are that “birdsong,” whether podcasts or playlists.
19. Mason relatedly claims that, through sonograms, “[t]he visualization of birdsong opened up the possibility that birds have evolved cultural traits” (130).
20. Incidentally, McKay included his “Song for the Song of the Coyote” in *Another Gravity* (2000).
21. He invokes such technology in passing in “Sometimes a Voice (2),” when he refers to an “ancient microphone” and the recordings of W. B. Yeats in the 1930s.
22. Dickinson amusingly shares John Oughton’s coinage that McKay is “Lord of the Wings” (53).
23. As a child, McKay gained a heritage of renaturalizing a space when his parents purchased a former farm near Williamstown, Ontario, and “made the forward-looking decision to put the whole place back to trees” (Dickinson 55).
24. As Dobson cautions us, or at least me, “Listening to birdsong is a choice that is bounded by time and by location and by a decision to pay attention to that one certain thing, though it is also determined by the privilege of being able to do so” (30). Certainly, I have that privilege, and I’m thankful to the birds and their environments and all their listeners, particularly McKay.

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## Matthew Rooney

### *Yeats*

I see him old; wrinkled where a poet  
should be wrinkled, yet in the eyes and cheeks  
shadows pool

and play their filthy games.

Everyone dressed like poets, then, simply  
in suits too large for shoulders,  
always hunched  
as if the heavy fabric was enough  
to burden Atlas.

Yeats' small glasses  
make me wonder how he found them again  
after he noticed Maud was gone. Their frames  
discarded on his desk to wipe his eyes.

Poets die twice, if they're good and lucky.

Many of us can only glimpse a life  
standing on the bodies of dead poetry.

Many never live for hope and longing.

*Matthew is a poet and PhD student from Nova Scotia. His work has appeared in Queen's Quarterly, Best Canadian Poetry, and others.*

# Stan Rogal

*(S)laughter*

he's eaten breakfast & gone for a walk  
such a great bear all hung with stars  
carrying a knife, a camera & a book of myths  
between black teeth he has to wear his skin out

blood is the belly of logic, the ribs of the disaster  
saddles of deep snow on the ridges  
glacier-slick rattlesnake country

what is nature except a place of predators & victims?  
a red plant in a cemetery of plastic wreaths  
a woman's vulva drops over  
                    the man's neck & tightens  
lilacs blow across his face  
glad he brought you

*Stan resides in Toronto and is the author of twenty-seven books, including twelve poetry collections and a handful of chapbooks.*

**Renee Cronley**

## *Atypical*

We have a kind of cerebral scarring  
that can't be seen on scans.  
It changes our emotional landscape,  
so we use a different map than everyone else  
to navigate the geography of thought.  
We rise and fall with the tides of the mind  
and rest in those balanced moments  
others seem to be able to live in.  
Our view through peaks and valleys  
alters the lens we use to focus ourselves.  
We can use periods of tunnel vision  
when past and future are absorbed by the present,  
and break ourselves into a million pieces  
and reflect on the moments that brought us there,  
then choose which parts we want to pick up  
to put ourselves back together again.  
We are living, breathing optical illusions  
that deviate from the social norms—  
turning breakdowns into breakthroughs  
by using the fractures in our minds to rebuild.

| *Renee Cronley is a writer from Manitoba. You can find her at  
www.reneecronley.com.*

## *The Conference of the Birds*

We hierophants, devotees, followers and suitors,  
we chatter, chitter and murmur the flight  
path to each another, a murmuration  
of consensus swooping across the Spiral Galaxy's  
soaring limbs and branches. Our orbits  
attuned to coordinate intricate patterning,  
crater to ring and wingtip to Jupiter's Eye,

we flock on this long pilgrimage, when 'longen  
folk to go' out along the leafy twigs  
and sprays of the one Great Slowly  
Turning Wheel. We who are initiates  
at the court of the Sun King, celebrate with him  
the round of any galaxy that flattens time.

Dancers of branches folded inside bud shells,  
we leaf out. Why else call us Starlings?  
Because we stare. Because we startle.  
Which star do we choose? Which star  
chooses us in the Great Meadow? Which clearing  
do we land in, only to rise again? All.

All. All. All. All. All. All all all, oh, all,  
we croak, along with our sister Corvids.  
Flowing, fluent, fast influenced,  
we choose to hear their light, their light twinkle little bright  
little so near and blue and white so far  
so good. There is so much to be discerned,

unlearned and spoken, felt as the tongue's—the wing's—  
touch, so much felt as light as shelter-feather,  
"hleów-feðer" standing windward, fanning protection

in pulsing tide. Wings are hopeful tongues  
and tongues hopeful ears and ears the great conches.  
The Great Wheel, sisters, is within us.

We know *sors*, we source the sorcery within the flow  
of long time, brothers, and flowers  
rise up every day and, petal to petal, star  
to star, shine and rise and flash and fly.  
Consider this time inside our constellations.

| *Harold Rhenisch's book, The Tree Whisperer, was published in 2022. His fourteenth poetry collection is forthcoming from Oskana Editions.*

| *Poet and playwright Penn Kemp has been acclaimed a foremother of Canadian poetry. See [www.pennkemp.wordpress.com](http://www.pennkemp.wordpress.com).*

**John Barton**

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## *In a Station of the Kyiv Metro*

A ghost sitting on the crowded platform  
Beside train cars bedded down with children  
You post your petal face on Instagram  
Before signal grows dim, phone not plugged in

Back against concrete, cross-legged on tile  
Tacky with bottled water and canned goods  
Neighbours dividing them scarcely less pale  
Than you, trees on streets above yet to bud

And may not flower against drifting plumes  
Missiles fired in waves from Russia stencil  
Across your emptied tower block, living room  
Gaping through walls partway sloughed, guts reduced

To landfill, son's face saved to Pinterest  
Petal among petals smudged by what lasts.

| *John Barton published his tenth chapbook, Stopwatch, in 2024. His thirteenth book of poetry, Compulsory Figures, is forthcoming. He lives in Victoria.*

**Bryan Sentes**

## *By Mullet River*

Sitting noon on a big stone streamside  
                                hard to sit on  
                                thoughts like waters'  
white noise over rocks

Upstream rust  
                                chipmunk scampers  
                                                        up a log

Across glints a loose, long webthread  
a breeze strums  
                                stirred by the broken current

Neither a god nor a deity's  
abode nor living creature  
however restless nor a person  
as maple, chipmunk, or spider  
might imaginably be nor mere  
element one with its Tao

Easy, this way,  
to let things be  
themselves, the mind  
open to fill  
with something other  
than what  
windows or margins frame

Easy, for a two-night guest  
of the Auberge & Nordic Spa  
Beaux Rêves just up the short  
well-kept path, a lucky  
refugee from the city's heat,  
to think the stream free  
of thoughts about it

“ . . . in a hammock on the riverside path,  
surrounded by the sounds of nature  
and the rushing majestic river  
with its natural whirlpools . . . ”

Neither like language  
like air ripples pools  
nor a stream of speech  
over stone.

Novice, “Sit-close-  
beside-the-head,” attend  
the song-maker, intent,  
the water in the wordless  
murmur.

| *Bryan Sentes is the author of a baker's dozen of chapbooks and three volumes of poetry. More can be found at [bryansentes.com](http://bryansentes.com).*

Cecily Ross

## *Old Boys*

She wasn't taught  
to see her life  
as worth a lot.  
A son's a gift  
a daughter's not  
much cause for joy.  
He may be medi-  
ocre, he's a boy.  
But she's a girl,  
and doing better  
in this world  
has been her lot.  
The only thing  
he had to do  
was show up.

He always knew  
some other guy  
would have his back,  
a mentor. (He won't  
get the sack.) But  
her, she's in the line  
of fire. One false  
step, one stumble  
in the mire, trips

the wire of  
office politics and  
out she goes. They'll  
hold the door, and  
watch her leave—  
then wink at her  
as it closes.

| Cecily Ross is a writer living in Creemore, Ontario. Her novel, *The Lost Diaries of Susanna Moodie*, is published by HarperCollins Canada.

**Alastair Morrison**

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*Narcissus*

Borrowing of the Latin *narcissus*, from Ancient Greek *νάρκισσος*,  
ultimately Pre-Greek

early word and conquered  
sore thumb up from under  
doric duff and attic topsoil  
double-jointed NAR KISS OS

meaning seed or left leaf late spore  
of language laid over in brazen hellene  
alloying in overlay springing  
a daffodil

grafted to which a fable  
from greeks itching at its perseverance  
at water's edge a leftover  
boy just can't get over himself  
he spurns the north wind the fecund  
subjugation looking back

at looking back do they find  
themselves in him the implacable  
brother or against and we  
furtive hip-deep in philology heaven  
knows what we're after

| *Alastair Morrison is finishing an M. D. at McMaster. His poems appear in The  
Literary Review of Canada, The Shore, and elsewhere.*

Sarah Dorward

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## *A Working Bibliography of Texts by May Agnes Fleming*

Born in Saint John, New Brunswick, on November 14, 1840, May Agnes Fleming (family name Earlie) was a prolific transatlantic author. Her career began at fifteen, when she submitted a short story to the *New York Mercury*. Following this initial publication, Fleming developed a long-standing relationship with this American periodical, writing novels and short stories for it and its sister periodical, the *Sunday Mercury*, until 1868. She soon after signed a contract with *Philadelphia Saturday Night*, which lasted from 1868 until 1872, at which point she wrote for the *New York Weekly* exclusively until her death in 1880.

Fleming's ephemeral yet prosperous authorial career demonstrates that the material conditions of the production of literature in nineteenth-century Canada, while in some respects limiting, bred opportunities for Fleming to find success in the transatlantic print network through cross-border publication, a culture of unauthorized reprinting, and transatlantic publishing agreements. Exploring Fleming's bibliography demonstrates how recontextualizing the cultural, legal, and material conditions of authorship enables us to better understand the resourceful, canny negotiations some authors undertook to find (rare) literary success while residing in Canada. It also highlights what Carole Gerson calls the "internationalism of English-language print culture" in the late nineteenth century (26).

As the periodical titles cited above indicate, Fleming's notable literary connections were in the US. This meant that while she was living as a wife and mother in Canada, Fleming participated in a system of trans-border publishing—something not uncommon for

authors in nineteenth-century Canada to do. In 1874, two years after she secured her final contract with the *New York Weekly*, Fleming and her family moved to Brooklyn. Prior to the move, however, Fleming resided in Canada, meaning that for seventeen years of her twenty-three-year-long authorial career—which were also her most fruitful years—Fleming’s works were not protected by copyright.

Because she was a resident of Canada and her works were being published in the United States under the Copyright Act, Fleming’s works could legally be reprinted in the US without any obligation to compensate her financially. And because Fleming’s works lacked copyright protection, they could be freely recirculated and reprinted outside of North America, too—and often were, in British periodicals like the *London Journal*. Even after her move to Brooklyn, when she became a resident of the United States (and was thereby protected under the 1790 Copyright Act), Fleming’s later novels were still reprinted before the completion of the twelve-year protection term that the Act specified. This occurrence further demonstrates the degree to which Fleming’s career was shaped by unauthorized reprinting, as publishers and notorious reprinters elected to reissue popular fiction without authorization *even when* copyright status was obtained.

Through this lack of copyright protection, Fleming’s works, which were born from trans-border publishing agreements, reached transatlantic markets. And although Fleming was not compensated for reprints of her stories and novels, the audience she acquired through mass circulation underpinned the success of her career, as her popularity enabled her to secure long-term publishing contracts with *Philadelphia Saturday Night* and the *New York Weekly*. Moreover, Fleming’s contract with the *Weekly* resulted in a joint publishing opportunity, where the *London Journal*, a source that once reprinted his works without authorization, could publish his novels at the same time as the *Weekly*, with the stipulation that Fleming would be compensated and that the *Journal* would pronounce the works to be copyright protected.

Between her first publication in 1857 and her final publication in 1880, Fleming published at least sixty short stories, ten poems, and thirty-six novels. Posthumously, four short-fiction collections, seven novels, and two German translations of her novels were published. Fleming wrote at least 105 works, all published before her death in 1880. Nearly thirty per cent were reprinted without authorization in

the months or years following the original publication. These reprints appeared in periodical and book forms throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Many of these titles were reprinted multiple times—often by the same publishers.

The bibliography below, which expands on Lorraine McMullen's 1989 research and follows her bibliographic style, demonstrates the transatlantic reach of Fleming's work. It cites the poems, novels, and stories published during each year of her career, the publishing venue, and the volume and/or issue of publication insofar as they are known. This bibliography tracks the transatlantic trajectory of Fleming's career and demonstrates how her career—however much of an anomaly it may have been—was fundamentally grounded in and facilitated by the culture of unauthorized reprinting that dominated and sometimes plagued authorship in the nineteenth century.

May Agnes Fleming's career and transatlantic legacy encourage us to challenge our perceptions of nineteenth-century publishing conditions as being exclusively a hindrance. Indeed, her negotiation of transatlantic and trans-border legal conditions invites us to explore how authors in nineteenth-century Canada benefited from carefully navigating these international conditions. Reviewing Fleming's bibliography and tracking the ebbs and flows of her works across the Atlantic and back allow us to develop a more complex, rich, and holistic understanding of how authors residing in Canada manoeuvred the transatlantic print network throughout the nineteenth century.

## 1857

"The Last of the Mountjoys." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 1857. Published in *The Old House among the Mountains*, edited by Mary Jane Holmes, *Leisure Hour Library*, vol. 350, 1901, pp. 27–32.

"The Lady's Choice." *Western Recorder and Carleton Advertiser and Home Journal* (Saint John, NB), 28 Nov. 1857, p. 1.

## 1858

"Sporting His Figure; Or, Sam Sugarloaf's Courtship." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 25 Sept. 1858, p. 6.

## 1859

"The Squire's Son." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 29 Jan. 1859, p. 7.

"The Unknown Wooer." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 26 Feb. 1859, p. 7.

- "Hallow Eve." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 19 Mar. 1859, p. 6.
- The Rover Chief; Or, the Witch of the Moore.* *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), Mar.–Apr. 1859.
- "Zion: An Old Man's Tale." *Western Recorder and Carleton Advertiser and Home Journal* (Saint John, NB), 23 Apr. 1859, pp. 1–2; cont'd 30 Apr. 1859, p. 2.
- "Little Lilly." *Western Recorder and Weekly Herald* (Saint John, NB), 21 May 1859, pp. 1–2.
- "Nora; Or, Love and Money." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 26 June 1859, p. 3. Reprinted in *Married for Money and Other Stories* (1891) by Ogilvie.
- Edith Percival; Or, The Hermit of the Cliffs.* *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), vol. 21, nos. 30–38 (July to Sept. 1859). Published as *The Hermit of the Cliffs* (1865) by F. M. Lupton (New York, NY). Published as *Edith Percival* (1893) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Second half published as *Caught in the Snare* (1893) by Street and Smith (New York, NY).
- "Annot Craig." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 24 Sept. 1859, p. 6.
- "Love's Young Dream." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 20 Nov. 1859, p. 2.

## 1860

- "The Husband's Revenge; Or, The Castle by the Sea." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 29 Jan. 1860, p. 2.
- "My Beau." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 4 Feb. 1860, p. 3.
- "St. Valentine's Day." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 11 Feb. 1860, p. 3.
- "The Wages of Sin." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 19 Feb. 1860, p. 6.
- "Lost." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 25 Feb. 1860, p. 2.
- "Wilfred's Wife." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 3 Mar. 1860, pp. 6–7.
- "A Slight Mistake; Or, How Uncle Pete Became an Old Bachelor." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 31 Mar. 1860, p. 3.
- "First Love; A Boarding School Story." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 7 Apr. 1860, p. 3.
- "Ned's Wife and Mine." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 8 Apr. 1860, p. 2.
- "Aunt Becky's Niece." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 21 Apr. 1860, p. 3.
- "Ida Gwynne." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 12 May 1860, pp. 6–7.
- "Captain Ben Stannerd and His Ward." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 19 May 1860, p. 3.
- "Cousin Doug's Bride." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 4 Aug. 1860, p. 2.
- "By the Sea." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 4 Aug. 1860, p. 6.
- "Wooing and Wedding." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 14 Sept. 1860, p. 8.
- "Maggie's Love." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 23 Sept. 1860, p. 2.

*Sybil Campbell; Or, The Queen of the Isle*. *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), Sept. 1860–Jan. 1861. Published as *Sybil Campbell; Or, The Queen of the Isle* (1861) by Beadle (New York, NY). Published as *Sybil Campbell; Or, The Queen of the Isle* (1862) by Brady (New York, NY). Published as *An Awful Mystery* (1875) by Brady (New York, NY). Published as *An Awful Mystery; Or, Sybil Campbell, the Queen of the Isle* (date unknown) by Beadle and Adams (New York, NY). Published as *The Queen of the Isle* (1886) by Federal Book Co. (New York, NY). Published as *The Queen of the Isle; Or, The Campbell's Curse* (1886) by E. E. Sheppard (Toronto, ON). Published as *The Queen of the Isle: A Novel* (1886) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Published as *The Queen of the Isle* (191–) by Hurst (New York, NY).

"The Philopena." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 7 Oct. 1860, p. 2.

"The Death-Watch." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 16 Nov. 1860, p. 5.

"The Collegian's Supper." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 29 Dec. 1860, p. 3.

*Gipsy Gower; Or, The Star of the Valley*. *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 1860.

*Three Cousins; Or, Life at Hinton Hall*. *Metropolitan Record* (New York, NY), 21 Apr. 1860, p. 10 (promotion), 28 Apr. 1860, pp. 1–2, to 2 June 1860, pp. 1–2. Published as *Three Cousins* (ca. 1873 to 1877) by W. G. Gibson (Toronto, ON). Published as *The Three Cousins; Or, Life at Hinton Hotel* (1878) by Street and Smith (New York, NY). Published as *The Three Cousins, and One Summer Month* (1881) by an unknown publisher (New York, NY).

## 1861

*Fairy May; Or, The Child's Prophecy*. *Pilot* (Boston, MA), 5 Jan. 1861, p. 1 to 2 Mar. 1861, p. 1.

"The Sea." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 5 Jan. 1861, p. 5.

"The Old Romance." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 19 Jan. 1861, p. 5.

"An Echo from the Past." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 9 Mar. 1861, p. 2.

"The President's Levee." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 23 Mar. 1861, p. 2.

"Waiting." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 13 Apr. 1861, p. 5.

"The Doctor's Choice." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 18 May 1861, p. 6.

"The Magic Gift: A German Legend." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 25 May 1861, p. 5.

"That Night." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 1 June 1861, p. 2.

"Our Minister." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 1 June 1861, p. 5.

"A Memorial." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 8 June 1861, p. 1.

"At Last." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 8 June 1861, p. 5.

"St. John's Eve." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 22 June 1861, pp. 5–6.

"Which?" *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 29 June 1861, p. 5.

*Silver Star; Or, The Mystery of Fontelle Hall*. *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), July 1861 to Oct. 1861. Published as *Silver Star; Or, The Mystery of Fontelle Hall. A Story of New Jersey in the Olden Time* (1861) by Brady (New York, NY). Published as *Silver Star; Or, The Mystery of Fontelle Hall. A Story of New Jersey in the Olden Times* (1863) in *New York Mercury* (New York, NY). Published as *The Dark Secret* (1875) by Hurst (New York, NY). Published as *The Dark Secret; Or, The Mystery of Fontelle Hall* (1875) by Beadle and Adams (New York, NY). Published as *The Dark Secret* (1875) by Federal Book Co. (New York, NY). Published as *Pride and Passion* (1878) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Published as *Pride and Passion* (1882) by Carleton (New York, NY). Published as *Pride and Passion* (1882) by Low (London).

"Essica." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 6 July 1861, p. 2.

"Haunted." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 13 July 1861, p. 1.

"Rose Hill." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 31 July 1861, p. 3.

"Once." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 3 Aug. 1861, p. 7.

"Our Professor." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 19 Oct. 1861, pp. 5–6.

"Shipwrecked." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 2 Nov. 1861, p. 8.

"Our Midnight Visitor." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 23 Nov. 1861, p. 7.

## 1862

*Hagar Clyde*. *Metropolitan Record* (New York, NY), 4 Jan. 1862, pp. 1–2 to 17 May 1862, pp. 1–2.

"Accursed." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 9 Feb. 1862, p. 2.

*Erminie; Or, The Gypsy's Vow*. *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), from 8 Feb. 1862, p. 4, to May 1862, vol. 24, no. 21, p. 6. Published as *Erminie; Or, The Gypsy's Vow. A Tale of Love and Vengeance* (1863) by Brady (New York, NY). Published as *The Gypsy Queen's Vow; Or, The Victim of Fate* (1865) by Beadle (New York, NY). Published as *The Gypsy Queen's Vow* (1875) by Hurst (New York, NY). Published as *Maud Percy's Secret* (1884) by Carleton (New York, NY).

"Water Dolorosa." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 8 Mar. 1862, p. 7.

"For Spite." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 27 Apr. 1862, p. 3.

"What I Did." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 25 May 1862, p. 3.

"A Traveller's Vexations." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 27 July 1862, p. 3.

"A Coquette Caught." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 25 Oct. 1862, p. 7.

"Beaux Yeux." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 15 Nov. 1862, p. 6.

"How I Became a Zouave." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 20 Dec. 1862, pp. 6–7.

"Fanny's Letters." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 27 Dec. 1862, p. 7.

"Sue's Secret." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 31 Dec. 1862, pp. 6–7.

*Victoria; Or, The Heiress of Castle Cliffe*. *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 1862.  
Published as *Victoria; Or, The Heiress of Castle Cliffe* (1864) by Beadle (New York, NY). Published as *Victoria; Or, The Heiress of Castle Cliffe* (1868 to 1869) in *Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA). Published as *Unmasked* (1870) by Beadle (New York, NY). Published as *The Heiress of Castle Cliffe* (1875) by Federal Book Co. (New York, NY). Published as *Wedded for Pique* (1897) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Published as *The Heiress of Castle Cliffe; Or, Off with the Old Love* (1904) by Street and Smith (Eagle Series) (New York, NY). Published as *Viva, the Heiress of Castle Cliffe* (date unknown) by James Henderson (London, UK).

## 1863

"My Folly." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 5 July 1863, pp. 2–3.

*Sisters of Torwood: In Three Parts*. *Metropolitan Record* (New York, NY), 25 July 1863, pp. 1–2, to 26 Dec. 1862, p. 3. Published as *The Sisters of Torwood* (1890) by Street and Smith (New York, NY). Published as *The Sisters of Torwood* (1898) by Dillingham (New York, NY).

*La Masque; Or, The Midnight Queen*. *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 1863.  
Published as *La Masque; Or, The Midnight Queen* (1863) by Brady (New York, NY). Published as *The Midnight Queen: A Tale of Illusion, Delusion, and Mystery* (1870) by Frank Starr and Co. (New York, NY). Published as *The Midnight Queen* (1876) by Beadle (New York, NY). Published as *The Midnight Queen* (1888) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Published as *The Midnight Queen* (date unknown) by Federal Book Co. (New York, NY). Published as *The Midnight Queen* (date unknown) by Hurst (New York, NY).

## 1864

"Hazelwood." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 1864.

*New Year's Eve*. *Metropolitan Record* (New York, NY) from 2 Jan. 1864, pp. 1–2, to 30 Jan. 1864, pp. 1–2.

*The Twin Sisters; Or, The Wronged Wife's Hate*. Beadle and Adams (New York, NY), 1864. Published as *The Twin Sisters; Or, The Wronged Wife's Hate* (1869) by Starr (New York, NY). Published as *The Rival Brothers* (1875) by Beadle (New York, NY). Published as *The Rival Brothers* (1875) by Federal Book Co. (New York, NY). Published as *A Wronged Wife* (1883) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Published as *A Wronged Wife* by Carleton (New York, NY).

## 1865

"Miriam." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 1865.

"Natalie Marsh." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 1865.

## 1866

*Eulalie; Or, A Wife's Tragedy*. *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 1866. Published as *Eulalie; Or, A Wife's Tragedy* (1866) by Brady (New York, NY). Published as *Eulalie; Or, A Wife's Tragedy* (1881) by Low (London, UK). Published as *A Wife's Tragedy* (1881) by Rose Belford (Toronto, ON).

## 1867

"An Early Dream." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 21 Sept. 1867, p. 8.

"Duke's Mistake." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 28 Sept. 1867, p. 8.

"Miss Ingersoll's Story." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 6 Oct. 1867, pp. 2–3.

"Sir Gervais." *Sunday Mercury* (New York, NY), 20 Oct. 1867, pp. 2–3.

"My Rival." *New York Mercury* (New York, NY), 28 Dec. 1867, p. 8.

## 1868

*The Baronet's Bride*. *Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 3 Oct. 1868 to 26 Dec. 1868. Published as *The Baronet's Bride; Or, A Woman's Vengeance* (1868) by Donohue (Chicago, IL). Published as *The Heir of Kingsland Court; Or, The Baronet's Bride* (1887) by James Henderson (London, UK). Published as *The Baronet's Bride; Or, A Woman's Revenge* (1892) by Munro (New York, NY).

## 1869

*The Heiress of Glengower*. *Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 23 Jan. 1869 to 17 Apr. 1869. Published as *The Heiress of Glen Dower; Or, The Hidden Crime* (1869) by Donohue (Chicago, IL). Published anonymously as *The Sister's Crime; Or, The Heiress of Ravensdale* (1869) in *London Journal* (London, UK), 15 May 1869 to 1 Sept. 1869. Published as *The Heiress of Glengower; Or, The Hidden Crime* (1892) by Munro (New York, NY).

*Estella's Husband*. *Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 24 Apr. 1869 to 24 July 1869. Published as *Estella's Husband; Or, Thrice Lost, Thrice Won* (1869) by Donohue (Chicago, IL). Published as *Estella's Husband; Or, Thrice Lost, Thrice Won* (1860) by Munro (New York, NY). Published as *Thrice Lost, Thrice Won; Or, Estella's Husband* (1892) by Street and Smith (New York, NY).

*Sybilla's Marriage. A Woman's Story*. *Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 11 Sept. 1869 to 20 Oct. 1869.

*The Unseen Bridegroom; Or, Wedded for a Week*. Munro (New York, NY), 1869. Published as *The Unseen Bridegroom; Or, Wedded for a Week* (1869) by Donohue (Chicago, IL). Published as *The Unseen Bridegroom* (1890) by Surprise Library (New York, NY).

## 1870

*Lady Evelyn. Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA) from 1 Jan. 1870 to 16 Apr. 1870. Published as *Lady Evelyn; Or, The Lord of Royal Rest* (1870) by Donohue (Chicago, IL). Published as *Lady Evelyn; Or, The Lord of Royal Rest* (1882) by Robertson (Toronto, ON). Published as *Lady Evelyn; Or, The Lord of Royal Rest* (1899) by Street and Smith (New York, NY).

*Who Wins? A Love Story. Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 16 Apr. 1870 to 23 July 1870. Published anonymously as *The Mystery of Mordaunt Hall* (1870) in *London Journal* (London, UK), 16 July 1870 to 1 Nov. 1870. Published as *Who Wins? A Love Story* (date unknown) by Surprise Library (New York, NY). Published as *Who Wins? Or, The Secret of Monkwood Waste* (1870) by Munro (New York, NY). Published as *Who Wins? Or, The Secret of Monkwood Waste* (1870) by Donohue (Chicago, IL). Published as *Who Wins? Or, The Secret of Monkwood Waste* (1895) by Munro (New York, NY). Published as *Who Wins?* (1910) by New York Book Company (New York, NY).

## 1871

*Magdalen's Vow. Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 18 Feb. 1871 to 3 June 1871. Published as *Magdalen's Vow* (1871) by Munro (New York, NY). Published as *Magdalen's Vow* (1893) by Munro (New York, NY). Published as *Magdalen's Vow* (19–) by Hurst (New York, NY). Published as *Magdalen's Vow* (19–) by Federal Book Co. (New York, NY).

*Which Will She Marry? Philadelphia Saturday Night* (Philadelphia, PA), 29 Oct. 1871 to 3 Feb. 1872.

## 1872

*A Wonderful Woman. New York Weekly* (New York, NY), 1872. Published as *A Wonderful Woman* (1872) in *London Journal* (London, UK), 6 July 1872 to 28 Dec. 1872. Published as *A Wonderful Woman* (1873) by Carleton (New York, NY). Published as *A Wonderful Woman* (1874) by Carleton (New York, NY). Published as *A Wonderful Woman* (1884) by Carleton (New York, NY). Published as *A Wonderful Woman* (1891) by Dillingham (New York, NY). Published as *A Wonderful Woman* (1897) by Dillingham (New York, NY). First half published as *A Wonderful Woman; Or, Rose O'Donnell's Secret* (1906) by Street and Smith (New York, NY). Second half published as *Mystery of Bracken Hollow* (1915) by Street and Smith (New York, NY).

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## Long Monologues

**John Terpstra**

*Wild Hope: Prayers and Poems.* The St. Thomas Poetry Series \$20.00

**Ken Norris**

*South China Sea: A Poet's Autobiography.* Guernica Editions \$25.00

**David O'Meara**

*Masses on Radar.* Coach House Books \$21.95

Reviewed by Carl Watts (Huazhong University of Science and Technology)

Spending a long time making any kind of art comes with the assumption that one has an identifiable style or voice. But poetry, with its oft-described processual nature, might call this seemingly common-sense observation into question. What do we expect a long run as a poet to sound like? Like a voice we've always known? A voice that ages expectedly? Or develops unexpectedly, turning back on itself, modulating in innovative permutations?

John Terpstra, who has published many books of poetry and non-fiction, has his recurring themes: nature, spirituality, and place, the latter often being his home of Hamilton, Ontario. These themes have at times defined his work more than form or genre: 1990's *Naked Trees*, republished by Wolsak and Wynn in 2012, has been classified as poetry but, with its brief prose ruminations on the lives of its subjects, is almost unrecognizable as such. *Wild Hope: Prayers and Poems* draws on Terpstra's common interests, but it also features a formal awareness that isn't always evident in his work:

You are with us  
your soil, your black loam  
and compost  
your bud and shoot  
they comfort us (8)

The constraint of the prayer format allows Terpstra to tighten his language and use sonic devices to greater effect than in a book like *Naked Trees*, in which language is free to spread shapelessly, as if on purely descriptive terms.

From the first page, the format is also an access point into issues both timeless and contemporary:

The kind of world we live in  
is fraught  
with where and when the next outbreak  
will occur (5)

Frequently, Terpstra gets directly into the topical:

We pray for our own children  
and others  
for whom even a small house  
these days  
is so far out-of-reach  
financially  
that it may as well be a very big house (77)

The immediacy might seem almost tasteless if we think of poetry as some exalted form. But it makes perfect sense given the quotidian, present-oriented prayer format.

One doesn't find this kind of tension in Ken Norris' *South China Sea*. The book provides another iteration of its author's signature poetics: sometimes confessional, frequently aphoristic free verse. Subtitled "A Poet's Autobiography," the book forgoes "the props of conventional narrative," as the back-cover copy puts it, in its telling of the speaker-author's peregrinations, instead jumbling together vignettes from North America, Asia, and the Pacific. The strategy subverts chronology and closure, privileging the arbitrariness of memory. "Chicken Curry—Fiji, 1980," for example, moves swiftly from the animal's death to the observation that

It's one of those meals  
you certainly feel strange about,  
the connection so direct.  
What you order results  
in an immediate death. (45)

Still, at more than 250 poems spread over 180 pages, one wonders what kind of organizational logic could be applied at all; in terms of style and subject matter, many poems are interchangeable. Some resemble those in the chapbook *Hawaiian Sunrise* (also published in 2021), which seem at once more playful and tightly wound. But most are content to plot themselves in an autobiographical haze, unfolding quickly even as they mess around with temporal coordinates, as in "1984—Montreal, 1984":

Everything changed in 1984.  
My daughter was born in 1984.  
I started dating my ex-wife in 1984.  
Charlotte told me the sexual revolution was over  
in 1984, and I didn't believe her,  
and I don't believe her now. (16)

It all hangs together in its superficiality; there are poems about having "travelled through" over a dozen languages "long since forgotten. // Mastering none, a few words of many / clinging to me" (57). This superficiality highlights memory's failings, but it exists on a formal level as well: most poems are very short, this one running up against the next on the verso, that one meandering only a short distance down the recto. There's little attention to form or sound; the speaker in one says they "never understood / writers who spoke / of how difficult the work was" (18); another seems bemused by bpNichol's practice of rendering a poem "this way / or this way or this way / or this way or this way" (66). There's a gentle pulsing in the collection's

familiarity, but one wonders how *South China Sea* might have looked if its author had varied his own approach.

David O'Meara's *Masses on Radar*, meanwhile, is built from a visualization and temporalization of the lyric voice at middle age—according to the press sheet, an experience of being “equidistant from the past and future” that can be rendered also as the lyric subject's detecting “encroachments” from its central vantage point. The collection's opening poem features a compelling reflection on perception, language, and, ultimately, narrative:

Our earliest memories are hearsay, or Mom's, the one  
reliable witness. Most begin at floor level, before  
grammar: table legs, linoleum, toddler push toy

stalled at the carpet trim. (16)

A dispersed sonnet format, with stanzas of three, four, four, and three lines, recurs throughout the book, interspersed with more sprawling poems with more white space. The effect is a cautious and controlled navigation of uncertainty.

“Vigour,” which ends by complaining that “our domestic AI” is “no Rutger Hauer, soon to be laughed at but grimly / muttering *I've seen cat hair you people wouldn't believe* / into the dustbin of, like, literally, the kitchen” (21), makes comedy out of the conceit. But things also get grim, like in “I Walk Dripping from a Sea Journey on the Highway across America in Tears to the Door of Your Cottage in the Western Night,” where these cultural signifiers edge beyond generations and culture wars into the bleakness of the Anthropocene:

The end caps we use for beer steins,  
the flare-stacks our tiki torches.  
I am post-millennial, post-X, -Y, -Zed,  
post-economy, post-black  
rhino and—polar bear. I'm now  
and only here to party. (52)

Such moments add to O'Meara's engagements with time and advancing age by wondering whether the cyclical nature of these things may now itself be in decay. Similarly, *Masses on Radar* drifts as much as twists itself up, knowing its voice and yet looking elsewhere as its author's cumulative monologue extends just past his comfort zone.

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## All Aboard

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**Jocelyne Saucier; Rhonda Mullins, trans.**

*And Miles to Go Before I Sleep.* Coach House Books \$21.95

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**Tara Gereaux**

*Saltus.* Nightwood Editions \$22.95

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Reviewed by Zachary Abram (Dawson College)

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The ceremony to drive the last spike into the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1885 was apparently a muted affair, meant to mark the completion of a project beset by an endless series of catastrophes, bankruptcies, and at least one violent insurgency. Since then, however, this spike has come to represent the precise moment Canadian national unity was achieved. The schism between reality and symbol is understandable. It's hard not to be romantic about train travel, which conjures images of dining cars, the Orient Express, and fraught encounters with charming strangers. The reality of train travel, characterized by days-old sandwiches and a shrinking service map, has not punctured its undeniable allure. This juxtaposition is something Jocelyne Saucier understands intuitively. Her fifth novel, *And Miles to Go Before I Sleep*, is a celebration of the particular freedom train travel can offer.

The opening pages of the novel feature a beautiful hand-drawn map. This is more typical of fantasy epics meant to orient readers to imaginary lands like Middle Earth or Narnia. Saucier's map, though, depicts the distinctly less fantastical world of railways in Ontario and Quebec. At the novel's outset, the narrator introduces the somewhat extraordinary case of Gladys Comeau who, apparently without warning, "climbed aboard the Northlander and was never seen again" in her hometown (9). Her hometown, the improbably named Swastika, is described as "not an easy place to leave" (11). This is meant quite literally. The railroad is under constant threat of closure and the fact that a meagre two hundred people populate Swastika means that Gladys' departure was never going to escape the scuttlebutt inherent to small-town life. Any sympathy the reader has for Gladys' escape is quickly problematized by the revelation that Gladys has abandoned her adult daughter, Lisana, who "has Death in her soul" and has made several attempts to take her own life (94).

The central question of the narrative is why Gladys got on that train with no fixed destination or plan. The burden of answering that question falls to the narrator. Obsessed with trains, the narrator's "purpose is not to put her on trial" (9), but rather to painstakingly retrace Gladys' steps. In the role of detective, the narrator discovers that not only was Gladys born on a train, but educated on one as well. The train is the place, simultaneously fixed and moving, where she found love and knew peace. Perhaps her later railway adventure was merely her attempt to recover the sense of freedom she had as a child, when life's possibilities seemed endless. Saucier's novel, translated vividly from French by Rhonda Mullins, offers no easy answers. The narrator concedes that Gladys' decision "has been subject to many interpretations" (9). In her depictions of the polyphony of voices that denounce and praise Gladys in equal measure, *And Miles to Go Before I Sleep* performs the function of any sophisticated metafiction: to remind its readers that stories do not tell themselves. Every narrative is constructed by writers through a process of selection and omission according to their own values, rather than a commitment to strict verisimilitude.

*Saltus* by Tara Gereaux similarly depicts a place that is not easy to leave, describing the various forces, seen and unseen, that conspire to keep a person's life and identity fixed. Set in the early 1990s in a small prairie town, the titular *Saltus* appears to be one of those places that remains stubbornly untouched by change: "Going nowhere for far too long." Then, suddenly, something shocking happens. The novel examines the ramifications of one mother's decision on the various *Saltus* residents who become entangled in its aftermath. Each inhabitant of the town responds with a mixture of pity and scorn to a decision they don't quite understand, but Gereaux carefully reveals how the reverberations of this incident force everyone caught in its wake to confront the ways in which they too are alienated.

Unsurprisingly, an interloper makes the decision that disrupts *Saltus*' sacred status quo. Nadine is a wilful single mother whose trans child's quest for gender-affirming medical care is stymied by an intransigent and indifferent healthcare system. A mother's desperation to save her child, who has made a suicide attempt, compels her to seek an unsanctioned, dangerous alternative: "Trauma makes people do things they normally wouldn't." As in Saucier's novel, *Saltus* is told from multiple viewpoints. Each character sympathizes with or condemns Nadine according to their particular notions of value and propriety: "You can't make sense of crazy." Even in their opprobrium, Nadine's plight cannot help but force each witness to probe aspects of their identity that they might prefer to wall off: "sometimes I wonder if there was another person I was meant to be." There is the cop, Roger, who is hours from retirement, but doesn't relish the prospect of knowing himself divorced from the authority afforded by a badge and gun. There is Trish, a waitress, who bristles at her status as mother and townie but who "has made choices that have kept her here."

*Saltus*' most compelling denizen, however, is Lenore. Lenore is alienated from her Métis identity because she was raised in a settler household: "She didn't feel Métis, if there was such a thing. It was strange to think she was an entirely different person than she knew." Her attempts to reconnect with her heritage are thwarted by trauma and addiction, leaving her identity perpetually in flux. Gereaux movingly depicts a town in crisis, but the trans character at the centre remains a convenient symbol, like that final spike, masking a more complex reality, only ever perceived by others and never empowered to take the reins of the narrative. While Gereaux wishes to explore the cisgender characters' reactions to alterity, the decision not to grant the lone trans character agency is conspicuous. In fact, this choice runs the risk of reiterating the existing power structures that contribute to trans erasure in the first place, a decision which counters the novel's otherwise sensitive portrayal.

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## Moral Philosophy in Need of Attention

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**Warren Heiti**

*Attending: An Ethical Art.* McGill-Queen's UP \$44.95

Reviewed by Fabio Akcelrud Durão (State University of Campinas)

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*Attending*, by Warren Heiti, is a remarkable book that deserves to be read at least for two reasons. The first one is properly theoretical: as a sustained, though not strictly systematic, commentary on Simone Weil's work and its most competent readers,

*Attending* unfolds a moral philosophy centred on the notion of attention, which offers an invigorating alternative to established and by now standardized philosophical positions. The kernel of the theory can be presented by a passage from Simone Weil's *La pesanteur et la grâce*, which, as it were, encapsulates the whole of Heiti's book:

There are cases where a thing is necessary from the mere fact that it is possible. Thus to eat when we are hungry; to give a wounded man, dying of thirst, something to drink when there is water quite near. Neither a ruffian nor a saint would refrain from doing so. (44)

For Heiti,

The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real. It is the same with the act of love. To know that this man who is hungry and thirsty really exists as much as I do—that is enough, the rest follows of itself. (24)

It is fitting that the nucleus of Heiti's presentation of Weil's thought should not be a philosophical category, but an example, a micronarrative. Instead of the vocabulary of norm and normativity, choice, will, desire, and belief, we have here a focus on being open, on passivity, unselfconsciousness, and receptivity; instead on the search for universal abstract principles, the stress falls on the richness and fruitfulness of the particular moment: "This approach does not tell us who the moral patients are; nor does it tell us what acts are prescribed or forbidden. For those who are accustomed to moral theory, universal consideration may seem too indeterminate and too inclusive to be useful. But it is only by attending to particulars that we can learn what is required" (26).

Such particulars, however, are not immediately accessible; for the individual case to become visible as such, much training is needed. Attention is something that must be learned and can be perfected; it reaches fullness when it is converted into a habit:

Because, for Weil, attention is a cardinal virtue, and because habit has a role in the development of virtue being attentive will involve habitual (non-cognitive) acts. The expert cyclist attends with her body no less than with her mind, and her expertise includes trained sensitivities that do not rise into consciousness. Indeed, their not rising to consciousness is a measure of the cyclist's expertise. (61)

In this approach, perhaps surprisingly, studying becomes ethically relevant, for if it is carried out in the right way, it disciplines will into patience and prepares the way for a mastery of attention that becomes part of one's own body. Indeed, as it ignores the division between sensation and intellect, this characterization of corporeality is one of the most fascinating aspects of Weil's thought, as it is presented by Heiti: "For Weil, attending is not only an act of the mind, brain, consciousness, reason, belief or perception; nor is it only a set of cognitive processes operating in unison; it is an act of the whole agent, in which her passions and body are integrated with her intellect" (60).

Following the same logic, a moral philosophy based on attention does not recognize a hiatus between perception and action: the latter "is not the sudden effect

of a free choice; instead, a particular action follows from a particular way of reading" a given situation (129–30). Such reading involves the imagination as an integrative force that attends to what is relevant in a certain situation: "To act with full integrity is not to be moved by thoughts of one's own integrity, but to be wholly focused on something else—an injustice, an ideal, a particular being" (237). In sum, the moral agent here is not an autonomous entity who operates according to laws; rather than a doer, she is "a medium through which the circumstances, clearly perceived, express themselves in action" (133). Thus, "if we attend and perceive clearly and accurately, then we will be relieved of the agony of choosing; the appropriate response will follow automatically" (81).

Of course, one could resist these claims and call them unrealistic, perhaps too facilely so. One might point to the lack of control inherent in this theory, the voluntary blocking of the general and abstract, the blindness resulting from its emphasis on habituation, and a possibly regressive de-differentiation of the moral realm vis-à-vis material labour, e.g.: "A virtue—such as bravery et cetera—is a skill (or an art, or expertise), and it is no more strange than other skills such as carpentry or playing the clarinet. Nor are its objects any more peculiar than dovetail joints or musical scales" (118). However argumentatively true dismissals such as these may prove to be, they are not satisfactory, because they just re-enact the position *Attending* is itself rejecting. They thus fail to do justice to what is productive and eye-opening in Weil/Heiti's theorization, the new light it throws on and the way it reconfigures traditional problems of moral philosophy. Interestingly enough, however, such resistance can be felt *inside* the text through a heightened attention Heiti devotes to a virtual unsympathetic reader, anticipating and trying to pre-empt possible objections, and even at times adopting the form a dialogue. If we add to this Heiti's preoccupation with "draw[ing] on examples and images from literature, film, visual art and newspapers" (21) and the fact that, instead of a conclusion, *Attending* presents an "Exodus," which consists of a series of quotations from various authors, including not only philosophers, but also poets and novelists, we realize that the book is somewhat uncomfortable with the field it speaks from and to. The second reason *Attending* deserves to be read is a symptomatic one, for, unwittingly or not, the text bears witness to the limits of Anglophone moral philosophy, how it has become scholastic and averse to anything not reducible to the structure of arguments. *Attending* seems to want to break free from such structure without being aware of it. Be that as it may, at the very least the book is valuable for showing that institutionalized moral philosophy is in sore need of attention.

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## Tenants of Time

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Nora Foster Stovel, ed.

*The Collected Poetry of Carol Shields*. McGill-Queen's UP \$34.95

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Reviewed by Marta Dvořák (Sorbonne Nouvelle University)

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Recipient of both the Pulitzer Prize and the Governor General's Award (for *The Stone Diaries*), Carol Shields is best known for her novels and short stories. Yet two collections of her poems had appeared before she ever published a novel, as Nora Foster Stovel comments in her remarkably comprehensive introduction to this first complete collection of Shields' poetry. Stovel adds previously unpublished poems from Shields' archives in the National Library to the three previously published poetry books. The first (*Others*, 1972) actually contains the writer's earliest work—poems composed for a 1964 CBC competition, which she won. These already deflect the lyric poem from the self (its traditional focus) to the world.

The titles spotlight multiple subjects in the manner of a cartographer: "Grandpa Who Is Eighty," "A Fiftyish Aunt," "The Ferryman at Prince Edward County," "Our Old Aunt Who Is in a Retirement Home," "An Old Lady We Saw" who falls on ice, a small daughter ("Sara") providing an ankle-level perspective. The metonymic agenda is also a philosophical one, which involves filling the world, naming what or who is. And *what is* is more than just the visible. The poet processes actual observation with a vision of things in context, modified by perception. The old aunt whose memories "tremble like jellies," who lives "from tray to tray, / briefly fingering / squares of cake" (27), is there in all her thickness of substance. So is time, blocking access to an intuited Pauline numinousness which Jan Zwicky's sensitive preface underlines. In an ironic upset of stock associations, the poet remarks,

The final outrage,  
not death,  
but lingering  
has begun (27)

Attuned to the Romantics, notably William Blake, who saw "a World in a grain of sand" (*Auguries of Innocence*), Shields' sympathetic identification with one individual extends to humankind and posits a gnomic truth. The world she engages with is one peopled by tenants of time. In a manifesto titled "Confession," she admits indifference to landscape, the traditional channel for outpouring feelings and insights. "Mountains go flat / on me and trees fall," but, she adds, "time's tenanted chronicle / fills me full" (158). The writer invites you elsewhere to feel your way back "toward the exact / centre where history / and miracle intersect / announcing another beginning" (114), perhaps in your living room, where that philodendron "out-snakes the future" and "dreams of jungle space" (5). Shields clearly explodes Plato's cave when she brings the ferryman home from a family holiday, "captured alive . . . caught / by a click and locked / in a box" (7). By positing the startlingly real, tangible presence of the image, she addresses the relation between the existence of things and their apprehensibility.

The early poems already showcase how Shields' writing operated and evolved within the international currents of the modernist and postmodernist literary scene.

The very first poem, which opens Stovel's collection, stages a collision between the banal and the uncanny, detachment and involvement, disclosure and concealment. The title, "A Woman We Know Who Suffers from Occasional Depression," posits a localized narrator anchored in a realist space-time, who observes and describes. But the poem diffracts and, like an in-camera double exposure, melds two voices and two viewpoints. You expect to view a woman from the outside (she) but find yourself sucked into a mind ("I"). What you get is not description but organic participation in experience. Engaging with the multiforms of the consciousness, that "bold weed" which "grows where it wants" (123), the young Shields blasts realist space-time, the logic of day and night, supper and sleep, by coupling concrete particulars with impossible abstractions: "I housekeep / in rooms of my making, squares / of reason stacked against the clock" (4). Matter and manner collide in the closure which discloses chilling alterity in a matter-of-fact tone and provides the textual impression-point, giving articulation to the whole:

The trick  
is to find the square  
root of a clock tick  
and hide there (4)

Such a micro case study raises questions of craft and influence. Shields admitted to having written very derivative poetry when still a schoolgirl. You can detect a dialogue with literary predecessors throughout this collection, from Donne and Dickinson (conceits as riddles) to Auden and Pound (colloquial and imagist stances). This particular poem showcases Shields' writing before an admiration for Philip Larkin induced her to sacrifice the musicality of rhyme. The rhyme scheme above, buttressed by consonant [k] yet unravelled by enjambments, is anything but mechanical.

Fracturing the sonnet form, Petrarchan and Shakespearean quatrains frame a delicately specular sestet (*abccba*), which deploys an intricate interlocking melody. Shields performs a mind's free movement through the self-imposed limits of form and pattern, broken and remade like the poetry of T. S. Eliot, which haunts twentieth-century poetic production. Prufrock's patient etherized upon a table inhabits Shields' "Anne at the Symphony":

She listens like someone submitting  
to surgery;  
and at twelve she's quiet  
under the knife,  
stilled in ether (14)

Prufrock's "Do I dare [disturb the universe / eat a peach]" is invited into the meta-textual archived poem "Sonnet," whose speaker playfully turns to, then rejects, pre-texts defining love. Milton is dull, Byron too fiery, and Mrs. Browning overdoes it, so she wonders: "If none will satisfy to whom then may / I turn? Dare I trust myself?" (260). On an overt level, the speaker emancipates herself from her models: "You alone / Can tell me what the poets have not known" (260). But all along, despite the modern, conversational speaking voice and use of dramatic personae (practices which Eliot recycled from Donne and Blake), Shields cunningly conforms to a self-imposed

constraint. By bending her language to the Shakespearean sonnet's codes, in which pattern channels thought and generates invention, Shields positions poetry as an agonistic craft. A performance involving cognitive challenges, a taste for the difficult, and the pleasure of surmounting obstacles, which she shares with her audience. Uniting feeling and intellect in both image and conceit as vortexes through which ideas rush, Shields "doodle[s] a theory / of life" (14).

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## Beyond the Body

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**Kyla Jamieson**

*Body Count*. Nightwood Editions \$18.00

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**Liz Howard**

*Letters in a Bruised Cosmos*. McClelland & Stewart \$19.95

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**Liz Howard**

*Infinite Citizen of the Shaking Tent*. McClelland & Stewart \$18.95

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Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson (University of the Fraser Valley)

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Poetry collections from Liz Howard and Kyla Jamieson exemplify aesthetics and style, each author thoroughly inhabiting their own distinct voice. These poets are demanding in their voices and precise in their language, approaching a wide variety of subjects and forms within their collections. From the natural landscapes of lakes and marshes populated with herons to parks populated with "ultimate bros," each of these collections reveals poets taking chances with their dynamic and propulsive work.

I had the pleasure of seeing Kyla Jamieson on a panel at the Fraser Valley Literary Festival this fall, where she read from a new poem and talked about the craft of poetry. Her comments around writing disability echoed what I had read in Jamieson's first full-length book of poetry, *Body Count*. In her collection, she uses unsentimental and often humorous language to explore difficult subjects including disability, desire, misogyny, and navigating the ever-changing contemporary Canadian literary landscape. The poems detail crushes and crushing disappointments, pleasure and the pain of endings, the before and after of brain injury, the voice close and confessional, as if the speaker is whispering in the reader's ear. The result is intoxicating, engaging as the poems unravel themselves across the pages. Jamieson's poems about her concussion and subsequent brain injury are some of the strongest and most affecting of the collection; in form, they shift from the earlier "pre-concussion" poems, in that they take on a more amorphous, shifting shape to reveal the changes to the speaker's perspective and reality:

not lying  
in bed with a two-  
week headache  
bored & lonely  
while everything  
happens in sound  
waves around me (52)

Jamieson's poems are also concerned with the contemporary world they are situated in—some explore pop culture and the strangeness there with dark humour and a wry voice, commenting on everything from beauty standards to sexual assault to casual misogyny. Often, her lines are short and sharp as spikes, eliciting that proverbial punch to the gut. This sparseness of language is one of the most successful and specific aspects of her voice as a poet—every word is weighed, measured for its impact and purpose, as if hefting a bomb before throwing it.

Despite the dark overtones to some subject matter, Jamieson's poems remain airy, due in large part to the physical structure, the lean columns that propel the reader forward. There are not necessarily easy solutions included within the poems, but Jamieson is able to really immerse us in the worlds of her poems, unafraid to ask the difficult questions.

Liz Howard's debut collection, *Infinite Citizen of the Shaking Tent*, won the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2016; the jury described it as a collection that "keeps us delightfully off balance with a mix of lyricism and experiment, allusion and invention." The poems in the collection are cerebral, precise in language and form, and often deal with the landscape of the North. The poems travel that terrain with lovely images of blood moons, wild blueberries, and abandoned hunting shacks, drawing heavily in both image and allusion from the natural world.

History plays a large role in this collection as well, with Howard exploring her mother learning to field dress a moose, a childhood in the bush, and her youth working in lumber mills. In "Debarker," Howard writes,

debarker: where they  
keep the machine that  
cuts bark away from  
the trees years ago  
blood cousin fell in  
and emerged skinless (13)

The integration of history, memory, and violence speaks to the colonial past and postcolonial present woven throughout the collection, a steady beat of loss. A certain meditative quality runs through these poems—they are recursive, each one informing the next in an essential way. The poems are lyrical in their construction, the language careful and fresh to reveal the narrative. However, Howard's success as a stylist is perhaps seen most through her use of language—she is not afraid to upend expectations, marrying the lyrical with the scientific, creating a vibrant contrast of the body, the physical, and the intellectual within her work.

Howard's second poetry collection, *Letters in a Bruised Cosmos* feels more intimate, holding tragedy and family history up against philosophical and astrophysical science (it should surprise no one that Howard holds an Honours Bachelor of Science with Distinction as well as an MFA). Of mixed settler and Anishinaabe heritage, she draws on aspects of Indigenous culture and concepts as a framework throughout the collection. These poems remain lyrical narratives, weaving together the past and the present, the myth and the physical, often centring around Howard attempting to reconcile herself to her father's abandonment. She finds him shortly before his death, and in "Father's Day," she writes:

The human form is difficult to destroy  
utterly. When fragments of your father's  
bones thud against the ground of his wishing  
forgive yourself for the shock (24)

Much of this collection focuses on grief, and identity, and Howard's place in the world, in that vast cosmos. There is an immediacy to these poems, as if she is bearing witness to all these disparate happenings of the universe, documenting and interrogating them at once. These poems are layered, coupled with startling language and sharply drawn images, while still retaining the meditative quality seen in her first collection. There are reverberations within the poems, the past intimately tied to the present, circling around always to the central question: "Who do we become after the worst has happened?"

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## Animals within and Among

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**Pamela Korgemagi**

*The Hunter and the Old Woman*. House of Anansi Press \$24.99

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**Rachel Rose**

*The Octopus Has Three Hearts*. Douglas and McIntyre \$22.99

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Reviewed by Olivia Pellegrino (University of Toronto)

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Critical Animal Studies positions animals as subjects of thought and activity, its practitioners attempting to understand how humans represent and, often, anthropomorphize animals. From studies of animal behaviour to viral streaming programs on big cats in America, humans and the beings we call animals have consistently interfaced. Animals have been used to develop vaccines and assist in therapy and have been a source of food, entertainment, and companionship for humans. This relationship has been documented in a long literary tradition of representing the animal and its significance to the human—they have been divine beings, satirical representations of our flaws, political caricatures, and subjects of scientific interest. The convention of representing the animal is continued in both Pamela Korgemagi's debut novel *The Hunter and the Old Woman* and Rachel Rose's collection of short stories *The Octopus Has Three Hearts*. Each seeks to capture the emotional nuance with which humans imagine and interact with animals, rendering complex portraits of characters, both human and animal.

*The Hunter and the Old Woman* is an evocative tale of two beings and the strange compulsion that catalyzes the crossing of their paths. Korgemagi's novel follows the Old Woman, a panther who has taken on mythic status within the town that springs up outside her territory. However, one of the strengths of Korgemagi's representation of the Old Woman is that her life is chronicled apart from that of the town and humans, which for a large part of the novel are absent from the cougar's life. Instead, in lush and uncompromising prose, Korgemagi depicts the Old Woman's life wandering in her woods interacting with other cougars. There is a depth of emotion in Korgemagi's portrayal of the Old Woman that underscores her instincts and learned behaviours. For the most part, the novel avoids anthropomorphizing the thoughts and

feelings of the Old Woman, instead representing the human struggle to understand and relate to the animal. She is, in her own right, an enigmatic and surreal character. This struggle to truly understand that which is unhuman is mirrored by the novel's titular Hunter, Joseph Brandt, who, as a boy, becomes obsessed with hunting and killing the Old Woman. Brandt is immensely human in all his flaws, from tantrums as a boy to the strange and compulsive need to meet the Old Woman and achieve the impossible task of interpreting her. The vivid descriptions that constitute Korgemagi's novel are at their finest when encouraging contemplation on nature and life. Viewing lightning, the Old Woman wonders whether it is a whole life contained in a single moment, or if it is a piece of a larger, fuller life. These silent musings—if they can be called such—are similar to those that Brandt, and by extension the reader, entertain on the Old Woman. Is she a single, unique cougar, or does she come to stand in for something larger than herself? The chapters that reveal the Old Woman to us are so empathetic and passionate that Brandt's life somewhat pales in comparison. That his years-long-sought-after encounter with the Old Woman is divulged from his perspective keeps the reader at a distance from the Old Woman and how the animal knows or resists knowing humanity.

*The Octopus Has Three Hearts* seeks to explore and understand the emotional connection that humans share with animals. In fourteen stand-alone stories, Rose establishes these connections as equal parts caring and exploitative, healing and fraught. The most poignant stories in the collection are those that fully embrace the animality of their other-than-human characters: for example, "Warhol" in which a chatty parrot plays a pivotal role in the dissolution of a marriage or "White-Nose Syndrome" in which a scientist's mourning of the bats she studies accompanies thoughts of her own mortality in the face of a cancer diagnosis. However, Rose also astutely folds in questions of animality within the human. Affairs, addiction, mental illness, body dysmorphia: all these experiences that have been characterized as "bestly" are treated with compassionate and deep empathy. In this way, Rose overturns the characterization of trauma as healing through human relationships, so that, in "Revolting Beasts and Those Who Love Them," a woman coping with the loss of her boyfriend finds comfort in his reptile pets. While the stories in Rose's collection draw on a variety of thematic concerns and human experiences, they are united by the hope, safety, or strength that may come from a reciprocal relationship between human and animal.

Each of these books offers an insightful and thoughtful engagement with the gulfs of experience that exist between humans and animals and the emotional connections that can bridge those divides, leading to a fuller understanding of what it means to be.

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## Woven Narratives

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**Harold R. Johnson**

*The Bjorkan Sagas*. House of Anansi Press \$24.99

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**Sofi Papamarko**

*Radium Girl: Stories*. Buckridger Books \$20.00

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Reviewed by Nola Peshkin (University of Utah)

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The late Harold R. Johnson's novel, *The Bjorkan Sagas*, and Sofi Papamarko's short story collection, *Radium Girl*, share little in form, theme, or subject. However, the authors do share a distinct and formidable set of skills in the delicacy and deftness of weaving. Sometimes they are weaving storylines together; other times, they are finessing the ups and downs of characters' narrative threads; and, most consistently, they weave vastly diverse, and seemingly disparate, themes together with similar deft skill and delicate artistry. With these books, it is clear that Johnson and Papamarko have each sat at their pen-and-paper looms and created something entirely new and entirely wonderful.

Is *The Bjorkan Sagas* a mainstream novel? Absolutely not. Unless you consider a mix of aliens, dragons, storytellers, medicine-women, and Valkyries all under the umbrella of Cree and Swedish influences, mainstream. If that is the case, I'd love to see your reading list. It is this novel's definitive commitment to itself, and assertion of what it exists as and believes in, that makes it so remarkable, and so very unlike anything else in similar genres. *The Bjorkan Sagas*, published in 2021, is broken into three sagas, which together tell of Juha the storyteller's journey with a few fellow Bjorkans as they explore the world beyond their home valley. Along the way, they encounter Anthony de Marchand, a cunning story-trader, Lilly the medicine woman, and forceful aliens with guns pushing the words of their Book of God in search of wealth and Heaven. Juha and his friends must protect the people of their valleys from the aliens' attempts to exploit the sacred riches within the Bjorkan trees, with help from Lilly and the Valkyries she calls upon for aid.

In telling this story, Johnson blends storylines exploring questions of human relationships and responsibility to the land, as well as questions of Indigeneity and colonization. This novel creates a central tension between the invader aliens, more than willing to murder in the quest for their goal of Heaven and riches, and the Bjorkans, inhabitants of their valley for eons and highly in tune with the land, whose job it is to protect the Bjorkan trees. Underneath layers of otherworldly settings and characters, the novel uses this relationship to ask ever-green questions about settler contact and colonization. The narrative often feels dream-like, and Johnson writes throughout with a self-described "minimalist" style (Johnson), giving readers only what they need to know in order to allow their imaginations to take the reins in regard to the details. While Juha likely looks much different in my head than yours, his actions, choices, and ethics remain the same. Johnson's style is influenced by his mother's Cree culture and the way that she told trickster stories. The story's form—prose interspersed with poetry—resembles that of ancient Icelandic and other Scandinavian sagas. The writing as a whole is straightforward and engaging, giving the reader enough room to play within the bounds of the story itself, and leaving them meditating on questions about who, in our world, plays the roles of aliens, Bjorkans, and story-traders.

Sofi Papamarko's debut short story collection explores death, joy, love, ethics, and justice in twelve stories. While each piece details separate characters and settings, they are loosely tied together by their thematically dark similarities. From one family's involuntary entrapment in a doomsday bunker, to a pair of conjoined twins navigating teenage experiences, to a doll-collector's pedophilic son, each story contains a purity and innocence of character and narrative that is heavily outlined with a resonance of death. Sometimes the deathly element feels imminent, sometimes it's planned, and sometimes it remains looming a strong sense that it will arrive after the story's end. This, however, does not negate the collection's overarching humour and lightness. Moreover, this mixing of dark and light displays Papamarko's masterful ability to warp and weft threads and themes of macabre and playfulness into a uniquely beautiful tapestry. Her writing is clear and self-aware, without being obvious about her authorial goals, leaving room for readers to linger in the minute moments and details. Papamarko gives her characters great agency and respect, allowing them to make their own choices (occasionally this means murdering their husbands or consuming toxic radium paint) and honouring what comes next for them as a consequence. Clearly, the author is intimately familiar with the inner lives and workings of each of her characters. Each one is an anchor for their respective story, keeping the pieces grounded, and giving the stories unshakeable foundations from which to flourish. The narrative perspective changes in each piece to best accommodate readers knowing and understanding the characters, whether that be a story told from their own narration, their diary entries, or a third person telling. The genuine care and detail with which each narrative is crafted is part of Papamarko's great artistry, and a central reason for her collection's deep emotional effect on readers—that, of course, and the shock endings in most of the stories, generally well-delivered. It's easy, as a reader, to end up with a racing heart. Sofi Papamarko has mastered the art of the short story, and if this debut collection says anything about what is to come for her future published works, readers should be excitedly awaiting everything she has to offer.

Harold R. Johnson's writing weaves a tapestry that blends threads of colonization, aliens, stories, myths, sagas, dragons, and landscapes, while Sofi Papamarko's loom warps and wefts humour, joy, death, decisions, and relationships. While these books appear disparate on the surface, they share an incredible level of authorial craftsmanship, delicacy, and dedication.

#### *Works Cited*

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## Beautifully Broken Buffoon

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Anosh Irani

*Buffoon*. House of Anansi Press \$19.99

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Reviewed by Taylor Marie Graham (University of Guelph)

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Often, reading plays is an act of filling in the blanks, an act that requires ample imagination to colour in context and missing aspects of a production, from sets to lighting to bodies in space on stage. It's extremely rare to come across a playtext that carries with it the layers of a full theatre production and that makes the experience of the live, in-person play accessible to the reader. Incredibly, my experience of reading *Buffoon* by Anosh Irani did just that.

Felix is fascinating. We first meet the play's protagonist in a prison visiting-room. This opening image, coupled with the first few lines of dialogue, prompts the essential driving questions for the rest of the play: How did Felix end up in prison? Does he deserve to be locked up? Why does he have white chalk on his face? Who does he think is the audience, to whom he speaks directly? "Look," he tells us. "I don't really know why you're here. I mean, I do, kind of. To be honest, I don't have much to say. I don't want to say anything, but now that you're here, I guess I do owe you some sort of . . . transmission. Where do I begin?" (4; ellipsis in original). In fewer than seventy-five pages, Irani's buffoon Felix reveals the story of his remarkable life in the circus. Beginning from the very day he was born, Felix introduces us to his high-flying, trapeze-artist parents: The Great Frank and The Flying Olga. He then spins a tight and complex tale of coming of age, falling in love, experiencing abandonment, finding our life's purpose, and navigating tragedy and the ways in which our pasts pull at us from behind.

In the stage production of *Buffoon*, this is all achieved by one performer on stage. Some of my favourite theatre-going experiences have been watching one-person plays. When an actor is in the throes of solo performance, if all is going well, it can be mesmerizing to watch them juggle multiple characters in various settings with just their body as the story's main instrument. In this way, solo productions often require great feats of athletic prowess. Capturing this experience for a play reader is quite difficult, but this was the exact experience I had while reading *Buffoon*.

As I was reading, I found it impossible to forget that one actor was performing this piece entirely by himself on stage. I easily imagined an actor transforming from character to character as I read on. Why this is the case, I'm still working out, but I have a few theories. Perhaps it's the skilful way that the play moves between showing and telling, between action and description. One moment, the actor plays Felix's caretaker, Smile. Another moment, he is Felix's mother, Olga, then Felix responding to Olga, then Felix offering an inner monologue that describes the action of the rest of the scene as if it happened years ago.

Perhaps I was able to see an actor so clearly because the story is also about Felix becoming a performer. "I *am* a buffoon," he eventually discovers (46). It's not only the actor but also Felix who plays multiple roles. He is, in fact, all of these characters, and they are all part of him. Half the fun for the reader is trying to find out why Felix needs to tell this story to us. How did these characters get themselves inside of him?

You can also feel Felix's disposition towards each character as he performs them. Felix often plays them up as larger-than-life, hilarious stereotypes, which makes the precious, rare moments of humanity all the sweeter when they unexpectedly seep in. One particularly hilarious moment of rare tenderness comes from Felix's mother, Olga, who speaks in a thick Russian accent and always has a cigarette dangling from her mouth. When she sees that Felix is struggling with love, she tells him, "Love is for puppy. You can love puppy forever. But human . . . just like cigarette smoke. My first cigarette, I cough, cough, cough. After some time, I get used to smoke. I don't cough anymore. Same with love. One day there is no hate left. That is the end of love. You feel . . . nothing" (24; ellipses in original). As these lines demonstrate, the play teeters masterfully on that tightrope-thin edge somewhere between comedy and tragedy. As the clown is made before us, we also bear witness to what Felix's chalk mask hides. At one point, Aja, Felix's love interest, says to him, "Felix, everything isn't a joke," to which he replies, "Of course it is. If it isn't a joke, then it's life. And I don't do life" (66).

There are also important decolonial themes embedded within the story. These themes are crucial to its final few pages. Without giving too much away, the play asks the reader to consider aspects of identity that are lost or forcibly changed through immigration. This is one part of the play that makes it a significant piece of theatre in Canada today.

*Buffoon* is another intelligent and thoughtful play from critically acclaimed writer Anosh Irani. Felix—and all the characters who live inside him—invite readers to consider the many masks that we wear every day and the very serious business of being a clown.

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## The Places We Were

**Jane Munro**

*Open Every Window*. Douglas and McIntyre \$28.95

**Kelly Jo Burke**

*Wreck: A Very Anxious Memoir*. Radiant Press \$22.00

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane (University of Regina)

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I dipped into these two extraordinary memoirs while travelling between Regina and Toronto this fall. Each is the fruit of Canada Council and provincial arts board grants, and while the tone and tenor of each is distinct—from west coast to east coast—they share themes of permanence, passages, and complicated love. Alternating between time periods in the authors' lives, they provide short chapters focusing on recurring images and employ captivating narrative techniques such as excerpts from letters, lists, poems, photographs, and quotations. At the same time, they both dive into the commonality of human life and the homes in which we live. Houses are renovated, crumble or burn, are sold to others, and the recurring image is ultimately rooted in that other house—the mortal flesh we inhabit. Yet another Canadian reflection on land, nature, and the unsettled settler might easily become saccharine, but these two miraculously do not in the hands of these nimble artists.

How does one make sense of the mystery of appearance and disappearance, of birth and death, and of time's passage? Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill," with its line,

"Grab your things. I've come to take you home" (qtd. in Burke 30), is the theme song of these brilliant pieces of life writing. The tortoise, who can retire to its shell, "at home in itself" (Munro 19), is another image that gains significance. I devoured Jane Munro's *Open Every Window* in short bites between departure lounges and waiting areas, savouring every morsel. It yokes Indian philosophy and contemporary Canadian life, incorporating several of Munro's travels to South Asia before, during, and after her partner's illness. During these travels, she picks up the thread of cyclical nature, opening with the observation that "every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home." Munro's memoir is in seven parts, and the ultimate section is a kind of revolving door—flying west, travelling east; dipping into the past of the house fire that takes her mother's life; reflecting on romantic relationships, children and grandchildren, and the inexorable loss of her husband to Alzheimer's. "My life—my marriage. My home" (17), Munro writes near the beginning of the book. Living on the west coast of Canada, she alternates between depictions of forests and rocky shorelines and supernatural apparitions, interlacing transcriptions of her father's letters from the 1940s, lists, and dialogues. Most remarkable, perhaps, is the attempt to see through the perspective of her husband in "Who Is the Seer and Who the Seen?" When Bob recalls the loss of his own family members, the simplicity of his statement "[e]ven though you are familiar with losing people, it's alarming" reminds us of that existential mystery: "Terrifying," states Bob, "He's here, and then—poof! . . . He's gone" (215).

Kelly Jo Burke's *Wreck* is an often-bipolar—or multi-polar—exploration touching on similar mysteries in family relationships; it is darkly comedic too. No pretensions in this funded project. I was delighted to untangle the dense wreck of "wreckage," "being a wreck," and repeatedly "wrecking" the illusory perfection of our lives. I chuckled aloud reading her recounting the seminal Canada Council grant proposal—down to the nitty-gritty deciphering of envelope thickness—and chain of correspondence that compels her return to Maine and the home of her grandparents. Burke's wit is self-deprecating and often playful in its parody of state-funded art; it begins with an "About the Author" note that discloses her compulsive lying even while providing footnotes and photographs as a nod to academia, and yet its core is raw honesty, pathos, grief, and deep love for her family of origin, and the family she has helped create with Ian. Eccentric elements include the voice of "Teen" [her grandmother Ernestine] in her head, the strained relationship with her grandfather, her thwarted attempt to return to "her rock," and even the reflection on alternate titles such as "At the Lighthouse"—a "shout out to Virginia Woolf" (21). Like Munro, she alternates between the early 1960s of her childhood, the 1990s, and a recent return to what is now "Gabrielle's house" for her writing project.

Both memoirs, then, use a variety of narrative techniques to reflect on the places we live—that bear our imprint—and the bodies we inhabit. Burke's is more introspective, with family members described as larger-than-life characters in some sections; Munro, on the other side, extends her perspective into the region of the transcendent soul reflective of her yoga practice and interest in Indian culture. In the end, though, the fear of institutionalization—of Bob's resistance to home care and Burke's grandfather's fear of hospitals—echo paradoxical longing for both roots and liberation. As Burke notes, "Show me contentment . . . and I'll poke it over. Point at the nasty that waits underneath. Gifts are for losing. Love's a landmine step" (55). It is truly a pleasure to luxuriate in the presence of two accomplished writers, both humble

enough to expose their insecurities and fears. These memoirs are not-so-sentimental journeys that are simultaneously sweet and spicy.

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## Gaming Lit, Winning Crit?

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**Adam Hammond**

*The Far Shore: Indie Games, Superbrothers, and the Making of JETT.* Coach House Books \$21.95

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Reviewed by Gregory Betts (Brock University)

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*JETT: The Far Shore* is a grim videogame for PlayStation and PC depicting the collapse of a planet, its people “haunted by oblivion” (according to the PlayStation copytext), and their desperate search to find a suitable new home. If the lore is sci-fi cliché, the gameplay presents a uniquely contemporary Canadian ambivalence about the whole discovery and colonization experience. The past is desolate, the future uncertain, and the present marked by both the wonder of an alien world and the ambivalence of a biosphere that humans will inevitably disrupt and harm. Though PlayStation downplays the creators in its marketing, focusing instead on the “cinematic action-adventure” gameplay and user experience, the critical and fan reception of the game confirms that it is widely understood as the work of video game auteurs Superbrothers (a.k.a. Craig Adams) and Pine Scented Software (a.k.a. Patrick McCallister). The game’s nonviolence and ambivalence are thus read as markers of the artistic vision of the duo, part of an elaborate environmentalist or anticolonial-or-something allegory overlaid onto a five-part eight-to-ten-hour game.

Instead of the ecological or colonial insights of the game, Adam Hammond’s book *The Far Shore: Indie Games, Superbrothers, and the Making of JETT* responds to the game’s auteurship and the ambiguity of its allegory. His theory is that the game performs a kind of narrative methodology characteristic of modernist novels by the likes of Virginia Woolf and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. To make this claim, Hammond borrows liberally from Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin and German literary critic Erich Auerbach and their shared interest in the dialogic, multi-voiced modality of modernist novels. Dialogic models, at the most basic level, take note of the representation of competing personalities and the co-existence of alternative ideologies. Difference is set in dialogue in the narrative. Works by modernist masters like Woolf and James Joyce become inevitably less conclusive, more resistant to closure, and comfortable in their multi-layered ambiguity. Hammond wants to position the auteurs of *JETT* as heirs to this modernist tradition, linked through an indie, do-it-yourself aesthetic he traces from modernism through the historical avant-garde, punk music, and riot grrrl music+zine culture to independently produced video games. He also spends multiple pages linking John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into that trajectory.

In order to complete this idiosyncratic lineage, Hammond borrows a theory by Walter Benjamin that all allegories are destined to become increasingly ambiguous as the cultural and historical links become more obscure through time. His point is that *JETT*’s structural ambivalence—the story attends to characters who don’t want to leave exploring a planet that doesn’t want them to arrive—creates a modernist ambiguity.

Furthermore, the sensory experience of actually playing the game overwhelms any possible allegorical superstructure to the narrative. Couple this anachronistic modernism with the auteurship of the game's conception (Adams and McCallister were on their own for three of the nine years of the game's development), and the book plausibly fits the theory, however strained it sometimes seems.

More than any other element, though, Hammond's book is determined to discover and arrive at a theory to fit the game. If there is any tension to this "blender" of a book (in his terms; 184), it is in this quest. The author struggles to develop a theory about the game that provides a better reading of its ultimate impact than do the dozens of online critics (whose opinions of *JETT* were mixed, middling). Take note that this book was published days after the release of the game, rushed because the game and the intended book-length response had been delayed by years. Hammond had enough time to present his theory to the principal game creators and is content to conclude his book with their quiet acknowledgement of its plausibility.

His anxiety about his own theory, and his need for approval by the auteurs, reveals that the book isn't really about the theory, nor, ultimately, the development of the game. Indeed, the theory appears suddenly as a *deus ex machina* in the final section, a happy inheritance luckily bestowed by the critics Hammond was "totally obsessed with in [his] early twenties" (209). It is a moment of Dickensian relief and reward, rather than reflection or rhetorical accumulation. The first section is all about the author's appropriateness for this quest to develop a theory, followed by sections that detail the episodic obstacles to arriving at one. *The Far Shore* is thus a heroic and gamified rendering of literary scholarship, falling prey to a tendency Hammond identifies and critiques in other critics: "Interpretation itself becomes a game. Getting it right means recovering the creator's vision, which means you win" (193).

But what does *winning* mean for literary scholarship, for literature? Hammond starts an interrogation of the "perverse" goal of literary criticism and the pedagogy (including his own) that creates it: "Your job as an English undergrad is to make a brilliant argument, whether you think it true or not" (19). Like the game he tracks, then, Hammond's book, in presenting both a heroic theory-of and the reason why a theory-of is not actually a winning model for literary scholarship, has its own structural ambivalence that is never resolved.

#### Works Cited

"JETT: The Far Shore – PS4 & PS5 Games | PlayStation (Canada)." *PlayStation*, 2024, [www.playstation.com/en-ca/games/jett—the-far-shore/](http://www.playstation.com/en-ca/games/jett—the-far-shore/).

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## Stories to Live By

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### Sheung-King

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*You are eating an orange. You are naked.* Book\*hug Press \$20.00

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### Kim Fu

*Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century Girl.* Coach House Books \$21.95

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### Hiroshi Nakamura; Ansel Adams, photographer

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*Treadmill.* Mosaic Press \$24.95

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Reviewed by Kelly Baron (University of Toronto)

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There is, and always has been, an unstable binary between fiction and reality. In recent years, that binary has become even more precarious, causing renewed fascination with the author, with the real. Autofiction blurs the real and the fictional, leaving readers to wonder what elements of the novel actually happened; historical manuscripts, discovered by academics in archives, result in a renewed interest in the authors behind them. Magical realism blurs the limits of reality, sometimes resulting in a reality that feels closer to home than anything realism can achieve. Sheung-King's *You are eating an orange. You are naked.*, Kim Fu's *Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century*, and Hiroshi Nakamura's *Treadmill* illustrate the unstable binary between fiction and the real, while demonstrating the vast range of storytelling from Asian Canadian and American authors.

Sheung-King's *You are eating an orange. You are naked.* is an autofictional novel that tracks a fragile relationship, one between the unnamed narrator and a woman referred to only as "you." It is, primarily, about their travels together, and the narrator's love for her, but the relationship is made tenuous by the woman's disappearances, by her inability to reciprocate the love that he extends to her. Much of their time together is mediated by their storytelling and by scholarship. He wonders, early in the narrative, if she is a fifty-year-old fox, after recounting that Guo Po, the ancient Chinese scholar, wrote that "at the age of fifty, a fox can transform into a person," before continuing to detail the magical abilities of elderly foxes" (9). This initial story serves almost as instructional for the rest of the novel. Their interactions together are interspersed with Chinese folktales, with the narrator frequently reflecting on her character and his love for her. Stories, for Sheung-King's narrator, are how he understands his existence and his love. It makes sense, then, that Sheung-King's novel is eerily close to the details of his own life; a translator himself, having lived in Toronto and Hong Kong, he resembles his unnamed narrator; in his acknowledgements, he thanks "M" for inspiring the character "You." *You are eating an orange. You are naked.* is a gorgeous book, and it is as much about a relationship in decline as it is about the value of storytelling, of using fiction to mediate the real, demonstrating what excellence in blending that unstable binary can look like.

*Lesser Known Monsters in the 21st Century* is similarly about the stories we tell ourselves to understand reality, but rather than blending fiction with reality, it stays in the fictional realm, drawing from the magical and the monstrous to provide poignant insights on contemporary life. Fu's writing is clear and engaging; the magical and the monstrous seem inevitable in her stories, serving to highlight flaws in our contemporary condition. "Liddy, First to Fly," for example, details the story of a young

girl who one day grows wings from her ankles, later cliff-diving to test her newfound flying abilities. As the mothers of Liddy and her friends rush to stop the girls, the narrator reflects that if it had just “been one adult, the magic could have lasted;” four, however, can “talk to each other until reality straightens, until doubt is crushed, until their memories unstitch and reform” (35). Fu’s story serves as a useful reminder of the diminishment of magic and creativity in adult life. Her storytelling is at its peak in “Bridezilla,” a story about a woman who reluctantly decides to get married, interspersed with details of what appears to be some form of massive sea monster, a result of climate change. In “Bridezilla,” the woman tracks the sea monster while planning her own wedding, an event she had dreamt of as a child but lost interest in as an adult. Her partner is indifferent; her friends mock the concept of weddings, even while married themselves. She agrees to a simple, boat-cruise wedding package, but accidentally leaves her partner at the altar, stepping off the boat briefly right as it was leaving the harbour. “Bridezilla” is a marriage story which fixates on the ugly instead of the beautiful; in her final scenes, she is subsumed by the ocean, and it is unclear if she becomes the sea monster from the opening scenes. Fu’s collection is a clear, intriguing, and entertaining form of storytelling that bends the limits of what fiction can achieve.

Hiroshi Nakamura’s *Treadmill* provides a very different kind of narrative. Published after the author’s death, the novel was transcribed by Dr. Peter Suzuki, a former professor at the University of Nebraska, who found the manuscript in an archive. It is unique in that it is the only novel of Japanese internment during World War II written while the author was in the internment camps; the plot focuses on the poverty and extreme weather conditions endured by Japanese Americans during their enforced segregation. As a historical document, it shows how little has changed in the last eighty years. The characters wonder if they will ever be accepted as Americans before Mr. Itaya, an Issei, a Japanese immigrant to America denied citizenship rights, begins a speech that could easily be told today: “There’s no use trying to delude ourselves that we’re American. If our skins were white, it would be another matter. Look at the Indians around here. They say they’re discriminated against even yet. Then look at the white-skinned immigrants. They don’t even have to be born here to be considered full-fledged Americans” (153–54). The novel is a rare historical document, one that serves to highlight the legacy of anti-Asian racism in North America.

Together, these three releases demonstrate the exceptional range of storytelling from Asian Canadian and American authors, while further destabilizing the formal limits of fiction as it engages with historical and contemporary reality.

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## Agents against Their Erasure

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**Peggy Lynn Kelly and Carole Gerson**

*Hearing More Voices: English-Canadian Women in Print and on the Air, 1914–1960.*  
Tecumseh Press \$24.95

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**Rona Altrows, ed.**

*You Look Good for Your Age.* U of Alberta P \$26.99

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Reviewed by Melanie Power (Concordia University)

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Rigorously researched and compiled, *Hearing More Voices* offers a welcome retrospective examination of women's contributions to early-twentieth-century Canadian publishing and broadcasting industries. Organizing sections by genre (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and radio), Kelly and Gerson investigate the social and cultural influences that framed these creative spheres during the years 1914 to 1960. While profiling works that are “under-acknowledged and scarcely known,” they illustrate how harmful ideologies (misogynist, racist, ableist) manifested as exclusionary practices that hindered the reception and endurance of women's creative work (138). The book succeeds in its mission of increasing awareness of the worth and ongoing relevance of overlooked, forgotten, or lost women writers from an understudied period in Canadian literary history.

*Hearing More Voices* takes care to highlight and contextualize the various barriers faced by women writers at the time, as well as the strategies that they employed “to subvert systemic professional challenges or turn them to their advantage” (19). For example, when women were excluded from professional writers' organizations, they formed separate associations (such as the Canadian Women's Press Club, established in 1904). Their challenges, however, were not only political but also socio-economic. Kelly and Gerson include choice quotes from the journals or epistolary correspondences of various women writers, including an extract from a 1947 letter by poet P. K. Page, in which she writes, “I simply don't want to work for a living. I'd like to sit on a cushion and write a fine poem” (68). While Page was privileged enough to focus full-time on her writing, many others had to juggle their literary ambitions with more practical career options and domestic responsibilities—a balancing act that many writers today, of course, still struggle with.

In addition to colouring in the social, political, and cultural contexts in which these creatives operated, Kelly and Gerson also carefully delineate the publishing and editorial forces that led to the marginalization or erasure of interesting work. “Availability has much to do with canonicity,” they write, illustrating how the masculinist literary values of the early twentieth century led to the omission of many women-authored works from anthologies or to these works falling out of print altogether (36). Novels by Madge Macbeth, Flos Jewell Williams, and Joyce Marshall are some of the many cited examples of understudied texts—texts that radically centre on “sexual desire, unwanted pregnancies, childbirth, unhappy marriages,” all “key aspects of female experience” (53).

“You look good for your age,” a specialist told writer and editor Rona Altrows in 2018; this so-called compliment served as the catalyst for the conception and completion of her book (xi). Through personal essays, short stories, and poems, *You Look Good for Your Age* catalogues twenty-nine women's meditations on aging as these

women are variously pulled, pushed, or lulled by the currents of time. With wit, candour, and wisdom, these writers explore the pleasures and hardships of growing older: of “trading a tight body for a lumpy body and a baby” (254); of caring for aging parents or ill spouses; of finding a new presence of mind and body; of “wearing out bit by tiny bit, small wound by small wound” (12); of discovering their unique, indelible value. Inherent in the book’s title, in that complicated compliment many women regularly receive, is the “social assumption that it is better to look young than old and, by logical extension, better to be young than old” (xi). In the wide range of their ages and lived experiences, the contributors to this collection attempt to untangle the knots of agism and misogyny that exist outside—as well as inside—of themselves.

Although unified in subject, the style, tone, and mood of each piece varies widely, combining to create a poignant patchwork of protest and peace-making, of lamentable losses and celebratory gains. Many of these writers grapple with the frustrating double standards for women regarding physical appearance and aging, as well as contemporary society’s vanity and absurd beauty ideals more broadly. Women in these pieces comically characterize themselves as “the nearly dead” (4), “as over-ripe fruit” (258), “an old crone” (272), and “a fugitive from the land of fuckability” (274). Other writers discuss the dangers of visibility in a culture where “there are still women being attacked in back alleys,” still women “being raped and thrown in the river”—a reality more terrifyingly possible “for queer or trans people, for Indigenous women,” and for other women of colour (19). In addition to this precarity, there are also the gendered expectations of womanhood, which Roberta Rees summarizes beautifully in her non-fiction piece “Upriver”: “How I keep writing and often can’t write about what it means to be a woman looking—being looked at, doing the looking, looking out, looking after, living long enough to see children grow up, to wear time in our bodies, our faces, our minds” (56).

In addition to these writers’ grief, rage, and resignation, there is also joy, peace, and anticipation regarding the years to come. For Julie Sedivy, aging can mean “feeling the growing tug of everyday pleasures” (202) even while failing to “mak[e] a serene transition toward the wisdom of living more deeply in the moment” (204). There are many lessons to glean from *You Look Good for Your Age*. While “[d]yeing is such a waste of time,” as E. D. Morin comments with regards to her decision to let her greying hair show (278), this collection as a whole reminds us that the prospect of dying gives us something worthwhile, in the ways that it clarifies and makes us cling to the small and large meanings we contrive.

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## Ecstatic and in Flux

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**Therese Estacion**

*Phantompains*. Book\*hug Press \$20.00

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**Phil Hall**

*Niagara & Government*. Pedlar Press \$20.00

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**Susan Holbrook**

*Ink Earl*. Coach House Books \$21.95

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Reviewed by Tim Conley (Brock University)

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*Phantompains*, as Therese Estacion explains in her debut of the same title, should not be confused with *phantomsensation*, and the *phantomfuture* is something else again. This book often makes for harrowing reading and it is very difficult to imagine a reader who will not at least wince at, say, the lubricant prescribed “to / prevent mummification of vagina” (82) or the description of a right hand which “has four mini Vienna / sausage fingers stuck to a palm that is / perpetually open” (48) or the post-hysterectomy report: “*Your eggs / were all black*” (72).

To say that Estacion “writes through” a life-threatening rare infection not only sounds too neat a formula for what has obviously been an experience that defies adjectives except perhaps *long*; it also hints at a sort of passive acceptance that is not what we find in *Phantompains*. The book manages to convey an erratic range of reactions, from disbelief to defiance. At various points Estacion writes of her body as though it were not hers, or not connected to her sense of herself:

and my body was flown from Trail, BC  
and through  
the Okanagan thermals

I imagine that the sound of the  
helicopter blades  
dragged my soul  
back to my sick body. (42)

Just the phrase “sick body” trips up comfortable epistemologies. The crunchy word “eunuched”—Greer’s title *The Female Eunuch* surgically altered here to “Eunuched Female” for one poetic sequence—is not chosen not to hurt, not to unnerve.

The blending of Philippine mythology into the mix is all the more expressive, though what might be called the “point form” of some of the poems has the opposite effect. The need to take this book as a whole, as the embodiment of a process, to understand it as more than (only painfully removable) parts, is affirmed by its last words:

*they were full*  
*they were ecstatic*  
*& in flux*

As readers of his previous books know, Phil Hall is no stranger to trauma and pain. The fact that *Niagara & Government* is named after an intersection suggests an understanding of Hall's poetics at a crossroads: the book is often melancholy but at the same time a meditation on melancholy. Taking up Muriel Rukeyser's incisive writerly questions, "Do I move toward form? Do I use all my fears?" Hall wonders about the instigating, abiding roles that pain and trauma have in his writings. This involves weighing the force of family estrangements and old but unforgotten injuries against the need to attend to one's own mental health, and Hall can be disarmingly frank—for example, about the long silence between himself and his son, who resents Hall's writing about him. Hall's poems "circle failure & abuse" and this circling can be, he acknowledges, repetitive and unsatisfactory, and perhaps must be so, or must risk being so: "an unassociative detritus-squeal / is all that's left of so much arrogant scrawl" (91). These lines echo a bolder assertion from the book's first poem, "Typo": "I cherish not clarity no our demotic scrawl" (9).

This "scrawl" is distinguished from "poems that are what I call *typey-typey* / in love with cheap play they flaunt ego-blab" (92). By the same token, Hall avers a preference for Pollock over Mondrian, for the rough and frayed edge rather than the precision-cut straight line.

Mating Joan Miró with Maeve Binchy to produce "that rare hybrid *Miróbinchy*" (38) exemplifies the poet's understanding that "folk art & fine art are one" (39). Accordingly, Hall's poetry blends personal (and sometimes *folksy*) anecdotes with wordplay as a method of thinking. For example, he recalls a photo album anonymously sent to his grandmother arriving hours before her death. The pictures all include her incidentally: again and again she appears, unselfconsciously photo-bombing, at "protest marches" and "wedding deceptions" (12). (Is that a typo? Remember how this book begins.) The album was buried with her. The poem is called "The Lyric" and it ends like this:

the phrase *all the time in the world* is a pencil sharpener  
to squeeze the I'm out of a word don't squeeze  
are you carrying fervour or currying favour  
the line with no hook is my fish

Process and examination of the lyric are also integral to Susan Holbrook's latest, which is a volume of erasure poetry—wait, where are you going? Don't give me that look. Sure, the business of uncovering some new text within an invariably canonical work has become routine, but Holbrook not only chooses an unexpected, non-"literary" text to excavate but predicates her work on variations: the same single-page text repeated with different erasures. And in case that's not meta enough for you, the text is ad copy for the Pink Pearl eraser, extolling its virtues as "the perfect partner for your writing," a premise that Holbrook takes at, well, face value. On each page she reproduces the ad copy in faint print, which grows fainter with each passing page, while leaving selected words and letters unerased, as it were, to find unexpected messages.

These messages flash variations between familiarity and strangeness, between banality and wit: from "erase your darlings" (33) to "tex mex – a trusted source for gas" (94). They are grouped into different category sections, including "Love," "Food," "Family," and "Writing," though the theme of writing (perhaps inevitably) tends to persist, overtly or otherwise. The "erased" text becomes fainter and fainter as each

section progresses, until it is gone entirely, and this clever feature is a reminder of how much *ink earl* is focused on process, not just in the repeated returns to Pink Pearl promotions but in the process involved in reading Holbrook's pages, connecting the stranded islands of words and letters (with a ratio of amusement to aggravation to be determined by each reader). After "fin" comes one more message, "OK your deal": an invitation, a passing of the eraser.

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## Recessive Potentials

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**Philip Resnick**

*Pandemic Poems*. Ronsdale Press \$17.95

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**Lillian Nečakov**

*il virus*. Anvil Press \$18.00

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**Anahita Jamali Rad**

*still*. Talonbooks \$16.95

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Reviewed by MLA Chernoff (York University)

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Philip Resnick's *Pandemic Poems*, Lillian Nečakov's *il virus*, and Anahita Jamali Rad's *still* respond to life in the age of covid-19 on disparate registers, exploring the conscious, unconscious, and material possibilities of this new era. Whereas Resnick and Nečakov employ poetry to address the everyday woes of lockdown subjectivity, Jamali Rad wields isolation as a tool heralding a politics to come.

*Pandemic Poems* is an outlet for Resnick's fear and frustration. He frequently gestures toward the chronic overwhelm of the crisis and the bombardment of doomscroll-inducing coverage in the mainstream media, observing society as it transforms into a collective of "hermit crabs, / self-absorbed within our shells" (86). Resnick responds to a wide range of source materials, from headlines all the way to Salman Rushdie, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Lenin. Despite this rich tapestry of influence, some of the pieces read like prosaic takes from a Facebook meme or a tweet stating the obvious. In "Crises," for instance, Resnick writes, "Crises have a way / of forcing us to come to terms / with paradoxes we ignore," concluding that "we must seek contentment where we can, / in love and friendship that endures" (120). Nevertheless, the book does not lack charm, especially when it comes to its relatability. It is easy to empathize with Resnick, and the dates inscribed at the end of each piece are like small wounds, reminding readers of the pandemic's strangely accelerated temporality. There is comfort in seeing the idioms and metaphors that other people use to work through a global state of panic. Feverishly archival, Resnick attempts to extract meaning from moments which would otherwise be lost, like tears in masks.

Like Resnick, Nečakov is devastated by the fallout of covid-19, but she does not fall into the solipsistic trap of compiling linear meditations for the purpose of hoarding memories. Rather, Nečakov withdraws into the depths of the psyche to dilute the intensities of daily life. As an edition of Stuart Ross' *A Feed Dog Book* imprint via Anvil Press, it is hard not to associate *il virus* with the surrealism for which Ross and his cronies are famous. By "surrealism" I mean that body of work that privileges dreamscapes as the most authentic wellspring of creativity and radical hope.

Nečákov's work illuminates the intricacies of the wandering mind and its discontents, finding humour in the mundane, without foregoing sentimentality:

my pyjamas are not impressed  
and continue  
to hold me hostage for hours  
and that's okay  
I realize that all these syllables  
are just scars on a life lived. (93)

The poems are a complex entanglement of half-thoughts, revelatory disillusiones, and nostalgic delusions, all of which point to the enduring terror wrought by lonely, sad brains in search of new neural connections, new memories and ways of thinking to help facilitate and process the most grandiose work of mourning imaginable:

On waking, I realize  
the Anthropocene,  
along with the bread  
is gone (61)

*il virus* is a must-read for those seeking a more lighthearted approach to the virus. The book gives equal weight to political turmoil and absurdity, as the former becomes indistinguishable from the latter. Referencing the cancelation of the annual Gathering of the Juggalos in 2020, Nečákov writes,

Even the Juggalos  
restless as hummingbirds  
know there will be hell  
to pay (69)

Finally, Anahita Jamali Rad's *still* takes as its starting point the financial and psychic economies that were immediately pulverized by the first lockdowns, which seemed like "*an opening / an unravelling of structure*" in early 2020 (41). Jamali Rad's brilliant collection shows how a recombinant critical theory—transformed into an experiential, meditative practice of refusal—is both a way out of the "boredom, suffering, and generalized pain" (21), as well as a guide to the shifting tides of the political landscape: "Disruption is / and is not staying still, forgetting consumption, limiting the scope. // Disruption alters without warning" (61). As an affirmation of quietude as a performative mode of evading capital, the book attempts to make use of state-mandated isolation as an opportunity for a radical line of flight. Sure, the speaker uses language to better understand "governmental / neglect and . . . anxieties gone viral," but more importantly, "I only write to be unproductive" (29). Like Resnick and Nečákov, Jamali Rad acknowledges the importance of reminiscence, but not the kind limited to depressive nostalgia: "The body forgets sometimes, too. How it used to breathe. How light it could be to breathe. How effortless. When air moved through the body, before its boundaries were so heavy, a density of materiality weathered by space, this unregulated instability" (46). After all the fever-dreamt CERB money is spent and it seems like UBI is possible, the body nevertheless still finds itself "within the bounds of

capital" (47), which is now outwardly encouraging the death of its workers for the sake of maintaining the economy. What is to be done? Jamali Rad does not leave the reader to wonder in isolation, luckily. The book concludes with a Mao Zedong quotation about the importance of dialectical materialism, in which life can only be lived as the affirmation of contradiction, a theme which runs throughout *still*. Jamali Rad writes,

I stayed, still  
waiting

for the right external conditions  
for my internal contradictions to

shift my  
being to non-being (100)

Covid-19 did not and will not shake the system up like many leftists hoped it would, but it did—and continues to—suss out more and more contradictions: a slow, destructive burn rather than the immediacy of revolutionary rupture.

Through deep, contemplative exercises, Jamali Rad reveals the biopolitical stakes of the pandemic, whereby the body becomes the foremost site of discursive contestation and possibility: "The body considers how its militant materiality can reconcile its desire for that which is yet material" (49). But in the age of covid-19, the body—as both symbolic and real—is bombarded with new, irreparable affects and limitations, which leave us no choice but to turn inward, in what the state hopes to be a form of complacency. But prolonged meditative acts reveal "a soft resistance to participation in control" (56). For Jamali Rad, inwardness is a chance to *recede* into the body, to work toward a new understanding of the self-as-body in secret, away from the ever-intensifying spectacle of covid-19 and biopower.

These three texts are coagulations of distinct coping mechanisms. While Resnick leans into the melancholy of an ego in the throes of endless reality-testing, Nečakov offers a gleefully uncanny turn inward, toward the deepest recesses of the psyche. In other words, *Pandemic Poems* and *il virus* are, respectively, representative of conscious and unconscious subjective testimony, which seek to affirm the presences and absences of a certain *I*. Jamali Rad offers a third strategy, which supersedes the I-Thou of testimony: withdrawal and anonymity, or the possibility of "recessive potentials," a deeply intimate espionage, which panders to no ego and works to materialize the autonomous, unproductive, recessive, and ungovernably still body, in order to counter the excessive new forms of bare life created by the state's insistence on production under the so-called new normality:

In the absence of human activity  
light spreads over the city

a hidden presence or  
negative action with  
the aim of disappearing

a recessive potential that  
appears only to disappear (38)

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## En plein air

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**Brian Bartlett**

*Daystart Songflight: A Morning Journal*. Pottersfield Press \$21.95

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Reviewed by Hilary Clark (University of Saskatchewan)

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“Like a final punctuation mark . . . a tent caterpillar has crawled onto my sweat-jacket, then across the blank book’s page” (58). Writing done outdoors in nature, *en plein air*, offers surprises and annoyances—and moments of sudden insight. Written from 2018 to 2019 and set primarily in Nova Scotia, Halifax poet Brian Bartlett’s *Daystart Songflight* takes on the project of writing a nature journal according to two constraints. Bartlett had to rise before sunrise and go walking in a chosen location, observing the sunrise and the morning. Then, swatting at mosquitoes and finding a rock or a log to sit on, he had to write and stop before noon. The location and times of sunrise and of “writestart” are noted at the head of each entry. Within these constraints, the “neophyte of daybreak” (11) casts a light net over the multiplicity and flux of nature.

The nature journal is a literary genre, often poetic, predicated on the human enjoyment of walking in nature, just rambling and observing—perhaps the equivalent of urban flânerie. Neither activity has a goal; both are open to digression and change. An avid reader of Thoreau, Bartlett finds inspiration in *Walden* and the voluminous *Journal* that records Thoreau’s solitary observations and musings in nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson is another American precursor. Looking back to the Romantics, too, the genre of nature writing has burgeoned as environmental degradation has grown increasingly evident.

Bartlett’s *Daystart Songflight* is a birder’s journal. While the author observes *everything*—beetles, squirrels, goldenrod, maple trees, rock formations, water, and the shifting colours of sunrise—birdwatching is central to his project: seeking new birds, naming and describing those in the air and trees around him, “translating” their songs, and musing on the traumatic experience of “returned migrants” (169) that have navigated a changing climate of worsening storms: for instance, he lists “Northern Parulas, Black-and-White Warblers, a Catbird, a Winter Wren, American Redstarts and an Epidonax species of flycatcher call, sing, squeak, trill and whistle” (168). Hinting at more than they include, such lists promise an impossible “comprehensiveness” (83).

However, a nature journal is more than a collection of details and lists such as the following: “*Thunk-thunk-thunk*—three more fallen cones. More jay and squirrel voices. Crickets and cicadas. A distant chainsaw. One mosquito’s buzz near my ear. The rushing brook recently fed by Dorian’s rains” (221). This list is poetic, haiku-like, in its juxtaposition of unlike things connected by their buzzing-rushing sounds. However, as the reference to Hurricane Dorian shows, wider contexts and interpretations clarify and give depth to the day’s individual “finds.” Bartlett’s journal

(like Thoreau's) unfolds in a constant back-and-forth between specific detail and wider connections. For example, he brings in other authors—William Wordsworth, Charles Baudelaire, Elizabeth Bishop, Alden Nowlan, Philip Larkin, and more—for their visions, optimistic or gloomy, of morning. He thinks of his childhood and family: an account of his father's dying is particularly moving. He asks many questions but points out that these are "not always answered" (5). As well, speculations fan out from individual sightings: for instance, he tries to imagine "all the other birds, insects, unseen fish, and human strangers of this October morning, and the total individual sum of their second-by-second experiences"—and is overwhelmed, concluding that "omniscience is not for us" (130).

Inherent in Bartlett's project is an interplay between his "guidelines" (5) and his actual experience in its unspooling—its interruptions, digressions, failures to adhere to the rules. The rules form the basis for committing to being "a student of the morning" (257). Bartlett asserts that he has "faithfully followed one guideline to be out under the sky before sunrise" (5); nonetheless, he has a "comic self-awareness of faltering discipline," as when nudged off course by a Tim Horton's or a need for hot tea. Whatever his self-judgments, he has written a highly readable and often humorous *plein-air* journal—while conveying that every sparrow he sees, every wild rose, every caterpillar comes under the shadow of loss: the ongoing devastation of the world's species and their environments.

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## Life-Writing Trilogy

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**Carla Funk**

*Mennonite Valley Girl: A Wayward Coming of Age*. Greystone Books \$32.95

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**Cheri DiNovo**

*The Queer Evangelist: A Socialist Clergy's Radically Honest Tale*. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$29.99

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**Lisa Moore, ed.**

*Us, Now: Stories from The Quilted Collective*. Breakwater Books \$22.95

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Reviewed by Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr (University of Ottawa)

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These three works, all spearheaded by women, are worth picking up for different reasons. *Mennonite Valley Girl* offers a fresh coming-of-age narrative, *The Queer Evangelist* offers a radical look at politics, and *Us, Now* offers new voices in fiction.

Beautifully, lyrically written, *Mennonite Valley Girl* considers a 1980s childhood before computers and cellphones made everything mundane. The telephone itself, firmly bolted to the kitchen wall, brought in magic from the outside world—the voice of grandma, or the voice of a stranger in Hawai'i indulging teenage girls making random 1-800 calls from central British Columbia. That chapter, "Hello," is by itself worth the price of the book.

Funk's growing up hovers on the edge between Mennonite society and the mainstream, too worldly to be considered "a good Mennonite girl" and too Mennonite to be considered "normal." Funk says that she originally

relished the blessing of being set apart from the secular realm where kids grew into teenagers who blasphemed and smoked and did not submit to authority, where they weren't even being warned that the Mark of the Beast would soon be tattooed on every unbeliever's forehead. I'd felt sorry for those public-school students abandoned to the kingdom of darkness, sorry for their ignorance. (104–05)

But as she grows older, like most teenagers, she also begins to find her small town—in this case, Vanderhoof—rather constraining. Not willing to settle for a life of marriage and babies, Funk decries this fate during a bra-shopping trip with her mother:

She pointed us toward a rack of huge cups and thick straps in a color called “nude,” the shade of beige assigned to females as they age. Beige shoes, beige pantyhose, beige underwear, beige purse, beige tuna casserole with a can of mushroom soup, beige wall-to-wall carpet hushing the footfall in a split-level house. A message from the future whispered *beige, beige, beige*, a soft, hypnotic syllable ushering me toward womanhood and boredom. (58)

In its marketing material, the publisher has tagged *Mennonite Valley Girl* as a book that will appeal to fans of Miriam Toews' writing, but this seems unnecessary since Funk herself is such an excellent writer.

DiNovo is the Ontario MPP who has perhaps made the most individual difference in the legislation governing the province, sponsoring several private member's bills that actually passed into law, not an easy feat for an opposition backbencher. Chapter 18, “How to Get Laws Passed with Little Power,” is worth reading for her account of innovating the tri-party (NDP, Liberal, Conservative) private member's bill, a brilliant strategy that worked so well it is now against the rules.

But DiNovo found her way into politics via a circuitous route: an unconventional childhood, a Trotskyist youth, a lucrative flirtation with capitalism, and then an about-turn into the pulpit of the United Church of Canada. This last shift was courtesy of the 1990 recession, which tanked her corporate headhunting business. “Without the recession,” she muses, “would I ever have changed? I started going to church before the recession, but I never really immersed myself in church until after. Cocaine left the lives of everyone I knew, and direct involvement in capitalism left mine” (45).

As perhaps the most left-wing of mainstream churches in Canada, the United Church was not a bad segue into the NDP. But the ruthlessness of politics meant that DiNovo made the changes she could, and then got out again, returning to the pulpit, which she calls “the best job in the world” (172). Looking back on her political career, she says, “I used to joke with colleagues and friends that working in politics was like working in the Mafia. Every day was graft and corruption, and a good day was when no one got whacked” (107).

Overall, this is a very refreshing book in that vast, dense field of Canadian political memoir. Despite the fact that the publisher is an academic press, however, there is no index, making the book less useful than it could be. They also skimmed on the copy-editing.

The Quilted Collective is a lucky group of new Canadians brought together for a six-week fiction-writing class coached by Lisa Moore. Keen to add new voices to the

literature of Newfoundland and Labrador, Moore took up the challenge proposed by Remzi Cej of the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism. It is delightful to see a government department acknowledge the power of the arts, and so appropriate in this case. As Moore writes in her introduction, “stories infamously, magically, slip through all kinds of borders, the imagination uncontainable” (xiv). Stories like “Water Buffalo Boys,” by Zay Nova, will resonate with farm kids everywhere who have won 4H prizes for animal care, while others, like “softly, with niyyat,” by Sobia Shaheen Shaikh, will resonate with women of any background who are stuck in a bad marriage. While all the stories are interesting, one—“The Chinese Lady,” by William Ping—reveals an already accomplished author at work.

Though *Us, Now* is meant to be fiction, almost every story reads as personal experience. Consequently, *The Queer Evangelist*, *Mennonite Valley Girl*, and *Us, Now*, make an interesting life-writing trilogy, weaving a line across the country from BC, running through Toronto, and tying off in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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## Stories to Move Spirits

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**Richard Wagamese; Drew Hayden Taylor, ed.**

*What Comes from Spirit*. Douglas & McIntyre \$24.95

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Reviewed by Melanie Braith (University of Winnipeg)

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Even though Ojibway storyteller, writer, mentor, and journalist Richard Wagamese passed away in early 2017, his words and stories continue to move his readers' spirits. The present collection brings together a selection of his social media posts, blog posts, and newspaper columns. Wagamese was a survivor of the Sixties Scoop who grew up separated from his Ojibway family and traditions. Reconnection and the search for identity are themes that are woven into all of his fictional and non-fictional work—and this latest publication is no exception. Ojibway author Drew Hayden Taylor wrote the introduction, which highlights Wagamese's impact on Indigenous literatures in Canada and emphasizes how Wagamese was a mentor for emerging Indigenous writers. *What Comes from Spirit* honours Wagamese's role as mentor. For each copy of the book that is sold, a donation is made to the Ontario Arts Foundation to support the Indigenous Voices Awards, which “were established in 2017 to support and nurture the work of Indigenous writers in lands claimed by Canada” (“About the Awards”).

*What Comes from Spirit* brings together deeply personal stories about Wagamese's own life experiences and reflections, but also teachings that he was willing to generously share with a wide audience. The length of these texts ranges from a few lines to a handful of pages, and the editors compile a list of sources that shows where each text was originally published. Wagamese's storytelling spans many different genres and media, but all of his work is deeply influenced by Anishinaabe oral storytelling principles. As Wagamese writes in *One Native Life*, “I sought out stories and storytellers. I sat with them and asked questions and learned about the role of storytellers in our tradition and about the principles that guide that role. I learned about the importance of perpetuating the tradition of storytelling into a new time with powerful new tools. Then I began to write” (123).

One defining feature of oral storytelling is that listeners encounter different versions of the same story over the course of their life. Wagamese's oeuvre embodies this characteristic, and the reader of *What Comes from Spirit* will find that many of the excerpts echo stories told in other works by Wagamese (both fictional and non-fictional). One example is the story of a little red truck, a toy Wagamese was gifted as a young boy shortly before he was separated from his siblings through the foster care system. Even though the story is told in a slightly different manner, readers of Wagamese's work will recognize this truck as the one that also appears in *For Joshua* and his first novel *Keeper 'n' Me*. Readers of Wagamese's work will also recognize themes and phrases that echo each other across his different publications, such as the statement that "the land is a feeling" (6), which also appears in *Keeper 'n' Me* and *One Story, One Song*. It is the encounter with these echoes in *What Comes from Spirit* that allows avid readers of Wagamese's work to feel connected to what Drew Hayden Taylor in the introduction calls "a universe he created for us" (x).

*What Comes from Spirit* is divided into four chapters, with texts in each chapter that loosely respond to the themes of "The Land Is a Feeling," "The Truth Stays the Same," "There Are No Strangers," and "We Are All Story." The topics of Wagamese's writing range from personal stories about his childhood in the foster care system and critical reflections on what it means to be Indigenous, to his love for hockey and music and his thoughts on writing and storytelling. In many of these texts, Wagamese thinks about what it means to find peace in one's life. Maybe before anything else, these stories are about relationships and living in relation to other beings and the land. They are also about processes of reconnection. The reader learns how Wagamese reconnected with his brother through hockey after years of separation—a theme that echoes Wagamese's celebration of community hockey in *Indian Horse* as a way to strengthen family bonds. Echoes like this allow readers to see Wagamese's work in a new light, as they remind them of how traditional oral storytellers put certain stories in relation to each other to illuminate aspects that they consider important to their audience.

Perhaps Richard Wagamese's own words best summarize *What Comes from Spirit*: "Spirituality isn't simply spectacular. It's spectacularly simple. It means whatever moves your spirit. Not your mind. Your spirit. Your mind is not the seat of you. Your soul is. Your spirit. Finding, approaching and engaging with whatever moves your spirit is being spiritual" (124). What follows from this astute definition is that reading *What Comes from Spirit* is a deeply spiritual experience. It is certainly possible to read all of the 164 beautifully designed pages in one sitting. However, this might be the kind of book that readers want to take their time with in order to give all of the texts in the collection the attention that they deserve. The brevity of the texts also invites readers to revisit them again and again—just as audiences of oral stories encounter certain stories more than once in their life.

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## The Pull of the North

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Audrée Wilhelmy; Susan Ouriou, trans.

*White Resin*. House of Anansi Press \$22.99

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Norma Dunning

*Tainna: The Unseen Ones*. Douglas & McIntyre \$19.95

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Reviewed by Rachel Fernandes (Queen's University)

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Alienation is a prominent theme in both Audrée Wilhelmy's novel *White Resin* and Norma Dunning's short story collection *Tainna*. Wilhelmy's characters do not easily fit in with their peers, and tend to haunt the fringes of their society. In *Tainna*, Dunning's stories are populated by Inuit characters living away from their traditional territory, dealing with the complications of being uprooted from their history and, in many cases, their families. Both books delve into complications of place: how the land that one is situated upon can affect one's very spirit. Wilhelmy and Dunning are interested in boundaries in their work: the sometimes blurred line between our world and the spirit world, as well as the firmer boundaries between the harsh yet evocative landscape of the taiga and the unfamiliar land that lies farther south.

*White Resin* is reminiscent of an Impressionist painting: Wilhelmy's carefully chosen words are like myriad tiny brushstrokes creating a hazy yet enchanting picture of the Québec taiga and the quasi-magical characters who inhabit this world. Wilhelmy draws on the genre of magic realism to weave a story about Daã, a girl born through supernatural means to twenty-four nuns near the Québec taiga. The story follows Daã and her love affair with Laure, a young doctor's apprentice born with albinism. When the pair move farther south for Laure's work, Daã finds herself uprooted from the natural world and uncomfortable in her new role as a medical officer's wife in a mining town. The couple's clashing beliefs about their children's future forces them to confront the unforgiving landscape to which Daã wishes to return.

The tone of *White Resin* is consistently melancholic, even as Wilhelmy's prose (and Susan Ouriou's translation) are vibrant and rich, reflecting the harsh and sparse landscape against which the novel is set. The language in the book—although gorgeous—is at times so dense and layered that it is difficult to parse. The reader might find themselves unmoored, wading into the poetics of magic realism. The effect is that many things are unclear, from Daã's sudden arrival with the nuns to the exact time period in which the novel is set.

Daã seems connected to Indigeneity, although her ethnic background is never explicitly explored. Wilhelmy includes a lexicon at the end of the novel explaining the various terms used throughout the book. The languages range from Innu to Inuktitut to Wendat to Lakota (Sioux). The range of Indigenous languages is interesting but also disorienting. It is unclear whether Daã herself is Indigenous or whether the nuns pass down their own Indigenous knowledge and languages to her. Wilhelmy also draws from European folk traditions: the sections of the book are named after pagan celebrations of the changing seasons. Cultures and languages merge and brush up against one another throughout the book, creating an eclectic vocabulary that also leaves the reader slightly adrift.

Feminine power is a recurring theme in the book: the nuns share their knowledge of the natural world with Daã, who learns to discern and use all kinds of flora for

healing purposes. She is eventually able to share this knowledge with her husband, integrating this folk knowledge with his formal medical training. Mother Nature is even more wild and unforgiving than her daughter, Daä. Nature is sometimes ripe and abundant, sometimes stark and empty—ultimately, she cares not about the fate of these characters.

In Inuktitut, “Tainna” means “the unseen ones,” and Dunning explores the meanings of this notion through her short stories. The spiritual world and spiritual beings figure prominently throughout the collection, but nowhere more poignantly than in the story “Eskimo Heaven,” in which a somewhat self-righteous priest, Father Peter, is transported by touching the hand of Ittura, a man who has been dead for years. Ittura promises to take the priest to an unseen world, “somewhere you’d never dream of” (59). This place turns out to be a McDonald’s in a city, where the two find themselves eating Filet-O-Fish and checking up on one of Ittura’s stepdaughters who works there. Eskimo heaven is not what Father Peter expects, and neither is Ittura: this ghost is subversive and sexual, humorous and spritely. The trip to Eskimo heaven is meant to teach Father Peter that the Inuit people of his congregation are complex in their inner lives, but also that they need compassion from him and more focus on the present, rather than constant fear and preparation for an afterlife. The story urges the reader to think about Inuit cosmology and life philosophy, focusing on issues in the present moment while still honouring the ancestors.

Each of Dunning’s stories sparkles in its own right, particularly because of the careful rendering of each character. The characters in Dunning’s stories are well-rounded and real; they have memories and care deeply about their loved ones. They embody strength and perseverance in spite of immense opposition and alienation. However, the goal of Dunning’s work is not solely to celebrate the resilience of the Inuit people, but rather to show her characters as complete people, utterly human in their needs, desires, and struggles.

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## Language, Land, and Body: An Indissoluble Nexus

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**Helen Olsen Agger**

*Dadibaajim: Returning Home through Narrative.* U of Manitoba P \$27.95

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**Eufemia Fantetti, Leonarda Carranza, and Ayelet Tsabari, eds.**

*Tongues: On Longing and Belonging through Language.* Book\*hug Press \$25.00

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Reviewed by John Charles Ryan (Southern Cross University)

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The year 2022 marks the beginning of the UNESCO International Decade of Indigenous Languages, proposed two years earlier in the “Los Pinos Declaration” as a means to highlight “the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages” (“Los Pinos” 2). The Declaration acknowledges the fundamental role of Indigenous languages in fostering social cohesion, cultural identity, community health, and biodiversity conservation. Indeed, the preservation of linguistic heterogeneity is an urgent issue globally. Research suggests that forty per cent of the approximately seven thousand languages in use around the world are threatened in some way. Within four decades, “language loss could triple,” marked tragically by the disappearance of “at

least one language . . . per month” and “over 1,500 by the end of the century end” (Bromham et al. 163).

In the Canadian context, *Dadibaajim* by Helen Olsen Agger and *Tongues*, edited by Eufemia Fantetti, Leonarda Carranza, and Ayelet Tsabari, present cogent interventions. Although differing in composition—the former, a research monograph, the latter, an anthology of personal essays—both texts are comparably multilingual and polyvocal in their attention to the indissoluble nexus of language, land, and body. Whereas *Dadibaajim* comprises nine chapters and a conclusion, *Tongues* features twenty-six essays and an editors’ introduction by a diverse cohort of contributors. Notwithstanding their mutual emphasis on Canadian languages, lands, and communities, both respond to the increasing pervasiveness of linguistic homogenization and, more specifically, the dominance of English in postcolonial societies. The distinctive parallelism of their subtitles—“through narrative” and “through language”—intimates the crucial role of storytelling in mediating processes of *returning* and *belonging*.

In “Ni Noopimakamig-aajimomin: Our Boreal Narratives,” the sixth chapter of *Dadibaajim*, Agger details the teachings of her mother, Dedibaayaaninanook Sarah Keesick Olsen, an Elder of the Namegosibii Anishinaabe people of northwest Ontario who was born in 1922. Dedibaayaaninanook alludes to a traditional narrative, or *dadibaajim*, of *miishijiimin* skunk cabbage, in which the early blooming, mud-loving plant offers a vegetal heuristic guiding children’s interactions with the community’s Elders. Emerging soon after the boreal snow recedes, *miishijiimin* expresses—through its physical transformation—the virtue of forbearance and, more specifically, the importance of respecting Elders by not outpacing them. The plant teaches people to show patience by pacing themselves. Moreover, whereas both the vernacular English name “skunk cabbage” and the Latin *Symplocarpus foetidus* denote the pungent scent effusing from the leaves when bruised, the Anishinaabemowin term refers to the coarse texture of the plant’s edible fruits (223n1). Dedibaayaaninanook’s narrative of *miishijiimin* is but one example of the intricate biocultural understandings embedded in *dadibaajim*, centralizing experiential knowledge of hydrological flows, seasonal patterns, animal behaviour, plant ecology, human-land relations, and cosmic phenomena.

The concept of *dadibaajim* is foundational to Agger’s study, which comprises eminently readable analyses of knowledge-making, identity formation, subjectivity, embodiment, community, language, tradition, and colonial adaptation among the Namegosibii Anishinaabe, or “people of pristine trout water” (6). Anchored in decolonial theory and participatory research strategies, *Dadibaajim* compellingly articulates the all-encompassing multi-dimensionality of the titular concept, especially for readers unfamiliar with the study’s cultural grounding. The author spent her childhood in Namegosibiing Trout Lake with Anishinaabe relatives, listening to the Anishinaabemowin language and learning about *dadibaajim* interweavings. A complex signifier, *dadibaajim* denotes narratives and practices of narration as well as the fortification of Anishinaabe identity through narratives. The polyvalent term encompasses the content, practice, and impact of narration.

As an ontological framework based on narrative and narration, *dadibaajim* imparts knowledge of relationships, values, practices, beliefs, and symbolologies. Characterized by Agger as “a purveyor of culture and an institution of learning,” *dadibaajim* offers “a means for intergenerational conveyance of Anishinaabe identity

across the eons” (81). Nourishing memory, reinforcing speaker-listener dynamics, and engendering “land-derived subjectivity” (46), *dadibaaJim* illuminates genealogical, social, cultural, and ecological identities. In addition to “Ni Noopimakamig-aajimomin,” the chapter “Wenji-Anishinaabewiyang: Our Anishinaabe Selves” provides a nuanced elaboration of *dadibaaJim* vis-à-vis the power of ancestral narratives to vivify “speaker-listener-land relationships” (81). For Namegosibii Anishinaabe, *dadibaaJim* invigorates biocultural traditions and, in doing so, counters the destabilizing impacts of Euro-Canadian colonization.

Namegosibii Anishinaabe people use *dadibaaJim* narratives to consolidate relations between human communities, *noopimakamig* boreal lands, and *ishpiming* celestial beings. Linking identity to the environment and other-than-human life, Anishinaabe narratives reverberate with lessons delineating responsibilities to nature. Evoked by Agger as resilient media with the capacity to evolve, *dadibaaJim* narratives also integrate Anishinaabe perspectives on *wemitigoozhiwag*—the culture of European settlers and their descendants. Some narratives satirize Euro-Canadian attitudes towards the environment as an expendable resource while, at the same time, expressing an abiding resolve to endure the privations of colonization, including government policies designed to deny Anishinaabe people their land and language. Agger explains lucidly that, as a fountainhead of cultural sovereignty, *dadibaaJim* “reminds us that knowledge resides in unexpected places, whether the land, the *wanagoshag* of the night skies, the *omagakiig* frogs and their mists of rain, or each of us as Namegosibii Anishinaabeg” (214).

Agger’s study contributes emphatically to Indigenous research paradigms recognizing the value of narrative (*Windchief* and *San Pedro*). In the last two decades, scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith have implicated Eurocentric research in the colonization and subjugation of Indigenous societies. As a culturally responsive method, traditional storytelling incorporates Indigenous perspectives on land, community, and health (Datta). In the context of Aboriginal Australia, for instance, *yarning* is a research approach that places human and non-human relationships at the front and centre of inquiry (Atkinson, Baird, and Adams). The method of “Yarning with Country” reflects an Indigenous research ethos cultivating respectful and reciprocal interactions with the environment regarded as a living presence (Hughes and Barlo).

Throughout *DadibaaJim*, the inclusion of Anishinaabemowin words alongside their English counterparts amplifies the text’s polyvocality. The generous infusion of non-italicized Anishinaabemowin serves as “a perspectival reminder about the diversity of human thought, conceptualization, and world views” (16). Free from italics, quotation marks, parentheses, brackets, footnotes, endnotes, and other typographical interpolations, the in-text presence of a First Nations language decentres the linguistic hegemony of English, enabling Anishinaabemowin to express “history, spirituality, ceremony, and land-based identity” directly, on its own terms (77). Comparably, in “The Seven Grandfathers and Translations,” her contribution to *Tongues*, Ashley Hynd considers the implications of using non-italicized Anishinaabemowin in English-dominant writings. For Hynd, if done conscientiously, the insertion of Anishinaabemowin advances the decolonization of written texts by privileging the epistemologies of Indigenous language speakers (108). Hynd’s essay also underscores the difficulties—indeed, impossibilities—of translating between

process-based Indigenous languages and noun-focused imperial languages in which subjects impose their will on passive predicates (108).

In “Say Something in Your Language” from *Tongues*, Rebecca Fisseha similarly challenges the norm of italicizing non-English. In conjunction with the normative use of equivalents and explanations, italics produce a “distancing effect . . . both for readers who do, and do not, know Amharic” (86). In contrast, embedding terms from other languages generates a more accurate representation of reality, especially in linguistically diverse Canada, where “[t]here are more than seventy Indigenous languages and over two hundred mother tongues” (8). The momentary delay—what Fisseha describes as a “hiccup in the flow of English” (89)—becomes an appreciable element of a text’s aesthetic, allowing readers to derive meaning from unfamiliar terms through their presence on the page. Rather than an act of exclusion, non-italicization aims to immerse readers as active participants in the text-world. Raised by several contributors to *Tongues*, the convention of typographically signalling non-English words has been critiqued elsewhere. Poet Khairani Barokka, for instance, aptly characterizes the editorially enforced application of italics “as a form of linguistic gatekeeping; a demarcation between which words are ‘exotic’ . . . and those that have a rightful place in the text: the non-italicized.”

Italicization, translationality, linguistic heterogeneity, and language imperialism, as addressed by Hynd and Fisseha, exemplify the engaging mix of concerns raised in *Tongues*, a timely anthology that—as its title suggests—is as much about longing for language as it is about belonging *through* language. As the editors comment, “the essays in this collection . . . confront the pain of losing a mother tongue or an ancestral language, and celebrate the joys and empowerment that come with reclamation” (9). Opening the anthology, Kamal Al-Solaylee’s “Tongue-Tied” calls critical attention to “first-language attrition, or FLA, a process that happens when people are isolated from other speakers of that language or when another language dominates” (12–13). Al-Solaylee adroitly navigates the joys and tribulations of embracing his birth language, Arabic, after a protracted period of “dereliction” beginning in his teenage years (13).

A common thread between *Dadibaajim* and *Tongues* is their focus on the intergradations between language, land, and body. Many essays in *Tongues* exhibit a visceral lyricism that enlivens this conjunction, asserting the inherent relationality between these three elements. For Kai Cheng Thom in “Language Is the Fluid of Our Collective Bodies,” an ancestral language is one that exists as “a mostly dormant neural network, a vestigial organ that has lost its original purpose” (67). For Ayelet Tsabari writing in “Disappearance/Muteness,” the process of reclaiming Yemeni Arabic involves attuning to the corporeality of her mother tongue, “the throaty ayin as it was meant to sound, as though a marble slides down your throat” (162). Tsabari likens her longing for Arabic to a physical ache: “Can a language be lodged inside your body, folded into your organs, the same way we inherit memories from our ancestors, like trauma? How else can you explain the warmth that spreads inside my body when I hear it? The yearning?” (170).

For many contributors to *Tongues*, the visceral yearning evocatively narrated by Tsabari is a response to the gravitational pull of place, land, ecology, and more-than-human assemblages. In this regard, language is not the exclusive attribute of humankind but extends like a mycelial network, connecting all life. In her essay on the multifarious tonalities of Dutch, Sadiqa de Meijer speaks of the “[g]rammar of nettles

and elderberry and the blue-grey shells of blackbird eggs” (195). For Hege Anita Jakobsen Lepri in “Holding My Tongue,” the anthology’s final essay, language reclamation is mediated by somatic memory activated through contact with nature: “As I push my tongue against the roof of my mouth, I remember things: the smell of salt on a windy day; the taste of cloudberry not quite ripe; the texture of longing for things long lost” (229).

*Dadibaajim* and *Tongues* offer valuable contributions to our understanding of linguistic diversity, Indigenous languages, and identity-making in Canada. In particular, both texts mutually affirm the importance of body, land, community, and human-nature relations to the preservation of languages at home and elsewhere. Read in tandem, the two publications compellingly articulate the vital place of narrative knowledge in engendering and safeguarding linguistic sovereignty.

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## Unearthing (Her)stories

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**Kathryn Magee Labelle, in collaboration with the Wendat/Wandat Women's Advisory Council**

*Daughters of Aataentsic: Life Stories from Seven Generations.* McGill-Queen's UP \$34.95

**Jeannette Armstrong, Lally Grauer, and Janet MacArthur, eds.**

*Okanagan Women's Voices: Syilx and Settler Writings and Relations, 1870s to 1960s.* Theytus Books \$34.95

Reviewed by Sylvie Vranckx (Independent Researcher)

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Much Indigenous scholarship and activism on Turtle Island regards the rematriation of knowledge as central to decolonization. As Labelle underlines, publishing Indigenous women's biographies is essential to nurturing cultural resilience and resisting white patriarchal interpretations of history. *Okanagan Women's Voices* and *Daughters of Aataentsic* foreground "hidden" Indigenous figures and alternative interpretations of known historical figures through, respectively, Syilx (Okanagan/Okanogan) and Wendat/Wandat ("Huron") epistemologies. Through contextualization, photographs, and rich historiographic and archival work, both studies nuance simplistic views of Indigenous-settler interactions in early contact zones and of Indigenous women as victims. They further strive to throw bridges across cultures and regions (the US border cuts through the Syilx homeland, and the Wendat/Wandat are spread across several states and provinces). Accordingly, both books are the result of collaborative processes between Indigenous and settler women: *Daughters* is edited by famous Syilx author, researcher, nsyilxcn speaker, and Elder Jeannette Armstrong along with settler scholars Lally Grauer and Janet MacArthur, and settler historian Kathryn Magee Labelle worked closely with a council of eight women from the four Nations of the Wendat/Wandat diaspora.

Author of *Dispersed but Not Destroyed*, an award-winning history of the seventeenth-century Wendat, Labelle complicates the declension model of loss of culture and feminine power in Wendat/Wandat society. The seven case studies over seven generations document how Wendat/Wandat women resisted colonialism over the centuries and "attempted to preserve and protect their culture for future generations" (154) as part of their responsibilities as daughters of Aataentsic (Sky Woman). For these case studies, the Wendat/Wandat Women's Advisory Council chose to focus on seven women, basing their selections on the women's "significant family connections, community importance, evidence of motherwork, and cultural legacies" (8). These women are Cécile Gannendâris (?–1669), Marie Catherine Jean dit Vien (1676–1767), Margaret "Mother" Grey Eyes Solomon (1816–1890), Mary McKee (1838–1922), Eliza Conley Burton, Jr. (1869–1946), Jane Zane Gordon (1871–1963), and Dr. Éléonore Sioui (1924–2006). In accordance with the criteria above, each chapter is structured into four parts: family, community, legacy, and motherwork (or, work that draws upon matricentric traditions and directs itself towards family, community, and future generations). A map and genealogies enable readers to situate each woman.

*Daughters of Aataentsic* argues that if Wendat/Wandat culture survived multiple forced relocations, it is largely thanks to women's innovations. Within this framework, apparent cases of assimilation reflect strategic acculturation in line with Wendat/Wandat diplomacy. Thus, Gannendâris' zealous involvement in a New France

religious society is explained by the fact that Catholic orders sheltered Indigenous girls from sexual violence and enabled Gannendâris to access a support network for her family, to counsel other women, and to maintain some power. This strategic use of colonial institutions also characterizes the centuries-long Wendat/Wandat enthusiasm for Western schooling, culminating in contemporary appropriations of the colonizers' tools. Thus, lawyer Lyda Conley became the first Indigenous woman to take a case before the US Supreme Court, and Dr. Sioui subverted academic language to promote Indigenous feminism and global Indigenism. Finally, *Daughters of Aataentsic* underlines that these trailblazers' legacies are alive today: the Wendat/Wandat have protected heritage sites, language revival programs, cultural and historical events, and a four-Nation treaty reinstating the seventeenth-century Wendat Confederacy.

Through a selection of seven Syilx and settler women's published and unpublished poetry, drama, fiction, translated orature, popular history, correspondence, and memoirs, *Okanagan Women's Voices* also addresses misconceptions about Indigenous women's agency. Settled in the second half of the nineteenth century, Syilx territory in the BC and Washington state interior is commonly viewed as *the West* or *the frontier* and associated with white male pioneers and cowboys. By contrast, this collection reaffirms the centrality of the Syilx homeland through a detailed map and numerous references to nsyilxcn (Syilx language) toponyms. Moreover, a Syilx-centred gendered analysis reveals the "spaces between" (vii) in which Syilx women acted as pack train owners, guides, traders, or interpreters and were often wives or daughters of settler men. Understudied due to a longstanding taboo, intermarriage was a Syilx tradition: chiefs' women relatives would marry prominent men from neighbouring communities to create alliances. Thus, all Syilx women in this collection wielded power as royalty and insiders to both worlds.

Beyond this, *Okanagan Women's Voices* examines what kinds of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women were possible in those liminal spaces. The editors map contiguities, continuities, and discontinuities through the metaphors of intersections, inroads, and boundary-crossing; since they strive to bridge divides, the Syilx and settler voices from the corpus do not fall into distinct perspectives. Josephine Shuttleworth (1866–1950) and Christine Quintasket (Mourning Dove) (1886–1936) married settlers; Eliza Jane Swallow (1868–1944) and Marie Houghton Brent (1870–1968) had settler fathers; and settlers Susan Moir Allison (1845–1937), Hester Emily White (1877–1963), and Isabel Christie MacNaughton (1915–2003) had strong ties with Syilx women through collaborations and kinship networks. Thus, Mourning Dove blended the novel and Syilx captikwł stories in her groundbreaking *Cogewea, The Half-Blood*. Shuttleworth's friendship with MacNaughton resulted in "a unique blending of voice" (7) as the latter published the former's orature. A more ambiguous case is White, who bonded with Brent over their pioneer fathers and advocated for her while shunning her own Syilx half-siblings.

*Daughters of Aataentsic* and *Okanagan Women's Voices* provide vivid windows into the lives of fourteen women across time, landscapes, and genres, sharing insights into the Wendat/Wandat and Syilx lifeworlds. Comparing the two books emphasizes the shocking rapidity of Syilx colonization, which took place over a few decades, whereas the Wendat/Wandat were first displaced 350 years ago. As a European Native studies scholar, I was also humbled by how little I knew about Wendat/Wandat history, such as the fact that Kansas City was founded by Wendat/Wandat refugees. Finally, both studies bespeak profound respect in their documentation and commemoration of

these women's legacies. I am reminded of the fact that Theytus Books, the Indigenous-owned publisher of *Okanagan Women's Voices*, takes its name from a nsyilxcn word meaning "preserving for the sake of handing down."

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## The Freedom to Mother

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Zoe Whittall

*The Spectacular*. HarperCollins \$24.99

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Reviewed by Christina Turner (University of Toronto)

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"Some people are meant to be mothers, and some people are meant to be free" (98). The first time I encountered these words, spoken by protagonist Missy in *The Spectacular*, they resonated deeply: I read most of Zoe Whittall's new novel as my newborn son slept on my chest. For the first several weeks of his life, my child would neither sleep by himself nor take milk from a bottle, which meant my body had to be constantly available to him as both food source and mattress—a sudden lack of autonomy I found bewildering. While my captivity was the (blessedly temporary) kind of the pandemic-era newborn parent, in Whittall's novel the prison of motherhood is social and political in nature: reproductive injustice, unevenly divided domestic labour, and thin communal supports make motherhood feel impossible not only to Missy, but also to her mother, Carola, and her paternal grandmother, Ruth. When the story opens, Missy and Carola are estranged. Several years before, Carola and her then-husband started a farm commune called Sunflower, an intentional community founded on egalitarian values through which Carola hoped to escape her abusive childhood. But Carola found that the commune's utopian intent did not align with its reality, wherein the women worked, and the men drank. So she escaped, leaving behind her teenage daughter.

Many years later, Missy also runs away from the values that informed her childhood by becoming a musician in the punk rock scene of the late 1990s. This is where the novel's title comes from: Missy wants to "experience every spectacular, vivid detail of life on the road," which she can only do by crossing "the country with the freedom of any man my age" (15). To be a man is to be free; to be a woman is to be trapped by social obligations, by fertility, by motherhood. But the group Missy finds herself in has disturbing parallels to the Sunflower community Carola fled. Missy sleeps around, just like her male bandmates, but unlike them, she has a reputation for being "pretty wild" (120). Missy encounters men who are married with children, but she knows she could never be a mother and a musician at the same time. Both the commune and the punk rock world purport to be alternative social spaces. Yet both entrench conservative hierarchies as deeply as the Catholic world of 1950s Montreal in which Carola grew up or 1920s Turkey, into which Ruth was born.

This is the silent pain that defines both Missy and Carola in the early part of the book. To achieve or retain any modicum of freedom, both women must spurn community. In particular, they must spurn community with other women. Carola and her daughter are both queer but closeted, which is, in Missy's case, a direct result of the punk rock scene being made up of "mostly straight white dudes" with undercurrents of homophobia (92). In this, her fourth novel, Whittall skillfully weaves

these storylines together, originally casting Carola and Missy as opposites and gradually revealing how each woman has been shaped by a similar set of circumstances despite their divergent paths.

Whittall's interest in drawing parallels between mother and daughter sometimes occurs at the expense of character depth. Missy is a cellist in a rock band, yet her choice of both instrument and music genre goes underexplored—she confesses to choosing the cello in high school because she could “hide my body behind it” (12), but we learn nothing of why the instrument has become her “beautiful sidekick” (149) or what makes her a “cello prodigy” (120). Similarly, Carola becomes a renowned meditation teacher, but we learn nothing of her practice's spiritual or philosophical underpinnings. Why did Whittall choose such distinctive careers for her characters only to leave these vocations as little more than window dressing? Similarly, Whittall's choice of first-person narration seems mismatched with her desire for exposition. The testimonial *I* of first-person narration can foster intimacy with the reader: we are meant to imagine that we are encountering the character's memories and thoughts directly as they unfold. Yet Whittall's characters overexplain. At one point, Missy recalls that “Taylor (the only kid my age on the commune) and I used to be allowed to run around all afternoon” (67). Here, Whittall is clearly providing a detail she wants the reader to know, but it feels incongruous coming from Missy, who in this moment is recalling her childhood only to herself.

However, the unevenness that occasionally makes for frustrating reading in *The Spectacular* succeeds at the level of plot. Missy and Carola come together, then drift apart again; they become close as older adults, although the sting of Carola's abandonment never entirely goes away. By the novel's conclusion, each woman has come to terms with her sexuality, but years of denial mean neither finds long-term queer partnership. Whittall's choice to leave the character's relationships in a state of messy imperfection makes the story feel true to life.

To be in community is to be bound somehow or somewhere, which is especially true in the case of parenthood. Having a child is an act of community because doing so makes one fundamentally accountable to another person. The problem—one that Whittall deftly probes in this novel—is that this accountability falls disproportionately on mothers. Motherhood and freedom can indeed coexist, with the right supports, with the right forms of accountability to mothers as well as to children. This is the point Whittall seems interested in making at *The Spectacular's* conclusion. We leave these characters with Carola having learned how to mother Missy in a new way, and Missy embarking on her own transition into parenthood within a community that she has created for herself.

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## In Current News

**Diane Schoemperlen, ed.**

*Best Canadian Stories 2021*. Biblioasis \$22.95

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Reviewed by Lillian Liao (University of British Columbia)

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In her candid introduction to *Best Canadian Short Stories 2021*, Diane Schoemperlen recounts an obsession with the news: “With my need to know what was happening

slugging it out daily with my need to protect my mental health, I was unable to look away from the news even though I knew I should" (3). Here, Schoemperlen is not only referring to her urge to track coronavirus cases "locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally" (3), but also to other catastrophic events, including the undeniable effects of climate change and tragic consequences of violence driven by racism. At a time when so much is happening and we seemingly have unlimited access to information, the stories compiled by Schoemperlen make us question the root of our desire to know, as well as the ethics behind our methods of knowing.

This need to stay up-to-date (to not be left behind), to be informed (and to inform others), to understand (and be understood), and, in certain cases, to consume information is indeed the thread that ties together the sixteen stories of Schoemperlen's collection. The anthology begins with Senaa Ahmad's "Let's Play Dead," a story that sardonically retells, through fragmented narrative, the relationship between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, who is playfully referred to as "Anne B.," to challenge our archiving of history (9). This playing with temporal linearity is common throughout the collection: Elise Levin's "Arnhem" is told from the perspective of a married woman recounting her traumatic sexual experiences, and Sara O'Leary's "The Ones We Carry With Us" depicts a woman coming to terms with a past experience of being conned while reflecting on the death of a friend. Even in Lucia Gagliese's "Through the COVID-glass," a story that attempts to follow a chronological temporality as the narrator journals her days in self-isolation, time escapes from human consciousness and control, morphing into an unstoppable stream of information.

This back-and-forth between past and present, with few signs of an abundant future, is, as Schoemperlen's introduction suggests, indicative of our present moment, a time when most people are overwhelmed by how rapidly and incessantly information is conveyed through the news. These stories thus ask readers to consider the utility of information. What are we to do with all this information? How can we personally document our lives when there is already so much documentation? How can we catch up with all that we do not yet know, all that has yet to be reported, when every moment seems unprecedented? Just as a sense of urgency remains in our lived experiences, these stories push us to recognize that more information does not automatically translate into more understanding.

Then there is the question of shapes and forms, which is perhaps the solution offered by Schoemperlen's compilation. In Megan Callahan's "Good Medicine," the narrator, in response to her therapist's suggestion "to give [her] anxiety form" (47), describes her anxiety as a wolf. Her ability to give form to her feelings allows Callahan's protagonist to understand herself as well as those around her. Similarly, Francine Cunningham's "Asleep Till You're Awake" challenges us to think about the human forms of death and how they may coincide with our own living shapes as sleep and death become indistinguishable when the narrator grieves for the death of their mother. In addition, Shashi Bhat's "Facsimile," which depicts a young woman reacting to her family's pressure to marry, draws attention to how we are frequently asked to give forms to ourselves, particularly when composing an online dating profile.

This theme of form as an antidote or, at the very least, a sedative is further highlighted by Schoemperlen's inclusion of stories that challenge our ideas about the genre of the short story. Most notable in this regard is Angélique Lalonde's "Lady with the Big Head Chronicle," a story that is organized into encyclopedia-like statements, such as "Lady with the Big Head Reads Poetry" (98), and culminates in prose that

looks akin to poetry. This turn to forms suggests that these stories will, too, become a type of archive of these times. Interestingly, Schoemperlen chose to order these stories alphabetically by authors' last names, suggesting that our fear of the unknown can still be appeased by a reliance on the familiar.

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## Redefining Love

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Lindsay Zier-Vogel

*Letters to Amelia*. Book\*hug Press \$23.00

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Reviewed by Lillian Liao (University of British Columbia)

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Lindsay Zier-Vogel's *Letters to Amelia*, as its title suggests, is an exploration of intimacy across temporal barriers. The protagonist of Zier-Vogel's novel, Grace, a library technician living and working in Toronto, is tasked with preparing a previously private collection of Amelia Earhart's letters to her rumoured lover, Gene Vidal, for public display. Asked by her manager, Janice, to keep the project confidential to avoid unnecessary scandals prior to the public unveiling of these letters, Grace secretly reads and summarizes the collection, letter by letter, growing closer to Earhart's celebrity as a pioneer of aviation, which is gradually overshadowed by what she learns about the famous pilot's personal life.

This layering of the private with the public, the hidden with the disclosed, is further emphasized through Grace's own unravelling of her personal tribulations: Grace is barely recovered from a difficult breakup with her long-term boyfriend when she finds out about an unplanned pregnancy. The intimacy between Grace, the reader, and Amelia, the writer, is further emphasized when Grace sees parallels of Amelia's situation in her own life and begins to write letters to Amelia that express uncertainty regarding an unconventional path, but also solidarity in the face of societal pressures. Zier-Vogel's novel thus asks readers to consider the relationship between secrecy and intimacy. Is secrecy necessary for creating a sense of intimacy? Can the intimacy created between Grace and these letters survive in the public sphere?

The answer to these questions may lie in the intertextuality of Zier-Vogel's novel, which is created by various voices, including other characters who share information about Earhart, in addition to Grace's and Amelia's letters. Upon being asked to participate in the project, Grace admits to having "a vague picture of Amelia Earhart—a pilot, a feminist, icon, dead" (10). Despite her lack of familiarity with Earhart's life, she begins to supplement the information divulged by Earhart with her own googling of the historical events and places mentioned in these letters. Grace soon finds that the intimacy she created by reading Amelia's letters does not compare with the way Earhart is portrayed in the public eye. Hence, the role of archives—in both the physical sense of a university's reading room as well as the digital access to information through unregulated websites—when it comes to disseminating information regarding a woman's professional and personal life are under investigation in Zier-Vogel's novel.

Despite the abundance of information that Grace finds about Amelia, Grace has an impulse to keep her letters confidential. At this point, one must ask, why the secrecy in the first place? From Grace's mother's disapproval at her decision to raise

her child on her own to Earhart's own confessions of vulnerability in the face of societal pressures, *Letters to Amelia* suggests a lack of public venues where women can comfortably express their burdens and successes. Here, Zier-Vogel refigures intimacy by displacing it from romantic relationships and situating it in the friendships women share with each other. As Grace grows closer to Earhart through her letters, she also begins to rely on her friends for both moral and practical support. The idea of love is indeed reclaimed in Zier-Vogel's novel, most notably when Grace reads one of Amelia's letters that says, "*She was my first great love. Don't laugh, she really was*" (243). The "she," in this case, is Amelia's aircraft, supporting the idea that women can define what intimacy means to them.

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## Human Stories

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**Ivan E. Coyote**

*Care Of: Letters, Connections, and Cures*. McClelland & Stewart \$25.00

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**Robyn Sarah**

*Music, Late and Soon*. Biblioasis \$24.95

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Reviewed by Emma Morgan-Thorp (York University)

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This pandemic has posed a specific kind of challenge for performers. Studying in a theatre and performance studies program, I spent two years watching my friends and colleagues itch to be onstage again, on the road again, in person again: to glory in the intangible now-ness of *the live*. From behind our screens, performers and lovers of performance wracked our brains for ways to gather and perform, despite our inability to be "in person." With *Care Of: Letters, Connections, and Cures*, Ivan E. Coyote has found a way to be in community again by publishing a selection of letters from fans and readers, along with their responses. "These letters," Coyote writes, "and the people who wrote them, were a lifeline for me, an antidote, a cure for the sudden stillness of the wheels under me. Our stories can still travel, I tell myself" (5). Many will be familiar with Coyote's writing from their immense body of work spanning from the late nineties to the present: stories about queerness, family, gender identity, falling in love, building community, and finding oneself. *Care Of* will not disappoint those craving more of Coyote's signature storytelling, which has always had the particular gift of making readers feel at home in it. And there is something more here, too: twenty new storytellers sharing fragments of their own journeys. Among them is Ace, "the older guy with the walker sitting in the front row lipreading" (9), saddened by the chasm he sees between binary and non-binary people, and Angela, achingly estranged from her dad. Lee writes about learning to be a better parent to his trans son, and Darach expresses his relief at having found Ivan to be "angry and unabashedly emotional" (147) in performance. With *Care Of*, Ivan invites us into their new, smaller pandemic life, at home in Ontario, but also invites us into memories of the road with them, and into the lives of the letter writers who've agreed to have their stories published in this moving compilation. Coyote has been sharing stories about their life with a startling degree of openness for decades, and in this book we see that this inspires others to want to do the same. In the sharing of these stories, we all gain insights about ourselves, and about the insights that the sharing of the stories gives us.

*Music, Late and Soon* welcome us in with a similar generosity of spirit. Robyn Sarah's memoir of a (more *and* less) musical life—a youth devoted to the study of piano and clarinet, and the decision to return to her piano studies years later—is a luxuriant pleasure to read, due to the care for language and rhythm that infuses it. Even the table of contents reads like poetry. Sarah shares with Coyote an evident love of words and trust in their power, having left music to pursue a writing life. An acclaimed and award-winning poet and short story writer, Sarah reflects on the musical side of herself, revealing the deep influence of her long-time teacher, Phil Cohen. What feels so special about this book is the quiet, focused attentiveness to the nature of artistic practice: that is, the ongoing and endless journey of developing a relationship with music, with one's instrument, with one's teacher, and with oneself. As Sarah herself puts it, "Human stories are complicated. This is a human story" (5). As human stories, both of these books are autobiographies of sorts: personal stories of artists going about their crafts. While Coyote writes about surviving the pandemic by responding to mail from fans, Sarah reflects on her ebbing and flowing relationship with music over the course of a lifetime. Both are writers preoccupied with writing, balancing the interiority of the writing life with the exteriority of performance. Both have music in them, which emerges through their words. And both share their personal stories with a stylistic twist: one through letters, and one through musical notation.

There is also something else, something that made these books feel timely to me in these dark and dangerous days: both Coyote and Sarah seem to be seeking a better world outside of capitalism, one through building queer community and the other looking to music as "a bulwark against the hustle of getting and spending" (epigraph page). Without wanting to give too much away, both author-musician-performers are preoccupied with learning about themselves by being in relationship, with finding and with being a certain kind of people. As Sarah puts it: "People whose willingness to listen is all the answer we really need; people whose listening helps us find our own answers, or helps us accept that sometimes there is no answer" (86). This sense of seeking is palpably at the heart of both books: the authors reach outside themselves to gather strength in the face of hardship, to find a softer, truer way of being in the world.

In one of the letters published in *Care Of*, Ivan's correspondent Adonastare writes, "I liked reading your book, you seem tender" (221). If I only had eight words with which to review both of these books, those would be the ones. Such personal and tender stories. They reach towards questions about art and how to be a person in the world, they reach towards answers to those questions, they reach towards community and commonality. The way a song or a story can change the quality of light. Like a mushroom trip, the story-song leaves us aglow in a world intangibly changed for the better. Like an insight, it allows us to see differently. Colours are brighter; all of a sudden, we notice that leaf and its shadow, flickering on the branch. I liked reading these books. They made me feel tender.

# ACADEMIC/LITERARY PUBLISHER?

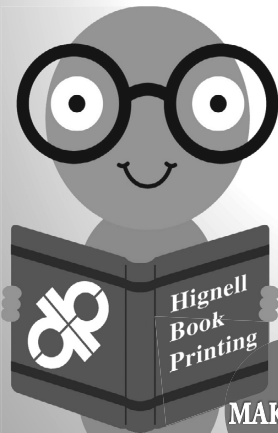
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