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Donna.Chin@ubc.ca
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Editorial

Surprise, Surprise

Nicholas Bradley

As I begin to write this editorial, worrying at the turn and tune of a phrase, I hear crying in the next room. I get up from my chair, lurk soundlessly in the hall, and wait for our eight-month-old to fall asleep again. When he does, it's a miracle. Everyday magic. I tiptoe to my desk and stare at the screen, having forgotten whatever I was about to say. What can I do but start over?

We all forget things all the time. A letter goes unanswered. A meeting is missed, or a deadline, an appointment. Sleep-deprived, I find myself forgetting more than usual. Where did I misplace the anthology I'll need for class in an hour? Did I mark all the essays? In a befuddled state, I ponder the notion that at the heart of teaching and learning, and of reading and writing, is a dance between forgetting and remembering. Literary scholarship is shaped in no small part by the limitations of scholars themselves. We aspire to expertise, and bear a professional obligation to know what is not generally known, yet there is always more to read, and our interpretative claims are governed by how little any one of us can remember, let alone truly comprehend. I'm often surprised by the accidents that occur when I pull books from the shelf. One Canadian poet describes the thrill of bibliographical discovery (or rather, *re*covery) by drawing a historical parallel: "I felt then an excitement such as I think Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini felt in 1417, when, poking through manuscripts at a monastery in Italy, he uncovered the lost text of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*" (Bringhurst, *Pieces* 104). Few of us make findings of such consequence, but I think we all recognize Poggio Bracciolini's exhilaration. And maybe we know bafflement as well as excitement: I'm sure I've read that

poet's essay a dozen times, but I had utterly forgotten the apt reference to Lucretius until I spotted it while looking for something else.[1] I saw it by chance, as if for the first time. As if by magic.

Everyday magic. That phrase appears in "Kikastan Communications," a poem, set in the Kikastan Islands, from Al Purdy's *North of Summer* (1967). The speaker—identifiable as a version of the author—attempts to bridge a linguistic and cultural gulf between him and "two Eskimo women" by emitting "strange vocal doodles" (*North* 67). It's an old habit:

> a memory summoned from childhood
> when for other kids
> it was everyday magic
> that made things happen
> and then unhappen[.] (67)

"Kikastan Communications" arose from Purdy's Arctic travels in 1965; the terminology ("Eskimo women") and even the conceit of the intercultural encounter belong to another century, not ours. But despite the poem's outdated elements, Purdy acknowledges the awkwardness and intrusiveness of his sudden appearance in the world of these women, whose names are Leah and Regally. The speaker's babbling, as he understands it, represents his "hunting for common ground." He also observes that his "happy grunting language" is "subversive to commonsense" [*sic*]. The poem suggests at first that the "everyday magic" of children's (or childish) language can span a significant divide. The Purdy figure is indeed rewarded with laughter. At the poem's end, however, he is simply "a grey-haired child" unable to do more than entertain. The barking dogs outside the tent are "wise," but the speaker is merely a wise guy. In this account of partial communication, poetry makes something happen, but not enough.

Still, I am heartened by "Kikastan Communications." As a teacher, I hope that I may find with my students common ground in poems and stories, and I trust that such works of imagination will resist and confound our common sense—that they will flummox and delight us, perplex and provoke us, and test our assumptions about our lives and worlds. I hope, in other words, that we may forget, if only for the duration of a short lyric, what we think we know. As Purdy realized, "odd sounds" have tremendous power (*North* 67). A baby's crying makes something happen—and fast. Babbles and burbles are related to riddles and puzzles, spells and charms, prayers and songs. These forms of speech, or near-speech, plunge us into new realms of meaning, granting us close calls with nonsense.[2] Such strange language, like the writers

and readers who create and celebrate it, also stubbornly resists the common sense of the contemporary university, which seeks to make rational and quantifiable even that which we value because it makes no usual sense. Helen Vendler proposes that aesthetic and scholarly pursuits are closely associated:

> The restless emotions of aesthetic desire . . . perish without the arranging and creative powers of intellectual endeavor. . . . The mutual support of art and learning, the mutual delight each ideally takes in each, can be taken as a paradigm of how the humanities might be integrally conceived and educationally conveyed as inextricably linked to the arts. (21)

I agree, adding only that we might attend as well to the arranging powers of aesthetic desire and the restless emotions of intellectual endeavour.

Everyday magic. Purdy's phrase gave Laurie Ricou the title of *Everyday Magic: Child Languages in Canadian Literature* (1987), a scholarly study that I find suddenly pertinent.[3] Writing of "a dumbfounded wonder at the unconscious poetry of child's speech and its poetic remaking in fiction, drama, and poems for adults," Ricou offers that "[i]t's just because it's so everyday, that child language surprises us with magic" (xi). Purdy's apparent contradiction has become an intriguing paradox. Despite the title, however, *Everyday Magic* begins not with Purdy but with another poet, Robert Kroetsch. A line from *Advice to My Friends* (1985) suggests to Ricou a readerly *modus operandi*: "Let the surprise surprise you" (Ricou, *Everyday* ix; Kroetsch, *Advice* 18). Two decades after *Everyday Magic*, Ricou turned again to Kroetsch's sage words, using them to explicate, in these editorial pages, a poem by Don McKay:

> A sense of being possessed by every verb seems to be economically expressed in the opening lines of a poem generously addressed to me in Robert Kroetsch's *Advice to My Friends*:
>
> Let the surprise surprise you, I said
> (or should have)
>
> In that curiously permissive imperative, in that half-swallowed redundancy stirs a manifesto of sorts. It speaks not only about being open to the unexpected, about being willing to be surprised, but of creating surprise, of not wanting to reduce the wonder. The *sur* in surprise signals something in addition to the *prise*, something beyond or above the *taking*, some attitude that allows that everything has the capacity to astonish.[4] ("When" 8)

In the moment of astonishment, of "dumbfounded wonder" (*Everyday* xi), the mind goes blank, and we call it the sublime. It's a different kind of wonder, of course, when the sleepy teacher draws a blank in class. *What* is *the name of that poem by Don McKay?* We call that ridiculous.[5]

Kroetsch's advice is good not only for his friends, but for all readers and writers as we embark perpetually on new beginnings. Those of us who study literature may believe that we have a vocational and even ethical responsibility to remember the literary past, even if our primary aim is to expose the limitations of historical perspectives. We try to illustrate how we got *here* from *there*. As a consequence, we look backward as often as forward; reading is by definition to encounter what someone has already written. But some things are beyond remembering. We forget what we know, what we thought we knew. We commit errors and blunders. *Beyond Remembering*—that phrase is the title of Al Purdy's *Collected Poems* (2000), and I relish its plural meanings. That which is beyond remembering may be forgotten information that the poet, like an archaeologist or archivist, seeks to recover. Or it may be the nearly inexpressible knowledge expressed in faith and myth, in the beliefs that order human lives. In his poetry, Purdy frequently used myths from various cultural traditions to explain worldly experiences, but the phrase, when I think about it in a scholarly and pedagogical context, also has a resonance that Purdy (a reluctant teacher) probably didn't intend. Professors of literary studies may be professional rememberers, but what does it mean to go beyond remembering? The other week, trying to make a point about something or other, I asked my class who knew who Margaret Laurence was, and who Jack Hodgins. No one. (Or no one wanted to say.) I can't fault the students, who after all were there to learn, but I was a little startled. Remembering on their behalf, I said something about regionalism, short stories, the 1970s. OK—but did we find common ground? Did I link their world to mine, and ours to those of the authors? Did I offer the students an opportunity to be surprised by new ideas and new names, by unfolding paths of inquiry?

"A dumbfounded wonder." By the mystery of association, Ricou's adjective brings to my mind the title of a volume of poetry, Margaret Avison's *The Dumbfounding* (1966). That thought in turn reminds me that Avison (1918-2007) is due to be commemorated in 2018, the centenary of her birth. Purdy, who died eighteen years ago this spring, likewise would have marked his hundredth birthday in 2018. Two poets born in the same year, one in April and the other in December. One the author of intricate and devotional verse; the other, earthy and secular. How will they be remembered? Purdy's "On First Looking into Avison's 'Neverness'" (1986) links the two writers and suggests their shared concerns. This poem of dialogue reminds me that poems can be conversations and quarrels as well as songs or scenes. Kroetsch

knew as much, writing to his friends. Purdy adds a folksy touch to the Adam of Avison's poem, calling him "lonesome Adam and no Eve" (*Beyond* 432). Which reminds me of an earlier poem, Purdy's "Adam and No Eve," which is about "a giant yellow-faced tortoise / the last of his species" (*Beyond* 372).[6] Which reminds me that this is how reading and writing work—that literary criticism is an intensely personal form of scholarship because it depends on the idiosyncrasies of the individual imagination.

Thus we require *aide-mémoires*. Anthologies are works of remembrance, and sometimes remonstrance. When I bought *Peacock Blue: The Collected Poems of Phyllis Webb* (2014) so that I could follow the page references in a student's research paper, I was at once dismayed and delighted to learn how many of Webb's puzzling poems I had never read. (But often forgotten completely are poems omitted from anthologies, whether by design or by oversight.) Poets themselves employ a range of mnemonic devices. Webb's *Hanging Fire* (1990) is dedicated to the "*memory of the poets Gwendolyn MacEwen, bpNichol, Bronwen Wallace*" (*Peacock* 359). In *Wilson's Bowl* (1980), one dedication is devastatingly succinct: "in memory of Lilo, who walked into the sea" (*Peacock* 263). With this editorial in mind, I reread P. K. Page's *Hologram* (1994). Her glosas originate in passages of other poets' works. Literary borrowings or adaptations are forms of tribute, of homage, of acknowledgement of debt, as Page herself notes: "[R]eading again the giants of my youth, I could not help wondering what their effect on me had been. Had I been influenced by any of them? And if so, how?" (12). Allusion remembers what the poet has read—and perhaps prompts her reader to notice what he has failed to read. Translations too are works of recollection. In her recent rendition of *The Odyssey*, Emily Wilson attempts to make the archaic contemporary. "Tell me about a complicated man," she begins, her adjective suggesting heroic complexity, the analyst's couch, and a notorious Facebook status (105). Later in the epic poem, "a humble / slave girl" serves "bread and many canapés, / a lavish spread" (154). *Canapés*: seemingly a modern word, and yet the dictionary (surprise!) records its usage in English in the eighteenth century. *Slave girl*: Wilson's role as translator is also to be faithful—a "gendered metaphor" (86)—to the text and the past: "The possibility that people of any rank might be enslaved—through trafficking or war—is assumed as a fact about the world; *The Odyssey* is not an abolitionist text" (54). Remembering, we realize, must be distinguished from misremembering, from nostalgia. Precision generates the conditions for surprise to flourish.

The articles in this issue of *Canadian Literature* are engaged in these very processes of revisitation, reappraisal, and reckoning. For Kirsten Alm, the poetry of Robert Bringhurst and Tim Lilburn demands recognition of colonial injustices in North America, while for Ben Hickman, the poetry of Wayde Compton, Peter Culley, and Meredith Quartermain illustrates the complexity of establishing a sense of place in contemporary Vancouver. In order to understand familiar works differently, Robert David Stacey looks again at P. K. Page's "After Rain," Margaret Boyce at Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, and Donna Palmateer Pennee at Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*. And Carrie Dawson shows how certain stories are misused in service of a comforting national narrative. These studies attest to the surprises that lie in store for attentive readers.

This essay began with interruption, and now as I rush to finish it I hear the happy, ordinary, magical noises of waking. "Let the surprise surprise you." Yes—in the literary life as in everyday matters, let the surprise surprise us.

NOTES

1 A version of the essay in question was published in this journal; see Bringhurst, "Breathing."
2 The appealing phrase is from Stephanie Burt's *Close Calls with Nonsense* (2009).
3 Ricou uses lines from "Kikastan Communications" as an epigraph (*Everyday* xv).
4 Ricou's editorial appeared in *Canadian Literature* 193 (2007). A glance at that issue's table of contents reveals, in the titles of the articles, several evocative terms that echo the sentiment of his essay: *listening*, *curious*, *reconsidered*, *wondering*. "Addressed to me": In fact, two poems in *Advice to My Friends* are addressed to Ricou: "back in the spring of '76: for Laurie Ricou" and "Laurie Ricou waiting to present a paper entitled 'The Intersections of Plain/s Space and Poetry,' March, 1982" (*Advice* 18, 19). "Let the surprise surprise you" appears in the former (18). The capitalization of the titles is regularized in *Completed Field Notes: The Long Poems of Robert Kroetsch* (106, 107).
5 The poem is "Pond," from *Strike/Slip* (2006). Moments of forgetting allow professors to become slightly more human, letting students see "behind the shutters / normally drawn across the human face," as Purdy wrote in "On Being Human" (*Beyond* 508), a poem of shame and stoicism; I take the phrase out of context for a happier purpose.
6 I suspect that Purdy borrowed the title from Alfred Bester (another *Al*), the author of "Adam and No Eve" (1941), a short story about the last surviving man on earth. Purdy was an aficionado of science fiction, and I presume that he knew Bester's story.

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Bola Opaleke

Religion is a Complete Sentence

my mouth inhale darkness
see what I become
for you goosebumps over orchards
growing at the spot where the heart
embraces treachery again
with excuses and grief and fear

my mouth inhale needles
chasing after torn lungs
chasing after torn salty liver
waiting for the subtle manifestation of thread
navigating blindly again
in a pool of blood magnificent and magnified

when memories threaten to abandon the skin
and the evening sun
walking over that untended garden
refuses to leave a single footprint
like snake walking over tiny rocks again
my dreams crumbled into the quivering arms of pain

my mouth inhale silence
inhale gallons of constant warnings
from the eyes hard-boiled with sins
the body knows nothing about
to never exhale on this transitory bed again
where the nose must not tell what it smells

Carrie Dawson

"Treaty to Tell the Truth"
The Anti-Confessional Impulse in Canadian Refugee Writing

The world is in the midst of an enormous refugee crisis. Harrowing images and stories of refugee suffering have been media mainstays for nearly a decade. In Canada, such stories have been particularly prominent since November 2015, when the federal government embarked on a high-profile initiative to resettle 25,000 Syrians in four months. So, Canadians have become accustomed to stories that construct refugees as pitiable victims who are subject to the state's scrutiny and beholden to its largesse. Whether or not such narratives are designed to generate sympathy, they underestimate and undermine the agency of their subjects, whom they tend to construct as passive objects of analysis rather than complex objects of knowledge. In response to popular stories of pitiable and passive refugees, this article considers how refugee writers shape their own stories. Paying particular attention to the work of Laotian Canadian poet and former refugee Souvankham Thammavongsa, I explore some of the forces that constrain the stories told by refugee writers and examine the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies these writers use to resist and reshape readerly expectations.

By necessity, refugees are storytellers. In the process of seeking refugee status, they are asked for particular kinds of stories. Indeed, their well-being often hinges on their ability to tell verifiable stories of persecution and trauma in a manner that satisfies the state. But those who succeed in getting refugee status also get called upon—by the media, the academy, and the publishing industry—to repeat those stories, to offer confessional accounts of trauma that serve First World catharsis and shore up pleasing national

myths. By way of example, Guatemalan Canadian multimedia artist and former refugee Francisco-Fernando Granados recalls the difficulties he encountered as a teenaged migrant-rights activist in Vancouver:

> Talking to the *Vancouver Sun,* Global News and documentary crews became increasingly frustrating as it became obvious that their interest in our stories had less to do with creating some kind of discussion around our work in the community and more to do with repeating an idealized version of Canadian multiculturalism. . . . Refugees are meant to be grateful, and talking about the struggles of institutionalized discrimination or the brutalizing refugee certification process would not fit into these frames. (30)

Earlier this year, Dina Nayeri, an Iranian American novelist and former refugee, made a similar point: "Month after month, my mother was asked to give her testimony in churches and women's groups, at schools and even at dinners. I remember sensing the moment when all conversation would stop and she would be asked to repeat our escape story. The problem, of course, was that they wanted our salvation story as a talisman, no more." With the arrival in Canada of more than forty thousand Syrian refugees since late 2015, the mainstream Canadian media has devoted significant amounts of space to the sorts of salvation stories referenced by Granados and Nayeri. And no wonder: the confessional narrative that begins by testifying to foreign persecution and concludes by thanking the Canadian state and citizens is gratifying for its audience, who are invited to see themselves as the benevolent gatekeepers of a benign, manifestly multicultural nation. As Vinh Nguyen puts it, "these narratives help to confirm liberal ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality," and "function as proof of the inclusive, tolerant, and fundamentally non-racist constitution" of Canada ("Refugee Gratitude" 18).[1]

With reference to the representation of Vietnamese American refugee narratives in American literature and popular culture, Mai-Linh K. Hong explains the American demand for salvation stories this way: "[T]he sentimental rescue-and-gratitude tale, now a dominant mode of representing refugees, deflects attention from the destructive effects of past US military actions by refiguring the war-torn Vietnamese civilian or refugee as a grateful, rescued subject and the American military as a care apparatus" (20).[2] In Canada there is comparatively little need to deflect attention from the destructive effects of our military actions because, as Sherene Razack has argued, our military actions are rarely figured as such, but are instead framed as peacekeeping missions.[3] So, if there is a "care apparatus" presented in our refugee salvation stories, it is not the military so much as the state itself. For example, consider the image that accompanied the many print and television stories about

the Canadian arrival of the first plane transporting Syrian refugees: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau presenting a small child with a new winter coat. One might also look to the many news articles celebrating the Hadhad family as model refugees: the Hadhads are chocolatiers who established a thriving business in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, months after arriving from a refugee camp in Damascus, but news stories celebrating their success have tended to figure it as the product of state succor, as is suggested by the headline of the most widely circulated of those stories, "Syrian Refugee Says His Family Proves How Canadian Openness Pays Dividends" (Bresge). At the same time as such stories construe refugee success "as the nation's own success at multicultural, collective-building projects" (Vinh Nguyen,"Refugee Gratitude" 18), they also downplay the fact that the refugee resettlement process is typically characterized by what Jana Lipman calls "a stark absence of choice" (qtd. in Espiritu 2), and by an enduring sense of ambivalence and loss. Thus, Yến Lê Espiritu notes, "[t]he messiness, contingency, and precarious nature of refugee life means that refugees, like all people, are beset by contradiction: neither damaged victims nor model minorities, they—their stories, actions, and inactions—simultaneously trouble and affirm regimes of power" (2). And yet, because the stories that are asked of refugees and told about them typically get simplified and reoriented so as to shore up "regimes of power," it is important to investigate the contingencies and contradictions of refugee writing. Doing so can help us better understand how popular narratives of state succor disguise and perpetuate social inequities. Equally importantly, it can help us heed the claims made by writers who "possess and enact their *own* politics as they emerge out of the ruins of war and its aftermath" (Espiritu 11, emphasis original). So, rather than foregrounding the discourse of the good and grateful refugee in Canada, I foreground the figure of the "ungrateful" or recalcitrant refugee who is disinclined to represent past trauma as "easily consumable spectacle" (Granados 31).

Elsewhere I have considered refugee recalcitrance in Francisco-Fernando Granados' multimedia art and essays: beginning with his argument that "the dominant paradigms of nationalism and capitalism fail to recognize the humanity of those who are not legible within its [*sic*] structures" (32), I have considered how he uses illegibility as a strategy to resist the expectation that refugees will make past trauma legible—and "easily consumable"—for a variety of audiences.[4] Here, I want to extend that argument by examining the anti-confessional impulse in recent refugee writing, asking what we might learn from the representation of silence and subterfuge in that work. Poems

by Souvankham Thammavongsa feature prominently because, as Christine Kim notes, Thammavongsa's work "eschew[s] the mode of the confessional replete with large gestures and chest-beating in favour of subtle probings of the world" (153), but also because those "subtle probings" have much to teach us about the relationship between fidelity, truth-telling, and self-determination in writing by and about refugees.

This is "Earwigs," from Thammavongsa's 2003 collection *Small Arguments*:

> EARWIGS
> are born
> holding out their limbs
>
> to a world that will not
> hold them
>
> They know
> this is a world
>
> that will not return
> this gesture
>
> but they make it,
> aware that
>
> a limb, empty
> still has its weight. (53)

The poems in *Small Arguments* are rendered in tiny type surrounded by a great deal of white space. The very smallness of the font helps communicate the intense vulnerability of their subjects, many of which are bugs. Though Thammavongsa's bugs are dignified in all their "bugginess," these beings—typically imagined as invasive, dirty, and threatening—are also posited as metaphors for refugees, illegal migrants, and, perhaps, all racialized migrants who might be said to "hol[d] out their limbs // to a world that will not / hold them." This is made clear by the poet, who was born in a refugee camp, and who likens *Small Arguments* to a collection of identity documents or citizenship papers: "I was never given a birth certificate when I was born. . . . We need documents to prove that we are alive and real. It isn't enough that I happen to be right here—a piece of paper needs to prove this. *Small Arguments* makes me feel real in that sense. It feels like I've been granted a place of belonging" ("Interview"). Unlike a birth certificate, passport, or iris scan, *Small Arguments* is not designed to make its subject legible to the state. Indeed, a number of its poems can be understood as indictments of the invasive technologies and sometimes brutal processes designed to "fix" migrant identities:

THE WORM
found, sliced
into its body, metal

we do not know
how so simple

a creature
can manage

a world
in which we invent so much

Here, in a display case
we lay out

its simple form;
name and label
what we know

Its face,
its face, wherever it is,
pinned back from view. (54-55)

There is a wonderful instability in the first lines, which present the worm as both subject and object: the creature is introduced both as a sentient being capable of making a finding and as a found object of violence. Either way, the worm is resilient: it "can manage." On the other hand, "we" appear less capable. Despite the violence we inflict upon the worm in our bid to "name and label" it, we "do not know" much and the creature remains enigmatic, "its face, wherever it is, / pinned back from view."

To the extent that it underscores the unknowability of its subjects in poems that are also about the processes and practice of citizenship, Thammavongsa's collection might be understood, in Amitava Kumar's phrase, as "an act of fabrication against the language of government agencies" (ix). In the preface to his book *Passport Photos*, Kumar embraces the language of forgery, saying that it allows him to recognize the immigrant's refusal to yield wholly to the strategies and codes that (over)determine her identity and either silence her or trap her in "narrow accounts" (xiv). This matters here because Thammavongsa's 2007 collection, *Found*, can be read as a forgery of sorts. *Found* begins with this prefatory note: "In 1978, my parents lived in building #48. Nong Khai, Thailand, a Lao refugee camp. My father kept a scrapbook filled with doodles, addresses, postage stamps, maps, measurements. He threw it out and when he did, I took it and found this." The "this" can be understood to characterize *Found* as found poetry, suggesting that what

follows is a reproduction of her father's scrapbook. But this is not the case. Many poems describe scrapbook entries, but they do not reproduce them, and the collection does not include any of the scrapbook's drawings and photographs. Also, the narrative voice shifts throughout the collection: some poems are rendered in her father's voice; others align the speaker and author, addressing the father as "you"; and, crucially, some poems meditate on the limits of the poet's ability to understand her father's journal, which was written in Lao, a language she does not read. For example, in the poem "What I Can't Read" the speaker suggests that spoken Lao feels intimately familiar to her ear, but the "tiny / and landlocked letters" on the page are as inaccessible as the ear's inner workings (26), curling inwards like "small dark / hole(s)" (26). This meditation on "landlocked" letters changes the way we read the following poem, which offers a confident translation of a scrapbook entry that identifies parts of the body, explaining that the Lao text describes "what / each part / of the body / did / bent / like the part / it was" (27). With transitions like this, Thammavongsa underscores the difficulties, limits, and, crucially, the excesses of her translation. Thus, she reminds readers, as Kumar does, that "to forge" has "among its meanings the sense of forming, making, shaping" through the application of careful effort and in extreme circumstances, including "the heat of history" (Kumar xii).

"I took it and found this," declares Thammavongsa. To the extent that the word "this" encourages us to evaluate *Found* as found poetry, it asks if the repurposed or forged text is faithful to the source material, and to its author. At the same time, though, Thammavongsa's introductory statement raises questions about context, inviting us to consider how the scrapbook resonates differently outside of its original context in a refugee camp on the edges of a "tiny / and landlocked" country embroiled in a vicious civil war. Here, too, it is useful to recall Kumar's suggestion of forging as a metaphor for a creative and scholarly practice that tries "to restore a certain weight of experience, a stubborn density, a life to what we encounter in newspaper columns as abstract, often faceless, figures without history" (xi). Forging is a particularly attractive metaphor here because media references to Laos often note that the country has the distinction of being, per capita, the most heavily bombed nation in the world; so, as Thammavongsa emphasises, forging continues to be a crucial and dangerous industry in Laos, where people routinely risk their lives searching for bombs to take to smelting centres, and bomb casings are used "to lift / our homes / above / the ground" (33). Those lines are taken from "Laos," a poem which begins thus: "When

bombs / dropped / here / we buried / the dead" (33). The poem's very short lines and its vertical arrangement visually reproduce both the violent act of dropping bombs and the later repurposing of those bombs for stilts to support homes, and thus can, perhaps, be seen to "restore a certain weight of experience, a stubborn density" to ugly facts found in newspaper columns. But because the poem's "we" is unspecified and any attempt to align the speaker with Thammavongsa's father is complicated by her admission that she could not read his original text, "Laos" is not so much found as forged, that is, simulated or replicated. Notably, it is a peculiarly faithful forgery that acknowledges what it owes to "the heat of history" and to the people for whom it speaks.

Given that the refugee determination process often hinges on the state's ability to determine the credibility of claimants and the veracity of their stories, my decision to harness the metaphor of forgery when discussing refugee writing may seem counterintuitive. By keeping both meanings of forgery in play, I hope to suggest that the narrative representations of past trauma by the refugee claimant and the refugee writer are—like all historical accounts—inevitably creative acts, more or less faithful simulations. At the same time, though, I mean to underscore the ugliness of asking the same thing of both kinds of stories, of valuing refugee writing for its veracity rather than its ability to forge something new from "the heat of history."

As Peter Nyers has argued, the state tends to smile only on the most demonstrably abject of refugee claimants, those able to prove that they are utterly powerless, hopeless, and innocent. Where they are deemed to have any agency, that agency is typically understood as "unsavoury" (they are economic migrants or queue jumpers) or "dangerous" (they are criminals and potential terrorists) (1070-71). But, as Nyers suggests, the fetishization of refugee innocence is equally damaging because it reifies the paternalistic idea of the refugee as a helpless guest of the state, thus undermining their political agency and underestimating their social and economic contributions. Besides, the idea of refugee innocence is increasingly untenable given the recent proliferation of Canadian laws and practices that make it very difficult for people from poor or war-torn countries to get to Canada legally.[5] So, underscoring the trope of forgery and related forms of fabrication in creative writing by and about refugees is about scuppering the demand for, or expectation of, a demonstrably true salvation story by emphasizing the agency and creativity of individual authors and, more generally, of a group of people who are too often understood as only abject.

As Kumar argues, "Forgeries work only when they recall what is accepted as real" (xi). Accordingly, his "forged passport" mimics the presentation of information on an official document closely enough to draw attention to the ways in which its "rich ambiguities" can "resist a plain reply" or "demand a more complex though unequivocal response" (xi). The excessiveness and complexity of that reply frustrates "the language of government agencies" and the reading practices of their representatives, whom, he argues, typically seek to make a direct, one-to-one connection between the text and its subject.[6] Though *Found* is not presented as an identity document in the same way as *Passport Photos* or, perhaps, *Small Arguments*, it, too, is designed to frustrate the one-to-one connection that demands fidelity but understands it as naked, incontrovertible fact, rather than as an ethical obligation to one's forebears that can refuse the representation of fact or necessitate the forgery of fiction. In an essay entitled "My Father's Scrapbook," Thammavongsa explains:

> I don't know how to read or write Laotian but I do know how to speak it. Everything I found and everything in *Found* is about what I felt, discovered, put together while reading through the scrapbook. I never asked my father to translate or explain anything he put in there. That belongs to him, even the questions themselves. What I wanted most was to protect my parents, to respect and honour their private and personal experience. I wanted to tell our story but not to exploit or polish it.

Ultimately, she concludes, "*Found* is about where I came from and am coming from and what I can do with that." Thammavongsa's emphasis on what she "can do with" past experience—on her ability to forge something that is both new and faithful from the "heat of history"—emphasizes agency and creativity, countering the tendency to demand that refugee writers tell particular kinds of stories. Equally important, it challenges the troubling tendency to evaluate those stories for their rendition of unburnished truths in a manner that edifies a First World audience while reinforcing their own nation's "success at multicultural, collective-building projects" (Vinh Nguyen, "Refugee Gratitude" 18).

In order to understand the tension between the creativity and licence suggested by Thammavongsa's emphasis on what she "can do with" where "[she] came from," on the one hand, and the commitment to fidelity implicit in her avowal "not to exploit or polish" her parents' experiences, on the other, it is useful to consider Nam Le's much-lauded, self-referential short story "Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" from his 2008 collection *The Boat*.[7] Therein, the narrator, who is also called Nam and is also the Australian child of Vietnamese refugees, struggles to complete

the story that is the final assignment for his writing class. A classmate chides, "How can you have writer's block? Just write a story about Vietnam" (8). The "just" reverberates, suggesting that writing from experience, and especially from an ethnically particular experience, is both easy and expedient.[8] A writing instructor corroborates this, urging, "Ethnic literature's hot. And important, too" (9). "*Fuck it*," thinks Nam, and he decides to write "the ethnic story of [his] Vietnamese father" (17), who witnessed the My Lai massacre as teenager. Recognizing that a narrative's apparent truthfulness means that there is "a better chance of selling it" (24), Nam pens a version of a violent, traumatic story he once heard his father recount to a group of old friends. In the interest of "selling it," Nam takes some liberties with that story, admitting, "Maybe he didn't tell it exactly that way. Maybe I am filling in the gaps" (17). Significantly, that "filled in" story is superseded by two other stories that exist as pivotal gaps or absences at the heart of "Love and Honor." The first of these is told by Nam's father, who disavows his son's interest in writing for a North American audience that will "read and clap their hands and forget" what they have read (24). So, he tells his son stories that are "not something [he]'ll be able to write" (24):

> He told me about the war. He told me about meeting my mother. The wedding. Then the fall of Saigon. 1975. He told me about his imprisonment in reeducation camp, the forced confessions, the indoctrinations, the starvations. The daily labor that ruined his back. The casual killings. He told me about the tiger-cage cells and connex boxes, the different names for different forms of torture. (25-26)

The use of anaphora—"he told me"—emphasizes the scope of these stories and the fact that they break the strained silence that has beset the father-son relationship for years. But the radical economy of Nam's rendition of that telling—"The wedding. Then the fall of Saigon. 1975."—reminds us that the stories themselves are not for us, readers who might be inclined to "clap [our] hands and forget." Likewise, we are not privy to the story that Nam writes later that night after listening to his father and helping him to bed. All we know of that narrative is that it is imagined as an homage. Referring to his father, Nam thinks: "He would read it, with his book-learned English, and he would recognize himself in a new way. He would recognize me. He would see how powerful was his experience, how valuable his suffering—how I had made it speak for more than itself. He would be pleased with me" (27). In the context of an article that considers how *The Boat* interrogates the demands of "ethnic writing," Donald Goellnicht argues that Nam sees himself as his father's conduit, "adding value to his father's suffering" by "making the story

'speak for more than itself,' making it represent a community" (201). As Goellnicht suggests, "making it" has as many resonances as "selling it." And thus, while Le's story dignifies the notion of refugee writing as an homage to those who have suffered, it also asks about the ethics of "making" a story speak, especially if that story testifies to the suffering of one who thinks, "Sometimes it's better to forget" (24). Whether or not it is better to forget, it is important, Le suggests, to respect the privacy and will of those who have suffered, and to recognize that the viewer or reader does not have the right to know their stories, and may lack the ability to understand them.[9] Because "Love and Honor" is thoroughly metafictional, one might argue that the story Nam writes while watching his father sleep is, in fact, the one we read. But, given Le's emphasis on privacy, it makes more sense to understand Nam's revised story as withheld, existing within gaps that the writers choose not to fill.

While the "ethnic story" in "Love and Honor" is supplemented by pivotal absent stories that affirm the importance of privacy and silence in refugee writing, something very different has happened with *Found*, where a 2009 short film based on the book supplements it by including the photographs and personal narratives withheld in the original. Paramita Nath's film *Found: The Poetry of Souvankham Thammavongsa* begins with a voiceover in which Thammavongsa—whose face is not shown—relays the difficult circumstances of her premature birth while turning the pages of her father's scrapbook. She goes on to recite a number of poems from *Found*, including "My Mother, a Portrait of":

> There are
> no photographs
>
> of
> my mother here
>
> just
> her name
>
> her
> real name
>
> Her
> real name
>
> looks
> like her
>
> Quiet
> and reaching
>
> for
> my father's (31-32)

Nath accompanies the poem with a close-up of a photograph of Thammavongsa's mother with her husband and daughter. However evocative, the effect is to overcome or deny the absence signalled in the poem's opening lines. This matters because that absence is instrumental to the poem: the speaker's insistence that "There are / no photographs // of / my mother here" reminds us of absences within the scrapbook and the absence of the scrapbook itself. Likewise, the speaker's suggestion that the mother's "real name // looks / like her" reminds us that we are strangers who do not know either of the mother's names and are unable to recognize her. While the title of the poem and the image of the "[q]uiet / and reaching" woman in Thammavongsa's collection figure the poem itself as a portrait, the lack of visual details about the mother makes it impossible to imagine her, so that the reference to a "portrait" underscores its own absence. Tellingly, the website for the film foregrounds transparency, access, and "truth" by likening the pages of the scrapbook to "windows into [an] extraordinary past" ("the film"). However, the accompanying "poet's statement" written by Thammavongsa foregrounds the act of looking for something over the more passive experience of seeing it: "I'm interested in things people don't look at but are there. My father is here and no one's looking. When I finished writing *Found*, I saw that it wasn't about my father but about my looking." She continues: "When Paramita Nath talked to me about turning *Found* into a film, I thought deeply about my own decision not to include photographs of the actual scrapbook pages in my book. I wanted to control what a reader was looking at, where they were looking and in what sequence, and how they were looking" ("poet's"). So, Nath's film is about finding and Thammavongsa's *Found* is about looking. Because that looking is structured by multiple absences, the poetry collection underscores the value and the process of trying to grasp what we cannot see and cannot fully comprehend. Like nearsighted voyeurs, readers of *Found* study the poem's small print and engage its details while longing for the big picture—be that the missing portrait with its promise of plenitude and intimacy, or a more thorough understanding of the often traumatic history to which the poems allude and in which the scrapbook was produced. Thus, as Goellnicht argues with reference to Le's collection, we are asked to reckon with the extent to which our own gaze "assumes the right of the dominant culture, the viewing subject, to know the viewed as an ethnographic object of study" (216).

Thammavongsa has expressed frustration in response to requests that she tell—repeat and replete—her story of refugee trauma. She laments, for

example, that interviews about her writing typically begin with the question, "What was it like in the refugee camp . . . tell us the conditions[?]" ("12 or 20"). Anh Hua, a scholar, creative writer, and former refugee, refers to such requests as the "Treaty to Tell the Truth." In her fictionalized personal essay "The Blue Tank" Hua tells the story of a young girl's escape from Vietnam with her family in 1979. The story's plot corresponds with Hua's personal history, but the author warns against collapsing the two by introducing her text with an extended meditation on "the telling of a retelling of a story that is told again and again in repetitive trauma and pleasure until the story becomes myth, legend, unbelievable" (110). Likening the process of reconstructing her story of escape to that of dusting and "arranging bones" so as to create the "pretense of coherence" for her audience, Hua's narrator wonders, "Should I tell the story? I fear the trap of the Confessional: Treaty to Tell the Truth. But there was no original story. The story has changed each time I tell it to myself, to others" (110). Hua's characterization of "The Blue Tank" as a "tale-tell" (110) underscores her suggestion that the refugee narrative is mutable, changing depending on the context in which it is told. But, the ways in which "tale-tell" brings to mind the tall tale—with its evocation of imaginative excess and incredulity—is also worth noting because it directs readers to forego any expectations of a linear narrative based on verifiable truths.

Hua's contention "that there was no original story" remembers Stuart Hall's argument that memory exists in and as narrative, that it is shaped by language and by the contexts in which it is recalled. But that argument and related ones about the inevitable partiality of memory are tricky for refugees, because the reliability and fulsomeness of memory often plays a crucial role in the refugee certification process, where success is often contingent on a claimant's ability to tell a verifiably true story of past persecution in a manner that satisfies the state. And, as Viet Nguyen argues, "memory's incompleteness" can be particularly painful for those who left their home countries under duress and who thus struggle with "the contradictory yearning to imagine one's memory as whole" and the desire "to forget altogether" (qtd. in Goellnicht 203).

Whereas Hua uses repetition and variation to refuse the "Treaty to Tell the Truth," Thammavongsa uses silence and restraint to similar ends. For all of its inventiveness, *Found*, is very restrained. Indeed, many of its poems are wordless. For example, the seven poems representing records of the father's journal entries for the months between February and August 1979 contain

only a slash and the poem-records for October through December are entirely blank. In "My Father's Scrapbook," Thammavongsa explains that the liberal use of white space and the use of "personally particular" handwritten marks in these poems are intended to "draw out [a] sense of time, of waiting." For this and other reasons, the slashes are hard to read. As Christine Kim asks,

> Is the slash finally an act of repeated negation, determined to continue crossing out even when there is nothing left to obliterate or even oppose? Or might we perhaps read commitment and futile hope into his act of marking, constant even when betrayed by the forward march of a calendar year that does not correspond to the stagnant state of other affairs? (153)

Other poems more clearly align silence with the lack of political voice. Consider, for example, "Postage Stamp, 31 Cents, U.S. Airmail," which describes the American stamp taken from the letter carrying a negative response to her father's appeal for asylum in the United States. While the plane pictured on the stamp is seen to move between "two worlds" and speaks to the father's dream of leaving "here" for "there," the letter determined that his dream would not be realized; because such a letter came "only once," it indicated the father's lack of recourse (36). Significantly, the poem has fewer than thirty words and uses very short lines. Its brevity and its arrangement on the page underscore the very limited dialogue arising from the father's petitions for asylum, and reinforce what Joseph Pugliese calls "the inadequacy of language to justice."

Pugliese's phrase is taken from an essay about the mainstream media and the Australian government's response to a 2002 demonstration by asylum seekers incarcerated at Australia's Woomera Immigration Detention Centre. In what would be the first of many such protests, seventy people sewed their lips shut to protest the camp's dire conditions and its isolation. Their suffering was compounded by fact that they were prevented from corresponding with the outside world. In an effort to address the complexities of the prisoners' symbolic gesture, Pugliese writes:

> The act of suturing your lips stages the graphic disruption of the social contract as founded principally on an ethics of speech and dialogue: in the face of a regime that pays no heed to your pleas and petitions for refuge and asylum, that juridically eviscerates your right to free speech, the withdrawal of language signals despair at the very possibility of ethical dialogue. . . . Your sutured lips open up the violent disjunction between law and justice. Your silence signifies the inadequacy of language to justice.

To reference Pugliese is not to suggest that the situation of refugee claimants held at Woomera is directly comparable to that represented in *Found*. But,

Pugliese's reading of the first Woomera protest is relevant because, at the same time as it addresses a silence that signals "despair at the very possibility of ethical dialogue," it also reminds us to consider how refugee silence and—by implication—how silences in writing by and about refugees might be seen as an active, agential "withdrawal of language" that addresses their very diminished access to consequential forums in which to tell stories that are both meaningful and politically expedient.

Silence and agency are also very important in the final poem in Thammavongsa's *Found*.

> WARNING
> My father took
> a pigeon
>
> broke
> its hard neck
>
> cut open
> its chest
>
> dug out
> a handful
>
> and threw back
> its body
>
> warning (60)

Brittany Kraus' reading of this poem focuses on the bird, noting that, like the bugs in *Small Arguments*, it is often associated with pestilence. But the pigeon, she points out, is a carrier of messages as well as disease (19), and thus its violent death may be understood as a protest against the powerlessness of the human being who is caged in the depoliticized space of the refugee camp while waiting for a response to his applications for sanctuary. This makes excellent sense, but it is also true that the poem's economy and open-endedness make it difficult to settle on a single reading. It is worth noting that "Warning" directly follows *Found*'s many wordless poems, and while it returns us to language, it does not disrupt that silence so much as amplify it and insist upon its complexity. Put differently, the wordlessness of the previous pages and the silence of the poem's subject make it difficult to determine whether his violent act is born of hunger, frustration, or fury. Certainly, the poem's arrangement on the page and its use of enjambed lines that begin with active verbs—broke, cut, dug—underscore the father's agency. But beyond that, the poem seems to warn us against overestimating what we know about its subject. Put differently,

"Warning" protects the privacy and autonomy of its subject, who, on the last page of the collection, is seen to exceed rather than accede to anything we think we know about him.

Given that this paper began by considering the figure of the ungrateful refugee and emphasizing the need to heed the contradictions and contingencies of refugee writing, it is important to recognize Thammavongsa's public statements of gratitude. "I am lucky," she writes; "I am the child Canada saved. I am the child of the parents Canada saved. Canada opened its doors to us" ("Souvankham"). These comments were made in 2015 as part of the narrative she contributed to Compassionate Canada: Stories in Solidarity with Refugees, a web-based initiative that collects stories from Southeast Asian refugees, immigrants, and their children living in Canada. Noting that "Canada's role in the resettlement of over 200,000 Southeast Asian refugees after the Vietnam War has been repeatedly referenced as a model of Canadian generosity and humanitarianism," the contributors call upon the state to demonstrate these same attributes in responding to the current refugee crisis: "If Canada's history of compassion towards Southeast Asian refugees is celebrated, then we want to use this public celebration to advocate for those currently in dire need of assistance" ("Call for Stories"). Despite the fact that many of the submissions to Compassionate Canada foreground gratitude and use the language of salvation, they are not paeans, but "petitions" offered "in *support* of and *solidarity* with Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian, Afghani, Libyan, Eritrean, and countless other refugees" ("About," emphasis original). Put differently, they are political texts that use the personal experience of and popular belief in state succor to call on the state "to live up to its claim as a humanitarian world leader" ("About"). This may also be true of the creative works considered in this paper, but it would be a mistake to read these poems or stories as petitions. Like the stories collected on the Compassionate Canada website, they deserve to be read on their own terms. And yet, readers cannot take any of these texts on their own terms if their readings are overdetermined by expectations of straightforward and demonstrable refugee gratitude, innocence, or abjection. Moreover, heeding the claims made in creative writing by refugees means attending to what those texts invent and what they refuse to reveal. Among other things, this involves recognizing the eloquence, contradictoriness, and intentionality of poetic silences that protest speechlessness and also resist the "Treaty to Tell the Truth."

Louis Althusser wrote, "there is no such thing as an innocent reading, [so] we must say what reading we are guilty of" (15). Thammavongsa—like Granados,

Hua, and Le—warns against letting readings of refugee narratives be hampered by the ideal of innocence or overdetermined by the trap of the Confessional. Whereas the refugee narrative that emphasizes gratitude and provides explicit, coherently rendered evidence of persecution sometimes allows readers to process its claims in a way that affirms their own benevolence, the stories and poems considered here make a different kind of claim—one that takes some time to process—because they are not salvation stories and are not concerned with apprehending a subject's identity, so much as recognizing their singularity. At a time when refugees figure very prominently in the news and in the social imaginary, these writers challenge us to think about how to read those stories and what to ask of them. In so doing, they ask what it means to read poems and stories "in solidarity with refugees."

NOTES

1 As Vinh Nguyen has argued, Kim Thúy's much-feted, semi-autobiographical novel *Ru* (2012) is the most obvious recent example of the refugee success story in Canada. It is worth noting that Nguyen's article emphasizes the importance of refugee writing that underscores gratitude and success not for the nation, but for the wellbeing of the refugee.

2 Hong draws on Yến Lê Espiritu's foundational work in the field of critical refugee studies and on Mimi Thi Nguyen's suggestion that American refugee narratives have helped cultivate support for overseas American military operations.

3 With reference to the Somalia Affair, Razack demonstrates that Canadian "peacekeeping violence" is largely overlooked in favour of a more palatable myth about an innocent, morally superior middle-power nation obliged to sort out Third World violence. Also see James, who argues that Canadian narratives about Vietnamese Canadian refugees typically ignore Canada's role as a producer of arms and chemical weapons for American military use in the Vietnam War.

4 See my article "The Refugee's Body of Knowledge." On the function of illegibility in writing by refugees, also see Christine Kim's suggestion that Souvankham Thammavongsa's *Found* substitutes "the illegible history for the particular refugee narrative" (148).

5 For example, in the 1990s Canada expanded its interdiction practices by increasing the number of overseas immigration officers employed to prevent people from travelling to Canada without bona fide travel documents; at the same time, amendments to the Immigration Act (Bill C-86) made it necessary for Convention refugees to produce "satisfactory" identity documents in order to be landed; and, in 2002 Canada and the US signed the Safe Third Country Agreement, which required asylum seekers to lodge refugee claims in the first country of arrival.

6 Drawing on Kumar, I elaborate on the implications of such reading practices in "On Thinking Like a State and Reading (about) Refugees."

7 One might also take up Thammavongsa's determination to forego "polish" with reference to her reflections on her preference for the "violence" of minimalism ("Interview"). Punning aside, her very spare story "Mani Pedi" can be said to forego "polish": that story

details the health problems endured by people working in the manicure business, and ends with the two protagonists—manicurists, siblings, and Laotian Canadian children of refugees—sitting in silence, separately ruminating on their shared childhood. Like *Found*, "Mani Pedi" uses silence to underscore and protect the complex interiority of its subjects.

8 With reference to his own scholarly practice, Vinh Nguyen explores this idea to great effect in his essay "Me-search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance."

9 Goellnicht develops this idea with reference to Le's title story, "The Boat," arguing that its insistence on blankness and incomprehensibility works to critique the "voyeuristic gaze" (216).

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Changming Yuan

You vs Us
As If in a Quantum Entanglement

You cut meat with sharp knives
We poke grasses with bamboo sticks

You punch others with hard fists
We dance around you with *taichi* gestures

Your men fuck around everywhere outside your households
Our women lay babies right in your living rooms

You colonize every city with an English syntax
We decorate each street with Chinese signboards

You deploy aircraft carriers near our waters and coasts
We marry girls to your princes and paupers

You enjoy setting fires and blowing winds along our long walls
We have Chinese stomachs to digest all insults and injuries

You try every way to overthrow our government
We sell every artifact to help your people survive

You borrow money from us to build more weapons
We work hard to make more money for your banks

Donna Palmateer Pennee

Transatlantic Figures in *The Imperialist*

Public Sentiment, Private Appetite

"It would have been idle to inquire into the antecedents, or even the circumstances, of old Mother Beggarlegs. . . . And why 'Beggarlegs' nobody in the world could tell you" (Duncan 43). So begins Sara Jeannette Duncan's 1904 novel *The Imperialist*, with this enigmatic figure who continues to be something of a mystery insofar as students and scholars rarely recognize Mother Beggarlegs as a Black woman. And yet she *is* identified as such and generates a particular effect in the novel's eponymous character: "The name invested her with a graceless, anatomical interest, it penetrated *her wizened black* and derisively exposed her; her name went far indeed to make her dramatic. Lorne Murchison, when he was quite a little boy, was affected by this, and by the unfairness of the way it singled her out" (43, emphasis mine). Scholars have observed the real-life antecedents of other characters in the novel, and Frank Davey refers in passing to "the old black vendor of taffy and gingerbread" (423), but no one seems to have sought an antecedent of Mother Beggarlegs. A possibility is, nevertheless, identified in a letter from one of Duncan's contemporary readers, quoted in Thomas Tausky's 1980 monograph on Duncan and his 1996 critical edition of the novel: "'In the [18]70s I was a boy living in your city . . . my mind lingers along the Old Market place on Dalhousie St. [*sic*] especially on Market day. I still can see that dear old Black mammy, with her basket of Gingerbread covered with little caraway seeds & sugar'" (Tausky, *Imperialist*, 286 n1). Whether or not Duncan had this particular person in mind is less important to this essay than 1) the long-standing *non*-recognition of racialized difference as a key ingredient in the novel's opening scene, and 2) the apparent lack of memory in Duncan's novel about Mother

Beggarlegs' antecedents in the diaspora of transatlantic slavery and abolitionism. Together, these observations suggest the success of a white, Anglophone national pedagogy: a pedagogy through which Canada has sought to differentiate itself from the United States (and before that, British North America from New France) by way of silence on its own history of slavery and racism against people of African descent as well as self-congratulation on being the terminus of the Underground Railroad. A white settler-colonial inheritance of "the moral advantage" of the British Empire (Duncan 130), or the "moral capital" Britain earned in the abolition of the slave trade (Brown), seems to be an inexhaustible fund from which white Canada still draws.

Despite Duncan's relegation of Mother Beggarlegs to "a group of odd characters, rarer now than they used to be, etched upon the vague consciousness of small towns as in a way mysterious and uncanny" (43), this essay examines the semiotic functions of this character's presence in Duncan's exposition of everyday life in a rapidly industrializing Ontario town at the end of the nineteenth century. In one sense, to inquire into Mother Beggarlegs' antecedents really would be "idle"—because transatlantic slavery severed family lines—but it would also be regressive in Duncan's "go-ahead"[1] town of Elgin *and* unsettling in a novel whose idealistic hero advocates an explicitly white Imperialist nationalism for Canada. Such inquiry would remind us not only of other fractures in the novel that would threaten Canada's "destiny" as a nation (see Devereux, Kertzer, Tough), but also demonstrate Canada's participation in the white supremacy practiced by Britain (see Coleman) and the US (see Antwi, Ferguson).

This co-existence of an assumed "moral advantage" with everyday practices of racism is itself an antecedent of Lorne's idealism, insofar as Britain's moral leadership in abolition was arguably for its own later gains in the "scramble for Africa" (Brown, Drescher). Yet the contradiction is covered over on the novel's first page when the eponymous hero is characterized as *different* from the "untrounced" boys of Elgin for his feelings of injustice: Lorne Murchison was affected in his youth by the "unfairness" of the way the name of Mother Beggarlegs "single[s] her out" (43). The narrator observes, "with the invincible optimism one has for the behavior of lovable people," how "his kind attempt at colloquy" with old Mother Beggarlegs "is the first indication" she "can find of that active sympathy with the disabilities of his fellow beings which stamped him later so intelligent a meliorist" (44). In marking this difference between Lorne and the other boys, the text provides

the first of innumerable signs that Lorne's idealism will not be shared by his fellow Elginites, for whom "sentiment" is no obstacle at all to the pursuit of personal gain, social mobility, and material progress because it is understood as "a thing by itself" (90).

Given that sentiment cannot be "a thing by itself," Lorne's sentiment will defeat him, just as "sentiment" defeated the women writers of abolitionist (and other) romances in the romance-realism debates about which Duncan was acutely aware (see Dean 14-17). Lorne is on the fringe of Elgin in the novel's closing pages just as Mother Beggarlegs appears at the edge of the text as a member of a group "rarer now than they used to be" (44)—objects of "a sentiment of affection" that is now "an anachronism of the heart" (90). His early sympathetic engagement with Mother Beggarlegs makes him a small "l" liberal just as his later economic protectionist sympathies are out of sync with the local electorate's desire for free trade. These traits also make him an early representative of the cultural nationalists, like those who institutionalized Canadian literature in the 1970s, insofar as he develops into the young professional who, in the novel's free trade debates, most insists that Canada should not become like the US. Lorne is idealistically unaware of Canada's entanglements in a political realist history that precedes and exceeds his vision. He is also so affected by his fellow citizens' vote for free trade and the loss of his marriage prospects that he must be sent away—to Florida—to convalesce (Duncan 295). In this go-ahead town that "produced" him (Duncan 60), Lorne has failed to distinguish a public sentiment of loyalty to Britain from the private appetite for upward mobility and consumption at the lowest personal cost. Despite the "public sentiment" (Duncan 45) displayed in Chapter One, then, the public measure of appetite in the election plot, and its ample evidence in the novel's representations of everyday life, erases moral advantage as a means of national distinction.

And so, although for Duncan's narrator "[i]t is hard to invest Mother Beggarlegs with importance" (44), I argue that her function in introducing us to Lorne through sentiment makes her a very important index to Canadians' assent to the manufacturing of national differences between Britain, America, and Canada *in the midst of* the novel's displays of their common allegiance to capitalist values. Lorne's feeling for injustice in relation to an old Black woman is demonstrated *in a marketplace encounter with her*, and so unsurprisingly the novel repeatedly figures social, emotional, political—and religious[2]—relations between individuals and families through the market's language of profits, losses, speculation, investment, and debt. The fact of Mother Beggarlegs'

presence in the novel points us to the rise and management of capitalism through African slavery in the Americas, to an absence of difference among the European empires and subsequently an absence of difference between Canada and the US. Economic protectionism and free trade—the subject of debate in the novel's election plot—were first practiced as intermittent political and/as economic arrangements between empires in the transatlantic circuit of slave labour and goods (Drescher). And it was in the abolition of the slave trade, then of slavery, that mercantilist capitalism was morphed into industrialized capitalism, that peasants, artisans, and other economic migrants became factory workers, and many white British immigrants to Canada—like John Murchison, himself an economic migrant—became owners of property and profits. Such changes occurred amidst, and relied on, the circulation and symbolic value of Black labour long after actual slavery was abolished. This essay looks to the symbolic, or figurative, implications of Mother Beggarlegs' early presence and rapid disappearance from the novel. She is a citation of slavery and abolition history in Duncan's story of "the making of the nation" (79).

The purpose of this return to *The Imperialist* is neither to discredit this particular novel, which I think is brilliant, or the very rich body of scholarship on Duncan, nor is it to say again, as Cecily Devereux so succinctly puts it, "*The Imperialist*, not surprisingly, is imperialist" (186). Rather, the purpose is to attend to the pedagogical necessity of reading closely the *figurative* dimensions of a work of literature as marks of history's incorporation into the everyday-ness represented therein. This novel remembers old Mother Beggarlegs on the Queen's Birthday when she "helps" (44) the narrator to remember an era before the Murchison family could afford to give their children money to celebrate. She is also remembered in the novel's interweaving of the discourses of sentiment, business, economics, war, "race," and evolution and adaptation, to represent the texture of everyday values across thirty years of change in the colony. Through the figurative recurrence of such discourses in the novel, we can find the structure of feeling by which assent to overlook contradiction in the colony's search for political autonomy is secured under such names as "business" and "opportunity" (used no fewer than one hundred times and thirty times, respectively, across the novel's thirty-three chapters).

Limited to the close reading of just a few portions of the novel's first chapter, this essay identifies only some of the many threads in the novel's weave that are tied to the facts and the effects of transatlantic slavery and

abolition. I use this textile-texture metaphor deliberately, not only because the novel's ending relies on the same metaphor when it "lose[s] the thread of destiny" for "Lorne and his country" (296), but because looms and weaving are simultaneously metonyms for the labour and economics of wool and cotton production, and for the Scottish and African diasporas in Canada's history. They are key metonymical ingredients in the story of modernity, of industrial revolutions and everyday life, in Britain, the US, and Canada. In other words, they are antecedents for Duncan's manufacturing town of Elgin and its residents, its making of owners, classes of workers, and the free trade outcome of the novel's election. Such history would have been part of the everyday-ness of Duncan's early biography; that she knew about the invention and effects of the cotton gin is a certainty, given that her first professional writing assignment was to submit articles to selected newspapers, on both sides of the Canada-US border, on "the New Orleans Cotton Centennial, the World's Fair of its time" (Tausky, *Sara* 1). By opening her novel with an encounter between a first-generation Scotch-Canadian white boy and an old "Black mammy" in a southwestern Ontario town, Duncan flags how the making of Canada is inextricable from its economic and/as racial history.

Names and Naming

Though Mother Beggarlegs is not referred to beyond the novel's first two paragraphs, the terms of her introduction circulate metonymically in scenes about names and their relation to origins, status, and the probable futures of selected residents of Duncan's Elgin.[3] Typical to the novel's density and economy of exposition, Chapter One also observes social distinctions being re-made in the Dominion in commentary on family names, religious and political affiliation, and degrees of economic mobility. The account of the names and naming of the Murchison children articulates some of those "social principles" of Elgin (79) that will produce the obvious later contrast in the scene of names and re-naming of the "Indians" who are given the vote but, according to Mrs. Murchison, can "never" be trusted (270; see Kertzer, Tough). Despite the narrator's humorous account of the history of Elgin's settlement from which these social principles derive—"Any process of blending implies confusion to begin with; we are here at the making of a nation" (79)—the novel's first chapter is very clear about "where to draw the line" (80).

Recurrent scenes that address names and naming recall the first person to whom we are introduced in Elgin: Mother Beggarlegs. The novel not only

discourages inquiry into the gingerbread vendor's "antecedents, or even circumstances" (43), it also undermines further inquiry by commenting thus on her *name*: "And why 'Beggarlegs' nobody in the world could tell you. It might have been a dateless waggery, or it might have been a corruption of some more dignified surname, but it was all she ever got" (43). While the "untrounced young male[s] of Elgin" shouted "insultingly 'Old Mother Beggarlegs! Old Mother Beggarlegs!'" Elgin's "[s]erious, meticulous persons called her 'Mrs.' Beggarlegs, slightly lowering their voices and slurring it, however, it must be admitted" (43). Yet recognition of the "wizened black" that "derisively exposed her" also particularizes her identity. There are two ways, then, in which the name "invests" her with far more significance than is suggested by the "graceless, anatomical interest" to which others' use of this name reduces her in young Lorne's sympathetic eyes (43). Indeed, this anatomical interest, drawing attention to what twentieth-century federal rhetoric will call "visible" difference, actually facilitates inquiry into her antecedents and present circumstances.

As Maureen Elgersman notes, "re-naming . . . was one of the important aspects of the seasoning of slaves" and "one of the most basic tenets of the institution" of slavery (8). In this sense, Canada's history with the peculiar institution begins as early as the re-naming of the second known Black man to arrive in (what would become) Canada, "Olivier LeJeune, named after the trading company's clerk and the priest who taught him his catechism" (Elgersman 7). (That this name is French does not obviate the need for attention to the continued presence of Black people and slavery in British North America after France's defeat by Britain, though the defeat allows Duncan's narrator to be particularly ironic about, when not dismissive of, the French presence in Elgin; e.g., 80). That no one in Elgin knows the gingerbread vendor's actual name, or how she came by her current name, suggests that the history of slavery in Canada was history deliberately forgotten by Duncan's representative Canadians in the last decades of the nineteenth century, even though the loyalty to Britain echoed in Lorne Murchison's characterization goes back to the migration of United Empire Loyalists (UEL) with their slaves and free Black men and women who fought alongside the British against the US colonies in the American War of Independence (see, e.g., Hill). One UEL ally in particular, Joseph Brant, Mohawk leader of the Six Nations (the novel's Moneida "Indians") after whom Duncan's birthplace, Brantford (the novel's Elgin), is named, brought Sarah Pooley, a Black domestic worker, from the US to the Six

Nations reserve with his family (Elgersman 92-93). White descendants of white UELs are identified in the novel: for example, Squire Ormiston, the Indian Agent (treated sympathetically), as well as the patrician forerunners of UELs, the Filkin sisters (treated less sympathetically, with their French connections), who come from "Nova Scotia" (81) where African diasporic roots run deep. But the narrator reserves her affection for John Murchison, an immigrant from northern Scotland, and his family, who illustrate the rapidity of the upward mobility enabled in Canada in the final decades of the nineteenth century, i.e., the period between John Murchison's emigration and his family's current success.

The novel's citation of refugees from the American Revolution (and the War of 1812) leads us to a likely answer to why the name "Beggarlegs." In "The Question of 'Begging': Fugitive Slave Relief in Canada, 1830-1865," Michael Hembree notes the following of the migration of free Black people and fugitive slaves into Canada West from the US: "once the fugitive slave crossed the Canadian border, the question of aid became problematic. . . . Many Northern free blacks had the opportunity to prepare for their move to Canada," but, "For the fugitive slave, fresh from the Southern plantation, the ordeal of the escape did not end at the Canadian border. Fugitives often arrived exhausted and destitute . . . Their needs were genuine, and the flood of refugees in the early 1850s overwhelmed the existing sources of aid" (314-15). Given that "By 1860, the black population of Canada West had reached at least forty thousand, and probably three-quarters of that number were fugitive slaves," the need for assistance was great, but "the numerous appeals tested the limits of Anglo-American philanthropy" (Hembree 315, 317). Whether or not Mother Beggarlegs was a former slave, her place in Elgin at century's end—making and selling cookies and taffy—satisfies a colonial sweet tooth formed by the transatlantic trade in slave-made sugar (see Mintz).

In the context of a novel that considers the *future* of the transatlantic circulation of goods and profits, and particularly the question of charity in the form of taxes and tariffs, it becomes equally interesting to learn from Hembree that fundraisers for the relief of Black settlers in Canada "tapped philanthropic sources in the Anglo-American antislavery network" (316). Similarly, given Lorne's early sentiment for Mother Beggarlegs and his later political interest in protectionism in foreign relations and economic policy, it is pertinent to learn that philanthropic protectionism entered into the refugee relief efforts when the needs of Black immigrants became greatest after 1850 with the Fugitive Slave Act: some American anti-slavery

advocates insisted that relief be directed only towards free Black men and fugitive slaves who stayed in the US, while British abolitionists "kept their contributions within the empire" (Hembree 317). Thus, when Duncan's narrator tells us that "such persons [as Mother Beggarlegs] contributed little to the common good" (43), the irony deepens at how we are introduced to Lorne Murchison via his sympathetic response to the unfair treatment of the gingerbread vendor. His boyhood sympathy, and his later desire to ameliorate the circumstances of England's poor through trade protectionism, represent his failure to understand the incompatibility of government economic policy with social relief.

Meanwhile, evidence and memory of Black settlement in Canada West, and its antecedents in slavery and racism, seem to have been reduced to this sole Black presence in Elgin, a representative of "the group of odd characters, rarer now than they used to be, etched upon the vague consciousness of small towns as in a way mysterious and uncanny" (Duncan 43). Perhaps old Mother Beggarlegs' rarity speaks to how after 1865 (the end of the American Civil War), some sixty percent of Black refugees had returned to the US precisely because they did not find Canada free from racism (Thomson 46-47).

Workers and Smutty Faces

By repetition and association, Mother Beggarlegs also functions in relation to forms of May 24, "Victoria Day," celebrations that are not only frowned upon by Elgin's polite society as excessive, but also ironically exposed to indicate how such celebrations in the colony have less to do with felt sentiment for the Crown and more to do with conspicuous consumption.

> Such a day for the hotels . . . such a day for the circus . . . such a day for Mother Beggarlegs! The hotels, and the shops and stalls for eating and drinking, were the only places in which business was done; the public sentiment put universal shutters up, but the public appetite insisted upon excepting the means to carnival. (Duncan 45)

But "Polite society . . . preferred the alternative of staying at home and mowing the lawn, or drinking raspberry vinegar on its own beflagged verandah; looking forward in the afternoon to the lacrosse match" (47). With typical ironic implication, the narrator leaves it to readers to draw the line at impolite society, but in case we need instruction, she takes to the sidewalk to observe the public appetite on this Queen's Birthday.

From an aside on the scale of "discrimination" and "choice" at Snow's ice cream parlour—"(Gallantry exacted ten-cent dishes, but for young ladies

alone, or family parties, Mrs. Snow would bring five-cent quantities almost without asking, and for very small boys one dish and the requisite numbers of spoons)" (45)—the narrator moves seamlessly to a cautionary tale about unintended semiosis. Ever alert to how Elgin draws its lines, she distinguishes between a "soft felt hat," worn by a pastoral Corydon in search of a mate (45), and "a dark green one, with a feather in it" (46): "here was distinction, for such a hat indicated that its owner belonged to the Independent Order of Foresters [IOF], who would leave their spring wheat for forty miles round to meet in Elgin and march in procession, wearing their hats, and dazzlingly scatter upon Main Street" (46). Here is the caution: "It is no great thing, a hat of any quality; but a small thing may ring dramatic on the right metal, and in the vivid idea of Lorne Murchison and his sister Advena a Robin Hood walked in every Independent Forester" (46). As Misao Dean explains, the IOF was a "non-profit 'fraternal' society that offered sick benefits, disability, and death benefits to subscribers. It was promoted in Ontario in the 1880s by Peter Martin (Oronhyatekha), a physician born on the Six Nations reserve near Brantford" (Duncan 46 n1). This example of co-operation represents what factory workers' unions would try to secure from owners, so we shouldn't be surprised that the narrator ironically remarks on Lorne and Advena's reading thus:

> Which shows the risks you run if you, a person of honest livelihood and solicited vote, adopt any portion of a habit not familiar to you, and go marching about with a banner and a band. Two children may be standing at the first street corner, to whom your respectability and your property may at once become illusion and your outlawry the delightful fact. (46)

Respectability and property are the cornerstones of capitalist democracy and polite society, and not to be risked in the short or long term! By the time Lorne is in his twenties, these values will be sufficiently developed in Elgin to tilt the election to a victory for free trade and a defeat of Lorne's vision by which taxes would redistribute the wealth among "the British race" (Duncan 225).

But there is an undertow to the irony here because it opens a gap not only between the narrator and her characters, to which the criticism has richly attended, but also between the narrator's pedagogy, her obvious affection for the Murchisons, and the historical knowledge available through figurative language and semiotic movement. This undertow gathers force in the structure of Chapter One, where significance is produced by relations of synecdoche and contiguity, by association and proximity. The narrative moves metonymically from respectability and property, to illusion and outlawry, to an excursion by train that crosses the border into the US; it

features the working classes who arrange their own "deal" to take this train and the phenomenon of "social combination" that can lead to a decline in standards and social distinctions.

Treated with characteristic irony, the May 24 train excursion in Chapter One is nevertheless different in tone from the ironic narration of an earlier period of social mobility in the Dominion, i.e., before the rise of factory manufacture and the migration of Black people from the American South to the American North. In that earlier period, which is narrated in Chapter Five, grandsons of former aristocrats "married the daughters of well-to-do persons who came from the north of Ireland, the east of Scotland, and the Lord knows where. It was a sorry tale of disintegration with a cheerful sequel of rebuilding, leading to a little unavoidable confusion as the edifice went up. Any process of blending implies confusion to begin with" (Duncan 79). But Chapter One's narration of possible "social combination" of the middle class with Elgin's factory workers must be understood in the temporality of the novel's election plot *in the present* and in the cultural geography of anti-US sentiment. That the period of "unavoidable confusion" is in the past, is distinct from the achieved progress of Elgin's middle class who are now a generation or more beyond the period of "unavoidable confusion," provides a degree of nostalgia for mercantile capitalism: "The valuable part of it all was a certain bright freedom, and this was of the essence. Trade was a decent communal way of making a living, rooted in independence and the general need; it had none of the meaner aspects" (80). But in the period of Lorne's childhood—that is, at the time of his encounter with Mother Beggarlegs in Chapter One—Old World class attributes are being redistributed across Elgin's growing middle class in such a way that the lines of social distinction are drawn, on one side, at a declining aristocracy associated with Britain, and on the other at wage slaves, associated as they are with the northern US terminus of the Grand Trunk Railway. These lines of distinction are made visible in Chapter One's account of how *im*polite society celebrates Victoria Day: the account of the May 24 train excursion will end with "smutty faces" of factory workers, an aristocrat's son who "loved stoking," and a middle class that will decide against proximity to either social extreme (47).

To demonstrate Chapter One's semiotic movement from Mother Beggarlegs to metonyms for "blackface" entertainment, to the evidence of upward mobility of the Murchisons, *and* the spatialization of this movement across the Canada-US border, I quote at length below. Note how money is not only an actual object that changes hands; it also literally and figuratively

modifies and classifies the people it touches by whether or not they have it, how they have acquired it, and how they choose to dispose of it:

> A cheap trip brought the Order of Green Hats to Elgin; and there were cheap trips on this great day to persuade other persons to leave it. The Grand Trunk had even then an idea of encouraging social combination for change of scene, and it was quite a common thing for the operatives of the Milburn Boiler Company to arrange to get themselves carried to the lakeside or "the Falls" at half a dollar a head. The "hands" got it up themselves, and it was a question in Elgin whether one might sink one's dignity and go as a hand for the sake of the fifty-cent opportunity, a question usually decided in the negative. The social distinctions of Elgin may not be easily appreciated by people accustomed to the rough and ready standards of a world at the other end of the Grand Trunk; but it will be clear at a glance that nobody whose occupation prescribed a clean face could be expected to travel cheek by jowl, as a privilege, with persons who were habitually seen with smutty ones, barefaced smut, streaming out at the polite afternoon hour of six, jangling an empty dinner pail. So much we may decide, and leave it, reflecting as we go how simple and satisfactory, after all, are the prejudices which can hold up such obvious justification. There was recently to be pointed out in England the heir to a dukedom who loved stoking, and got his face smutty by preference. He would have been deplorably subversive of accepted conventions in Elgin . . . (Duncan 46-47)

The normative position from which a middle-class perspective narrates the new social distinctions for the Canadian nation is evident in several places here: for example, in the reduction of the efforts of a socialist collective, the Independent Order of Foresters, to a feature of their appearance ("Green Hats"); in the synecdoches by which "hands" identify workers and "half a dollar a head" reduces people to financial units in a statistical herd; in the pun on "common" that typifies the undignified behavior of factory workers who take part in "social combination," and arrange for a reduced price for it, too; in the explanation that people from the industrialized northern US (the "other end of the Grand Trunk"), among whom are also many Black economic migrants from the US South, are unlikely to understand "the social distinctions" of their betters in Elgin; and in the "obvious justification" of prejudices both against and within factory workers about their proximity to the Blackness of slavery.

If we needed a succinct tutorial on the parameters and stakes of restoring "social distinctions" out of the "social confusion" of the Dominion's past, on the consequences of the shift from mercantile to industrial capitalism, and on the future implied for Canada, we would find it here in this small sketch of the transatlantic circuitry in the nation's making. This sketch includes a reference to how working for factory wages was once considered a form of

slavery for white workers and how the white practice of blackface managed such anxieties among a new working class (see Roediger, Antwi "Lack", Ferguson). Like the aristocrat who chooses stoking and a black face, those smutty faces of the boiler factory *aren't really* Black people; but neither are they to be mistaken for or considered equivalent to the white middle class. That Duncan's contemporary readers would have recognized the everydayness of these racialized citations here is confirmed in a later chapter by her use of the phrase "cake-walk," where the narrator once again brings together a taste for manufactured goods (86), "the propriety of mixture" (87), and Lorne's first encounter with his political adversary, the Conservative Walter Winter: "Voting on purely party lines, the town had lately rewarded him [Walter Winter] . . . by electing him Mayor, and then provided itself with unlimited entertainment by putting in a Liberal majority on his council, the reports of the weekly sittings being constantly considered as good as a cake-walk" (87). Originating in pre-Civil War plantations, the cake-walk became enormously popular in minstrel shows in the last decades of the nineteenth century: a dance competition in which a cake was often the prize, it is the origin of such turns of phrase as "takes the cake" and "piece of cake" (Gandhi).

From the streets of Elgin, Canada, then, to the US end of the Grand Trunk Railway, to a British aristocracy in decline, and the Canadian factory worker on the rise, this cross-border, cross-class, and transatlantic excursion by which Duncan shows us the spectrum of Elgin's social values demonstrates figuratively the epidermal limits to social blending permitted in the Dominion.

Names and Naming, *Redux*

The narrator seamlessly turns from the public face of this Victoria Day to the private sphere of the Murchison kitchen for our first detailed introduction to the whole of the Murchison family and their circumstances at the time of Lorne's adolescence. Here we find

> one of those domestic crises which arose when the Murchisons were temporarily deprived of a "girl." Everybody was subject to them in Elgin, everybody had to acknowledge and face them. Let a new mill be opened, and it didn't matter what you paid her or how comfortable you made her, off she would go, and you might think yourself lucky if she gave a week's warning. Hard times shut down the mills and brought her back again; but periods of prosperity were very apt to find the ladies of Elgin where I am compelled to introduce Mrs. Murchison—in the kitchen. (47-48)

In the history fondly remembered by the narrator in Chapter One, the Murchisons "could never have afforded, in the beginning, to possess it [the

aristocratic Plummer Place], had it not been sold, under mortgage, at a dramatic sacrifice" (60); the family has yet to prove that they are not only "of" but "in" Elgin (60). Yet, they *are* nevertheless typical Elgin householders in their "domestic" crisis, *and* they are also not the only Elginites who desire—and go after—the opportunity for upward mobility. The servant gone for the May 24 holiday, "the Murchisons had *descended* to face the situation" (48, emphasis mine, since the narrator will shortly emphasize another pun that slips the family by in their distress at the injustice of the servant's actions):

> Lobelia . . . had scurvily manipulated the situation—her situation, it might have been put, if any Murchison had been in the temper for jesting. She had taken unjustifiable means to do a more unjustifiable thing, to secure for herself an improper and unlawful share of the day's excitements, transferring her work, by the force of circumstances, to the shoulders of other people, since, as Mrs. Murchison remarked, somebody had to do it. Nor had she, her mistress testified, the excuse of fearing unreasonable confinement. (48)

When Mrs. Murchison discovers that the "girl" did not finish the ironing before she left, "Five shirts and *all* the coloured things" (48), the word coloured, coming so soon after "fearing unreasonable confinement" (the servant wasn't shackled, after all, but she did escape), takes on a different function in the complex play of racial citation established by the presence of a Black woman in the novel's first sentence, five pages before.

The Murchison family's sense of injustice on this day, and the astonishment with which Mrs. Murchison meets Advena's explanation that the servant left because "She objects to rag carpet in her bedroom" (48), will dissipate quickly, however, in Mrs. Murchison's nostalgia for the days when her rugs were made by her own hands (i.e., when she couldn't yet afford manufactured ones):

> "Rag carpet—upon my word!" . . . "It's what her betters have to do with! I've known the day when that very piece of rag carpet—sixty balls there were in it and every one I sewed with my own fingers—was the best I had for my spare room, with a bit of ingrain in the middle. Dear me!" she went on with a smile that lightened the whole situation, "how proud I was of that performance!" (48-49)

The injustice is felt most keenly in the narrational temporality—the space of nostalgia—between Mrs. Murchison's past when she could not afford more than a rag carpet made by her own hands and the current moment of not getting her just returns on capital expended in hired help, especially now that she configures herself as one of the servant's "betters." The narrator, with self-reflexive irony, takes the opportunity to introduce the names and

naming of the Murchison children into this space, and therein she returns to injustice, a topic first raised in reference to Mother Beggarlegs. Its treatment, however, will continue to be humorous and to present the Murchisons, and especially the young Lorne, in the best possible light.

The story of the names and christenings of the Murchison children segues seamlessly from that earlier time when Alexander Mackenzie "roared" at his christening to his

> weeping now, at the age of seven . . . behind the wood-pile. His father had cuffed him for importunity; and the world was no place for a *just* boy, who asked nothing but his *rights*. Only the wood-pile . . . stood inconscient and irresponsible for any share in his *black circumstances*. . . . Poor Alec's *rights*—to a present of pocket-money on the Queen's Birthday—were *common* ones, and almost *statutory*. How their father . . . could evade his *liability* in the matter was unfathomable to the Murchisons; it was certainly *illiberal*; they had a *feeling* it was *illegal*. (50-51, emphases mine)

This vocabulary of legal statutes and rights would have been prominent in those American newspapers that John Murchison is typically reading (alongside local and British periodicals) when we see him in the family home. The circulation of such vocabulary that Duncan employs so ably here was an effect of the American Civil War and Emancipation, though we also know that such rights (e.g., of African Americans to vote) were selective and unstable. When talk of rights gets Alec nowhere, Oliver turns to the language of money: "Eph Wheeler, he's got twenty-five cents, an' a English sixpence an' a Yankee nickel. An' Mr. Wheeler's only a common working man, a lot poorer'n we are" (51).[4] Failing to shame his business-owning father into liberality, Oliver turns to inflation as justification: "Give us our fifteen cents each to celebrate with. You can't do it under that . . . Crackers are eight cents a packet this year, the small size" (51). When inflation fails, Oliver consults his siblings and comes back with a final offer: "'Look here, father,' he said, '*cash down*, we'll take ten'" (52). Oliver's attempts to speak business, like Alec's understanding of a right to pocket money, are as naive—but telling about everyday discourse—as the young Lorne asking old Mother Beggarlegs "sociably one day, in the act of purchase, why the gilt was generally off her gingerbread. He had been looking long, as a matter of fact, for gingerbread with the gilt on it, being accustomed to the phrase on the lips of his father in connection with small profits" (43-44). Oliver and Alec will come to understand that business is business, not kindness, not sociability, not philanthropy, and certainly not a limited form of socialism of the sort Lorne the Liberal candidate thinks he will find in Imperial economic

protectionism. They will in time become the "sons" in "John Murchison and Sons" (Duncan 57), but Lorne will have to be rescued by the narrator, and "not without emotion," from a convalescent oblivion (Duncan 296), a final proof that "A sentiment of affection" for Britain is "unrelated to current conditions . . . an anachronism of the heart" (Duncan 90).

But in his boyhood days, the redistribution of Lorne's modest wealth worked. Chapter One ends with an IOF form of co-operation in miniature to enable the children to celebrate this 24th of May holiday. Lorne pools his own earnings of "thirty cents" with Alec's "four cents," and his mother secretly tops up the fund so that "the Queen isn't going to owe it all" to Lorne (53). Lorne's selfless leadership in this childhood scene of redistribution of resources, like "his kind attempt at colloquy" (44) with Mother Beggarlegs, will not survive his double defeat, in courtship and in politics, at the novel's close, when Lorne's own "black moment" (294), in which he utters an imprecation, just as Mother Beggarlegs did (44), requires the narrator's intervention.

Irony upon Irony

"Even Duncan's penetrating and clever irony does not get in the way of her fondness, or ours, for the Murchison family and their fundamentally intelligent, honourable ways," observes Teresa Hubel (438). As the abundant scholarship on *The Imperialist* attests, Duncan and her narrator are as much individuals as their characters are, and whether or not we see the narrator as inseparable from Duncan, her predilections and taste for irony are omnipresent and provide as much of the enjoyment of the novel as the humour at her community's expense. As such, the narrator becomes one of those "individuals, rather than bureaucracies, nations, [or] governments," in a novel about "processes of colonization and the ideas of imperialism in the past" (Devereux 188). The gap between the narrator's pedagogy and the knowledge history provides—the gap through which I locate some of the deeper ironies tied to Mother Beggarlegs and "etched upon the vague consciousness of small towns as in a way mysterious and uncanny" (Duncan 43)—may be more than a means to see how the text "inscribes and problematizes its own sense of power" (Devereux 188).

While *The Imperialist* is Duncan's only "Canadian" (and canonical) novel, like her other works it is also a novel of international relations, and one that defines *Canada*'s antecedents explicitly in transatlantic and cross-border terms. Mother Beggarlegs signals the presence of peoples of African descent in British North America in ways that ironize not only "the moral

advantage" in which our imperialist hero believes, but the moral sentiment with which Duncan's narrator invests him when introducing him through his "kind attempt at colloquy" (44) in a marketplace encounter with Mother Beggarlegs. But getting this irony, as well as being alert to its implications as productive of an unrecognized source of ambivalence in Duncan's novel, also depends on recognition that Mother Beggarlegs is a person descended from the African diaspora of slavery and a businesswoman whose wares contribute to the community, despite the narrator's assertion that "it was clear that such persons contributed little to the common good, and, being reticent, were not entertaining" (43).

The scholarship on the novel has amply addressed its narrator's skill in irony and, more recently, the novel's amnesia and ambivalence (e.g., Dean, Coleman, Kertzer) about its settler-*post*-colonial "white liberal guilt" (Devereux 188). I have tried here to attend to how this amnesia and ambivalence circulate beyond the Indigenous past and presence these scholars have addressed in the novel, to descendants of both enslaved and free people of the African diaspora whose relationship to the history of southwestern Ontario and the colony speaks in particular ways to Elgin's politics *and* Canada's present. The irony deepens when we keep a sufficient distance from the narrator's irony to recognize how, between the past of John Murchison's arrival and the story's present in which Lorne's ideals are defeated, seamless shifts in narrative temporality work against recognition of how the Murchisons are no longer "too good for their environment" (76). Their attachments to Empire in the novel's present have become, like the Milburn-Filkins'—even though wielded with none of the UEL's ostentation or snobbery—a matter of symbolic capital, no more.

By remaining alert to the transatlantic and cross-border dimensions of the novel cited through Mother Beggarlegs' presence and the cues we are given in Lorne's boyhood relation to her—wherein, despite his sympathy, his naive use of a business trope only reminds Mother Beggarlegs that despite her freedom, her profits are small indeed—we may find in microscopic detail the foundations and practices of white liberal guilt. "The politicization of personal life," a process Jon Kertzer illustrates in an example of the novel's "interplay of romantic and political loyalties" (14-15), occurs, then, not only in relations between characters *in* the novel but between the narrator and reader, between narration and what gets narrated perhaps beyond the narrator's control—but not beyond a reader's ability to learn. In this sense, the "here" of the making of a nation is always also "now" in the act of

reading this novel from the past, in the politicization of personal life between the narrator, history, and a reader.

The Imperialist is productive of reading our own time, after the media coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement was displaced—and the gains for African Americans by two terms of the first African American presidency—by the election spectacle of an openly racist President of the United States. The increasingly public acts of overt racism in the US draw renewed attention to the question of Canada's perceived moral advantage. And renegotiations of NAFTA, this time with the US taking the protectionist position and Canada promoting (as the majority of voters in Duncan's novel do) the advantages of freer trade for all, provide a new layer of irony to the reading of a novel justly celebrated for its irony.

NOTES

1 Duncan frequently uses this adjective, e.g., pp. 58, 83, 92. The OED defines "go-ahead" as follows: 1) "*colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*). Displaying or characterized by eagerness to proceed with something; headlong; (sometimes) hasty, precipitate"; and 2) "*colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*). Displaying or characterized by initiative and energy; enterprising; receptive to or enthusiastic about new ideas, progressive; (more generally) associated with or expressive of entrepreneurialism, enterprise, etc." The term's origins in the US fit the narrator's sympathy with Lorne's anti-US, pro-Imperialist election position.

2 See Chapter 9, especially, for Dr. Murchison's calculations.

3 See, for example, the scene of the naming of the Murchison children in Chapter One (49-50); the citation of the names Delarue and Leveret in relation to changes to "lines of demarcation" in Elgin's history in Chapter Five (79-82); and the names under which the novel's Indigenous characters were christened and vote in Chapter Thirty-One (274).

4 Note the transatlantic denominations of the amounts.

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dee Hobsbawn-Smith

Cassandra the Seer

—after the 1895 marble bust by Max Klinger, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

i. Within my ears the bells of the universe toll the deaths
of all I know—my city, my brothers, my own.
The bells announce our lives, from birth to passing,
fabric woven from sound,
warp and weft resonating into the future.

Within my ears is past and yet to come—
cracking walls, fires, soldiers bent on brutality, my city
falling
into antiquity, to be re-found in a later century
I cannot imagine—

as treasure uncovered spoonful by spoonful,
revealing our walls, golden urns, the masks of our
conquerors.
Nowhere will be found a lyre, tuned
to the key of the heavens that sounded only for me.

ii. My marble eyes cloaked,
a hood of clay that protects me.
I was cursed to walk a corridor set with many windows
onto eternal night, cursed to know—
when I breathed in the light
from the temple garden for the last time,
when I stood above my city, upraised arms ignored,
when I said what must be said despite
the deafness all around,
when I told the death-hours
before they were rung.

Apollo's vengeance—his temple snakes curled against me,
found my neck, my armpit,
then both ears, slithering tongues
clearing out all static, all the resonances-yet-come
amplifying in my head like clappered bells.

It drove me mad. So the soothsayers claimed, ousted
from their spot at the Trojan royal table,
usurped by the King's red-haired sprig
with voices in her head. It was they who sowed the seed
of stigma, rumouring Apollo's favour—granted, then denied
as I denied him my body—a woman's prerogative,
yes, but a god's revenge—to know, to be heard, but disbelieved.

iii. I heard Death before it came to Hector, the sword's hiss
as it opened my brother to the dogs,
the pop of tendons severed,
the drag and dust as Achilles hauled his corpse.

Enough to keep me in the world of madness,
in the rape of war. *Beware of horses* I said.
Madness they answered *she's mad,*
just look at her eyes.
It took no insurgent Trojan Horse,
no fires, no falling walls,
to crack the glazed clay of my eyes.

My own death, I already knew—rape in Athena's temple,
a half-life as slave, concubine, and in a far-off land, I will die,
seeing the axe-blade fall before it
                                fells me.
All-seeing eyes, ears that hear, o treacherous tongue,
unbelieved. My world, spinning to its end,
and no one listening.

iv. How many words for pain? for loss? death? suffering?
Draw your lines up after you, bind your wounds—
peace is a foreign land worth visiting.
War comes, I tell you this, I tell you.

How many? Numbers beyond counting,
bodies of babies drowned in the sea, lost women, ravaged men.
Razing of a jungle, bombing of a town. Death
by radiation, by orange fire blossoms, by insensate drones.
War comes! Bind up your wounds. Bind them,
and bind yourself to the mast, again we sail toward war
and again, no one attends to my words.

Draw up your lines. Listen! Do you hear me?
Within my head, the raging voices,
temples fallen upon me, snakes sinister,
and none to listen. Bind up your dead, bind up
the jaws of Hector. Peace is a foreign—none shall heed.

v. Lost among other warnings,
another small brown girl,
solitary in her tent, looks into the dead faces
of her parents, seeing only sky
where war rides on the backs of drones,

only her own irises reflected, alone
in her fear of what lurks outside the walls—the road to Death
entirely imaginable. The warnings,
nightly on the six o'clock news, repeated at ten. Peace is—
and still you don't heed me.

Robert David Stacey

"After Rain" Again
P. K. Page and the Labour of Others

> I simply don't want to work for a living. I'd like to sit on a cushion and write a fine poem.
> —P. K. Page, qtd. in Sandra Djwa's *Journey with No Maps*

In 1971, A. J. M. Smith could begin an essay on P. K. Page's poetry by lamenting the lack of critical attention given to her work (17). Today, the situation is quite altered, and the critic who wishes to engage with Page's writing finds him or herself dealing with a highly mediated object; few Canadian writers (and even fewer poets) have received the kind of sustained, intense, and polyvalent study that Page has. In her introduction to a 2014 issue of *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* dedicated to Page's work, Emily Ballantyne acknowledges the somewhat crowded field of Page scholarship by noting that Page "is one of the most studied poets of her generation"; indeed, the volume she is introducing takes its place beside the "hundreds of scholarly essays, [and] several special issues and collections" already published (5).

No doubt there are multiple factors fuelling all this industry—including the fact that Page was a very fine poet whose compositions continue to reward careful attention. But we must also recognize that if Page has emerged in the last few decades as one of the most discussed and revered of Canada's modernist poets, it is partly because her work lends itself to what has been established as an essential paradigm in Canadian modernist criticism. I refer to the oft-repeated claim that an inclination towards subjective, personalist self-disclosure and prohibitions against the same emanating from the quadrants of international modernism (presided over by the likes of Eliot and Pound) produced a tension that is in some sense constitutive of the Canadian poetry of the 1940s and 1950s that we call modernist. A dominant narrative has consequently developed around Page's work that derives its explanatory power from this basic opposition: "Critical consensus

supports the identification of two opposing styles in Page's early work, contrasting the objective portrait poems with those relating to more personal themes" (Swann 181). In 1971, Smith had wondered whether "the effort to discriminate between the subjective and objective elements in her work . . . has been thought by the critics too unprofitable or found too fatiguing" (17). Ironically, it is precisely a perceived tension between subjective and objective "elements" in Page's work—whether read diachronically across her career or synchronically within specific works—that has proved infinitely "profitable" to Page's critics.[1] This view is now so established that it conditions nearly every reading of the poet's work regardless of the more local concerns and methodologies of particular critics—whether these are biographical (Djwa, Pollock, Sullivan), feminist (Killian, Rackham Hall, Swann), thematic (Jamieson), literary-historical (Essert, Hickman), ecocritical (Relke), or materialist (Irvine).

The *locus classicus* of this now institutionalized narrative of personalism and impersonalism in conflict is surely Brian Trehearne's long chapter on Page in *The Montreal Forties* (1999). Arguing that "a constitutive irony for most poets of the period lay between their innate and historical urges to self-affirmation and self-expression, and their stylistic compulsion to modernist self-erasure" (45), Trehearne depicts Page as a poet whose eventual transition "away from impersonal poetics" demanded first a complete poetic breakdown and a "prolonged period of silence" before she could reinvent herself as a more open, accommodating, and "sympath[etic]" poet (100). "[T]he Page who resurfaced in the mid-1960s," following a ten-year "silence" in which she turned to painting rather than poetry for expression, "was a stylistically different poet" (45), writes Trehearne, for whom the change indicates a dialectical resolution of the tensions that had previously defined her work. This story of crisis, breakdown, and eventual transformation furnishes for Page criticism an attractive resolutionary narrative of personal transformation and of obstacles overcome through struggle, the seeming credibility and coherence of which, in turn, validates the original terms of the inquiry—that is to say, modernism and its "constitutive ironies" and oppositions: objectivity vs. subjectivity, personalism vs. impersonalism, aesthetic distance vs. sympathy, and so on.

It's not a story I like very much. For one thing, it obscures contradictions both internal and external to Page's poetry that she could never have hoped to overcome, least of all in individualist terms; for another, it obscures *consistencies* that run throughout her work, across the impersonalist

and personalist divide that is meant to separate her early work from that following her middle silence. Finally, it validates a narrative of modernism that I take to be especially destructive to a fuller understanding of Page's poetic project and its politics—for which the question of style is somewhat (though not entirely) beside the point. In what follows, I attempt to tell a different story—a story about the relationship between poetry and labour—that should cast Page's work in a new light while simultaneously casting some doubt on the utility of literary modernism as an explanatory framework *tout court*.

The following analysis is deeply influenced by the political and aesthetic philosophy of Jacques Rancière. For Rancière any discussion about the meaning of particular art works or kinds of art works must begin by inquiring into the conditions that enable that work or those works to announce themselves to us *as art* in the first place. As he puts it in an interview with Gabriel Rockhill, "The visibility of a form of expression as an artistic form depends on a historically constituted regime of perception and intelligibility" (*Politics* 50). The world is full of objects and products, but only some of those appear to us as *artistic* objects and thereby invite the special kind of attention we reserve for them. Insofar as literary-critical practice is predicated on a sense of the art object's 'special' or 'exceptional' status among human productions, it relies on and manifests the complex network of ideas, customs, and feelings that produce art as a distinct category of experience and knowledge. Rancière's name for the currently dominant "regime" in accordance with which certain kinds of objects become visible and available to experience as art is the "aesthetic." He reads the aesthetic regime as a historically specific configuration of the sensible world, one that differs from previous modes by identifying art, not according to the properties of its objects or rules governing their production, but by virtue of its bearing witness to the existence of a separate "realm" of sensations and experiences that are to be enjoyed *in their difference* from the sensations and experiences of the workaday world. The aesthetic, in other words, delineates a heteronomous and supplementary world—a place of imagination, a "free" space—and, as such, divides up the social world in a particular way.

We tend to take an idea of the aesthetic for granted, but it is a historically determined concept. Unavailable to thought before the eighteenth century, the aesthetic presented itself and continues (under some duress) to present itself as a distinct "sensorium," an autonomous "region of being" (Rancière, *Politics* 27).[2] It can therefore be understood as another world within the

world, one which has the capacity to reveal that world in its difference to itself, hence the paradoxical politics of the aesthetic that simultaneously asserts its independence from the rules and hierarchies and norms of the common world while proposing somehow to affect or alter those structures from its position outside them. As Rancière puts it, the aesthetic is precisely that sensory experience that "holds the promise of both a new world of Art *and* a new life for individuals and the community" (*Dissensus* 115; emphasis mine). Every possible definition of the aesthetic—including even that anti-aesthetic which rejects the possibility of a distinct sensorium by declaring the end of all outsides (usually because global capitalism has colonized every sphere of human activity)—arises within the context of this originary paradox. What Rancière calls the aesthetic regime therefore simultaneously enfolds and cuts across more specific periodizations including Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism, which name the general patterns that negotiations of the aesthetic paradox have taken but do not constitute in themselves fundamental departures from the underlying logic of the regime itself.

To the extent that the preceding is true—and I see no reason why we shouldn't at least entertain the possibility that the notion of literary modernism "prevent[s] a clear understanding of the transformations of art and its relationships with the other spheres of collective experience" (Rancière, *Politics* 26)—then we are invited to see how Page's literary crisis speaks within and to a particular regime of art, an aesthetic *ideology*, the logic of which precedes and exceeds both personal style and modernist critical tropes. At the same time, the aesthetic regime names a kind of experience (the feeling I am feeling when I am feeling "this is how art makes me feel") that can only take place in specific, local encounters with particular works. As Rancière puts it, "Art's difference only exists insofar as it is constructed case by case, step by step, in the singular strategies of artists" (*Dissensus* 179). What interests me here is how, exactly, Page conceives of the aesthetic experience and the "strategies" she adopts in order to realize or validate that experience in words.

* * *

"After Rain," as Laura Killian wrote in 1996, is "a poem universally recognized by her critics as a pivotal Page poem" (97). As one of the last poems Page wrote before her publication hiatus, "After Rain" figures prominently in discussions of her work as the embodiment of the "crisis of subjectivity" (Irvine, "The Two Giovannis" 35) or "creative impasse"

(Rackham Hall 39 n10) that would eventually produce a radically different poet—one, the drift would have it, more worthy of our approbation. First published in *Poetry* in 1956, the poem is set in the garden of the Canadian embassy in Australia where Page, wife of the High Commissioner, lived between 1953 and 1956. After a night of rain, the embassy garden has been attacked by slugs and snails that have eaten up most of the plants. The poem has two human figures: Page, the poet, and Giovanni, the embassy's gardener. Page self-consciously, and the poem self-reflexively, stages a contrast between the poet's imaginative embroidery, which transforms the ruined garden into a *locus amoenus* of radiant beauty, and the gardener's deep sense of disappointment and dismay.

> The snails have made a garden of green lace:
> broderie anglaise from the cabbages,
> Chantilly from the choux-fleurs, tiny veils—
> I see already that I lift the blind
> upon a woman's wardrobe of the mind.

The poem continues:

> I suffer shame in all these images.
> The garden is primeval, Giovanni
> in soggy denim squelches by my hub
> over his ruin
> shakes a doleful head.
> But he so beautiful and diademmed,
> his long Italian hands so wrung with rain
> I find his ache exists beyond my rim
> and almost weep to see a broken man
> made subject to my whim. (*Cry Ararat!* 18)

Though ashamed of having transformed Giovanni's loss into her poetic gain, the speaker nevertheless remains unable to break from her aestheticizing gaze, such that the gardener's "ache," though acknowledged, remains "beyond [her] rim."

Critics have been especially interested in Page's use of the first person and her confession-like admonishment of the "female whimsy" that leads her to entertain the images that block sympathetic understanding.[3] Indeed, by juxtaposing the metaphorical wit of the first few stanzas (whose rhymes are strongly reminiscent of Marvell's "The Garden") with the "squelch[y]" reality of Giovanni's sorrowful pragmatism, "After Rain" acknowledges a conflict that had remained unresolved in the whole of her work up to and including itself. I agree with most critics that the poem speaks to a crisis, but I read

that crisis as arising from an attempt to render, as art and in art, activities and objects upon the very exclusion of which the aesthetic regime has historically depended: namely, non-creative labour and its material products.

On this count, the publication history of the poem is interesting. The version that appeared in *Poetry* in 1956 ends with an apostrophe to the garden's birds on Giovanni's behalf:

> O choir him birds, and let him come to rest
> within this beauty as one rests in love,
> till pears upon the bough
> encrusted with
> small snails as pale as pearls
> hang golden in
> a heart that knows tears are the half of love. (*Poetry* 101)

Here, the best the poet can do is invite Giovanni to see things her way and to transpose himself into her world, to join her "within this beauty." Page later restored a dropped final stanza (which was part of the original composition but which she was convinced to suppress for *Poetry* on the advice of her friend Floris McLaren who thought it too hokey[4]) for the poem's republication in *Cry Ararat!* (1967). In that version, the presumption of the (now) penultimate stanza is counterbalanced by an admission of her own shortcomings and a desire for change:

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size
> larger than seeing, unseduced by each
> bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
> so that the whole may toll,
> its meaning shine
> clear of the myriad images that still—
> do what I will—encumber its pure line. (*Cry Ararat!* 19)

Dean Irvine argues that the repatriated final stanza constitutes an "attempt at a closing rapprochement between her poet-persona's impersonalist poetics and Giovanni's sentimentality, a "whole" in which she contemplates the integration of the sentimental and the aesthetic, the personal and the impersonal, in the image of her "heart a size / larger than seeing" ("Two Giovannis" 36-37). Likewise, Killian argues that "After Rain," by giving voice to "the poet's subjectivity," registers "a very serious critique of modernism's anti-sentimental and anti-subjective stance" (98) that constitutes a "primary step" towards "a new wholeness of vision" (100). More recently, Michele Rackham Hall has suggested that the poem stages a conflict between geometric modernism (which she aligns with "impersonality")

and "biomorphic modernism" (which she aligns with "personality" and subjectivism) and attempts to reconcile these "two modernist aesthetics" (37)—a reconciliation Rackham Hall argues Page eventually achieves in her poetry after a foray into visual art, where she could "grapple with the modernist dichotomy more directly" (37).

I choose these examples because they are cogently and convincingly argued, but also because they echo or anticipate Trehearne's authoritative reading of the poem's final stanza, which he likewise presents as an earnest, but consciously unsuccessful, attempt to unify contraries, the full significance of which, he argues, would only become clear after her "prolonged middle silence" (41) and her subsequent achievement of a more inclusive and "coherent" poetics of "whole[ness]" (77). Rather than read "After Rain" through a set of oppositions supplied by Modernist theory or Page's own personal testimony, however, I want to consider how the poem maps the terrain of poetry's place in the world. How does it attach its subjects and objects to concepts that, in the words of Rancière, "partition the sensible" (*Dissensus* 36) world and coordinate affect with understanding?

To begin answering this question, I would point out that Trehearne's reading basically neglects Giovanni's subordinate status (he is not quite Page's employee, as he works for the embassy, but she is the High Commissioner's wife and a figure of authority at the embassy, especially with respect to household management) and, more crucially, downplays the status of the garden's fruits and vegetables (pears, cabbages, cauliflowers) as *produce*, the objects of his labour. Trehearne moralizes Page's failure to fully sympathize with Giovanni by noting that the poem's oppositions "divide two people whose mutually disappointed labour in the garden might be uniting them" (44). But that's not right. The labour never was "mutual," nor is Page's speaker disappointed. *Giovanni* is disappointed because his labour has been undone and it will be up to him, not Page, to rectify the situation as best as possible. As the speaker herself makes clear, the wrecked garden is "*his* ruin" (18; emphasis mine). The speaker, though guiltily cognizant of Giovanni's pain, and wishing she might reconfigure her poetic perspective so as to better incorporate his experience, never does attempt to read the garden as the site of *labour*, mutual or otherwise.

Like most of Page's critics, Trehearne is no less preoccupied than Page herself with the work of the poet's imagination and therefore takes the aesthetic realm, that "sensible element torn from the sensible" (Rancière, *Dissensus* 173) as a given. But if we recognize the garden as a site of both this

poetic work *and* the gardener's more material labour, the lines of the conflict are redrawn: for at issue in the poem is not only, perhaps not even, whether a depersonalized poetics must necessarily eliminate the basis upon which to make sense of and render Giovanni's pain, but whether the plants and trees could ever be treated simultaneously as both objects of labour and as objects of poetry. Or, in what amounts to the same thing, the poem questions whether the poet and the labourer can ever occupy the same ground.[5]

To get at this question, we need to recognize in "After Rain," and in Page's work more generally, the workings of a cultural logic that enables the effects and affects through which art manifests itself as a recognizable domain of experience and meaning and which subtend a work's politics *prior* to any subsequent ideological expression on its part. The objects of art, notes Rancière, are defined by their belonging to a "specific sensory experience" (*Dissensus* 179). The essence of the aesthetic

> lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible. I call "distribution of the sensible" a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed. The partition of the sensible is the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*) . . . . A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (*un commun partagé*) and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience. (*Dissensus* 36)

In speaking of a "partition" of "the sensible," then, Rancière refers simultaneously to a division of occupations within social life, an affixing of particular kinds of experiences to particular times and situations, and the process by which occupations, situations, and experiences are coordinated with organizing concepts that give them their "sense" in its dual aspect as a *felt* notion.

When we recognize that it is the implicit function of every work of art—to the extent its creator wants it to be apprehended *as such*—to validate itself *as art* by effecting a "partition of the sensible" whereby it establishes its proper domain and signals the appropriate "mode of perception" for its correct use and enjoyment, then we are in position to identify a more pressing tension at the heart of "After Rain." While Page was capable both before and after "After Rain" of writing what we might call subjective poetry, she was never capable, and perhaps never wished to be capable, of reconciling the world of labour with the world of art precisely because her aesthetic was constituted by way of its exclusion of and "difference" from labour and labourers. In other words, the boundary where labour and poetry meet but do not mix is precisely the "rim" that draws the charmed circle enclosing the aesthetic

experience and defining the realm of the poet. "After Rain" merely reaffirms the incommensurability of these two spheres of knowledge and experience; it is a meditation, admittedly a heartfelt and self-recriminating one, upon "art's difference." As such, it enforces the impossibility of mixture, overlap, or interpenetration of labour and art, the very hygiene upon which the aesthetic regime depends.

Page, we all know, was obsessively attached to an idea of the aesthetic understood as an autonomous world of total coherence and immanent meaning, a world she terms variously as "another realm," "another world," a "higher order," a "luminous circle" ("Traveller" 35-40), an "other world" (*Planet* 59), a "hidden room" (*Planet* 51), a "secret place" (*Planet* 51), "another space," (*Planet* 96), "another dimension" (*Planet* 100), a "never nether land," (*Planet* 161), a "higher realm," "another order" ("Writer's Life" 18, 22), a "dreaming world" ("Questions" 19). In "Dot," she calls upon the merest artistic gesture, a point on a page, to

> Hurry me to spaces where
> my Father's house has many dimensions.
> Tissue of tesseract.
> A sphered sphere. (*Evening* 90)

These examples are taken from Page's poems and interviews across a wide chronological range. Her delineation of the artistic experience as belonging to "another" territory, space, realm, or zone that transcends the ordinary world and its obligations and constraints is remarkably consistent. In her versified "Address at Simon Fraser" (1991), she locates this "sensorium" somewhere

> beyond materiality,
> beyond the buy-and-sell, beyond the want
> embedded in us . . . . (*Planet* 86)

Art matters, she insists, because to be granted access to this place "beyond" is to be made "whole again" (*Planet* 86). Thus, by asserting "wholeness" as the supreme value for Page's poetics, Trehearne and other critics merely redraw the uncrossable line between art and life, poetry and praxis, that Page's work had endeavoured to inscribe "case by case, step by step" throughout her long career. I do not wish to be misunderstood: I am not saying that "After Rain" attempts to invalidate Giovanni's experience. On the contrary, I am merely suggesting that the poem, being the kind of poem it is, jettisons that experience to the realm of what Peter Bürger calls "the praxis of life" (49), with which the poem's own work can never quite coincide. This is not a

question of "style," nor even a question of modernist form, but a question that concerns the very category of "art" as such.

Anticipating Rancière's correlation between the development of capitalism and the emergence of art as the object of an autonomous sensory experience under the "aesthetic regime," Bürger explains the aesthetic "realm" in terms of the division of labour which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century capitalism established as paradigmatic:

> If experience is defined as a bundle of perceptions and reflections that have been worked through, it becomes possible to characterize the effect of the crystallization of subsystems resulting from the progressing division of labor as a shrinking of experience. Such shrinkage does not mean that the subject who has now become specialist in a subsystem no longer perceives or reflects. In the sense proposed here, the concept means that "experiences" the specialist has in *his partial sphere* can no longer be translated back into the praxis of life. . . .The aesthetic experience as a specific experience . . . would in its pure form be the mode in which the shrinkage of experience as defined above expresses itself in the sphere of art. Differently formulated: aesthetic experience is the positive side of that process by which the social subsystem "art" defines itself as a distinct sphere. Its negative side is the artist's loss of any social function. (33; emphasis mine)

Here, we have a very useful framework for understanding the crisis in "After Rain" in historical terms: what the poem expresses is precisely the shrinkage and untranslatability of experience between "partial spheres" of specialization. It was the emergence of a new aesthetic logic in the eighteenth century, first described by the likes of Kant and Schiller, and later popularized by German, French, and English Romantic writers, that replaced an idea of the artist as maker with an idea of the artist as a kind of affective specialist—someone who could see and feel the world in an alternative way: hence the emergence of play, the imagination, freedom, disinterestedness, and purity in the dominant discourse surrounding artistic production and enjoyment. It was at this moment, a moment that coincided with the establishment of wage labour and the capitalist division of labour as the Western norm, that it became possible to speak of a "realm" of art. By becoming a "specialist," the artist (whether poet, painter, dramatist, or composer) gains access to this realm, but at the cost of forfeiting art's continuity with the common world.

Reframing the conversation around "After Rain" along these lines tends to confirm Wendy Roy's sense that the poem not only grapples with a limitation on the poet's capacity to actively sympathize with others but to deliberately "express socio-political concerns" (61). Even so, Bürger's argument that the

artist-cum-specialist "los[es] any social function" (33) needs to be qualified. While it may be true that the artist who functions in accordance with the logic dictated by the "aesthetic regime" withholds his experience from the "praxis of life"—or rather, posits the experience of art in terms of its non-identity with the time and space of ordinary living—it is also true that art's value has been seen to reside in that very condition of apartness. As Rancière explains, art "in its very isolation" may conceive of itself as "the guardian of the promise of emancipation" (140).

With respect to Page, who in a 1979 interview tells Jon Pearce that her art is "a memory of Eden, of heaven" (37), we need to recognize the utopian dimension of her practice. It would be along these lines that Northrop Frye, modern criticism's most articulate Romantic—and a powerful influence on both writers and critics in Canada—justified the political value of an otherwise disinterested art.[6] To that extent, Page's poetry manifests a "dissensual" element in the prevailing distribution of the sensible, a splitting off of the world against itself, the assertion of an irreconcilable duality where what Rancière calls the "order of the police" would proclaim only unity. To experience art as value, as Page reminded the graduates to whom her "Address at Simon Fraser" was directed, is to entertain the possibility of a different world, a genuinely real world because it can be experienced, whose logic is not determined by instrumentality and the pursuit of financial gain. Fundamentally free, this other world, by its very nature, embodies the object of an emancipatory desire.

But crucially, this unalienated space of revelation is not *entirely* free, insofar as it remains a contingent one: *internally* undivided, it nevertheless requires a fallen and compromised and unfree *external* world against which to define itself. For Page, this world is supplied, ideally and practically, by the realm of work and labour. (To the extent that the aesthetic can be imagined as a reaction-formation to hegemonic capitalism, this is not at all surprising.) Tainted by money, instrumentalist reason, materialism, social inequality, contractual obligation, self-interest, and, above all, *lack*, the world of work names the "sensorium" from which the aesthetic offers an escape. This assumption underlies Page's poems about female clerical labour written in the 1940s whose critique of the alienating effects of office work depends on a contrast between the freedom of the aesthetic and the constraints of the work day. Recalling Frye's view of the aesthetic as the "power of constructing possible models of human experience" via an imaginative transcendence of worldly necessity (*Educated* 5), Page recurrently depicts her workers as bereft of this faculty:

> some—if you speak to them of a different world,
> a future more like life—become sharp,
> give you their whittled face
> and turn away like offended starlings from a wind. ("Offices" 6)

Killian notes the dismissive treatment of workers in these poems and, sensing the connection between Giovanni and these earlier figures, wonders whether "After Rain" constitutes "an implicit acknowledgment of their failure, now an embarrassment?" (98).

Undoubtedly, Giovanni's presence is unsettling, and the poet's "shame" at her inability to see him as anything other than "beautiful and diademmed" (19) despite his pain is what prompts her double apostrophe to the birds that each may be "choired" into some other reality where they are less divided. The poet's shame here recalls the "guilt" expressed in another Page poem from the 1950s, "Photos of a Salt Mine," which appears to anticipate, in condensed form, the tensions of "After Rain."

> So all the photographs like children's wishes
> are filled with caves or winter,
> innocence
> has acted as a filter,
> selected only beauty from the mine.
> Except in the last picture,
> it is shot
> from an acute high angle. In a pit
> figures the size of pins are strangely lit
> and might be dancing but you know they're not.
> Like Dante's vision of the nether hell
> men struggle with the bright cold fires of salt,
> locked in the black inferno of the rock:
> the filter here, not innocence but guilt. (*Poems* 83)

We might think of the "filters" here, the filter of "innocence" and the filter of "guilt," as indices of aesthetical perception in which the same thing is made to mean differently by way of its translation into art. (Or, we could say, by way of its transposition from one sensorium into another.) As in "After Rain," the admission of guilt relates to the poet's ability to see beauty in what others actively engaged in the struggle to make a living experience as pain and brutality. Despite the poet's self-recriminations, though, both poems exploit the labour of others as part of their attempt to expose the logic of a liberating aesthetic. The inevitable result of this operation is that labour and its material relations must be figured as always and essentially alienated; labour is, for Page, art's absolute "Other," its "outside" that marks its limits and reveals its contours.

In one of the few recent essays on Page's work that does not reproduce the dominant logic of the criticism I describe above, Wanda Campbell discusses continuities between Page's poetics and those of nineteenth-century poet Isabella Valancy Crawford. Focusing primarily on their shared notion of a "hidden room" as locus of the (female) poet's imagination, Campbell stresses the contrast between this space and the demands of household labour. Quoting Crawford, she writes: "Juxtaposed with this private shrine where human need is brought to divine attention is the 'busy, busy cell / where I toil at the work I have to do.'" Page's own celebration of "the presence and power of the hidden room," Campbell argues, must likewise be seen in terms of its implicit and explicit opposition to "the work one [has] to do." This opposition between freedom and constraint, immanence and alienation, "play" and "work," informs and sustains all her poetry.

Whatever problems one might have with this schema, it only becomes a problem for Page when she attempts to write sympathetically about the labour of others, as she does in "After Rain," "Photos of a Salt Mine," and her dozen or so poems about office work. It poses a problem because in these poems Page runs up against the hygiene of her own aesthetic that precludes her (or her poem) from being in two places at once. Having been granted access to the aesthetic realm, Page (or her poem) must always look at the labourer from the other side of an invisible barrier, as it were. It is not quite a question of sympathy (for Page always feels sorry for the worker) but of the possibility of *cohabitation* with the worker, of sharing with him or her a common world. This prohibition has two main effects, one visible at the level of content, the other at the level of form. Thematically, worker and poet can never coincide, whatever the artist's political commitments. Page's poems thus verify what William Empson has argued is a "permanent truth about the aesthetic situation," namely that the "artist" can never "be at one with the worker" inasmuch as she is "never at one with any public" (14). While the restored final stanza of "After Rain" regrets this impasse on the part of the artist, the penultimate stanza more accurately expresses the general tendency in Page's poetry, which is to pity the worker who has been blocked from or denied access to the higher realm of art. If help exists for Giovanni in "After Rain," it is only to the extent that he can—through some leap of the imagination precipitated by the chirping birds—"come to rest" in this heterogeneous experience of "beauty" (19). In crossing over, in translating himself, however, he would cease to be a worker, and become an artist. There is in that word "rest," after all, more than a hint of a respite from

the *travails* of physical labour. Emancipatory change is imagined, but not within or as a consequence of "the praxis of life," only inside and because of a transcendent artistic experience.

True to the logic of aesthetic regime as described by Rancière, art here is not understood as a practice, as something one *does*, but as a way of seeing and being, an affective (corporeal, emotional, intellectual) *capacity to be elsewhere*. "Beyond materiality," art, for Page, is the experience, the perspective, the emplacement but *not* the production. "I'm never terribly interested in the thing when it's finished," she says in an interview with Lucy Bashford and Jay Ruzesky, "[t]he book is the by-product, the evidence of the fact that a lot of stuff went on" (114). Work, all about doing, is consequently denied its historicity as a realm of praxis or working through: it effects no translation. At the level of form and technique, then, poetic composition—the *doing* of writing—must likewise assert itself as non-work, erasing its possible commonalities with other kinds of labour. This is the second effect of art's "difference." In describing the differences between visual art (to which she turned after "After Rain") and poetic composition (to which she returned after a hiatus and maintained alongside a visual art practice), Page declares: "[I]n all essential particulars writing and painting are interchangeable" ("Traveller" 40); they are equally "roads" to the healing "silence" of "another world" (40), "some absolute elsewhere" (40). Thus, the material conditions of artistic production—the means—are downplayed in favour of the ends: that is to say, access to an alternative dimension of affect and understanding. The poem, as textual body or mechanical inscription, is dematerialized in a process of sublimation.

At this juncture, it may be worth pointing out that the avant-garde attack on the aesthetic regime invariably involved a foregrounding of the *medium* of expression. For socialist writers in particular, as Walter Benjamin's criticism repeatedly asserts, the need to revolutionize artistic means and techniques so as to "put an improved apparatus at their disposal" (233) was strongly felt. For a writer who had, at one time, imagined herself to be working towards socialist goals, the contradictions are readily apparent. There is indeed a crisis at the heart of "After Rain," but it is not a crisis of subjectivity: it is the strain of an entire artistic *institution* attempting to reach beyond its logical limit, rendered in personal terms. If this problem appears less acute following "After Rain," it is not because of an alteration in this concept, but simply because, barring a handful of exceptions, Page effectively ceased to write about her own relation to work and workers.[7]

To return to Killian's question as to whether "After Rain" signals a desire to redress the "failure" of her earlier work poetry, I would answer "yes, it does." But not by opening a way, at that time or after her poetic silence, to a rapprochement between art and labour or between the poet and the labourer. Not at all. "After Rain" recognizes a conflict between art and the "praxis of life," but it also accepts it as unresolvable within the logic of an aesthetic regime from which Page was not prepared to break. Far from anticipating an aesthetic departure, "After Rain" announces Page's retreat from art's open exposure to its destabilizing Other and a *fuller* commitment to an idea of artistic experience as occupying a space somewhere beside, above, beyond, behind—but never *in* or *with*—the ordinary world defined by labour and lack. As Laura Cameron argues in her article "P. K. Page's Poetic Silence," the poet who emerged after her poetic hiatus no longer struggled for control in her poems; indeed, she had acquired an "authority" over both her materials and her own sense of vocation by submitting to a "higher organizing principle" (50). *More* romantic, *more* transcendental, *more* mystical—more *purely* aesthetical—this ostensibly new poet had simply withdrawn from her art the disorderly elements that had confounded the poetic ideal that already underpinned both her own thought and dominant literary ideology of her time. She had tidied up her garden and could thus lay claim to the full power and security of the aesthetic regime and its prevailing "distribution of the sensible."

NOTES

1 Douglas Freake's argument that Page's work is structured by a tension between "Romantic" and "Modernist" tendencies such that the projection of a "lonely and lost self, seeking and occasionally finding at-one-ness with the world," is tempered by the Modernist's belief that "self-presentation and exploration" is "the major obstacle to the understanding of social reality" (96-97) represents the basic structure of most approaches to Page's poetry, notwithstanding a variation in terminologies.

2 The uniqueness of the aesthetic regime, argues Rancière, is that it redefined art, which previously had named a given body of practices among other material practices, into a mode of *being* belonging only to art. He writes: "I call this regime *aesthetic* because the identification of art no longer occurs via a division within ways of doing and making, but is based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art. [. . .] In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power" (*Politics* 22-23).

3 The phrase is curious enough to elicit commentary in practically every treatment of the poem, but Relke (1994), Killian (1996), Trehearne (1999), Irvine (2004), Swann (2005),

and Rackham Hall (2014) all connect it to a tension between modernist objectivity and subjective self-disclosure.

4 For a fuller discussion of McLaren's influence on the ending of the poem see Irvine's "The Two Giovannis" (35-38).

5 I concede the point made by one of this essay's anonymous reviewers that Page, as ambassador's wife and household manager, is herself engaged in labour on behalf of the Canadian state—and unpaid labour at that. But it is precisely the complete absence of any reference in the poem, explicit or implicit, to this shared status with Giovanni that makes my point that the poem jettisons labour from the imaginative, aesthetic realm. Page registers some of these concerns in her Brazilian and Mexican journals, but there is no strong indication that she herself regarded these as *artistic* productions. To be sure, it is precisely the powerful logic of the aesthetic regime that arguments defending the artistic status of life writing must confront, and do.

6 This principle is so inherent in all of Frye's work it is almost difficult to come up with a definitive statement. But *The Educated Imagination* begins with Frye separating out the work of the imagination from other kinds of work and assigning to the imagination "the power of constructing possible models of human experience" (5). Thus, while non-artistic labour (everything from farming to science to journalism) deals with "reality," art discovers "the real realities" which "are bigger and more intense experiences than anything we can reach—except in our imagination, which is what we're reaching with" (40). The final goal of art, specifically literary art, for Frye, is political insofar as it models and works towards a final dissolution of the barrier between self and world, and between one self and another. It is fundamentally instructional: "Literature is a human apocalypse, man's revelation to man" (44). In this context, it is also worth noting that Frye praised Page's *The Metal and the Flower* (1954) for its aesthetic "pur[ity]" ("Letters" 132).

7 I thank the reviewers who drew my attention to Page's "Macumba: Brazil" and the later "Custodian." It is true that following "After Rain," Page occasionally wrote poems about work. But the minor presence of this theme—accounting for no more than a handful of works in more than five decades of writing—is in sharp contrast to the theme's dominance in her work preceding "After Rain." But even in these later work poems, the same antimonies that structure "After Rain" persist, though in a muted fashion. "Macumba: Brazil" itemizes the various activities undertaken by locals (some of whom, we presume, are working in the Ambassador's residence) as part of the rites of a pagan festival of the Macumba. The list begins with a series of domestic chores such as might be performed in a grand manor, but progressively names activities far less occupational: "they are dancing to the drums / they are bathed in the blood of the rooster" (*Essential* 40). The poem is driven by a tension between the speaker's point of view, which establishes as normative a difference in kind between bodily energy expended in work and bodily energy expended in the pursuit of spiritual excess, and the apparent unrecognizability of that difference for "them." At the same time, it is the very univocality of this "sensorium," this wholeness, that lends to their praxis something of a poetical quality. And so it may be "the[y]," and not she, who embody poetry while the poet herself, as Page suggested in a letter to Sigrid Renaux, "watched from the sidelines" (qtd. in Chávez 55). The poem remains suspended upon these two possible interpretations, but in either case throws up a barrier between poetry and labour that the poet cannot cross. In "Custodian" Page uses the language of a caretaker's labour to discuss her own ministrations to her aging body, which she "dust[s]," "wash[es]," "guard[s]," "rub[s]," and so on (*Essential* 25). I think the poem represents a

remarkable turn away from what Frank Davey saw in her earlier work as a "severe distrust of the physical universe," leading him to brand her an "anti-life" poet (232). It *is* interesting to see her write explicitly about her corporeal self via a vocabulary of work; but I would point out that the poem does not attempt to represent the work of *others*. Nor does the poem draw attention to its own material processes, the *work* of writing, in any direct way. Finally, I take the fourth stanza, which is placed centrally in the poem, as more crucial to its overall point than the janitor conceit: "It is but matter / and it matters not / one whit or tittle / if I wear it out."

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Rocco de Giacomo

Mon-Fri

for Robert Creeley

I have yet
a name for this
sadness. Step off
the 111 bus

onto the overlow
road. Of all things
in my little world.
The shadows

that glide
the Atlantic, far
outside the
choices

I have made. Have made me
a fixed point, my face attached
to the phone. I don't care
I say to no one. Every

8:00 AM. In a minute
I'll forget more ocean
than what these sea-
gulls will ever see. And

there is power
in this. Hunch
the morning
into a black box, walk

across the empty
lot into the near-vacant
school. Not sadness
I say to no one.

Defiance.

Ben Hickman

Location and Address in Vancouver's New Poetries of Place

Wayde Compton, Peter Culley, Meredith Quartermain

To read Vancouver's contemporary poetry is to be located. That is, the poets of the city present place as dialectically poised between a here people live in and a node in a total web of economic, historical, and geopolitical relations—between place as the solid ground of embodied social fact and as the fluid mobility of changing interconnections. The model of this dialectic of here and elsewhere is, as he has been for much British Columbian poetry for half a century, Charles Olson, whose address is Gloucester, Massachusetts, and who addresses *everyone* from that shore: "It is undone business / I speak of, this morning, / with the sea / stretching out / from my feet" (57). Vancouver poetry's home address, however, be it in the Downtown Eastside or Hogan's Alley, does not have a single locus, the certainty of place from which a body might project. Its poetry adapts the universal poise of Olson's globalizing manner (however "wind and water" [57] Olson himself fretted that it was at times). And yet it does not simply cease to seek that poise, but tries tenaciously to speak from, to grasp, a place, moving and pluralized as it may be, as a particularity that can encompass the general, rather than in the abstract nowhere of so much late modernist North American poetry. This tense poetics of the foothold is an original and important articulation of early-twenty-first-century locatedness in general, and is how Vancouver's contemporary poetry, as it were, puts itself on the map.

I will illustrate such originality and importance by reading the work of three poets—Wayde Compton, Peter Culley, and Meredith Quartermain—with close attention, but the richness of Vancouver's contemporary experimentalism clearly offers many more poetries to whose variety and

richness I cannot hope to do justice.[1] Conventionally, Vancouver's poetry has been best known for the magazine *TISH* and its heir, the Kootenay School of Writing (KSW): both remain important for the writing of the city now, but the reputation of their avant-gardism, and the critical attention this avant-gardism receives, may obscure the variety and diversity of new writing of place.[2] The voices of several writers of colour, for example, are currently decisive: Cecily Nicholson's *From the Poplars* (2014) speaks the inaudible inaccessibilities of Poplar Island in ways that resonate with the gendered, racialized, and classed exclusions of place; Marie Annharte Baker practices a raucous identity-making and breaking that eyes Vancouver "awry"; Rita Wong ecologically grazes "ground to push against, red earth, / bloody earth, stolen earth" with the ambitious aim "to turn english from a low-context language into a high-context language" (12, 11). All are important practices that are not discussed below. Nor are, quite differently, the many alternative forms of agitational poetry emerging that look beyond avant-garde traditions: the projects of Stephen Collis, Jordan Abel, Christine Leclerc, for example, which all suggest varied ways of approaching the so-called "politics of poetry" quite different to the late modernism of *TISH* and KSW.[3]

As for how one might describe these writings collectively, we can speak broadly, perhaps too broadly, of a new, fourth stage in Vancouver's changing poetics of place. Warren Tallman describes the more mainstream "personal localism" of the 1950s and 1960s as concerned with "the place where *you* are," whereas more adventurous poetries would be defined by "the *place* where you are" (67, emphasis original). The poetry of the 60s and 70s, coalescing around *TISH*, may be characterized as the adaptation of an Olsonian poetics, in its local-global dialectic mediated by the figure of the coast, to a British Columbian context.[4] Next, KSW developed the avant-garde orientation of *TISH* poets at the same time as it rejected the supposed localism of Olsonian poetics, and particularly its anchoring in lyric voice: a shift, as Stephen Morton has put it, from location as "a place from which to speak . . . to a shifting relation of political antagonism" (156). I want to suggest that some recent poets are rethinking place as a site of the shifting antagonisms and relations *from which one speaks*. I will claim, finally, that this poetics of place, of locatedness, constitutes an important contribution to more international tendencies towards a post-avant-garde.

Vancouver, in the poetry that follows, is defined by what we might call a moving marginality. The canonical concept for critical accounts of literary Vancouver is already, of course, the periphery. All of the accounts listed in

this essay's first endnote, with the possible exception of Christian Bök's, place marginality at the centre of the potency and distinctiveness of Vancouver's experimental poetry scenes. But this conviction also extends to later poets whose work comes out of such scenes, though Vancouver itself may not be their subject, such as in the work of Culley:

> Because Vancouver historically has had no effect on literary establishment, energy that in a more "sophisticated" literary centre would be devoted to defeating rivals for power and maintaining free-masonic levels of exclusion, was able, when it finally emerged, to percolate immediately to various levels within the larger community. . . . Cut off by its eclecticism from the CanLit mainstream, Vancouver writing managed to remain both peripherally active in and centrally important to the life of the city itself. (Culley, "Because" 194)

Other accounts, of course, see "CanLit" itself in terms of marginality.[5] This is a notion that articulates the historical importance of marginality to British Columbian poets, the distinctive sense of the place as not fully Canadian but certainly not American, as away from cultural centres but also geographically a kind of West beyond the West beyond the West (and in more recent transpacific cultural studies, also a kind of East beyond the East). Marginality has also, however, been a sometimes heroizing, voice-in-the-wilderness gesture, often tied to problematic identifications of experimental poetics with Vancouver as a supposedly empty place.[6] The poets below, through figures of exile and arrival, boats and roads, walks and trains, refigure marginality as a mobile, historical condition, defined by exclusions from and/or compulsions by modern currents of movement. Movement in these poetries inevitably means, distinct from the self-enclosed narcissism of more influential accounts of Vancouver like Douglas Coupland's, a centrifugal looking outwards. They speak to Vancouver as a port town, a unique place of transit and migration, a place with waves of displacement and rapid development, and a zone of shifting borders. The rapidity of the turn to real estate speculation, from the production of things to the market in space through an unprecedented mobilization of global capital flows, puts Vancouver in a vanguard of urban development globally—one meaning, perhaps, of descriptions of the city as "a model of contemporary city-making" (Berelowitz 1).

Bonds: Wayde Compton

Wayde Compton's two books of poetry, *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999) and *Performance Bond* (2004), explore how a black population came to and lived in Vancouver: in the latter what was once known as Hogan's Alley in Vancouver itself, in the former various places where black migrants from

San Francisco settled or passed through on their way. Compton is the founder of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project, an organization concerned with the historical reclamation of the now destroyed area of Strathcona that once made up perhaps the most ethnically diverse neighbourhood in all of Canada but now survives only "on the periphery of public memory."[7] He is, then, preoccupied with place, with how so-called urban renewal is often another term for black removal and with arrivals to particular destinations. He also, however, rejects place as a metaphysics: there is no single placing that will unlock Compton's complex black identity, and so the emphasis in these two collections is consistently on journeying: "when your destination / is the crossing / how do you know / when you've made it?" (*49th* 146-7).

The concept repeatedly undone in *49th Parallel Psalm*, for example, is home. In one dramatic monologue, an exile thinks on setting out for BC: "I notice / no one uses the word *home*" (41, emphasis original). This homelessness is directly a function of racial oppression, as Compton explains in a poem that is also a set of directions for hide-and-seek: "and remember: if you're It, you have to go out looking, you can't just hang around Home Free. absolutely no Home-Sucking" (63). Place is where black bodies get lost, as on landing at Victoria, but still ungrounded, *on the way* to Vancouver:

> gettin lost
> in the act of racing,
> gettin got
> in the act of chasing,
> becoming behind
> in the act of arriving . . . (75)

Compton refuses, and is refused, a single place-bound identity that would be untrue to this black experience and reinforcing the fragmentation that oppression relies on ("snow white screams of // *back where you came from*" [170, emphasis original]). At the same time, however, he is anxious to locate these oppressions and exploitations in particular places and movements. Speaking oppression as the operation of global but material forces, Compton registers black British Columbian experiences within the wider and changing relations of the African diaspora even as he articulates lostness in its precise locations, communities, and lives. The aim is to mark the place where black subjectivity can be "in // deep" as well as "a circle of out / casts" (59): tenaciously existing where it is, but conscious that this placing only acquires meaning from its centrifugal rippling out into relatedness.

"Bluer Blues" offers such a dialectical sense of place most distinctly. Taking its starting point as "the water in / which you wade" (165), the poem

defines the city by water and flow rather than rootedness (as many earlier poems did, most notably Daphne Marlatt's 1974 *Steveston*). The land does allow for place-based identifications, as Compton connects "the blues" with the blue of Vancouver's mountains, but even here we see the characters "drowning // under // the mountains and their wishful blue" (165). That is, the identification, despite the singularly grounded landscape feature of the mountains, is still with a watery sense of place, a sense Compton soon makes more generally historical:

> and if one more some
> body asks me where I'm from today
> I'm gonna offer,
>
> 'out there in that ocean
> where you left me
> when you drifted away. I got no'
>
> better response. (165)

The question of an originary *where* is rejected through tropes of water: the speaker is "from" the middle passage, "out there in that ocean," where s/he was left by the white interlocutor. A more ambitious sense of location then unfolds, in which place does not merely have a history but is fundamentally historically constituted:

> see, as kids we spun
> the globe closing
> our eyes, going,
> 'here
> gonna be my home.' globe rolling
> on a plastic axis . . . (165)

Black exploitation is connected to and indeed animates, as labour, a world network of flows and forces. Spinning and spun, black subjectivity attempts to stop the "here" to pin it down and to turn it into something approximating a home, but the effect of the suspended line is to make the word vulnerable, exposed, before the globe rolls on again. Home here is struggle: tragic, blinding, utopian, dynamic.

Conditions of displacement cause Compton's speakers to guard against feelings of settling. Even after arriving and finding a "place," the exiles of *49th Parallel Psalm* become again the displaced residents of Hogan's Alley, the principal subject of *Performance Bond*'s main long poem, "Rune." Place as *locus*, as a meeting point of moving flows and antagonisms, is emphasized at the same time as there is a struggle to find a foothold in that locus, to find a

place to speak from and from which to speak this instability. This is vividly the case in the section "Wild Style" (146-47) and its story of an "old bluesman [who] made his way to Vancouver and settled down," which unsettles almost immediately by figuring virtuosity as "mak[ing] your *guitar* sound like that *train*" (146). Here the story expands to explore the energies of today's North American black culture, the "Grandkids of the bluesmen" that spray paint on trains:

> making nonblankness, signing, singing, singeing
>
> like they did in NYC in the seventies: script on walls
> mimicking the effect on the eye of glimpsing text stationary
> from the elevated train, electrifyingly passing, script anticipating
> the blur in the still: futurist blues atomized
>
> plain, pseudonymous, acronymous, vertical, writers
> unholdable, purposeful, loseable, the audience, pieces,
> commuters,
> reading a mussed lucidity mutable (147)

Black Vancouver's experiences of transit have become a writerly method here, and graffiti's predominance on and around trains a metaphor for mobile and responsive black cultural forms, "plain" but "atomized," "purposeful" but "unholdable." The necessary dynamism of this culture is inevitably connected to much wider currents, and to a more general articulation of "the blur in the still": an underlying "new uncanny fluid through the concrete" (147).[8]

Behind this story is the particularity of Hogan's Alley. Already a marginal throughway in its very name, destroyed by a viaduct but also dependent as place on work at the train stations nearby, settling and transit form an uneasy dialectic here. Mobility's trumping of settling is a function of black displacement, and Hogan's Alley makes this question specific: what Olson never had happen in Gloucester, nor even Marlatt in Steveston, was the place they memorialized disappearing even as architectural trace. Going to the site of Hogan's Alley now is frustrating because there is almost nothing left, not just as place but even as space—there is no "alley" to be found at all. Compton searches for a way of articulating this singular removal, of what was there and how it is gone—of making it, as "Rune" puts it, "lost-found" (122). In this, Compton's work grapples with the dialectic of place as a nexus of moving relation and an actual site of living, articulating the tensions of wanting, as poet, to fight for or "find" the place of settlement, however temporary, and to insist on the manner in which contemporary Vancouver displaces, marginalizes, and allows for changing identifications with place.

Letters: Peter Culley

Peter Culley is interested in very different but related issues of marginality in his trilogy, *Hammertown* (2003-2013). In the immediate, this marginality is twofold: Culley's work emanates from the Vancouver poetry scene, as he characterizes it above, but he more literally speaks from a small city, Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island. From these immediacies, Culley is more generally concerned above all with address: the place from which one speaks, and where one speaks this place to—discovering his address, his being where he is, by speaking to another address, out there. This dialectic is at the centre of Culley's project from the start: Hammertown itself is the Parisian Georges Perec's fantasy of a snowy Vancouver Island fishing port from his 1978 novel, *Life: A User's Manual*, and so the gesture of the title, renaming Nanaimo, alienates what is ostensibly "home" for Culley.[9] Hammertown is also a real place, however, described by Culley in meticulous detail:

> Only the densest
> dentist insect overtones
> dare drop into the valley
>
> from the Sunday construction
> so impatiently at ten begun above
> though the rate of such things
>
> varies more than you'd think:
> some build as if session men
> called out by the union
>
> to short time the undergrowth
> for the Xbox simulation
> of the Birth of Skiffle, others
>
> as if flown in on Blackhawks
> to build an interrogation centre
> five days ahead of the army. (*The Age* 76)

The beginning of one of Culley's many "Letters from Hammertown," this is a scenic poem. Far from painting a significant single scene that might form a backdrop to an emotional event, however, Culley articulates a site of simultaneity in which straight talking in the William Carlos Williams tradition gives way to a complex relatedness, opening a landscaped nature up to industrial relations, imperial violence, and popular culture. These elements are not so much united as brought into proximity by Culley, and yet the effect is one of consistency, of one image meaningfully following another because seen, heard, and spoken from the same position in the world. Really the precursor is not Williams or

even Olson but Leopold Bloom, looking from the outside in, moving through and making relations as he goes, at home nowhere but constantly located and self-locating. Even seemingly random movements are seen to cohere as "[o]dd patterns / and congruences / of traffic" ("The Provisions," *Hammertown,* 6). Hammertown is a particular material spot in a global sphere of relations—a place in the sense that, as Culley puts it in the second poem of the whole series, "matters convene / under the heading / 'infrastructure'" (6).

Following *The Maximus Poems*, *Hammertown* takes the letter as its main form. Olson's letter-writing stakes a claim to address, consciously speaking from one place and projecting its voice across a variety of distances, sometimes overbearing, sometimes compelling in its vatic scope. Culley inherits this conscious positionality in which address is the *where* of language, and yet his *where* faces somewhere quite different and therefore addresses itself quite differently. In general, though this address looks predominantly eastwards from a margin out west. Hammertown is much less a single place with a singular history, but an insignificant site of ephemera, economic decay, and rapid so-called development—a place caught between other places—that might nonetheless serve as an emblem for twenty-first-century experiences of location.

Parkway, the final book of *Hammertown*, shows this positionality best. It asks, as its title implies, about the relation of a place to movement. The central question is this: how does one refuse the pastoral idyll of a traffic-less place, but at the same time refuse to abandon place to random traffic and the pure flow of non-place? One poem answering this question is the book's first, "A Midsummer Cushion," where we find Culley standing by the eponymous parkway, a part of Highway 19 completed in 2001:

> Sam, the patch of woods
> where I "found" your
> razor scooter is officially no more,
> save for this wan mohawk of alderpoking scrub—
>
> walked past today a grader
> working over the loamy slash
> like a chimp taking notes
> . . . *a matter of hours.*
>
> Trees to landscaping as books
> to decorating; ominous clutter, obscene.
> Peeps asleep inside or cooking cabbage
>
> in the air where once I'd stood,
> looking around for the "real" owner,
> a shaven hedgeloafer out of Thomas Bewick

the last cheap real estate mid-Island
a chain of similarly
smoking copses, knotted

perpendicular oak meadow
crime scenes, Pepto-Bismol swamps.
Mountain Dew—

coloured spring growth
on the tree tips edible
according to Tony.

Sam and Tony could be omitted from this poem and many of its observations would still stand, so what difference do they make? Most obviously, addressing his memorial of an "officially no more" place to a friend, Culley refuses the classically romantic inward turn from a disappointing world, rather opening outwards towards a sense of place as a relation between people. From here, Culley's poem tries to grasp place as at once moving with the world and real in its particularity. At a banal level, the poem is against parkways, seeing in them a "confection" that attempts to remove artifice and direct vision toward a picturesque so-called nature to be smoothly passed through. Like the viaduct in Compton's work, parkways sacrifice place for mere circulation. Landscape ceases to be a site of encounters, industry, and traces—"crime scenes, Pepto-Bismol swamps. / Mountain Dew"—becoming a non-place that is driven through as a series of "decorations" intentionally unconnected to a wider environment. Culley's address corrects this negation of place by grasping what is outside but still a part of the parkway, as in the final mention of "Tony" in the context of speaking to Sam. We end up with a rougher, proper mobility of place, something beyond movement as abstract circulation: a razor scooter, after all, is a vehicle, but here it is, as a real relation between friends, something that can be weighted with memory, solidarity, connection.

Earlier British Columbian poetry often has a similar preoccupation with roads, from Brian Fawcett's *Cottonwood Canyon* (1985) to Gerry Gilbert's bike poems, but Culley is different, I think, in that the road is not a romanticized venue for free movement, but something one speaks by the side of. The pathos of the lines above comes mainly from their being a marginal conversation: the word "Sam" itself, as address, is sorrowful because it sounds like a compensation for the desolate loneliness inspired by the "grader" killing the scrub. This "wan Mohawk" speaks, as we will also see Quartermain do in a moment, to an Indigenous context of

tenacious persistence otherwise "officially no more." The identification may be problematic, but it is affirmative rather than tragic; the response to the disappeared and disappearing margin Culley experiences here is "wan," but it is still "alderpoking," still *there*, still curious, holding on. For a British reader like me, the adaptation of Olsonian poetics to Culley's geography is particularly striking, since the inheritors of Olson in the UK have generally been preoccupied with London, a place that remains central even in its post-imperial malaise and decay. Culley's reference to Thomas Bewick above, a minor Romantic regionalist of Newcastle, is not incidental: Nanaimo represents a regional space on the periphery one can commit to because one *needs* to reach out from it (as Newcastle does in England). It is, in Culley, a locatedness from which to see, and to see locatedness as defined and redefined by its relation to elsewhere.

Walks: Quartermain

Meredith Quartermain's *Vancouver Walking* (2005), like the work of Compton and Culley, is primarily interested in routes. It is within this interest that we see a striking development of, and argument with, the Poundian poetics Quartermain's work only seemingly models itself on—a poetics that has typified other would-be comprehensive poetic accounts of the city, such as George Stanley's superficially similar but much more classically ideogrammatic *Vancouver* (2008). In Quartermain's routing, that is, we witness both a return to and divergence from the Poundian-Olsonian models of place poetics that have dominated so much Vancouver poetry. My discussion here will centre on one of those routes, from the long poem "Walk for Beans," which heads from Campbell Avenue up to Powell Street and over to Victoria Drive.

Walking raises questions of duration. Ever since Wordsworth, the walk has moved thought, so to speak, and spaced it in time. Having recreated Quartermain's walk myself, reading the text as a kind of tour guide, I learned that the duration of my reading of the text roughly coincides with the duration of the walk. Furthermore, each stanza in "Walk for Beans" and the other walks in the book forms a unit of thought lasting for around a block. Clearly, in its mobility, this is not as Poundian as the book's ideogrammatic style might otherwise suggest: history is not apportioned a meditational hypostasis emanating from a singular consciousness; it is "here on the frontier of where this is going" (24), moving with city life (of which Quartermain is part in walking purposively *for* something, even if only

coffee beans). In this, though, there is a paradox between the etymological stanza (where one stands) and the Quartermain stanza (where one walks):

> Victoria and Hastings
> gas station, public school, Owl Drugs & Post Office
> Sandwich Farm. Lattes.
> lunch counter tacked on the back of the building
> anything you can sell to keep going
>
> Lowertown 1920s
> Rosa Pryor started her Chicken Inn:
> *I couldn't afford to buy but 2 chickens at a time—*
> *I'd run my husband over there to buy the chicken*
> *he'd just cut them up right quick*
> *I'd wash them*
> *get them on frying*
> *I'd commence talking,*
> *"Oh, yes, yes, so and so and so,"*
> *talk to take up some time*
> *I'd see him come in, then I'd say*
> *"well, I must get those chickens on."*
> *I'd get him to pay*
> *Say to my husband*
> *"Now, you get 2 more"* (25-26)

The beginning of this excerpt, marking place-names, is the structuring unit of the poem—such moments of orientation are the text's measure, its punctuation: "outside again, corner of Victoria and Powell / grey brick Hamilton Building and the Princeton Hotel dock side" (28). The text moves as it walks through place, improvising in the manner of the two-chicken anecdote, making do with the city's markings as it goes. And yet, Quartermain has stopped to register this story, to reach back to quite another temporality: in this case, one overlapping with Compton's, referring to Rosa Pryor of Hogan's Alley, the first black woman to own a business in Vancouver. Throughout, the poem is anxious, as it passes and orients itself in the present, to recognize and foreground the histories that have led to its current flow. These are often histories of violence: "khupkhahpay'ay, the Squamish called that place / on the shore of our now Vancouver / Cedar Tree" (26-27). As Zoë Skoulding has said of the poem, "because the emphasis is on movement, names do not denote static entities but are always placed in relationships, often colonial ones" (23). It is this dialectic of presence and archive, of moving through and reaching back, of observing apparent flow with a consciousness of political power—of, say,

Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* and Pound's *Cantos*—that defines the book's durational signature.

The counter-duration of "Walk for Beans," neither stopping nor walking, is that of the road. Mainly on Hastings Street between Campbell and Victoria, Quartermain moves through singularly inhospitable walking territory, on wide roads busy with often fast traffic, flanked with imposing buildings designed for car access. While the poem's walking shows the potential for a faithfulness to history, a durationality and embodiment of place that can remember and feel living history, this other, parallel mobility represents the bypassing of it in both thought and body. Walking "down through the auto repair joints" that dominate the Downtown Eastside, the poem is much less celebratory, far from the "everything suddenly honks" of Frank O'Hara's city:

> Colour Photo and the coffee shop landside
> Steady roar of traffic rushing toward town
> Or the iron workers' bridge
> crazyman—gray hair flying out
> screams, points up Victoria Drive
>
> RIGHT HERE! RIGHT HERE!
> points down at the pavement middle of Powell Street
> raging yelling
> oblivious to honks and screeches (28)

We are disoriented by traffic here, and the desperation of the madman's "RIGHT HERE!" registers the road as a kind of pure duration, unstoppable and meaningless, merely "raging yelling," and gestures to a pure "here" that, in its inability to register any past, is diffused to a manifold and diffuse elsewhere. Quartermain's walking, indeed, seems to be a corrective response to such mobility-as-transit: the poem's walk is wilfully unpleasant and endured to provide the city with a duration of thought it would not otherwise receive, of which the "steady roar of traffic rushing toward town" is the constant counterpoint.

Quartermain refuses to merely block this traffic out. As much as it bypasses and shouts over the histories of Vancouver, it is also part of the city's fabric and history. Though Quartermain's expansive method is able to encompass suppressed and overwritten existences occluded by official narratives, her poetry is more than a "did-you-know" local history because it also articulates the forces that stymy such memorializing. Down to the poetry's rhythm, history obtrudes rather than explains in *Vancouver Walking*, and the poet does not find composure in it:

Gore Avenue—track of an old skid
Surveyor General of British Columbia
ran from a True Lagoon
to a place between first and second narrows
the Spanish said people called Sasamat
—no translation—
teals, widgeons, shovelers, buffleheads,
scoters, redheads, golden-eyes
blue herons and the *Branta canadensis*
lagooned at Ka wah usks—Two Points Opposite
sawmills, sewage, shacktown
till the railways paved it over. (3)

Quartermain's landscape is subject to revelation but not penetration, concerned less with the historical depth typical of conventional psychogeography than with the historically determined but far less defined movements of the city now. We are presented with "an old skid" rather than an orienting route, untranslatable collisions of language rather than linguistic keys to the city, a medley of particulars rather than an architecture of archetypes. History is unmanageable, obliterating of other histories, and finally unstoppable itself, and yet when dynamically placed in relation and placed in dynamic relation by poetry, writing does achieve a status beyond mere impotence—of, in Fred Wah's formulation on the back of the book, "a kind of naming the city answers to."

Conclusion

This brings us finally to the politics of these poetries. Stephen Morton speaks of the ability of *TISH* and KSW poets to "defamiliarize and interrupt the global flows of capital and the dominant rhetoric of the free market" (158). Clint Burnham, seeing a different method but a similar ambition, describes KSW poetics in terms of an imitative formalism that calls "for a revolution arising out of those very conditions," or "a using of the very tendencies in neoliberalism against their progenitors" ("The Remainder" 43). On the one hand, such claims are true to the modernism and political commitments of the poets they discuss by reading them on their own terms. On the other, poetry interrupting or weaponizing global flows of capital is an unlikely proposition at best, and a quixotic fantasy at worst. Even Jeff Derksen's notion of "rearticulation," in which "resistance" from an "exterior" is rejected for an emphasis on "disarticulating and rearticulating linkages within systems, somehow rearrange [*sic*] structures from within," though it partly registers the limitations of language acts, still conflates poems and political action (with a "somehow" that is revealing

enough), and at root repeats the compulsion toward destructive inside-ness typical of the Language School.[10] "To be critical of a world system," Derksen concludes, "you have to somehow imagine yourself within it, as opposed to barking at it from a local position" (Butling and Rudy 131). The two decisive identifications here—of abstraction with political participation, and of locatedness with outsider fantasy—are bizarre, and show the impossibility of describing contemporary poetries of place within well-rehearsed avant-garde models. I want to suggest that the poetries I have looked at here are post-avant-garde in the sense that they have abandoned a rhetoric of destructive action for a political art of construction, and more precisely the construction of relation. To speak of a politics of post-avant-garde poetry is to speak of connection—rather than an immediate attack on prevailing institutions, we see a constructivist ambition to make what otherwise seem like remote relations alive, available, urgent.[11] All three poets I have discussed, along with many other contemporary Vancouverite writers, seek to make what is *there* (as Other, as an apparently external nature, as seemingly unassailable social fact) newly *here*, animated, related, and responsive. This is both exhilarating and an urgent political truth: the interdependence of each to everyone is now total but also more hidden behind disavowals of these connections and declarations of sovereignty. As Marx put it in the *Grundrisse*, the world market is both the highest form of "the connection of the individual with all" and the point at which we see "the independence of this connection from the individual" (161). A poetry expressive of this dissonance is still on the horizon of negation, but as an "affirmative" form, to use Alain Badiou's term, by which he means the inverse of the negative, destructive negation typical of early-twentieth-century vanguards and avant-gardes: a historical form rather than its universal condition.[12] Through a poetics of shifting locatedness rather than fixed place, and through the organizing metaphor of routes, Compton, Culley, and Quartermain offer an affirmation of Vancouver and coastal BC as a centrifugal node of moving relation and a place where people live, suffer, and resist.

NOTES

1 I should also add that my own experience of both Vancouver and its poetry has also been a mobile one, as an Englishman visiting for only three weeks, an invited guest of uninvited guests on unceded territories. This seems worth registering since, firstly, Vancouver's poetic history, for better or worse, is written by insiders in a way that, say, the New York School never has been; and secondly, because the manner in which non-parochial poetries of place are partly addressed to people who live elsewhere is a fundamental element of their power.

2 Notable examples of these critical histories, more often than not written by participants from within each movement, include: Frank Davey's *When Tish Happens*; Warren Tallman's long essay, "Wonder Merchants"; Peter Quartermain's "Romantic Offensive: *Tish*"; Clint Burnham's *The Only Poetry that Matters*; Christian Bök's "TISH and KOOT"; and Stephen Morton's "A Poetics of Place in the World-System."

3 I will speak briefly of the fate of the avant-garde later, but clearly the three projects mentioned here each take different relations to political action than the more orthodox late modernism of KSW: Collis, in both the *Barricades* project and his work's increasingly direct connections to actual political movements and events, opens up space for thinking about poetry's instrumentalisms; Jordan Abel's conceptualism, depending on your viewpoint, exaggerates or inverts the traditional avant-gardism typical of Language-centred poetries; whereas Christine Leclerc's extraordinary editorial collaboration, *The Enpipe Line*, constitutes a poetics of place as (communal) organizational as it is aesthetic, and even more interested than Collis' work in poetry as localized direct action.

4 The story of Olson's arrival and influence in British Columbia is a subject for another place, but we may here, as shorthand, point to the convergence of a series of events and personalities that laid the ground for it, such as the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, where Olson spoke for around five hours; the arrival of the Olson scholar Ralph Maud, a founding professor of the English Department at Simon Fraser University in 1965, and poet Robin Blaser in 1966; as well as the adhesion to Olson of many energetic poets, like George Bowering, Fred Wah, and perhaps most notably Daphne Marlatt, whose *Steveston* is arguably the greatest Vancouver poem.

5 See Chelva Kanaganayakam's *Moveable Margins: The Shifting Spaces in Canadian Literature*.

6 Tallman, for example, explains how "Modernism caught on in the Canadian west because it was right for the west, where the environment is so open and undefined" (67). For Davey, meanwhile, Vancouver and other nearby cities were "vast empty cultural spaces for one to fill" in the 1960s (61). George Bowering, in a similar vein, speaks of British Columbian poetry as being at "the margin . . . thousands of miles from history" (103).

7 The phrase is that of the artist Laura Marsden, speaking of her "Hogan's Alley Welcomes You" installation of floral text, planted as part of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project in 2007 (see Marsden).

8 This dialectic is echoed in Cecily Nicholson's exploration of the train that runs past Poplar Island, where "place is a while we walk on the bones of all time" (11): that is, where place evinces a tension between passing by and the ambition to present alternative, temporary, "passin" models of ownership.

9 Hammertown appears in Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*, p. 270.

10 I have described this tendency at length in my *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, Chapter 5.

11 The very rough beginnings of a theory of non-avant-garde experimental Anglophone poetry might be found in my "After the Avant-Garde," a paper given at ASAP/9 (Oakland, 2017).

12 In a short lecture on Pasolini, Badiou separates the figure of negation into "affirmative" and "negative" modes. The latter is the "destructive" dimension which seeks the overthrow of existing systems—Badiou's examples are Schönberg's destruction of the tonal system and Marx's dismantling of the bourgeois state. The former, negation that affirms, works in relation with destructive negation, but is distinct from it:

> [T]his new coherence is not new because it achieves the process of disintegration of the system. The new coherence is new to the extent that, in the framework that Schönberg's axioms impose, the musical discourse avoids the laws of tonality, or, more precisely, becomes indifferent to these laws. . . . Clearly, this subtraction is in the

> horizon of negation; but it exists apart from the purely negative part of negation. It exists apart from destruction. It is the same thing for Marx in the political context. Marx insists on saying that the destruction of the bourgeois State is not in itself an achievement. The goal is communism, that is the end of the State as such. . . . ("Destruction")

Negative and affirmative negation are interdependent, but for Badiou they must be balanced to respond to that which they negate: their historical situation. Destruction, Badiou says, is "the very essence of negation" in the twentieth century, both in political practice (Lenin or Mao) and art (Duchamp or Cage), and what we need now, in the twenty-first century, is an account of negation that can be affirmative and world-building.

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David Eso

Trying to Feed the Baby

Trying to feed the baby
someone left on my doorstep (with a little note that says
"back in half an hour") takes longer than expected
because she likes what I've prepared
but enjoys better the sloop and plosh the puree makes
when she swats or knocks it about.

She speaks in gums, an eatspeak
of earnest nonsense, and breaks loose

with excited punctuating screeches:
St. Vitus's cherub, writhing in glee.
Then amid her latest syllabic montage
she says, "re-oxidizing"—clear as mother's doorbell,
giving me a start.

Just that one, hard articulation
like a legbone in her word-salad
that I cut short, asking, "re-oxidizing?"
That stops her but she does not look up.

"Baby, did you just say 're-oxidizing?'"

The next smile is not expressive but to herself.
She looks at her red sippy-cup
breathes a few cycles
then sends it whizzing for the floor.

Margaret Boyce

Taking Cereals Seriously in Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*

In this essay, I revisit Martha Ostenso's 1925 novel *Wild Geese* in order to consider how the framing that literary critics bring to their analyses can either support or disrupt anthropocentric and settler-colonial ideological and discursive frameworks. Throughout the twentieth century, Canadian prairie literature was read predominantly as either regional tales that offer Naturalist representations of human life struggling against the conditions of an inchoate frontier, or as realist texts that convey human dramas that transcend the strictures of place. With its insistence on disregarding hierarchies and viewing humans and other-than-human beings as co-constitutive, ecocriticism can perhaps counter the abstractions of the latter form of realist criticism and allow a return to what might seem to be a more capacious, adapted, and updated Naturalism. Prairie fiction is a genre about settlement, so reading it in a new way is important for supplementing twentieth-century literary criticism as well as for challenging the normative discursive formations that Canadian literary analysis can unintentionally reproduce, such as Lockean notions of individualism and property that have been used to simultaneously ignore other-than-human subjectivity and dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands. Anthropologist Anna Tsing's essay "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species" advances a provocative ecocritical framework responsive to the agency of vegetal life that may be particularly useful for analyses of prairie literature, especially with its attention to the influence of grain crops on human society both at the level of the family and at the level of the state. Tsing's historical and conceptual study is of particular interest because it identifies plants as agents

in burgeoning agricultural societies, insofar as they have shaped human families and directed state policy. This phenomenon is likewise at work in *Wild Geese*, wherein, seen from an ecocritical perspective, cereal crops arrange for their *own* survival by fashioning the novel's central family into an apparatus of agriculture, as well as by consecrating the bond between the fledgling provincial bureaucracy and the homesteader family. An ecocritical reading that reflects Tsing's enticing conceit that "cereals domesticated humans" (145) therefore allows us to view the other-than-humans in *Wild Geese* as subjects, not just symbols. A model thus emerges for reading Canadian literature in a way that notices, acknowledges, and responds to the array of subjects, human and otherwise, in whose company we seek a sense of belonging.

Ostenso relocated from Norway to Minnesota with her family when she was a toddler and later moved to Manitoba, where she earned a university degree and worked as a teacher. In 1925, she entered the manuscript for *Wild Geese* into a contest for best North American first novel, where it beat nearly fourteen hundred competitors. Shortly after her now-famous win, her novel was published, and later made into a film. *Wild Geese* is the only novel that Ostenso published while living in Canada; after its publication, she returned to the US, which became her home base for writing and publishing. Ostenso's novel is the story of a homesteading family living in the fictional region of Oeland, west of Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the 1920s. It is perhaps best known for its tyrannical patriarch, Caleb Gare, and much scholarship has focused on his death at the novel's climax. Caleb is a despotic father figure, and yet strangely bonded to his cereal crops—especially his flax. He terrorizes his family, compelling them to work and think in ways that ultimately support the prosperity of the flax. While Caleb's most obvious trait is his cruelty, this quality seems both related to, but also difficult to reconcile with, his uncompromising affection for his crops.

Reading the Patriarch

Midway through the novel, the reader finds Caleb gazing at his crops. As the narrator observes, "[t]here was a transcendent power in this blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life, and death. It was more exacting, even, than an invisible God. It demanded not only the good in him, but the evil, and the indifference" (152). After ensuring that no one is watching, he "run[s] his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress—more intimate than any he had ever given to woman" (152). Caleb's tyrannical rule over his family and community is underpinned by a strange

tenderness for his cereal crops—particularly the flax. The land's influence on Caleb has inspired various readings of the novel, such as the suggestion that it depicts the individual, human experience of prairie life in the early twentieth century. Rosalie Baum contends that the land's strange agency, as well as its supposed tendency to stifle human ingenuity, dramatizes "the effect that an austere environment can have in the development of a person's sensibility and on a person's dreams and ambitions" (127). Here, the land symbolizes determinism, a prominent feature of Naturalist fiction, and is thereby responsible for the family members' inability to take the sort of decisive action necessary to change the conditions of their lives (129). Other critics have expressed unease with the Naturalist reading, contending that labelling regional literature as such means that characters' "behaviour will be seen as a function of their relation with the place in which they live" (Loriggio 14), although early criticism of prairie literature has seen this as a positive quality. For instance, Desmond Pacey, in an essay from the 1960s, writes that "the best [Canadian] novelists" of the early twentieth century shunned fable and romanticism, and evoked "the actual conditions of Canadian life" (658).

A recurring critical concern with the Naturalist reading, however, has been that overemphasizing the influence of environmental conditions on human existence (and, by extension, literature that captures that existence) excludes regional literature from the broader Canadian canon. Alison Calder observes that prairie fiction's reputedly local character has sometimes led critics to view it as irrelevant to Canadian literature proper (53). In the context of a developing national literary canon, regional fiction had been seen, at least by some, not as fiction, but as "representative of a typical regional ethos" (Calder 55). Colin Hill allays such concerns and defines Canadian realism as a form of *modernist* writing, in part by suggesting that a "national-referential ideal" persists therein, insofar as the literature embodies ontologies and aspirations that extend to the burgeoning nation (20). He refutes the idea that prairie realism is isolated and inconsequential, arguing "that prairie realism is not a conservative, mimetic, and regional genre at the periphery of Canadian literary development. It is a major, even central, component of the modern-realist movement that was unfolding across Canada in the early twentieth century," especially given that it was one of "the most modern forms of writing to appear in Canada before the 1950s" (80).

More recent criticism of *Wild Geese* has tended to read Ostenso's prairie realism through the poststructuralist frameworks that have been developed to counteract the once-conventional Naturalist reading, whereby the novel

offers readers a glimpse into 1920s Canadian prairie living (Pacey 679). Brian Johnson interprets the novel as "an attempt to represent the experience of settlement in psychic, rather than realistic or romantic, terms" ("Unsettled" 24). It is the characters' "superstitious fear that ascribes eerie malevolence to the land itself" (26). The landscape is "animate[d]" by the unconscious (26), making the flax a "fetishized node" of Caleb's desire (27). The land merely symbolizes fear and erotic desire; it is a "projection of animism" (28), not the representation of an actual agent. In 1981, Marta Gudrun Hesse took a similar stance on the land's metaphorical status, claiming that "the Gares' submission to the land—exacted by Caleb of all the family—is spiritually destructive because it is, in fact, poisoned at its roots" (49). Hesse interprets the family's closeness to the land as a failure of human ingenuity, a bitterness over bright futures irredeemably darkened by past events. In this view, the prairie is both a backdrop to, and a metaphor *for*, human drama.

In attempting to assess prairie fiction in a way that undercuts the essential environmental characteristics of the region, while also making it relevant as *Canadian* literature, much literary criticism has tended to undermine the relevance both of place and the agency of other-than-humans—oversights that ecocriticism is especially positioned to remediate—while consequently forgiving Caleb's truly horrid behaviour. At the same time, critics often read the fact that he saves his affections for the plants as either emblematic of his disaffection for his family or as symbolizing the multiple despairs endemic to early prairie life. Thinking through Tsing's interspecies genealogy of grain agriculture, by contrast, encourages us to think of Caleb's "tyranny" (Ostenso 17) and his affection as not only related, but as intertwined in a way that serves the pervasive cereal subjectivity in the novel. Tsing traces early agriculturalists who "transferred their affection from multi-species landscapes to shower intimacy upon one or two particular crops" (145). Agriculture was founded on a transition from a promiscuous affection for the multiple offerings of the wild to a "love affair" (145) with a select few species. As agriculturalists developed intimacies with a limited number of favoured species, tending to one's most cherished crops became an act of fulfilling one's devotion. Humans and crops thereby participated in a process of mutual domestication (145). Caleb's relationship with a single plant species—the flax—exemplifies this sort of "love affair," suggesting that the crops, rather than being subordinated to Caleb's will, are actually exploiting his affection and loyalty. The flax is Caleb's "pride—his great hope" (Ostenso 127), but it is also a sort of deity. The literature on its "cultivation had become

to him the Word of God. . . . [T]he flax was a thing to pray over" (127). Caleb is unwavering in his tyranny over the humans in his life, but becomes deferential when facing his fields, the crops less an object of his labour than a seductive force, whose voice only he can hear.

Wild Geese provides a sweeping alternative to anthropocentric presumptions about other-than-human life. Critics have become increasingly wary of the culture-nature dichotomy, but finding ways to speak that do not simply reproduce the binary proves difficult. Addressing the link between ongoing and future environmental degradation and contemporary humans can often convey a sense that nature is "passive" (Alaimo 2) and thus exists solely at the pleasure of humans. Ecofeminism, for example, often holds up the notion that hegemonic power operates in a separate sphere from other-than-human life, which, strangely, is a claim that validates the logic that ecofeminists aim to scrutinize. Narrativizing human existence as a process of self-alienation enacts an erasure of other-than-human agency, thus re-establishing traditional subjectivity, which is traditionally assigned to men. In *Undomesticated Ground*, which challenges the conventions of ecofeminism to take nature seriously, Stacy Alaimo references Luce Irigaray, who wonders, "[i]f there is no more 'earth' to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always to desire (for one's own), no opaque matter which in theory does not know herself, then what pedestal remains the ex-sistence [*sic*] of the 'subject'?" (qtd. in Alaimo 7). In other words, if we know ourselves through subordinating, representing, and longing for "nature," then our subjectivity is ultimately dependent on our various other-than-human *others*. Irigaray's question foregrounds nature's role in *producing* the speaking, acting subject, in line with Judith Butler's conception of subjects as unavoidably vulnerable, ever "given over to the Other in ways that [we] cannot fully predict or control" (38). Indeed, the notion of the individuated subject relies upon a false distinction between agents and objects. The subject is constituted through a literal pressing down, which is regularly actualized in traditional accounts of agriculture as acts of plowing and sowing (plants), but also taming and disciplining (animals, both human and other-than-human). These entanglements of violence, dependency, and desire thereby instill nature with a sort of voice—a radical reversal given that "the silent ground is not supposed to speak" (Alaimo 7). Do objections to Naturalist readings of prairie fiction evince perhaps a similar disquiet?

Burgeoning scholarship on plant intelligence intent on enhancing biological and philosophical understandings of vegetal life (Marder 125)

might also have much to say to literary studies. If making space for vegetal intentionality and subjectivity—if not a form of consciousness as such—can help us "gain admission into the yet-uncharted terrain of plant-thinking" (126), as Michael Marder proposes, then perhaps a similarly expanded conception of subjectivity can help unearth new possibilities in literary criticism. Tsing's historiography does not examine plant life with the intention of better understanding the essential qualities of plants as such, but instead views plants as exerting social and political agency. Such thinking, if applied to a literary work, would allow us to view *Wild Geese* as profoundly intersubjective. In the novel, the crops exceed their status as a symbol of humankind's experience of the prairies insofar as they dictate Caleb's actions, even when he exerts his ostensible mastery over the lands. They seduce Caleb, as we witness his enduring commitment to the crops, while also laying out a test through which Caleb can prove his competence: "There was a spirit in the flax—the growing of it was a challenge to a man's will in this gaunt land. It took Caleb Gare to raise flax" (Ostenso 285). The narrator signals Caleb's subordination to outside forces with wording that offers multiple readings: not only does flax require Caleb to raise it, but *something takes him* ("It took Caleb").

Family Matters

While literary criticism has tended to emphasize the symbolic nature of vegetal life, the social sciences have perhaps better attended to the significance of people encountering other-than-human influence when developing land. Geoff Cunfer and Fridolin Krausmann, for example, adopt a socio-ecological approach to suggest that the interplay between the "highly managed" but dynamic landscapes of agriculture and its human attendants might influence thinking around "agro-ecology and sustainability science" (361). They write that, historically, taming frontier lands through agriculture "created hybrid human-natural landscapes that then required further readjustment by settlers to accommodate both natural forces and the new environmental conditions of their making. It was an adaptive, evolutionary, and recursive process" (356). In this view, agricultural societies have grown thanks to resilient humans who could respond and adapt to a range of conditions. Conversely, Tsing's radical claim that "cereals domesticated humans" invites us to consider that other-than-humans might have played a vital role in dictating how people have acted across time. Hence, human adaptation or "readjustment" in the face of other-than-human pressures is

not an act of the liberal individual overcoming obstacles to ensure their own success; rather, such strategies are ways in which cereals discipline humans to do their bidding. Crops, then, are not simply the result of an "adaptive, evolutionary, and recursive process"; instead, they fundamentally inform how humans conceive of their application.

Baum writes that Caleb "is the counterpart of the land: just as the land and its power have enslaved him, he enslaves his family and his neighbours" (125). An ecocritical reading allows us to ponder whether Caleb's confidence in his own independence is in some way an extension of the crops' agency—a compelling reversal. At the very least, the reader knows that Caleb's insistence that the farm's prosperity is a result of his own industriousness is a delusion: the novel makes clear that the farm's success depends almost entirely on the labour of Caleb's family. However, taking into account the historical agency of cereal crops invites us to see how the patriarch's faith in individual striving works directly to support the proliferation of the plants. By contending that he alone has brought prosperity, Caleb embodies a rabid loyalty to the farm that does not serve him in any obvious way. He is both unloved and unloving, paranoid, an eccentric surrounded by people whom he cannot trust. Rather than nurturing a family—what else is a farm *for*?—Caleb works in the service of the crops. Not only that, but while Caleb might destroy "dreams in others" (Hesse 52), the crops seem to work *through* him, compelling him to structure the Gare family as an apparatus of agriculture. Caleb assures his wife's ("illegitimate") son, Mark, that the Gare children are "too close to the land" to ever leave (Ostenso 201). Regardless of the fact that his daughter's departure late in the novel belies this claim, Caleb is desperate to instill his family with loyalty to the land.

The Gares' compulsory commitment to place accords with Tsing's account of how plants have influenced human history, which notes that the advent of agriculture required people to produce more children; bluntly put, "the family needed more labour for the cereals" (Tsing 146). To care for his crops, then, Caleb must increase his family's workforce. He is thereby compelled to train the appendages of the family structure so that it develops a singular allegiance to the crops. Caleb *must* refuse to hire outside help for the "haying," not because his family's unpaid labour increases his profits; rather, hired help is "treacherous, rapacious" (Ostenso 13) because their commitment to the land is not established through flesh and blood. Taking note of the cereal crops' cross-species manipulations in *Wild Geese* explains why the Gares "all have a monstrously exaggerated conception of their duty

to the land" (93), as the children's teacher and consummate outsider, Lind, reports. Caleb's tyranny is a demonstration of his devotion to his crops, and by compelling Caleb to codify his devotion in the practices of the family, the crops domesticate all of the Gares. What Ostenso presents as the attitude of Caleb's wife, Amelia, towards her children is at once a product of Caleb's psychological violence and a way for Caleb to extend the will of the crops. In order to protect Mark from knowledge of his illegitimacy, Amelia consents to "bend" her children "to the land like implements, just as Caleb wished her to do" (108). Amelia's internalization of her own domestication is ritualized in, and symbolized by, her commitment to the tomatoes: they "were last in her thoughts before she had gone to sleep, and first when she had wakened, although her heart was heavy with other things" (106). Not the benevolent spirit of life-giving nature, nor a prosaic deity that humbly offers up her fruit, nature exerts a "sinisterly passive influence" that ties the Gare children "hand and foot" to the land (121).

Caleb, while unquestionably a tyrant, is also strangely vulnerable, at least insofar as he depends upon the (underacknowledged) labour of his wife and children. He worries that, should his wife become disloyal, "the results of his labour would be swept from these fields like chaff from a barn floor" (13). His standing as a "symbol of the land" (93) is dependent on the proliferation of the crops and the boundedness of the family, both of which he is unable to sustain: his crops burn (309-13) and his daughter Judith departs the homestead (302). Caleb and his crops perish together. Their simultaneous demise is part of a broader assemblage of effects that includes the reorganization of the Gare family. Indeed, our initial introduction to the flax crops foreshadows the precarious nature of the bond between Caleb and the flax, which he fears will "vanish like a vision" (90). This awareness of the crops' potential impermanence informs and echoes the anxiety that drives Caleb to perpetually reassert control of his family. In fact, the novel opens with a gesture to the limits of his control: "Out here in this unorganized territory things go on much as the weather sees fit" (6). The patriarch's determination and vision are ultimately subordinated to the whims of nature. Struggling across his burning fields after discovering that Judith has left, Caleb bears both the knowledge of his fields' destruction and his daughter's departure, the wildfire "taunting him with human ingenuity" (311). A pervasive superhuman subjectivity thus brackets the novel, leaving the chaos of other-than-human being as a primary organizing structure. The land proves a fickle lover, mocking Caleb's loyalty as well as his delusions of

individual agency. His status as patriarch is impossible to disentangle from the authority of the crops. Lind realizes that Caleb's favourite daughter, Ellen, has a "contorted sense of loyalty" that has "overrun every other instinct like a choking tangle of weeds" (86). This is not to suggest that we should blame the land for the countless ways in which Caleb torments his family. Rather, the land benefits from Caleb's tyranny. His influence is an undergrowth, both fecund and deadly; not feral, but abjectly domestic. The weeds are not only a metaphor for Ellen's subjugation, but a gesture to the *actual* plants that shaped frontier existence.

Canadian frontier myths have frequently centred on the phantasmagoric figure of the modern human who heroically masters the natural world. Settler societies in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Canada embraced a "liberal vision" that "saw individuals as separate from, and acting upon" nature, "fired by a utopian vision of progress, rationality, and individualism" (McKay 631-32). Accordingly, the novel's homesteader family is driven by notions of property and improvement that distinguish between land as raw material for a person's sustenance and *the land* as a threatening, undeveloped—possibly *undevelopable*—entity, beyond property, and beyond literary apprehension. This distinction is seen in the Gares' embittered loyalty, which extends to include a disdain for wild, undeveloped spaces that seems at least partly inherited from Caleb. Early in the novel, Jude seems at peace with the wild spaces beyond the homestead, lying naked in the forest. In an instant, however, she thinks of her "hatred of Caleb" and her body becomes "rigid on the ground, and suddenly unnatural in that earthly place" (59-60). Her father's influence, even *in absentia,* prevents her from fully exiting the strictures of property and improvement that structure the family.

In his foundational study of Canadian prairie fiction (1977), Dick Harrison distinguishes between two meanings of the word "land": "land as natural environment" (110), with which Jude is associated, and land as "a human construct, property, a means to power" (111). Harrison's distinction between different "lands" recalls John Locke's political theories of property and personhood. Turning to Locke is productive because he proposed that humans gain personhood when they improve and develop land, and thus transform it into property; his ideas have resonances for understanding latter-day orientations towards non-human beings as objects through which humans express their ingenuity, rather than as subjects in their own right. In *Two Treatises of Government*, originally published in 1689, Locke contends that when nature's ingredients acquire usefulness through cultivation, the

product also becomes the property of the individual (and Locke explicitly had only men in mind here). Nevertheless, Locke must do some rhetorical manoeuvering to explain how individuals who are equal in their liberty can also own things, and thus prohibit others to access or make use of those things. The answer derives from the idea that a person has an inviolable claim to his own self:

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This noBody has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with it, and joyned [*sic*] to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. (185)

A person has dominion over himself, so when he applies his labours to nature's raw materials, he renders those products proper to himself—both owned by him and, in a sense, an extension of himself. Moreover, not only does a thing's status as property come from its being improved upon, but a thing's value also comes from the work invested in it; according to Locke, "'tis Labour indeed that puts the difference of value on everything" (195). This ability to claim land through making it property—by labour and "improvement"—relies on the idea that all individuals are independent and self-determining, born with the right to live freely and to seek sustenance unencumbered. Locke's conception is based on a unidirectional assertion of authority, with the self-determining person imposing his labour—and perhaps his will—onto the passive other-than-human entity.

An ecocritical framing for literary analysis can upend the vectors of agency that Locke presumed to structure human/other-than-human encounters, and which Harrison also presupposes. Harrison reads Caleb as an archetypal "oppressor of the land" (111) typical of prairie fiction, later describing him as someone who "sees land not as something he lives with, or from, or upon, but as possession, almost as though it were moveable property which someone might steal" (112). Regarding Caleb's affinity for the flax, he describes the patriarch's desire as simply another aspect of life that he "must conquer" (113). Harrison's analysis of the flax's symbolic status espouses Lockean ideas about property and personhood, even though he expresses concern that the land might be a companion rather than a possession. Moreover, both Harrison and Locke disregard that establishing dominion through development does not eliminate one's reliance on the thing that one aims to improve; indeed, development as a prerequisite for

full personhood subordinates man to the elements of life that are supposedly subject to his will in the first instance. Recalling Irigaray's insights regarding the co-constitutive character of humans and other-than-humans, a person's need for sustenance similarly indicates a state of dependency—even vulnerability—that necessarily undercuts the notion of the bounded, discrete self upon which Locke's rationalization of property relies.

Humans might be self-determining, but our ability to sustain ourselves is wholly dependent on what the earth offers us—both the raw materials of nature *and* the fruits of our labour. Accordingly, in *Wild Geese*, Caleb is engaged in a project that looks like something other than straightforward conquest. He experiences a "pang of regret . . . at the thought of the cutting of the flax. It had grown with such pride, such rich dignity. It was beautiful, stretching out and stirring with life, as though nothing could end its being" (224). Caleb's sense that "nothing could end [the flax's] being" highlights his subordination to the crops' supremacy. In his mind, if briefly, the flax has an invincible spirit. He is seen by community members as a successful farmer; but while his relationship with the flax recalls status quo modes of property development, his devotion often exceeds the logic of production and improvement. Caleb is cruel and tyrannical in ostensibly human spaces, but his world view acknowledges the sovereignty of the flax. Cereals, strangely, thus pose a threat to conventions that promote "man" over all other beings. Judith Gare's description as she watches the farm from afar presents a vision of this reorganized hierarchy: "[H]ere was the prairie, spare as an empty platter—no, there was a solitary figure of a man upon it, like a meagre offering of earth to heaven" (143). Man might stand on the land, but here he is figured as a sacrifice, a conduit for the fears and desires of something bigger than himself.

A Vegetal Dominion

The novel highlights multiple strata of dependency that structured prairie settlement, particularly in how the individual and land dovetail with the state. Land use is a thread that links these three sites of settler-colonial legitimation. Individual dominion over the homestead is determined by proper usage—improvement, in other words—which, in turn, naturalizes the state as the body that distributes deed, thereby confirming its authority. Returning to Locke, cultivation denotes sovereign authority, whereby "subduing or cultivating the Earth, and having Dominion, we see are joyned [*sic*] together. The one gave Title to the other" (191). For Locke, as it appears in the novel as well, an individual's improvement of the land is thus necessary

for state control. Caleb is despotic, but he is also subject to forces beyond the household. In addition to nurturing the crops, his loyalty to the cereal crops marries the family to the farm, as well as to the incipient state. Caleb is not the only character subject to what had become an agricultural imperative for early settlers. Anton Klovacz, a homesteading acquaintance of Caleb, represents the way that crops organize state and family. He notes to Caleb: "I will try to make these improvements the government wish. Then it will be mine—the homestead. And my children will have a home" (Ostenso 196). Whereas burgeoning "[s]tates encouraged family-based households and guaranteed the forms of family property and inheritance that drew lines within and between families" (Tsing 146), so does cereal agriculture in the novel acquire a position of prominence in ties between individual, family, and government.

Wild Geese illustrates the relationship between the homestead and the state, in keeping with the 1879 amendment to the Dominion Lands Act: "Every person claiming a homestead right on surveyed claims on land must, previously to settlement on such land, be duly entered therefor [*sic*] with the Local Agent within whose district such land may situate" (Canada 14). Ownership in the eyes of the state is contingent upon "proof of settlement and improvement" (14). A legitimate family, having children who "have a home" (Ostenso 196), is recognized as such based on observable care of the land. By properly tending to his land—by demonstrating his *devotion*, in other words—a man can prove up his homestead (261). The "strange unity between the nature of man and earth" in "the north" that Mark and Lind discuss (93) is political. This is an effect, in part, of the state's reliance on the crops to organize the homesteader family. Wrapped up in the processes of state-sanctioned place-taking and property-making is the strange influence exercised by the products of the land, which provide the evidence *of* and serve as the necessary condition *for* the homesteader's legitimacy.

Caleb depends on the crops to feed his body, while the state is, in a way, reliant on the crops to foster a sense of allegiance within Caleb, the agricultural adherent. In fact, Caleb is perhaps too eager a disciple. He is unable to remain emotionally detached from the flax's well-being, which not only demonstrates his deference for the presumably lower-order being, but also belies his performance as a person who relies only on his own labour. In his diligent attention to his crops' needs, he exposes the fallacy that underpins the idea of the discrete man as fundamentally proper to himself. Indeed, the novel culminates with the flax succumbing to a brush fire and

with Caleb drowning in the swamp that has rendered a portion of his fields useless. His death might be retribution "for his fanatical possessiveness about his land," as Faye Hammill argues (81); however, it also serves as the ultimate example of his and the flax's intractable interdependence. His death also signals the failure of his labour to maintain the boundaries between the untamed and the cultivated, insofar as the fire that he succumbs to also destroys the border between his fields and the forest. These multiple and interlocking dependencies, as well as Caleb's submission to the crop's authority, express *Wild Geese*'s central anxiety: that claims to colonized place are based on false premises regarding human vulnerability, as well as parochial ideas about Indigenous land use.

In the 1920s, Manitoba was a relatively new addition to Canada, having only become a province fifty years prior with the Manitoba Act of 1870. In the waning years of the nineteenth century and at the start of the twentieth, Manitoba instituted a scrip system to assign land to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Manitoba Métis 17). However, the system targeted Indigenous inhabitants, as the government issued deeds in exchange for treaty rights. As the Manitoba Métis Federation reports, the scrip system served the government as a politically expedient and economically sensible technique for "pacifying the troubled Native population" in the years following what is now commonly referred to as the Red River Rebellion (and sometimes Rebellions), but which was long known as the "Half-breed Insurrection of 1869-70" (17). The Red River uprisings were not far from the minds of government officials, and distributing land was not only less expensive than "resort[ing] to armed invasion" (18), but also worked in the interest of government policy that equated "civilization" with land ownership and agriculture.

The Manitoba scrip system, as well as countless other instances of settler land-taking, drew on notions of individual property and legitimate land use that mirror Locke's proviso. Of particular salience is Locke's assertion that "several Nations of the *Americans* . . . are rich in Land and poor in all the Comforts of Life . . . for want of improving [the land] by labour" (244). Of course, considering Locke's claim that dominion derives from pacifying the earth, especially with the benefit of hindsight after hundreds of years of colonial violence, his distinction between proper and improper use is not an innocent claim. Here, we get two aspects of Locke's proposal that are the basis for settler-colonial rationale: first, there are people who are not using their land in the right way—i.e., sharing it, not seeming to cultivate it, not settling down in one place; and second, a person with the right attitude and

proclivity for hard work might claim this land by mixing their labour with it, by making the resource proper to themselves. In the case of Manitoba scrip, the relationship between settlement, agriculture, and citizenship is made particularly obvious, as beneficiaries of the system were meant to gain citizenship by giving up treaty rights in exchange for land. The road to citizenship was not so clear, however, given the government's confusing and inefficient patent system, by which Métis applicants would lose their homestead, or have their scrip cancelled or reassigned by state intermediaries, "the so-called Attornies [*sic*]" (Manitoba Métis 20-22).

Set against the backdrop of a historic moment of settlers re-establishing certainty in the Manitoban prairie, *Wild Geese* is haunted by the Indigeneity at its margins. Aside from some mention of "Indians," the only Indigenous character of some direct importance for the Gares as a family is Malcolm, a Métis hired hand and trapper "with Cree blood two generations back" (169). Indeed, Malcolm's Indigeneity is figured as a threat to the structure of the family. Not only does he show an interest in Caleb's daughter Ellen, but he is a man who comes and goes with the seasons, in time with the agricultural cycles (44). His is the transient way of life, which is anathema to colonial settlement principles (169). Malcolm's sporadic visits bring forth the family's unease with its place on the land, including the fact that settler belonging must be constantly worked towards, and therefore worked *at.* As Ellen watches Caleb speak to Malcolm, who hopes to take her to the North with him, the narrator reveals the stunted sorts of rationale required to reconcile Caleb's family to his tactics:

> Caleb was her father, and any wrong that he had committed must, necessarily, reflect upon herself. Hence she strove to vindicate in her own mind Caleb's conduct of the lives and affairs of the farm. . . . The coming of Malcolm into her life again was like the scene in a mirage which she hoped with her whole heart were solid land, even while she knew it to be only a vision. It could not materialize. (171)

Malcolm's presence causes Ellen to reflect on how she adapts herself to the methods of settler colonialism embodied in Caleb and his other-than-human affiliations. It is in these moments of longing and loss that Ostenso's novel gives a glimpse of another possibility—the ephemeral "it" that cannot "materialize." The future that Ellen envisions is the condition of possibility that the homesteader life must preclude in order to foster modes of being that are amenable not only to state and family, but to those products of improvement that the family serves.

Much is at stake if we read—and, I suggest, misread—the other-than-human agency in *Wild Geese* as metaphorical—as "symbolic and yet almost incidental," so much like "many areas of the modern world" (Baum 133). Such an argument dismisses the particularities of place, and how they might play out in a novel that is so explicitly *about* place. Literary criticism that emphasizes the symbolic status of other-than-human agency risks not only reinscribing human exceptionalism, but also reproducing the types of dismissals and abstractions that support settler colonialism. Accordingly, through an ecocritical reading that takes place seriously, we can refuse to view the seeming lack of hope and ambition in the novel as a symbol of homesteading's burdens, and instead consider how the life and labour described in *Wild Geese* are so fundamental to the place-making project unfolding in Manitoba at the time.

In Caleb's death, the novel thus reveals its own anxieties about settler society's future, reflecting upon the tenuous nature of settler "fantasies of entitlement" (Mackey 42): the stories that settlers in North America tell themselves to feel that they have a legitimate claim to illegitimately attained lands. The novel both observes and acts in "the settler-invader's 'endless quest' to escape the anxiety of dwelling in an uncanny national space" (Johnson, "Beyond Regionalism" 142). The patriarch perishes in the fire that crosses the woods to the Gare fields (Ostenso 309-12), incinerating the line between the wild and domestic. The deadly, never-quite domestic symbolizes the porous barrier between the domestic and the wild, and casts doubt on the Lockean extended family that enrobes crops, family, and state. While Caleb's death is a break in the family's life, however, it is also a moment when the family's narrative folds back on itself, with Caleb's son, Martin, becoming the new master of the Gare farm (314). Here, the novel reproduces the settler family, as Caleb's son imaginatively reconstructs a familiar orientation towards colonized space. The development logic driving the agricultural imperative persists, so that even with the death of the settler patriarch, the thematics of prairie settler colonialism continue. Martin has hitherto been made to bow unquestioningly to the exigencies of agriculture, but the novel leaves open the possibility that the son will inherit his father's affection for the flax, and thereby germinate a new love affair.

Ideas of human supremacy and exceptionalism that are central to property regimes do not account for human vulnerability to other-than-human subjectivity, and are thereby internally contradictory; however, in practice, such notions have been used to naturalize settler claims to place, in part by

ignoring other-than-human beings, in the service of what Shaun Stevenson calls "settler sanctification and sacrifice of landscapes" (54). In assigning a purely symbolic status to other-than-human subjects, past literary criticism of prairie fiction, in general, and *Wild Geese,* in particular, risks normatively re-centring settler subjectivity, while rendering invisible not only the multi-species subjectivity that pervades the novel, but Indigenous presence as well. In offering this call for taking cereals seriously as a model for reading Canadian literature, I look forward to a literary criticism that sees this place we call Canada as full of histories and voices, not as a ground that must be silenced in order for us to make a home.

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Tom Wayman

Wind Elegy

Mike Mulcahy, 1953-2015

The lake waves
are blue light

undulating shoreward
tipped here and there

with white: swells
—glistening—

that transform to an audible mist
as they land on rock, sand,

beached logs
while the masts of boats

fastened to buoys offshore
oscillate and clang

like bells. A wind
clear and chill as light

pushes that water south
between green autumn mountains,

wind that, once inland,
becomes steady surges

of twirling dust
that pulse along the streets of the village

at water's edge
—a motion that makes an absence palpable

in the sunshine, though that result is not
wind's purpose, any more than

a village's purpose
is to craft new window frames, imagine a design

for a garden shed
or tile a kitchen floor. Yet these tasks

are part of what a village does, or did,
along with being a father,

stepson, brother, husband,
assessor of dietary trends, of alternate

electrical generation technologies,
of the calmness of a fellow citizen's mind.

Lake water
that rises and falls at wind's behest

in fact remains in situ: the illusion of wave
is what appears to travel.

The village, too, emptied of
a life we living cherished and

lost, remains stationary,
as occupied by its Saturday's

activities, its Wednesday's, as wind is:
heeling a sail toward

water, through wave
after wave.

Kirsten Alm

"The mountain's neck moans"

Mourning Places in Robert Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3" and Tim Lilburn's *Assiniboia: Two Choral Performances and a Masque*

At the end of "Breathing Through the Feet: An Autobiographical Meditation" (1985), the poet and typographer Robert Bringhurst addresses and dismisses his readers in one rhetorical flourish: "I ignore you, reader, for something larger than you, which includes you or not, as you choose—though of course, in another sense, whatever you choose, it includes you. And you include it, and our fate rests not just on our own feet but in one another's hands" (15). With the stealth of a Trojan horse and the heft of final words and last lectures, Bringhurst uses the autobiographical genre to engage and exploit the interest of his readers; under the guise of self-reflection and revelation, he aims to conscript their ethical and moral agency in his canny project of attending to and preserving "salvageable wisdom" ("Breathing" 10). In the three decades that have followed this statement, Bringhurst has continued a politically charged attention to and preservation of the pre- or as-yet-*un*-colonized aspects of the local place as a response to what he sees as the cultural impoverishment and environmental destruction in North America. For Bringhurst, this act of attention to guardianship of the pre- or uncolonized is an appropriate response to centuries of settler-colonial failure to recognize the existence of a plurality of ecologies, of which Indigenous cultures are a part, that exist in each place. Bringhurst's poetry, prose, and translations demonstrate his belief that heeding Indigenous languages and stories is a critical part of an ethics of attention.

These linked concerns are also observable in the writing of the western Canadian poet Tim Lilburn. The alarm about environmental degradation and the destructive nature of the settler-colonial relationship with Indigenous

peoples that Bringhurst and Lilburn share is expressed in the sometimes markedly political element in both poets' writing about place.[1] Such concerns lead both authors to what can be seen as a form of hybrid writing that blends philosophy, literary criticism, sociology, environmentalism, and spirituality. In their work, the relationships between the settler individual entrenched in Western philosophy, the places of Canada, and Indigenous cultures form a test case for a much broader critique of Protestant Christianity and post-Enlightenment Western philosophy, as well as the applications of these systems in the realms of anthropology, sociology, and resource use and abuse.

Both Bringhurst and Lilburn have advocated in their poetry and prose for learning the oral stories of the Indigenous cultures in North America as a means by which the inheritors of colonialism can begin to address the injustices of the colonial past, though Bringhurst's writing has done so perhaps more pointedly than Lilburn's. Bringhurst's and Lilburn's writings suggest that becoming learners of Indigenous stories and languages is a sign of respect and acknowledgement of the sophistication and value of Indigenous cultures and world views. Despite differences in their approaches, the two poets' emphases on becoming students of the teachings of Indigenous cultures suggest their belief that, in doing so, settlers might begin to establish new relationships with Indigenous peoples and nations and reform attitudes toward the physical space of Canada to enable a transformative encounter with place. Both writers have faced critique in this process as a consequence of their manner of approaching Indigenous oral traditions and/or members of Indigenous communities. After publishing *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* (1999),[2] Bringhurst was criticized by some for what they argued was a violation of Indigenous intellectual and cultural property.[3] Lilburn has been criticized for his treatment of Métis ontology, particularly for seeming to subsume it into a global mysticism. The responses to Bringhurst's and Lilburn's work suggest the potentially vexed nature of settler-colonial desire to use Indigenous oral tradition to revise the nature of the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples after centuries of violent colonial displacement that Daniel Wildcat describes in terms of "geographic, social, and psycho-cultural" attempts to remove Indigenous peoples from their "indigenousness" (*Red Alert* 3).

Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3" (1995)[4] and Lilburn's *Assiniboia: Two Choral Performances and a Masque* (2012) are examples of the poets' efforts to "unsettle" the settler-colonial world view. Both of the poems explicitly combine an environmentalist ethics with a critique of settler-colonial

exploitation and abuse of Indigenous peoples. The poems recollect the inequities and injustices of colonialism, but also attempt to bring Indigenous ontology—the understanding and explication of the nature of being as expressed in cultural values as well as oral literatures—into conversation with all inheritors of colonialism. Both poems suggest that mourning is an ethical response to colonialism in North America and its mistreatment of Indigenous peoples and of the physical environment. Through mourning the dis-remembered history of North America, "New World Suite No. 3" and *Assiniboia* attempt to create a place and space of textual and performative witness—a place of mourning wherein the scattered or forgotten are gathered and made "grievable" (Butler 25). While the poets are ambitious in their aims, the attempts at decolonization in these poems reveal the complexities of disentangling ecopoetics from colonial ideology and the difficulties inherent in making settler mourning central to decolonization.

Of course, these poets are not alone in commenting on the relation between Euro-American ideology and destructive cultural practices. Indigenous authors, scholars, and activists have written extensively on this topic for many years and have demonstrated how Indigenous peoples have been used as symbols of Romantic primitivism in colonial discourse and how these symbols have continued to affect contemporary cultural life. Furthermore, many Indigenous writers in Canada have written about the significance of place to identity, showing how relations with place are "part of an Indigenous response to social justice" (Gray 511). Given their position as direct inheritors of colonialism, the interest of non-Indigenous writers in Indigenous world views and traditions has sometimes seemed a repetition of the appropriation and fetishizing of Indigenous cultures that were a part of colonialism. Still, silence from the Euro-American inheritors of colonialism seems inadequate, especially in light of the silence that has surrounded this history. Rita Wong writes that there are "cases where silence also seems to be an equally and perhaps even more unsatisfying complicity with—and perpetuation of—this violence" (332). Instead, there is a need for humility, dialogue, and "[attention] to how material conditions and existent power relations" continue to shape the present (332). Bringhurst and Lilburn strive in these long poems for the kind of remembering Wong describes, attempting something similar to what Smaro Kamboureli describes as a practice of "negative pedagogy" that acknowledges complicity while "negotiating [their] position in relation both to the knowledge [they] have and to the knowledge [they] lack" (25).

Bringhurst's and Lilburn's poems demonstrate that such a negotiation is not only rational; it also involves the emotions, in particular sorrow that leads to mourning. Still, foregrounding settler mourning introduces its own difficulties, posing questions about the difference, if any, between mourning and "white guilt." As such, the poems force consideration of the question: can mourning be made productive or is it a means for non-Indigenous people to appropriate guilt and continue to disempower those who have been wronged, as Deena Rymhs has argued (117)? Is mourning, or can it be, different from what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call settler "moves to innocence" that seek to "reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" apart from difficult conversations about land rights or governance (3)?

I. Mourning and Remembering in Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3"

Bringhurst's prose clearly demonstrates his strongly held belief that there exists a right—and ethical—way of living in the world. He defines this way of living partly through critiquing the "wrong" way of life associated with the "cadaver of western culture" ("Breathing" 7), which he argues emphasizes human supremacy and humanity's right to endless consumption. According to Bringhurst, alternatives are found in Indigenous ontologies as well as in cultures "in the tangled roots of the European tradition" (14). Using an analogy of a web, he argues that the "moral fibres" that once guided society have been "cut or snarled" (193). Consequently, much of Bringhurst's writing attempts to reconstruct new webs of "relatedness and obligation" (193-94) by cultivating an awareness of the other—"gods, plants, animals, strangers, stones"—that is also committed to "subjugating nothing" (193-94). Bringhurst's poetry suggests his belief that the colonial past—and its present legacies—must be acknowledged and mourned before new webs of interrelation can make personal or cultural change possible.

The polyphonic poem "New World Suite No. 3" is a definitive work of mourning in Bringhurst's poetic corpus thus far. In the poem, Bringhurst revises theories of musical counterpoint for a trinity of speaking voices as an expression of resistance to the monolithic voice of Euro-American culture (*Everywhere* 24). The title of the poem's first movement, "All the Desanctified Places," immediately signals a possible concern with place, spirituality or religion, and secularization. The movement makes connections between the Judeo-Christian religious tradition and the Hegelian logic of historical necessity showing how they were used by settlers to justify the use and abuse of environments and peoples. The movement suggests that the influx of

people into the "New World" has also led to the arrival on the continent of systemic "Old World" class violence along with its patriarchal system. As a part of this analysis, the poem links the patriarchal system with capitalist development (movement 1, lines 7-8). The movement also describes the newcomers' subsequent devaluation and destruction of Indigenous cultures, arguing that this violence was sanctioned by the dominant culture's philosophy and religion. After a choral litany-like recital of Indigenous place names written to include all three voices, voice three takes the role of critique and lament. The voice states:

> At Cuzco, Tenochtitlan, Acoma, Kitwancool,
> the churches squat on the ruins
> .....
> Visitors gnaw at the moth-eaten light
> with mechanical eyes.
> Whole towns are trussed up in the webs
> of our fences and parking lots,
> guardrails, turnstiles, interpretive signs. (1, 23-25)

The "squatting" churches suggest unlawful occupation of places once belonging to Indigenous groups, while the description of the visitor's "gnawing" and "mechanical" eyes suggests that the newcomers' appetite for Indigenous cultures is at once unnatural and carnivorous. The dominant Euro-American civilization ignores indications of the vitality of Indigenous cultures and peoples and identifies them as relics. The poem's guardrails and fences confine vital Indigenous settlements in a manner evocative of both a zoo and a prison. In final assessment, the movement suggests that the degradation and destruction of the non-human environment goes hand in hand with the dominant culture's treatment of Indigenous peoples.

While acknowledging colonial violence, the movement also shows how easily ecopoetics' attempts at decolonization become recolonization. By connecting the damage done to Indigenous peoples and damage done to the environment, Bringhurst's poem flirts with the same Romantic tropes which equate what Tuck and Yang have called "the wild land and [the] wild people" (6). According to the Romantic line of reasoning that was a part of settler-colonial logic, Indigenous peoples served as a symbol of primitivism, humans existing in a state of nature and serving as a foil to Euro-American notions of expansion and development. This trope as employed by Euro-American settlers allowed those settlers to ignore the sophistication of the Indigenous civilizations they encountered in favour of a narrow Lockean understanding of the connection between agricultural practices, land ownership, and nation building. As

Camille van der Marel observes, since the Indigenous cultures encountered by Euro-American settlers did not cultivate and develop the land according to the narrow definition of these terms familiar to Euro-Americans, settlers felt justified in arguing Indigenous people did not "own" the land, which, in turn, allowed settlers to lay claim to that same land (19). The destruction of the cultures of these romanticized "peoples of nature" was mourned as an inevitable part of the progress of settlement, an act which, notwithstanding his critique of historical necessity, Bringhurst's poem might seem to repeat. The absence of consideration of contemporary Indigenous presence and agency exacerbates this and repeats the violence of colonial logic that suggests that contemporary Indigenous people, by stint of their difference from those living in the past, may be less "authentic" (Wildcat 37). In short, while gesturing towards the Indigenous past, it does not acknowledge present Indigenous cultures, repeating thereby the colonial tendency to expunge Indigenous presence from the land the settlers have claimed for their own (Tuck and Yang 6).[5]

The poem goes on to suggest that satisfaction, sustenance, and even a salvific experience are found in a return to the local, yet it mourns in response to the seeming dearth of inhabitants who truly understand their local place. Continuing the theme of consumption, the first voice observes that people eat food which "has come 2000 miles in bottles and cans" (1, 65), arguing that few know how to live on what the land itself provides. In effect, it claims the residents of this teleological, history-worshipping, apocalyptic culture are cut off from the nurture they are meant to receive from attachment to place. Imported bread made of nothing more than "eggwhite and sugar" (1, 73) is a synecdoche for the figurative—even Eucharistic—bread of the monotheistic religions which "have been brought in a book / from a place without caribou, moose, wolf, lynx" (1, 68-69). The poem argues that only the local can sustain life, both physical and spiritual. This is a conversion to a poetic attention to place that enables the individual to attend, in the full sense of the word (even the French sense of *attendre*, to wait, to attend) to what is present. One sees here how Bringhurst inverts Freud's theories of mourning by making *re*attachment to the lost the primary means of healing instead of finding substitutionary attachments.

The latter three movements, following the musical form of the fugue, take up the theme of living rightly in place that is introduced in the first movement to imagine and capture participatory attention to place. In order to do so, Bringhurst incorporates elements of various wisdom traditions

that counter post-Enlightenment European and Euro-American philosophy while also subverting any perceived hierarchies between these systems. Bringhurst incorporates Indigenous mythologies into the second movement; Daoist philosophy and mythology into the third; and Greek, Iranian, and Indian mythology into the fourth and final movement. In these three movements, Bringhurst resituates these myths in the landscape of North America, making his poem a new, blended mythology, itself a space wherein the individual might meaningfully encounter the stories.

Ultimately, the poem becomes a synecdoche of the reattachment that is a necessary part of the work of mourning. However, the reattachment and the combination of local ontologies and traditions with foreign ideologies seemingly contradict the poem's earlier claim that it is the local that must sustain life.[6] This might be charitably explained as Bringhurst's attempt to redefine the meaning of "local" to gesture to global interconnectedness, though this possibility gestures to the privileged ease of movement that too easily leads to appropriation of various cultural traditions.[7] On the other hand, Bringhurst's expansion of the idea of place might also be seen as turning away from the notion of the local as geographical to emphasize instead its temporal dimension. Here, the "local" could be understood as "concurrent," which could then include traditions existing at the same time in different places, almost in the manner of stratigraphic layers surviving the erosion of time in different locales. Given Bringhurst's interest not only in Indigenous oral traditions but also in traditions from Greece, India, and pre-Enlightenment Europe, this is not a far-fetched notion, though the focus on temporal simultaneity as a point of connection and similarity could also lead to colonizing acts which occlude difference.

As "New World Suite No. 3" demonstrates, Bringhurst's writing insistently acknowledges a depth of violence to non-Western cultures at the hands of the West, initiating a change in the colonial culture's assumed hierarchical relationship with Indigenous peoples and the environment. Indeed, Bringhurst's mourning affirms that avoiding a truthful retelling of history is another form of violence, invading the past and disavowing what should rightfully be mourned. In his examination of his own culture and its complicity, Bringhurst's poetry addresses one of the concerns Leslie Marmon Silko had about poets who demonstrate the desire to "obliterate (one's) white, middle-class ancestry and origins" (213) in order to claim a new identity and inheritance. The criticism of Euro-American colonial culture and history in "New World Suite No. 3" counters the tendency to amnesia about the violence

of colonialism in Euro-American cultural remembering. Mourning—in addition to the poem's "polyphonic effect" (Kane 185) that speaks of multiple stories and ecologies—creates openings in the text that invite non-Indigenous readers to discern their own implication in the colonial violation of spaces and Indigenous cultures. This is not the false sense of "mutuality based on sympathy and suffering" that occludes differences between sympathetic oppressor and the actually oppressed (Tuck and Yang 20), but a personal accounting. Certainly, Bringhurst's poetry and prose suggest that this act is prerequisite for any possibility of being reoriented by non-Western ideology and practice. Still, the absence of reference to present and contemporary Indigenous cultures and people raises troubling questions about the part they might conceivably play in the attachment imagined in Bringhurst's mourning.

II. Sorrow and Desire in *Assiniboia*

As in Bringhurst's work, Lilburn's writing also suggests that there is a fundamental problem with the manner in which Euro-Americans live in the spaces of Canada. This problem is a product of "what we are: detached long ago, while still in Europe, from that part of the Western tradition that would have taught us the suitability of 'living undivided from one's earth,'" and "[w]hat we did: we met the new land as conquerors and subjugated it" (*Going* 10). Elsewhere, he describes the worldview that enabled this state as "an arrogant, anthropocentric Christian ontology, a Baconian, privateering union of experimental science, technology, and human enrichment" ("Philosophical" 96). According to Lilburn, this history and heritage have integrally affected the ability of the settler descendants of colonialism to be "at home" in Canada. "We aren't from where we are . . . we've yet to take out chthonic Western Canadian citizenship" ("Philosophical" 92). Lilburn's writing suggests that what follows from this realization is shame and mourning. In an interview, he states that "the shape, or spirit of the age we're living in, will next move . . . to compunction, to apology, tears, sorrow . . . for all of the imperialisms we have engaged in" (Whetter 141-42). For Lilburn, poetry, when it shares the "*telos*" of contemplation ("Thinking" 162), involves "the loss of the sense of language as a tool, the loss of thinking as an explanatory power, the loss of the image of oneself as a knower to whom the world is presented" (162); it might then allow an "interior alteration" (163) that would lead to an ontological, "chthonic" knowledge of place.

Assiniboia is, in part, a polyvocal enactment of this movement to compunction and sorrow, but it is also an attempt to reimagine the past

in order to find a way to be "at home" here. The opening section, entitled "An Argument," begins with an accusation about the ills of colonial history including "the theft that founds our nation," or the sale of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory to Canada in 1869 (ix). "An Argument" condemns the armies from central Canada who ended the hope held by "members of the revolutionary government, Louis Riel and the others" for the possibility of a "polyglot (Cree, French, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, English, Michif), local, mixed race, Catholic-mystical" government (ix). It also explains the political aspirations of the book:

> It is surprising how many of the old imperial gestures remain still vigorous among us. One way to move against them, from the settler side, is to bring forward, in a certain insistent way, the occluded mystical imagination, chthonic, convivial, in the Western cultural tradition itself, and fix it to this continent by first allowing it to wander freely. The army that wins, indeed, is a mystical one. (ix)

Here, Lilburn states his intent as effecting an anti-imperialist "homecoming" by searching the roots of the Western tradition, which he defines in other places as "the underside of the old tradition" (*Going* 172). The mixings and combinations of traditions in *Assiniboia* are intended, in part, to be a "recital . . . applied to the wound" of colonial injustice (27). They are also intended to reimagine a new kind of place and a new future, "an aspirational, theophanic land" (*Assiniboia* ix) that deviates from the narrative of imperial history. Indeed, the book creates an alternative future based on what might have been: an *apokatastasis* or "[r]estoration, re-establishment" ("apocatastasis"), as Lilburn calls it elsewhere, that is "a 'remembering' of a community beyond imagination, yet within the scope of desire" (*Living* 99).

The "other tradition" that Lilburn incorporates into *Assiniboia* stands opposed to those world views that "produce solipsistic practices, ways of standing apart from the world" (*Going* 179), and enables a "convivial" dwelling. The word "convivial" is critical to *Assiniboia*'s political purpose, especially in light of the military metaphors prevalent in "An Argument." The word *convivial* is rooted in the Latin words *convīvālis* and *convīva*—relating to joyful feasts—and *convīvĕre*, or the notion of living together in joy ("convivial"). In spite of the martial metaphors of wandering mystical armies, the "convivial imagination" *Assiniboia* introduces is not the conqueror's totalizing, controlling knowledge, but the guest's arrival at the feast. In the book, this notion is symbolized in the figure of the Stranger, revealed to be Dionysos in the fourth section of the book, subtitled "Songs of Clarity in Final Procession." In Euripedes' *Bakkhai*, from which *Assiniboia*'s epigraph is

taken, Dionysos is the "strange and potent divinity . . . at the city gates" who offers a "liberating surrender of self that . . . offers the restorative blessings of festivity, collective enjoyment, and the exhilarating release of barriers between oneself and others" (Segal 3, 4). In *Assiniboia*, Dionysos is again a symbol of arrival, this time of the Greek tradition in North America—though this is the part of the Greek tradition that embarrasses reason by challenging its hegemony (*Living* 6). Dionysos' arrival leads to the possibility of connection between the Greek god and the Métis woman Sara Riel (Louis Riel's sister) through the symbol of the feast; in a poem entitled "House," Sara Riel describes a synesthetic moment of looking that becomes like feasting:

> there someone, or perhaps some trees
> Or a slope perhaps,
> Has laid out a long meal down a narrow pine table
> .....
> A meal that changes you as you eat it
> Lifting its antlers in. (13)

Dionysos' wandering in western Canada leads both on an arc toward conversation but also to a new vision of place, one which "drags you and angles you into soil" (74), and perhaps the soil into you, as "House" suggests. However, this connection and new experience of place, *Assiniboia* suggests, necessarily begin in mourning. Indeed, "The Revised Bill of Rights as Drawn by the Executive Council of the Provisional Government at Fort Garry, 1869," which lies almost exactly at the halfway mark of the book, represents one major source of this mourning. The twelfth point of the bill, which explains the unity of the diverse community of Assiniboia as a justificatory basis for its geopolitical territory, speaks to the failure of the Dominion of Canada to respect difference.

However, mourning in *Assiniboia* is always blended with joy and the potential satisfaction of desire, which then turns back to mourning when the desired proves unattainable. This is aptly expressed in the poem "War Preparations" from the "Exegesis" section of the book. The poem is spoken by Odysseus—the un-homed figure *par excellence* of the Western tradition—who balances the Dionysiac figure of celebration and connection in *Assiniboia*. Adding to the mourning symbolized in the presence of the Weeper, the land itself mourns for Sara Riel—"Still, alone, for her, for her, / the ice torque on the mountain's neck moans / for Sara Riel" (19)—but the poem moves from mourning to frustrated sexual desire between two male characters named Ibn 'Arabi and Utah Phillips, whose phallic symbols are

"a stalk of devil's club" and "a black berry wand" (19).[8] While these names suggest another meeting of cultures, the meeting does not lead to conclusive fulfillment; though they "become instantly *single*," still "their loaned tongues elide, / their loaned tongues fall through / one another, early snow in air" (19). The sexualized complex of passions in the poem, exemplified in this part of the poem by the male longing for the lost Sara Riel that shifts again toward unsatisfied sexual desire, suggests a straining at the limits of emotion that is rooted in the experience of a place that is not entirely knowable. For Lilburn, desire to know the "otherness" of the other, "an eros for union with the world building from awe" (16), is unachievable and thus a cause of mourning. Still, the perpetual state of desire leads to a winnowing of self, to being "shaved and narrowed" by the other (*Moosewood* 16). This is a transformation through desire and mourning that relies on the ultimate unknowability and difference of the other, where desire leads not to union but to "intensely felt differentiation" (*Living* 5).

Like "New World Suite No. 3," *Assiniboia* calls for a stance that opposes a colonial mindset. To create this, Lilburn sifts the Western philosophical and religious tradition for ways of thinking and believing that call the individual and community away from domination and imperialism. Particularly important to the shift in world view Lilburn seeks is his rejection of the notion that the world is ultimately knowable or coherent, a notion which is rooted in the contemplative tradition. Here, "the apophatic knowledge of the contemplative is the essence of the *via negativa* . . . the core of the 'dark' mystical path to a relationship with the heart of the universe" (*Living* 29-30). But perhaps more challenging is Lilburn's suggestion that "[to learn] to be in western North America . . . what we must learn is not geography, not an environmental ethics, not a land-benign economics, not a history, not respect, but a style that is so much ear, so attentive, it cannot step away from its listening and give a report of itself," a style that itself cannot be taught but "can be participated in" (*Going* 177).

III. The Ethics of Mourning

Assiniboia was not universally well received. In one review, Sonnet L'Abbé criticized "the way [*Assiniboia*] equates 'reason' with a dominant, guilty Anglo conscience, and a Western idea of mysticism and myth with a Métis worldview" (R.4), a criticism with some merit. In a particularly derisive review of the book, Michael Lista accused Lilburn of being "unself-conscious" and "[prescribing] as the balm for our colonial wound a kind

of nebulous Catholic mysticism, whose eschatological esurience played no small part in colonialism."[9] These criticisms have some validity, though Lista fails to acknowledge the hybrid Catholicism of many participants in the rebellion—including Louis and Sara Riel—and thus denies the possibility that *Assiniboia*'s foregrounding of a "Catholic mysticism" is not entirely inappropriate.[10] However, it is also impossible to ignore the complicity of the Catholic Church in the colonial project that led to discrimination and genocide. As Jenny Kerber observes of the healing capacity of language and stories, "our attempts to implement a new vision of how to live together in this place" depend on "acknowledging the traumatic effects of European mythologies on First Nations peoples and the environment" (*Writing* 10). While it does not ignore these traumas, neither does *Assiniboia* address this history directly, an oversight which might be seen to undermine what seems to be the piece's intended ameliorating effect.

Furthermore, while both *Assiniboia* and "New World Suite No. 3" critique parts of Western thought and traditions, their efforts to "resettle" other elements of these traditions within the space of North America threaten to repeat past settler-colonial attempts to recreate European culture in the New World while also appropriating the beliefs and practices of other cultures. As texts, then, they risk the dangerous metaphorizing of decolonization of which Tuck and Yang warn. Beyond the hope of claiming a place, Bringhurst and Lilburn also look with desire at the inheritance of Indigenous traditions in North America, which are defined by their opposition to "colonialism." Casting Indigenous people as the positive example in opposition to a supposedly ecologically unwise settler-colonial culture risks perpetuating the racist discourse that romanticizes Indigenous people. Furthermore, focusing as they do primarily on the past without consideration of contemporary manifestations of Indigenous cultures, the poems risk resurrecting the image of the "iconic stoic noble savage," a symbol which can "obscure real Natives living, working, and sometimes struggling in contemporary society to maintain unique tribal lifeways and knowledges" (Wildcat 20, 36-37). This is at least a partial failure of the poets' apparent desires for a decolonized poetics of place. The desire for knowledge of Indigenous ontologies and lifeways that is expressed in each poem, though it may stem from respect for and admiration of Indigenous cultures, moves toward assimilation of the Indigenous into the non-Indigenous poetic metaphor of hybridity championed in both poems, leaving little room for the agency of Indigenous people living today. Clearly, Lilburn's and Bringhurst's poems take political

risks and suggest some of the difficulty inherent in writing in the vexed political, cultural, and environmental realities of contemporary Canada. Indeed, notwithstanding the poets' apparent desires to distance themselves from imperialistic ways of thinking and acting in order to encounter the local, they repeat some of those same colonial patterns.

Despite these difficulties, the stance of mourning, with the added component of unrequitable desire in Lilburn's poem, suggests if not decolonizing then at least "unsettling" possibilities for both poems. While there are dangers and difficulties introduced into the poems by the authors' turn to Indigenous knowledge and oral literature, the imperfect act of mourning or the desire for reparation that both poems present demonstrates "the thrall in which our relations with others [hold] us . . . in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (Butler 13). In this context, mourning "resists a purely emotional or affective feeling of grief that lends itself to settlers simply 'feeling bad' for colonial violence" (Park 274). Both poems register the "affective dissonance" experienced by their poets' grappling with knowledge of local history and current reality—"the impossibility of undoing the harm and suffering that has taken place" (Zembylas 394). As such, the poems are more than a rehearsal of injustices or an expression of desire for chthonic being. They are a movement to mourning that has the potential to be fundamentally different from guilt or sorrow over lamentable histories, though of course the poems cannot force this type of reader response. Certainly, mourning is often accompanied by affective response and, if this response were all, it would be indistinguishable from what Tuck and Yang call the "feelings of guilt or responsibility [that] conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege" (21). However, the nature of mourning as *work* carries with it a latent potential that differentiates it from this settler-colonial affective paralysis, demanding psychic labour that leads to changes in patterns of attachment instead (Woodward 85). As Augustine Park argues, "[it is] a political resource that calls for an agenda of decolonising structural justice" (274). Whether the invitation to mourning inherent in the words of the poems can produce the kind of decolonizing or unsettling work that Bringhurst and Lilburn seem to hope for is not clear, but the two authors' bodies of work suggest they believe in this possibility. The "thralldom" to which these poems attempt to lead their readers moves past acknowledgement of the history of abusive colonial practices towards a hoped-for encounter with colonialism's "other," whose response the mourner cannot predict or force.

In other words, the personal and situational mourning in the poems *may* present the beginning of a movement toward justice, even difficult justice that acknowledges and supports political change. It gestures towards what might be required to make a "convivial" dwelling possible out of the learning and alliances that both poets imagine and, it appears, desire. However, in the same way that Rymhs observes that "asking for forgiveness does not imply the granting of it" (108), expressing the desire to become an ally or a learner is not the same as being accepted as one. Indeed, the assumption that one's allegiance is desired or welcomed by Indigenous communities can be another expression of settler-colonial privilege.

While failing to offer the authors' seemingly desired decolonized poetics of place, these poems suggest some possible decolonizing possibilities for environmental literature. The poems show the benefits of textual spaces of mourning—a "textual sepulchre" or monument that gestures to the absence and grief caused by the recognition of settler-colonial violence and its profound impact on Indigenous cultures and the continent's environment. The polyphonic intertextuality of the poems as well as their calls to the work of mourning do carry the potential of leading some readers past metaphor or affect toward responsible thought, practice, and support of political change. Turning toward the past and present with sorrow and the *eros* of longing, these imperfect poems encourage the reader to participate in welcoming and incorporating dis-remembered history into the present.

NOTES

1 I follow the general trend among those writing about the subject by defining place as any site that has been invested with significance or meaning by its inhabitants. According to Lawrence Buell, "placeness implies physical site, though site alone does not constitute place. It also implies "affect" that is in part "constructed . . . by collective standards as well as by physical terrain and personal proclivity" (60). It can also include an awareness of the passage of time, which "brings a fourth dimension to the contemplation of landscapes by exposing the history and projected future of the 'conflictual interpenetration of industrial and natural temporalities'" (69).

2 For those unfamiliar with the history of this publication and the debates which followed, Nicholas Bradley's "Remembering Offence: Robert Bringhurst and the Ethical Challenge of Cultural Appropriation" provides a précis.

3 Bringhurst has also been criticized for his use of the word "myth" to describe the knowledge and stories of Indigenous cultures. There is evidence in Bringhurst's writing about myth and story that his use of the word myth refers to a less commonplace definition of the word as "ageless truth," which stands in sharp contrast to the more commonly understood definition of the word as a justificatory story akin to a lie,

such as the justificatory story told by settler-colonials about Indigenous land use and land ownership (see Bringhurst's "Myths Create" C1, or his *Prosodies of Meaning* 37). Bringhurst's retrieval of this former definition in his use of the word may create problems for some readers, but his choice to do so is consistent with his practice.

4 "New World Suite No. 3" was first performed in 1990 and then published in his collection entitled *The Calling* in 1995. The text of the poem used for this paper was the one published in Bringhurst's *Selected Poems* (2009).

5 Thank you to one anonymous peer reviewer for pointing out the danger of this "rhetorical collapse" of Indigenous cultures and non-human environment.

6 Thank you to one anonymous peer reviewer for pointing out this contradiction.

7 Thank you to one of the anonymous peer reviewers for this observation.

8 Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) was a Muslim scholar who emphasized the importance of intuition and revelation, divine and otherwise, in addition to reason in knowledge (Chittick). Utah Phillips (1935-2008), on the other hand, was a self-described anarchist and folk singer who was also known as a lover of the American landscape (Russell).

9 He also claims Lilburn uses traditional European cultural forms—the masque and the choral performance—without acknowledging the way these forms have been implicated in historical power structures, a criticism that might be directed equally to the symphonic or sonata-like elements of Bringhurst's "New World Suite No. 3." However, Lista's critique does not take into account the paradoxical nature of the masque, which was related to the anti-authoritarian and transgressive history of mumming (Welsford 9). Similarly, the polyphony of "New World Suite No. 3," which Bringhurst claims is "non-Newtonian or non-Aristotelian or both," allows for at least the idea that "two bodies can occupy the same space at the same time without ceasing to be two" in a manner which resists being co-opted by the state (*Everywhere* 38). Polyphony is a "relational hymn" (Higgins 42).

10 Louis Riel and many of the residents of Batoche were Catholic and, thus, Catholicism might have made up part of the world view of the rebels, though there is also evidence that Riel wanted to renovate Roman Catholicism, which he believed had become corrupt (Flanagan 81).

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Codes of Misconduct

André Alexis
The Hidden Keys. Coach House $19.95

Suzette Mayr
Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall. Coach House $18.95

Reviewed by Heidi Tiedemann Darroch

Recent novels by André Alexis and Suzette Mayr draw on genre fiction conventions in intriguingly plotted and intricately allusive works. *The Hidden Keys* portrays a Toronto underworld of thieves and thugs, and *Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall* satirizes the more gently cutthroat domain of academia. Race intersects with identity and place in complex and varied ways. Alexis assembles a multiracial and socio-economically diverse cast of characters scattered around Toronto, while in Mayr's campus novel, white and colonial hegemonic power structures are stubbornly entrenched at the fictional University of Inivea.

The Hidden Keys, Alexis' follow-up to *Fifteen Dogs*, is part of his planned series of five connected novels, each taking up a philosophical idea. Tancred Palmieri is a skilled thief with a rigorous sense of personal honour. After several chance encounters of varying degrees of intensity, he develops an affinity with Willow Azarian, an older woman whose drug addiction has alienated her from her siblings and diminished her once-formidable intellectual abilities. Willow is convinced that the objects bequeathed by her father to his five children are clues in an elaborate treasure hunt. She asks Tancred to retrieve them so that she can solve the mystery. In this psychologically astute novel, which Alexis identifies as a loose reading of *Treasure Island*, Tancred undertakes a quest that changes him more than he had anticipated.

Alexis depicts comically error-ridden heists mounted around the city. Tancred's investigation precipitates encounters with a motley assortment of underworld tough guys, urbane businessmen, and poised society ladies. In these vividly realized minor characters, Alexis' novel is reminiscent of Carl Hiaasen's or Elmore Leonard's mystery fiction. Below the surface-level pithy dialogue and rapid action is a thoughtful meditation on the lives we choose (or that seem to choose us). Identity, family, home, and belonging are carefully woven in Tancred's musings and in the reflections of other characters. The humour in the dialogue-heavy work alternates between slapstick and irony, and Alexis' witty aphorisms resonate beyond the experience of reading the novel.

Mayr also deploys comedy to good effect in her portrait of an anxious English professor. For the title character of *Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall*, "post-tenure Elysium was a rabbit on a greyhound racetrack." Instead of basking in the anticipated appreciation of her colleagues and students, Edith is beset by a series of woes, from a malfunctioning washing machine to marginalization at work. She hopes that her long-awaited book on "Beulah Crump-Withers, former sporting girl, then housewife, prairie poet, maven memoirist, and all-around African-Canadian *literary*

genius," will install the author in the canon while elevating her own academic status. Instead, her celebrated former doctoral supervisor joins the department; where she once attempted to quash Edith's work, she now schemes to usurp it. Edith has few allies, and they are not faring any better than she is.

Mayr notes the divergent fates of academic disciplines under a neo-liberal regime of monetized research and corporate sponsorship. While the Engineering and Business faculties enjoy shiny new facilities, the Arts Faculty is housed in the maggot-infested decay of Crawley Hall, where more than the asbestos needs to be remediated. Edith is reluctant to acknowledge the mounting evidence of "possible paranormal phenomena" because "she doesn't like having to believe in the supernatural, especially so early in the school year, and so early in the morning." But as uncanny incidents multiply, it becomes increasingly clear that the building harbours dangerous secrets. Edith's name conjures up both Shirley Jackson's insecure Eleanor Vance, from *The Haunting of Hill House*, and the sturdier Harriet Vane of Dorothy L. Sayers' celebrated academic mystery, *Gaudy Night*. Peculiarly menacing jackrabbits that have infiltrated the building and other references to *Alice in Wonderland* highlight Edith's disorienting immersion in a world of arbitrary and punitive authority.

Notwithstanding the Gothic trappings, Mayr's portrait of campus life is disquietingly familiar. This is higher-educational sociology as much as fiction, with Mayr's protagonist grappling with the issues of overwork, diminished collegiality, and corporatized research agendas outlined in recent critiques, including *The Slow Professor*, by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber. Edith entered the profession because she loved books and wanted to share her passion. How did she end up hiding in the bathroom?

Capital Broadcasts Culture

Robert Armstrong
Broadcasting Policy in Canada: Second Edition. U of Toronto P $35.95

Stephen Broomer
Hamilton Babylon: A History of the McMaster Film Board. U of Toronto P $75.00

Len Kuffert
Canada before Television: Radio, Taste, and the Struggle for Cultural Democracy. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Jeff Fedoruk

The CBC's Canada Reads program, having developed from a radio show in the early 2000s to a live television show with a studio audience in its present format, is probably the most immediate example of Canadian broadcasting on the topic of literature. Whether or not Canada Reads actually gets Canada reading, it is revealing that the program's website outlines its producers' initial designs for a reality TV show where books are voted "off the bookshelf" to create an intriguing scenario and promote a single book that the whole country should read and ultimately purchase. The books in this review do not concern Canada Reads, but they help to unpack the cultural politics of Canada's broadcasting history, delineating the longstanding efforts of the CBC as well as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to shape national tastes while attempting to direct the influx of broadcasting capital. The relationship between broadcasting and its public is not as straightforward as producers often make it out to be.

Robert Armstrong's *Broadcasting Policy in Canada* is a detailed and clearly written resource for understanding policy development and policy changes throughout the history of Canadian broadcasting. The second edition takes up digital broadcasting and digital rights more comprehensively, culminating with an open question

concerning how policy might adapt to compensate for the revenues lost from Internet-recycled content that does not participate in the development or financing of programming. And while there are critical limitations to the large scope of Armstrong's survey—the author readily admits that a full discussion of broadcasting's social and cultural issues, for example, "would require a book-length treatment"—each chapter offers a platform for expanded discussion. There are interesting intersections between outright policy frameworks and the discourses surrounding their implementation, such as the regulations for Canadian content as stipulated in Canada's Broadcasting Act, which, as Armstrong notes, leaves definitions of "what constitutes 'Canadian creative resources,' 'Canadian programming,' or a 'Canadian program' . . . to the discretion of the CRTC." English and French language requirements, along with "ethnic programming" discretions, mean that the cultural content of Canadian broadcasting is highly centralized, less reflective of an active public and more an impression of what is sustainable for the industry. Armstrong's conclusion is skeptical of the federal government's role in public (and commercial) broadcasting, since, despite the CBC and CRTC supposedly operating at "arm's-length," Stephen Harper's Conservative government appointed many Conservative supporters to the CBC's Board of Directors; meanwhile, private broadcasting corporations—some of which financially supported the federal Conservative Party—were able to put pressure on broadcasting policy developments by threatening to withdraw their funds.

Len Kuffert's *Canada before Television* focuses on the initial period of struggle between private and public broadcasting interests in Canada. Kuffert relies primarily on archived communications between CBC staff to trace the narrative of "cultural democracy" burgeoning in the CBC's formation, organizing principles, and programming directives, given the consistent pressure of competing with private broadcasting stations for listener attention. It was not enough to simply gain more listeners; the "public" premise of the CBC meant that it was trying to cultivate tastes counter to British or US models. Kuffert's use of *taste* as a key word enables a consistent analysis of CBC operations in the first few decades of its existence, linking Gladstone Murray's intention to set "high standards" for the CBC with J. S. Thomson's idea that public broadcasting should "leave them better than we found them." The first chapter on radio "intimacy" also draws out the central notion that public Canadian broadcasting was intended as a form of direct communication between broadcaster and listener—even if this conversation ends up being somewhat one-sided. The general assumption that the listener was "valuable, impressionable, or eager to be entertained," beyond guiding private and public programming, raises issues related to cultural conditioning, when the product-placed pop of private radio is contrasted with state-funded taste experimentation. Ultimately, capital flows through all radio waves, and even private stations must jump through political hoops to maintain certification. The "cultural democracy" that Kuffert examines, then, is less public and more bureaucratic, since "broadcasters could only imagine or plan for a limited range of listening outcomes, namely: continued interest in a program, tuning in something else, or switching off altogether." Sure, one could write or call in to the station, but the listening "public" remains a relatively amorphous entity. The more detailed statistical data that digital media provides does not necessarily help the public cause, either—transformations in broadcasting technologies have only led to the defunding of public broadcasting.

Broadcasting began as an amateur hobby, and in this way it grew out of the public

sphere, taking shape through cultural democratization as operators and listeners fumbled their way across the dials. The subsequent marketization and bureaucratization of broadcasting has distinguished and limited "amateur" pursuits, however. Stephen Broomer wrestles with this process in *Hamilton Babylon*, attempting to recuperate the history of the student-run McMaster Film Board—particularly with the story of its founding member, experimental filmmaker John Hofsess. There is a strong narrative thrust throughout *Hamilton Babylon*, from the Film Board's early days and constant head-butting with the Student Union and school newspaper, to its participation in an international avant-garde scene, to its increasing commercialization in the hands of Ivan Reitman and Dan Goldberg, before it fizzled out completely after *Columbus of Sex*'s obscenity charges and under less talented management. Broomer might rely too much on notions of heroes and villains, pitting Hofsess and then Reitman and Goldberg against more antagonistic characters, but their efforts for artistic recognition with limited resources and support are telling of how quickly Canadian broadcasting had become reliant on stable genres and predictable audiences. The mistrust of the McMaster Film Board seems ill-informed now, but at the time there was little room in existing funding models for art films, and even now artists must navigate through layers of policy for funding opportunities in a system primarily meant to protect a centralized economy and centralized ideas of taste.

"Lonely for the World"

Adèle Barclay
If I Were in a Cage I'd Reach Out for You. Nightwood $18.95

Kate Cayley
Other Houses. Brick $20.00

Michael V. Smith
Bad Ideas. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

Bad Ideas, from which this review's title is taken, is BC author Michael V. Smith's third poetry book. Structured in four sections—"Prayers," "Dreams of Friends and Family," "Queer," and "Little Things"—the poems explore loneliness, the complexities of family, and the way we navigate the world around us. Smith's poems read as personal, sometimes confessional, but they are most often political narratives. Thread through the collection are poems such as "Handy Tips to Limit a Queer's Chances of Being Gunned-Down," "Your Peers Die Like This," "Wolf Lake," and "Prayer for Gender." In "Prayer for Gender," we meet a young child who is asked to draw his future self in class. He draws:

> A dress where there was no dress.
> Heels where none had been before.
>
> He senses the future is something more
> than black ink, white paper.

With a specific eye for details, and an airiness to the poetry itself, Smith is able to transport readers into disparate worlds, revealing the fissures and chasms in the human experience.

The poems in *Bad Ideas* are by turns revelatory and dazzling; Smith moves from subject to subject, creating landscapes (and dreamscapes) that are intricate and still relatable. In "A Woman Dreams the Birth of Her Son," the speaker grapples with new parenthood, exhausted by the baby. The dream-poem ends with:

> *Ube*, it says, mocking me
> with its blank-slate perfection

and rounded lip. *Ooh.*
Ooh ooh.
I am convinced
I will love this child
one day or the next.

In *Bad Ideas,* Smith explores all our bad impulses, surprising the reader with his honesty, his empathy, and the generous way he reveals us back to ourselves.

Adèle Barclay's *If I Were in a Cage I'd Reach Out for You,* winner of the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize, travels to various locations, examining our understanding of our place in the world. Moving from physical geography to more intimate interior spaces, Barclay's poems are often challenging in terms of form and structure, asking the reader to make metaphorical connections. Many of the poems within the collection act as a dialogue between themselves; poems such as "Dear Sarah I" through "Dear Sarah VI" are most effective when read together, images and symbols building along with the poems themselves. These poems range from dense to shockingly spare, but never fail to offer emotional resonance for the reader. In "What Transpires in the Night Before the Night," for example: "Tequila. / Horses who had to swim. / Stories my mother wrote about Acadia." While the poem itself is very short, Barclay uses subtext and an imagistic discussion between poems to create something larger. In this way, the collection reverberates, individual poems echoing their parallels throughout.

Kate Cayley's *Other Houses,* her second collection of poetry, explores objects and myths, and the way that the past is constantly a part of our present. Cayley's poems allow the dead to speak with us: the artists, the mystics, the self-proclaimed prophets, and their legends. In "David Bowie in Drag, 'Boys Keep Swinging' Video, 1979," Cayley writes:

Wig plucked off, lipstick

raising a red bruise, granny
lolloping over into wolfishness.
We're in on the secret, aren't we?
Even as we're eaten.

These poems perform the magic trick of making explorations of the past both timely and relevant; their reverberations offer revelations about our current social landscape.

The collection is broken into three sections, "Writers' Bedrooms," "Other Houses," and "The Library of the Missing." "The Library of the Missing" is made up primarily of one long poem, also titled "The Library of the Missing," which details a library founded in 1884. The library houses exhibits of missing people and their artifacts. Cayley uses the poems to occupy other voices and other lives, giving weight and meaning through her lyrical descriptions and language. The images are crisp and engaging, such as in "Item #47564, Category 2, 2003 Wedding Ring," where "The scratch marks on the ring may indicate use of force, or that / Vitric refused to remove it when doing the dishes." In other moments, Cayley's reimagining of these missing people creates vivid narrative poems. In "Item 9042422, Category 3, date unknown Comb and Five Hairs," Cayley recreates a whole internal life for an anonymous woman via a single comb:

At night, she would pause on the stairs (the third or possibly fourth stair) after she turned the lights off on her way to bed and feel the silence that dwelt around her and inside her and even though most people would find this sad, she found it to be the most peaceful time of her day.

This ability to create so much from so little speaks to Cayley's extraordinary skills as a poet, displayed throughout *Other Houses*.

All three collections attempt to answer how we relate to the world, the past and the present, the political and the personal, the physical and the metaphorical. The result is three distinct and accomplished books of poetry.

North and South

Arthur Bear Chief
My Decade at Old Sun, My Lifetime of Hell.
Athabasca UP $19.95

Eddy Weetaltuk; Thibault Martin, ed.
From the Tundra to the Trenches.
U of Manitoba P $24.95

Reviewed by Shaina Humble

Arthur Bear Chief's memoir *My Decade at Old Sun, My Lifetime of Hell* shares his experiences of abuse as a student at the Old Sun Indian Residential School from 1949 to 1959. Bear Chief expertly crafts a narrative that blends his horrifying experiences of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse at residential school with the loving, familial, childhood memories of time spent with his Blackfoot family in Siksika, Alberta. Connecting these experiences to the contemporary moment, Bear Chief articulates the impact that these abuses continue to have on his interpersonal relationships (particularly those with his children and romantic partners), as well as the challenges he faces with alcoholism, and his re-traumatization as a result of the legal battles involved with the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and of the continued financial abuses of the Canadian Government following the settlement. Eddy Weetaltuk's memoir, *From the Tundra to the Trenches*, begins by depicting his birth in the snow during a family visit to the Strutton Islands for the annual arctic whale hunt, proceeds to cover his years as a student at the Old Factory boarding school in Fort George, and concludes by presenting his worldly experiences as the first Inuk member of the Canadian Armed forces. Both texts are gripping memoirs that describe the personal experiences of two Indigenous men during the twentieth century and how these experiences connect to life in the twenty-first—North or South. These texts demonstrate how twentieth-century government policy continues to impact the lives of Indigenous peoples in lands claimed by Canada today.

Bear Chief's memoir is essential reading following the completion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and subsequent discussions of reconciliation. At the beginning of the memoir, Bear Chief informs the reader that he hopes writing will help him on his "journey of healing and recovery" from the abuses that he experienced while at residential school. Sharing the continued impacts that residential school has had on him and on his family, Bear Chief argues that he does not believe the government has "learned anything from this dark era"; he needs to "write about [residential school] so that people will know what really happened." The narrative, as living proof that the government policies imposed on Indigenous peoples were ultimately unsuccessful in erasing Indigenous peoples and cultures, also addresses Bear Chief's successful career in public service and his work with his community, his re-acquaintance with some of his children, and his reconnection with the Blackfoot language and culture with the support of elders. Bear Chief's personal account is supported by a preface that provides insight into the writing process, an afterword that adds additional context to the challenges of reconciliation outlined in the text, and a set of appendices that include legal correspondence around Bear Chief's case and letters of apology from various organizations involved in the administration of residential schools.

When he began *From the Tundra to the Trenches* in 1974, Eddy Weetaltuk sought to produce, as Thibault Martin writes in his foreword, a "bestseller" that would reach a large readership, while simultaneously encouraging other Inuit to tell their stories. Published for the first time in English,

Weetaltuk's memoir provides readers with a first-person account of growing-up Inuk in the James Bay area during the 1930s: he narrates his experiences of being assigned his disc number or "Eskimo tag name," of living in "matchbox" houses that were not built to withstand a Northern climate, of surviving the "seven years of famine," and of seeing a seaplane that made him yearn to "fly to visit other foreign worlds." Following the completion of grade eight at boarding school, Weetaltuk was informed that Inuit were unable to travel to the South to complete their education. However, Weetaltuk would later learn about the Canadian government's plan to use Inuit to "rationalize the land occupancy" and assert sovereignty in the North, despite many relocated Inuit suffering from "starvation and misery." To circumvent the Canadian government's travel restrictions, Weetaltuk changed his name to Eddy Vital and created a fictional family history in which he had a French father and an Inuk mother. Weetaltuk's fictional European name enabled him to join the Canadian Armed Forces, and to travel to the Canadian prairies as part of his training, to Korea as a soldier during the Korean War, to Japan during a military leave, and to Germany during a later posting. Written in a conversational style, Weetaltuk's text effectively demonstrates the continued, personal effects of war, particularly its impact on future personal relationships, such as his romantic involvement with a German woman named Clara. The inclusion of Weetaltuk's artwork, which he drew to represent narrative and contemporary photographs, adds an excellent visual element to the memoir.

Bear Chief's and Weetaltuk's memoirs are visceral accounts of their respective childhood experiences in different locations within Canada and of their returning home to share new experiences with their respective communities.

The Pleasure of Not Knowing

Stephen Cain
False Friends. BookThug $18.00

Ulrike Narwani
Collecting Silence. Ronsdale $15.95

Reviewed by Gregory Betts

I have been invited to review two books, side by side, that I would once have considered aesthetically opposite. The divide was borne in the politics and poetics of a bygone era, however, when lyric poets were pitted against language poets. The lines between the poetry camps are no longer so tidy, especially with the contemporary resurgence of identity poetics and the emergence of hybrid spaces like "lyric conceptualism" and experimental Indigenous literatures. As a result, either by the shift in time, or the softening of the divide, I am drawn as much to the parallels between these books as to their obvious differences.

Consider the titles: *False Friends* and *Collecting Silences*. Both are two-word paradoxes that call attention to irreconcilable divides. Similarly, both are idiomatic and point to language itself as complicit in the divisions. "False friends" are two words that seem similar in two languages, but are entirely different. Narwani's title foregrounds what is left unsaid around the words of her collection, which distract from the more important collected silence.

The poems themselves, however, couldn't be more different. Narwani's speaker calmly observes meaningful, epiphanic parallels she finds between things in the world. She notes objects (mushrooms, statues, walls) and explores elaborate connections to a delightful web of other images, building elegant metaphoric networks. This is the familiar fodder of lyric poets. And yet language's ability to represent the world accurately haunts the entire book. Narwani's speaker writes of her mother and presents

crystalline images that seem to reflect her. This surface simplicity gives way to something more troubling, more important. She watches as her mother brings newspapers to an elderly friend in the hospital who is "unable to talk." Her heirloom is a gold watch "passed from mother / to mother" that "always loses time." Silence accrues in such images, and highlights an underlying failure to connect. Another mother figure sees her daughter but is unable to recognize her body, her eyes. Later, we learn that "In the beginning / woman / was / wordless."

Cain's book, in contrast, is stylistically diffuse. Each section presents a radically different approach to writing. The idea of "false friends" works in multiple ways here: ekphrastic poems mis-represent source texts, one-liners twist aphorisms into cleverly inverted jokes ("If dogs did not exist it would be necessary to invent them . . ."), images are paired with literary jokes, and more. Beneath the humour, there is an insistent mistrust in language. Words point to other words, while extra-textual meaning slips in a grand "allegory of erosion." The humour holds the book together, and the humour is fashioned largely through inappropriate or bizarre word pairings coupled with a constant set of allusions to postmodern theorists, Canadian authors, and pop music. It makes little sense to ask why Roland Barthes is being evoked in one line, Milton Acorn in the next, or why Johnny Rotten appears in another. Instead, it is safer to assume that every word is a kind of hyperlink. From the contorted language (especially in the long poem "Stanzas"), there emerges a unique pleasure in sensing an allusion but not knowing the target. This is, as Cain says later, "alphabetic acrobatics."

Narwani writes, "Though shut out / I know about incomprehensible words." This shared sense of mistrust in language, of its opaque qualities, of the limits of expression, and the difficulty if not impossibility of escaping language to real life experience, links these two books. Narwani even writes a series of reverse centos, writing poems between the lines of her epigraphs. There is a silence or an abyss in the limitations of language. Yet, the difference between these texts reasserts the aesthetic divide: in that silence, that failure of expression, Narwani discovers "a language / sacred," whereas Cain recognizes the bared fangs of ideology, the "teleology of teeth." His poems are rich with the pleasure of disrupting the false bonds of communication. Hers are marked with the return of something more when language falters. She depicts a carrier pigeon, no longer used by humans, turning feral, becoming a "wild homing." In contrast, Cain uncovers the world "shrouded in phallogocentrism." Where he finds a defamiliarizing "Alphabet alphababel," she finds an "Alphabet cathedral" with sound poems emitted from a "pipe organ spilling letters." Like Cain, Narwani's sense of faith in human expression has been shaken, but yet her faith in the ineffable remains.

Species of Spaces

Claire Cameron
The Last Neanderthal. Doubleday $29.95

Michelle Elrick
then/again. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Will Smith

Claire Cameron's *The Last Neanderthal* introduces two time frames: the third-person narrative of the titular last Neanderthal, Girl, and the first-person narrative of Dr. Rosamund Gale, an archaeologist working on a startling discovery in modern France. In the first, we see life forty thousand years ago as visceral, immediate, and storied, whilst the second, less distant than we might imagine, gradually echoes the precariousness of human relationships and fundamental questions of life. Gale spends

her professional life moving between dig site, museum space, and media narrative, considering how intimate connection with the past might be presented. Cameron's novel is reminiscent of two other Canadian novels: Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* and Anne Michaels' *The Winter Vault*. Cameron cites *The White Bone* as a touchstone, and her novel resonates with the force and immediacy of Gowdy's. The novels by Cameron and Michaels share sensory poetic aims and the use of the potent lens of the modern archaeologist to think through the possibilities of spaces to reconnect to the past.

Initially, Girl's life is framed by her immediate family, whilst the presence of Big Mother hints at a connective chain of learning in which prior generations and the codependent group work together or merge. Girl also experiences a kind of merging in what her language knows as "warm," or what Cameron's glossary defines as "'family,' but the word had a connotation of physical warmth and safety of the kind that brought peace of mind." Girl feels the root of this "warmth" in the family's communal sleeping pattern. Cameron's use of a separate vernacular for Neanderthal life within a glossary preceding the text gives the novel the feeling of both case study and recovery; the book also includes the paratext of Girl's family tree. Cameron departs from conventional ways of seeing, opening up questions of our origins, the divisions of species alongside a wider understanding of kin. The novel's sense of kin attributes much significance to the strange figure of Runt, but could just as easily be read for the powerful non-human presence of Wildcat, another key participant in Girl's feeling of "warm."

then/again, Michelle Elrick's second poetry collection, is motivated by similar questions of origin and the meaning of place-making. Opening with a powerful personal history of understanding home, Elrick draws on Doreen Massey and Yi-Fu Tuan to explore the poetics of how "bodily apprehension makes place count." Using personal and family history as a map, Elrick traces "the homes I've inherited through ancestry," visiting and revisiting them to unpack what becomes familiar and what traces of dwelling can be recorded and communicated. "A Sea" alludes to the process of accumulation and departure tracked in these poems. Dwelling in place also means to "hear a sea swaying back/forth, then/again, once/more into edges." The frayed tidal tension of sensing meaningful space is also present in "Rathven: Burn and Grave Fort," which meditates on the eroding stone etchings of graves with their "mellow dents, slow blooming lichen."

The shifts between countries and provinces in Elrick's collection seem apt, reflecting Don McKay's observation in *Another Gravity* that "homing loves leaving / home." Place, or more particularly home, is an evasive quality all the more acutely felt in Elrick's acknowledgement of digital mediation and the language of such infiltrating encounters with place. "A Sea" notes how "cold fingers fail to activate the screen," whilst in "Square" the Red River is subject to "wave pixilation." Language is also such a mediation, and felt throughout is the pressure to distill, record, and observe becoming entangled by the imprecision, the rewilding expansion of definition. The final poem, "crow (v.)," is a long observation of urban nature which continually reflects on the role of the "observer, I." It is this observer who adds details to definitions of the scene whilst being drawn to "look up the origin of crow." Evolving into a conversation with the crow, with language, and with dwelling, the poem returns and reorders previous phrases into an impressionistic but still located conclusion.

These two very different books find common ground in their desire to understand the spaces of human habitation and the histories which imbue them with meaning.

Unsettling Love Codes

Tenille K. Campbell
#IndianLovePoems. Signature $17.95

Anahita Jamali Rad
for love and autonomy. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Sylvie Vranckx

While love poetry easily devolves into the patriarchal and/or clichéd, these two collections demonstrate its subversive potential: they both tackle feminist decolonial themes of how "race," gender, class, sexuality, culture, history, and the body intersect in relationships and society. However, these two books of prose poetry are fundamentally different in style, tone, and philosophy: while Campbell's is written in deceptively plain English and rooted in Indigenous realities, Rad's is an uncompromisingly deconstructionist investigation of alienation and reification.

Campbell's (Dene/Métis) acclaimed debut *#IndianLovePoems* is fresh and humorous, like a wink in poetry form. The book's tone is announced by its cover, a professional photograph by Campbell (whose process she describes on her collective blog, *tea&bannock*). Superimposed on a forest landscape, the young Indigenous woman with a sensual, playful expression also establishes the collection's themes of self-confidence and connectedness with the Dene lifeworld. Indeed, the speaker's sexual agency is framed as part of a story repeated since time immemorial. Her free, unashamed one-night stands counteract the patriarchal colonial discourse that disparages overtly sensual women—especially women of colour. Asserting her "sacred womanhood," she addresses a poem to a white man who shelves her "in that dirty little section / between Squaw and Slut / because pure sexuality is too broad a concept for [him]." One is reminded of Cherokee Two-Spirit/Queer scholar Qwo-Li Driskill's sovereign erotic, the notion that (re)claiming one's body and sexuality is a decolonizing gesture of healing from historical trauma. Thus, the speaker describes her encounters in their emotional and sometimes political complexities, as sharings of universes. She longs to understand the canoeing traditions of her West Coast lovers; admires a Cree woman's "bannock bum / flat and lean / yet fluffy and thick" as she dances at a powwow; learns "exotic syllables" from a Nakoda Fancy Dancer; and creates a medicine wheel with her partners of the four "races." She feels unable to see her clueless white lovers outside of the framework of colonization and often depicts mingling bodies as claiming territory and signing treaty—including with the Cree, traditional enemies of the Dene.

These are resolutely modern poems written for the great variety of women and LGBTQ2S people of today. They turn the stereotypes of the "Vanishing Indian" and "unchanging cultures" upside down with mentions of campus life, sexting, Tinder, and of course Twitter (the poems have non-serialized numbers with hashtags). There is power in Campbell's creative use of imagery and everyday language. *#IndianLovePoems* is a must-read from a very *exciting* new voice who will undoubtedly become an established name.

The first pages of *for love and autonomy* from Iranian Canadian poet Anahita Jamali Rad follow an iterative syntax that constantly reveals new, almost subconscious meanings. Such layering characterizes the whole book, calling for several readings. This feminist materialist collection is very challenging; Rad even helpfully provides a selective bibliography. The research that it can require may lead to interesting surprises, like Marx's hilariously trite love poetry quoted in the epigraph. The tone of this manifesto is mostly distressed and disillusioned, though the multi-layered "I" wields dark humour like a weapon and will not accept passivity. Rad describes

existences so thoroughly colonized by mechanization and capitalist ideology that even intimacy might inadvertently be complicit ("fearing your bedroom eyes may have ties to a petroleum politics"). In that system (which, due to the all-pervasive sense of confinement, one hesitates to call a "world"), the gendered and racialized bodies of the working class have become cheaper, more disposable than machines. Violence as well as a sense of mutilation and homelessness abound in the workplace, at street corners, in bedrooms, and in the mechanisms of institutions.

The most intriguing section of the collection's ten is probably "post-harem heavy breathing," built on fragmented, often unfinished or overlapping lines ("no I won't / shed a tear / gas or shot / with rubber"). Each poem title is taken from the previous poem, creating a *mise en abyme*. The main theme of the section seems to be the implication of capital and the media in the Iraq War, although it is never mentioned by name. The shattered prose evokes bombshells or the exploded consciousness of the disenfranchised, as well as the panting of a panicked or aroused character. To conclude, Rad's semiotic experimentation would almost necessitate a new critical language.

Both *#IndianLovePoems* and *for love and autonomy* are groundbreaking collections in unique ways, and will certainly foster engaging academic discussions.

Promises to Keep

J. Edward Chamberlin
The Banker and the Blackfoot: A Memoir of My Grandfather in Chinook Country.
Knopf Canada $34.95

Reviewed by Heather Macfarlane

J. Edward Chamberlin's landmark book, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*, made a huge impact on my academic life, and shaped my theoretical approaches to literature. I didn't hesitate, therefore, to agree to review his latest book, *The Banker and the Blackfoot: A Memoir of My Grandfather in Chinook Country*. I wasn't quite as prepared for the almost four-hundred-page hardcover that didn't fit in my mailbox, and I confess that I was a little put off by the idea of reading that many pages about what the title seemed to indicate was the memoir of a settler banker in Alberta. The title is an odd choice, given that Chamberlin sets out to accomplish much more than tracing family history. This book, like his others, demonstrates the importance of the local, or the personal, in understanding the universal, and it is precisely this focus on place and the personal that makes his prescriptions for the future feasible.

The book details twenty years in the life of Chamberlin's grandfather John (Jack) Cowdry following the signing of Treaty 7 by the Canadian government and five Plains First Nations. At the heart of the text is the story of the friendship between Cowdry—a settler newly arrived in the foothills from Ontario—and Blood Chief Crop Eared Wolf. This relationship between settler and Blackfoot captures the spirit of the years between 1885 and 1905, which, Chamberlin argues, offers the key to future Indigenous-settler relations, and is symbolized by the quirt, or riding crop, that Crop Eared Wolf gave Cowdry as a gift. The quirt, carved and painted by Crop Eared Wolf, is covered

in Blackfoot iconography, and tells stories of heroic exploits and Blackfoot history. Chamberlin explains that the quirt is much more than a gift between friends, but rather a testament to the responsibility of recognizing and honouring Blackfoot stories. The book, Chamberlin writes, is his way of keeping alive "the obligation that came with that gift and flowed from that friendship."

Just as these motives extend far beyond the personal, this impressively researched book extends far beyond the life of one man. John Cowdry's stories dictate the time and place, and are the colourful material of Western movies, complete with stick-ups and saloons, but also loyalty and suffering, and a focus on the real lives and histories of the Blackfoot. Those concerned with fact might well question some of the fiction that goes into creating a good story and into Chamberlin's romanticization of his grandfather, a selfless, courageous, and magnanimous rancher-turned-banker. This is how the author imagines the story, however, and how he manages to create a hero—or in this case two heroes—who can serve as an example for settler-Indigenous relations. Chamberlin reminds us that we are "*all* treaty people," and that it is modest or local stories such as his that recall "a place of promise and a time when good people . . . believed in keeping promises." This is perhaps what sets this book apart from a historical account. Chamberlin highlights the importance of imagining the real, and the significance of stories to creating what he calls a way forward. The text includes his trademark philosophical discussions of stories, home, the imagination, horses, and ultimately finding common ground, and the author uses writers and poets such as Oscar Wilde, John Keats, and Charles Dickens along with the Carter family, Johnny Cash, and cowboy poets to illustrate the narrative.

Those years between the signing of Treaty 7 and the turn of the twentieth century—the years when people kept their word, as Chamberlin puts it, and respected the treaty—are what offer hope. Far from seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses, however, Chamberlin chooses this story to imagine a solution, and doesn't shy away from tragedy. In the first half of the book he references the disappearance of the buffalo—devastating for Plains peoples—on almost every page. He describes residential schools as "institutionalized holocaust," refers to reserves as refugee camps, and accuses the government of withholding clean water from reserves to punish Indigenous peoples for resisting authority. Remarkably, however, he is still able to imagine a future where there is hope for reciprocity between Indigenous and settler cultures, and he manages to do this without ever encroaching on Indigenous autonomy. Offering up his grandfather's story as an example, he imagines a Canadian nation that keeps its promises and recognizes Indigenous sovereignties.

Reading China through Diaspora

Janie Chang
Dragon Springs Road.
HarperCollins Canada $22.99

Madeleine Thien
Do Not Say We Have Nothing.
Knopf Canada $35.00

Reviewed by Stephanie Fung

Janie Chang's *Dragon Springs Road* and Madeleine Thien's award-winning *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* are valuable texts emerging from the Asian diaspora, especially for those who cannot read Chinese (like me) and whose access to Chinese history is, in most cases, through texts written in English. How might these texts, refracted through the diaspora, portray Chinese experiences productively in ways that disrupt colonial histories?

Set in Shanghai in the early twentieth century, *Dragon Springs Road* tells the story of Jialing, a Eurasian orphan, who is abandoned by her mother when she is seven years old. The Yang family, new owners of the derelict estate where Jialing is found, take her in as their bond servant. Jialing grows up in the family household with Anjun, the eldest Yang daughter, and Fox, an animal spirit, by her side. Despised by Chinese and Europeans for being *zazhong* (a derogatory term for "mixed race"), she endures discrimination and alienation in a patriarchal society where gender, class, and racial inequities are deeply entrenched. Every situation she encounters—from navigating a murder to being caught in political crossfire and a love affair—ties her to "the shadows of her past" and her identity. Jialing longs for a new life elsewhere, such as Harbin, a "city of refugees and émigrés." A character tells her, "you would not be the first to go there to escape your past, and no one will ask, including me."

Chang skilfully crafts an intriguing (and not often told) narrative of what life might have been like for a mixed-race person like Jialing living in Shanghai in the early 1900s—a time of instability with the end of the imperial Qing dynasty and the beginning of the Chinese republic. For Chang, her novels are strictly historical fiction where, as she notes in an article,

> characters and their responses to the conditions around them inform the reader . . . they must behave in a way that's true to the realities of their era, economic status, and position in society; otherwise they turn into anachronisms.

Do Not Say We Have Nothing, however, demonstrates how historical fiction can move beyond its temporal trappings to point to other ways of understanding the past. The novel opens in Vancouver in 1990 with Marie, the daughter of Chinese Canadian migrants, whose father has recently committed suicide. With the arrival and guidance of Ai-ming, a young woman who flees Beijing after the Tiananmen massacre, Marie delves into the history of her extended family during the Cultural Revolution, attempting to understand the lives they led. At the heart of the narrative are three close friends fervently studying and creating at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in the 1960s—Ai-ming's father, Sparrow, who is a composer; her aunt, Zhuli, a violinist; and Marie's father, Kai, a pianist. As the state transforms into an oppressive regime, these three try to stay true to themselves and to each other, but are ultimately torn apart, with devastating repercussions.

Like *Dragon Springs Road*, Thien's novel asks how one might act and survive under political pressures, trauma, and oppression. Yet *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* goes beyond an exploration of personal survival and brilliantly haunts us with broader questions about intergenerational storytelling, survival of people's histories, and what we inherit in the present. How do we imagine histories that have been erased? What does it mean to bear witness to such histories? And how can we imagine ourselves and alternative futures through the past? Thien's characters traverse temporal and spatial boundaries through language and art. If, as Thien writes, Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 is "deceptive" for "inside, concealed and waiting to be heard, were ideas and selves that had never been erased," so is the "Book of Records"—the manuscript of a novel—that offers an alternative, open-ended history and that is passed down from generation to generation. One of the characters' fate is to

> populate this fictional world with true names and true deeds . . . to continue this story, to make infinite copies, to let these stories permeate the soil, invisible and undeniable.

The novel's ending is left unfinished, and what we are left with, or inherit, is this task:

the power and responsibility to continue this story and others—to participate in history and imagine other ways of living.

Footsteps in Edmonton and Shenzhen

Lauralyn Chow
Paper Teeth. NeWest $19.95

Xue Yiwei; Darryl Sterk, trans.; Cai Gao, illus.
Shenzheners. Linda Leith $18.95

Reviewed by Stephanie L. Lu

Both books are collections of short stories that offer sketches of ordinary people's lives in growing cities: 1960s Edmonton, modern Calgary, and modern Shenzhen. *Paper Teeth*, the first book by Alberta writer Lauralyn Chow, is about a third-generation Canadian Chinese family and its quirky neighbours in Edmonton and later Calgary. The table of contents is playfully titled "Today's Menu," offering up a selection of exotic-sounding names such as "Number 88. Spicy Beef in Lettuce Wraps." Borrowing from the structure of an English-language menu in a Chinese restaurant, the book plays on mistranslations, on the humour as well as the disappointment and misunderstanding that can emerge from the intersection of two languages. Each "dish" is a unique experience, related to but distinct from the other "dishes." Moving through the menu, we meet all sorts of characters, including an imaginative little girl who wonders what it would be like to go to Chinese heaven without knowing Chinese; a rich but ridiculous man who insists on having his very own koi pond in his kitchen in Edmonton; an aunt who wraps herself in smelly bandages because she doesn't trust Western medicine; a neighbour who says that fatty food is an ideal thing to give up for Lent; and an enthusiastic husband who, upon seeing Chinatown for the first time, becomes excited about tai chi, dried lizards, and live chickens. The book is a lively jumble, much like the city it is based on: "Sandwiched between the bread of the Foon Kee Bean Cake Company and the Coffee Cup Inn stands the House of the Lord."

Xue Yiwei's *Shenzheners*, recently translated from Chinese by Darryl Sterk, offers a similarly diverse range of characters and perspectives. Dedicated "to the Irishman who inspires me," *Shenzheners* consists of nine short chapters, each with a different character focus, which is reminiscent of the structure of James Joyce's *Dubliners*. The first story focuses on a prairie-raised woman from eastern Ontario whose chance encounter with a Chinese man on a train eventually leads her to seek out a new career in Shenzhen, China. The following stories, all set in Shenzhen, weave through a vast kaleidoscope of characters, including a former soldier who, in his old age, battles energetically with schoolboys to protect his wares; a woman confident in her choice of a "reliable" husband who later becomes the victim of vicious gossip; and a young piano prodigy who keeps a painful secret.

Even though individual characters make only fleeting appearances in these two—for lack of a better word—"city-shaped" books, their footsteps seem to mark out a question: What happens to a city's values when its population and economy grow? What does it mean to be an Albertan, or a Shenzhener, when one's hunger and directions and desires form just one story among many? Set in urbanizing environments where so much hinges on appearances, both of these books seem to be advocating for a deeper knowledge of and compassion for people as people. The aunt with the smelly bandages turns out to be a surprisingly thoughtful person. The glamorous piano prodigy turns out to be a deeply wounded child. In the end, what really matters in the creation of a home is not having the most admired fish pond; it is to be surrounded by family and neighbours who understand and cherish you.

Materializing Finality

Lorna Crozier
What the Soul Doesn't Want. Freehand $16.95

Wendy Donawa
Thin Air of the Knowable. Brick $20.00

Molly Peacock
The Analyst. Biblioasis $18.95

Reviewed by Lorraine York

These three collections by Canadian women poets probe the complicated interactions between distance and intimacy, particularly as they bear upon the question of how one can give witness to that which has vanished, or will imminently or inevitably vanish. All three poets write with awareness of the losses that accumulate with age, but ultimately each turns that awareness into a broader question of how to understand loss as a poetic and embodied *presence*. Wendy Donawa's website trumpets the words of the American poet Mary Oliver: "Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? / Tell me, what is it you plan to do / With your one wild and precious life?" All three poets attempt to frame an answer.

Lorna Crozier's seventeenth book of poems, *What the Soul Doesn't Want*, answers the question, as the title of her collection would suggest, by reference to negatives: what one plans *not* to do with one's one, wild, precious life. Her opening poem, "Not the Tongue," brings Crozier's characteristically smart, caustic wit and intelligence to bear on the question of facing, and writing, mortality, wondering if perhaps we give too much credence to articulation and not quite enough to sensation. Noting that it is the butterfly's feet that "taste" the "nectar," the speaker concludes: "We give the tongue / too much credence. It makes us / loose and daft." The embodied articulations of touch, instead, occupy Crozier's attention; referring in another poem to the macular degeneration and growing blindness of her partner, poet Patrick Lane, the speaker observes, "For him, I don't get old. / His fingers, chapped from gardening, sand my skin, / . . . I am made beautiful by loss."

Wendy Donawa—writing from the opposite end of a career from Crozier—in her first collection, *Thin Air of the Knowable*, likewise probes the condition of vanishing, and, like Crozier, finds in loss a surprising affective mixture. Writing of a cancer diagnosis, the speaker reflects that "Somehow catastrophe's patina / glosses our *now* of pleasure: / raku still glowing from the kiln." Unlike Crozier, though, whose brilliance largely involves the seemingly easeful way in which her speakers glide from deep philosophical questions to the wryly circumstantial quotidian and back again, Donawa sometimes moves too obviously into the realm of Deeper Thought. Often, in such poems, description of the natural world serves as an opening springboard for those deeper musings, and when these poems are collected together, this proceeding from observed natural phenomena to meaning becomes repetitive. Some of the strongest poems in Donawa's collection are those that experiment with (relatively) fixed forms. Her "Ghazal" powerfully brings together daily minutiae and deeper abysses, and the form eases the transition between the two, since the ghazal has a long tradition of uniting love or beauty and separation, loss, longing.

A noteworthy aspect of *Thin Air of the Knowable* is Donawa's concern with issues of imperial contact, particularly the history of slavery in the Caribbean. Donawa, who lived for a number of years in Barbados, is intensely aware of the politics of place and race. Her poem "Testimony of Subject No. 22," inspired by international researchers' discovery of genes "associated with antibiotic resistance" in Yanomami villagers in Venezuela, tells the story of this contact from the perspective of one of the test subjects, who observes of the visiting scientists:

"They seemed to lack a layer of skin— / so pale, smelling not quite human // But they did not know how to behave." (One thinks here of Thomas King's "A Coyote Columbus Story," in which Coyote, surveying Columbus and his crewmen, concludes, "They act as if they have no relations.") In another poem, Donawa's speaker reflects on her own strange (i.e., not neutral) whiteness: "I knew this place, comfort amid discomfort, / though sometimes saw my pale face in shop windows / . . . history's sins stamped on my forehead." Though the final line flirts with cliché, Donawa's awareness that the material effects of imperialism do not vanish but remain, embodied, links her contact poems to her poems of personal loss and grief; as a speaker of another poem asserts, "What has vanished can yet be known / in the clarifying day."

Those lines could serve as the credo of Molly Peacock's fascinating collection *The Analyst*, which ponders deeply how the vanished can be known. These are poems that probe Peacock's close and longstanding relationship with her analyst in the aftermath of the latter's devastating stroke, observing the dance between distance and intimacy occasioned by such changed circumstances. In "Fret Not," the speaker tells us how she finally worked up the courage to ask for one of her analyst's paintings the first time she visited her after the stroke, and was taken aback by an invitation to view the paintings in her former analyst's bedroom. In a brilliant stanza, Peacock takes us inside that intimate space, rendered more intimate still by the force of traumatic events: "Red blanket like a hemorrhage contained / after a time bomb exploded your brain."

A recurring image in Peacock's *The Analyst* is the act of jumping into a gorge or crevasse, often associated with approaching the crumbling edge of loss, psychosis, grief. In poem after poem, it becomes clear that it is the relationship between these two women, its admixture of professional distance and profound intimacy, that has kept the speaker out of the abyss: "Thank you for simply standing / as I learned how to stand on the sand."

As Peacock's arresting image of standing on sand forcefully tells us, loss is both a falling away and a coming to presence. Crozier, Donawa, and Peacock all explore the paradoxical materiality of loss, the way that loss shapes us and is marked on our bodies and in our minds. As Peacock sagely reflects in closing, "Only when / something's over can its shape materialize."

Small-Town Fiction or Something (Un)like It

Wayne Curtis
In the Country. Pottersfield $21.95

Elaine McCluskey
The Most Heartless Town in Canada.
Anvil $20.00

Reviewed by Liza Bolen

What comes to mind when thinking of narratives set in Canada's small towns or big cities? In what ways are these (very) arbitrary literary categories represented? Questions pertaining to "small towns" and "big cities" have generated vast critical discussions, as the divide between city and country remains an ongoing theme in the field of Canadian studies. Since the early 2000s in particular, many have investigated the urbanization of Canadian literature and attempted to define the semantics of "urban" and "rural" within the Canadian context: works such as *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities* (2005), edited by Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison, provide a critical guide to the matter. But, as is often the case, mapping the subject can lead to its morphing into unexpected forms—take, for example, this divide from the perspectives of immigration, gender, family and tradition, or stylistics. These questions have been further problematized

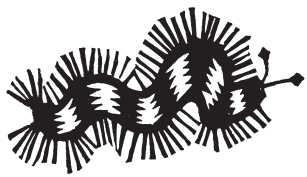
by the growing scholarly interest in transnationality, subsidiarity, and translocality, allowing for heterodox representations of what had been traditionally confined to the roles of the good, simple country and the bad, tough city.

How, therefore, can we consider this dichotomy in contemporary literature? In recent years, Quebec literature has seen a resurgence of rural-centric fiction as part of a movement often referred to by critics as *néo-terroir* (Raymond Bock, William S. Messier, Samuel Archibald), which plays with the codes and mythologies of pastoral traditions. And, although they have perhaps not yet been labelled within such niche categories, many contemporary writers throughout other parts of Canada demonstrate a similar desire to engage with rural themes through the optic of hybridity and identity (Michelle Berry, Dionne Brand, Derek McCormack, Fred Wah). The two books reviewed here, Wayne Curtis' *In the Country* and Elaine McCluskey's *The Most Heartless Town in Canada*, offer an additional layer to the depths within small-town fiction.

At first glance, you may think *In the Country* proposes a series of short stories that come together as an ode to the tranquil beauty and nature of rural New Brunswick. This impression is not entirely false, but with his precise, intimate prose, Curtis—who counts Robert Frost among his influences—is able to accompany the reader into progressively darker portraits of his hometown of Keenan, New Brunswick, in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Thus, without ever falling into the trap of parody or caricature, he exposes the hardships of farm life and discusses the difficult, self-conscious relationship with larger towns and cities. Curtis touches upon this issue in his excellent introduction to the collection of short stories: "A country youth, however deep-rooted, is always curious about the urban lifestyle and feels deep down in his or her heart of hearts that they are buried alive from the modern world and its amenities." The tension—or temptation—with city life is also noted in a few of the stories, exposing the struggles of both rural and urban spheres.

Also set in the Maritimes, McCluskey's *The Most Heartless Town in Canada* is a very honest, unfiltered, and refreshing take on small-town fiction. The "heartless town" in question is Myrtle, Nova Scotia, an otherwise unmemorable part of what the author calls "dying Canada" (there is, indeed, a fair dose of well-placed, self-deprecating humour in this novel). There, we are taken into the quotidian lives of Rita Van Loon, who spends most of her free time as part of the rather average Otters Swimming Club, and Hubert Hansen, who came from Newfoundland after the death of his father and spends most of his free time disappearing into the night with his dog. Through their stories, we are taken back to the moment that changed everything: the mysterious deaths of eight bald eagles, captured in a viral photo also depicting Van Loon and Hansen. With this intriguing and poignant plot line, McCluskey offers a rare take on small communities, the media, and the commodification of small-town people and stories (a theme embodied through the character of Toronto journalist Maggie Delaney).

With these books, Curtis and McCluskey demonstrate captivating styles and energy. They provide rich, complex illustrations of the daily realities of the worlds they chose to depict, interlaced with sensitive, honest reminders of the remaining tensions and misconstructions surrounding the notions of city and country.



Difficult Terrain

Sarah de Leeuw
Where It Hurts: Essays. NeWest $19.95

Reviewed by Susie DeCoste

By infusing landscapes with personal metaphors and showing how people react to and adapt to the spaces that surround them, Sarah de Leeuw's collection of creative nonfiction essays suggests that physical, geographical places and the human cultures that develop in them are inextricably linked. Essays parallel relationships between people and landscapes: a former landfill signifies a healing relationship; an active volcano stands for a child's burgeoning self-consciousness and awareness of the world's horrors; asbestos mining fills the area with a toxic, transient culture; and gardening around an immigrant's house develops a way of belonging and becoming "emplaced." Many essays focus on northern British Columbia, and some feature and in turn critique the layout of reserves and towns. For instance, in a vignette in the title essay "Where It Hurts," a man introduces his wife to their new hometown of Fort St. James, but first pretends by touring her through the neighbouring impoverished reserve instead as a prank. De Leeuw demonstrates how the stark differences between the proximate town and reserve show up in the ways people treat and think of one another.

What lingers after reading the collection is a tragic and worrying motif: that of women and children who are abducted or go missing and whose bodies are found along roadsides, damaged and discarded. In "Where It Hurts," three women and a teenaged girl are found assaulted and murdered "in gravel pits" or "off the highway." In "Soft Shouldered," female hitchhikers along a stretch of Highway 16 (the "Highway of Tears") disappear, as do children in "Seven in 1980." At the close of that essay, de Leeuw writes in the style of a newspaper article: "[T]en children aged nine through eighteen went missing, were reported as abducted, were found slaughtered and mangled across the lower mainland of British Columbia." This journalistic style is troubling because it distances and sensationalizes these heart-rending deaths. Further, this type of discourse does nothing to change the interpretation of the children as worthless; their lives and relationships are not thought upon, as only their dead and "mangled" bodies make an appearance here. The lack of reflection risks perpetuating the sense that these lost lives are meaningless and that the situation is hopeless. The collection thus raises the question: if people and places are so connected, is the only way to create change to leave?

Perhaps the most productive way to read the essays about missing and murdered women and children is to see them as crucial conversation starters. Here, ideally yet uncomfortably, readers become responsible for what they witness; they must face these cruelties and find ways to move forward.

Esprit de Corps

Lisa de Nikolits
The Nearly Girl. Inanna $22.95

Erika Rummel
The Effects of Isolation on the Brain. Inanna $19.95

Malcolm Sutton
Job Shadowing. BookThug $20.00

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

"Esprit de corps" is a French expression translated literally as "spirit of the body," but metaphorically it suggests the pride and loyalty felt by members of a group. The expression emerges in Malcolm Sutton's first novel, *Job Shadowing*, which tells the story of two separate yet linked characters, Gil and Etti, each involved in mysterious couplings. Etti's connection is with an eccentric artist, Caslon, who uses this military term to communicate his ideal: "being a small part of a great body whose power comes

from the parts." Gil, meanwhile, listens as an outsider to one of many lectures on the zeitgeist of the mostly millennial audience:

> *Rather than going away to find ourselves we believe in staying where we are and viewing the world from another angle, another person's perspective. Let us discover what it is like on the shadow side of the global experience. . . . An institution of job shadows.* (emphasis original)

Both Etti and Gil become indistinct extensions of the characters they shadow—Gil so intertwined with his subject, Victoria, that while he retains a first-person narrative, chapter titles are given her name rather than his. Etti is viewed more as a trainee of the sinister Caslon, a man so obsessed with living through other viewpoints that he creates a genetic double as a separate body. The idea of body and spirit links characters in ways that become increasingly disturbing.

The theories of esprit de corps and zeitgeist emerge in Erika Rummel's *The Effects of Isolation on the Brain* and Lisa de Nikolits' *The Nearly Girl*, although the emphases and approaches to identity and connection are distinct in each novel. In Rummel's novel, the reader is immersed in the perspective of Ellie, who is mysteriously abandoned in a cabin in the "Near North," expecting the arrival and rescue of her conspirator, Vera. Travelling back to Ellie's difficult childhood in Vienna, and her subsequent emigration to Canada, the novel explores the impact of an even darker kind of esprit de corps, along with the recurring lines from canonical writers that intertwine the thoughts of isolated Ellie. Unfortunately, both Sutton and Rummel, in their approaches to character and story, evade what is perhaps the most interesting esprit—how the isolated reader "shadows" a variety of people, relationships, and narratives. Neither book is as compelling or successful as de Nikolits' satirical yet tender examination of personalities, families, and group dynamics.

In de Nikolits' *The Nearly Girl*, a young woman named Megan falls hopelessly in love with an eccentric poet named Henry, who treats her abysmally but then becomes a target of questionable psychiatric treatment, through which he is rendered an overmedicated, malleable shadow of his unconventional self. Megan becomes pregnant, marries Henry, and then abandons both child and husband to her own parents, an ordinary couple who become the extraordinary foundation of the family. The daughter, Amelia, later enters into group therapy with the charismatic Dr. Carroll, whose self-declared revolutionary treatment labelled "D.T.O.T." (Do The Opposite Thing), again leads to disturbing consequences for his patients. Both "artist" and "expert" are interrogated in ways that are compelling, often hilarious, and yet oddly uplifting. The structure of the frame established through the novel's prologue and epilogue is eclipsed by the fast-paced story of lives and communities, with titles that list either single characters or relationships. Disappointing, however, is the *reductio ad absurdum* approach to Dr. Carroll's theory, which becomes less engaging, particularly as it extends increasingly into the bizarre life of its founder.

All three novels probe boundaries between bodies and spirits—and create a variety of extended bodies—inevitably transgressing borders between the mundane and the magical, between "Spaceship Earth" and the extraterrestrial or fantastic. Most powerful, however, is the affirmation of esprit de corps in ordinary, yet extraordinary, families, communities, and relationships—their capacity for loyalty, acceptance, and reconciliation. These novels ultimately lead the reader to reflect on how his or her own opening of a book is itself an act of eavesdropping, shadowing, or even (ideally) "*viewing the world from another angle*" while "*staying where we are*."

Dinner before Grace

Darrell Epp
After Hours. Mosaic $18.99

Jessica Hiemstra
The Holy Nothing. Pedlar $20.00

Catriona Wright
Table Manners. Véhicule $17.95

Reviewed by Natalie Boldt

In a recent review of Catriona Wright's *Table Manners*, Kerry Clare of *49th Shelf* declared the debut collection "devourable." Barb Carey, writing for the *Toronto Star*, praised the book as "a baroque feast of juicy diction"; Gillian Sze, for the *Montreal Review of Books*, avowed that it would "linger both on the mind and palate"; and Daniel Scott Tysdal touted its "delicious artfulness . . . and biting wit." The richness and sheer availability of the wordplay in these and other assessments are, I think, proof positive that Wright's poetic gastronomy translates. *Table Manners* introduces readers to the rich world of food as food—at times creative and delicious, and at others lacklustre and rancid—and food as metaphor, exposing the sometimes comical, sometimes horrifying rituals, rules, and strictures we've built up around eating. Rest assured, Wright is no pretentious foodie—though she clearly knows her stuff.

From the first line of "Gastronaut," the collection's introductory poem, Wright's epicurious poet will resonate: "I would cut off my own thumb," the gastro-poet declares, "for the perfect thimbleful of wood-ear mushroom and bamboo soup." This is self-parody at its best. Indeed, throughout *Table Manners*, Wright manages to convey her love of all things weird and wonderful about food even as she crosses the boundary from appreciation to obsession, creativity to absurdity. We live, Wright demonstrates, in a culture of extremes, and while eating can be transcendent, almost orgasmic, as in "Confessions of a Competitive Eater," it can also be psychically painful, a method of avoidance, as in "Mukbang," or the locus of shame should one eat the wrong thing—pudding cups instead of edamame, kale, and quinoa—as in "Groceries." One might also indulge too much ("Talking to My Father") or consume too little ("Dietary Restriction"). Though Wright's descriptions of delicacies like "pickled lamb tongues," "singed pigs' feet," and "rococo . . . noodles and beef" are entertaining, to say the least, it is her meditations on the psychology of food and consumption of all kinds that make *Table Manners* worth savouring.

Equally dark and playful is Darrell Epp's *After Hours*—a gripping collection that tours readers through the seedy underbelly of Hamilton, Ontario, and into the collective unconscious of the disenfranchised. Our guide, who could be called the patron saint of underachievers (unemployed, "not quite a model citizen," "more like [an] alienated Parisian pickpocket" than a hero), is surprisingly savvy, but it is an almost unrelievedly gloomy space he inhabits. A postmodern consumer wasteland littered with "scratch-and-win lottery tickets" in place of "cherry blossoms" and peopled with "[A]rmani-clad satyrs," "movers and shakers," and their "suburban duplicitous daughters," the landscape of *After Hours* is nothing if not lonely. "[Y]our life's all parking lots now," the alienated pickpocket declares in "Mind Your Manners":

> [F]riends
> die off and leave you holding the bag,
> with no way home and clown shoes
> on your feet. the jagged rock beat
> that explained everything, it's
> just noise, no soulmates or
> angels, only masked strangers
> and robots gone uppity.

Fortunately, the gloom is not beyond redemption, and in poems like "Weather Report," "One Possible Conclusion," and "Attention Historians!" Epp explores the unexpected

graces that may rain down on us unawares. What are they, you ask? They are "the first cigarette," "the last hotel room," "the lost toys of kindergarten"—memories of "words and names and / priceless things on a planet gone plastic." These are the antidotes he offers to "our outsourced obsolescence," the "narcoleptic fogs" that "swaddle the suburbs" and make us complacent and stupid. Epp's advice and his poems are sound. In his patron saint of underachievers I think he has achieved something quite wonderful.

Jessica Hiemstra's *The Holy Nothing*, her third publication, is also very special. A visual artist as well as a poet—and equally talented in both areas—Hiemstra has scattered small sketches throughout this new collection. Tiny avocados, mango skins, and broken plates, among other images, decorate its pages, echoing, in their simplicity, the straightforward meditations to which they relate. With titles like "Shallot," "Artichoke," "Chocolate Cake," and "Cabbage Rolls" in the table of contents, *The Holy Nothing* seems like it would be comparable to Wright's *Table Manners*, but it is much closer in theme to Epp's *After Hours*—sans the pops of dark, gritty humour. Like Epp, Hiemstra ruminates on modernity, mourning the loss of magic, mystery, meaning—"I want words for what I can't see," she announces in "Cold"—and, again like Epp, she manages to mine the quotidian for simple graces. In what is perhaps most accurately described as a sixty-seven-page search for transcendence, Hiemstra finds that the sacred can be in the profane. For holiness, she looks not *up* but around and *in*; in place of transcendence she wants immanence. "I thought I wanted resurrection," she reflects late in the collection, "but sadness changed me. I want / pain to make us kind . . . / We don't rise from the dead. Let suffering transform, / redeem us."

But Hiemstra's collection is a journey told in three parts, and enlightenment does not come easy. "I Haven't Told the Truth" is the first and lengthiest of the three sections, with twenty-four poems. The second, "This Damned World Is Good," and the third, "Rescuing the Future from the Past," are much shorter, with thirteen and four poems, respectively. There is, in other words, much to sort through before one can recognize that "this damned world" is, in fact, "good," and, indeed, that we are capable of rescuing both it and ourselves from the past. Hiemstra's vulnerability and her resilience are palpable throughout this volume, and she addresses hard personal and universal truths with a relentlessly straightforward honesty. It is this honesty that makes her collection so compelling.

Things of This World

Cary Fagan
The Old World. Anansi $19.95

Alice Petersen
Worldly Goods. Biblioasis $18.95

Reviewed by Tina Northrup

Cary Fagan's *The Old World* and Alice Petersen's *Worldly Goods* are short story collections that explore how the things we own collect memories and inspire elaborate fictions.

The Old World is an effervescent collection inspired by thirty-five photographs that once were lost but now find themselves given new life through the stories Fagan has spun. Flip through the pages of the book and you will find photographs of adolescents drinking punch at a house party, a sombre boy in a two-piece suit holding a guitar, blighted trees, a lapdog dancing for a treat, a woodworking shop full of chairs, and numerous portraits of people whose lives inspire reinvention now that the pictures have been dissociated from their subjects.

Fagan gives himself enormous range by having each story spring from a lost and found photograph. The tone of the writing varies considerably from one narrative

to the next, with some channelling Franz Kafka's mordant absurdity and others evoking the emotive insight of Alice Munro. Each story intrigues—not one of them flops. That may be because Fagan's method guarantees readers the pleasure of discovering what the author's imagination will do with each of the photographs that herald the stories. It's a lot of fun to look at a picture and ask, *What tale will he spin from this?*, and the collection makes it easy to enjoy a lively imagination at work.

Worldly Goods starts strong with a story in which an aging man slips on his basement stairs and must wait, immobilized, for help to come. Looking up at a record player that sits collecting dust on a nearby shelf, the man recalls the party that led to the destruction of the first record player he ever owned—a party that also produced a narrative that he has told and retold throughout his life, keeping alive the memory of an old infatuation while occasionally departing radically from the truth. The story does a fine job of channelling the spirit of the epigraph that Petersen lifts from Irène Némirovsky's *Les Biens de ce monde*—a passage in which an old woman returning to Paris in wartime explains that she is going to collect a set of curtains that were passed down from her mother. Petersen might just as easily have taken her epigraph from Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, as Levi is even more sharply attuned to the ways in which personal belongings come to be extensions of our selves.

Many of the stories collected in *Worldly Goods* explore this phenomenon, and they often succeed in limning the ways in which human intimacies can be shaped and then ruptured or preserved by objects that come to carry special meaning. There are times, however, when the stories offer less insight into our human conditions. "A Nice, Clean Copy" is one example. In it, an exceptional discovery at a second-hand bookstore catalyzes a train of thought and consequent conversation that make a husband realize that his wife of many years is stranger to him than he'd realized. Although the story is engaging, it's difficult not to feel after reading it that one has simply been given James Joyce's "The Dead" in a new guise, and, once that thought has occurred, it's difficult not to feel that Petersen's story is paled by the comparison. These moments are rare, however, and *Worldly Goods* offers much to mull over and appreciate.

Voices on Alice Munro

Janice Fiamengo and Gerald Lynch, eds.
Alice Munro's Miraculous Art: Critical Essays.
U of Ottawa P $39.95

Reviewed by Laura K. Davis

Janice Fiamengo and Gerald Lynch's edited collection of essays on Alice Munro brings together a number of rigorous pieces from scholars across the country on one of Canada's best writers. The essays, which began as presentations for the Alice Munro Symposium at the University of Ottawa in 2014, are diverse in subject matter and style.

The editors strategically and successfully ordered the essays according to three broad approaches to Munro's work: form, theme, and effect. Essays cover Munro's full career, from her earliest writings—analyzed in D. M. R. Bentley's "The Short Stories of Alice Laidlaw, 1950-51,"—to her later writings such as *Dear Life*, discussed by Alisa Cox. The collection ends appropriately with a final section called "L'Envoi," which includes a single essay written by critic Magdalene Redekop. She reflects upon her reading of Munro's short story "Lichen" many years after her first encounter with it. "When I look backward," Redekop notes, "I am aware that one constant for me has been a repeated return to the stability of individual texts that offer new rewards each time they are reread." Such an assertion indicates the importance and timelessness of Munro's

stories. Redekop's essay, retrospective and conversational in tone, makes for an excellent conclusion to the collection.

Many of the essays focus on aspects of Munro's writing that identify her as a difficult yet skilled and exemplary writer. Trina Trigg's analysis of Munro's short story cycles highlights absences or mysteries in her work, while Ian Dennis addresses deferral of meaning as he discusses "stories within stories" in Munro's well known "Royal Beatings." Two excellent essays, Sara Jamieson's "'The stuff they put in the old readers'" and Maria Löschnigg's "Carried Away by Letters," discuss the complexities of Munro's inclusion of different literary forms in her writing—poetry and letters, respectively. Jamieson argues that oral recitation both celebrates community and demonstrates the "erosion of familial and communal bonds" in Munro's work, whereas Löschnigg argues that "Munro's stories abound with letters" that, while to different effects, always "play an important role." In one of the best essays in the collection, Linda M. Morra nuances the familiar debate regarding the extent to which Munro's writing is autobiographical, suggesting that Munro is strategically ambiguous "in terms of what she allows us to know." Morra argues, moreover, that Munro creates space or distance between writer and reader in order to highlight the notion of shame and the question of what readers have a "right to know," particularly when it comes to autobiographical discourse.

Taken together, the essays collected in *Alice Munro's Miraculous Art* make an important addition to the substantial corpus of literary criticism on Munro, incorporating new and important perspectives on the beloved Canadian short story writer.

Histoires de copistes

Dominique Fortier
Au péril de la mer. Alto 21,95 $

Elsa Pépin
Les sanguines. Alto 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Magali Blanc

Le premier contact qui s'établit entre le roman et le lecteur commence toujours par un regard, attentif ou furtif, vers la première de couverture. C'est elle qui donne le ton au récit que l'on s'apprête à lire. *Au péril de la mer* (récipiendaire du prix littéraire du gouverneur général en 2016) et *Les sanguines* offrent deux illustrations aux couleurs diamétralement opposées : le bleu et le rouge, la mer et la terre, le calme et la colère. Pourtant ces deux romans auront plus de thèmes en commun qu'il n'en y parait.

Nos deux romans vont mêler Histoire et histoire. En effet, tantôt nous serons projetés au XVe siècle avec *Au péril de la mer*; tantôt au XVe, XVIe et XXe avec *Les sanguines*. Mais pourquoi faire un va-et-vient entre deux temporalités? Quel est l'intérêt derrière ce procédé littéraire? Le découpage par chapitre facilite la lecture et ne pose donc aucun problème au lecteur pour séparer le temps historique du temps contemporain. *Au péril de la mer* nous plonge au cœur de l'abbaye du Mont-Saint-Michel où un peintre perdu et meurtri par la mort de son amante va tenter de se reconstruire grâce au calme de l'église abbatiale, mais également grâce à une nouvelle forme d'expression : la copie de manuscrits. Ainsi, l'écriture sera au centre de ce roman où Dominique Fortier inscrira à jamais sur le papier les difficultés rencontrées de (re)écrire le passé, mais aussi celles liées au futur. Tour à tour, l'auteure et le peintre remettront en question le processus d'écriture de l'Histoire : qu'est-ce qui est vrai? Qu'est-ce qui est faux? Car il semblerait que l'objectivité soit une gageure dans ce monde.

Du côté des *Sanguines*, Elsa Pépin analysera à la fois la signification du lien sanguin qui unit deux sœurs entre elles, mais également l'évolution de la médecine dans ce domaine au cours des siècles. Sarah et Avril sont littéralement opposées : la première est une femme en mal d'amour et une peintre qui se contente de copier le travail des autres; la deuxième, l'aînée de la famille, est la mère de deux jolies petites filles et à qui tout réussit. Malheureusement, un jour, Avril tombe gravement malade et doit recourir à un don de moelle osseuse. Ironie du sort, la seule personne capable de l'aider est sa petite sœur, Sarah. Le choix ne sera pas si simple pour cette dernière qui jusqu'à présent était considérée comme le vilain petit canard de la famille. Dès lors, un dilemme se pose : pourquoi devrait-elle aider celle qui était l'enfant prodige ? Et surtout : pourquoi le destin l'a-t-il choisie *elle*? Entre récits scientifiques détaillés sur les essais cliniques organisés par, entre autre, Jean-Baptiste Denis et le cheminement personnel de Sarah, Elsa Pépin nous propose de reconsidérer la relation que nous entretenons avec la famille et donc avec le sang. Pour Sarah, la maladie d'Avril lui ouvrira de nouvelles perspectives jusque là inconsidérées; ce sera l'occasion pour elle de sortir de l'ombre. Ainsi, Sarah commencera à emprunter doucement le chemin du don et de la révélation de soi.

Au péril de la mer et *Les sanguines* sont deux romans unis par la peinture et la réalisation personnelle. Dominique Fortier explore à sa manière sa passion pour les mots et par la même, son attirance pour les livres qui pour elle se trouve personnifiée par le Mont-Saint-Michel. Elsa Pépin, quant à elle, revisite les liens sanguins et fraternels qui unissent à jamais deux sœurs. Certes, la thématique du sang « coule » à travers tout ce roman, mais ce n'est que pour servir un but précis : se laisser aspirer par la peinture que nous sommes en train d'observer, c'est-à-dire admirer la première et vraie peinture de Sarah Becker.

Augury amidst Aftermath

Rhonda Ganz
Frequent, small loads of laundry.
Mother Tongue $19.95

Clea Roberts
Auguries. Brick $20.00

Budge Wilson
After Swissair. Pottersfield $19.95

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

Grief—difficult to handle, much less write about—is subject of all three collections under review; they are addressed, in Clea Roberts' words, to "people like us / who have eaten / from the same plate of sorrow."

In "Judging Sorrow," from her debut collection, *Frequent, small loads of laundry*, Rhonda Ganz comments, "Every poet with a dead mother has a dead mother / poem," reflexively outlining the usual (perhaps bathetic) tropes and unexpected leaps. In "Incommunicado," her parents say that their intermittent silence, because they refuse to pay for "cruise ship Wi-Fi," will "be like when we're dead / and your loudest wail / won't reach us"—shockingly funny, real, and relatable. Not yet orphaned, she seems no stranger to death; suicide runs in the family, as "Pruning the Family Tree" (a fun pun) shows. The "you" in "Permit Yourself an Afternoon of Wailing I," who gets an addict rather than a "gardener off Craigslist," with absurd results, is invited to "mourn for everything / that will never grow back." "Permit Yourself an Afternoon of Wailing II," similarly funny yet plangent, ends the collection: "on a Tuesday in March 1995, / Gretchen . . . / lay down on her bed and prepared to die. That she would not take / her last breath until a Friday in November 2009 did not deter her." Comedy, too often maligned, leavens darkness.

In *After Swissair*, her first poetry collection, prolific children's writer Budge Wilson bravely takes on the grief of the

entire Halifax community who suffered after the crash of Swissair Flight 111 in 1998. As Wilson's voluminous Introduction and Acknowledgements attest, she's spoken to several members of the community most affected by the crash, allowing many to comment on the manuscript. Channelling grief into dirge, she wants to give them voice; however, the Appendix, a two-page prose recollection, "One Year After the Crash," offers the concentrated emotional resonance that the hundred-odd pages of poetry go little beyond. It mines Memory for accuracy, as if such is Truth, not taking wing, as does Renée Saklikar's *Children of Air India,* an imaginative reinvention about a similar tragedy. This reviewer wanted to hear more about the lost Picasso painting, or the possible incendiary device, but Wilson's book is narrowly focused—a well-intended tribute to the wide range of Haligonians involved.

Wilson's poetry works best in images: golf balls replacing flowers as a tribute to athletic Monte; the human chain transferring mementoes to the wind-ravaged sea; and the heart-shaped stones commemorating the dead on the seventh anniversary of the crash, though even this piece includes a note that the process recurred on the tenth anniversary, echoed again in the Acknowledgements. The photograph of a beautiful commemorative quilt appears three times. Though the book's relentless prosiness might suggest the scope of grief, it becomes monotonous, not harrowing.

Clea Roberts' second poetry collection, *Auguries,* is a stellar depiction of grief amidst the brightness of new life. "Morning Practice," a long lyric poem, looks at grief through a series of yoga poses. The clever double equivocation of the title carries through in rich visuals and sharp imagery. It's no surprise that Roberts "facilitates a workshop on poetry and grief"—her arresting writing could be a textbook. Roberts reminds us of the thin line separating life and death: "our first exhale / and our last." "Pneumonia" reveals her dying mother "sprinting into / the dazzling whiteness / of that whole world / opening inside of [her]." "Spring Planting" lists various unadorned definitions of grief, "a slow / river, never freezing / to the bottom," each more evocative than the last. In poetry, less is more. The reader is able to fill in the blanks with her own experience.

The arrangement of each collection is revealing of how it approaches its subject. Wilson's has no breaks and is mostly chronological (suffering clearly continues years after the disaster), with many monologues from actual people. Ganz's pretty book, self-designed, goes through days of the week, each marked by a different song/singer, foreshadowing the mix of profundity and silliness (alongside the graphics of laundry and birds) enclosed within. Its endpapers are a cheerful yellowy-orange. Roberts' sections are unnamed; instead, empty (or all-but) pages are inserted between sections, with outlines of gray jays flying off the pages into the great unknown. The reader becomes inclined to follow the flights of what could be cliff swallows, geese, swans, cranes, waxwings, kingfishers, ravens, juncos, sparrows, or gulls, all of which appear in the collection. The endpapers are new-leaf green, appropriately signifying rebirth.

Wilson wonders how her beloved sea could be the repository of such horror—all aboard the plane dead, the salvage machinery of the Grapple appears a "sinister insect / searching for prey." In "Epiphany," when her nun friend explains that the sadness will never disappear, she sees anew the waves' "underbellies full of sun and gold" and the "[sea] created by wind my wind / sorrow and beauty wedded in one place." Such beautiful and taut imagery is similarly woven throughout Roberts' work, so often that it is difficult to choose examples:

Spaciously—

this is the way
the living walk

after they pierce
the firmament

with their heads.

Or,

There is a dark, quirky
fluttering at the periphery:
bats arriving; or
parts of our dreams
we forgot, remembered.

Roberts is mistress of the line break, creating breathtaking stanzas—even whole poems—that read like runes. She delights in the physicality of her infant daughter, Linnaea (the name itself a poem), "fierce // petal of [her] tongue / drawing down the milk." The book has a sensual haiku-like spareness: frost meets forest, Yukon flavouring, love of the natural world. Even the sound of a dying fridge is described as that of crickets. Ganz, "Elgar on [her] breath," plays with "sugar" in different contexts: a possible term of endearment in a direct address; melting, sweating, "blackened sugar" after a bomb; never cloying. Kimmy Beach-like quirky juxtapositions deliver a wide cast of characters: departing and ex-husbands, Hades, Ophelia, Picasso, Schrödinger, the Pope.

Each book is about more than grief. Wilson unfurls the power of community in her collective consolation. Earnest portraits show real humanity: the uncomplaining fishermen unable to return to their place of work. Roberts finds love and hope in nature, a new child, and the flight paths of birds. Ganz looks to the wicked fun offered by life. Eloquently expressing a sentiment shared by the others, Roberts writes:

Tell me
how to breathe
between
the painful
and the beautiful . . .

Pushing Boundaries

Vickie Gendreau; Aimee Wall, trans.
Testament. BookThug $20.00

Catherine Leroux; Lazer Lederhendler, trans.
The Party Wall. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Myra Bloom

Catherine Leroux's *The Party Wall* (translated by Lazer Lederhendler) and Vickie Gendreau's *Testament* (translated by Aimee Wall) are products of the Canadian translation boom that, spearheaded by small presses, is introducing Quebec's emerging writers to the English-speaking world. Though formally and thematically distinct, both works provide a window into the dynamic and increasingly cosmopolitan leanings of contemporary francophone writing from Quebec.

The Party Wall is composed of four interlinked stories, each of which is anchored by the relationship between sibling pairs. As each narrative hurtles toward its climactic event or revelation, it provides the reader with a glimpse into a world ravaged by the forces of climate change, religious fundamentalism, and fractious partisan politics. Although this dystopian backdrop was purely speculative when the book was first published in 2013, Leroux's predictions of Trump-era phenomena, including a wall separating Mexico and the US, have proven eerily accurate. Her description of the newly elected Canadian prime minister tasked with battling these issues ("He's young. He brings people together. Has ideas. Energy. Charm") is equally uncanny, penned as it was before Justin Trudeau had even announced his bid to helm the Liberal Party.

While the macrocosmic issues cast a menacing pall, Leroux is more interested in the human-scale calamities. One story chronicles two siblings' desperate hunt for the identity of their father. Another culminates in a tragic accident. Although Leroux successfully braids several bizarre real-life

events into a compelling fictional drama, one wishes at times that she had pushed the dystopian elements further rather than letting them pend ominously in the background. Nevertheless, the political prescience of *The Party Wall*, combined with its use of real sources, reminds us that truth is, as they say, indeed stranger than fiction.

The line between reality and invention is even more porous in Vickie Gendreau's auto-fictional novel *Testament*, in which the twenty-three-year-old writer, dying of an incurable brain tumour, imagines her death and its after-effects. As the name implies, it is both a witnessing and a bequest, at once a chronicle and an offering to the friends she will leave behind. Gendreau's writing shares key similarities with that of the late Quebec writer Nelly Arcan, who likewise worked in the sex trade and whose auto-fictional novels were similarly concerned with her own demise. Where in Arcan's work death is a desired release from suffering (Arcan committed suicide in 2009), the tragedy of Gendreau's slim novel is its testament to the young writer's desire to live in spite of her awareness that her time is short.

Testament hits a number of affective notes, with the sadness at the novel's core frequently offset by gallows humour. Imagining a former lover posthumously receiving an electronic copy of her work, she writes in his voice, "Today Vickie is wearing a USB key and a brown envelope, it's cold out, it's winter. She's naked underneath. Always naked, that girl." Elsewhere, she gently mocks her own self-pity by anthropomorphizing her "sad brunch": "I have sad orange juice . . . sad tomato juice, sad green tea, a sad club sandwich . . . totally-depressed milkshake."

Despite the novel's comedic elements, Gendreau takes her craft very seriously, reflecting on her writing practice throughout. Her critique of the challenges faced by young female writers in a patriarchal literary culture is particularly trenchant: "You said: I find it so cute, a girl writing. It's like a cat that plays the piano . . . It's just that I only write out of melancholy and fury, and that's not cute. I'm not cute when I write. I cry, I get all snotty, it gushes out." Like Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?*, another recent Canadian auto-fiction, Gendreau's *Testament* makes space for female experience through formal experimentation. The challenging form works in tandem with agonizing descriptions of Gendreau's failing body to resist stereotypes of female quaintness or docility.

Aimee Wall, one of Quebec's most exciting emerging translators, has done a superb job in rendering a novel that is peppered with oblique references and inside jokes, and penned, moreover, in an idiosyncratic mixture of French and English. Wall joins established translator Lazer Lederhendler in showcasing the new generation of Quebec writers, one whose star is on the rise and another whose career was cut tragically short. Experimental, culturally attuned, and unafraid to blur the line between fact and fiction, Quebec writers and translators are pushing the boundaries of contemporary Canadian literature.

A Wide-Angle Lens on DH

Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, eds.
Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016.
U of Minnesota P. US $35.00

Reviewed by Alyssa Arbuckle

A broad, sweeping representation of the field of digital humanities (DH), *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*—edited by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein—is a touchstone for those who study, practice, or administer the digital humanities. This collection includes standard book chapters, but also incorporates blog posts, synopses of conference presentations, interviews, and position statements, and it is available in print or online. *Debates in the Digital*

Humanites 2016 situates itself among other recent DH book collections, such as *Doing Digital Humanities* (Crompton, Lane, and Siemens, 2017), *Between Humanities and the Digital* (Svensson and Goldberg, 2015), and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities* (Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth, 2016). Beyond the first, seminal *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Gold, 2012), Gold and Klein's 2016 iteration also builds on previous collections, including *Hacking the Academy* (Cohen and Scheinfeldt, 2013), *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth, 2008), and *Understanding Digital Humanities* (Berry, 2012).

Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016 differentiates itself from its contemporaries by sheer scope. At an impressive 579 pages, the collection includes fifty pieces from over sixty contributors, bookended by volume and series introductions by Gold and Klein. The editors purposefully frame DH as an "expanding field"—one that is integrative and malleable, and that connects various nodes of thought and theory in a network rather than adhering to limited definitions. Gold and Klein include interventions that range across areas as diverse as archaeology, code studies, pedagogy, and text analysis, with many stops in between. This variety of material makes the collection set immediate disciplinary standards for those seeking a comprehensive understanding of the multi-faceted digital humanities. There is another defining feature of *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*: it includes far more chapters that deal overtly with identity politics than any of the collections listed above. In addition to the expected tool-, method-, and pedagogy-based contributions to a DH collection, this volume offers ruminations on the intersections between DH and queer studies, critical race studies, and feminism, as well as more general calls to heighten critical interventions in the field.

Following a succinct introduction by the editors, this volume is divided somewhat arbitrarily into six parts. For brevity's sake, I will outline representative selections from across the collection. In the first section, "Histories and Futures of the Digital Humanities," authors ruminate on the development and possibilities of the field. Melissa Terras and Julianne Nyhan revisit a DH origin story—of Father Busa and his famed concordance—and draw attention to the female punch card operatives who assisted Busa's work; Steven E. Jones discusses how DH "is a response to and a contributing cause of" William Gibson's concept of network eversion (a blurring of the boundary between online and offline); Miriam Posner calls for "interrogations of structures of power" in order to truly diversify the field's next steps. The second section, "Digital Humanities and Its Methods," presents a broad perspective of methodology. Elizabeth Losh and others urge colleagues to embrace an "ethos of generosity" predicated on collaboration and inclusion; Tanya E. Clement considers the range of methodological perspectives from the social sciences that are or could be employed in DH; Bethany Nowviskie warns of the inevitable disenfranchisement that the growing institutional practice of replacing secure jobs with contingent labour will bring. Part three, "Digital Humanities and Its Practices," showcases DH in action. Wendy F. Hsu suggests that DH practitioners interested in the Public Humanities need to "participat[e] as partners with the public" by engaging with communities from the inception of a project instead of viewing community members as an afterthought or object of study; Andrew Stauffer warns of the dangers of mass digitization, out of a concern that it may lead to the disposal of editions whose differences might not be obvious or recognized as valuable for study; Amy E. Earheart and Toniesha L. Taylor detail their pedagogical project *White*

Violence, Black Resistance, which engages students in archival research on local, racially-charged history. The fourth section, "Digital Humanities and the Disciplines," incorporates chapters from various fields embedded in, related to, or aligned with DH. Roopika Risam surveys the "lessons for digital humanities to be learned from black feminism"; Matthew Battles and Michael Maizels locate digital art history and DH within the larger context of art history as a discipline; Sheila A. Brennan outlines the difference between Public Humanities and DH. In part five, "Digital Humanities and Its Critics," Brian Greenspan considers the pros and cons of the field's frequently utopian rhetoric; Ryan Cordell urges more nuanced digital pedagogy than a survey DH course; Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and others aim to find a productive way forward despite the neoliberalism that characterizes "the economic framework within which we are reluctantly operating." Finally, the sixth section, "Forum: Text Analysis at Scale," collects "position statements from a range of scholars who have contributed to the discussion around a topic of pressing import to the field"—in this case, textual analysis.

Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016 is an eminently useful anthology for students, faculty, researchers, librarians, administrators, and citizen-scholars alike. Gold and Klein present reflections on many pressing issues in DH, and do not shy away from incorporating divergent positions. As its precursor did in 2012, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016* is sure to become a frequently referenced resource for those working in, or interested by, the field.

Post-Apocalyptic Nonfiction

Alex Good
Revolutions: Essays on Contemporary Canadian Fiction. Biblioasis $19.95

Richard J. Lane
The Big Humanities: Digital Humanities/Digital Laboratories. Routledge US $44.95

Reviewed by Adam Hammond

The great cliché of contemporary literary culture is that literature is dying. Paradoxically, there's a hot genre in this reputedly arid landscape—what I call "post-apocalyptic nonfiction": books about literary culture that assume it's already all over, that the end is upon us, that books are now just so much cockroach fodder. Two recent books—vastly different in tone, in subject, and in relative optimism—agree on two key points: that literature and literary studies have lost their audiences, and that the Internet is the protagonist in this melodrama. But where one sees the internet merely as a destroyer, the other sees it also as a source of unexpected salvation.

Richard J. Lane's *The Big Humanities*, the more optimistic of the two, concedes that English departments are in a bad way: underfunded, short of students, full of professors playing "private language games that the general public cannot understand." But if the digital age bears some of the blame, it also holds the promise of revitalization. Lane presents the standard case for the digital humanities (DH). By adopting the methods of high-tech fields—lab work, quantitative methodologies, "big data"—English profs can get back to asking the sorts of big questions that will re-engage the alienated "general public." Much of the book is spent reviewing projects Lane sees as especially promising: Matthew Jockers' computational "distant reading" of thousands of novels, Transcribe Bentham's crowd-sourcing model, a "social edition" of the Devonshire Manuscript that

lets anyone be an editor. But Lane's case is not convincing. He includes a Tweet from the Devonshire Manuscript team as evidence of public outreach—but with three retweets and one like, the Tweet suggests the public's response is an emphatic "no, thanks." *The Big Humanities* itself won't connect with the broad audiences it desires for DH. Its jarring disjointedness—its many bumpy jumps from high theory to highly technical discussions of LaQuAT and XML—shows just how much more work is needed to bring scientific and literary discourses together for an academic readership, not to mention a popular one. A more likely audience for *The Big Humanities* is university administrators, who will surely respond to Lane's concluding image of literary departments as akin to tech start-ups, which must heed "feedback from the marketplace" and "pivot" accordingly. But can a literature department really save itself with the methods of Silicon Valley? Aren't those the tools of the enemy?

Alex Good's *Revolutions* would answer this question with a hearty "yes." Hewing to the conventions of "post-apocalyptic nonfiction," Good identifies a large cast of culprits in literature's demise. Literature professors are among the vilest: overpaid gatekeepers who can't write but get angry when no one reads them. In Good's account, professors are drawn to "distant reading" only because they're too lazy to read themselves, and want computers to do it for them. His takedown of academics and their newfound fondness for computers is entertaining and often on target. But he can't be trusted on his greatest villain of all, the Internet. Much of *Revolutions* is concerned with analysis of "the CanLit establishment," which Good attacks as essentially conservative. He derides David Adams Richards as "Canada's greatest nineteenth-century novelist" and luridly laments the "gerontocracy" of Atwood and Ondaatje, a "corpse" to which the younger generation is "shackled." Yet when it comes to digital culture, it's Good who comes across as geriatric. His repeated attacks on "the Internet" as "crap" reveal an inability to distinguish a medium from a genre. "The Internet" is not one thing but a purveyor of everything: lots of crap, sure, but also many kinds of dazzlingly "literary" work in forms that often exceed that label. One advantage professors have over journalists like Good is contact with young people. And let me tell you: young people would laugh Good out of the room. If asked, they'd tell him to engage with online literary culture before bashing it—to stop looking for the literary impulse in *books* only, but also to seek it out in the unclassifiable digital productions that proliferate online, especially those still feebly called "video games" (a dirty word in *Revolutions*). Their advice to Good would mirror Good's advice to literature professors: stop being so conservative and lazy, open your eyes—and *read*.

The Engaged Classroom

Ajay Heble, ed.
Classroom Action: Human Rights, Critical Activism, and Community-Based Education. U of Toronto P $25.95

Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, eds.
Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures. Wilfrid Laurier UP $48.99

Reviewed by Julian Gunn

In *Canadian Literature* 124-25 (1990)—"Native Writers & Canadian Literature"—Ojibwe scholar Basil H. Johnston published "One Generation from Extinction," calling for the study of Indigenous cultures in Indigenous terms, through direct experience of specific languages and philosophies rather than the cataloguing of artifacts. One of the many exhilarating aspects of *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures*, edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, is witnessing the flourishing response to Johnston's call. In "One Generation," he offered "w'daeb-awae" as a term signifying

not only veracity but also the limitations of the human ability to express truth. In "Gdi-nweninaa: Our Sound, Our Voice," her essay in *Learn, Teach, Challenge*, Anishinaabe scholar, writer, and musician Leanne Simpson responds directly to Johnston through her development of this concept: "diversity and difference are seen as necessary parts of the larger whole." *Learn, Teach, Challenge* is designed around such dialogue: modelling it, tracing it, and encouraging it.

I am a visitor in Lkwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories, an instructor who teaches Indigenous literatures, and a scholar of literature who frets about how to communicate the relevance of literary study. I am, therefore, always in search of academic books that, like *Learn, Teach, Challenge*, address the reading, teaching, and discussion of literature, and particularly Indigenous literatures and oratures, with intellectual rigour, political commitment, and aesthetic excitement. Expressly a teaching anthology, *Learn, Teach, Challenge* grew out of the editors' awareness that, while "studying the work of Indigenous knowledge keepers—Aboriginal writers included—is the corrective" for the colonizing forces of Canadian literary studies, this change was obstructed by the lack of teaching materials on Indigenous literatures and oratures. With collaboration and feedback from other scholars and students, Reder and Morra have created a meticulously organized and theorized anthology. Its five groups of readings—"Position," "Imagining beyond Images and Myths," "Deliberating Indigenous Literary Approaches," "Contemporary Concerns," and "Classroom Considerations"—would provide an excellent foundation for an upper-level undergraduate or graduate-level course, or, even more useful, support reading for new scholars and designers of lower-level courses.

Ajay Heble's *Classroom Action: Human Rights, Critical Activism, and Community-Based Education* explores the relationships among educator, student, and community when human rights education is undertaken. Heble's introductory account of his University of Guelph course—"Pedagogy, Human Rights, Critical Activism: Educating for Social Change"—is followed by five chapters written by former students, who reflect on their experiences in planning, developing, and undertaking community-facing projects.

Classroom Action is a book of passionate praxis, strongest when students and instructor dig into the pragmatic details of a project or course: what does theory look like, and how does it transform, on the ground in real time? Particularly engaging in this respect are the playfully self-reflective "Is This Project 'Skin Deep'? Looking Back at a Community-Facing Photo-Art Initiative" (by Gregory Fenton) and the collaborative performance history of "Reflections on Dialogic Theatre for Social Change" (by Majdi Bou-Matar, Brendan Main, Morvern McNie, and Natalie Onuška). Useful section appendices include Heble's own course outline and a problem/solution-structured discussion of organizing a student conference (by Elizabeth Jackson and Ingrid Mündel).

Time was one of the students' main concerns in pursuing community art projects in an academic setting. Many expressed frustrations with the limitations of the academic semester. This problem isn't, of course, limited to students. Time is also a rogue factor in academic publishing. *Classroom Action* has its origins in projects beginning as far back as 2003. Some chapter authors are therefore writing at a remove of a decade or more from the original project. Inevitably, this means that some details are forgotten and that projects must be discussed in general terms rather than specifics.

Another pleasure of both collections is watching ideas transform over time, whether across a semester or a decade, through dialogue. As reference and inspiration, *Classroom Action* would be of interest to any educator or student interested in

community-engaged pedagogy and practice. I hope to carry *Learn, Teach, Challenge* into every classroom I enter from now on.

Digital War, Hidden Worlds

Steven Heighton
The Nightingale Won't Let You Sleep.
Hamish Hamilton $18.00

Kevin Patterson
News from the Red Desert.
Vintage Canada $32.00

Reviewed by Benjamin Hertwig

In Governor General's Award-winner Steven Heighton's latest novel, *The Nightingale Won't Let You Sleep*, wartime trauma confronts the reader obliquely, through the accumulation of sensory detail, and directly, through casual eruptions of violence. Early on, a thirty-year-old Afghanistan vet with PTSD receives psychiatric counsel in Cyprus. A small detail such as a turning ceiling fan creates a fractured mental space, recalling the opening in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, where a fan transforms into helicopter downwash, troubling the boundaries between wartime and peace, equilibrium and trauma. Heighton establishes the novel's terrain—the mental and physical impact of wartime violence—and asks the reader to consider the lineage of war.

Heighton grafts the novel onto various literary traditions—the wartime ruins of Rose Macaulay's London and the modernist infatuation with churchgoing—as detailed in the work of Pericles Lewis—the Homeric "lotus" spell of sleep, and keeping a returning soldier away from home. While the novel is ostensibly a response to post-9/11 war, there is little in the character of Elias Triffanis to suggest the narrative necessity of Afghanistan, as opposed to Vietnam, or the first Gulf War, or even the two major wars of the twentieth century. Elias embodies the millions of men and women who return from war changed. In one particularly subtle evocation of trauma, Triffanis runs into the ocean and is almost overcome. When questioned about his motivations, about how he thought he could survive, Triffanis responds, "I wasn't thinking 'could' or 'can't.'" PTSD is a force he inhabits rather than an experience he simply carries.

Ultimately, Heighton's novel is most compelling at its most poetic, particularly in the portrayal of the hidden city of Varosha. In descriptions like "a bunch of wild lavender and torn bougainvillea stuffed into a joint of bamboo," one can almost imagine the line breaks. It is not the description of wartime violence that remains in my mind: it is the description of a wild, resurgent enclave, where all the flowers are named, where the simple beauty of a shared meal transcends the violence surrounding it.

In *News from the Red Desert*, Kevin Patterson, a former military doctor and co-editor of *Outside the Wire: The War in Afghanistan in the Words of Its Participants*, has written a laudably expansive novel about the war in Afghanistan. From the incisive and clinical description of combat medicine to the overarching systems of supply and infrastructure, Patterson presents a world where complexities are acknowledged and explored, where the everyday interactions of a Kandahar Airfield coffee shop have the same importance as the decisions of generals. As such, Patterson's novel is not easily reckoned with: it demands a rereading.

For instance, the decision of an American master sergeant to post online a photo of an embedded journalist results in a stomach-churning unfolding of tragedy. The digital world is inextricably linked to the material world, and the collision between the two makes for an acutely modern war novel: the force of the action is derived from intentional proximity to the events of September 11.

Patterson has written a polyphonic text where the Western war experience is not foregrounded over that of the people of

Afghanistan and Pakistan. Patterson's awareness of material conditions and social forces feels as influenced by a text such as Slavoj Žižek's *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* as by the layered drama of writers like Dostoyevsky or David Adams Richards. Like Teju Cole in *Open City*, Patterson presents radicalization as a response to Western aggression, rather than the cause of it. If anything, Patterson could have spent more time on the radicalization of the young coffee-shop worker, Mohammed Hashto. The violence inflicted upon Hashto and the violence he inflicts linger long after the novel is over.

Patterson writes:

> The soldiering parts of these wars was all anyone at home talked about. But wars are more than the shooting. Even within the same side, they're about competing ideas about how to live, about what is disposable and what is essential. A place like this stands for something.

What exactly does a place like Kandahar Airfield stand for? Patterson's Airfield, a small, makeshift city in the middle of southern Afghanistan, takes on the complexity and easy familiarity of Dickens' London, Cole's New York, Joyce's Dublin. It's a spacious city where the mind has room to roam, where the implications of Western military force can be better approached and understood.

Three from Gaspereau

Sean Howard
The Photographer's Last Picture. Gaspereau $29.95

Matt Robinson
Some Nights It's Entertainment; Some Other Nights Just Work. Gaspereau $17.95

Rob Taylor
The News. Gaspereau $18.95

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

"They fuck you up, your mum and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do." The last poetic word on parenthood belongs to Philip Larkin, who in "This Be the Verse" suggested bleakly how to lead a happy life, or at least a not completely unhappy one: "Get out as early as you can, / And don't have any kids yourself." (He did not.) Larkin's poem appeared in *High Windows* (1974), a glum book of only twenty-four poems. Although it too is slim and spare, Rob Taylor's *The News* contains half as many poems again—and offers a decidedly cheerier account of procreation. The collection records stages of his wife's pregnancy—one poem for each week, beginning with the fifth—and the arrival of their son. Interspersed with reflections on imminent fatherhood are references to the news of the world, which is often violent and rarely uplifting: "the Paris shootings" in "Eleven Weeks," "Nine dead in Charleston, S.C." in "Thirty-Three Weeks," and so on. (*I read the news today, oh boy*.) The happiest developments, Taylor's poems propose, cannot be isolated from the most harrowing; the public world and the intensely personal cannot be separated. But here and there in *The News* are passages that could be called Larkinesque not in the misanthropic sense, but instead in reference to quiet moments of grace and fallibility. In "Nine Weeks," the father-to-be is comically (but charmingly) unhelpful: "In a fever of worrying / the world ready for you / I wasted another day." In "Thirty-Two Weeks," he ventures into the mountains for a last touch of solitude. Yet he remains a homemaker in the wilderness, his new responsibilities evoked even in his retreat:

> I crush a house deep
> in the well of my pack
> and drive and hike.
> Check cell reception
> till it's gone. Unfurl
> the house beneath
> a glacier, blow moisture
> through my sleeping pad's
> synthetics, relieve the bag
> of its compression sack
> and crawl inside.

And in "Thirty-Four Weeks," the speaker anticipates by the glow of "the bedroom's single bulb" the advent of daily rhythms. He addresses his son: "You'll soon know day from night. / But first, I pray, you'll sense / this rustling ochre light." The book's structure is somewhat rigid—unavoidably so—but Taylor's best poems have a compensating capacity to surprise. They succeed in showing how the extraordinary resides in the resolutely ordinary passage of days and weeks, and in a phase of life so common that we have all experienced it: "That's the thing about news— / you've heard it before."

In *Some Nights It's Entertainment; Some Other Nights Just Work*, Matt Robinson dwells on familiar domestic matters and on reliable pastimes: hockey, baseball, drinking. His poems' titles indicate a directness of approach—"Dog," "Bear," "Harbour," "Heart," "Explanation," "On Doubt," "Cold Spring Song"—but the poems themselves are dense meditations that sidle up to their nominal subjects. In "Bear," a fearsome, hungry creature wakes the speaker's friend: "An animal at her window pawing, lazily, for / a meat; a dank, unseen set of mandibles anxious / for a smatch of god-knows-what." (*Smatch*—an odd, old word meaning "taste.") Yet the disturbance turns out to have been something else altogether—an earthquake—and Robinson takes the midnight mistake as an illustration of the imagination's unreliable workings:

> Sometimes a bear
> is nothing but the earth's quarrel with itself.
> Another way the mind plays tricks, infers.
> How
> time settles, awkwardly aslant; how we
> fix things
> to one another, in error, then partially
> recant
> those bonds. How a logic's birth is often
> tremored.

Although his poems are rarely longer than a page, they have a sprawling quality: Robinson favours lists, digressions, synonyms, and departures. He stacks words upon phrases; precarious sentences wobble with style. His lexicon includes both the recherché ("apologue," "fibril") and the everyday ("those frosty tallboys"), and memorable coinages fleck and dapple crackerjack poems: "stark ozoned crackleflash," "a candycorned indigestion," "slumptumbled-cum-crumbled." Robinson's fifth book, *Some Nights It's Entertainment* is the work of a poet assured of his topics and tone.

In the introduction to his complex book of poetry and prose, Sean Howard supplies a necessary explanation of his project:

> *The Photographer's Last Picture* is an experiment in poetic investigation of another "monstrous world," that of the Great War, a disaster cutting deep into our culture, breeding even fouler monsters—including the Nazi and Soviet death camps—and still shadowing our movements[.] . . . In full view of the reader, and craving both her patience and participation, the investigation slowly develops twenty photographs from *Collier's Photographic History of the European War* (1916) into poems sharing Wilfred Owen's aim (and achievement) of *distillation*: flashes illuminating an uncapturable reality.

Over the course of nearly four hundred pages, Howard provides commentary on the photographs (which are reproduced in the book), extensive notes inspired by the images, and poems extracted from the jottings. Part commonplace book, part log, the result is an idiosyncratic assemblage of observations about the First World War, other historical atrocities, photography, reading, and the process of poetic composition. As a poet, Howard is laconic, aphoristic—a reference to Bashō hints at the relevance of haiku—while his prose is often anecdotal. He is a compelling chronicler of the wastelands of the Western Front, the North Sea, Gallipoli, and elsewhere. A description of a remarkable picture suggests the intensity of Howard's writing. Killed while

pressing the shutter, a war photographer is shown collapsing in his own exposure:

> *First or last light? Top left, bloom of smoke, sun I think lifting, opening a grandly ruined scene, showstopper backdrop artfully devised: front and centre, a broad, branchless trunk, tower leaning slightly right, leading a line of ragged figures, brutalized, surrendering to the photographer. But he, too, surrenders, arms high, tilting slightly right (satchel over left shoulder), falling, it looks,* through *the camera, to* and through *the earth, slow spin from airlock, left arm brushing a cone of light, shellburst-fan from bottom left, moon surface fast approaching, pebble-comets tailing shadow. Right of the cone, firefly-flaws, meteor shower, light sharp as shrapnel.*

A strange, imposing book that defies simple review, an obsessive magnum opus, *The Photographer's Last Picture* is an impressive contribution to Canadian literature about the Great War.

Keeping Pace with Global Times

Paul Huebener, Susie O'Brien, Tony Porter, Liam Stockdale, and Yanqiu Rachel Zhou, eds.
Time, Globalization and Human Experience: Interdisciplinary Explorations.
Routledge US $145.00

Reviewed by Tania Aguila-Way

This volume marks a new direction in the field of globalization studies, which, as noted by the editors, has been slow to address the *temporal* dimensions of the "time-space compression" that geographer David Harvey famously ascribed to the global back in the 1990s. The collection addresses this gap by drawing on multiple disciplines to grapple with the "contested notions of time and speed" that accompany the global. Subjects under discussion include the relationship between time, political sovereignty, and political critique; the temporalities of global capital, preemptive security, and petroculture; the global spread of infectious diseases; and the tension between official timekeeping and the material realities of lived time.

Despite their diversity of subject matter, the chapters share an interest not just in identifying the many ways in which globalization hegemonizes our experience of time, but also in asking how the very contradictions that pervade global capitalism can create unexpected openings for the creation of "more socially just and sustainable futures." Robert Hassan's chapter on "temporal sovereignty" locates this potential in the contradictions inherent to "accelerated" networked time, which is modelled on computer networking, but involves participation by human actors who can never be fully in sync with their technological counterparts. For Hassan, this tension emphasizes that "time is *human* before it is technological," and thus requires "political recognition . . . as a human right." Wayne Hope's chapter on worker exploitation sees opportunities for transnational networks of "labour resistance" in the time-sensitive structures of global supply chains, which require collaboration across workforces in multiple time zones. In their chapter on the SARS crisis, Yanqiu Rachel Zhou and William D. Coleman explore how the time-space compression that enabled the rapid spread of SARS across the globe also facilitated the development of an effective transnational infrastructure for combatting infectious disease threats. Other contributors see a democratizing potential in the tension between officially imposed temporalities and the "material rhythms" of the environment and the human body. In his chapter examining the workings of global time standards, Kevin K. Birth concludes that official timekeeping depends on an assumption of "temporal uniformity" that belies the complex relationship between the

earth's rotation and the circadian cycles of the human body. Adam Barrows' chapter addresses this complexity by theorizing globalized time as a "perpetual negotiation" between "larger global cycles and smaller idiosyncratic local rhythms."

For readers looking for direct applications to literary studies, several chapters stress the importance of the narrative imagination as a key terrain for negotiating the conflicting temporalities involved in globalization. Simon Orpana's chapter analyzing the sci-fi film *Looper* illustrates how cultural texts can reinforce dominant temporalities by limiting our capacity to imagine "present and future" alternatives to the status quo, while Liam Stockdale examines how the practice of preemptive security relies on the speculative imagination to govern a future that remains "unknowable." Brent Ryan Bellamy asks how the narrative resources of science fiction might be used to disrupt the "endless, oil-infused present" envisioned by petroculture, while Petra Rethmann argues that finding alternatives to "neoliberal life" requires replacing linear conceptions of time with a "utopian imagination" that "sees time as contingent."

All in all, this wide-ranging collection illuminates the social, political, and environmental stakes involved in thinking about the relationship between time and globalization, providing a useful starting point for scholars interested in examining how the timescapes of Canadian literature and culture interact with the timescapes of the global.

Newfoundland: Can You Dig It?

Anna Kearney Guigné
The Forgotten Songs of the Newfoundland Outports: As Taken from Kenneth Peacock's Newfoundland Field Collection, 1951-1961.
U of Ottawa P $69.95

Benedicte Ingstad
A Grand Adventure: The Lives of Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad and Their Discovery of a Viking Settlement in North America.
McGill-Queen's UP $39.95

Reviewed by Paul Chafe

If we are to take our instruction from the many televised advertisements for Newfoundland and Labrador tourism, Newfoundlanders and their culture are composed of equal parts hospitality and whimsy, untampered landscapes and plucky puffins, and, of course, Viking adventurers and Celtic fiddle music. Given the wide swath cut by such a culture, it is perhaps not surprising that an "omnibus" review can be written about two texts as disparate as *A Grand Adventure* and *The Forgotten Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*. Reading about the work of Norwegian-born explorer-archaeologist couple Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad and the work of Toronto-born ethnomusicologist Kenneth Peacock, one is reminded of philosopher F. L. Jackson's slightly cynical response to the Newfoundland culture industry: "[W]e had no idea we were a living cultural goldmine until the anthropologists came along and told us so." Both texts are goldmines in their own right, and depict depths and sides of the Newfoundland character not examined in tourism commercials.

A Grand Adventure is not really about Newfoundland—it is anthropologist Benedicte Ingstad's biography of her parents; the peak of their professional careers being their discovery of a one-thousand-year-old Norse settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows on Newfoundland's northern tip.

The work is thorough, engaging, and lovingly rendered. Ingstad details the early lives of her parents, their courtship, their lives and adventures, and the surprising amount of resistance the couple had to face, even into their old age, around the authentication of the Norse site and their rights to the accolades as the site's discoverers.

Helge was eighteen years Anne Stine's senior and he outlived her by four years, and this is probably why *A Grand Adventure* often depicts Anne Stine as a part of Helge's life rather than the other way around. Helge is certainly an interesting character, and he trounced through the twentieth century with a man's certainty that there was a part of the world out there he was destined to claim. Far more interesting was Anne Stine, who had to navigate the world differently. Witness her father's toast at her wedding, in which it appears Anne Stine has achieved her life's purpose while Helge could have done worse:

> Eilif said to Anne Stine: "As a young girl he was your dream hero, who now as a mature woman, you have found your way back to." And to Helge he said, "Accept Anne Stine as she is. Flawless she isn't, but I can say she is a worthy person and is dearly and completely in love with you."

I found myself playing the archaeologist and digging through the text for more details of Anne Stine's life—a life made all the more unknowable due to the fact she burned many of her letters and journals just before she died.

Those who like a little poesy in their prose will not find much to satisfy them in *A Grand Adventure*. Ingstad's utilitarian language moves her parents expeditiously through the plot points of their lives. The same cannot be said of *The Forgotten Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*. The text is presented largely as a scholarly source, but like that other great reference text, the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, it can be read as one would read a narrative, and provides enjoyable moments of the captured cadences and *joie de vivre* of its subjects. The field notes following the lyrics of "The Bellburn Tragedy" claim, "Following the performance of this song Clara Stevens commented, 'What do you think of he? I made he.'" Of "Harry Dunn (The Hanging Limb)" it is noted, "For line one of stanza two, Mike Kent pronounces the word 'once' as 'oncst' or 'wuncst.'" Perhaps most notable is the disparity between the singers and the songs they sing, which sometimes depict tragedies or crimes or failed loves but are described often as being delivered with great vigor and humour.

Guigné notes that Kenneth Peacock's original text "is considered to be a bible for Newfoundland singers and a valuable resource for research," but that the selections suffer because "his personal preferences frequently guided his publishing agenda." In essence, those who pilfer Peacock's text for songs of themselves are using the work of a researcher whose interest in the people he was recording was, according to Guigné, at times of only a "passing nature." Guigné uses her considerable scholarly talents to present more information about these songs and their singers, and she does so without agenda. In that same spirit, my copies of both these texts now rest in strategic locations in my home, inviting visitors to dig into them and make their own discoveries.

Two Survivors

Ilse Johansen; Heather Marshall, ed; Hans Rudolf Gahler, trans.
Surviving the Gulag: A German Woman's Memoir. U of Alberta P $34.95

Eric Koch
Otto & Daria: A Wartime Journey Through No Man's Land. U of Regina P $25.95

Reviewed by Graham Nicol Forst

"Kanada" was the name given by prisoners of the notorious Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp to the enormous warehouse

section there, where prisoners' belongings were sorted out. It was so called because it was regarded as a place of abundance. Canada ultimately became a preferred destination for hundreds of Europe's wartime detainees; and the lives of two of these Canada-bound prison survivors are documented in these two new books from prairie university publishers. It is hard to imagine two more dissimilar books.

German-born Ilse Johansen was a civilian in the German military; she almost certainly (although it is never mentioned) was a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM; League of German Girls), and certainly, according to her editor, became a Nazi party member. After she was captured by advancing Russian troops in 1945, she spent four harrowing years in Russia's dreaded "Gulag Archipelago."

Surviving the Gulag is Johansen's extraordinarily detailed account of these four bitter years. Recently discovered by family members, Johansen's German-language memoirs were edited by her grandniece, Heather Marshall, and are here skilfully translated from the German by Hans Rudolf Gahler. The book's subtitle reveals its uniqueness: readers of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn would be unaware of the particular indignities suffered by women in the Gulag (the affronts to modesty, the sexual advances, the inordinate physical demands, and so on), although, ironically, it was her "feminine" skill as a seamstress which often won Johansen favour amongst the prison guards and authorities, often leading to relatively comfortable conditions.

Hunger, freezing cold, typhus, lice, mosquitoes, bedbugs, rats—all were part of Gulag life, and Johansen survived these dreadful conditions through luck, extraordinary resourcefulness, cunning, audacity, and discretion, together with an icy, tougher-than-nails fortitude and, above all, a remarkable skill with learning foreign languages. The fact that she was *German*, of course, often made her a particular target of cruelty from the Russian guards, a fact rooted in Germany's genocidal attack on Russia starting in 1941. On this point, Johansen is silent. Nor is she forthcoming about her Nazism, or about the disastrous results of her fellow Germans' racist and expansionist policies. Hitler's name does not appear in the index.

A completely different prison-time experience of a German national during World War II is recounted in Eric Koch's *Otto & Daria*. Koch, who was born about twenty years earlier than Johansen but still lives in Ontario, was a German citizen and Jewish refugee who escaped to England before the Holocaust; he was imprisoned there as a German national, and was subsequently deported, along with 35,000 other German nationals, to a Canadian internment camp for "Enemy Aliens" in Sherbrooke, Quebec. *Otto & Daria* is Koch's memoir of his eighteen-month internment in the Sherbrooke camp, and of the seven years following his release, leading eventually to his long career with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

Canada's internment camps—at least those in the east created for Europeans, in contrast to those ramshackle abodes created (mainly) in BC and Alberta for Japanese Canadians—were vastly more liveable than those in the Russian prison archipelagos. Consequently, Koch's brief internment was relatively benign, and his prose accounts of those years, unlike Johansen's bitterness, are quite breezy and witty, and often nostalgic, especially when he turns to letters he received (and kept for eighty years!) from an English *bohèmienne* he met briefly while in England, named Daria.

Although Koch (he later changed his real name "Otto" to "Eric") only met the teenaged Daria twice, their friendship was strong, as her quirky, precocious letters to him reveal. These witty and droll letters provide a sort of metonymy for the nonagenarian Koch's sense of lost life during his

long sojourn in "No Man's Land," and also for his guilt in deserting Daria; they take up only a few pages of the memoir but their teenaged author is so articulate, intelligent, and mature beyond her years (never mind flirtatious and scatterbrained) that the reader has no trouble understanding Daria's lifetime effect on "Otto."

Both Johansen and Koch were (are) blessed with an incredible memory for detail; and if Koch's experiences are less visceral and degrading than were Johansen's, they offer an interesting contrast to the bitter and anguished Gulag memoir. Here, then, we have two lives torn apart by World War II, finding a peaceful home in "Kanada."

First and Fourteenth

Allison LaSorda
Stray. icehouse poetry $19.95

Susan McCaslin
Painter, Poet, Mountain: After Cézanne.
Quattro $18.00

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Neither the emerging Allison LaSorda nor the veteran Susan McCaslin disappoints with these two new volumes. *Stray*, LaSorda's debut, shows much promise and contains many gems. The speaker often explores and develops her identity through various images and short narratives, sometimes opaque or jarringly juxtaposed but slowly revealing her deepening confidence and understanding as the collection progresses. The poems in the opening "Fish" section often embody aspects of an adult identity emerging from the sometimes wistful, sometimes comic, often turbulent events of childhood and adolescence. Family members—father, mother, and sister—appear on the fringes, never quite clearly defined, but playing important developmental roles. The speaker sometimes appears to both attract and resist the reader, as in these lines from "The Sea Is All about Us": "My anxiety's / origin story isn't in bleached reefs / or fault lines, it's in maws / gaping with *somedays*." In other instances the arch humour of poems such as "Playdate" resonates through a tight and effectively controlled structure. "Fish & Bird," the section's concluding piece, develops confidently to a brilliant conclusion on the difference between "small" and "large" cuts—in our bodies and our lives. In the following "Bird" section, a poem like "Out of the Chorus" captures the breathless energy of the speaker's imagined memories of restlessness in the womb and her lively adult dancing, with an ending that echoes that of Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill." In other poems LaSorda poignantly recreates some of life's most tragic moments, as in "Fraterville Coal Mine," which recounts the Fraterville mining disaster of 1902, the worst in Tennessee's history. It is narrated by alternating voices, with real quotations from a letter written by one of the miners a short time before his death by suffocation and imagined replies from his wife on the outside. The final section, "Meat," continues some of the earlier topics and themes, notably in "Driving 25 Sideroad, North of 30," which sums up the challenges of keeping identity intact through selective memories: "Finding oneself is a chore. / I want the wild impulses / of another's troubles." There will surely be more books to come from LaSorda.

McCaslin's *Painter, Poet, Mountain*, subtitled *After Cézanne* and featuring a cover photo of one of Paul Cézanne's most famous works, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, is a poetic pilgrimage of sorts, beginning with McCaslin's journey to Aix-en-Provence and continuing but not concluding with her return to Fort Langley, BC. The groundbreaking career of the painter Cézanne (1839-1906), bridging impressionism and cubism, was to have a profound impact on many twentieth-century painters, novelists, and poets. McCaslin focuses on some of his most famous artistic subjects, most notably

Mont Sainte-Victoire, apples, and bathers, to all of which he returned many times; his relationships with his father and mother, Paul Jr., his wife Hortense, and Émile Zola; and his later influence on writers as varied as Gertrude Stein, Rainer Maria Rilke, Martin Heidegger, and Thomas Merton. But in this, her fourteenth book of poems, the profound influence of Cézanne's legacy on McCaslin herself is almost palpable. There is a brilliant suite of poems on the subject of Mont Sainte-Victoire, which she casts, among other tropes, as a modern Mount Sinai, down which Cézanne ("this late-coming Moses") lugs "his burning canvas scrolls." Like Cézanne's own variations on this subject, McCaslin's poems approach the mountain from many angles, including three "Quantum Mountain" études. The processes of painterly and poetic compositions are almost effortlessly conflated in these ekphrastic offerings, perhaps nowhere more than in these lines with their perfect bilingual pun:

> Open the lines to themselves
> to make room for the painter's
> crisp, mellow
> *pommes*
> and their absences[.]

Cézanne's apples figure significantly in many other poems—as in quotations such as "*Cézanne's Apple rolled the stone from the mouth of the tomb*" (D. H. Lawrence) or "'There's more of ultimate reality / in an apple by Cézanne / than in a Jesus by Hoffman'" (Suzanne de Cézanne [*sic*] playfully quoting the spirit of Thomas Merton de Cézanne [*sic*] paraphrasing Paul Tillich). *Painter, Poet, Mountain* is, among its many brilliances, an evocative journey into the lives and artistic spirits of both Cézanne and McCaslin herself. At one point she writes: "I want to make one poem / as real as his apples." In this luminous journey into the heart and mind of a genius, she has succeeded, more than once, in doing so.

An Asian Canadian Literary Landmark

SKY Lee

Disappearing Moon Cafe. NeWest $20.95

Reviewed by Lily Cho

A few years after the first publication of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* in 1990, I got up the courage to ask my Canadian literature professor for permission to write my term paper on this novel. I was an English major in the second year of my honours BA program at the University of Alberta. The novel was not on the syllabus, but my professor encouraged me to go for it. I don't know how I knew about the novel. I must have come across it at the library. Up until that point, I had not read any literature by an Asian Canadian writer in my school work. Lee's novel and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* were the only Asian Canadian texts I would be "taught" throughout the rest of my academic training. As I recently recounted at the launch of the *Asian Canadian Studies Reader* (a textbook I really could have used to help me think about *Disappearing Moon Cafe*), I wrote a terrible paper on Lee's novel. I had no idea what I was doing. All I knew was that the book mattered to me because it was the first time I encountered cadences and rhythms of a world that I knew intimately, but that I had thought was irremediably separate from my life as a student of English literature. I had not thought there was room for the sound of Cantonese, for talking about ghosts and haunting as an unexceptional part of daily life (my mother still refers to some places as "dirty," by which she means too full of ghosts), for the painfully tight bonds of shame and history, and for telling stories that were not for telling.

In my family, the most important stories were the ones that we knew should never be told. As Lee understands, there is "a secret code" that guards these stories from the ears of outsiders. It was a silent pact leading to

more silence. And yet, here she was, telling stories that busted injunctions of shame and silence. Here was a book that knew the risk and cost of what it means to tell such stories, and it did so with care and tenderness. These were not quite my stories, but I knew them. And, as Lee suggests in the interview with Smaro Kamboureli that accompanies this new edition of the novel, these were not quite her stories either. Lee tells Kamboureli, for example, that there is a "barbershop tale" embedded in the novel, a tale that Chinatown bachelors would have told one another sitting on the bench of the barbershop, warming up by the stove and trying to stave off loneliness by "shooting off one's mouth." She tells us that in her own "barbershop gang" (who would become the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop and contributors to *Ricepaper* literary magazine), a "photographer-poet-postman named Jim Wong-Chu" told her that "he had a woman's story" for her. Given the enormity of his contributions to Asian Canadian literature and culture, it is so fitting that Wong-Chu is threaded through the story of the stories in this novel. These are stories that have been passed on, that have been told, but only within the enclosure of the family, the gang, the barbershop.

This novel tells a lot of stories and, in doing so, breaks open a world of Asian Canadian literature that would come. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is a landmark. In 1990, it marked out a new and necessary site in Canadian literature, and this beautiful new edition, accompanied by an afterword by Chris Lee and by Kamboureli's telling conversation with SKY Lee, affirms the status of this novel as a singularly core text in the canon of Asian Canadian literature. How lucky we are that the first major contemporary Chinese Canadian novel would also engage so brilliantly and so presciently with issues that remain vital: the construction and constructedness of family and kinship; queer desire; settler colonialism; relations between and across immigrant and Indigenous communities; and feminism. Lee accomplishes all of this through an engrossing story of betrayal, adultery, loss, and deep, deep love. Canadian literature has been graced with this novel for almost three decades. It remains an urgent and necessary novel.

Human/Mythos

Jay Macpherson; Melissa Dalgleish, ed.
The Essential Jay Macpherson.
Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Micheline Maylor
Little Wildheart. U of Alberta P $19.95

Reviewed by Emily Bednarz

Edited by Melissa Dalgleish, *The Essential Jay Macpherson* (2017) is the fifteenth volume of the Essential Poets Series published by Porcupine's Quill. It presents an eclectic assemblage of the late Macpherson's poetry, including selections from well-known works such as *The Boatman* (1957) and *Welcoming Disaster* (1974) as well as lesser-known and previously unpublished pieces. As Dalgleish deftly outlines in her introduction, Macpherson cuts a complex poetic figure and is not without her critics. Her poetry, with its dense allusions and often strict technical form (similar to works of other "mythopoets" of her ilk), has been accused of being "disconnected, antiseptic, academic literature about literature instead of literature about life." Dalgleish embraces the seemingly ambitious task of showcasing Macpherson's focus on "the fundamental feelings, dreams and desires that make us human"; Macpherson's poetry, Dalgleish's selection reveals, resides at the intersection between mythology and "emotional and psychological resonance" where ancient stories "tell us something about ourselves and our place in the world."

This endeavour is made clear from the first poem of the selection: in "Non-Identification," a poem from Macpherson's

early periodical and unpublished works, the speaker compares the earth's elements to feelings of human pain and disconnection:

> Unenvying we lack
> Water's ignorance of pain,
> The old indifference of stone,
> Fire's easy taut and slack
> —And therefore shall be hurt again.

Dalgleish's selections continue to emphasize the very human inflections of Macpherson's work, even in the poet's allusion-heavy pieces. Such poems place the speaker at the junction between personal experiences of loss (as depicted through the death of the speaker's mother in "The Comforter") and the epic scale of mythological figures (as Lucifer's fall runs parallel to her mother's ascension to heaven). The collection also showcases Macpherson's developing sense of humour in regards to mythological allusion (perhaps best represented in "Poets & Muses," from *Welcoming Disaster*).

While Dalgleish indicates that the collection is organized chronologically, it may have been beneficial to label the divisions in publication between selections; this would have aided in Dalgleish's intent to place Macpherson's work "back within its original contexts." The effect of linking the poems together without interruption, however, seamlessly represents Macpherson's evolving poetic, philosophical, and psychological sensibilities. As such, this collection is recommended for any admirer of Macpherson's work as well as students, teachers, and researchers of Canadian modernism and mythopoetry.

Micheline Maylor's 2017 collection *Little Wildheart* similarly fuses the personal and visceral to the mythological and metaphysical. In turns surprising and affective, Maylor's collection presents a bodily, sensory intervention at the intersection between human and animal, intellectual and ephemeral. In "Dissilience," for example, the speaker portrays a commune between rodents killed at the roadside and a celestial body:

> And the gophers, whose life had already faded,
> opened their ribs, peony-like, wild, unclenched
> . . . . . .
> Then they unwound tendrils of intestines up to the sky
> and offered organs to heaven above
> with all the bravery they could.

The path to heaven is paved with the rodents' innards and marked by a too-common violence that is refocused through Maylor's carnal, even gory, imagery. Her adroit use of surrealist technique is also apparent throughout the collection; she examines, even blueprints, the terrain of human fear, desire, apathy, confusion, elation, and release through unexpected and generative associations. Poems such as "For there are still such mysteries, and such advice," "Free," and "Benediction" showcase Maylor's imaginative capacity and draw in the reader with maddening ferocity—we stand at the edge of the abyss that Maylor invokes alongside the speaker.

Following *Full Depth: The Raymond Knister Poems* (2007), *Starfish* (2011), and *Whirr and Click* (2013), *Little Wildheart* is Maylor's fourth book of poetry. Her diction is dense yet comprehensible and is well suited to both the casual reader of poetry and those seeking a linguistic challenge. Maylor takes some tactical poetic risks, however; her use of the second person in poems such as "Ten" perhaps runs the risk of alienating particular groups of readers —but tactics like this establish the way in which the speaker feels divided from former versions of herself. Her form and style appear deceptively straightforward; while her line-formatting is orderly and eye-pleasing, her quick cuts between images, accelerated rhythm, and use of enjambment force the reader to re-evaluate the impact and connotation of Maylor's words, and to appreciate her nuanced and masterful poetic technique.

Lying about Lemons

Nicole Markotić, ed.
Robert Kroetsch: Essays on His Works.
Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Ryan Melsom

Nicole Markotić's edited collection *Robert Kroetsch: Essays on His Works* is, above all, a biographical documentary poem masquerading as a book of essays. The particular way Markotić assembles a critical field of commentaries challenges the expectations of an essay collection at every turn. The book starts off with the expected introduction—a well-rehearsed recap of "Mr. Canadian Postmodern" scholarship dealing with Robert Kroetsch's self-erasing explorations of genre, narrative, geography, binaries, and (it goes without saying) himself. Given the collection's timing in relation to Kroetsch's life, it understandably reads as a scholarly hagiography of sorts. However, that's just one genre among many here, as it turns out. The collection is anything but run-of-the-mill.

Markotić's inclusion of biography, interviews, and poetic responses in addition to a series of compelling scholarly essays ultimately provides *Essays* with its unmistakably documentary feel. It surprises a reader with lyrical scholarly prose ("Tradition is not automatically bad and getting lost is not automatically good"); with risky linguistic gestures protected by their status as academic sass ("Robert Kroetsch is a liar. Or so he'd like us to believe"); and with scholarly citations legitimating scandalous explorations of deeply personal responses and musings ("As a serialist fondler, of words and objects, his was a citrus mind").

In several pieces towards the end, particularly in Bowering's reading of "The Stone Hammer" and a collaborative series of reflections entitled "A Flight of Lemons," *Essays* risks exposing itself as an identifiable permutation of postmodern poetry. Staying true to its subject matter, however, it defies the label by switching genre again at the last moment, including a recorded interview wherein an MFA class of aspiring writers brings Kroetsch's dodgy voice itself into the text through the form of a wily little Q&A.

What emerges in the end is not exactly the story of Kroetsch's life and works. It's something deliciously haunted by the lively (if not exactly living) field of textual Kroetsch that has emerged throughout. It's partial, gestural, and to borrow Kroetsch's words, "something as complicated as love." It renders legible Markotić's comment in the introduction that it "breaks [her] heart" not to have been able to include more. As editor-poet, she's tasked, like Kroetsch's readers, with trying to "perceive the thing while questioning the limitations of [her] own perception." A brief list of Kroetsch's accolades appears to close off the book's final, Wikipedia-style biography, but in offering an even more distilled, reductive version of Kroetsch's life, it only raises questions about the man: Is he there in the facts? Elsewhere? Does the text about Kroetsch end with absolute finality at any point?

That's the thing: Kroetsch's writing does this to people. That's what's so elegantly illustrated in both the form and content of this remarkable collection. You think his work has had its say but it's only just begun. It's academic text as trickster figure: excellent, creative scholarship morphing into poetic fancy aiming to get back to firm scholarly ground but unable to hide that persistent glint in its eye.

Unpacking Migration

Donald F. Mulcahy, ed.
Coming Here, Being Here: A Canadian Migration Anthology. Guernica $25.00

Donald F. Mulcahy, ed.
A Second Coming: Canadian Migration Fiction. Guernica $25.00

Reviewed by Emily Ballantyne

The collections of migrant writing edited by Welsh Canadian writer Donald F. Mulcahy —*A Second Coming* and *Coming Here, Being Here*—are primarily framed as a celebration of Canada as an adopted homeland, where opportunity and freedom from oppression have allowed peoples from around the world a safe harbour and a fresh start. Both volumes involve a diverse array of authors and perspectives, primarily European, on immigration to Canada and its impact on their descendants. These personal and fictional reflections on the experience of migrant life in Canada are strongest when they nuance and at times challenge Canada as a welcoming land of bounty and multicultural harmony, and when they trouble migration as a linear, progressive narrative.

In *A Second Coming*, the narrators can sometimes be careful observers and comparative thinkers. Veena Gokhale's "Fantastic Falafel" contrasts the experience of Keshav with that of his former university mate Vaman; Keshav unexpectedly encounters Vaman and slowly identifies the changes they have each gone through after their long separation. In Michael Mirolla's "Above El Club El Salvador," a second-generation Italian Canadian graduate student hunting for an apartment is compelled to take political and social action after renting a space above a social club of raucous guerrilla resistance fighters from El Salvador. Many of the authors construct intensely reflective witnesses who nuance the experience of identifying as a Canadian, as a newcomer, and as a resident in conflicting cultural spaces. Changes in identity, by choice and by circumstance, are a common thread in *A Second Coming*. Where in "I Am Anil," Romeo Kaseram presents the complexity of a rebel soldier coming to terms with his assumed identity as a war victim, in "Mephisto in the Land of Ice and Snow," Eileen Lohka beautifully confronts her narrator's growing dissatisfaction with assimilation. "Mephisto" explores the psychological tolls on Kamla, a young immigrant woman who chooses to assimilate into the expectations of white, masculinist Canadian culture and suffers long-term repercussions as the repressed, but more socially accepted, "Camilla."

Coming Here, Being Here, the nonfiction companion to *A Second Coming*, is much more of a pastiche of forms and styles. While some authors offer their own personal memoirs, others contribute newspaper articles, narrative genealogies, and letters. There are a number of highly engaged reflections on language, translation, and identity, including works by Laurent Chabin, H. Masud Taj, and Myrna Kostash. Barbara Janusz offers a moving reflection on providing legal counsel to a Polish refugee who misunderstood the distinction between stores in a mall and departments in a store, accidentally stole a pair of boots, and must navigate the Canadian justice system. Other writers trace their own family genealogies and histories in Canada, and engage in journeys of return through historical research, personal interviews, and travel. Particularly memorable are the ways that found objects feature in *Coming Here, Being Here*. Vid Ingelevics discovered that his deceased father kept mementos from every time his name was misspelled; Iris Jones uncovers letters from a young immigrant woman in Saskatchewan to her friends in Wales. Carrie-Ann Smith identifies perhaps the most amusing found object of all: cornflakes. This Canadian staple, part of welcome packages offered at

the Pier 21 immigration facility and elsewhere, was a first taste of Canadian society. Most often, they were littered on the floors by disapproving newcomers, providing a soundscape for the first crunching steps into Canada. Though the stories and nonfictional accounts vary in style, perspective, and quality, the take-away of these two collections is that "Canadian" continues to be an unsettled identity that requires constant unpacking, reimagining, and, hopefully, revising to better account for the diversity of its iterations.

Collaborators Unbound

Renee Norman and Carl Leggo
Hearing Echoes. Inanna $18.95

Jennifer Still
Comma. BookThug $20.00

David White
The Lark Ascending. Pedlar $20.00

Reviewed by Michael Roberson

While co-authored books of poetry may not seem unusual, considering the long shadow cast by Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, conversation poems are apparently rare. Inevitably, then, that rarity makes *Hearing Echoes*, by Renee Norman and Carl Leggo, rather refreshing. The book alternates between authors, presenting a "complementary" collection that, despite offering distinct voices, delves into thinking "human life into poetry." Norman dedicates the book to her daughters and her mother, and Leggo dedicates it to his granddaughters; both authors embrace a definition of poetry as "patterns of documentation / recording lives so nothing is lost." Across five sections, the authors meditate on growing older in different roles: as parent, grandparent, partner, daughter, friend, educator, and pet owner. Each section begins with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf. While epigraphs provide inspirational "words for weaving," Woolf's presence remains relatively cursory and academic: "a question on *Jeopardy* / an answer in Trivial Pursuit."

At their best, the poems in *Hearing Echoes*—wholehearted demonstrations of the lyric as the "measure of the heart"—exhibit both honesty and wit. In tone and theme, the poems have a conversational familiarity; they echo recognizable experiences and feelings. Norman's "All Texted Out," for example, captures the poetry in text messages: "howdoyoumakespacesagain?" one line cutely reads. And in "Faster Than a Bullet," Leggo quotes his granddaughter: "Please, take the crust off my bread. Nana always does that sometimes." Part of the approachability of these poems, the comfort they can provide, comes also from the vulnerability they exude while dealing with grave themes like miscarriage, dementia, separation, and insecurity. That said, the poems often seem casual, rather than careful, like "poem[s] written / quickly in the gaps." But the occasional mixing of metaphors and awkward mechanics hardly diminish the sincerity of the voices in dialogue.

Given the apparent rarity of contemporary conversation poetry, I want to mention that David White was a contributor to *Renga: A Collaborative Poem* (1994), an exercise in the traditional Japanese collaborative form. Since the renga begins with haiku, I am not surprised to see White hone lyrical intensity in his newest work, *The Lark Ascending*. Written between 1997 and 2016, it infuses lyric meditation into narrative memoir and travelogue. A sequence of poems, it also serves as an essay about the culture that produced his adopted Chinese daughter, Shen—to whom he dedicates the book. White brackets his book with the figure of Lynda, a dear friend, who in the first poem, "Matrilineal," represents one of Shen's spiritual mothers, and who by the final poem, "Lynda," has tragically passed away. The book invokes both George Meredith's poem "The Lark Ascending" and the classical composition by Ralph Vaughan

Williams (inspired by Meredith). White uses the lyric voice to celebrate and articulate the spirit of life, past and present: both she "soaring from my (sad) release" and she "soaring up / into the song of your life."

Across the book's three sections, White demonstrates the kind of "elaborate, intricate" attention to detail he describes in "Paper Cutting":

> dedicated months expand
> a picture, subtract
> from the template
> as days are subtracted
> from a life.

He combines meticulousness with tenderness and humour. In "Chicken Pox," for example, he describes how his daughter has accidentally stepped on some alyssum flowers and must confront the "inescapable mortality of flowers" as the "[f]irst shock of knowing / transgression may arise / by the purest of accidents." Spanning nearly twenty years of writing, the book captures the expansions and subtractions that mark the life and wisdom of "a Queer Odysseus" with plenty to report about being alive in the twenty-first century as an adoptive father, a gay man, a devoted friend, and a human being.

In *Comma*, her third book of poetry, Jennifer Still uses methods of erasure and cut-up, constructing poems as remedial spells for her brother, who spent months in a coma. Listening to his breath and reading his "handwritten field guide to prairie grasses," she collaborates with his interests and condition. She begins the unpaginated book with a single poem, "Chrysalis," as an invocation to the ultimate symbol of regeneration. In that poem and across the book, "breath" figures prominently because "[s]omewhere / just below the breath, silence / reorders." Brilliantly, Still takes her brother's condition, his silence, and reimagines it as the condition of poetry itself. But when she writes that "[t]he poem, like a field, when leveled, can regenerate," she also refashions poetry as a device for healing. While the book contains seven sections in total, the middle section, "Papery Acts," provides her statement of poetics, in which she describes "[t]he scrap poem as suture. A mend." Still uses the book's pages to showcase her "pilfer[ed]" and "forag[ed]" poems—poems that originate in books, but also, as her notes describe, in such discoveries as a hornet's nest, flowers, a pencil box, seeds, tape, and even curtains. She also includes reproduced visual poems demonstrating her cut-ups, erosions, and erasures. Most of the poems "climb at the outer edge / of order," asking us to think beyond syntactic logic in favour of something far more rhizomatic. Still maintains an intense engagement with etymologies and word residues: shifting, omitting, or reordering letters pushes us beyond usual dimensions of sense on the path to discovery. She lightens the first "m" in the book's title, *Comma*, to enable the punctuation mark and her brother's condition to inhabit the same word. She takes hope in the possibility that a coma is not necessarily a full stop, that poetry has the capacity to heal.

Scorching Air

Catherine Owen
Dear Ghost,. Wolsak & Wynn $18.00

Sina Queyras
My Ariel. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Myra Bloom

Poets Catherine Owen and Sina Queyras conjure literary spirits in their new collections.

The comma in Owen's title *Dear Ghost,* registers the phrase's provenance in a line by the late great John Ashbery, the book's patron saint: "Dear ghost, what shelter / in the noonday crowd?" Though its final section explicitly comprises "Poems that veer into the freakish and may echo John Ashbery," the latter's influence can be felt in the peripatetic, expressionist qualities of the collection as a whole. Meandering through locales ranging from the far-flung (the

sinister streets of Istanbul; the misty lakes of Michoacán, Mexico) to the domestic (the subway; the bathtub), Owen goes on a corresponding interior voyage. "Sometimes life is just a series of events / with filaments less than more connecting," she muses in "Little Note on Passing By."

If the filaments of *Dear Ghost,* don't always connect, the poems nonetheless offer a compelling succession of vignettes, by turns poignant and humorous. The section "Poems that Work in the TV World" is an ironic behind-the-scenes look at Vancouver's film industry. In "The Deceased BGs," extras in monster makeup "tilt on chairs, texting the living, not quite / zombies but more the recently deceased with their inability to recognize / boundaries." Later, the phone of a hanged man rings mid-dangle, announcing the birth of his child: "the crew gathers around the killed man, / applauding again and again, the juxtaposition, the miracle." This poem attests to Owen's mastery of ironic juxtaposition, a technique infusing her existential musings with revivifying whimsy.

Montreal-based poet and professor Sina Queyras is also "looking for role models," as she affirms in her latest collection, *My Ariel.* Like generations of women before her, Queyras finds inspiration in Sylvia Plath, whose lyrical self-excavations shattered norms of propriety and prosody. Plath's 1965 *Ariel*—published under the curatorial auspices of her estranged husband Ted Hughes two years after her suicide—is widely recognized as one of the most important collections of the twentieth century and as an exemplar of confessional poetry. In *My Ariel,* Queyras intersperses rewritings of the *Ariel* poems with original compositions, joining her voice with Plath's to interrogate intersections of gender, motherhood, and art.

Like many contemporary cultural products (including Owen's *Dear Ghost,*), the collection oscillates between irony and sincerity, simultaneously inhabiting and critiquing the confessional mode. Queyras boldly unclosets skeletons of her past (her brother's death; her mother's rape) and lays bare her deepest anxieties in the present ("I am a very bad mother. A bad / partner. A bad poet"). At the same time, she registers the coercive pressures of self-disclosure, which have become particularly acute in this era of social media, epitomized here by retweets: "RTs, RTs, RTs have their reason," she riffs on the closing line of Plath's "The Couriers" ("Affirmation, affirmation, affirmation is the season").

Though Queyras initially frames the desire for validation as a product of digital culture, she goes on to connect it to the female artist's struggle for recognition. In the masterful sequence "Years," Queyras juxtaposes self-censoring lines from Plath's diary ("*DO NOT SHOW TED. He is genius. I his wife*") with the sexist dismissal of literary critics ("Her mind claws along"; "she wasn't / My physical type"). These voices form a chorus of patriarchal naysaying, which Queyras supplements with descriptions of her own experience:

> I have been writing a book about grief,
> which is also childhood.
> The director of the program has told me
> the novel is indulgent.
> I've thrown away the story—in his
> estimation, it's overwrought.

In this same poem, she summarizes the double-bind to which female writers are subject:

> We are either victims of our imagination
> or our lack
> Of imagination: either way, with or without
> Adequate containment, we appear to be
> victims.

Throughout *My Ariel,* Queyras draws in the voices of feminist and queer writers—an intellectual inheritance Dana Ward and Maggie Nelson have called "the many-gendered mothers of my heart"—to shore a fortress of female artistry against the ruinous

stereotype of the compulsively confessional woman. The closing lines of "I Am No Lady, Lazarus" are the book's manifesto, as well as a warrior cry of intellectual sovereignty:

> I want my poems and babies too. I want to have my sex
> And eat it too. Is that too much? You men, you have it all
> And raw. They say the only gold left to pan is buried
> Deep in shit. I will relish you right up inside me
> And at my leisure. I will take the baby teeth and songs
> Of happiness. I am no lady. I am scorching air.
> You can eat my genius, rare.

Newfoundland Letters

E. J. Pratt; Elizabeth Popham and David G. Pitt, eds.
E.J. Pratt: Letters. U of Toronto P $140.00

Reviewed by David Johnstone

Elizabeth Popham and David G. Pitt provide an invaluable resource to scholars of Canadian modernist poetry with *E. J. Pratt: Letters*, the last installment of the Collected Works series. These letters show the man behind the poetry that was arguably both the groundwork for and the substance of modernism in Canada. Pratt's poetry takes part in the "making of Canadian culture" in the first half of the twentieth century, while his letters record it. Ironically, the editors introduce the text with a quotation from Pratt: "As for my own letters and correspondence generally, I haven't preserved a syllable—not a letter." However, this is revealed to have been not necessarily the whole truth. Rather, the collection that the editors present is vast—and wholly indispensable for scholars in the field and those with an interest in Pratt's poetry.

Pratt's idiosyncrasies flourish in this text—his "erratic capitalization" and innovative indentation have purposefully been left unedited—to nearly the same extent that his realistic portrayal of Newfoundland's dialect flourishes in his early poetry. The reader is given a glance into his private personality, as opposed to his cultivated public personality, as it develops through the letters. Pratt is often charming, but he also proves himself to be extremely extroverted and dependent on social relationships. To his close friend Arthur Phelps he writes,

> Hi there! You old bees-wax! Hi there! you of the golden aureole! How are ye? How are ye? Why the Sam Hill, Art have I not received a line from you since your sail from Bobcaygeon? Here Lal [Phelps' wife] has written Vi [Pratt's wife] twice most devotedly, most voluminously, but ne'er a chirp from you.

Northrop Frye once quoted a small magazine's Notes on Contributors that read: "E. J. Pratt is the best poet and the kindest man in Canada." Consider Pratt's correspondence a testament to the latter, if not the former, as his insistence on hosting guests and throwing "stags" shines in many of these letters. Without doubt, I can say that Pratt is not your isolated artist—he is a friend. And reading this collection, it is as if he is your friend.

Of course, there is a voyeuristic feeling to the kind of insight into a person's life that letters can provide. This collection is no exception. However, the compassion that Pratt so often brings in his correspondence with his wife and child can be utterly heartwarming, too. To his daughter, Claire, while she is at camp, he writes:

> I am breathless at the way you write. Your description of the lake and the clouds was a prose poem. You really do not know how beautifully you can write. It is either modesty or an inferiority complex which denies the ability. Now cultivate it because it is an immense joy when it is pursued.

Pratt's letters, at times, share this poetic quality. When they do, they are not only "an immense joy," but an inspiration.

The cultivation of the public personality is valuably revealed too: the control that Pratt exercised over his image is clear from the beginning. Of *Newfoundland Verse* (1923), Pratt writes to his editor, Lorne Pierce, to "kindly see to it that such an ugly, stiff term as 'Professor' [be] absolutely excluded [from any publicity]: first, because the title is at present technically incorrect and, secondly, the term is sufficient to stultify any poetic claims which a writer may, in all modesty, put forth." He begrudges the term several times throughout, both when applied to him and when applied to others. Pratt's desire for success in the early years is shown when, after writing "The Witches' Brew," he writes to his editor again: "I should like it to be tried out upon one or two American and English Publishers first—firms of a more aggressive character that take hold of young men. . . . I am not particularly anxious for Canadian publication alone for reasons I will state later."

At another point we are given Pratt's thoughts on some of the first submissions to *Canadian Poetry Magazine*—"One and one half tons of stinking mackerel"—as he bemoans that he must "not ignore the traditional schools, though [he keeps] out the scarlet maples and the beaver dams wherever possible." While Pratt may seem to celebrate Canada in a poem like *Towards the Last Spike* (1952), he resists the nationalistic maple leaf-slinging image quite passionately and distastefully in his letters. Pratt longed to be a poet not restricted by borders, as his letters make clear: "though I objected to the Maple Leaf on the cover it was put on." Pratt's resistance to performing these stereotypes and being constricted to Canada is due in large part to his being, in some ways, an outsider in Canada: Newfoundland did not officially join the country until 1949.

Popham and Pitt's detailed effort is undeniable, serving any interested reader beyond expectation. However, for the reader who craves more after diving into these 792 pages, there is an online edition that is thoroughly hyperlinked and which includes many more letters, including some of the other sides of the correspondence. That being said, the content of these letters, while admittedly dry in places, is enough to keep a reader or scholar occupied for quite some time. This resource is one for the shelves of any researcher in the field, and it will no doubt be cited regularly.

Class of Generation U

Meredith Quartermain
U Girl. Talonbooks $19.95

Jacob Wren
Rich and Poor. BookThug $20.00

Reviewed by David M. J. Carruthers

Rich and Poor, Jacob Wren's most recent novel, traces the contours of the ever-widening chasm between wealth and poverty in the globalized West. It follows the lives of two men, each an unnamed narrator: the one, an aging Baby Boomer, an executive of a mammoth multinational; the other, an ambitious Millennial, precariously employed and hell-bent on revenge. Wren's third novel demonstrates the shifting attitudes, on both sides of the divide, toward the class conflict of the twenty-first century. As much about the journey toward maturation—of the temperance of vengeance into justice, the conversion of greedy self-interest into altruism, and the transformation from radicalization toward social organization—as it is about the dire need for economic reform, *Rich and Poor* provides a surprisingly insightful and deeply sympathetic characterization of the values and attitudes of *both* classes, with its first-person narration softening readers, whatever their material conditions, toward two figures often demonized in the popular imagination: the ruthless capitalist and the zealous activist.

This said, however, *Rich and Poor* can be a bit of a slog at times—slow to begin and occasionally riddled with long exposition that neither significantly develops character nor moves the plot forward. There is little distinction in voice between the character-narrators—a strength in Wren's more colourful, zany, and comic *Polyamorous Love Song*, but a fault here. The novel-in-two-parts orients itself toward a popular audience; those with backgrounds in economics or political theory may find Wren's jargon unbelievable, his concepts oversimplified, and his solutions to social injustice naive, even saccharine. The narrative does offer hope, however, for the amicable resolution of ideological differences—those, perhaps, between a son and his father—at this crucial historical moment in which the political climate grows ever more charged, disparate, and partisan. If anything, *Rich and Poor* is an interesting read and shouldn't be neglected for its few shortcomings.

Meredith Quartermain, however and as always, cannot disappoint with her new novel, *U Girl*. Recognition of Quartermain's versatility leads to astonishment at her oeuvre. The contrast is sharp, for instance, between the dreamy flights of the poetic prose in *I, Bartleby* (her prior book, marketed as a collection of short stories) and the curt, realist prose of *U Girl*, which exhibits great restraint in the writing and shows Quartermain's flexibility and mastery of her craft. *U Girl* is a *Künstlerroman*, set in 1970s Vancouver, that follows the development of an ambitious young student at the University (the "U" of *U Girl*) of British Columbia, Frances Nelson, as she forges an understanding of her purpose as an author and intellectual. As an aspiring author, Frances models her novel, *Turquoise Room*, on her favourite texts from her courses in literature, slotting the characters of her daily life into the narratives of Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, almost to farcical effect. Frances attempts (and, with the metafictional production of *U Girl*, succeeds) to develop a voice that is uniquely her own: that of a strong, independent woman not afraid to break with tradition and social expectation.

The pleasure of reading *U Girl* comes from the dramatic irony produced with recognition of the naiveté of each of its characters, including its protagonist. Rather than ridicule them, however, the novel gracefully acknowledges the limitations of each, creating foils to Frances' own pursuits: the risk that she, like Carla, might find herself stuck in a dead-end job; or, like Cheyenne, in an abusive relationship; or, like Lorna, with an unexpected pregnancy and deadbeat husband—predicaments highlighting the obstacles not only to Frances' pursuit of autonomy and authorship, but also to women's achievement in Canada during the era of second-wave feminism more generally. Likewise, *U Girl* establishes a tension between high and low art forms, with each character defined by his or her taste in culture. We find Dwight's Pink Floyd and Allen Ginsberg pitted against Nigel's John Fowles and D. H. Lawrence; Carla's *The Secret Woman* against Frances' *Jane Eyre*; and Dagmar's postmodern poems against the masturbatory verse of her male contemporaries. Rather than alienating readers, however, this inclusion of high and low culture creates a literary atmosphere in which all readers, no matter their background or education, can participate alongside Frances in her struggles toward independence—romantic, intellectual, material, and otherwise—identifying with her trials, sympathizing with her affections, and gaining strength from her heroism.

Livres d'artistes, poets' lives

Bruce Meyer
Portraits of Canadian Writers.
Porcupine's Quill $22.95

Leon Rooke; Tony Calzetta, illus.
Fabulous Fictions & Peculiar Practices.
Porcupine's Quill $22.95

Reviewed by Krzysztof Majer

A profound connection between word and image lies at the heart of these two fine offerings from Porcupine's Quill. *Fabulous Fictions & Peculiar Practices*, a complex and exquisite collaboration between two seasoned masters of their craft, chronicles a cross-pollination of graphic and verbal ideas, testing the limits of representation. Inspired by Tony Calzetta's stripped-down visuals—always suggestive of familiar shapes, yet oddly refusing cognitive closure—Leon Rooke's peculiar, lusty, surrealist miniatures suggest plots and characters without taking their ontology too seriously. As so often in his work, central to Rooke's tales is the distinct, theatrical voice, seemingly capable of conjuring up anything at all; as Robert Enright observes in his informative foreword, "[t]his is a world governed by Could-be." Here, the voice becomes an intriguing analogue of Calzetta's deceptively simple, endlessly generative line, which Enright traces back to the work of Philip Guston, Keith Haring, or Red Grooms. In Rooke's humorous renditions, Calzetta's shapes give rise to abbreviated, absurd tales of vengeful gods, spurned artists, petulant muses, cuckolded lovers, and fawning critics. The verbal and the visual interpenetrate in this remarkable *livre d'artiste*: details from illustrations recur as shadows on word-lined pages, and textual fragments insinuate themselves into the images, as in the enthralling colour foldout centrepiece, "How God Talks in His Sleep."

A different principle of intermediality governs Bruce Meyer's *Portraits of Canadian Writers*, the fruit of an impressive three decades worth of encounters, collaborations, and friendships with some of Canada's most celebrated authors. The book's documentary aspect is made clear in the introduction, where Meyer reminds us that many of those portrayed here, in photographs and textual vignettes, have passed on, leaving an indelible mark on their followers. Meyer—an accomplished poet in his own right, as well as an editor, journalist, and teacher—has sifted through thousands of photographs and negatives in search of definitive shots. Unlike the Rooke-Calzetta collaboration, which achieves a rare equilibrium between the two modes of expression, Meyer's black-and-white photographs often speak more powerfully than the accompanying text. Seldom relying on props or arranged settings, and shot in the writers' houses, backyards or other cherished spaces, they instantly communicate a sense of individuality and passion, fully justifying Meyer's claim that "a successful portrait . . . becomes a text" and "acts as a work of criticism."

The book's title is somewhat misleading since it downplays the proportion of poets to practitioners of other literary arts: out of the nearly ninety authors included, only ten or so are not associated first and foremost with poetry. However, this marked underrepresentation of prose writers is compensated for by their stature. (We have here, for example, portraits of Atwood, Findley, Frye, Kogawa, MacLeod, and Rooke.) What may also come as a surprise is the extent to which the book foregrounds Meyer's personal and professional connections to his subjects. Many notes succeed marvellously at conveying a writer's unique personality through superb anecdote. One easily imagines Northrop Frye encouraging the diffident young author at Victoria College by pointing to his own awkward photo; Leonard Cohen toying with the

nascent "Hallelujah" during Meyer's awe-struck visit; or Milton Acorn waiting for hours at a Toronto fruit store to avoid meeting Dorothy Livesay. The writing, however, is uneven, not always matching the almost uniformly remarkable, perceptive images. Some of the compliments are puzzling: for instance, that Kateri Lanthier is "the Mrs. Dalloway of contemporary Canadian poetry," or that John B. Lee as a writer is "profoundly glib." In a number of notes Meyer prioritizes his reminiscences, connecting only marginally to their subject (such as Kate Marshall Flaherty or Eric Folsom). For better or for worse, the main (written) portrait is that of Bruce Meyer, who emerges as a fascinating, full character: inventive, energetic, helpful, reverent towards his mentors, and open to younger colleagues. Proud of his protégés' accomplishments, as well as his own, he is also courageous enough to admit failure, and in this way sheds light on the personalities involved: P. K. Page, who turned an interview into a nightmare by dismissing every question; Al Purdy, whose drunken antics prevented any questioning, but who later sent "a very contrite letter"; and Dennis Lee, whose enigmatic disapproval still understandably rankles. Even if all of the vignettes are not equally insightful or moving, coupled with the photographs they are testament to three fascinating decades of a unique mind and eye at work. At its best, Meyer's book is a genuine treasury of Canadian poets' lives.

Lyric Intimacy in Contemporary Canadian Poetry

Ken Sparling
This Poem Is a House. Coach House $17.95

Richard Therrien
Sleeping in Tall Grass. U of Alberta P $19.95

Derek Webster
Mockingbird. Véhicule $18.00

Reviewed by Jeffrey Aaron Weingarten

The lyric is alive and well in Canada, and here are three books that prove its enduring appeal. Each book explores intimacy, and the success of each one varies dramatically.

I appreciate Richard Therrien's *Sleeping in Tall Grass* for its vulnerability, its intimate explorations of personal histories, family struggles, and the inevitability of both life and death. He offers vivid scenes, rich with feeling and emotional maturity, that give the reader powerful glimpses into the poet's eye. That aspect of his text is not terribly surprising given that three epigraphs to his book (from Gwendolyn MacEwen, Muhyiddin Ibn al-'Arabi, and Robert Bringhurst) foreground the importance of the "I"/"eye." His epigraphs are commentaries on *seeing* through the individual eye, a reflection on (to borrow MacEwen's word) the "carnival" that happens inside the mind. The epigraphs foreshadow the intimate spirit of Therrien's book and his continuous effort to make his world vivid for the reader. That aspect of the poems is likely why his colourful treatment of the prairies captures sounds and sights with exactness; I could imagine Therrien in every scene, present on every page. There are many moments, too, in which Therrien gets the sound of his poems just right:

> a thick sonorous breeze rides the drifts in
> from the hills
> and above that the sound of a swollen
> airstream

> solid with celestial authority a sigh so deep
> it could only be coming from within.

Exploring the carnival of the mind, Therrien's book is lyrical in the truest sense of the word: it is personal in every utterance, dialogic at times, and most certainly it is musical.

I did wonder at times, though, whether or not Therrien had struck enough of a balance between the intimate settings of the "I" and the broader world of his readership. I felt this especially in poems where Therrien switches to the second-person "you," and even more especially in poems predicated on imperatives: "Follow the arc of the axe-head down the length of dried birch / hear the split opening up its own sigh of relief." Don't get me wrong: I love that image, that scene, and the sonic dance of every syllable. Yet there is always a risk in such poems that readers will be unable to picture themselves in these intimate and regionally specific scenes: the ability to bridge "I" and "you" is an essential feature of lyric. No doubt Therrien's aim is to root his readers in these locales and emotions, but the landscapes will be unfamiliar to some and thus difficult to inhabit, even in vividly rendered and mellifluous poetry. The above is more a thought than a criticism, and it hearkens back to fundamental debates about the potential insularity of the lyric mode, of some of which contemporary poets must be aware.

For instance, I found Derek Webster's *Mockingbird* to be especially insular as a volume that (in the words of the back-cover blurb) "tracks the aftershocks of a failed marriage." Webster captures the musicality of traditional lyrics through his use of rhyming couplets in many poems:

> Spread wings of a brained gull.
> Drained and weather-beaten, dull.

> A forest beetle struggles through the ash.
> Open barrels of potash.

Couplets pepper not just this poem ("Grey"), but much of Webster's book, and while some readers may appreciate them as nods to an earlier style, I found the rhyming wrenched and awkward, often verging on cliché. Take, for example, the closing couplet of "Grey": "Wood-smoke's listless curlicue— / what's left of what you thought you knew." Or the opening couplet of "Night Game": "Homeruns can save. The bases clear / the windup monolithic as the year." Webster strains for emotional depth and effective metaphors throughout the book, but I often felt unaffected:

> Amy, I know you too well.
> Your problems bury us like winter drifts.
> Every night, another foot of pure white hurt
> falls in the dark, smothering us.

Mixed with lines like these (from "Intervention") are lines in other poems that sometimes struck me as unnerving, perhaps even inappropriate: "I like to lull myself to sleep / and turn to her. No one else / will guard her as she sleeps." There may be more to these lines than I saw, but the image of a man guarding a woman while she sleeps shows, at best, self-centredness and, at worst, chauvinism. Readers may struggle to identify with such scenes.

Webster's book is difficult to review because I believe in the importance of his subject and the reality of the painful experiences of the lyric "I." But however much I sympathize with that "I," the poems feel too much *for him* and not enough *for his audience*. Likewise, as much as I can appreciate a poet exploring traditional poetic structures, such pristine structures capture neither the emotional turmoil of the poetry nor the spirit and forms of modern poetry since 1950. There may be genuine emotion and an evident literary knowledge underpinning Webster's collection, but I rarely felt his poems could challenge a contemporary audience already familiar with motifs of pain, loss, resilience, and emotional rebuilding that pervade English-language poetry.

Ken Sparling's *This Poem Is a House* is, in complementary ways, a much more challenging book about family and home. Not lyric in the strictest sense, but still somehow lyrical, Sparling's text is generally a pleasure to explore: his delicate tone, the meticulous construction of each scene, and the philosophical depth of his lines make it so. There is ambiguous joy, too, in his paradoxical pairings, which capture the exact sensation of being part of a family: security/fragility, connection/disconnection, safety/fear, belonging/alienation, and so on. There is no way to summarize this collection—it has no narrative; it cloudily builds a fluid home—except to say that it is a love letter to the true weirdness of a house. One moment, "the boy" (Sparling's foil to "the girl," the second of the two central characters) will feel "reassur[ed]," but then, this:

> the girl came
> down the stairs like something spit
> out of a cloud. She stood
> before the boy like some terrible storm.

The shifts in mood, attitude, scene, and home keep the two central figures moving. They often pace an amorphous house, and they constantly rearrange furniture: "*Do you think we could move the kitchen / table into the living room?*" I loved the architecture of the poems, the sensation of a house being built and dismantled, leveled and rebuilt, secured and then threatened.

At the same time, I did occasionally feel Sparling was putting too much weight on ambiguous symbols in passages such as this: "He scratched his chin, which was covered / in stubble. He was tired. He had not seen the angel / in what seemed like years." The "angel" (perhaps a nod to the motif of "the angel in the house") is a recurring symbol, and yet I found it awkwardly mystical in poems that are already made delightfully odd by vibrant imagery: furniture in trees, papers filed in ovens, pitch-black attics, or cigarette smoke curling its way across a room. Indeed, I loved most Sparling's surprisingly grounded, if complex and enigmatic, imagery of the home; I enjoyed least his mystical symbolism, as well as his heavy rhetorical questions that rarely stirred or engaged me as much as the crystalline imagery of domestic scenes. Sparling's book is very much a collection of these scenes, and, as such, it deliberately lacks momentum or crescendos. Instead, one finds slices of life that, for some, may seem too disconnected, whereas others may appreciate Sparling's aleatory and scenic rhythm and his occasional echoes, parallelisms, and shy nods. The purposeful incoherence of the book is enchanting.

Great lyric poetry occupies a space between ease and difficulty—because too much of either will push readers away. Such poems, too, draw readers in by avoiding the potentially alienating effect of overly intimate poetry. The effectiveness of lyric depends on the poet's ability to extract from intimate scenes something inscrutably relatable and vitally human, a move beyond what matters most to the poet and a chance to imagine and render what matters to the reader. These poets—Therrien, Webster, and Sparling—evidently see something universal in their poetry, and their success in rising above the intimacy of personal reflection varies as much as their styles, forms, and voices.

Contributors

Articles

Kirsten **Alm** teaches English Literature and History at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Vancouver. Her research focuses on Canadian and American ecopoetics and the cross-border intersections of literary traditions. Her current work, a study of the connections between the work of the American poet Wallace Stevens and the Canadian poet Robert Bringhurst, examines themes of place, displacement, and the poets' perspectives on the responsibility of poetry to facilitate an encounter with place.

Margaret **Boyce** is a PhD candidate in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. Her areas of research have included critical animal studies, settler-colonial studies, and especially the connections between incarceration in Canada and colonial recognition politics. Her current research project examines Inuit art appreciation in southern art museums in the context of Canada asserting sovereignty over the Arctic.

Nicholas **Bradley** is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Victoria. He is the editor of *We Go Far Back in Time: The Letters of Earle Birney and Al Purdy, 1947-1987* (2014), the co-editor of *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (2013), and the author of numerous reviews and essays on aspects of Canadian literature.

Carrie **Dawson** teaches Canadian literature at Dalhousie University. Her recent scholarly work focuses on the representation of refugees and undocumented people in contemporary Canadian literature and culture.

Ben **Hickman** is Senior Lecturer in modern poetry at the University of Kent, and Director of the Centre for Modern Poetry, having studied at University College, London and the University of Kent. Recent publications include *John Ashbery and English Poetry* and *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde: Poetry and Real Politics*.

Donna **Palmateer Pennee** works at Western University Canada. Her research on the relative "absence" of the American Civil War in the canonical history of Canadian literature and criticism, and its implications, first examined the afterlife of slavery in Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* and was published in *SCL/ÉLC*.

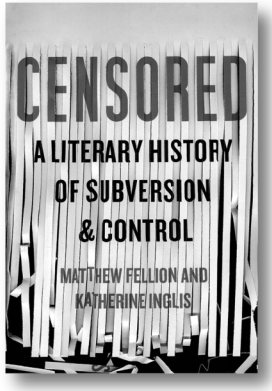
Robert David **Stacey** is an associate professor of Canadian literature at the University of Ottawa. His current research focuses on the relationship between aesthetics and representations of labour in poetry. His most recent article on this topic is "Robots and the 'End of Work' in Archibald Lampman's 'City of the End of Things.'"

Poems

Rocco **de Giacomo** lives in Toronto. David **Eso** lives in Victoria. dee **Hobsbawn-Smith** lives near Saskatoon. Bola **Opaleke** lives in Winnipeg. Tom **Wayman** lives in Winlaw, BC. Changming **Yuan** lives in Vancouver.

Reviews

Tania **Aguila-Way**, Myra **Bloom**, and Adam **Hammond** teach at the University of Toronto. Alyssa **Arbuckle**, Magnali **Blanc**, Liza **Bolen**, Stephanie **Fung**, Benjamin **Hertwig**, and Stephanie L. **Lu** live in Vancouver. Emily **Ballantyne** lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Emily **Bednarz** lives in Kitchener, Ontario. Gregory **Betts** teaches at Brock University. Natalie **Boldt**, Heidi Tiedemann **Darroch**, and David **Johnstone** live in Victoria. Nicholas **Bradley** teaches at the University of Victoria. David M. J. **Carruthers** lives in Kingston, Ontario. Paul **Chafe** teaches at the Ryerson University. Lily **Cho** teaches at York University. Laura K. **Davis** teaches at Red Deer College. Susie **DeCoste** lives in Currys Corner, Nova Scotia. Jeff **Fedoruk** lives in Toronto. Graham **Forst** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Julian **Gunn** teaches at Camosun College. Shaina **Humble** lives in Edmonton. Crystal **Hurdle** teaches at Capilano University. Dorothy F. **Lane** teaches at the University of Regina. Heather **Macfarlane** teaches at Queen's University. Andrea **MacPherson** teaches at the University of the Fraser Valley. Krzysztof **Majer** teaches at the University of Łódź. Ryan **Melsom** lives in Ottawa. Tina **Northrup** lives in Halifax. Neil **Querengesser** teaches at the Concordia University College of Edmonton. Michael **Roberson** lives in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Will **Smith** teaches at Lancaster University. Sylvie **Vranckx** lives in Brussels, Belgium. Jeffrey Aaron **Weingarten** teaches at Fanshawe College. Lorraine **York** teaches at McMaster University.



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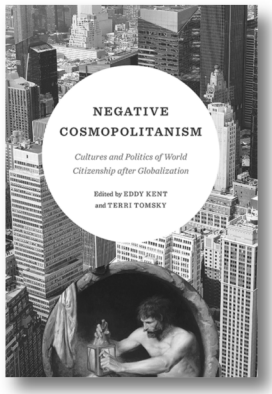

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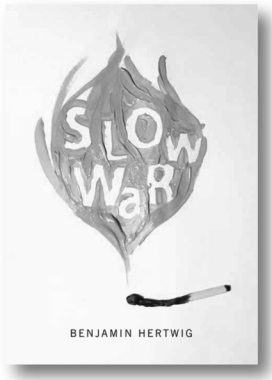

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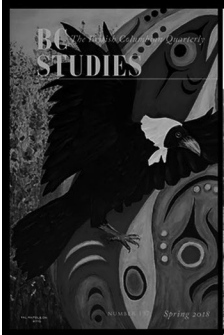

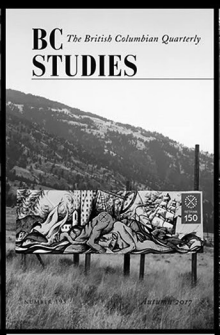

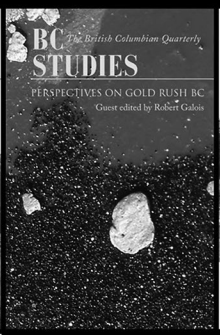

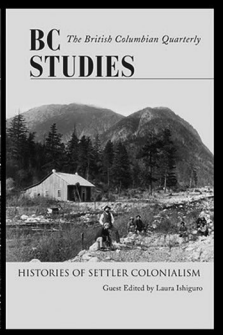

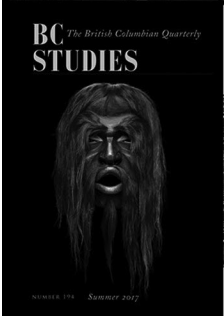

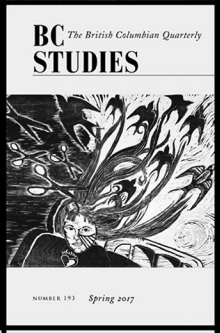

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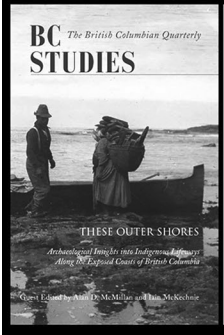

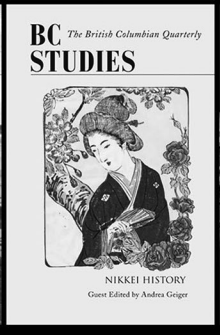

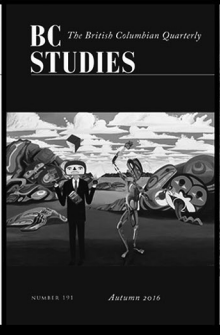

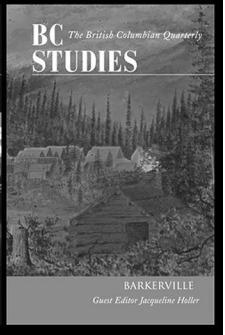

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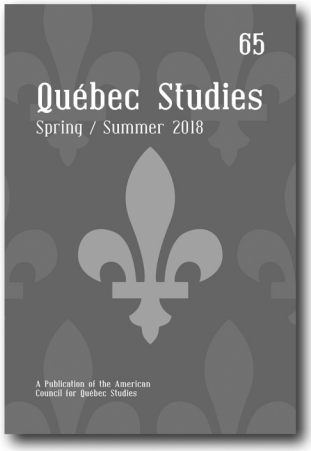

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