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We acknowledge that we are on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓ən̓-speaking Musqueam people.

Editorial

A Diamond Anniversary

Laura Moss

On June 1, 2019, we publicly celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of *Canadian Literature*. When the journal launched in 1959, there was skepticism over whether there could be enough critical material on the small body of literature produced in Canada to keep the publication alive for a year. The skeptics were wrong. *Canadian Literature* was the first journal devoted to the critical discussion of Canadian writing but absolutely not the last. In the early days, the journal was in the vanguard. Now, it documents the accomplishments and the ruptures in the culture it anticipated. Over the past six decades, the journal has continued to grow and publish important work by scholars, critics, reviewers, historians, commentators, authors, poets, and novelists alike. It has met the challenges of an ever-evolving field and changing publishing platforms. And, in time, it has tried to be open and welcoming to many perspectives. Over the course of decades, the journal has been a venue for thousands of articles, book reviews, and original poems in 239 issues. That's thousands of voices coming together—sometimes in harmony and sometimes in dissonance—to engage in/with creative and critical writing in Canada and beyond. This issue serves as an example of the continued commitment to thinking critically about the places we stand. The articles take on the environmental crisis in Alberta, care relations in Ontario, masculinity in Manitoba, theatre in Quebec, Jewish Canadian writing, and decolonization in British Columbia.

Still, even in moments of celebration, it is vital to recognize that the fact that the journal has been operating out of the University of British Columbia for sixty years means that it has been produced on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Musqueam people for sixty years. Deep systems of

displacement, inequity, and appropriation have allowed space for the journal to exist in this place since its inception. As we reflect on our past, including on the rich body of work published by and about Indigenous writers in these pages over the past few decades, we must acknowledge that colonial history and recognize that we are accountable to it now and in the future.

Sixty years is a long time for any one thing to exist so we decided to pause, take stock, and honour this milestone. We took advantage of the fact that UBC was hosting the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences under the theme of "Circles of Conversation" in June 2019 and decided to host a few conversations of our own: an academic one on the state of the field; a creative one to share the work of some fine poets, most of whom have published in the journal; and a social one to toast the journal, its contributors, and its creators.

The academic panel was held in conjunction with the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) and UBC Programming for Congress 2019. The topic for the day was "CanLit and Canadian Literature" with an aim to have a healthy discussion about disentangling the broad field of Canadian literary studies (including its journals) from "CanLit" and its discontents and controversies. With Reviews Editor Nicholas Bradley chairing, literary scholars Lily Cho, Carrie Dawson, Gillian Roberts, Cynthia Sugars, and Karina Vernon addressed the various challenges at work in the field of Canadian literary studies. A lively conversation ensued about the role of academic labour in the CanLit cultural industries, the responsibilities of scholars as public figures, and the kinds of publics and communities to whom we see our critical work respond, among other pressing topics. The papers that initiated those conversations have been gathered in the Forum that opens this issue.[1]

From the beginning, *Canadian Literature* has been a place for creative and critical conversations to mingle. This was certainly the case at the poetry reading we hosted. In front of an overflowing crowd in the Coach House of Green College at UBC, and with Poetry Editor Phinder Dulai as the emcee, Jordan Abel, Sonnet L'Abbé, Daphne Marlatt, Cecily Nicholson, Shazia Hafiz Ramji, and Rita Wong offered a deeply engaging set of readings and range of poetic styles and voices. We heard Jordan Abel's immersive poem on black rocks and "a deep narrow chasm," and listened to Sonnet L'Abbé read "CLII" from *Sonnet's Shakespeare*, a poem that responds to the complexities of being a mixed-race culture creator and university teacher on unceded Snuneymuxw territory. Cecily Nicholson read a piece from *Wayside Sang* that thinks through what she introduced as "a lack of patrilineage" and

poetry of the road. Rita Wong, who had been arrested in 2018 while she sat in non-violent protest in front of the TransMountain pipeline entry gate in Burnaby, BC, read a draft of the "sentencing statement" she planned to present in court in her own defence. Following the event, Shazia Hafiz Ramji noted that reading her poem "Astronaut Family," published in the journal in 2017, in this venue was a "homecoming," and Daphne Marlatt offered up these wise words in reflection: "to participate in this reading that celebrated *Canadian Literature*'s 60th anniversary was both a delight and excruciating: a delight to hear such diverse poets writing so clearly and so devastatingly from their lives in our so-called 'post-colonial' society and economy; excruciating to represent the time-span of *CL* as the oldest poet, one initially formed by that colonial structure." Even, or especially, at this celebratory occasion, there were many important moments showcasing the power of poetry to intervene in times of crisis and accountability.

At the reception after the poetry reading, we connected with former editors, contributors, students, and friends of the journal to mark the milestone with cheer. We were joined by the UBC Dean of Arts, Gage Averill, and the Head of the Department of English Language and Literatures, Siân Echard, who each eloquently highlighted the ongoing support of the faculty and the department for the journal. *Canadian Literature* is fortunate to have such strong institutional, academic, and community backing. I want to thank everyone who came to Green College to celebrate the journal's diamond anniversary with us. The sense of joy in shared society that evening was tangible and heartening. There have been few moments in my professional life where I have fully set aside my innate skepticism and incredulity and have been so delighted to be a part of something so big. This was one of them. Sixty years is a long time to survive in scholarly publishing. It deserved a good toast.

Canadian Literature has endured in no small part because of a handful of people who have kept the journal alive. The job of editing the journal has moved from George Woodcock to W. H. New to Eva-Marie Kröller to Laurie Ricou to Margery Fee to me. It was lovely to be able to recognize the service of the past editors who were at the reception and are still a part of the *CanLit* family. And, wonderfully, we could also applaud the work of associate and assistant editors of the past and present who were also present (Glenn Deer, Ceilidh Hart, Iain Higgins, Kevin McNeilly, Karis Shearer, Shannon Smyrl, and Herbert Rosengarten, to name a few). There are also many people whose commitment and labour are less well-documented but who have been no

less dedicated to the production and dissemination of this journal. George Vaitkunas has been designing the journal since 1993. Donna Chin has been managing editor for over twenty-three years, keeping the publication on course through many obstacles and changes. And Beth Veitch has been the journal assistant for sixteen years, corresponding indefatigably with contributors and subscribers. Their combined institutional knowledge is staggering. Brendan McCormack has been the editorial assistant for four years and is an absolute editorial rock and gem. Over the past sixty years, there have been women and men who have worked on subscriptions, circulation, book ordering, cataloguing, correspondence, copyediting, proofreading, promotions, grant writing, cleaning, and design. The journal would not be celebrating sixty years without their time, energy, and care. It says something beautiful about the journal's community too that several former students who used to work in the office volunteered to come back to help us with the sixtieth anniversary. Kelsea O'Connor, for instance, who was an undergraduate student at the fiftieth anniversary events, came back for the sixtieth, and Mary Chen and Christy Fong returned to take photos and be part of the festivities at Congress.

As luck would have it, in addition to being editor of the journal, I also served as the Academic Convenor in charge of UBC Programming for Congress 2019. In this role I was tasked with bringing the theme of "Circles of Conversation" to life. A key goal of my team was to create spaces for dialogue and debate among scholars, educators, students, artists, activists, and the public at large, so that people could speak with one another, listen, and learn together. Another goal was to showcase the arts and creative critical engagements within and across disciplines. A final goal was to emphasize the vital public impact of research being done in the humanities and social sciences. The goals I set for Congress are similar to the goals that were long ago set for the journal. Create space. Dialogue. Listen. Engage. Make a difference. May they continue for years to come. Happy sixtieth anniversary, *CanLit*.

NOTE

1 Cynthia Sugars has opted not to publish her piece in this issue.

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Prathna Lor

In the archive of sensuality

In the archive of sensuality: no pastoral whining,
no lyricism of the frigid, no partitioning of alembic,
no unbridled treasury, no teething, no filament, no
sebaceous mist, no corollary, no acerbic awning, no
yapping, no earnestness, no dust bin, no blimp heads,
no brain surgeons, no dactyls, no asymptotes, no
lusciousness, no crannies, no frittering, no bleach, no
crumpets, no high noon airing, no smoke, no cup sizes,
no meters, no hijinks, no ammonite, no dukedom, no
cellophane, no drainage, no cardstock, no debt-setter, no
tepidness, no smokiness, no ingots, no monochromatic,
no distillery, no vestibular, no sinking toe, no arc shot,
no bauble, no heron, no pleather wing, no necromancy,
no anvil, no tinkered frost, no brackish seed, no
ploughing hornet, no ox cut, no fetidness, no adjectival,
no sipping, no aleatory range, no calculus, no impish
crudity, no ::

60th Anniversary Forum

North of Sixty: Surviving CanLit

Nicholas Bradley

Canadian Literature celebrates its sixtieth anniversary in 2019—at a time when the broader world of Canadian literature has been in nothing resembling a festive mood. When the journal's first issue was published in 1959, it would have been difficult to envision that, sixty years later, the critical conversation would be epitomized by phrases such as *Resisting Canada* (see Matuk) and *CanLit in Ruins* (see McGregor, Rak, and Wunker). Yet here we are.

At the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences at UBC in June, the journal hosted a panel discussion with ACCUTE—"CanLit and *Canadian Literature*"—intended to explore the place of institutions in a field that has been profoundly affected in recent years by acrimonious and polarizing public controversies; engaged in uneasy reckonings with its own limitations, oversights, and injustices; and riven by doubt and conflict. Panellists were asked to consider Canadian literature and literary studies by taking up such questions as: What are the necessary scholarly and public conversations today? What discourses of critique will lead to productive inquiry? How do journals and other institutions shape the field? And how can a more expansive and inclusive Canadian literature be imagined? The essays in this special forum emerge from the panel at Congress. They emphasize the importance of accountability and self-awareness for scholars and teachers of Canadian literature, and are evidence of the complexity of relationships between those individual practitioners and the institutions that influence and even sustain them.

When *Canadian Literature* turned fifty in 2009, a group of critics was invited to reflect on significant issues; their statements, as Laura Moss wrote

in her Introduction to the "Interventions" section of issue no. 204, "mark[ed] the past fifty years while thinking forward to challenges in the field in the future" (103). The following essays suggest that the future of Canadian literary studies is now less certain, or at least less clear, than a decade ago. Lily Cho and Carrie Dawson look back at the fiftieth anniversary to show how much has changed in ten years, while Gillian Roberts writes about the difficulty and ambivalence inherent in teaching Canadian literature today—in her particular case, in the United Kingdom in the era of Brexit. At fifty, a future was presumed, and could be multiply conceived. At sixty, that very future is an open question. Karina Vernon proposes that one way forward is "to remember the genealogies of struggle developed within Canadian literature as critical discourse"—to rethink, in other words, the history of the field itself.

The anniversary of *Canadian Literature* is a time of reflection, but the sober conversations taking place here, as in other venues, hold the promise of genuine transformation of the ways in which we teach and write about literature in Canada—and of renewed engagement with the reasons for doing so. Journals, presses, courses, and even disciplinary formations come and go, but the impulses that underlie literary studies exceed any single institution, no matter how venerable. Together, we are in the business of reading and writing, of listening and responding, with care, precision, and creativity. In a time of social and political disharmony—and, I would add, environmental calamity—language and imagination, and the uses to which they are put, demand our attention and commitment. Whoever we are, our survival depends on it.

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CanLit as Critical Genealogy

Karina Vernon

For Smaro Kamboureli

In CanLit, there is no "before" the trouble. . . . *CanLit is in trouble, and it* is *the trouble*. How do we stay with it, and how do we make new kin?
—Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*

1.

In his paper "Daring the Truth: Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique," philosopher Andreas Folkers notes that in the aftermath of the revolts of 1968, Michel Foucault began to allude to an increasing "criticizability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses" (qtd. in Folkers 3). What Foucault characterized as the "dispersed and discontinuous offensives" (Foucault 5) of 1968 and after, including "the new wave of feminism, gay and lesbian movements, struggles against psychiatry, prison and medicine, anti-authority struggles, etc.," effectively "expanded the scope of critique by rendering hitherto hidden forms of power visible" (Folkers 3). But these revolts also "manifested the limits" of certain "dominant modes of criticism" (Folkers 4). In this context, Foucault argued that genealogy could function as a new "knowledge of struggles" (Foucault 8), and "a new form of critique" (Folkers 4).

We find ourselves now in our own moment of struggle, catalyzed by a variety of social revolts against imperialism, state-sanctioned racism, and misogyny, such as #BlackLivesMatter, the TRC Calls to Action, Wet'suwet'en resistance against the construction of a Coastal GasLink pipeline on its traditional territory, and the #MeToo movement, to name only a few salient "dispersed and discontinuous offensives" unfolding in our time. In this context, scholars, writers, artists, and students, many in precarious social and institutional positions, have been undertaking the brave public work of confronting the structures of power which have sedimented in a range of Canadian cultural institutions. As the scope of critique expands beyond literary studies to include Canadian universities, creative writing programs, literary presses, magazines, and prize committees—a diverse range of

cultural sites which have their own particular and overlapping histories and practices but which are increasingly coming to be hailed under the sign CanLit—it is an appropriate time to pause and to ask questions about the modes of criticism that are emerging; the limits of discursive tactics, and whether genealogy, as Foucault theorized it, may reveal more "knowledge of [our] struggles" in CanLit.

2.

In their introduction to *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker write that "Canada and its literature" were "built on the same foundation of Indigenous genocide, anti-Blackness, anglophone dominance, racist immigration policies, eugenicist attitudes toward disabled people, and deep-rooted misogyny that the rest of Canada was built on" (21).

They also ask, "how do we stay with it, and make new kin?"

3.

In "Elegy for Wong Toy," a poem Robert Kroetsch published in his 1976 collection *The Stone Hammer Poems*, the poet-speaker excavates the historical contingencies of his emergence, existence, and becoming. This process involves claiming a critical genealogy. I say "critical" because it involves thinking in radically non-essentialist terms about partial, intersecting, and contradictory histories: histories of descent, migration, and empire, including the genocidal clearing of the prairie; the construction of the transcontinental railway, and the racist Chinese Exclusion Act. It involves thinking genealogically against the grain of national history. Kroetsch writes:

> Charlie you are dead now
> but I dare to speak because
> in China the living speak
> to their kindred dead.
> And you are one of my fathers. (43)

Working genealogically, as Foucault reminds us, is an "agonistic" process. What genealogies do is reveal problems and discontinuities. Instead of revealing unitary formations (e.g., "the nation," or CanLit, or CanLit-as-the-nation), genealogies elaborate the chasms and ambiguities that have existed in discourses and institutions across time. As Ryan Fitzpatrick argued on *Twitter* in response to Simon Lewsen's characterization of CanLit as a "broadly progressive consensus," "Nope. What gets called CanLit is historically a site of struggle" (@ryanfitzpublic).

4.

What I am trying to say is this. Not only is there a genealogy of struggle in CanLit, there is a genealogy of struggle *as* CanLit. What I mean is Canadian literature *as a critical discourse*.

5.

"make it new," writes Roy Miki in his collection *Surrender*.

> i have altered my tactics to reflect the new era
> already the magnolia broken by high winds
> heals itself
> the truncated branches already
> speak to me. (9)

6.

Tracing a partial, agonistic, and discontinuous genealogy of Canadian literature as critical discourse would involve thinking through the connections, to varying degrees, of the critical and creative practices of scores of writers and scholars whose discourses have been directed precisely toward challenging the nation's genocidal policies, its anti-Blackness, its environmental exploitation and deep-rooted misogyny. A partial genealogy of CanLit as critical discourse would think, for instance, through the work of Smaro Kamboureli, including her transformative anthology *Making a Difference* (1996; 2nd ed. 2007), which offered a model for how to construct a CanLit that includes Black, Indigenous, and racialized perspectives. A genealogy of CanLit as critical discourse would also think through the struggle-work of Roy Miki, back through the Writing Thru Race Conference; it would think through the prescient work of M. NourbeSe Philip, whose essays in *Frontiers* were already centering issues of racism in the wider culture industries. Indeed, *Frontiers* offers a rich archive of such anti-racism work in the arts. And before that, Vision 21: Canadian Culture in the 21st Century, a group which was formed in 1989 around issues of diversity, racism, and the arts. It would think back to the group De Dub Poets, formed in the mid-1980s; it would remember Lillian Allen's groundbreaking dub album *Revolutionary Tea Party*; and before that, the 1983 *Fireweed* issue called "The Issue is 'Ism: Women of Colour Speak Out," edited by Nila Gupta and Makeda Silvera. In these pages racialized and Indigenous women writers wrote about racism, sexism, classism, imperialism. Contributors included Himani Bannerji, Claire Harris, Sylvia Hamilton, Prabha Khosla, Cecilia A. Green, Claire Prieto (one of the first black filmmakers in Canada),

and many others. Before this issue was Makeda Silvera's Women and Words Conference, which raised the issue of racism in writing and publishing in Canada. We might continue to trace this genealogy back further through the work of Maria Campbell, E. Pauline Johnson, Mary Ann Shadd, and back further through the meditations on freedom and anti-Blackness in the Canadian slave narratives of Sophia Pooley, Reverend Alexander Hemsley, Francis Henderson, and Mrs. Frances Henderson (see Drew; Kamboureli).

> And these are also my kin.
> The truncated branches already speak to me.

7.

What I have sketched above is only one very partial line of critique in and as Canadian literature. With more time and space, I would elaborate other important genealogies of feminist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and decolonial struggle.

Tracing a genealogy of Canadian literature as critical discourse is not the same thing as recuperating CanLit. Far from it. As Foucault made clear, genealogy does not ask "what is" just to proclaim "what should be"; it poses another question: "how did 'that what is' come into being, and how can it become otherwise?" (Folkers 5; Foucault 46).

In this moment of deep and important critical work, of expanding the scope of critique by rendering hidden forms of power visible across Canadian cultural institutions, practices, and discourses, I want to remember the genealogies of struggle developed within *Canadian literature as critical discourse* in order to bring these lines of struggle-work out of the ruins and forward into the moment that is coming.

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The Bosom of CanLit

Carrie Dawson

Canadian literature is thriving, but CanLit—by which I mean the network of people who write, teach, research, and disseminate Canadian literature—is hurting. In the last three years a number of controversies to do with sexual misconduct and appropriation of voice have left the people who produce and support Canadian literature divided along generational, racialized, and gendered lines. Due in part to the representation of these controversies in the popular media, the fault lines between writers and academics have also become more entrenched. For example, in "Canlit versus its scholars," an essay published in *The Globe and Mail* in September 2018, Russell Smith presented CanLit as a synecdoche for a collective of precious pedants who are loath to stray from "the bosom of academe" into "the crass world of popular success," and who are given to "ludicrous hyperbole" around considerations of sexual violence. Smith went on to contrast the fast-paced and "satisfying" work of genre writers—whom he likens to pro athletes—with the prevarications of CanLit scholars, whom he describes as "terribly troubled" by "the epidemic of sexual violence that apparently plagues the institutions that created [CanLit]." While I object to the tenor and much of the substance of Smith's very gendered argument, I think it merits attention for two reasons: firstly, he is right to say that those of us who teach and study Canadian literature do well to attend to "the world of popular

success," including the mainstream media, even when it is "crass"; and secondly, he is also right to suggest that recent events have left many CanLit scholars "terribly troubled" by the systemic inequities and the sexual violence that continue to "plagu[e] the institutions that created [CanLit]." So, rather than grappling with the question posed to me and my fellow panellists—namely, can Canadian literary criticism be "disentangled" from "the problematic nature of CanLit?"—I have opted to briefly tangle with Smith's representation of CanLit and the depressing realities that beset the field. If my comments contribute to the unfortunate misperception that "the scholars of Canadian literature are not very interested in books" (Smith), I hope that they might also help clarify what it means to be accountable for and in CanLit.

The allegations of sexual harassment and sexual violence in Creative Writing programs at UBC and Concordia are scandalous, but more scandalous still are the results of the 2018 Ontario provincial government survey of some 110,000 university students, wherein 63% of respondents reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment at university ("63% Report"). Being accountable to those students means actively resisting the structures discouraging victims from coming forward and advocating for programming that educates faculty, staff, and administrators about how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence; it means demanding frank conversations about the preponderance and under-reporting of sexual violence on campus; it means being willing to tangle with those who caricature such efforts as "ludicrous hyperbole."

More generally, being accountable for the "problematic nature of CanLit" means reckoning with inequitable structures of power and failures of mentorship therein. For example, I'm thinking of the recent national survey conducted by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, which revealed that the number of university teachers working part-time in Canada increased by 79% between 2005 and 2015, while the number of tenure-stream positions increased by only 14% in the same period (CAUT). Recognizing that younger colleagues, women, and people of colour are overrepresented amongst contract academic staff, we need to be clear about the ways in which the casualization of academic work has fuelled the gendered and generational divides that were made so plain under the banner UBC Accountable. So, for those of us who have tenure-stream positions in Canadian literature, being accountable for CanLit must mean mentorship: it must mean building alliances with precariously employed colleagues (co-publishing, co-authoring grants, and co-organizing conferences), but also ensuring a more equitable distribution of labour by raising our hands for the

laborious service jobs and large introductory courses that contract academic staff do not have the luxury of refusing.

Writing in *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, Kristen Darch and Fazeela Jiwa argue that unless those of us who occupy positions of power and privilege within the field become accountable to those who are most vulnerable, "CanLit stands to lose the voices and the contributions of all those . . . who find its institutions hostile" (179). To wit, Oji-Cree poet and novelist Joshua Whitehead recently followed in Rinaldo Walcott's footsteps by publishing a "breakup note" with CanLit, which he memorably likens to a hall of mirrors that includes Indigenous stories only where they can be reanimated, reoriented, or redacted so as to reflect narratives of national progressiveness (191, 194). "Maybe I'll come back to you CanLit, if you can tell me who you're accountable to, but until then, I ain't got time to heal you, too[,]" he writes (197). With an eye to Whitehead's "breakup" note, I wonder how many of the 69,300 Ontario students who recently reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment on campus would make a similar argument about the ways in which narratives of institutional progressiveness shield violent realities and hamper the timely, transparent adjudication of harassment complaints? How many of those students abandoned their studies? How many were "broken up" by the experience of harassment? Whether or not such breakups are deemed newsworthy, those of us working in English and Creative Writing programs on Canadian campuses know them to be part of the sorry legacy of recent CanLit controversies. And we remain "terribly troubled."

Ten years ago, I was part of a similar panel on the future of Canadian literature. One of the most prescient contributions came from Herb Wyile, who asked that we pay close attention to the particular material conditions in which CanLit is produced, disseminated, and studied, in order that we can be clear about the ways in which neo-liberal ideologies structure our work in the field. Asked where CanLit was going, Wyile, one of the discipline's most thoughtful and principled stewards, argued that the question "implies a degree of agency that we may not have," and so reframed it as, "what is going to happen to Canadian literature?" (108). Because being accountable in and for CanLit also means being accountable to those who have shaped the discipline, I want to conclude by positing Herb's question as a challenge. And so, I suggest that we look back to the thinkers who have guided us, that we look closely at the inequities that have always divided us, and that we look beyond the narratives of "progressiveness" that have sometimes blinded us,

as we face the problem of "what is going to happen" and what has happened "to Canadian literature." Only then can those of us who enjoy some agency within the sometimes uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe "bosom of academe" really tangle with the forces that render it hostile for some.

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CanLit and Canadian Literature: A Long-Distance View[1]

Gillian Roberts

In addressing the discussion of whether there is or can be a Canadian literary studies apart from the problematic nature of CanLit, I find myself primarily responding from my personal and professional position: a Canadian who teaches Canadian literature (among other things) in the UK. The fact that I work not in an English department but rather in a Department of American and Canadian Studies, at a British university, and the fact that my job title is Associate Professor in North American Cultural Studies, inevitably inflect my response to the question with which we're grappling. My job title is appropriate for what I do insofar as I work

not just on literature but also on film. It's also appropriate because I do tend to take a cultural studies approach in my research and my teaching. And it's appropriate because, actually, very few students come to our programme already interested in Canadian culture, which means I often have to smuggle it in in cross-border courses that have some US content, too. (In fact, at present, most of my department's undergraduate students are primarily interested in US foreign policy, so literature more generally, regardless of which side of the border it comes from, has come to be considered rather niche.) But the real reason behind my job title is that my department had to pretend they weren't hiring a Canadianist, even when they specifically wanted one (before I was hired, there was only one other Canadianist in our department of American and Canadian Studies, my colleague Susan Billingham, who was outnumbered by Americanists by a ratio of 17:1). And the reason my department had to pretend they weren't hiring a Canadianist is because the Vice Chancellor (i.e., president) of the university at the time had declared, "There's no money in Canada."

As a former head of department liked to point out, in fact, the Canadian government was long the biggest funder of our department through Canadian Studies grants provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), grants that "had supported the development of interdisciplinary Canadian studies in fifty countries around the world for almost forty years" (Haynes et al. xii). Despite the fact that, as Jeremy Haynes, Melissa Tanti, Daniel Coleman, and Lorraine York point out, such grants were economically and politically driven, available only in countries with whom Canada was "interest[ed] in establishing trade or political alliances" (xiv), these grants were axed by Stephen Harper's government in 2012.[2] But while in my interdisciplinary department in the UK we two Canadianists have no obligations whatsoever to reproducing a Canadian literary canon (who's going to make us? certainly not each other), for many years, for UK-based Canadianists, funding by Global Affairs Canada (formerly DFAIT) prompted such questions as, "Are Canadianists in the United Kingdom simply lackeys serving the interests of the Canadian federal government? Or is CanLit part of a neo-colonial project?" (Fuller and Billingham 114). In such a position, then, in an absolutely fundamental way, there was no escaping "the problematic nature of CanLit" for us, because the Canadian state was helping to pay our salaries.

So I find myself in a contradictory position, as I'm sure many Canadian literature scholars and teachers do: the field I teach, as Hannah McGregor,

Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker note in their introduction to *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, "has always been tied to a colonial project of nationhood" (19). The substance of what I teach—in terms of the writers I select for my students to read—works to critique and undermine that project. As Laura Moss writes in her *Refuse* piece, "On Not Refusing CanLit," while "[e]xclusion and elitism have always been part of CanLit, [so] has resistance" (147). But my students, unlike the students of my Canadian-based colleagues, know absolutely nothing about Canada. The vast majority of them have never been here, although some will eventually come here on their equivalent of a Junior Year Abroad. Like Sarah Neville in her recent review of *Refuse* with Brecken Hancock, I teach Canadian literature to "people who have zero nationalistic response to it." Unlike Neville, however, I myself am a Canadianist. Moreover, I have literally been in the position of advertising Canada, when I was director of our Study Abroad programme. Teaching Canadian literature and culture at all in my institution is, in some sense, to promote Canada. So even if I teach from a position of critique of the settler-colonial project that is Canada, and even if Global Affairs Canada no longer funds my doing so, I don't think I can escape—again, on some very fundamental level—this sense of promotion. In a higher education system in which tenure was abolished by the Thatcher government, I'm uneasy about the fact that, in some ways, my job depends on this promotion, however contradictory, of the Canadian nation-state. In other words, if students stop studying Canada, I stop having a job.

Canadian literature is not just one thing. The editors of *Refuse* write that "'Canadian Literature' means literature written and published in Canada" (17-18). I would add that it is also literature written and/or published by Canadians outside Canada. The problematic nature of CanLit is clear in the litany of dumpster fires of the past few years, examined so brilliantly by the editors of and contributors to *Refuse*. Can there be a Canadian literary studies separate from CanLit? I don't think there can. Should there be? While I don't think Canadian literary studies is the same thing as CanLit, equally, I don't think we can separate them. I don't think there is a Canadian literary studies without a CanLit industry. To research and teach Canadian literary studies while ignoring the formation that is CanLit is not something I can imagine. Even if we teach resistant texts, we are always already addressing that which they are resisting. And although I agree with Moss that resistance has always been part of Canadian literature, I would also argue that the long history of that resistance alongside the long history of exclusion and

elitism functions hegemonically: that is, Canadian literature can absorb that resistance and continue to function to exclude, even if it does so in what appears to be a "kinder, gentler" way that perpetuates CanLit's reputation as "an environment where diverse writing, and writers, can flourish" (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 11).

I'm also mindful of the contradiction of writing about and teaching resistant work under the umbrella of Canadian literature when that work actively refuses Canada itself. What does it mean that I write about the attempts to impose Canadian-state citizenship on Indigenous peoples in an act of settler-colonial violence but teach Indigenous texts on Canadian courses (in which I teach my students about the imposition of Canadian-state citizenship on Indigenous peoples in an act of settler-colonial violence)? Oji-Cree writer and scholar Joshua Whitehead, in his contribution to *Refuse*, asserts, "I am not CanLit, I am Indigenous Lit. . . . Indigenous Lit will survive without CanLit, we have already, but I am not sure if CanLit can do the same" (197). As Métis scholar Chelsea Vowel says in her *Secret Feminist Agenda* interview with Hannah McGregor, Indigenous literature gets treated like "the sesame seeds . . . on the bun" of CanLit—there for a bit of flavour and texture, essentially. To what extent do we end up complicit in this sesame seeds analogy when we fold Indigenous texts into Canadian literary scholarship and/or teaching? Yet can we imagine Canadian literary scholarship and/or teaching *without* Indigenous works, as Whitehead prompts us to consider?

Perhaps it's easy for me not to break up with Canadian literature, because I'm in a long-distance relationship with it. At the moment, I only teach one course with the word "Canadian" in the title. My current research examines Canadian film adaptation in a comparative project that also considers the literature and cinema of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, India, the UK, and the US. But I have responsibilities as a scholar and teacher of culture produced in the land claimed by Canada, especially as a scholar and teacher who was herself produced on stolen Indigenous land. When I stand in front of my classroom, I inevitably stand there as a representative of Canada. Like many Canadian literature colleagues, I try to use this position to interrogate Canada's settler-colonial mythologies, to displace the voices of power, to centre works by BIPOC writers and artists. Doing this work is a structural challenge in a country where so few of the writers I want to teach are published. What Danielle Fuller and my colleague Susan Billingham wrote in 2000 continues to be true: "The material constraints imposed by

the political economy of the (Canadian) publishing industry impact directly on the classroom in predictable ways" (120). Margaret Atwood is, unsurprisingly, the author I could teach most easily in material terms, the only Canadian author my students are likely to have heard of, thanks to the presence of *The Handmaid's Tale* on the UK's English Literature A-level syllabus and the Hulu TV adaptation's success. If students in the UK are interested in Canadian literature, it is likely because of their interest in Atwood; at this point the students' and my own interests are at odds with each other as I want to avoid centring texts and figures who are already occupying the centre.

But it's one thing to claim you don't have to adhere to a canon, another to negotiate your long-distance relationship so that you can actually produce teaching material. With Brexit's impact on the value of the pound, bringing in Canadian texts from Canada is an increasingly expensive prospect for UK students whose tuition fees tripled under David Cameron's Conservative government. These material considerations matter to my students, and they affect what I teach. I hold these considerations along with the aspirations of the Canadian literature I want to present to my non-Canadian students. Ultimately, if I'm going to be, however problematically and reluctantly, a "representative" of Canada in the classroom, what—or *whose*—Canada, whose Canadian literature, or whose literature from the lands claimed by Canada I present to that classroom: those choices matter, even if we can't divorce Canadian literature from CanLit—maybe especially *because* we can't divorce them.

NOTES

1 Thank you to my colleagues Susan Billingham and Catherine Rottenberg for their suggestions.

2 See Eva Darias-Beautell for a discussion of the decline of PhD students in Canadian Studies outside Canada since the funding cuts instituted by the Harper government (7). As Haynes, Tanti, Coleman, and York observe, however, there were no Canadian Studies associations eligible for DFAIT funding in "Africa, the Caribbean, or the Middle East aside from Israel" (xiv) even prior to the cuts.

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Canadian Literature at 60: Inhabiting Discomfort

Lily Cho

In preparation for this panel, Laura Moss and Nicholas Bradley sent the panellists copies of the collected interventions in *Canadian Literature* no. 204 (2010) that were published to mark the journal's 50th anniversary. Like some of you here today, I remember being in that room a decade ago as we gathered at UBC to celebrate that anniversary, and to collectively discuss the future of the field at the time. What a great privilege it was for me to be part of that conversation then. And what a huge privilege it is to be here with you now on the occasion of *Canadian Literature*'s 60th anniversary.

Reading over the interventions in issue 204, I couldn't help thinking about what has changed, what hasn't, and more than anything about the new voices in the field, and those that we have lost. I think about the questions that Laura and Nicholas ask us in preparation for this panel, ten years after 204. "Is there, or can there be, a Canadian literary studies apart from the problematic nature of CanLit?" They also ask, "where can or should the field go in the near future?"

Thinking about these questions brings me first to the most immediate loss. Gregory Younging passed away on May 3, 2019. He died two days before he was to give a plenary address, alongside Julie Rak and Keavy Martin, at one of the signature annual events in Canadian literary scholarship, the Canadian Literature Symposium, organized this year by Jody Mason and Jennifer Blair under the title "Institutional Work." My remarks today are informed by the papers and discussions we had coming out of that symposium, and especially the healing circle the symposium organized to mourn Gregory Younging in place of his plenary address.

I offer a resounding yes to the first question. Yes, there can and is and will be a Canadian literary studies apart from what has been the discourse of the dumpster fire, which Dale Tracy so admirably unpacked at the Canadian Literature Symposium.

One question then: how do we separate out the problematic? I understand the question more precisely, and along the lines that Carrie Dawson so presciently identified ten years ago by tracing an unlikely line between Northrop Frye, Sara Ahmed, and Dionne Brand, as the affective register of Canadian literary criticism, the depth of the feelings that we have for our critical work, as what hurts (111).

When I read over the interventions from ten years ago, they largely identify problems as external to our work. There were issues but we, as a critical and literary community, would confront them together.

Now, the problems, or what hurts, are the divisions within our field, how we have broken apart, often rightfully so, and how we haven't decided how, or if, we should come back together. The first writer mentioned in Laura's editorial introduction to the interventions in issue 204 is Steven Galloway (103). Then, we took it for granted that Canadian literary writers and critics wanted, more or less, the same things (and here I am quoting Laura's introduction): "strong public support for arts and culture in Canada" and for the "critics of the future [to] have enough distance and generosity to read the literature and the theoretical debates of the turn of the twenty-first century with respect" (108).

Whatever side of the discursive dumpster fire you're on, I think we still want those things. But I'm not sure we are all together now.

Every time I think we are closing in on closure on the painful eruptions in our field over the last few years, something happens—a new petition, a *Twitter* thread, a paper given where I'm not sure I totally believe what I am hearing—and I realize that we are really far from it.

Instead, now, I think that we have to inhabit those divisions. We can't prematurely close off the discomfort of the current moment. I think we are in a period of real discomfort and we have to stay there.

We have to be uncomfortable with seeing afresh what decades of sexism have done to our field. Here, I think about what it would mean to read a canonical story such as Alice Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" in the wake of #MeToo. That is, not as a way to engage with issues of aging and dementia, or of literary adaptation, which is what most of the critical work has done so far, but as a chronicle of a serial sexual predator—of an English professor who fails to honour the privilege of being a member of a professoriate and who abuses the power he has over his students and refuses throughout the entire story to recognize what he has done. We have not yet engaged in such an analysis of this iconic story. And there are many more such stories that demand rethinking and renewed analytical attention. I do not know how we engage in this necessary critical work without calling out the analyses that have come before, the essays that focus on many other important aspects of this story, and of others, without discrediting the work of the critics who may not have examined the protagonist of Munro's story as the predator that he is. That is the work that is to come for Canadian literature as a field and for this journal.

We inhabit again a moment of historical reckoning. We have been here before. And we have to find a way to do it without losing the work that has already been done. I think this will be an uncomfortable time.

In particular, we have to be uncomfortable with what I now see as a generational divide that is especially painful because it is between generations of feminists. Some of the most difficult dumpster fire divisions are those that have erupted between people who should be allies.

We have to be deeply uncomfortable with the fact that the field has been founded on legacies of settler colonialism that continue to permeate every facet of our work, that we haven't mourned the role of the field in the colonial project (and not just in terms of obvious places such as Duncan Campbell Scott, but also in the less obvious ones such as the unfinished work of hearing Lee Maracle's call, made almost fifteen years ago at the first TransCanada conference, for understanding how diasporic subjects can, however unwittingly, serve as settlers [56]). We have to be uncomfortable with the fact that Gregory Younging passed away before his *Elements of Indigenous Style* became required reading on every Canadian literary comprehensive field exam.

We are in an uncomfortable place and I think we should plan to be here for a while yet. It is a sign of how far we've come that we can be so uncomfortable now. Happy birthday to *Canadian Literature*. I want to be uncomfortable with all of you, fellow travellers in this field and this journal, for a long while yet.

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Melanie Pierluigi

Ghosted into Submission

All the poems are writing themselves.
Flipping inside out.
Growing a second heart beat.

Another eyelid
and you are almost human.
The leaves are frustrated.

Each year their
falling cannot be stopped.
A letter unwritten, a message

paralyzed. Breeze
camouflaged, silent,
stirred into mourning

for what was never there.
But somewhere the ocean is leaping,
becoming something else entirely—

moths that roam in places we can't enter.
At the pool table, eight-ball skimming
where the heart can't feel—

like every home we ever left,
broken figurines untangled on the floor.
Air cemented with glue,

with taped mouths and curtains
ghosted into submission.
Old clutter cutting shapes on walls.

Now we've come too far: Patagonia,
The Nazca lines heaving and untroubled.
A slope of words where ink forgets to imprint.

Even this will be erased eventually.
Blistered with light. Feral. A burst of activity
attaching vein-like to the side of buildings,

our skin; a closed lid so quiet breath performs
the same surgeries around
us a bit longer.

Rosemarie Savignac

Fantômes et impostures dans *La fureur de ce que je pense* de Marie Brassard d'après des textes de Nelly Arcan

Auteure, metteure en scène et actrice, Marie Brassard est connue pour ses spectacles aux atmosphères surréalistes, pour sa pratique multidisciplinaire singulière et pour son travail sur la voix : solo, monologue, choralité, expériences technologiques où s'entremêlent voix, musique et son. Le spectacle *La fureur de ce que je pense*, présenté pour la première fois en 2013 au théâtre ESPACEGO à Montréal et repris au Festival TransAmériques en 2017, s'inscrit parfaitement dans cette esthétique : la pièce présente sept femmes unies sur scène par un texte composé exclusivement de citations de livres de Nelly Arcan (*Putain, Folle* et *Burqa de chair*), adaptées pour la scène par Marie Brassard quatre ans après le décès de l'écrivaine. Déjà, en lisant le collage[1], on sent que l'on se trouve devant un objet théâtral limite : on n'y trouve pas de fable, pas d'actions, pas de personnages. Il n'y a pas de description des lieux ni de didascalies ou presque. Toutes les locutrices parlent au « je », alternant monologues et chœur dans un entrecroisement calculé des voix narratrices des livres d'Arcan. On se trouve devant la métaphore matérielle d'un espace mental, celui d'un *je* énonciateur qui pense avec fureur.

Toutefois, le morcellement intérieur du sujet devient étrangement inquiétant lorsque surgit un imaginaire fantomatique hantant la parole de la comédienne Johanne Haberlin dans le fragment *Chant du Sang*. Dans les mots d'Arcan, agencés par Brassard, s'enchevêtrent identités et voix grâce à des procédés de superposition tels que la polyphonie et l'intertexte. Nous avançons donc qu'Arcan opère ici à partir d'une posture d'écrivain fantôme[2] renversée : Nelly Arcan n'écrit pas pour les autres (comme le suggère

l'expression dans son sens premier), ce sont plutôt les autres qui l'écrivent, elle. Elle écrit à partir des mots d'autrui, sa voix est possédée, hantée par celles, toujours plus fortes et plus contraignantes, des contes de fées et des diktats de la construction sociale. L'instance auctoriale de l'écrivaine fantôme naît alors d'un fort sentiment d'imposture.

Être imposteur, c'est duper, c'est reprendre parfaitement les postures d'un autre, comme une comédienne revêt un costume et confond ainsi le public. Arcan reprend les codes et les postures sociales d'un champ littéraire au « binarisme hiérarchisant » (Regard 98), où le masculin l'emporte toujours incontestablement sur le féminin. C'est cependant une imposture mortifère pour la voix énonciatrice de Nelly Arcan, dont l'identité s'efface au profit d'autrui, et c'est plutôt dans la transposition du récit littéraire au théâtre que l'écrivaine fantôme devient subversive : Brassard reprend mot pour mot les écrits d'Arcan en les agençant avec finesse. La dramaturge pointe les failles dans le discours dominant constamment remâché par la société occidentale aux filles et aux femmes, celui que reprend inlassablement l'écrivaine à travers l'ensemble de son œuvre. La création de Brassard lève ainsi le voile sur l'imposture d'Arcan et expose la force singulière de son écriture dans un champ littéraire dont les codes, intrinsèquement masculins, ne lui convenaient pas.

Nous prenons ici le parti d'étudier l'œuvre de Nelly Arcan, déjà maintes fois commentée[3], selon la perspective originale de la transposition théâtrale avec pour objectif de comprendre les réussites et les limites d'une pareille entreprise d'adaptation à la lumière des théories de Linda Hutcheon. Nous appréhenderons également les notions de théâtre de la pensée et de polylogue intérieur de Joseph Danan, afin de cerner les enjeux du dédoublement du sujet sur la scène de *La Fureur de ce que je pense*. Puis, en deux temps, nous analyserons les pratiques intertextuelles des auteures, Arcan et Brassard, à la lumière des théories sur l'imposture d'Éric Méchoulan, de Frédéric Regard et de Christian Biet.

Un fantôme de sœur

Comme nous l'avons affirmé dès l'introduction, nous considérons la pièce *La fureur de ce que je pense*[4] comme la transposition sur scène d'un espace mental, ce que Joseph Danan a appelé le « théâtre de la pensée » (Danan 16). Cette forme de dramaturgie procède à la manière d'un monologue intérieur romanesque ou *stream of consciousness* : les personnages sont à eux seuls le théâtre entier où se jouent leurs projections intimes du monde

et des choses (Danan 78). Le théâtre de la pensée revêt plusieurs formes, entre autres celle du polylogue intérieur. Ce dernier est constitué de discours tenus par de nombreux locuteurs, mais dont on revendique l'intimité : la masse d'énonciateurs représente les voix intérieures plurielles d'une psyché individuelle. Le temps et l'espace sont ainsi bouleversés : ils sont sujets à la métamorphose, la dilatation, la séparation ou la concomitance (Danan 264). Dans *La fureur*, l'audience se retrouve devant un espace fantasque, protéiforme, où plusieurs réalités, plusieurs lieux coexistent parallèlement; une chambre d'hôtel, un salon, une toilette publique. Le temps est fluide; il n'existe pas de liens de causalité entre les actions ni de progression temporelle. Alors qu'une comédienne se prête à son « chant », comme les a appelés Brassard, les autres, plongées dans la pénombre, continuent à se mouvoir de la même façon que les pensées évoluent simultanément, mais indépendamment, dans l'esprit humain. Les grandes actions aristotéliciennes ne sont plus l'enjeu théâtral principal dans le théâtre de la pensée : les personnages sont plutôt dans l'introspection, et le schéma actanciel est celui de la microaction (Danan 255-278).

Le polylogue intérieur est un élément capital du travail sur la voix effectuée dans *La fureur.* Les voix des locutrices, comme autant de facettes de la pensée du sujet, se répondent et se répètent dans un jeu de superposition, mais sans jamais se rendre illisibles/inaudibles entre elles : elles éclairent, l'une grâce à l'autre, les différentes couches de sens qui traversent l'œuvre d'Arcan, créant ainsi un *je* multidimensionnel. Prenons par exemple le chant quatorze que les locutrices déclament à la manière d'un chœur grec :

> Dans l'ambiance tamisée de ma salle de bains impeccable,
> Mes yeux rougis par les pleurs
> Je m'observe
> Car je fais aussi partie de ma foule portable et je pense :
> Comme je suis belle,
> Comme ces yeux seraient beaux sur un écran. (*LF* 53)

Toutes les voix s'unissent pour se regarder comme une seule femme dans le miroir, mais c'est une femme au reflet morcelé au sein de « [s]a foule portable ». Le déterminant possessif est éloquent : le *je* a conscience de la fragmentation de sa subjectivité et la revendique comme sienne. Son image est multipliée en sept, au nombre de femmes la représentant sur scène, mais plus encore : elle est fragmentée et réfléchie en autant de personnes spectatrices qui l'observent depuis la salle, en autant de regards qu'elle a intériorisés comme une foule aliénée en elle. Les regards sont encore plus nombreux quand le *je*

s'imagine sur un écran de cinéma, de télévision ou d'ordinateur : son image est démultipliée à l'infini dans le reflet des yeux des autres. Le *je* n'est donc pas seul devant le miroir; *je* est une foule, *je* est tous les autres.

Kristopher Poulin-Thibault avait déjà constaté dans l'écriture arcanienne cet aspect de choralité :

> L'espace créé par Arcan est constitué d'un chœur de personnages qui sont tous en partie Nelly Arcan elle-même. […] Leurs voix s'unissent pour exprimer des problèmes auxquels les femmes font face, dont certains sont des choix sans issue (soit pour plaire on porte un masque, soit on ne plaît pas). (37)

Nelly Arcan (personnage ou personne réelle, Poulin-Thibault embrasse cette ambiguïté) est constituée d'une série de voix, de couches et de voiles qui se réunissent pour exprimer son parcours ardu et laborieux vers l'agentivité, et ce, tout en ayant conscience d'adopter le rôle stéréotypé de la femme-objet (Havercroft 218). La femme créée par l'unisson des sept voix énonciatrices dans *La fureur* pleure dans sa salle de bains, ayant terriblement conscience des aspects néfastes de la construction de la féminité, tout en utilisant le masque évoqué par Poulin-Thibault pour plaire : la beauté (« Comme je suis belle ») et la description des yeux, à la manière d'une synecdoque qui réduit l'ensemble du visage à un élément de séduction[5], semble profiter au *male gaze* (Mulvey) puisque le *je* a conscience d'être observée et rêve même de voir projeter son image sur grand écran. La polyphonie peut alors être comprise comme une stratégie discursive qui rend compte de l'aliénation et du morcellement identitaires tout en servant à exprimer, comme Poulin-Thibault le décrit, la solidarité des voix féminines.

De plus, les métaphores qui expriment une fragmentation du sujet abondent dans le collage de Brassard, notamment dans le chant 7 où un imaginaire surnaturel est explicitement évoqué :

> Ma sœur est morte depuis toujours mais elle flotte encore au-dessus de la table familiale, elle a grandi là sans qu'on en parle et s'est installée dans le silence de nos repas. […]
> Si elle avait vécu je ne serais pas née
> Si elle avait vécu je ne serais pas née
> Si elle avait vécu je ne serais pas née (*LF* 20)

Un fantôme surgit littéralement : la sœur décédée un an avant la naissance du *je* revient hanter sa famille. C'est une présence culpabilisante : si la première fille avait survécu, le couple n'aurait pas eu de second enfant. Le *je* vit donc grâce à la disparition de sa sœur, son identité prend racine dans la mort de son aînée; identité nécessairement mortifère et rongée par le drame d'être,

elle, en vie. La double répétition immédiate devient un funeste leitmotiv : avant même de naître, le *je* était déjà mis en échec par le fantôme de sa sœur.

Le fantôme devient omniprésent dans l'existence de la narratrice/énonciatrice : « Je lui ai pris son nom comme nom de putain et ce n'est pas pour rien, chaque fois qu'un client me nomme, c'est elle qu'il rappelle d'entre les mortes » (*LF* 21). De nouveau, le surnaturel fait irruption dans le réel : le fantôme revient dans le monde des vivants lorsqu'on l'appelle par son nom, comme dans une incantation. Par le choix d'adopter le nom de sa sœur décédée comme nom d'escorte professionnelle, la voix énonciatrice lie inextricablement la prostitution à la mort (Havercroft 218). Dès lors, la prostituée n'a plus d'identité dans le monde des vivants : elle a effacé son nom, l'a renié presque, au profit de celui du spectre. Le dédoublement du sujet devient pratiquement parfait : dans un seul corps, elle est elle-même, ainsi que sa propre sœur. Cette situation est vécue comme une usurpation par la voix énonciatrice : « J'ai un double depuis que la vie m'a fait comprendre qu'une autre aurait dû se trouver là où je suis » (*LF* 22). Elle qui, depuis sa naissance, sent ce fantôme d'enfant morte planer au-dessus de sa tête, a toujours su qu'elle n'était pas à sa place, qu'elle était imposteur de sa propre vie.

Plus loin dans la pièce, dans le *Chant Occulte*, le *je* se décrit comme « une personne effacée, / diluée, / nébuleuse » (*LF* 36). C'est une personnalité tronquée, trouée. Même dans son apparence, le *je* dit ressembler à un fantôme : « l'effacement prenait chez moi un sens littéral, / […] j'avais la peau si blanche / qu'elle en était translucide, / on me voyait à travers » (*LF* 36). Ces descriptions ne sont pas sans rappeler les considérations de David Le Breton dans *Disparaître de soi*, qui propose le terme « blancheur » pour caractériser l'état « [d']absence à soi […] à cause de la difficulté ou la pénibilité d'être soi » (17). À la difficulté d'être soi, à la pénibilité d'être vivante à la place de sa sœur, le *je* répond par la blancheur[6] : blancheur de son corps, blancheur de sa personnalité. C'est l'abolition de son identité par la dissolution d'elle-même dans cette autre femme qui n'a jamais vraiment vécu. L'esprit de la sœur possède le *je*, sa peau, son nom, ses mots. Elle n'a plus qu'une identité fantôme, mortifère et dédoublée.

L'écrivaine fantôme

En plus de l'enchâssement des voix des locutrices dans le texte et de la fondation d'une identité morcelée chez le sujet énonciateur, le polylogue intérieur de *La fureur* est constitué de références intertextuelles. On

remarque à travers les extraits choisis pour le collage que l'écriture d'Arcan fait souvent référence à d'autres textes, notamment aux contes de fées et à l'Ancien Testament. Cette pratique correspond à la démarche intertextuelle que définit Julia Kristeva : « [T]out texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte » (85). Les écrits d'Arcan s'imprègnent, absorbent et transforment d'autres textes, aussi canoniques que la Bible, aussi stéréotypés que les contes de fées, afin de proposer un texte nouveau. Plus largement aussi, l'auteure reprend les stéréotypes de la construction du genre féminin dans la société occidentale. Ce n'est pas là une intertextualité évidente avec des citations rapportées ou des références directes, mais une pratique plus subtile : « [p]ar le «prélèvement» et la «transformation» que représente l'activité intertextuelle, la totalité des discours sociaux est prise en considération et ainsi sont engendrés les phénomènes du «dialogisme» et de la «polyphonie» », résume Ursula Jung en empruntant les mots de Bakhtine et de Kristeva (33). Autre part, Philippe Hamon considère l'utilisation de stéréotypes, de topoï et de clichés culturels dans un texte comme la « mention ou l'écho d'un texte antérieur » qui consiste en une « référence explicite à un contexte de substitution » (Hamon 25). Cette pratique référentielle remplit deux conditions : « 1) une grande stabilité, pour pouvoir assurer efficacement la communication avec plusieurs générations successives de lecteurs; 2) une valeur reconnue par tous » (Hamon 25). Dès lors, la reprise par Arcan de stéréotypes bien établis que sont ceux de la construction sociale de la féminité assure un lien solide entre ses récits et les discours de la culture dominante.

Les contes de fées réinvestis par l'écrivaine québécoise prennent toutefois une tournure tragique. La rivalité toxique entre les femmes est héritée des sorcières et des belles-mères jalouses (*LF* 34), la passivité extrême de la mère de l'énonciatrice est celle de la Belle au bois dormant qui meurt d'avoir trop longtemps attendu le prince charmant (*LF* 42), et les rapports de séduction entre les hommes et les femmes sont comme ceux du prédateur et de sa proie, à l'image du grand méchant loup et du Petit Chaperon rouge (*LF* 51). On reprend également la prémisse du *Petit Prince* de Saint-Exupéry (« je m'imaginais une petite planète […] grise recouverte de mignons cratères lunaires entre lesquels je ferais pousser des roses » [*LF* 13]) pour rendre compte de l'indépendance et de la solitude recherchées par le *je* dans le cosmos, séduit par « l'impossibilité de s'y reproduire » (*LF* 13). Les voix du patriarcat hantent les références littéraires d'Arcan et le destin de ses

personnages : jalousie, passivité, objectivation et maternité non désirée sont les seuls possibles envisagés. La voix énonciatrice répète des phrases creuses apprises par cœur par les enfants, « ils vécurent heureux / et eurent beaucoup d'enfants » (26), ne connaissant pas, dirait-on, d'autres textes qui présentent une finalité différente pour les femmes. Entre les lignes de cette polyphonie intertextuelle apparaît la notion d'aliénation : le *je* énonciateur a intériorisé les voix d'autrui, qui se mélangent de façon presque indiscernable à sa propre subjectivité. Aliéné par les contes de fées et l'image des femmes qu'ils véhiculent, le sujet devient étranger à lui-même, habité, voire possédé, par le discours patriarcal.

L'aliénation devient encore plus patente lorsque le *je* énonciateur reprend les stéréotypes de la construction sociale des genres :

> passer du lit au coiffeur à la maquilleuse à la gym à la boutique à la manucure au régime au chirurgien au strip-tease et encore au lit […] de la coiffure du maquillage de la gym des fesses et des seins trop petits ou trop bas, de la boutique de la manucure du régime du chirurgien du strip-tease et de la baise, oui, une femme c'est tout ça, ce n'est que ça. (*LF* 6-7)

Les activités de la beauté remplissent les journées par le temps et l'effort accablant à fournir. Le *je* revêt les clichés et les injonctions de la production sociale de la sexualité, et elle porte ce costume comme un lourd fardeau sur ses épaules : « je vivrai heureuse le temps de me déshabiller de mon sexe, je connaîtrai quelques minutes de soulagement » (*LF* 8). Tout en en dénonçant les effets, le *je* reconduit et perpétue malgré tout le discours patriarcal. Dans son analyse des masques dans l'œuvre de Nelly Arcan, Poulin-Thibault décrit ce phénomène paradoxal comme « l'illusion d'un choix » (34) pour les narratrices et les personnages féminins d'Arcan : on dresse « une liste des éléments de construction de la féminité qui s'emboîtent, se superposent afin d'engendrer la femme. La femme serait un amalgame de masques qu'elle *choisit* de porter » (Poulin-Thibault 33, nous soulignons). Les activités de la beauté énumérées dans *La fureur* seraient donc le résultat d'un processus d'autodétermination : pouvoir choisir comment notre corps et notre visage apparaissent en société. Les vêtements, le maquillage, la chirurgie esthétique deviennent ainsi les éléments contrôlables de l'identité. Pourtant, pour Poulin-Thibault, cet acte d'agentivité « serait bloqué par la nature oppressive du patriarcat inhérent à la société dans laquelle les femmes évoluent » puisque les masques que les narratrices et personnages d'Arcan utilisent sont ceux mis à disposition par les hommes (33). En effet, l'entraînement physique, la diète, le *strip-tease* seraient les constituants d'une hyperféminité

performative presque caricaturale, qui révèlent le choix fallacieux proposé aux femmes : « soit pour plaire on porte un masque, soit on ne plaît pas » (Poulin-Thibault 37). Cette ambivalence entre la quête ardue et laborieuse de l'agentivité et de la terrible conscience de l'aliénation dans la reprise du discours patriarcal est un paradoxe central de l'écriture arcanienne.

Nous avançons donc que de ces différentes pratiques référentielles découle une posture d'écrivain fantôme renversée : Nelly Arcan n'écrit pas pour les autres, elle est plutôt écrite par les voix des discours ambiants. Isabelle Boisclair constate comment le corps des personnages féminins d'Arcan devient le lieu de résonnance de la voix du Père : les personnages masculins sont parvenus à « colonis[er] » (Boisclair 260) l'esprit des femmes dans l'œuvre de l'écrivaine. Leurs points de vue sur le monde, leurs histoires et leurs références sont imprimés dans le discours des narratrices de *Putain* et de *Folle* (Boisclair 259-260). L'écriture d'Arcan est ainsi hantée par les références littéraires et sociales masculines et patriarcales. Tout comme le *je* avait usurpé l'identité de sa sœur, l'auteure est usurpatrice d'un discours qui ne lui correspond pas et qui, à l'image des contes de fées, est aliénant pour les femmes. Nelly Arcan devient donc imposteur sur la scène des rôles sociaux.

À cet égard, Éric Méchoulan s'interroge dans son étude « «À l'insu de mon plein gré» : impasses et impostures du sujet » quant à la posture de l'auteur vis-à-vis du discours social et du champ littéraire :

> La première chose que révèle donc un imposteur est que toute prise de parole dans une collectivité est une affaire de posture sociale, puisqu'il a pu se glisser dans une présence et une autorité qui n'était pas la sienne, à laquelle il n'avait pas droit. […] [L]'imposteur emprunte une figure d'auteur sans en avoir l'autorité reconnue, comme un pagure se glisse dans un coquillage la plage des rôles sociaux. […] [C]omme le parasite, [l'imposteur] réside tout entier dans les liens qui le fondent. (205)

Une femme qui prend la parole dans la collectivité est nécessairement imposteur : sa place en tant qu'écrivaine n'est pas assurée, n'est pas reconnue comme une figure d'autorité, simplement à cause de sa condition sociale d'infériorisée. À titre d'exemple, pensons à l'écriture woolfienne, où l'imposture est également convoquée par Frédéric Regard comme élément fondateur du sujet. Selon l'analyse de Regard, les milieux universitaires et artistiques tels que représentés par Virginia Woolf apparaissent comme les élites d'une société qui instaure un binarisme hiérarchisant dont chaque production culturelle, partant d'une simple table jusqu'à l'Université

Oxford elle-même, est déjà foncièrement sexuée. Les hommes y voient le souci de perpétuation des traditions, tandis que les femmes ressentent plutôt un état de servitude devant ces milieux sociaux et culturels qui ne leur correspondent pas; une table à nettoyer, un salaire inadéquat, une éducation inégale. Dans ces milieux d'élite, les mêmes que fréquentent les narratrices de *Putain* et de *Folle*, les femmes n'ont pas une présence et une autorité reconnues d'emblée, elles sont imposteurs (Regard 97-101). Alors, comme l'indique Méchoulan, l'imposteur ne peut réussir son entreprise qu'en parasitant un système déjà établi, le champ culturel dans le cas de Nelly Arcan, historiquement et encore actuellement[7] principalement masculin. L'écrivaine fantôme revêt les atours du système qu'elle tente de berner, afin de se conférer une autorité qui lui échappe; un coquillage sur une plage, des références canoniques dans le champ littéraire ou encore une burqa de chair[8] sur la scène médiatique. C'est un effacement destructeur dans la prose d'Arcan, où le sujet se perd lui-même dans le rôle d'un autre, possédé par la voix du Père (Boisclair 259-260). Tout comme l'énonciatrice *je* s'était emparée de la vie de sa sœur, l'écrivaine fantôme perd son identité propre, et s'abolit dans une posture sociale à laquelle elle n'avait pas droit dans le champ littéraire. L'instance auctoriale, qui absorbe les discours ambiants « à son insu de son plein gré » pour reprendre l'expression de Méchoulan, alors qu'elle revêt, telle une actrice, le costume de l'écrivain masculin fait de références canoniques, de clichés sexistes et d'injonctions patriarcales, se fond entièrement dans le rôle qu'elle veut tenir sur la scène sociale. Elle adhère complètement au système qu'elle veut parasiter et espère ainsi se délester des contraintes d'identité «femme » dans le champ littéraire masculin.

Ce n'est, cependant, que l'illusion d'un choix : car en revanche, lorsque le texte de l'écrivaine fantôme est transposé au théâtre, la posture de l'imposture révèle alors une nouvelle dimension. Nous verrons comment le collage intertextuel que propose Marie Brassard réinvestit et déstabilise l'ambivalence entre agentivité et aliénation[9] dans l'écriture arcanienne.

L'actrice dévoile

Dans un spectacle annoncé comme explicitement inspiré des œuvres de Nelly Arcan, Marie Brassard reprend fidèlement les mots de l'auteure et, grâce à leur agencement, à leur découpage et à leur répétition, elle crée une œuvre radicalement différente. C'est là le propre d'une adaptation selon Linda Hutcheon : « [a]daptation is repetition, but repetition without replication » (7). Brassard répète, mais ne reproduit pas tel quel.

Contrairement à une majorité d'exemples analysés par Hutcheon dans *A Theory of Adaptation*, Brassard échappe aux nombreux pièges du passage de l'écrit au performatif. Bien que la dramaturge se risque à adapter non pas un livre, mais bien trois dans une pièce de théâtre, elle ne perd rien de la complexité des œuvres[10]: la projection d'un espace mental sur scène avec les costumes, l'interprétation des actrices, la musique, parviennent à ajouter de la dramatisation à des textes qui relèvent du récit intime, presque du journal. Il est juste néanmoins de mentionner qu'en adaptant plusieurs livres en une seule pièce, Brassard a dû effectuer des coupures majeures pour les condenser en une heure et demie de jeu. Pourtant, à l'inverse des critiques que rapporte Hutcheon (« [P]erformance media are said to be incapable of linguistic narrative subtlety or of representing the psychological or the spiritual » [38]), l'œuvre de Brassard, en citant Arcan mot pour mot, réussit à conserver la structure circulaire et étouffante des romans, le style « lapidaire, désopilent, cruel, décapant » (Huston 2011) de l'auteure, de même que les références intertextuelles que nous proposons ici d'étudier.

Brassard a produit une mosaïque intertextuelle des extraits d'Arcan, les transformant en un texte nouveau. Si les écrits originaux dénonçaient les discours sociaux du patriarcat sans jamais toutefois échapper à la tension entre agentivité et aliénation, la reprise qu'en fait Marie Brassard devient quant à elle *autre* : on répète, mais à la manière d'une variation sur le même thème grâce à un collage inédit. Il y a alors un effet d'enchâssement vertigineux : Nelly Arcan, qui reprenait les contes de fées, est reprise par Marie Brassard qui répète à son tour le discours patriarcal en montrant le dédoublement et le sentiment d'imposture d'une subjectivité morcelée. Néanmoins, si l'imposture d'Arcan était, comme le *je*, mortifère et aliénée, celle que convoque Brassard en est une foncièrement woolfienne :

> [Le texte] ne peut arriver à destination que si la question a lieu d'être poétiquement, […] en créant un ordre rythmique, en écrivant un autre scénario, en suivant une autre route, celle d'un train fantôme, invisible, à venir, en devenir, poussé par des connexions impossibles, des combinaisons incroyables, des coopérations inédites. (Regard 115)

Il y a un mouvement certain dans le texte de Brassard, un ordre rythmique qui s'éloigne des scénarios proposés dans les récits d'Arcan. Le transfert du livre à la scène permet de nouvelles opportunités grâce au changement de médium. Les coopérations inédites sont celles de la « partition scénique » du théâtre de la pensée (Danan 256) : décors, lumières, danse, musique sur la scène de *La fureur* sont autant de voix qui s'ajoutent aux répliques

enchevêtrées des locutrices, multipliant les couches de sens du polylogue déjà touffu. Aussi, le travail d'adaptation de l'écriture d'Arcan par Brassard, qui crée des connexions autrement impossibles entre les divers textes de l'auteure, révèle sur scène la faillibilité du langage :

SOPHIE/JULIE
l-a-b-e-a-u-t-é

CHRISTINE
je ne réfléchis pas

JOHANNE
Ce qu'il advient de la beauté une fois en marche

MONIA
où va-t-elle

JOHANNE
à qui s'adresse-t-elle

SOPHIE/JULIE
À-q-u-i? (*temps*)

CHRISTINE
je ne le sais pas

JOHANNE
à qui s'adresse-t-elle

MONIA
peut-être se laisse-t-elle aller

JOHANNE
à jouir d'elle-même

SOPHIE/JULIE
l-a-b-e-a-u-t-é (*LF* 27)

Dans cet extrait, où la typographie et l'espacement du collage de Brassard ont été fidèlement reproduits, les phrases fragmentées en plusieurs morceaux sont distribuées entre les actrices, répétées comme en écho. Ces femmes partagent les mêmes mots, la même énonciation, mais leur discours piétine : il ne trouve pas de réponses à ses questions, n'en attend pas vraiment non plus. Notons la quasi-absence de point d'interrogation dans un discours essentiellement proféré sur le mode interrogatif. Les questions ne sont-elles pas alors que pure rhétorique dans cette forme tronquée? Elles s'invalident d'office tant sur le fond que sur la forme. La déconstruction syntaxique va encore plus loin : les mots eux-mêmes sont détruits, réduits à leur plus simple unité, la lettre. Cette déconstruction, cet évanouissement de la parole, qui n'a pas lieu dans les récits d'Arcan, prend acte seulement dans l'oralisation et dans l'incarnation physique du texte littéraire sur scène et rend encore plus tangible l'aliénation des femmes devant les injonctions de la beauté. Le texte et le langage n'ont lieu d'être que poétiquement dans cet extrait joué

au théâtre, quand les voix se répondent, hachurent les phrases, modifient l'ordre, se meuvent, à l'image d'une identité mobile composée de nombreux masques et de plusieurs postures sociales.

Comparons ce processus d'adaptation au discours « non pas «rapporté» mais «relayé» » (260) que remarquait Isabelle Boisclair dans la prose d'Arcan. Les voix des narratrices et des personnages d'Arcan qui relaient les discours du patriarcat font entendre les injonctions de la beauté et les injures proférées aux femmes (putain, folle). Elles les répètent, certes, mais sans les reproduire tel quel; elles en sont critiques aussi. Le *je* énonciateur « les détourne, les fait dévier de leur trajectoire, les relaie, les fait résonner dans l'édifice littéraire, les désubstantialisant […] en même temps qu'[il] les amplifie » (Boislcair 275). Arcan se fait lieu de résonnance pour faire entendre à tous et à toutes les insultes lancées aux femmes, « bruits entendus par elles seules » (Boisclair 260), et le théâtre de Brassard se fait médium pour les dénoncer eux aussi *différemment*, et ce, grâce aux conventions théâtrales.

Cette prise de parole dans l'espace public relève de l'imposture, et celle d'Arcan reprise par Brassard est mouvante, « inassignable à résidence » et marginale, « au nom d'une *Société des Marginales*, comme singularité une et plurielle à la fois, perdue dans une communauté «anonyme et souple» » (Regard 118). La communauté anonyme et souple est bien celle des sept femmes présentes sur scène pour dire un seul *je*, à la fois singulier et pluriel. C'est le chœur des Nelly Arcan que Poulin-Thibault retrouvait dans les récits et les romans, qui apparaît maintenant incarné sur scène. Offerte aux regards sur une scène de théâtre, la voix énonciatrice des textes de l'auteure québécoise résonne autrement :

> À dédoubler mes misères et à les grossir en spectacle,
> Ma douleur s'en va.
> Le temps de la représentation, un sens est donné à ma vie.
> Et quand c'est le théâtre qui s'en va,
> La solitude où je suis de tous oubliée reprend ses droits,
> Vide le monde de tout le monde
> Et la douleur revient. (*LF* 53-54)

L'explicit de *La fureur* est une réflexion sur le théâtre dans le théâtre. Ces phrases déclamées par des actrices sur scène devant un auditoire prennent un sens différent à celui du même texte littéraire imprimé (*Burqa de chair*), lu individuellement. L'identification et la compréhension que l'on peut faire durant une expérience privée de lecture sont complètement modifiées durant l'expérience commune d'une représentation publique sur scène (Hutcheon 110). Le théâtre mental de Brassard a justement grossi et dédoublé, voire décuplé,

les misères de la voix énonciatrice dans un spectacle polyphonique et protéiforme. C'est ainsi, et seulement ainsi, que le *je* trouve un sens à sa vie, dans la représentation visuelle et physique devant le public, devant sa « foule portable » (*LF* 53), à travers l'écran des yeux des autres. Ce *je* est fantomatique, imposteur, usurpateur ou, tout bêtement, acteur.

Le jeu théâtral est intrinsèquement imposteur, affirme Christian Biet, puisqu'il s'agit d'emprunter une identité et de l'exposer sur scène : c'est la mimésis, la représentation d'un personnage par un acteur ou une actrice pour un auditoire qui accepte de bon cœur de se laisser berner (Biet 111-113). Biet parle également du plaisir que les spectateurs et les spectatrices éprouvent à démasquer un imposteur dans la pièce elle-même : « Pouvoir dire, pouvoir nommer l'imposture c'est […] nommer une révélation : que celui qui trompait, usurpait une identité, n'est pas l'autre mais lui-même ou n'est pas le «lui-même» auquel tout le monde croyait, mais un autre » (113). Voilà le travail subversif de Marie Brassard : en reprenant textuellement l'œuvre d'une femme dont les narratrices sont morcelées et tiraillées, en transformant ses récits et nouvelles en théâtre, elle lève le voile sur l'imposture de Nelly Arcan, femme, écrivaine et personnage. La *persona* Nelly Arcan n'était pas *que* ça, une femme victime des diktats de la beauté et une auteure sulfureuse. L'instance énonciatrice n'était pas *que* ça, une femme aliénée par les histoires de princesses et par le regard des autres, embourbée dans une quête illusoire d'agentivité. La représentation théâtrale permet d'accéder à une couche de sens inédite grâce à la réflexion sur le polylogue intérieur, sur le morcellement du sujet et sur l'intertextualité entre femmes. La Nelly Arcan représentée par Brassard est inassignable, marginale, mouvante, jamais exactement là où on l'attend, à l'image de la pratique multidisciplinaire de la metteure en scène. Être écrivaine fantôme, c'est adopter la posture de l'imposture, c'est parasiter le système social patriarcal et en dévoiler les travers, c'est-à-dire la construction sociale des genres, la sous-représentation des femmes créatrices, la perpétuation du canon patriarcal dont on abreuve les fillettes dès leur plus jeune âge et la destruction du langage qui en découle. L'instance auctoriale d'Arcan était hantée par le désir de reconnaissance d'une société patriarcale qui ne lui convenait pas; elle était actrice sur la scène du champ littéraire, imposteur, travestie, mais dotée d'une voix et d'une pensée puissantes.

Dans *La fureur de ce que je pense*, le polylogue intérieur et l'intertextualité remettent en question le dédoublement identitaire et l'aliénation au féminin du *je* énonciateur. L'imposture se déploie en trois temps : premièrement,

la subjectivité de la voix énonciatrice est surnaturellement divisée entre elle-même et le spectre de sa sœur. Deuxièmement, il y a création d'une posture d'écrivaine fantôme renversée : la voix énonciatrice de l'écrivaine est hantée par les références littéraires patriarcales comme les contes pour enfants et par la construction sociale des genres contraignante. L'instance auctoriale se fonde alors sur un fort sentiment d'imposture, celui d'une reconnaissance sociale impossible et d'une autorité qui lui échappe, à cause de sa condition de femme auteure. Troisièmement, la pratique intertextuelle de Marie Brassard vient subvertir la posture de l'écrivaine fantôme : grâce à l'adaptation, un processus de répétition sans reproduction, la dramaturge montre les failles des discours patriarcaux servis aux femmes depuis l'enfance à travers les contes de fées et les stéréotypes de genre. Elle fait des narratrices de Nelly Arcan des personnages de théâtre dont on dévoile l'imposture sur scène : camouflés derrière les masques du système dominant existent un texte multidimensionnel et une voix souple et marginale. Nous sommes maintenant dans le travail de l'après-coup : « Viennent ensuite l'interprétation des raisons pour lesquelles il y avait usurpation, […] pour lesquelles certains savaient et d'autres pas, l'évaluation du processus qui a permis que l'imposture cesse, enfin l'exploration de ce qui se passe après la découverte » (Biet 113). C'est ce travail d'interprétation et d'exploration que notre analyse a proposé, à savoir revisiter une œuvre que le côté licencieux de l'auteure et de ses personnages a parfois éclipsée pour essayer d'en comprendre la portée artistique, sociale et politique. Le passage du texte à la performance, que ce soit au théâtre ou au cinéma, tente également de revisiter l'œuvre différemment. Les adaptations de roman ont souvent été sévèrement critiquées, accusées d'infidélité ou même de trahison. Linda Hutcheon suggère qu'il s'agit d'une « iconophobia » dont la culture occidentale souffre, c'est-à-dire que le mot aurait une supériorité incontestable sur l'image et donc un plus grand capital culturel (109). Si la pièce de Marie Brassard a reçu un accueil critique favorable (on a salué le travail de mise en scène, le jeu des actrices, la scénographie, le collage de textes), la réception du film *Nelly* d'Anne Émond, inspiré tant des livres que de la biographie de l'auteure, a été beaucoup plus mitigée. Des critiques ont dit ressentir un malaise réel devant cette œuvre cinématographique librement inspirée de la vie réelle de l'auteure et elles ont invité le public à relire ses textes plutôt que de s'en tenir au film[11]. Le film *Nelly* est-il une nouvelle victime d'iconophobie? Est-il choquant parce qu'il est artistiquement mauvais, ou serait-ce le mélange de la vie réelle de l'artiste et

de la fiction qui ne plaît pas aux universitaires, qui se méfient généralement du biographique? Sera-t-il possible un jour d'échapper aux discours évaluatifs qui hiérarchisent l'original et l'adaptation (toujours au profit du premier) afin d'appréhender chacune des versions comme une œuvre d'art autonome?

NOTES

1 Le collage est inédit; nous avons eu accès au texte grâce à la générosité de l'auteure.
2 Nous préférons ce calque de l'anglais plutôt que l'expression « nègre littéraire » pour des fins d'analyse et pour des raisons idéologiques évidentes.
3 Voir entre autres l'ouvrage collectif *Nelly Arcan : Trajectoires fulgurantes* publié en 2017 au Remue-Ménage, l'ouvrage de Patricia Smart, *De Marie de l'Incarnation à Nelly Arcan : se dire, se faire par l'écriture intime* ou encore l'article d'Andrea Oberhuber « Chronique d'un suicide annoncé ou la fictionalisation de soi dans *Folle* de Nelly Arcan » publié dans la *Revue des lettres et de traduction* en 2008.
4 Nous raccourcirons le titre de la pièce à *La fureur* dans le corps du texte et pour les citations, nous utiliserons la référence *LF* entre parenthèses.
5 Pour Barbara Havercroft, ce type de synecdoque exprimerait dans l'écriture arcanienne le morcellement identitaire de la voix narrative. Dans *Putain,* des synecdoques réduisent le corps entier du personnage à une série de parties sexuées (sein, bouche, cheveux), faisant d'elle une narratrice brisée, désassemblée, « indicating her desperate search for subjectivity and identity » (Havercroft 221-222).
6 Nous ne pouvons passer sous silence la question de la race qui surgit ici dans le texte d'Arcan. Si nous choisissons d'aborder la question de la blancheur de la peau comme une métaphore de l'effacement et du fantomatique, il serait néanmoins très intéressant d'examiner du point de vue de la race la construction d'une beauté hégémonique occidentale dans l'œuvre de Nelly Arcan.
7 À cet égard, Lori Saint-Martin a dénoncé en 2016 dans *Le Devoir* la discrimination systémique faite aux femmes par les instances culturelles du monde littéraire, autant au Québec qu'en France. Voir aussi les actions des regroupements *Femmes pour l'Équité en Théâtre* et *Réalisatrices Équitables* qui veulent sensibiliser la population à la sous-représentation des femmes dans les postes créatifs clés de leur domaine artistique respectif et qui visent ainsi à atteindre la parité.
8 L'un des personnages dans le roman À ciel ouvert (2007) souffre d'une « obsession esthétique » qu'elle appelle « burqa de chair » : « L'acharnement esthétique […] recouvrait le corps d'un voile de contraintes tissé par des dépenses extraordinaires d'argent et de temps, d'espoirs et de désillusions toujours surmontées par de nouveaux produits, de nouvelles techniques, retouches, interventions, qui se déposaient sur le corps en couches superposées, jusqu'à l'occulter. C'est un voile à la fois transparent et mensonger qui niait une vérité physique qu'il prétendait pourtant exposer à tout vent […]. » (Arcan 89-90)
9 En plus des articles de Barbara Havercroft et de Kristopher Poulin-Thibault déjà cités, voir le mémoire d'Élyse Bourassa-Girard, « Aliénation, agentivité et ambivalence dans *Putain* et *Folle* de Nelly Arcan : une subjectivité féminine divisée » pour une analyse de cette ambivalence dans les récits d'Arcan.
10 Nous pourrions même arguer que le collage, qui a préservé la complexité et la sensibilité

des textes originaux, peut s'avérer difficile à saisir dans sa forme théâtrale oralisée pour le public qui connaîtrait peu les œuvres d'Arcan.

11 Voir la lettre d'opinion d'Isabelle Boisclair et de Catherine Dussault Frenette dans *Le Devoir*, « Nelly Arcan mise en boîte », et l'entretien accordé par Martine Delvaux à Radio-Canada, « Pour comprendre Nelly Arcan, il faut la lire ». Les titres sont déjà évocateurs. Il faut noter que la lettre d'opinion de Martine Delvaux, « Nelly Arcan en série », publiée dans *Le Devoir* trois semaines plus tard, nuance le propos de sa première entrevue.

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Meredith Quartermain

Half Way

Shunt-creak side-track, clump-rumble forward
squeak, murmur, backslide. Slouch
toward Winnipeg three hours late
for Colin Smith *Carbonated Bippies!*
laugh-in.

Midnight wheel-gleam Union Station
thirty minutes till reboarding.
Rembarquement en trente minutes
this going somewhereness
roadless dark inside outerspace.

Car aides at their boxes
hand sleepy-eyed idea riders
to 'Grand Central' police-glare.
The mind's a monkey, Colin sez,
and poetry its best chimp

chasing the goose round Union dome
circle of brass maple leaves,
four stories up white space shimmers,
think domicide. *Poetry gets zero*
for conduct, always,
and doesn't care, sez Colin.

Strain retractable leash
through Roman arches
black wind-sniff watery murk
glass aluminum ghostlit tower
gives night the finger.

Snap. Neck-yank
back to basement fug.
Rembarquement en dix minutes
train of thought departs
seedy light on station pillar.

Jenny Kerber

Corrosive Aesthetics
On the Receiving End of Oil and Gas in *Who by Fire*

I. Lighting the Match

In Fred Stenson's 2014 work of petrofiction, *Who by Fire*, pyric imagery assumes striking visual form in the gas flare stacks that populate rural Alberta, conjuring promises of light and wealth drawn from the earth and separated into useful and waste substances. Spectral and yet material, natural gas has made for some spectacular profits in the province in the decades since its discovery. At the same time, though, the imagery of fire developed in the novel conveys the experiences of those who are burned by contact with an industry prone to creating ecological sacrifice zones with only limited attempts at precaution in advance or reclamation after. The spectrality of gas has material effects beyond money, yet such effects are rarely fully accounted for in the calculus of extraction. At its heart, the novel asks whose fates hang in the balance when the energy status quo in Western Canada continues without interruption, and what happens when demands for accountability are ignored in the drive to make Canada a global energy player. To explore these issues, I consider how Stenson develops the key metaphor of corrosion to probe the limits of narrative and industry containment, and investigate how the leaks corrosion generates might offer means by which to question the kinds of petrodeterminism that obstruct critique by pointing to our widespread indebtedness to oil. Ultimately, Stenson's work pushes its readers to understand (and ideally to *change*) the mechanisms of an existing system wherein industry and government feed one another's interests in enabling capital accumulation instead of safeguarding the health of citizens, animals, and landscapes that remain well after the resource is exhausted.

II. Leakiness in the Oil Patch and Narrating Chemical Encounters

The figuration of Alberta as a landscape with a fiery underbelly is one that stretches back into literary history. In 1907, for instance, Rudyard Kipling travelled across Canada on the CPR, and upon learning about southern Alberta's natural gas reserves, he commented, "This part of the country seems to have all hell for a basement, and the only trap door appears to be in Medicine Hat" (qtd. in Hanson 16; see also Gershaw 41). It would take several decades following Kipling's visit for the natural gas industry to become firmly established in southern Alberta, but by the 1950s and 1960s it was flourishing, with wells springing up across the region. There have been ebbs and flows in the petroleum industry in the ensuing decades, but as various scholars have pointed out, the long-standing "rule of capture" in the Western Canadian resource industry has largely encouraged a rush to rapid production, along with an accompanying compromise of regulatory regimes or adherence to principles of precaution (Daintith; Zalik 355-56).[1] Many businesses, workers, and municipal utilities went on to benefit from the extraction of this subterranean wealth, yet for some rural residents, the reality of living alongside the gas industry proved costly.

The experience of living "too close to the fire" is explored in Stenson's 2014 novel, a text that weaves together two different settings, the first of which is located in southern Alberta in the 1960s and focuses on a farm family living near a sour gas plant, while the second is situated in the present Alberta tar sands region, where natural gas is primarily used to liquefy bitumen (Stenson 355). In the 1960s setting, the Ryder family finds itself under siege from hydrogen sulphide (H_2S) leaking from the Aladdin Corporation's recently opened Hatfield processing plant on a neighbouring property. Their animals sicken (and in some cases die), and the family frequently has to evacuate to town when the gas makes them ill. In the latter, present-day setting, the young farm boy Bill Ryder has grown up to become a senior supervising engineer at an upgrader in northern Alberta, also run by the renamed New Aladdin Corporation. By weaving together these two settings, the novel invites readers to reflect upon divided loyalties, complicity, and the unruly temporalities of extractive economies. Here the past haunts the present with the prospect of unpredictable illnesses and deaths that trouble narratives of progress.

Yet at the same time, such hauntings also allow readers to see relations where they might previously have gone unnoticed, and open room to consider how to change the ways we live with the energy sector and its by-products. Put another way, Stenson's work of petrofiction opens up space to consider

geologic life and our implication in it as extractors, refiners, and consumers of fossil fuels, and as individuals whose biopolitical subjectivities are differentially animated and influenced by them, right down to the skeletal and cellular levels.[2] The question of which bodies get to enjoy the freedoms fossil fuels offer and which absorb the by-products generated by that pursuit of freedom is not always easy to untangle given that many bodies experience both, albeit not necessarily to the same degrees. The effects of petroleum are thus mixed in their promise when it comes to enabling the good life for characters in the novel; while some enjoy material prosperity and the chance to technologically improve the processes by which petroleum is drawn from the earth and turned into consumer products, Stenson also highlights the problems petroleum creates for those who live alongside its primary industrial sites but have little power over how those sites are run. The fifty-year timeline of the novel, as well as its open-ended conclusion, formally suggests that these problems have no quick or immediate solution given the current, mutually dependent relationships between public institutions and private industry in Alberta.

In what follows, I investigate the novel's handling of three key problems when it comes to the relationship between humans and petroleum. First, *Who by Fire* negotiates the challenge of how to narrate sensory encounters with oil and gas in ways that will generate corporate or governmental responses that move beyond outright denial of responsibility or bland statements of empathy. The novel thus contributes to a growing "critical petro-aesthetic" which tries to find aesthetic approaches suitable to communicating the effects of bodily encounters with fossil fuels, especially when those effects are rendered diffuse or invisible (Wilson et al. 6). Second, the novel confronts the systemic and ethical challenges facing those working within the petro-industry who might seek to aid affected citizens when it comes to addressing petro-industrial pollution. In so doing, the novel leaves readers to contemplate difficult questions about what defines success for those who seek safer, cleaner systems of extraction, production, and transport. Finally, I consider what readers can learn from one of Stenson's main aesthetic strategies—namely, that of developing *corrosion* as a key metaphor—to better comprehend the connection between the novel's two temporal and spatial settings. What can this metaphor reveal about the *limits* of containment, whether of plot, place, characters, or petroleum itself? And further, how might the very ideas of rupture and friction that corrosion implies be politically redeployed to disrupt the status quo when it comes to the movement of oil and gas in Canada?

Stenson's development of corrosion as a central metaphor is an especially appropriate representational strategy for narrating Western Canadian life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Corrosion imagery demonstrates the limits of current regulatory mechanisms that attempt (and fail) to fence off humans, animals, and plant life from sites of petro-production, processing, and transport. Corrosion's gradual nature, made up of micro-processes that often only become noticeable once the damage is done, also echoes the kinds of slow violence enacted by exposure to pollutants over time.[3] Further, the metaphor of corrosion defines the fraught position of the engineer as a recurring figure in the novel, someone charged with keeping production running while also minimizing risk to the environment and the public. As the book illustrates, such obligations are difficult to fulfill when the barriers between industry and government are highly perforated, and when seemingly inanimate substances like gas and steel also evince active properties whose agential capacities are not fully understood. Although the problems faced by the engineers in Stenson's book seem technical on their face, they end up serving as fitting metonyms for the broader challenges of confronting the cozy relations that exist between industry and government in contemporary petro-states like Canada. These are problems that cannot be solved by engineers alone; they demand the broader exercise of citizenship by those who live under petroleum's halo and cloud.

One of the things that makes petroleum a challenging subject to write about is its simultaneous ubiquity and elusiveness (see, for example, Barrett and Worden; Szeman; Wenzel, "Taking Stock"; LeMenager, *Living*). On one hand, oil is everywhere, powering our lives in forms that range from everyday consumer items, to transport, to long-range economic forecasts. However, getting a handle on the industry that brings oil into our lives is not easy. As Amitav Ghosh observed in the early 1990s, the oil industry is often perceived as geographically distant, multi-spatial, secretive, and multi-lingual. Further, oil exhibits forms of chemical agency whose side effects are not always easy to trace or to narrate. Collectively, these features pose challenges to novelists who might wish to write about oil (Ghosh 29-30; Macdonald, "Oil" 7; Macdonald, "Containing" 55). At a personal level, few among us have likely handled crude oil in its pure form or held a bottle of natural gas captured from a crack in the earth (Kerber 384). Despite the fact that we are in daily contact with petroleum products of one form or another, such contact is often highly mediated through processes of containment, transport, and chemical transformation into substances like plastics. Jennifer

Wenzel concludes that one of petroleum's "conjuring tricks" is to normalize a world where those with energy security are relieved from having to think much about how time, labour, distance, and environmental expendability enable their existences (Wenzel, "Introduction").

Stenson's characters complicate these dynamics since they are at once relatively privileged (they are landowners, for instance) yet unafforded the luxury of *not* thinking about petroleum. Instead, they are forced to reckon with geologic forces that are often unseen, but not unfelt. Stenson's narrative strategy of repetition, which blurs together a series of nighttime evacuations and cases of headache and nausea, helps readers to appreciate the cycles of frustration that his rural Albertan characters experience as their exposure to gas leaks becomes a chronic way of life. When exposure to toxic gas at varying levels becomes such a frequent occurrence, it becomes more difficult for the family members to separate out the crisis points from mere nuisances. Their health is clearly suffering as a result of exposure to flares and leaks at the plant, yet also they lack the formal training in risk analysis or environmental health to directly address the cause, or even the political allies who might aid them by regulating industry.

This set of challenges is compounded by the fact that Aladdin company officials normalize petro-stench as an undesirable but common side effect of gas plant start-ups, wherein elements in the extracted gas that cannot be processed and sold are burned off to purify the remaining natural gas as a saleable commodity. As one Aladdin executive puts it, sour gas is rendered "mostly harmless by removing the elemental sulphur" (45). It is that adverb—"mostly"—that keeps nearby residents up at night, yet instead of following a principle of precaution, Aladdin views the trial-and-error approach to toxins as a necessary part of "how the history of this business is written" (45). Notably, the idea of shutting down the plant is never part of industry's script. Instead, it is brought into production as quickly as possible with the idea that kinks will be worked out as they arise. Unfortunately, when it comes to sour gas plants, leaks and malfunctions are often detectable only *after* they have begun to damage human and animal health. Biology reveals, but too late: the damage to bodies that did not choose such risks is already done.

When Tom Ryder looks from his property to the nearby facility, Stenson writes, "he boiled with frustration. The plant never looked any different, just buildings and towers, and the flare and steam rising in the blue cold air. You wanted to see some putrid yellow or purple smoke, or an explosion, something you could point at and say, 'There it is. There's the bastard that's

making me sick'" (24). Instead, the flare that shoots skyward from the stack is presumed to indicate the safe disposal of gases via dispersion by the wind, at least according to Aladdin executives (17). Throughout the novel, Stenson uses parallel imagery to describe Tom and his chief nemesis, the plant: for instance, both are sites of building pressure that smoke and periodically blow their stacks. Yet where the plant feels no ill effects from flaring or leaks, the long-term consequences for Tom's health and psyche are considerable. It isn't just the unpredictable bursts of invisible hydrogen sulphide that harm him; it's also the cumulative stress of feeling powerless against a faceless foe. Leaks are often difficult to pinpoint, gas does not stay in one place, and detection technologies are imperfect—a fact illustrated when the Titrilog stationed on the Ryders' property goes haywire, its pens recording fluctuations of gas in the air that take its needles right off the paper scroll (179). The image of the Titrilog's failure to record expresses the challenges that fossil fuels pose to representation, wherein the power of threat is demonstrated precisely via its unwritable character. When the Ryders call the plant to let them know of the problem, they're told that the technician who looks after the machine works out of Calgary, and that no one will come to take a look at it until after the weekend (180).

The fact that the effects of gas work according to uneven temporalities—whether at the individual scale of human health or at larger scales like climate change—means that it is also challenging to come up with the right methods to trace its impacts. To fill the gap, human and animal bodies often serve as scouts, "the stop-gap technology for absorbing dangers that can't be or won't be otherwise controlled" (Trimmier). Given the elusiveness of the gas itself, along with the difficulty of holding any one party accountable for leaks, it is not surprising that regular citizens like the Ryders anthropomorphize the plant as a conscious agent of destruction: it is the thing they can *see*, and is a constant in their lives in contrast to company employees and scientists who briefly arrive on the scene to respond to complaints only to depart without doing much to alleviate them.

In the novel, as Tom's marriage sours and his livestock sickens, he increasingly figures the plant as a wilful antagonist, one whose godlike proclivities to decide the fates of the living are provoked by any hint of contentment on the Ryder farm. For instance, after a run of good luck during spring calving in which the final cow gives birth to twins, the plant's noise and gas emissions suddenly become stronger than ever. Tom ruefully reflects, "[i]t was almost fate that a happy time would rouse the plant's ire" (127). He needs to imagine

a force more spectacular and intentional than the mundane trial-and-error approach next door to reckon with the surprising loss of two newborn calves. Yet by figuring the plant as an independent and malevolent actor, there is also a risk of obscuring the human decisions that have created this situation in the first place; it comes to seem as though one must adjust one's activities to accommodate petroleum as an eternal, naturalized force, rather than framing it as a substance whose effects arise from particular human systems and choices.[4] In a petro-economy where easy mobility is prized, it is long-term intimacy with place that becomes reframed as a liability; to invest too much in a relationship with a particular landscape is to risk pain when that relationship is disrupted.[5] This is true not only at a physiological and emotional level, but also at an economic one, since the Aladdin company's buyout offer to the Ryders is below market value and limited only to one half section (162-63).

Throughout Stenson's novel, it becomes clear that there are other legitimate, non-technical means of expressing energy intimacies than those typically favoured by government or industry. Indeed, official discourse is often stymied when it comes to articulating the precise contours of people's experiences of natural gas and its by-products, whereas more "artful" speech can communicate the richness and ambiguity of physical sensation. For instance, when the gas plant superintendent, Alf Dietz, tries to explain at a community meeting the difference between the "regular" odour of a sulphur plant running as it should compared to the harmful odour that is making people and animals ill, his vocabulary is vague and repetitive: "'There's smell and then there's smell'" (46).[6] Yet where Dietz's explanations achieve little clarity, the figurative speech of local farmer Tom Ryder seems more viscerally precise by comparison; Tom describes the plant's smell as something that has a texture, "like wads of tissue winding in your nostrils" (87), and also as a "spunky fume from the deeps, the stuff that knocks birds off the perch at a coal face" (50). Here, metaphor does the work that technical language cannot, while also conveying the grim reality that methods of detection seem to have progressed little past those used in the era of coal.

What proves even more troubling in these olfactory descriptions, however, is the fact that hydrogen sulphide is a gas that humans can quickly lose the ability to smell at high concentrations or after continuous low-level exposure (called "olfactory fatigue"). This means that under certain conditions, amateur detection becomes difficult (see OSHA). In the end, the Ryders find themselves stymied at two levels: they cannot trust the plant's regulatory

mechanisms, but they also cannot wholly trust their own senses to detect danger. They thus live in a constant state of alertness, never knowing how much time they will have to leave for town before the gas knocks them to the ground. The fact that H_2S is a neurotoxin which at high concentrations can result in neurological symptoms including loss of consciousness, gives scientific support to Tom's sardonic comment to his wife Ella that "'this plant makes us stupider every day'" (88). Tom's comment in this context is meant to justify his decision to stay on the farm to look after a farrowing sow while the rest of the family evacuates once more amidst the creep of hydrogen sulphide, yet there is also a deeper biological basis for his assertions, a bodily reality sensed if not fully understood. The way in which petroleum wears away at its opponents thus works on two levels: the difficulty of predicting effects is something that industry struggles to master, but the problem of detection is also embedded within the chemical properties of the substance itself and how bodies respond to it.

III. Engineering, Extraction, and the Power of the Petro-Genie

Bill Ryder, the main character in the present-day setting, spends his childhood witnessing his family's frustrations with sour gas, and it is partly his desire to bring about technical improvements that leads him to become a petroleum engineer. Bill is the central character across the novel's two interwoven timelines, and through his work at a gas processing plant in northern Alberta, he seeks a measure of calm that might lay the turmoil of his past to rest. Bill's decision to go into gas processing work might seem counterintuitive, but it accurately reflects a larger social shift in Alberta in the second half of the twentieth century, wherein a largely rural agrarian society was transformed into an industrial and urban one by the rapid development of the energy sector (Stenson in Boyer and Howe, 18:58-22:30; 36:05-40:17). Rather than setting up a purely oppositional narrative wherein those who suffer for petroleum fight tooth and nail against it, *Who by Fire* explores the more fraught positions of those who are allied with industry and attempt to transform it even as they recognize its shortcomings. For example, following one of the requisite "community consultation" meetings hosted by New Aladdin at a First Nations community centre near the plant he oversees, Bill is questioned by Marie Calfoux, one of the community's residents, about why he continues to work in an industry he knows is operating at a scale that is environmentally risky. "'You could retire,'" she suggests. Bill responds, "'[s]omeone else makes the sulphur. What would that change?'" (102). It's a

bleak answer, but it also shows Bill's recognition of the fact that individual actions are not wholly adequate to address what requires systemic change.

Through much of the novel, Bill's preferred methods of coping with the contradictions in his life are to go on alcohol and gambling binges, activities that help to temporarily suppress his anxiety and generate physiological effects similar to the symbiotic motifs of "exuberance and catastrophe" that have come to define the North American cultural relationship to fossil fuels since the early twentieth century (Buell 276). Even when Bill wins at the casino, he experiences the haunting sensations of his encounters with H_2S as a child:

> Instead of feeling happy about the money, Bill's body surged with unpleasant after-effects. His lungs seemed too large, felt as if they were crawling up his throat. He'd been yearning in the direction of every VLT lounge in every town he passed. In his trailer days, he'd played them all. The only way to stop feeling disgusted over the waste was to gamble more. (Stenson 170-71)

Narratively, the line between cause and effect does not move in one direction, but rather in a circuit, wherein oil work becomes both an enabler of addiction and a means of coping with it. As Bill reflects, "His job was the only thing that could reliably stop a binge. In this way, work and gambling were essential to one another. The balance between them had to be maintained if he himself was not to crumble" (171). As with most addictions, though, the fantasy that one can keep things in balance breaks down; Bill's failure to seal away difficulties in his personal life ends up echoing the problem he wrestles with at a technical level, namely keeping noxious substances from leaking out of pipelines into the surrounding atmosphere.

Clearly, the binge activities of gambling and drinking tax Bill's soul, but when considered from a wider angle they are also difficult for readers to condemn without also shaking the foundational logic used to justify an enterprise like the oil sands in the first place. Indeed, they serve as metonyms for a larger social addiction to cheap energy, a belief in what Imre Szeman describes as a "fiction of surplus" that gets renewed every time we experience a six month interval of lower prices at the gas pump (Yaeger et al. 324). To reject this fiction is seen as a mark of bad faith for loyal Albertans, especially for those who work in the industry. Bill thinks to himself, "[i]f the oil sands made sense at all, it was the sense of money and economic privilege. If someone did not obey those laws, the whole thing swayed in the muskeg" (221). There is much that is left out of this calculus, of course—including the health of air, water, and human and non-human animals—but its logic is propped up by the assertion that such things can be reclaimed after extraction.

Jon Gordon points out in *Unsustainable Oil* that to question the economic logic of petroleum extraction as it is currently practised in much of Alberta is ironically portrayed as "irrational" or living in a fantasyland. The novel illustrates the strange workings of this bubble of logic when Bill gets cast by his superiors and co-workers as the one who lacks sense when he decides to evacuate a nearby Indigenous community after his plant malfunctions. To adopt an ethic of precaution is to go against the reactive stance adopted by industry through much of Bill's life. Further, his mixed feelings of "relief and disappointment" (266) when a post-evacuation air-quality test turns up clean shows his understanding of how the status quo works: since there is "[n]o evidence that what he was doing was necessary" and the evacuation generates bad press for the company, he can expect to be fired (266). The idea of working for environmental change within the industry seems possible only so long as such efforts do not stall oil's path to market.

The company Bill works for is called New Aladdin, a fitting name since despite the technological improvements in the oil and gas industry that have occurred since the 1960s, much of the older kind of magical thinking persists in the contemporary Alberta oil patch, especially the idea that one can release the power of the province's energy genie with few negative consequences. In the carry-over of the Aladdin name, one sees how the past bleeds into the present, and in Bill's increasingly uncomfortable position as a defender of a plant and an industry he knows to have problems, we begin to see the untenability of keeping things separate—whether those things are gases within pipes, or memories of the past and the present, or professional and personal lives.

The most prominent trope Stenson uses to explore the breakdown of such fantasies of containment is that of corrosion, a problem that engineers in the gas industry have been grappling with for decades. To corrode is to gnaw through with force (usually by slow chemical action), and in the natural gas business, the long-standing challenge has been to figure out a way to separate the sulphur from natural gas while keeping stray hydrogen ions from corroding the steel used to contain substances. When the ions embrittle steel, it results in leaks of potentially deadly hydrogen sulphide, as well as explosions and fire (Stenson 54). At the Aladdin Hatfield plant of the 1960s, leaks occur with disturbing frequency in part because the plant is brought into service before it has been properly tested. Further, it turns out that the very newness of the steel used in the plant is a liability, since the molecules of high-calibre steel line up so neatly that it's easier for hydrogen ions to invade

them, causing key bolts to fail. The plant actually functions marginally better once its engineers adopt a bricoleur approach, substituting older bolts that are more resistant to corrosion. Ultimately, however, truly fixing the plant requires a lot of money, and the engineer Lance Evert explains to Bill in a posthumous letter that Aladdin was not willing to make the investment (346). Instead, the company offers Bill's father a bit of barbed wire to replace that which exposure to gas has rendered brittle along his property lines (161). It's meagre compensation, and the steady erosion of the division between farm and plant reaches its climax when Tom and Ella give up on their herd and young Bill leaves home to work in a new gas plant up north.

At the end of the novel, Bill is on his way out of a job, but he leaves behind a document he's authored on his desk, which one of his junior engineers, Henry Shields, picks up and peruses. Henry is struck by Bill's development of what looks like a viable corrosion maintenance plan, something that could solve a decades-long problem for the gas industry. Despite Bill's boss' skepticism that any local plant could evolve a new best practice (109), Bill seems to have solved the technical problem of corrosion at last. Henry believes that by applying Bill's plan to the plant, he can resolve the problem of divided loyalties once and for all, satisfying the need for environmental safety while also ensuring that the plant need not halt production while checking for cracks and leaks. In the end, though, Stenson's narrative, like the petro-substance it explores, resists containment: Henry is fired along with his mentor Bill for disloyalty to New Aladdin, and while their boss says he's read the plan and "might be able to use some of it," there is no guarantee it will be implemented (353).

The stories of Bill, Henry, and the communities in which they work thus leave readers with many frayed edges: we do not know what will happen to these characters or places, though it seems unlikely that the future will involve the shutdown of New Aladdin. Further, the problem of "divided loyalties" seems as entrenched as ever given that Henry and Bill are now both out of work. And finally, even if Bill and his fellow engineers *were* successful in implementing an improved corrosion plan, the novel leaves a key question hanging: would their work merely facilitate more efficient and regularized extraction of fossil fuels, thereby speeding along climate catastrophe and the misery of many around the globe? When considered from this perspective, what the system might require is *more* rather than less corrosion to impede its smooth delivery of planet-warming emissions. By drawing the attention of readers to the pressure points surrounding

demands for constant petro-flow, *Who by Fire* ultimately suggests that even if the system were to function perfectly, at a larger scale even seemingly non-polluting pipes cannot contain themselves: there are emissions that will still be experienced by someone, somewhere. Matters of safety thus cannot be disentangled from thorny problems of scale, nor from readers' own complicity in an industry that supports so much of modern life. The novel thus uncomfortably exposes the gap between what people often claim to feel about a subject like the petroleum industry, and their willingness to investigate and question its business conduct so long as the downsides are not immediately felt.

The conclusion of *Who by Fire* seems fitting for a novel about petroleum; as Stephanie LeMenager points out, "[i]f we conceive of plots . . . as predominantly expressions of our desires for order, oil spills [and, I would add, gas leaks] fiercely resist plotting" (*Living* 23).[7] The dilemmas that the novel's engineers confront also speak to tensions embedded within their profession's current guidelines: according to the *Guideline for Ethical Practice* published by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, the duty to protect the safety of the public in accord with existing regulations must take precedence over the interests of the professional's client or employer (APEGA 4.3.1). However, the guide also explains that it is then the responsibility of the client or employer to address an engineer's concerns. Yet when the lines separating government regulators and industry have been corroded such that industry is relied on to self-regulate, there is little motivation for either employers or clients to take actions that do not help their bottom lines. As Bill observes, part of the problem is that industry and government only "[s]ort of" abide by the duty to protect citizens from harm (327). It "isn't concern number one," Bill says after years of experience, and while ordinary citizens often care about their lands, livelihoods, and health, "they don't think they know enough to challenge the industry or the government" (327). The issue in the novel and beyond is thus partly about vast differentials in economic and political power, but it is also an epistemic problem that stems from how different kinds of knowledge about oil are valued.

IV. Corrosion as Problem and Gateway to Understanding Energy

In some key ways, then, Stenson's novel shows that corrosion—especially of the boundaries between the energy industry in Alberta and the government that is supposed to regulate it—persists, despite whatever technical developments have been achieved.[8] Far from acting as the ideal gas plant

does, purifying elements by fire and leaving little residue, the novel hurls us back into a messier reality, one in which we're forced to see the flip side of fossil fuels' convenience and the toll it has taken on the health and safety of some Alberta residents for decades. The corrosion of boundaries between industry and government also pushes readers to consider some of the contradictions that pass for normalcy in petro-states like Canada, wherein institutions call for climate action on one hand while subsidizing the petroleum industry on the other. Furthermore, the novel's structural interweaving of two different timelines shows how decisions made in the past establish patterns of acquiescence that continue to characterize contemporary relationships to industry in Alberta today.

Who by Fire ends with a tripartite image that renders the abstract character of energy materially tangible—in "[t]he shaking house, the creatures born dying, the rivers running discoloured to the sea" (Stenson 355). The capacity to convey what it means to live "too close to the fire" will become more important as the current fracking boom and its fallout put many of the problems faced in the novel by the Ryder family in the 1960s squarely in millions of other North American backyards.[9] I'd suggest that if there is hope for imagining an alternative future, it might lie precisely in what LeMenager calls a "hunger for entanglement" that leads us towards the density of thought needed to understand what it means to live in oil, and to conceive of life beyond it (*Living* 194). At both the provincial and national levels in Canada, this means considering how to address the problem of ceding responsibility for industry regulation and oversight to industry itself. This situation can be altered only when a majority of citizens pressure the governments that represent them to subject industry to genuine critical scrutiny.

As a field and set of approaches, the energy humanities are showing that energy systems and their attendant benefits and problems are not merely technical in nature; they are also social and cultural, and so we need cultural forms to better understand, contest, and revise them in ways that steer away from climate peril. Energy humanists point out that a major concern of petromodernity is to make the resource as invisible and seamlessly integrated with modern human life as possible (Bellamy et al. 7). Perhaps nowhere are the fantasies of invisibility and containment more acutely illustrated than in the figure of the pipeline, a crucial entity of oil's infrastructure (Macdonald, "Containing" 38). To puncture this fantasy, *Who by Fire* lays bare the messy consequences of pipeline failures in terms that are tangible for readers—whether in the figure of a coughing child, a

dead piglet, or an emotionally scarred man. In Stenson's hands, corrosion is treated as a technical problem that literally ruptures the lines at Aladdin's gas plants, but also as a social one that tears apart families and communities who become uncertain about who to trust or where to turn for help when problems occur. The disruptions generated by corrosion are frequently conveyed in visceral descriptions of smell, but the Ryder family's experiences with sour gas also show the even more acute dangers of becoming habituated to pollution as olfactory fatigue wears down the body's capacity to sense risk. Such habituation to risk at the individual level captures in microcosm the problem of taking the continuous flow of cheap energy for granted without accounting for its dangers, which are reflected in poisoned air, water, and land, and the protracted effects of runaway carbon emissions at the global scale. Finally, by making a gas engineer the chief protagonist, the book is able to engage with interconnected issues of economic development, addiction, and environmental costs without oversimplifying them. Bill Ryder is a flawed character, but his actions and thoughts suggest how one might begin to poke holes in the logic of petrodeterminism that attempts to circumvent any critique of the oil industry by those who are also dependent on it. The novel's capacity to sidestep the temptation to either cast those who work in the energy industry as villains, or to dismiss environmental concern as naive, is something that is much needed in an era wherein political polarization, escalating climate change, and economic disparity gnaw at the fabric of national and planetary unities.

NOTES

1 On the "rule of capture," see also Alberta Energy's 2016 report, *Petroleum and Natural Gas Tenure in Alberta*.

2 See Kathryn Yusoff's call to understand ourselves as "geologic subjects" under the sign of the Anthropocene in her article "Geologic Life."

3 On "slow violence," see Nixon 2. See also Alaimo's discussion of transcorporeality in *Bodily Natures* 2-4.

4 On the risks of naturalistic modes that make narratives seem resource determined, see Riddle 59-61. See also Wiebe, who explains how public health discourse often individualizes systemic problems in cases of environmental injustice (53).

5 This is a fact recognized by the character Marie Calfoux, an Indigenous woman whose community is next to the upgrader where the adult Bill Ryder works (97). On "energy intimacy," see Cariou.

6 Such struggles express what philosopher of science Nancy Tuana describes as the "viscous porosity" of so many environmental challenges today, wherein agency is diffusely spread among networks of material-semiotic relations, such that it becomes difficult to say whether a phenomenon is caused by human actors or by other material forces (88).

7 See also LeMenager's "Spills" in *Fueling Culture*.
8 A recent example of the ongoing coziness between industry and regulators is illustrated in the case of Alberta landowner Jessica Ernst against Encana. In January 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that Ernst could not sue the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) for its alleged failure to protect her groundwater from contamination. In 2013, legislation removed "the public interest" from the AER's mandate, effectively making it a corporation funded by industry. See Andrew Nikiforuk's *Slick Water* and "Landowner."
9 Problems with government oversight of hydrogen sulphide levels have recently come to wider public notice in Saskatchewan. See Cribb et al.

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Cyril Dabydeen

Under Lock & Key

. . . finding a safety pin for a lady's knickers
that's fallen down.
—Douglas Millin (University College, Oxford)

Being nowhere else,
but with you I look
back upon locked in,
doors closed as in
a monastery.

Hallowed time because
of the air we breathe—
what I've longed for,
more than a fantasy
I now tell you about.

Oh, pain modesty
I expected to hear about,
nerve-endings what I
acknowledge to myself
being with you only.

Staid and proper
virtues I learn to live by,
contemplating love again
in another time or place
I tell you about.

What keeps passing between us
until the next embarrassing
moment occurs pins and
needles never far away—
I assure you once more.

What you've come to expect
in more genteel ways valour
with words sung now more
fully expressed I indeed
want you to know.

Jamie Paris

"Men break when things like that happen"

On Indigenous Masculinities in Katherena Vermette's *The Break*

Katherena Vermette's award-winning debut novel, *The Break*, tells the story of the horrific rape of Emily Traverse, a young Métis woman from Winnipeg's North End. Vermette writes about the North End without moralizing, according to Carl DeGurse, allowing the reader to see all of the people involved with a crime, from the victim to the victimizer to the investigators, with humanity and compassion. *The Break* is "a deeply felt story of a family's strength and healing" that "puts a human face to issues that are too often misunderstood" by people who are not from the community (Melgaard). The core of the novel is "the ways in which the various women remain resilient to being broken" (Watkins 274). Finally, Âpihtawikosisâniskwêw-Icelandic writer and critic Carleigh Baker notes that

> one of the critical responses to [*The Break*] has been to marvel at the strength and resilience of its women. While accurate, this response is problematic in its superficiality. Although there is much media talk of [I]ndigenous resilience as if it is an otherworldly cultural gift, it in fact takes significant daily maintenance. It is precisely this effort that Vermette focuses on—countless moments marked by a blinking back of tears and a hardening of the jaw.

Resilience is the ability to endure hardships and maintain kinship networks. As the young Métis police officer, Tommy, puts it in the novel, "all these women [hold] each other up," just like his own Métis mother and aunty hold his family up (291). For Métis critic Aubrey Jean Hanson, "[r]esilience is not magical or glamorous: it is the everyday business of enduring together—getting coffees, taking walks, making phone calls, buying sandwiches, sitting together over late nights, cleaning houses, getting blood out of fabric, putting

blankets over the blood that will not come out" ("Holding" 38). The women in the Charles and Traverse families lean on each other during difficult times, like a pack, and the family is associated with wolf imagery. (Alysia Shewchuk's back cover art on the 2016 trade paperback edition of the text, for example, has a picture of a wolf, and Rain compares her sisters to wolves).

Not all the women in this novel are resilient. Resilience and endurance take a physical, spiritual, and psychological toll on the characters, and the kinship networks in Phoenix's and Alex's (who goes by the street name "Bishop" in the novel) family break down. Even within the Charles and Traverse families, Rain struggles with alcohol and substance abuse before she is murdered; her daughter, Stella, becomes isolated from her family while suffering from postpartum depression; Stella's childhood friend and Phoenix's mother, Elsie, never recovers from the death of her grand-mère and her rape at a party; and Phoenix is homeless and pregnant when she attacks Emily. While I recognize the resilience of many of the women in this novel, we have to remember that Vermette balances this with stories of Indigenous and Métis women who are pushed to the point of breaking.

The North End is a character in Vermette's text, in the way that cities like New York, London, or Vancouver become characters in the work of other novelists. Vermette has explained that she writes "primarily about Indigenous women, Métis women, who are inner-city residents, who have all of these things that are familiar to me" (qtd. in Hanson *Resurgence* 180). She adds that "if you don't understand how I grew up and where I grew up and my place in the world, you don't understand much about me" (qtd. in Hanson *Resurgence* 176). Plains Cree and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach says that a prologue is important in Indigenous writing because it incorporates "essential information for the reader to make sense of the story to follow" (3). In this way, it is also important to know that my reading of Vermette's novel is influenced by the fact that I grew up a mixed-race (Black, Métis, and Scottish) orphan in Winnipeg's North End. While I have never met Vermette, I grew up blocks from where she went to high school, and we both did our undergraduate education at the University of Winnipeg. I went to St. John's High School and Gordon Bell High School, schools with large Indigenous and Métis communities. I grew up poor and spent time in Child and Family Services custody. I came of age in a community that settler anthropologist Kathleen Buddle calls the Aboriginal "gang capital" of Canada (178). I lost friends and family members to gangs and violence. Growing up in the North End, I watched young men struggle against the pull to become "good men" and the fear that doing so would

make them soft. Like Phoenix Stranger and her family, I lived in the "Lego Land" housing co-op (Vermette 233); like Ziggy and Jake, I went to a high school where my social life was spent negotiating a neutral position between Indigenous gangs (Vermette 59). I know how hard it is to become a "good man" growing up in that environment. What makes a man "good" in the world of this novel is a willingness to exist within the web of relations that allow women and families to endure violence and moments of crisis by supporting each other (Hanson, "Holding" 37). Such men take on rights and responsibilities. "Good men" are the ones that are willing to be part of this web of relations, existing in a space of "mutual and ongoing need, relying on, and taking care of each other" (Hanson, "Holding" 41). I care about the representation of masculinity in Vermette's novel because she is describing my community, the community I struggled to become a man in, and she is representing those of us who found the strength to resist being soft, while also holding up a mirror to the way that colonialism helps to create generations of "hard men" whose emotional fragility leads to the harm of women and destabilizes families and communities.

Vermette privileges an emergent, non-dominative, inner-city Indigenous masculinity as a way of being a "good man," and she contrasts it with toxic forms of masculinity that make life difficult for inner-city Indigenous women. As Robert Alexander Innes (Cowessess First Nations) and Kim Anderson (Métis) argue, the challenges facing Indigenous men are stark. They face racism and gender-based violence like other men of colour in Canada, and they have shorter lifespans, are less likely to graduate from high school, are more likely to be incarcerated, and are murdered at a higher rate than settler Canadians (4). According to Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice, one of the most toxic stories told about Indigenous peoples is the story of Indigenous deficiency, a theory that articulates "Indigenous peoples [as being] in a state of constant lack" (2). In the Indigenous deficiency model, Indigenous peoples are presumed to be incapable of caring for "our children or families or selves because of constitutional absences in our character, or biology, or intellect" (Justice 2-3). Settler scholar Sam McKegney argues that conversations about Indigenous masculinities too frequently centre issues of Indigenous men being absent because of gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, or jail, or ask what is wrong with Indigenous men that makes it difficult for them to assimilate to Canadian culture. McKegney notes that these conversation points "unwittingly accept[] the perverse 'success' of colonial policies of dispossession while obfuscating the living

models of non-dominative and empowered Indigenous manhood that persist in families and communities, in teachings and stories, in minds and in actions" (5). Peter, the boyfriend of Paulina, models what McKegney calls a "non-dominative" way of being male (5). Non-dominative masculinity is about men whose masculinity is influenced by Indigenous teachings and stories. It celebrates men who can experience "growth, loss, love, power, and responsibility" (McKegney 5-6). Such men have an emotional flexibility and range that enables them to deal with tragedy in positive ways. Non-dominative men willingly take up the responsibility of helping the men and women in their kinship networks.

Bishop and Phoenix, in contrast, embody toxic masculinity. According to settler psychologist Terry A. Kupers, "toxic masculinity involves the need to aggressively compete and dominate others and encompasses the most problematic proclivities in men," such that "toxic masculinity is the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (714, 724). It is this lack of emotional range that causes people to break when bad things happen to them and the people they love. After all, Phoenix's rape of Emily happens because she snaps: she is scared, homeless, and has been rejected by her uncle and her former lover. She does not have a working kinship network to help her deal with the heartbreak of being rejected by a man she loves, Clayton, and she deals with her toxic emotions through sexualized violence.

Vermette combats stories of Indigenous male deficiency by demonstrating the high social, emotional, and political costs women pay when Indigenous men try to embody settler masculinities based on domination and control, while also showing that "good men" like Peter and Tommy can lift up themselves and Indigenous women by embodying non-dominative ways of being male. Peter is comfortable showing love and, with others, knowing that he is loved in return. Peter's attitude towards love is reminiscent of that of Rain, who says, "Whatever else I was, I loved you and you knew it. Your Kookoo knew it too. And you all loved me back. Whatever else you think or know, that is the most important thing about me. That I loved and was loved" (82). The toxic masculinity embodied by Bishop and Phoenix is fragile because they see expressing love and affection as a sign of weakness. Phoenix, in particular, is an example of what anthropologists describe as a "manly-hearted woman," a term for Indigenous women "who inhabit third gender roles by taking on the behaviours and occupations of men," as Lisa Tatonetti describes it (134). However, where manly-hearted

women frequently take up masculine positions that help the community and their kinship networks, Phoenix does not have a stable kinship network or a positive outlet for her masculine energy. Phoenix internalizes toxic masculinity as a way of protecting herself from the slings and arrows of her community; she is particularly violent and dismissive towards women and men whom she perceives as weaker than she is. There is no necessary connection between biological maleness and toxic masculinity. In this case, Phoenix takes up toxic masculinity as a way of protecting herself, but her toxic, masculine actions end up harming her friends, her family, and Emily.

Toxic Masculinities in *The Break*

When reflecting on the murder of Lorraine Rain, Kookum, the matriarch of the family, acknowledges that she is happy that her abusive husband, Charlie, was not alive to deal with the aftermath of the crime because "Men break when things like that happen" (335). Kookum's point is not that all men break when they experience tragedy, but that her experience of men, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is that they are fragile and have difficulty dealing with tragedy. When Kookum sees Emily, she is reminded of her broken husband, saying, "Another monster was here. A monster hurt Emily. I don't know who it was. To me, it looks like my Charlie, or that stupid man who hurt my girl. I know it's not them, but another monster in another person. There's always another one" (329). Kookum does not think that these men are inherently monsters. When she reflects on Lorraine's murder, she calls him "a stupid man made dangerous because he had never been taught right" (326). Toxic men do not inherently lack awareness, compassion, and empathy in this paradigm; they become toxic because they have not been taught how to be a non-dominative man, and this can cause them to lash out. Phoenix, in particular, lashes out with physical and emotional terrorism when she is emotionally overwhelmed.

When Tommy attempts to discuss Emily's sexual assault case with his fiancée, Hannah, she is uninterested in the potential complexities of the case because she "wants life to be simple and has no desire to understand" (223). For Hannah, the men Tommy is talking about are gangsters, and she says they are "like, sadistic and don't give a crap. They're not going to, like, feel sorry for some girl. It doesn't happen like on TV. They're killers and rapists and drug dealers" (222). She sees these young men not as someone's sons or fathers, but as "just thugs and criminals," and she warns Tommy that he is being naive because "you can't *reason* with them" (222, emphasis

original). For Hannah, all of these men are unreasonable monsters, closer to animals than people, and the only thing to be done with them is to lock them up before they hurt people. Hannah's view of the North End is largely shared by Christie, a racist cop who sees the crime in the community as "just nates beating on nates. Same old" (72). *Nates* is a derogatory reference to Indigenous people in Canada. Hannah and Christie have a single story about Indigenous gang members, and that story shapes their perception. According to Nigerian feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a single story is founded through repetition and power: "show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" ("Danger"). This is why, for Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew, it is so important to re-story Indigenous masculinity so that we can see the complexity of the lives of men (8-10). *The Break* re-stories toxic men, allowing the reader to see the complexity of their lives and even to have empathy for them, without denying that what they have done is violent and monstrous.

The issue is not that Indigenous youth in Winnipeg's North End are more prone to toxic masculinity than other impoverished ethnic communities; the issue is that urban Indigenous gangs are prevalent in Winnipeg's North End, and they are incubators of toxic masculinity. Inner-city gangs encourage systems of domination. The men within these gangs are taught to be "hard men" who have minimal freedom to express tender emotions. As Nahanni Fontaine observes, there is a tendency to discuss these gangs as an "Aboriginal phenomenon," as if there is something inherent to Indigenous culture that helps to create them (Fontaine 114). Indigenous gangs are a "result of the settler colonial context and experience in contemporary Canada" (Fontaine 114). According to Elizabeth Comack et al., "The prevalence of Aboriginal street gangs in Winnipeg's inner city constitutes a form of resistance to colonialism, albeit one that has had negative consequences" (16-17). One issue is that Indigenous urban street gangs in Winnipeg "[i]ntentionally inflic[t] pain on and terroriz[e] the weakest and most alienated inhabitants of their own neighbourhoods," which becomes "the gang's recognized means for objectifying the individuated pain and childhood traumas of its members" (Buddle 181). The ideology of masculine "hardness" that the gangs encourage spreads to young men who are and are not gang affiliated. In this novel, the ideology of masculine hardness spreads not only to young men, but also to a young woman, Phoenix, who sees being hard as a way of avoiding physical and emotional harm while she undergoes social and economic hardships.

Phoenix is a "hard" woman who embodies many of the most toxic qualities of masculinity as a survival strategy. She is, as Lou says, "a pretty messed-up kid" (346). The key word here is kid. Phoenix will be tried as an adult, but she is a teenager who has been failed by her family, the Child and Family Services system, and the youth correctional system. Her uncle appears uninterested in helping her. She was abused and never really had a childhood. When she uses a beer bottle to rape Emily, Phoenix is a pregnant, homeless orphan with serious body issues that were likely caused by a lifetime of physical and sexual abuse. Phoenix becomes a monster in the text by mirroring the toxic masculinity of her uncle. For example, when she is asked in the Detention Centre to "[t]hink of someone you admire" during "one of their hand-holding bullshit therapy things" she thinks of Bishop (26). Her desire for Bishop to love and respect her is heartbreaking because there is no way that he could give either to her. As a way of proving to her uncle that she is tough and independent, she walks from the Centre to St. Vital mall, and then from St. Vital all the way to Selkirk in the middle of February with just a toque she stole from the dollar store (28). According to Google Maps, that walk is about two hours and thirty-one minutes in ideal conditions, and I can assure you that it would take much longer to make that walk in the snow in February. She knows that she should have "collect-called her uncle to come get her," but she sees this reasonable request as a sign of weakness, and above all Phoenix does not want to be seen as weak (28). What she wants to do is

> just show up at his house like magic, like she'd pulled it off with class. She wanted him to be impressed, to clasp her hand and pull her close like any other of his hard-assed friends, like his equal. She wanted him to come out of his room and be surprised, happy surprised, to see her. (28)

Bishop is not "happy surprised" to see her. The first thing he says to her is, "You can't stay here, fuck. Your worker was already calling around freaking the fuck out" (29). Indeed, when they are done talking, Bishop does not hug her or tell her that he loves her, but "[h]e gets up like he's dismissing her" (30). For Bishop, Phoenix is a problem to be solved, and she cannot stay with him because he has "too much shit going on" and he "[c]an't have any extra heat right now" (30). What Phoenix needs is a safe harbour, somewhere she can feel loved and respected while she figures out what is next. Bishop cannot be that harbour for her because he knows that the cops and social workers are looking for her, and his house is a drug den that hosts gang parties.

Phoenix is a young offender, a child who does not seem to know or care who her biological father is, and has been failed by her biological mother, her uncle, and the Child and Family Services system (and she is hardly the first Indigenous youth to be failed by that system in Winnipeg). Phoenix is a victim of childhood physical abuse. While "pathetic" girls who have psychological issues disgust Phoenix, she is dealing with her own unresolved psychological trauma (26). Phoenix was abused as a child by her sister's father, and she was abducted from her home where she lived with her mother and sister after she showed up to school with bruises. According to Phoenix, it is her fault that the family was broken up:

> They had only one Christmas in the Lego Land house. The girls were taken before the snow melted. That was Phoenix's fault too. She had worn her mom's baggy sweater to school, and the sleeves were too big and came down off her arms. She shouldn't have done that. She knew there were bruises there. Big long finger bruises. Not that she gave a fuck about Sparrow's fucking dad. He could fucking go to hell, but she knew everyone would blame her mama. (234)

She does not blame Sparrow's father for giving her the bruises, and she deflects. She clearly "give[s] a fuck about Sparrow's fucking dad," or she would not be discussing him with such obvious anger and disgust.

As part of her backstory, Phoenix's sense of safety and control was stripped from her by an experience of institutionalization at a "safe house" hotel while in the custody of Manitoba Child and Family Services. While she was still a child, Phoenix was put in a hotel with older girls, and she tells us that

> [s]he cried that first night. She'd never do that now but she was just a little kid. She tried to hide it and just cried into her blanket. One of the older girls caught her and laughed and said, "Don't be a fucking baby. It don't make no difference if you cry or not. No one's fucking coming to get you." Phoenix stopped crying after that. (235)

When Phoenix is sent to a psychiatric centre as a young woman, she refuses to speak in the group when asked. She stares at the facilitator, Grace, until Grace "knew enough to move on" (31). By the time we see Phoenix in the Remand centre, she has been emotionally hardened and institutionalized. After just nine days, Phoenix sees the women and guards in Remand as weaker beings that she can physically and psychologically dominate. She says,

> All these fucking uniforms are fucking weak bitches trying to push their weight around, trying things like keeping her cuffed up when she doesn't need to be, and waiting for her to beg for stuff. Fuck that. Adult Women's is just like youth lock-up, full of useless bitches who would rather claw your eyes out than throw a good punch. (312-13).

When she sees her mother, she says "Elsie looking skinnier than ever and blubbering into a tissue. Fucking weak-assed Elsie" (313). She sees the display of emotion as Elsie performing "[w]hat she thinks a good mother should look like" (315). At the end of their discussion, Phoenix puts on a hard face and "walks like nothing can get to her, like she doesn't give a fuck at all" (324). The point is that this is literally not true. She cannot show that the conversation with her mother hurt her, or that she is horrified by the idea of being tried as an adult as a "sexual offender" (318-19), something her mother says "like it is the worst thing ever, and Phoenix flinches because it is" (319). Even then, Phoenix's strung-out mother still offers to talk to her lawyer, to help find character witnesses who might "say nice things about you" (323). Phoenix finds such attempts "*Pathetic*" and sees her mother as "a small, skinny, useless woman" (322, emphasis original).

Rather than rejecting the gang life that has left her emotionally fragmented, Phoenix plans on raising her son in custody so that he will embrace the kind of hard, unemotional masculinity she values in her uncle and that she attempts to perform herself. Phoenix is happy that she will have a boy because "[h]e'll be strong," and for Phoenix, nothing is better than being seen as strong (322). Phoenix reveals that "[s]he's going to name [her unborn son] Sparrow [after her sister] because she wants him to be just like her little Sparrow. Only strong. Healthy. Hard. Like a boy is supposed to be" (322). The larger point of the narrative is that this is not how a boy, or a girl, is supposed to be, but this may be how colonialism has made some people feel like boys need to be. This idea that inner-city men should be hard is a harmful legacy of colonialism. Colonialism imposed patriarchy on many First Nations communities and left many First Nations men with lingering trauma, anger, and addictions issues. Phoenix's understanding of how to raise a boy reminds me of what Adichie calls a "hard man." According to Adichie, "We do a great disservice to boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way. Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage" (*Feminists* 26). "Hard men" seem strong, but they are emotionally fragile. Women and "weaker men" constantly have to worry about offending these men, for fear that they might have an emotional or physical outburst.

"Good Men" in *The Break*

If characters who embody toxic masculinity hurt others as a way of protecting themselves, "good men" are willing to love and support women without breaking when they are confronted with tragedy. For Vermette, what makes

a "good man" is a willingness to take up the rights and responsibilities of manhood without having to harm others. In this way, she is rejecting toxic masculinity as a colonial masculinity. As settler scholar Scott L. Morgensen argues, colonial masculinities "arose to violently control and replace distinctive gender systems among Indigenous peoples" (38). Haudenosaunee theorist Bob Antone argues that the internalization of colonial masculinity made communities "oppressive, violent, addicted, environments," and this ideology influenced the path of Indigenous men (22). He says that "the role of men as protectors and providers for their clan families was dismantled by the invading colonial masculinity" (27). In such a system, Antone says that men struggle to find their place and, in this struggle, many men struggle with issues of anger and addiction: "[t]he ongoing anger that one experiences is the single most powerful disruption in families today. Male anger is destroying Indigenous families and societies. Most men hide their anger and at times use it against their families. As men, we need to face this reality and come to terms with what it is" (28). Vermette's novel is about the consequences of masculine anger, and the physical, emotional, and spiritual stress male violence places on women's kinship networks. This anger is not inherent to Indigenous men, and men will have to learn how to deal with this anger in productive ways for a resurgence of non-dominative Indigenous masculinities to happen.

This masculine anger has the potential to destroy families; as Lou observes, in one of the defining lines of Vermette's novel, the sisters and their families "have all been broken in one way or another" (175). Anderson claims that narratives of strength and resilience may not be serving actual Indigenous women well. "My worry," notes Anderson, "is that what we celebrate as our responsibility is really a question of overwork for Native women" (88). Being strong and resilient comes at an enormous emotional cost. Toxic men force the women and children of the novel to pay this cost over and over again; "good men," like Peter, help to lessen the amount of emotional care work Indigenous women need to do. Vermette, in other words, does not just critique how toxic masculinity makes life harder for these strong and resilient women; she also shows us what a difference it makes for inner-city Métis women to have the support of ethical and non-dominative men in their lives.

Peter is an Indigenous man with a job, emotional intelligence, and moral character. His goodness is recognized and frequently commented on by the women in the text as they grow to trust him. As Cheryl states, Peter is "a

good man with a good job" (53). According to Paul, Peter is a large, gentle man with a crooked smile who smells good (187); his voice is "deep," but he seems "gentle and shy" (187). Peter is emotionally intelligent. He understands that Paul's trust issues are not about him; according to Paul, "when Pete finally told her he loved her, he cried" (191); Peter tells Paul that he "will never hurt [her]" and that he will "always be here for [her and Emily], no matter what" (192). It is one thing to say that you will always be there for a single woman and her child; what makes a decent man a "good man" is their firmness of purpose. Peter was given a choice between doing what was right or what was easy. He did not have to call Paul and tell her that her daughter was bleeding, but he did; he did not have to drive her to the hospital, but he did; he did not have to stay in the room while racist police officers were attempting to profile him, but he did. Peter looked like a suspect in the rape. He was alone with Emily in the apartment that he had just moved into with Emily and her mother the night Emily was raped. Many men would have been concerned with ensuring that they looked innocent, but Peter shows moral character by driving Emily to the hospital while she is bleeding "down there" (92). Peter stays with Paul even when she wonders if he might have been the one to hurt Emily. Even when he is under a cloud of suspicion, Peter never raises his voice or shows any demonstrable anger. He just stays with Paul and Emily, making phone calls to their families and gathering food and coffee that nobody will eat. Peter seems like the kind of man that Paul and Emily can trust "almost completely" (192). Peter, thus, can be read as a fictive embodiment of what McKegney calls a "non-dominative" way of being male that supports Indigenous women and girls.

Peter does not dominate and manipulate others. For example, Lou tells us that Peter "has always come off as a shy guy, quiet and burly-like, his hands never quite clean" (224). Yet, this shy guy lights up when Paul walks in wearing sweatpants and an old tee shirt (275). According to Lou, when her sister walked in the room,

> Pete looked up at her like she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. His face literally lit up. I remember thinking, 'Oh, that's what they mean by that phrase.' He was so bright. I nearly cried. Not even for my sister, though I did feel happy for her, but I mostly felt shamefully, completely, sorry, for myself. (275)

Peter's reaction shows that he is emotionally open to loving and being loved by Paul, and that he is willing to be seen as loving her (82). Too many men have been raised to hide their emotions for fear that there is something effeminate about expressing love for another. Consider, for example, the way that Bishop

is emotionally closed off with Phoenix, or the way that Christy cannot give Tommy a compliment without saying something racist or debasing at the same time. Peter, in contrast, is comfortable with others knowing that he is in love. Peter, then, is a reminder that Indigenous men should not be thought of in terms of an inherent lack or predisposition to toxic masculinity. He is a reminder that there is something beautiful about Indigenous men who love and are comfortable with others seeing that they love.

When Peter gets to the Emergency ward with Emily, he performs emotional labour for Paul while she deals with the shock of it all. He "puts his arms around Paul and steps back a few feet to give the nurses room. Paul [doesn't] notice her body shaking until his big arms hold her close to him, until they close firmly around her and try to keep her still" (93-94). Peter knows that Paul needs to be held in this situation, and the way he holds her allows her to process what her body is doing. There is something beautiful, masculine, and loving about holding a grieving mother so that she can feel safe enough to process her feelings. Peter, moreover, offers to call Paul's mother Cheryl and her sister Lou after Paul says that they should be called. This may also seem like a small thing, but it means that Paul does not have to go through traumatic phone conversations while she is numb and processing her feelings. Before Peter even moves his truck, a truck that is likely illegally parked and covered with blood, he asks Paul: "Is there anyone I can get to sit with you?" (95). Perhaps, just as importantly, when she "waves him away," Peter doesn't argue with her or act hurt by her small rejection, but "nods understandingly" (95). Peter appreciates that this is not about him and that his job in this situation is to support Paul in any way that he can so that she can support Emily.

Over the course of the novel, Peter endures the inevitable accusations about Emily from her family and from doctors at the hospital. When the doctor tells Paul that he has to "report this" because "[i]n matters like this, as violent as this looks, we have to report, as you know," he looks right at Peter, "who can only sit there" (97). The doctor is not necessarily making an accusation against Peter, but he is acknowledging with his glance that Peter is a suspect in the horrific and violent rape of a child. Peter could protest or lash out, or he could walk away in disgust, but he stays. He even stays when Paul and the other women of the family begin to wonder if he is responsible. Even Paul has "a random thought but it lingers a little too long. This isn't the first time Paul has wondered if she really knows him and what he could be capable of, if she can even imagine" (100). Peter is the kind of man who

knows that his job is to "stand[] quietly behind [Paul], holding her up" (98). "Good men" hold women up in times of crisis, allowing them to bend just a bit by leaning on them so that they don't break under the pressure of it all. Being a "good man" who supports Indigenous women means focusing on the pain of the mother and the child in this situation.

Peter endures this situation in a way that makes me think that Lou is right to believe that Peter is not going to run away once everything settles down (287). When Paul is talking to Lou, she says, "I think Pete's going to leave" and that, in the same situation, she might leave him, because the whole thing is "a bit much" and a man "can leave even if nothing's going on, and now so much is going on" (287). As Paul says, she "needs him" and "Em needs me" (287). The question is if she can rely on him. Lou goes as far as to argue that Peter is "[n]ot that kind of person" (297). She tells her sister: "You don't want to rely on him. But you can. It's hard but you can. He's a good man" (287). It is difficult to express how much is being said here. In a community that can be defined by unreliable, unavailable, and volatile men, Peter is the kind of man you can trust, and the kind of man other Indigenous men can aspire to be. He is not a perfect man, but perfect men do not exist. Peter is the kind of man who can become family. For Lou, Peter can be trusted in the way that their mother and their Kookom can be trusted, because "maybe Peter's your family now too" (288). For Vermette, family is not made by blood or marriage. Family is forged through trust and responsibilities. A family member is someone you can love and trust, and who is willing to love and trust you in return. The women of the novel trust each other, and Paul's relationship with Peter shows Indigenous men what it will cost them to be worthy of the love and trust of such amazing women.

That Vermette makes Pete such an admirable character only serves to amplify how troubling Christie's racist treatment of him is. Pete is racially profiled by Christie, a racist police officer who works in Winnipeg's North End. When Christie discovers that the crime was an assault, he assumes that it was Native gang members attacking each other, and when he finds out that one of the assailants had a long black braid, he assumes that Emily was raped by a Native man. Christie calls Pete "shifty as fuck" (120), although the only evidence he seems to have for this is that Pete is understandably morose during the interview; when discussing Pete with his young and impressionable partner, Tommy, Christie calls Pete "the big fucking Nate fucker sulking and staring at [Paul] in the corner" (120). Sulking alone is not evidence of criminality that should make someone a suspect.

The racist behaviour of the police in this novel may have an autobiographical element for Vermette. She lost her brother, Donovan Wayne Attley, in 1991 and in her Governor General's Literary Award-winning poetry collection *North End Love Songs*, she is deeply critical of the way that the police handled the case. In her poem "Indians," the speaker vocalizes the attitude of the police to her brother's disappearance, saying,

> indians go missing
> they tell the family
> indians go missing
> everyday
> blue suits shrug
> no sense looking
> they said
> he'll turn up when
> he gets bored
> or broke (90)

In this case, there was no reason to believe that Attley was on a bender or that he ran away, and the police officers in Vermette's poem rely on their prejudices about Indigenous men to get out of doing their job, not unlike what Christie tries to do in the novel. (In this way, it is significant that Tommy, a young Métis officer in *The Break*, insists on properly investigating what happened to Emily). Many police officers in Winnipeg have long acted as though brown lives simply do not matter. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the Winnipeg Police Department reacting as callously and inhumanely as in Vermette's poem to the disappearance of a white teenager from Tuxedo.

Conclusion: Towards Balance

In a culture that is fixated on Indigenous men as lacking or toxic, we need to see examples of "good men." Seeing Pete is a reminder that men can help women deal with trauma without being violent and causing more trauma. It is a reminder that, often, the strongest thing a man can do when facing trauma is just sitting with the women who are enduring that trauma together and supporting the kinship web in whatever way they can. Being strong is about driving people to the hospital, getting coffee, and holding people you love when they are scared. It is not about taking revenge against those who have wronged you and your family and creating more trauma. If Pete is a good news story about what Indigenous men can be, Phoenix is a cautionary story about what Indigenous young people might become if toxic masculinity becomes normative. As Hanson notes, Phoenix lacks

"a kin web of unquestioningly supportive women" ("Holding" 37). I would also note that Phoenix seems to be without any male role models or third-gender role models who could show her how to become a strong and ethical member of her community. Without this kinship network, Phoenix becomes hard as a means of self-preservation, but it is this very hardness that allows her to break when something bad happens to her. Phoenix is a toxic young woman "whose intergenerational struggle with sexual violence, poverty, and disconnection from family have led her to become solitary and hard" (Hanson, "Holding" 37). How do we encourage more young people to become like Pete and less like Phoenix and Bishop?

An answer, for Vermette, is robust kinship networks with a return to tradition and the land. Jake and Sundancer are also at-risk youth. Both of them start to emotionally withdraw in response to the violence that their sisters experienced. Jake and Sundancer are gang-affiliated, existing on the periphery of gang life like many Indigenous young men and women in the North End. For example, when Ziggy asks her brother what gang he is in, he tells her that it is "complicated" (217). Sundancer has a black bandana and a black hoodie (220), and he spends time on Selkirk Avenue, an area well known for gang activity. Jake also has a "black hoodie" (280). Rita is so concerned when Sundancer abruptly leaves the house that she calls his father and Moshoom and asked them to "[j]ust, like, go around and look for him" (219). When Dan finds Jake and Sundancer at a convenience store, he takes them out for coffee so that they can discuss "Man Stuff" (281). Jake and Sundancer are struggling with their feelings and emotions, and they are tempted by violence and a desire for revenge.

Vermette ends the novel on the reserve with the extended kinship network coming in for a sweat, with Dan and Moshoom spending time with Jake and Sundancer, teaching them "man things" as Cheryl calls them, "old lessons that only a Moshoom could teach properly" (340). It is in learning these old lessons that young Indigenous men can learn how to deal with their anger and toxic emotions in healthier ways. Men break when they are isolated from their kinship networks and the teachings that could help them deal with their negative feelings in more productive ways. To help men deal with this fragility, they need to be embedded within kinship networks of supportive men and women. Non-dominative masculinity is something men have to learn through mentorship and traditional stories. Frequently, it is something men learn when they are away from the temptations of the city. Men within those kinship networks, moreover, need to pass on teachings

that help men learn how to be supportive of others while rejecting toxic behaviours. After a few weeks in the bush with Dan and Moshoom, the boys look "peaceful, their smiles wide" and Jake "runs up and gives his mom a big bear hug" (241). The boys gain confidence and self-esteem spending time with men learning how to be men, and Cheryl notes that Jake even "looks taller somehow" (341).

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Franco Cortese

errorgatio*

For Christian Bök

a rote zygote joke, yolkative
rubycon, a vivipartisan

sonburn, a vulvacuous orb,
cannalclaw rue, era

roblation, eyeshore seawall
mhyrrmur, ashbrown

adam kindel, i.e. ceded
fact, unearthen heat,

vagabond of marrage,
blitzleague usurppers,

ovheirspill levellerr, bliss
tared slilvhiermare,

bhurried copses, codoned
note n' tin fib egging

ontofat, spat fen,
essence's census,

vinyl spirits, essayed
anihima, ediface tar,

stoulen void, etymolested
DD mammicry, copied

rope, copied nooserib,
grim aura,

noosecyte yarn, haruspectacle
vine, gemclone

plasma, grey dais, uí
riddle residew,

donor dryad ovum,
sodslur lysis

* errogatio is a perfect anagram of "Veils" from *Eunoia* by Christian Bök

Aislinn Clare McDougall

The Decolonization of Print, Digital, and Oral Spaces in Jordan Abel's *Injun*

When Nisga'a poet Jordan Abel performs his long poem *Injun* (2016), he remixes digital recordings of his own voice reading the work, disrupting and layering the tracks until there is an audible breaking down of language. *Injun* is a product of Abel CTRL-F searching for each instance of the word "injun" across ninety-one Western novels from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries hosted on *Project Gutenberg*. After compiling each use of the term into a printed, twenty-six-page document, Abel cut each page into one of the twenty-six sections of *Injun* (Abel 83). Mirroring the poem's typographical chaos, Abel's live performance involves a digital glitching of his own recorded spoken-word. I first experienced this live performance at the 2017 World Congress for Scottish Literatures in Vancouver, and my initial reaction was abrupt discomfort, frustration, and even resistance to the piece. As Abel's discordant layering of fragmented poetry intensified, the sound of digital malfunction echoed throughout the banquet hall, leaving me tense and apprehensive. In *Unsettling the Settler Within,* Paulette Regan theorizes a similar unsettling, drawing out an overt play on words—a double meaning for the verb "to settle." She "employs a conceptual framework for a decolonizing pedagogical strategy that is designed to teach Canadians about their history so as to initially unsettle and then transform how they view the past as it relates to contemporary Indigenous-settler relations" (13). As a non-Indigenous scholar writing "of [her] own unsettling" (18), Regan sees her work as a "call to action for non-Indigenous Canadians" (17) to unsettle themselves and take a necessary

responsibility for working towards decolonization. Regan's insistence that settlers turn inward to this unsettling has since informed my own experience of Abel's oral performance; it has allowed me to distinguish between my brash rejection of *Injun* as "unsettling," uncomfortable, and off-putting, and the more significant fact that I was, in that moment, failing to recognize that it was not the poem itself that was problematic, but rather, my response to it. I had felt resistance to my own feelings of guilt and discomfort in favour of an imagined and idealized version of Indigenous-settler relations in which reconciliation is both achieved and finite.

In an analysis of Canada's participation in what has been figured as a "global industry . . . promoting the issuing of official apologies advocating 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation,'" Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard criticizes Canada's tendency to "manufacture . . . a transition" "from an authoritarian past to a democratic present . . . by allocating the abuses of settler colonization to the dustbins of history, and/or purposely disentangl[ing] processes of reconciliation from questions of settler-coloniality" (106, 108). Taking issue with the way Canada has promoted a reconciliation that "takes on a temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent *legacy* of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself" (108-09), Coulthard argues that what is regularly misperceived as "Indigenous peoples' *ressentiment*," framed as an "inability or unwillingness to get over the past," is "actually an entirely appropriate manifestation of [their] *resentment*: a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures [their] lives, [their] relations with others, and [their] relationships with land" (109, emphasis original). Coulthard's work locates Indigenous resentment as a necessary and valuable reaction. If Indigenous resentment remains an ongoing response to the structural violence of colonialism, then a process of unsettling too should remain productively incessant. If so, my own unsettling after Abel's performance requires me not to look beyond my discomfort but directly at it, to be actively present within it, and, in time, to locate pathways for understanding, responding to, and learning from it. It is through a deeper engagement with Abel's *Injun* in its print, digital, and oral contexts that I intend to undertake such a process in this paper.

In order to more fully understand the importance of such an "unsettling," I turn first and necessarily to its root: to settle. Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Unangax scholar Eve Tuck discuss a "turn" in contemporary scholarship "toward analyzing settler colonialism" as "a persistent societal structure,

not just an historical event or origin story for a nation-state" (3-4). It is this emphasis on persistence that I think quite adequately informs a process of unsettling in that the kind of transformation of settler-Indigenous relations Regan sees as the productive outcome of "unsettling" must also be understood as ongoing. Reflecting on what it means "to settle" also means considering the compelling significance of place, and more specifically, *space*. In an explication of Patrick Wolfe, Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson defines "*settler* colonialism" by its "territorial project—the accumulation of land . . . [which] differentiates it from other forms of colonialism" (19). For Simpson, "The desire for land produces 'the problem' of the Indigenous life that is already living on that land" (19). The inherent importance of land in settler colonialism is first and foremost, but it can also be more broadly bridged to abstract places and spaces. If, in hearing Abel perform *Injun*, I felt "out of place," then what place or space was that? Was the poem itself moving across space(s) to catalyze such a feeling of unsettling, and, most importantly, was there not a dark irony in *my* feeling displaced as a settler Canadian?[1] While Rowe and Tuck offer helpful terminology, they actually gesture toward the "unsettled" nature of the terms themselves (3), and I suggest that such an insistence on the terms being "unsettled" actually exposes how, within the "persistent societal structure" of settler colonialism, language too is subject to crises of territory and occupation; like settler colonialism and its consequential "unsettling," language is neither static nor finite.

I have come to recognize *Injun* as a work of resistance and decolonization that confronts three distinct but interconnected spaces that are subject to settler colonialism's structure of ongoing erasure, elimination, and violence—print space, digital space, and oral space. Each space, I suggest, can be fruitfully contextualized by a metaphorical *terra nullius*, since colonized, that I argue Abel both resists and confronts in his poetry. I argue that *Injun* is a project of literary decolonization that uses digital technology to resist and dismantle the colonial language that, within print literary space, digital cyberspace, and oral space, has been used to violently define and disempower Indigenous peoples. While I explore how the digital can catalyze an intervention in print literature's colonial roots, I further address the crucial tension between print and digital as both predominantly white spaces. Ultimately, Abel's *Injun* instantiates an Indigenous presence via digital excavation, experimental typography, and a digitally remixed oral performance, all of which showcase an uncomfortable but necessary *breaking down* of the English language in both meatspace and cyberspace.

Print Space as *Terra Nullius*

To read Abel's *Injun* as a work of decolonization within print, digital, and oral spaces, it is helpful to first consider how these spaces can each be contextualized by a metaphorical *terra nullius*. Métis scholar Chelsea Vowel discusses *terra nullius* in the context of the Doctrine of Discovery and the Doctrine of Occupation. As Vowel explains, the Doctrine of Discovery was based on two papal bulls of the 1400s: the *Dum Diversas* (1452), which "gave Christians the right to take 'pagans' . . . as perpetual slaves," and the *Romanus Pontifex* (1455), which, Vowel very sarcastically relates, "clearly explained that since there were many people (heathens) around the world who weren't really using the land they were on, Europeans had every right to take that land" (236). The Doctrine of Occupation is dependent on the concept of *terra nullius*, "which is a Latin term that basically means 'land that belongs to no one'" (236). Essentially, *terra nullius* "was used as legal and moral justification for colonial dispossession of sovereign Indigenous Nations, including First Nations in what is now Canada" (Assembly of First Nations 2). Although a concept historically associated in North America with the territorial colonialism it helped facilitate, *terra nullius* continues to haunt contemporary relations between Indigenous communities and settlers beyond its original attribution to land. For instance, Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd calls *terra nullius* a "convenient colonial construct that maintained lands were empty of *meaning*, of *language*, of presence, and of history before the arrival of the European," arguing that "[f]or a worlding to take place to such a degree that the native comes to cathect her/himself as other, the native must be rendered as an unknowable blankness that can then be used to reflect back the colonizer's desires and fantasies" (64-65, emphasis mine). Byrd draws an important interrelatedness between the violent and dehumanizing impacts of *terra nullius*, and the desired and fantastical narratives of *language* used to fill the "unknowable blankness" of which she speaks. Thus, if language too can be "unsettled," and if, as Byrd suggests, there is a direct relationship between *terra nullius* and meaning and language, then Abel's literary reconfiguration of settler narratives challenges the "unknowable blankness" (Byrd 64) or figurative *terra nullius* that, as a componential substructure of settler colonialism, perpetuates Indigenous otherness.

Injun is first a reclamation of traditional print literary space that can be understood in the context of *terra nullius*. Max Karpinski reads Abel as confronting *terra nullius* in *The Place of Scraps* (2013) through print space

in his poetic form and methodology, a method which, I argue, Abel returns to in *Injun*. For Karpinski, *terra nullius* is a "viable entryway into *The Place of Scraps*" because *terra nullius* "operates through a . . . conflation of erasure and possession" that "is readily apparent in the form and method of Abel's poetry" (69). I propose that we think of North American print literary space in the context of *terra nullius* in that like the belief in land ownership, filling print space in the mainstream publishing industry was a practice historically dominated by European writers authoring settler narratives about Indigenous peoples. That is, just as North America was considered vacant by settlers, print literary space was not believed to be "occupied," so to speak, by Indigenous voices until the late twentieth century. If we think of print literary space in this way, then the ninety-one Western novels that Abel interrogates and reconfigures in *Injun* become instances of colonial occupation of this space. Another way of thinking of print literary space in the context of *terra nullius* is through the English literary canon, historically populated by white, male authors and poets. As discussed by Anishinaabe scholar Kimberly Blaeser, Western literary "'canonization,' can become a way of changing or remaking Native American stories" (53) so "[Indigenous peoples must] be aware of the stories [colonizers are] making about [them]" (Louis Owens qtd. in Blaeser 53). Similarly, Anishinaabe scholar Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm explores how "[i]n Canada . . . and the United States, successive colonizing governments have used language and the power of words . . . to subjugate and control the Indigenous peoples of the land" (11). She writes, "Language has been used not only to control what we do but how we are defined" (11). The Western print literary tradition undoubtedly has ties to the British Empire's agenda as the enforcing of the English language on Indigenous peoples was a dominant feature of their genocide. Furthermore, if we think of print literary space in the context of *terra nullius*, then we can see how early North American novels about the "wild west" and the "new frontier" colonized print space, staking claim to Indigenous identities, experiences, and voices, while violently displacing and superseding Indigenous storytelling in the process. These works undoubtedly exemplify Byrd's described reflection of settler perspectives onto a perceived nothingness attributed to Indigenous peoples (64).

Abel's *Injun* too confronts this notion of *terra nullius* within print space first in methodology. The poem signals to *terra nullius* with its epigraph from Mark Twain, which reads, "It is better to take what does not belong to you than to let it lie around neglected." Abel has remarked that his "writing

is in resistance to the problematic representations of Indigenous peoples in the Western genre," stating that "*Injun* . . . uses conceptual forms of appropriation in order to comment on the mechanisms of appropriation" (qtd. in Whiteman). When asked how he "think[s] of *Injun* in light of the appropriation of voice issue," Abel has expressed ambivalence about the continued conversation about appropriation in Canadian literature, ultimately suggesting that appropriation such as this is "a statement that demonstrates the absurd and greedy logic of colonialism" (qtd. in Whiteman). While Abel "uses conceptual forms of appropriation," he does so very self-consciously as a means of exposing the colonial structures that have and still do characterize print literary space. Abel's "conceptual" appropriation is literary resistance to the novels' occupying print literary space and it is reclamation of the racially charged language therein. While Abel's methodology obviously reveals his critique and reconfiguration of the appropriated Indigenous identity in the Western novels, it more crucially exposes his material interrogation of the Westerns' settler narratives through physical intervention. Although he digitally selected lines that use the word "injun" from the "91 public domain western novels," Abel "ended up with 26 *print* pages" which he "then cut up . . . into . . . section[s] of a long poem" very literally, to the point that there were often "scraps of paper everywhere" during his writing process (Abel 83, 85; emphasis mine). In disassembling texts accessed on *Project Gutenberg*—an open-source archive named after Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press—Abel methodologically responds to a colonial parallel between the written text and notions of space and settler colonialism. The very genesis of *Injun* is rooted in a tactile deconstruction of the novels that have perpetuated dominant settler imaginations of Indigenous identities and narratives in print literary culture, wherein Abel intervenes in an act of materialist and spatially conscious resistance.

Beyond Abel's material methodology, spatiality remains central to the poem's subject matter through Abel's exposure of the novels' hyper-focus on land. Starting with the line "he played injun in gods country," the poem begins with space, where Abel's use of the word "country" self-consciously emphasizes the colonial terminology used to label North America in terms that incite structures of ownership and sovereignty (3). Such a means of categorizing land remains aggressively at odds with the belief held by many Indigenous peoples that North America is more rightfully titled Turtle Island. Further, the word "gods" more explicitly relates the land to Euro-

Christianity, in that "God's country," as country "regarded as especially favoured by God" ("god, n. and int."), is also used to refer to sparsely inhabited spaces away from urban centres, i.e., "empty" land. The speaker also contextualizes a sort of "game" of "Cowboys and Indians," and this notion that settler violence is a "game" is one that Abel returns to throughout the poem, often associating it with land. For instance, in the opening segment, the speaker mentions "play[ing] injun" as well as "play[ing] english," and these phrases are made spatial by the phrases "*in* gods *country*" and "*across* the *trail*" (3, emphasis mine). Later, the lines "lets play injun / and clean ourselves / off the land" further this metaphorical "game" by positioning it in relation to space, land, and disappearance (14). Beyond this, the language of ownership and occupation figures prominently in the poem, and Abel exposes in his "[Notes]" the various occurrences in the Western novels of words like "frontier" (32), "territory" (42), and "possession" (58).

More crucially, these references to land ownership are often explicitly tied to language and they occur within the poetry itself, further reinforcing the relationship between print literary space and *terra nullius*. For example, the speaker introduces a male figure (presumably a settler) with the line "he spoke through numb lips and / breathed frontier" (3). The numbness of the lips insinuates an immunity to the "frontier" that infiltrates language and this, paired with the "strained words," quite intensely parallels language and land as both subject to the violent colonization at hand (3). In the following section, he is described as "hear[ing] snatches of comment / going up from the river bank," followed by instances of dialogue describing Indigenous peoples in ambivalent terms (4). This association between possessed land and language supports a reading of print space as a perceived *terra nullius* since the language drawn from settler narratives occupies the "frontier" of the page itself. When the speaker describes "bordering an artful territory / a partial injun tongue / steady in an old mans fingers" (11), the image of a severed Indigenous tongue held by the settler hand, associated with "an artful territory," proposes that this territory (both literary and actual) is one in which the white settler controls, oppresses, and even obliterates Indigenous language and narrative—a position that Abel actively resists.

Beyond this tension between land and language in subject matter, Abel further interrogates *terra nullius* in print literary space with experimental typography. From the outset, Abel rejects standard English punctuation and grammar, opening up his poetic lines to multiple interpretations. For

instance, the aforementioned phrase "gods country," if read as possessive, suggests that the land belongs to the Christian God. Alternatively, if read as plural, the phrase implies that, after contact, North America becomes a space occupied by settlers who believed themselves god-like, or having a divine right to land. Despite this lack of punctuation, *Injun* begins with some semblance of uniformity as the lines are organized in even couplets, and the poem is divided into twenty-six sections, each chronologically labelled from A-Z. At the outset of the poem, Abel's typographical strategies are reminiscent of the uniformity of traditional English poetry. However, he subverts this uniformity come section "g," which marks the initial breakdown of language. It is in this section that the couplets are no longer recognizable, and the lines are disrupted by incremental spaces. The fact that Abel arranges words and phrases from the Western novels with more traditional and uniform typography before actively dismantling them is demonstrative of how he self-consciously interrogates the white settler narratives that have and continue to occupy print literary space. This section comes immediately after the speaker describes "grubbed up injuns / in the glean of discovery," and I propose that Abel's typographical experiment be read as a disruption both of the glean of progress, but also of the ninety-one colonial novels as apparently clean by obscuring and disrupting the language in a retaliatory engagement with literary space (8). What is more, this section of broken language is the first of many, and, paired with the A-Z structure, it gestures toward an overt disruption of the English alphabet—the core of the English language which, in residential schools, violently silenced traditional Indigenous languages.

While the opening of space on the page disturbs the uniformity of the language, this typographical breakdown of language is most advanced between sections "r" and "s," where "words are broken into phonetic components and individual letters are dispersed widely across the page" (Neilson 287). Here, the letters on the page are flipped upside down and arranged in arbitrary couples, incomprehensible to the traditional, Western left to right reading experience. Shane Neilson proposes that this "exploded typography" "suggest[s] that to change relations between Indigenous people and settlers, poetry needs to be sundered first"; "[o]nly then," he writes, "can lyric be sutured back together with a changed polarity of power" (287). It certainly is an "exploded typography," but I am more inclined to read it as an act of destabilizing colonized spaces, both literary and actual. Rather than indicating that a sundering of *poetry* is required in order to

instantiate such a change, I see a shift within the exploded typography that transcends a sundering of poetry to signal not only a deconstruction of the colonial narratives within the Westerns, but also of the colonial violence that remains deeply embedded in North America's social structures. Neilson does argue that the exploded typography could represent the "dispersal and deliberate destabilization of Indigenous communities" (287), and it is true that sections "r" and "s" emulate a feeling of destruction without meaning, but as the sections dismantle the words taken from the Westerns, they more productively suggest Abel's destabilization of colonized print literary space. In other words, the Western novels already destabilize Indigenous communities in their rehearsals of settler-colonial violence. The typographical explosion is Abel's response and resistance to the structures that destabilize Indigenous life and identity both within and outside of print literary space.

While Abel's "exploded typography" is more a mode of decolonizing print literary space than a means of suturing Indigenous-settler relations, there is merit in reading into this shift the importance of change in settler-Indigenous relations that results in "a changed polarity of power" (287), as Neilson does. It is after this point in the text, after all, that the speaker begins using first-person pronouns and the poetry becomes quite literally turned upside down. Leading up to the typographical explosion, the third-person "he" is used to express much of the poem's political leaning, but between sections "s" and "z," during which the reader must physically read *Injun* upside down, the first person "i" is used to conclude the piece. In the earliest instance of this first-person shift, the speaker uses "my" to declare that

> buzzards
> are fine birds
> that are fooled
> by my redskin
> scent (23)

The "buzzard" as a bird of prey continues the theme of violence established by the colonial "Cowboys and Indians" narratives of the West that Abel deconstructs. Later, the speaker maintains the first-person perspective to make declarations of return:

> back to the bloody gorge
> to that mad
> paleface settler . . .
> back
> to the

folks
i call
brother and
sweetheart (24)

Again, there is a focus on space with this notion of a return to land ("the bloody gorge") as paired with a return to familial relations through language—it is *the speaker* who returns to those he "call[s] / brother and / sweetheart" (24). This first-person perspective offers a newfound power in the speaker's voice where he has a degree of agency over both his narrative and the words on the page. The first-person pronouns indicate a reclamation of the language lost in the Western novels' colonization of print literary space wherein this Indigenous voice rises out of the fragments that comprise the poem. Such reclamation is especially apparent when the speaker uses second-person pronouns in moments of confrontation: "black hair frontier / I hear your / dead heroes" (26). Here, the speaker confronts the land by personifying it. Of course, we are reminded of the references to violent "scalp[ing]" throughout the poem, with which Abel introduces a correlation between the Indigenous body and the violently colonized land (22). Moreover, while the second-person pronoun "your" certainly speaks to the frontier land, it also turns to the potentially white, settler reader in a provocative shift of address, and the speaker's confrontation, here, is twofold. On the one hand, "dead heroes" sardonically refers to those perpetually glorified by settlers throughout history for "shaping" the Americas about which Abel writes. But on the other hand, "dead heroes" refers to the settler Western novelists, similarly extolled by white settlers throughout history for shaping North American literature which Abel works to deconstruct. There is a clear parallel between the "authors" of North America's colonial violence, and those of the ninety-one Westerns. The latter interpretation is implied by the speaker's insistence that he "hear[s]" these dead heroes, which we can understand to mean there has been a transmission, perhaps through the literary works which Abel interrogates, of these "dead heroes[']" voices.

While the poem is somewhat pieced back together in the final sections, "revert[ing] to an easier legibility," the poem never returns to the traditional uniformity established in its early sections (Neilson 287). The words from the Western novels have occupied print literary space such that these settler authors, in a metaphorical *terra nullius*, have laid claim to the page with white, Western narratives about Turtle Island and its Indigenous peoples. But Abel's piecing back together in the final sections of the poem is not an indication that

poetry is somehow sutured, as Neilson imagines. Abel's decision not to return to the uniform couplets reminds readers that colonial tensions between Indigenous peoples and settlers remain unresolved. Abel restructures the language that dispossessed Indigenous peoples in print literary space, but he does so in a way that results in an uneasy fracturing. This poetic irresolution is part of what produces the perpetual "unsettling" that *Injun* evoked in me, mirroring, through poetry, the "persistent societal structure" of settler colonialism that we must linger within today. While Abel has the last word, so to speak, that word is haunted by its traumatic undoing throughout *Injun,* throughout colonial history and its persistence in the present.

Digital Space as *Terra Nullius*

Abel's poetics of deconstruction is also inherently digital insomuch as his decolonization of these novels exposes cyberspace as another space that can be contextualized by *terra nullius*. In "Terra Nullius, Terra Incognito" (2005), Cherokee/Hawaiian/Samoan scholar Jason E. Lewis explores the tendency to consider "cyberspace [as] another frontier undergoing colonization." Settler scholar David Gaertner further addresses this concept, noting that since the inception of Digital Humanities discourse, predominantly white "authors, scholars, and engineers have mobilized metaphors of colonization and terra nullius to conceptualize cyberspace" (Gaertner). Digital discourse is undoubtedly infused conceptually and linguistically with the discourse of inhabiting and occupying space: we build and own web*sites* with *domain* names, we refer to the Internet as a cyber*space*, the digital *world*, and an information super*highway*. Yet, while it has been common for settler scholars to think of cyberspace as *terra nullius*, it is imperative to consider the repercussions of such a metaphor. In "Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace," Lewis and Mohawk artist Skawennati Tricia Fragnito write, "if Aboriginal peoples learned one thing from contact, it is the danger of seeing any place as *terra nullius*, even cyberspace." As Lewis cautiously asks, if we think of cyberspace in terms of *terra nullius*, "and if we're concerned with how that colonization plays out, might we not do well to reflect on the historical course of colonization on this continent?" (Lewis). Drawing a parallel between actual and digital modes of settler colonization, Lewis and Skawennati expose the concept of digital *terra nullius* as one mobilized more by settler scholars and users, differentiating the Indigenous rejection of viewing "any place as *terra nullius*" (Lewis and Skawennati) and what Gaertner calls "the colonial drive to know . . . repackaged as open source"

that inflects "the realm of technology" (Gaertner). Abel engages with cyberspace similarly in *Injun,* and as he deconstructs the white settler narratives that have colonized print literary space via the ninety-one Western novels, he further resists this "colonial drive to know" through "open source." That is, if we consider cyberspace in this context of *terra nullius*, then in making these novels available in the "public domain," *Project Gutenberg* reinstates, through both literary and digital spaces, colonial narratives of inhabitance, ownership, violence, and territory. Their presence online is akin to settler scholar Joanna Hearne's description of "the digital . . . as a place of symbolic violence . . . a space where artifacts of settler imagination are simply rehearsed and (re)distributed" (17). However, many Indigenous scholars and artists work to combat this rehearsal of the settler imagination online by using digital technologies "as vehicles of resilience and cultural continuance" (Igloliorte et al. 9) as Abel does in *Injun*. In discussing *CyberPowWow04*, "a virtual gallery with digital . . . artworks . . . by . . . Aboriginal artists and writers" (Lewis and Skawennati), Lewis reflects on how cyberspace offers "the freedom" for Indigenous peoples "to define the territory as [they] see fit, a freedom that stands in stark contrast to the obstacles" faced by their ancestors (Lewis). While Abel uses print literary space to deconstruct settler narratives "as [he] see[s] fit," he also does so by use of cyberspace in a way that affords him more freedom and agency. According to Lewis, *CyberPowWow* promotes freedom of artistic expression in order to "ensure that there are no reservations in cyberspace." Inuk scholar Heather Igloliorte, Métis/German/Syrian scholar Julie Nagam, and settler scholar Carla Taunton continue this land-based metaphor online, quoting Métis/Cree scholar Cheryl L'Hirondelle's remark that Indigenous peoples' "connection to the land is what makes [them] Indigenous, and yet as [they] move forward into virtual domains [they] too are sneaking up and setting up camp—making this virtual and technologically mediated domain [their] own" (qtd. in Igloliorte et al. 7). Igloliorte, Nagam, and Taunton call "visual culture" "a colonizing tool that . . . represent[s] Indigenous peoples . . . as part of the past, static and primitive," but the same can be said of digital culture (9). For instance, *Project Gutenberg*'s open source reproduction of the ninety-one Western novels is a "colonizing tool" which redistributes white settler narratives that portray Indigenous peoples "as static and primitive," yet Abel deconstructs these narratives by working in the virtual domain and critically re-contextualizing the language of these narratives in resistance to the violent structure of settler-colonialism. Igloliorte et al. insist that Indigenous peoples can use new technologies

"for their own purposes of self-representation" (9), and if we think of Abel as responding to the "colonial drive to know" (Gaertner) in digital space and resisting the problematic association between cyberspace and *terra nullius*, then we can see how he reclaims and re-situates terms such as "injun" in order to prompt processes of "unsettling." Yet, the digital offers a more dynamic and boundless space than colonial North America and the more restrictive, print literary tradition in this respect. Abel uses technology as a means of self-representation and reclamation, using the digital's distinct tools for literary interrogation, artistic expression, and even self-conscious or "conceptual forms of [digital] appropriation" in order to "comment on the mechanisms of appropriation," as Abel says (qtd. in Whiteman); the digital can, according to Hearne, be Indigenized through "imaginative forms of claiming, a symbolic appropriation that accompanies tactical repurposing" (8), and it can be "reimagin[ed] . . . as a site of possibility" (9).

Jackson 2Bears' "remix theory" offers a more detailed account of these described acts of Indigenous reclamation and "symbolic appropriation," offering a productive framework with which to observe Abel's digital decolonization. 2Bears thinks of the remix

> as a new media *performance conjuration* . . . that becomes about the conjuration and exorcism of spectral narratives . . . that haunt our mediascape; a recombinant act that involves the slicing, cutting, and deconstruction of virulent colonial mythologies. (27, emphasis original)

Here, 2Bears parallels language and land by proposing a digital "mediascape" that requires an "exorcism of spectral *narratives*" (emphasis mine) and offers a digital space in which such narratives can be interrogated. His description of his work as a "conversation with spirits and spectres" that "takes place through electronic mediums and new media technology . . . wherein . . . ghosts of history are forced to (re)appear so that they might face up to their haunting of the living" (26) productively characterizes the affect of "unsettling" that I struggled with following Abel's performance of *Injun.* 2Bears' work exposes what Tuck and Rowe call the "narratives of conquest" which, although "mostly invisible within the settler consciousness," "remin[d] settlers that they belong, that their place in the social order has been hard-won through the taming of savages" and "confir[m] their status as the rightful owners of pastoral landscapes" (6). 2Bears achieves this in his digital remixing of the children's song "Ten Little Indians," which he describes as a reclamation through a "reappropriation of this music and the cultural stereotypes it evoked" (21). Expressing fear that his work might "perpetuat[e] these stereotypes" (21),

he expresses that he set out to "create artworks in which [he] could publicly re-perform these injustices, and [simultaneously] deconstruct . . . these . . . simulations of [his] peoples that had been sustained within . . . various media archives" (23) as an act of resistance.

Like 2Bears, Abel uses digital tools and technologies to commit what Hearne calls "a symbolic appropriation" as a means of self-consciously locating and deconstructing the acts of appropriation that are foundational to settler colonialism (8). Beyond remixing, one of the more particular ways in which Abel uses digital technology to deconstruct print and digital spaces is through data mining. In Digital Humanities discourse, data mining refers to the digital "extraction of information from a body of texts . . . in order to ask research questions," offering another metaphor for territorial excavation (Drucker). Data mining often includes the use of particular digital programs to "extract data from text according to certain parameters and deliver the data in useful file formats" (Gardiner and Musto 73). Of course, we must consider how data mining embodies colonial practices of land excavation in that to "mine" something is to engage directly with land and territory. The emphasis on extraction of raw data for the sake of "useful" delivery is reminiscent of colonial tendencies to mine raw resources from stolen land to actualize utilitarian productions and capitalist aims. Although Abel uses data mining practices to inaugurate his deconstruction of the Westerns, I contend that he does so in a self-consciously critical way that contributes to the conceptual forms of appropriation in *Injun* (Whiteman). Rather than participating in the "colonial drive to know" (Gaertner), Abel's mining uses cyberspace to redefine Indigenous identity. Hosted online, these Western novels occupy digital space in the public domain, and Abel's extraction of the word "injun" exposes this occupation while also mobilizing his symbolic appropriation of the word itself. Although he reuses the word throughout the poem, he does so after committing what 2Bears calls "a recombinant act" of "slicing, cutting, and deconstruction of virulent colonial mythologies" (27).

Abel's process included both the cutting of print pages and the digital cutting and pasting across documents following his CTRL-F search for the term "injun." More importantly, his data mining awards him a certain agency over the word where he reserves the right to use it, or not. In the "[Appendix]" of *Injun,* he includes the combination of every sentence across the ninety-one Westerns, with each instance of the word "injun" *omitted*. This excision symbolizes his confiscation of the word from both print and digital spaces, gesturing toward his own reuse of it in the long poem

which precedes. It is a visual manifestation of his data mining, where the word is not stolen but rather reclaimed, confiscated, corrected, troubled, and decolonized. If we return to the perception of print space as colonized *terra nullius*, then the word's absence also suggests that his repurposing of it accomplishes a rupturing of literary space on the page itself. This data mining exemplifies, as Hearne might say, a "reterritorializ[ing of] the digital as Indigenous space, engaging the ethics and politics of occupation across physical and virtual lands" (9).

While methodologically Abel's digital remixing shows through in his data mining, so too is it apparent in the poem's typography. In this context, the explosive typography demonstrates how digital technology allows Abel to destabilize traditional, Western reading methods. Abel suggests that *Injun* "is a non-linear book," explaining that "there are multiple reading pathways through the book" and that he can "imagine a reading process . . . in which the reader is asked to flip forward, flip back, and even invert the book while reading backwards" (qtd. in Whiteman). In Digital Humanities discourse, such nonlinearity exemplifies the hypertextual jumping common in digital reading methods. For instance, Alan Kirby describes "Internet reading" as reading that "accelerates and slows as interest flickers and dies, shifts sideways to follow links, loses its thread, picks up another . . . interrupted, redefined, displaced, recommenced, abandoned, fragmentary" (68). Such nonlinear reading is chaotic in comparison to the linear reading process familiar to the European tradition, but it is this chaotic, increasingly dispersed typography in Abel's work that is indicative of hypertextual, digital narrative strategy.

The multiple reading pathways throughout reflect the digital methodology Abel used to write the work. For example, in using CTRL-F to locate each instance of the word "injun" in the corpus of Westerns, Abel made a sort of hyperlink out of the word, utilizing it to link him to an array of different sentences and phrases across the novels. The mechanism of "injun" in this data-mining project is what makes possible the nonlinearity that Abel imagines. He further visually exemplifies this process in the "[Notes]" section of *Injun*, where he has listed and bolded various instances of words like "whitest," "frontier," "reserve," "silence," "discovery," "bordering," "territory," "land," "scalped," "redskins," and "country" (31-32, 36-38, 41-42, 45, 51-53). The bolding of these words highlights them like the sometimes blue-coloured hyperlinks that interconnect networked digital texts. In addition to emphasizing themes of erasure throughout the poem, even his

removal of "injun" in the "[Appendix]" highlights the ways in which the word has become a hyperlink to network and connect the language Abel used to craft the poem. Beyond opening up new meaning and proposing a more digital reading structure, this nonlinearity further renders the Western novels' original meanings flaccid in a way that fortifies Abel's decolonial reconstructions of the source text.

Oral Space

Abel uses digital technology to "remix" these colonial texts in digital space, but he also remixes digital *audio recordings* of himself reading the poem for a live audience, which illustrates how his reclamation of digital space transcends from the textual to the oral. His oral performances actualize these digital reading pathways by layering various lines from *Injun* in a way that disrupts the order and clarity of the reading, producing simultaneity as well as nonlinearity. The fact that Abel remixes the poem differently in each performance further indicates the ways in which digital technology allows him to vitalize these arbitrary digital pathways. When Abel manipulates the sound files until they begin to skip, lag, and cut-out, he offers his audience an aural experience of what it means for this language to be broken down. Abel indicates that, in his performances, he attempts "to re-present" the "multiple layers of meaning and text" and "to communicate how these layers came together during the process of writing and reading the book" (qtd. in Peters). The layers of meaning are certainly present in Abel's performance, but interestingly, his performance leaves textuality to the wayside and instead situates his work in an oral space wherein he delegates its sound and function. When Abel turns the lights off for a performance, he further eliminates this textuality so that the audience must focus only on the poem's orality, removed from the print and digital *textual* spaces of which it is born.

Abel's turn to the oral allows for him to actualize the work of resistance to settler-colonial power that he accomplishes conceptually in print literary and digital spaces, but more significantly, this orality constitutes an approach to resistance that uses Indigenous ways of storytelling and knowing. According to Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice,

> every time we privilege the literary, we run the risk of doing violence to the specific relational contexts of the oral. Reading can be a very isolated and isolating experience; sharing stories orally is done in the context of living, dynamic peoplehood—one reason why it's so significant to Indigenous communities, where so much knowledge is transmitted between living people, not mediated by objects like books. (25)

In crafting *Injun* through print literary space, Abel certainly engages the literary, but I argue that he does not "privilege" it and subsequently enact violence upon the decolonial subject matter. While *Injun* is a print literary text, its very genesis relies on Abel's resistance to the literary as that which has perpetuated settler narratives about and perspectives on Indigenous peoples and their histories. By performing *Injun* through digital recordings of his own voice, Abel actually relocates *Injun* from the Western textuality of these settler narratives to a more Indigenous method of storytelling. Of course, as digitally recorded, his performance is still "mediated by objects," to use Justice's words. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson similarly suggests that despite the fact that a performance of "a spoken word story" can "lif[t] the burden of colonialism by visioning new realities," "[w]hen mediated through print or recording devices," the relationship between storyteller and audience becomes "reduced," and the process loses "some of its transformative power" (qtd. in Justice 25-26). Despite its digital mediation, Abel's performance of *Injun* undoubtedly lays the groundwork of "lifting the burden of colonialism by visioning new realities." His performance maintains the transformative power of the relationship between storyteller and audience first because the recordings are poetic fragments *in Abel's voice*, as if to illustrate his agency over the colonial language that he dismantles with resistance. Second, from a digital technological perspective, his live sound mixing of his own voice illustrates a similar authority over the language in that he digitally (with his digits) determines the pathways and patterns of the colonial language *Injun* is derived of in real time.

Conclusion

Yet, if we think of his digitization of this orality as reducing the "transformative power" of *Injun*, to use Simpson's phrase, what, then, is *Injun*'s ultimate impact? Even if we agree that the digitization reduces its transformative power, this reduction might actually be indicative of the unresolved tensions at the close of the poem, and those that remain at the heart of settler-Indigenous relations today. Perhaps, through this reduction of transformative power, the necessary "unsettling" of certain audience members emerges and lingers. With this, the effectiveness of *Injun* lies in the fact that, during these performances, the writing process and one's reading of the text—what 2Bears would call the racist "spectres" "of the 'Indian'"—still haunt. Abel relates that his intention in his performances of

Injun "is not necessarily to produce discomfort," although "discomfort is a natural side effect," but rather that his "main intention is actually to attempt to re-present the spirit of the text" (qtd. in Peters). With this in mind, the digitization of orality allows for Abel to highlight the "spectres" within the textuality he engages, self-consciously halting transformation in favour of a call to unsettling. In other words, like 2Bears' "Ten Little Indians," Abel's *Injun* remains "a conversation with spirits and spectres, one that takes place through electronic . . . new media technologies . . . wherein these ghosts of history are forced to (re)appear so that they might face up to their haunting"—their unsettling—"of the living" (26).

Injun mobilizes this unsettling within the non-Indigenous reader, from Abel's discordant digital performance, to his data mining of uncomfortable language, to his explosive typography. Abel locates in print literary and digital spaces the structures of settler colonialism that have shaped and continue to inflect settler-Indigenous relations both within and outside of literature. While both spaces can be contextualized by metaphors of *terra nullius*, Abel decolonizes these spaces through an active resistance in language. Abel utilizes digital tools to reclaim the language that has been used to define and disenfranchise Indigenous peoples on the page, in meatspace, and in cyberspace. His ultimate turn toward a digitized oral performance reinstates Indigenous modes of storytelling and communicating, while also necessitating a lingering unsettling in non-Indigenous readers, summoning the spectres of settler colonialism that still haunt.

NOTE

1 Prior to engaging with Abel's *Injun,* I want to identify my own positionality as a white, settler scholar writing on *Injun* from what settler scholar Max Karpinski calls "a position of listening and learning" that "welcom[es] both conversation and correction" (66). I hope to read Abel's poem in a way that, according to settler scholar Sam McKegney, "encourages a healthy skepticism about claims made by non-[Indigenous] critics" and "privileg[es] . . . the work of [Indigenous] scholars" and "writers" in "a sincere attempt to produce the most effective criticism" (qtd. in Karpinski 66-67). Willie Ermine, focusing on the relationship between Indigenous law and the Canadian legal system, describes an "ethical space of engagement" as a productive "framework for a dialogue between human communities," "examining the diversity and position of Indigenous peoples and Western society" (193). It is my aim to write within a similar ethical space of engagement, with an awareness of the risks inherent in "reading [Indigenous] literature by way of Western literary theory," including "violat[ing] its integrity and perform[ing] a new act of colonization and conquest" (Blaeser 55). With this, I hope to enter into the dialogue with caution and an openness to contestation and amelioration.

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David Martin

The Canals of Mars

Each night I coax Mars into my vision's tunnel.
Channels of Mars furnish deserts, irrigate seams.

My Mars breeds beings, twenty times my size,
tends desiccated fields and gurgling craters.

My Mars mails hours to a Hades signal-scape.
After the harvest, my Mars blushes deeper rust.

My Mars hibernates till the compass of our hearts
thaws in my breath. My Mars tattoos its face

with scars for me to augur by. My Mars dissects
its mistakes as a daily drill. My Mars will mother

when I cry, lure me to its window with a wail,
and dream of when I resolve to come for good.

My Mars teaches what to make of the little left
of myself. My Mars refuses to speak about us.

My Mars is a sight that sighs at leering minds,
nullifies night while spinning under my eye.

My Mars treats all eyes as spies. But why, Mars,
does the sky shut its lid when I expose your prize?

Mars, you close in on my eye, veins that score
your body, and my eye sees my Mars, my eye.

Sally Chivers

"Your own guilty story"
Rethinking Care Relations through David Chariandy's *Soucouyant*

The metaphor of a silver tsunami to represent population aging continues to dominate popular discourse despite trenchant criticisms of the harm the ominous figure wreaks (Barusch 181-82; Charise 1-3). The comparison implies that baby boomers ride a wave of potential disability that will swamp younger generations who wait on the shore, never having had the security, opportunities, and freedom of the seniors who now threaten to rain down upon them. The sustained use of the metaphor promotes the idea that population aging results solely in greater numbers of so-called frail older people who require health supports and levels of care that will be costly to younger generations, while it ignores myriad other ways that an aging population might be figured.

Amid this already panicked popular discourse, dementia encapsulates the worst way to grow old, a monster under the bed that reassures those who do not experience it that they are perhaps not old after all (Chivers, *Silvering Screen* 21, 35). Mainstream and alternative media as well as policy and public commentary consistently depict "succumbing" to dementia as a moral failure on the part of the state, the family, and the individual. Dementia is the ultimate symbol of that failure not only because of the pressures of memory loss but also because it represents an economic, social, and cultural burden (Medina, *Cinematic Representations* 18). Magazines, op-eds, popular science, and policy commodify and prescribe Fitbits, volunteering, Sudokus, green tea, regular naps, and meditation, emphasizing preventative measures whose efficacy is uncertain and available only to those who can afford such

activities and products. Alongside prevention, the predictable yet currently unfeasible goal of cure dominates the public record, leaving little room for the more salient but more costly question of care, let alone the broader questions of what it means for a population to age.

Drawing on critical age studies that, as Stephen Katz explains it, "critique the practices by which current forms of knowledge and power about aging have assumed their authority as a form of truth" (22), I offer a close reading of David Chariandy's twenty-first century debut novel *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting* to show how literature can broaden the figurative landscape that dominates popular discourse about an aging population. Literature like *Soucouyant* that features dementia offers an (often untapped) opportunity to reorient the popular imagination away from medicalized fixations on an elusive cure and social preoccupations with overwhelming economic implications of care towards transformations in meaning, value, and the self. It frequently does so by focusing on what memory means to identity, society, and culture. Relatively rare among dominantly white depictions and considerations of dementia, *Soucouyant* challenges the assumption that being able to remember is inherently valuable. The novel raises questions about how cultural memory combines with illness to affect care relations, especially among groups who are expected to do care work rather than receive care. Chariandy's novel shows that dementia is about more than simply memory loss, and it also demonstrates the necessity to contextualize memory. As such, the novel offers a means to bring dementia and aging into critical multicultural, race, and diaspora studies as well as to bring central contributions from those fields into age studies.

Soucouyant's narrator returns home to Scarborough, a scenic and storied suburb of Toronto, ostensibly to care for his mother, Adele, a Trinidadian Canadian woman with early-onset dementia,[1] whom he had abandoned two years prior despite knowing about her condition. Upon his arrival, he concocts fictions—"guilty stories"—to make sense both of his return and of what he perceives upon returning (125). The guilty stories on which the novel relies are at the same time compelling and telling of the deep need to reorient how we write and think about care for an aging population, especially since they challenge dominant assumptions that valorize memory as well as risk obscuring the ongoing care work performed by Adele's friend Mrs. Christopher. Chariandy adds to these guilty stories Mrs. Christopher's detailed accounting of her time and work over decades, something she knows about better than most because she came to Canada, like Adele,

through the West Indian Domestic scheme that granted eligibility for permanent residency after one year of service. Thus, my critical age studies reading of *Soucouyant* illuminates what the humanities might bring to reimagining the political economy of aging, reliant as it is on an inequitable global flow of labour. This approach surfaces the tensions that arise when unrecognized care contributions are taken into account to address the oft-ignored question of who cares for the racialized caregiver.

Literary Perspectives on Aging and Dementia

Novels that feature older characters often adopt an intergenerational mode of storytelling, typically as a way to articulate not only familial relations but also care relationships (Chivers, *From Old Woman* 33-78). The youngest generation appears to have more reason to hope and panic about the future, as well as the most to benefit from care choices made for the older family members. Those older family members represent cultural heritage and a treasure trove of family stories that connect the younger generation to a past that threatens to slip away with their memories. The middle generation tends to be angry, distant, and, at best, wracked with guilt about the care choices they make for and with their parents. Especially in so-called multicultural novels published in a Canadian context since the 1980s (such as *Obasan*, *Tamarind Mem*, *The Jade Peony*), the oldest characters often symbolize the home country left behind. These characters contribute to the plot as ciphers of identity and authenticity for the future generations. The younger people endeavour to gather stories from the failing seniors while they can, in order to remain connected to a past that risks fading away from memory.

Fictional characters with dementia are not always particularly old; in fact, the texts in which they feature tend to focus on the enhanced tragedy of early-onset dementia such as that experienced by Adele. This pattern exaggerates the expression of loss associated with dementia. In memoir, fiction, and cinema, often not only a relatively young person develops dementia but also a person with an especially bright mind, such as Iris Murdoch or Alice Howland. Chronological age aside, characters with dementia have a condition (often an illness) that typically comes later in life and that threatens the central thing for which social and cultural texts encourage audiences to value older adults, the way that they connect younger generations to a familial past. As such, people with dementia come to stand for unsuccessful aging so as to amplify by contrast the normative figure of the successful ager who puts pressure on others to conform to an

impossible standard.[2] People with dementia appear in the popular record as costly, useless, embarrassing, and, most poignantly, at risk of losing the capacity to connect family members with their past. Their chief potential value in the commodified system, as containers of cultural knowledge, slips away along with their apparent capacity to narrate in the expected language and genres.

Literary formulations repeatedly frame dementia as horror and, in the process, they emphasize the divide between generations that motivates the tsunami metaphor mentioned above.[3] Even when not overtly deploying horror, these formulations frequently traffic in the exploitable idea of a classic unreliable narrator (such as in Mordecai Richler's *Barney's Version* and Emma Healey's *Elizabeth Is Missing*) along with the comic potential of the senile old fool (such as in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori*). They also consider the potential loss associated with dementia to be of family and cultural history, such as in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, while the gain is in what material goods an older character with dementia leaves to the next generation, a theme treated humorously in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* as well as in Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn*. Dementia plots frequently indulge in gothic tropes, as Marlene Goldman argues, offering the examples of the fall of the older woman, uncanny doubling, and the monstrous feminine as depicted in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* and Michael Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue* as well as Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* ("Purging" 69-88). Such stories amplify what Margaret Morganroth Gullette is most famous for identifying as master narratives of decline. But they have the potential to do much more (Chivers, *From Old Woman* xvi), including adding to the popular imagination of what late life entails and who is entitled to good care so that dementia symbolizes something other than failure. The aforementioned titles offer intriguing ways to think about dementia as rife with narrative potential, but they also paint a telling picture of the whiteness that continues to dominate age studies.

Literature offers the means to reimagine what population aging might signify globally, especially if accompanied by increasing rates of dementia. As Hannah Zeilig explains, "[i]nsights from literature are truly insightful . . . where the author and her/his work are contextualised properly, when their depiction and representation of age are interrogated rather than accepted and when they are understood as one in a number of cultural discourses" (29). Contextualizing *Soucouyant* includes considering racialized flows of labour migration, Canadian multicultural policy, and twenty-first-century

population aging as underpinning the dominant age ideologies it refuses to perpetuate. As I have argued elsewhere, literature holds the potential "for theorizing old age because of its capacity to work with vivid individual examples that remain individual while relevant to a wide range of experiences" (*From Old Woman* xxxviii). As such, literary gerontology "can balance social and cultural narratives of aging with the physical dimensions of aging to develop rich models for new understandings of late life," particularly necessary when unpacking the symbolic resonances of dementia in narrative, those that make it resonate as the worst possible way to grow old (*From Old Woman* xxxvii). Anne Davis Basting pushes this further, claiming that "understanding the depiction of the self in the crisis of Alzheimer's can also teach us the meaning and value of the 'whole' self. Exactly how does one achieve a 'self'? Who are we without memory? Is a 'self' possible when the ability to construct narrative through memory is broken?" (88). I return this idea to the question of care by considering how *Soucouyant* expands assumptions about care relations to reveal the oft-ignored perspective of the racialized caregiver who comes to require care. What is more, my analysis brings out of the margins of social gerontology into the purview of literary gerontology the role friends such as Mrs. Christopher play in care networks.

Dementia in *Soucouyant*

Soucouyant charts dementia as literal as well as figurative. In the novel, dementia is not primarily a medical issue, and the central characters subtly reject the institutional logic of the Canadian health care system, a logic which also makes no space for their full experience. As symptoms of memory loss begin to appear, Adele and her husband, Roger, doubt but tolerate the Western medical tradition. As the narrator explains:

> Both Mother and Father didn't want any more scans or questionnaires. They were suspicious about the diagnostic tests which always seemed to presume meanings and circumstances which were never wholly familiar to them in the first place. They were especially suspicious about medical institutions and offices. The scissors and hooks which certainly lurked in those antiseptic spaces. The bloody and jaggedly-sewn cures. Patients' heads opened up and then roughly laced back like old washekongs. (39)

As Adele's memory transforms, she starts to mumble references to a traditional healer who laid cobwebs on burns. She also remembers what remedies went with what ailments in Trinidad. Although he mentions healing (35, 181, 182, 193), Chariandy never poses it as a way to cure or even alleviate the

symptoms that cause Adele's family discomfort to the extent that they each abandon her in their own ways. The focus remains on Adele's humanity, symbolized by what the narrator's parents perceive to be the ontological failure of the doctors, hospitals, and tests: "[m]y parents never felt satisfied with how the medical specialists were articulating Mother's new being" (40).

More than synapses, plaques, tangles, and infections, the novel draws on the soucouyant figure to present the cause of Adele's dementia as trauma and cultural pain (Goldman, *Forgotten* 324-27). When the narrator of *Soucouyant* explains his mother's behaviour to a police officer, he offers a rare explicit mention of dementia:

> "She has presenile or early-onset dementia."
> "Dementia," he repeats as he writes.
> "Dementia?" asks Mother, softly.
> "It means that she's forgetting," I explain, "or that she's confused, or even . . . even that she's remembering. . . ."
> "Thank you, sir. I know what dementia is. Well, I guess that's about it for now."
> "Wait," I say, "I should explain. . . ."
> "Yes?"
> "She . . . she saw a soucouyant." (65-6)

Whereas for the police officer, dementia signifies symptoms and a rote response, for the narrator, dementia is about cultural memory, monsters, stories, and memory changes that include new forms of remembering. Rather than separating her from a cultural context she can no longer remember, Adele's memory loss launches her back into an agonizing tale of colonial violence, dislocation, and racism.

The "Soucouyant" and Dementia

How dementia is figured and understood affects care. Chariandy's novel ties dementia to Adele seeing a soucouyant, forgetting seeing the soucouyant, and then *forgetting to forget* having seen the soucouyant, all of which pertain to who takes care of Adele as her symptoms of dementia increase. Chariandy embeds an explanation of this figure into the text of the novel, pedagogically guiding readers not familiar with the cultural context he investigates:

> A SOUCOUYANT is something like a female vampire. She lives a reclusive but fairly ordinary life on the edge of town. She disguises herself by dressing up in the skin of an old woman, but at night she'll shed her disguise and travel across the sky as a ball of fire. She'll hunt out a victim and suck his blood as he sleeps, leaving him with little sign of her work except increasing fatigue, a certain paleness, and perhaps, if he were to look closely on his body, a tell-tale bruise or mark on his skin. (135)

This layered liminal figure is an old woman, monster, and shape-shifter who feeds on others and leaves them drained but unaware. Daniel Coleman demonstrates how "soucouyant stories are inventions that can be explained in rationalistic terms: soucouyants are scapegoats of people who fear or despise elderly women, and the legend of their bloodsucking power rationalizes people's desire for their lands and property" (62). The novel teases out a connection between dementia and the soucouyant, suggesting a comparison between the effects of dementia and of this monster that also pertains to rationalizing fear.

The monstrosity of the soucouyant surrounds dementia but is not attributed to it. Instead, the soucouyant remains enigmatic throughout the eponymous novel. For example, each chapter begins with puzzling handwritten letters, initially a backwards letter "s," then the letters "s" and "o" struck through, and then the letters "s" and "u" (7). Each chapter heading adds another piece to the word that stretches to "soucouyan" by the final chapter (173). These scrawlings mirror the gradual unveiling of the soucouyant as a figure that helps explain the context for Adele's memories and memory loss. Similar to these scrawls, early in the novel, the monster appears in the fragments that the narrator hears Adele tell herself: "'Soucouyant,' Mother said aloud to herself one day. 'I saw one in the morning. A morning thick with burnt light. I walking a narrow path of dirt, you see, my ankles painted cool by wet grasses'" (23). Building on such fragments, the most full and literal evocation of the soucouyant comes towards the end of the novel in a scene that portrays more fully a pivotal moment from Adele's youth. The soucouyant is evoked through the inhumane effects of a traumatic fire, caused when Adele's mother—attempting to protect Adele—goes to the military base at Chaguaramas to confront American soldiers who had engaged her for sex work in Carenage. A soldier douses Adele and her mother in gasoline, and young Adele, wanting to flee her frenzied mother, ignites her mother's clothing, accidentally turning her into a "ball of fire" like the soucouyant. This manifestation of the soucouyant figure is what Adele continues to struggle to forget she saw.

Hints of this traumatic story appear early in the novel, when as a result of her dementia Adele no longer suppresses the memory of when her mother "wore a dress of fire before it go ruin her" (24). The narrator remembers perceiving his grandmother (Adele's mother), whom he met during a childhood trip to Carenage, as a monster because of the burn scars that remain: "She was a monster. Someone with a hide, red-cracked eyes, and blistered hands. Someone who would claw her stiffened thumb across her

eyes and try to smile through the ruin of her mouth" (116). But although Adele describes her mother ablaze as a soucouyant, and although the narrator describes his grandmother as monstrous, the novel does not allow readers to settle on her as the sole soucouyant figure.

Decades later in Canada, Adele's burn scars hint at the suppressed story of the fire, the one that Adele is beginning to forget to forget. With the first appearance of a scar comes Adele's first explicit mention of Chaguaramas. The narrator describes the "lacy roughness" of a scar on Adele's chin as "a braille, it told a story" (24). The next time Adele fingers her scar, the narrator picks up the "lacy script," recounting a condensed version of what she had told him about falling on a sharp object as she turned to help her mother (35). This chin scar seems to unite the narrator with his mother, but when Adele's wig slips to reveal "glistening pink skin infected with purple and brown. The corrugations and whorls like an organ exposed to the air," the narrator freezes (122). The chin scar invites the story of Adele's attempt to escape from the traumatic blaze, but when Adele's burn scars show that Adele too was momentarily ablaze, like a soucouyant, the storytelling momentarily ceases. These corporeal marks situate both Adele and her mother as monstrous not because of the societal costs of dementia that motivate current ageist popular discourse but because of the dangerous memories that begin to unfurl when scars surface.

The novel draws on the soucouyant figure not only to track Adele's memory shifts but also to trace colonial legacies of trauma that pressure characters in contemporary Canada to force forgetting and to tolerate painful but less physical forms of racist violence. For Jennifer Delisle, "The soucouyant is a symbol of both personal and cultural memories, a vampiric force that is both frightening and compelling, and that cannot be escaped" (6). In reading the soucouyant as a figure related to but not representative of dementia, I consider not only memory and memory loss but also the care relations that develop among those who are compelled to both remember and forget. Those who care for Adele need to understand what she means when she says or cannot quite say that she saw a soucouyant, especially as they learn that the soucouyant is inescapable.

"A bruise still tender"

In addition to conjuring dementia, memory, and memory loss, the vampiric soucouyant figure summons the monstrous effects of generations of unfairness and injustice that span countries and centuries. The soucouyant links the US

invasion of Trinidad in the form of a military base at Chaguaramas and the related expulsion of "many blacks and South Asians [who] had been living on the Chaguaramas peninsula for generations" with the racist immigration policy that makes Adele's residence in Canada dependent on undervalued care work (Chariandy 178). The figure connects those layers of colonization and dislocation to the everyday racism experienced by her family members and neighbours in Canada who try to take on care roles, each in their own bumbling insufficient way. As the narrator explains, "[d]uring our lives, we struggle to forget. And it's foolish to assume that forgetting is altogether a bad thing. Memory is a bruise still tender. History is a rusted pile of blades and manacles. And forgetting can sometimes be the most creative and life-sustaining thing we can ever hope to accomplish" (32).

Throughout *Soucouyant*, bruises signify the insidious diasporic effects of the colonial violence that created the conditions that allowed for the blaze that caused Adele's and her mother's scars. Bruises begin to appear on the first page of *Soucouyant*, with what at first seems simply to be an apt description of the "bruised evening sky" in Scarborough, which puzzles the "old woman" Adele has become (7). As the bruises accumulate, to characterize the narrator's brother (16) as well as to signify racialized violence in Canada (49) and Trinidad (184), it becomes clearer that even those marks on the sky are the "tell-tale bruise[s] or mark[s]" (135) that signal an encounter with the soucouyant who haunts Scarborough as she haunted Carenage. The "mysterious bruise" the narrator discovers as he dresses for Adele's funeral connects him with the traumatic events in Chaguaramas in that it signifies the passing of a soucouyant (141).

The bruises also embed the narrator within care relationships Adele has forged in Canada, such as with Bohdan, a young autistic boy she cared for without charging his family, and Meera, a neighbour who has mysteriously moved in seemingly to care for Adele. Both Bohdan and Meera gaze at the mysterious "dark brown egg" that appears on the narrator's forehead on the day of Adele's funeral as though she has passed it on to him (143, 151, 141). Like the soucouyant figure, the origins of these bruises are at times certain and at other times mysterious. They imply not only the passing of the soucouyant but also the fashioning of care relationships. Bruises mark the characters Adele cares for—the narrator, the narrator's brother, Bohdan, and, more obliquely, Meera—so that the novel's compelling oft-quoted reference to memory as a "bruise still tender" insinuates how care relations are enmeshed in cultural memory (32).

As indicated by its subtitle, "a novel of forgetting," rather than offering a dementia narrative about the importance of preserving memory, *Soucouyant* explores the value of forgetting, especially how forgetting abets survival: "forgetting can sometimes be the most creative and life-sustaining thing we can ever hope to accomplish" (32). Rather than situate memory *loss* as shameful, the narrator figures memory itself as a carpet stain, a shameful thing that can almost be hidden but never quite removed (14). As Adele's grip on planned forgetting loosens, some memories dissipate, as is typical in such stories, but other memories—long stifled—creep back in, specifically the memories of internalized colonial violence that have resulted from and in familial trauma. The narrator reluctantly learns about this dislocated past through his mother's lapses *from* forgetfulness rather than lapses *into* forgetfulness. For example, "[Adele] might be standing near the kitchen window, looking out over the rippled granite of the waters, when a word would slip from her mind and pronounce itself upon her lips. 'Carenage,' she might say, almost surprised that she had done so" (22). Dementia ironically draws him into the valuable cultural memories his mother embodies at the same time as it changes the care relationship with his mother. The novel is about, as the narrator puts it, "What . . . you do with a person who one day empties her mind into the sky" (39). That is, it is about how you care for someone with dementia while taking into account cultural and historical contexts that also implicate you.

"No ghosts here"?

In narrating dementia, then, *Soucouyant* does not centre Western medicine but focuses instead on legacies of racism and traumatic memory tied to global circuits of care work. As a second-generation Canadian, Chariandy has spoken about how he was nervous about appropriating the soucouyant figure (Dobson and Chariandy 810). He uses his novel to argue that the figure can inhabit Canadian space. Poet Earle Birney famously writes, "[i]t's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted" (18). When Adele refers to an autistic boy she has seen other kids tormenting as "a ghost," the narrator chides her: "Don't be silly, Mother. There are no ghosts here" (113). Chariandy's wry projection indicates he has deliberately placed the novel in relation to a colonial CanLit tradition that imagines Canada to be a blank space, while injecting it with spectral forces from outside Canada. The novel is partly about challenging the myth of widely inclusive Canadian multiculturalism—showing that having an official governmental policy of multiculturalism doesn't lead to widespread feelings of belonging. As Chariandy explains in an interview with Kit Dobson,

> I wanted my title to suggest that the protagonist of the novel, a second-generation Caribbean immigrant based in Canada, was engaging with a cultural legacy that seemed, at least on the surface, to be attached to a very different space, a legacy that seemed, at times, to be remote, otherworldly, and spectral, and yet hauntingly present at the same time. The soucouyant functioned for me as a means to explore the language and "ghosts" of precisely such a "remote" cultural legacy. (811)

The soucouyant is both spectre and representative of a cultural heritage that Chariandy evokes to convey "a particular state of sensing but not really knowing one's origins" (811). For Chariandy, then, the soucouyant is about both "generational identity and cultural dilemma," connecting dementia to those key elements more than to biomedical contexts (810).

The surfacing memories that ironically accompany Adele's dementia connect the racism the narrator and his family experience in Canada with the legacies of slavery and effects of US imperialism more directly experienced by his parents. Adele's condition manifests as one more way she does not fit into a community that was meant to offer great hope and opportunity but has never delivered. While she had experienced vituperative racism based on white Canadians' interpretation of her appearance such as when she was asked to leave a restaurant or when squatters smeared feces on her apartment wall in letters that spelled out "Go Back" (50, 77), now her dementia offers strangers a means to explain away differences. When Adele slips out to join a Heritage Day parade, the narrator panics to find his mother mid-parade wearing only shoes, pantyhose, multiple pairs of underwear, and a bra. Echoing the previous scene where people react to Adele's incongruous presence in the restaurant, other people at the parade stop, stare, and whisper. But unlike in the restaurant, this time no one voices racist disdain to her, and a kindly older couple guides her home, where the narrator stands frozen. This time, now that symptoms of dementia are so publicly revealed, the crowd saves its racist assumptions and remarks for the narrator: "My god, what's he waiting for . . ." and "Have you noticed them? . . . The boys? They're *always* like that. They're always shrinking away and skulking about. They never meet your eyes . . ." (62) and "his *mother*, for god's sake. And he just *stands* there. I mean, what kind of people are we allowing to live here anyway" (62). The racist assumptions shift from what Adele ought to be and where she ought to go to what her son ought to be doing for her, now that her dementia means that she is the one who requires care rather than the one hired to do care work.

Guilty Stories

Soucouyant is at least as much about the narrator's "guilty stories" about his mother's care as it is about Adele's struggles to remember to forget her childhood guilty story. Adele's condition had offered him and his brother "special freedom" as teenagers, so that they could skip school and leave town without surveillance and almost without guilt (15). Now, the narrator repeatedly assumes that a woman around his age, Meera, who has moved into his mother's house during his absence, is a nurse (10, 33, 53, 55, 65). Indeed, Meera cares for Adele—massaging her, feeding her, putting her to bed, and knowing her movements, preferences, desires, and fears. When the narrator confronts Meera with "'[y]ou're not a qualified nurse at all. You're just studying economics or something . . .'" (124-25), she reveals his deeply lacking interpretive skills, retorting "I never once said I was a nurse. That was you. Your own convenient belief. Your own guilty story" (125).

The guilty stories about the people who surround his mother gradually transform into, generously speaking, poor interpretations. Those interpretations are based on the narrator's vested interest in believing that though he left Adele to fend for herself, he had not abandoned her. Curiously, they arise from his perception that despite his absence he is somehow her central caregiver. Through such misreadings, Chariandy refutes the idea that care for ill older family members is a largely economic burden. The narrator needs these guilty stories as he unknits past tales of trauma, dislocation, racism, and family horror, not in order to get back to being a productive member of neo-liberal society but to assure himself he was justified in his departure and is equally justified in his return.

Meera has her own guilty story that draws her into a care relationship with Adele. For the narrator and Meera, Canada has always felt like a land of not fitting in and of oppression rather than a land of hope and promise, as it had at times been for Adele initially, and as Meera's mother, Antoinette, stridently insists it can be for her daughter. Meera shares with the narrator and Adele a history of enduring racist abuse within their suburban neighbourhood. As a child, Meera joined neighbourhood kids in making crank phone calls to Adele, who they referred to as "the wandering lady" (157). For the most part, her calls were mild, making Adele unwittingly repeat puns about "Hugh Jazz" (25), "Oliver Clothesoff," and "I.P. Freely" (160). Meera even yearns for a connection, asking Adele questions "motivated by something approaching simple curiosity. Maybe even care" (160). But when Meera's graduating classmates exhibit their deep racism, she passes her rage onto

Adele, this time demonstratively crank calling her to tell a cruel story about an accident involving her family, with "charred flesh and guts that spilled like rope," unwittingly tapping into Adele's past trauma to the horror even of each "white-shocked face" of her peers (165, 166).

Unlike her mother, who persists in perpetuating the "immigrant success story" she has managed to construct, Meera resists the hopeful trajectory her university scholarship promises, choosing instead to move in to care for Adele (155). Meera's move also builds on deeper connections forged during Meera's youth when she had chosen Adele as a target onto which to ricochet her own experience of being othered. Meera escapes the pressures of the future, flunking out of college, by retreating to help Adele whom she has in the past persecuted, finding a place to live, read, and form care relationships that connect her to a cultural past her assimilated mother refuses to remember.

"Man can't take care of you"

The narrator does not learn much from his bumbling misreading of Meera's role, moving on to damagingly misinterpret the position of Adele's friend Mrs. Christopher, his "Mother's best friend for as long as [he] can remember" (86). They had been young domestic workers together in the 1960s, but she is introduced in the novel as a moody older woman, with a key to Adele's house, a keen knowledge of the care involved, and a poor opinion of the narrator. She describes Adele's condition to the narrator as "[s]he losing herself. She going she own way," showing that, unlike the medical system, Mrs. Christopher works to articulate Adele's "new being" (131, 40). The narrator is aware of one story about their past when the two young unmarried domestic workers went on a reckless road trip, momentarily free of the unfair systems that governed their existence as domestic workers. Mrs. Christopher—so named even though she has never married—prophetically cautions Adele against stopping to pick up a man, saying, "'[y]ou too foolish to know. Man can't take care of you. Friends, husbands, son, they all the same. They does leave you'" (90). Indeed, Adele's son yearns to tell Mrs. Christopher that he too is losing himself and going his own way. He is on the verge of telling her that he is going to leave Adele to her care yet again, assuming he can buy Mrs. Christopher off with compliments about "the strength of the black women of her generation" and money (132).

Adele dies before he can make that misstep, but motivated to recognize their long friendship, the narrator arrives on Mrs. Christopher's doorstep with what he believes to be a magnanimous offer of $10,000 from the sale of Adele's

house. To his astonishment, Mrs. Christopher has a balance sheet of her own that calculates the costs of the care work she has provided over the years:

> "In-home care at standard wages for 254 weeks." (The hours of each week here written most carefully in different coloured inks.)
>
> "General living costs for patient." (Also broken down weekly.) "Monies earmarked and available to be drawn out of Adele's bank account on a monthly basis for precisely these services and necessities." And finally, "Payment Owing." I'm looking here at the figure: $100,344.10. She's actually included the ten cents. And this is just the latest subtotal. (147-48)

Mrs. Christopher knows the value and costs of care, having been part of the West Indian Domestic care worker scheme with Adele. Both the women's opportunities to come to Canada were based on a racialized trafficking of labour that continues to this day and upon which multiple care systems rely, as Mrs. Christopher's ledger sheet attests.

Through the final exchange between the narrator and Mrs. Christopher, Chariandy challenges the familiar story of generational unfairness which recounts that older people are stealing opportunities from future generations. Of Mrs. Christopher, the narrator opines, "there's obviously no such thing as fairness in this world or any hope of reasoning with that whole idiotic generation before me" (149). But Mrs. Christopher is not only a friend as well as the only person who never abandons Adele; she also understands the value and devaluing of her seemingly invisible labour and mocks the narrator's feeble effort at restitution. As Camille van der Marel explains it, "[Mrs. Christopher] also keeps a larger tab, one that records not only the care required by an individual losing her memory but her own memories of exploitation and discrimination" (22). Mrs. Christopher disallows the narrator and readers to invest in the guilty fiction that the narrator's care is paramount or even adequate. While he imagines he would need to remind her to watch out for Adele's toenails, Mrs. Christopher has consistently cared for Adele but also knows her well enough to be the one to arrange her funeral and give the eulogy. She has done so out of friendship, based on their joint histories of exploitative and discriminatory labour migration. As such and for Adele as well as herself, Mrs. Christopher will not abide and can no longer afford guilty stories.

Conclusion

Adele and Mrs. Christopher's friendship fortifies the novel's representation of dementia as about more than a loss of family memories. The anguish throughout *Soucouyant* arises not from dementia but from dislocation and a racism that follows Adele from Carenage to Scarborough. The soucouyant figure signifies

colonialism and dementia as doubly haunting, so that the marks she leaves—the scars and the bruises—mark relationships that link racism with dementia. They signify the marks people make on each other, some lasting and some fleeting yet tender. Mrs. Christopher doesn't see the soucouyant, doesn't talk about the soucouyant, and is the one significant character who does not manifest bruises or scars. She is also the character who knows and performs care work for Adele, consistently if invisibly and without pause.

Soucouyant questions the apparent monstrosity of memory loss as well as the dominant popular focus on cure in its thoroughgoing exploration of the relational selves that emerge through long-term care. The novel thus exposes the myriad underlying tensions of care systems, revealing their cultural specificity that often passes as neutrality. Evoking the soucouyant figure, the "novel of forgetting" contextualizes the imperative to preserve memory as a sign of humanity within an intergenerational diasporic tale of dislocation, trauma, and care. It shows that *when* dementia is about memory, memory itself must be contextualized. As Goldman puts it, "[r]ather than portray dementia as an isolated biomedical disease, *Soucouyant* represents pathological forgetting within the larger social context of the gendered and racialized, traumatic history of the Afro-Indian diaspora" (*Forgotten* 326). *Soucouyant* imaginatively articulates the values and risks of what Anne Basting refers to as forgetting memory and the privilege associated with being able to do so.

But the "novel of forgetting" is not only about forgetting to forget. It also offers an astute reckoning with the contemporaneous political economy of care. Not about purchasing products or commodifying dementia, the novel might appear to skirt the circuits of capital associated with population aging that lead to women like Adele and Mrs. Christopher continually contributing much needed, undervalued care work. Aging in this novel is not *reduced* to the economy, but Adele's place within the care economy affects how she is able to age and ail compared with the relatively wealthy white people who dominate popular stories about dementia. The novel investigates care relations, but it uniquely does so without ignoring the bottom line that someone always has to be there to do the gritty bed and body work of care.

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NOTES

1 As I discuss below, the novel does not go beyond dementia as a diagnostic category, participating arguably in a broader popular slippage among forms of dementias associated with late life such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Lewy Body.
2 For a critical perspective on the concept of successful aging, see Katz and Calasanti.
3 To read more about the effects of literary framings of dementia, see Chivers, "Seeing the Apricot"; Falcus; Medina, "From the Medicalisation"; Sako and Falcus; Swinnen; Swinnen and Schweda; Zeilig.

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Adrian De Leon

I, Wound

before the cock coaxed iron
cage entreating for release
our noses prodded at the gap for air.
mouth on mouth. two chalices as wet as
christ.
four tendrils groping at
the scrappy slivers
of salvation,
little caves of secret warmth,
clinging to our late-night cotton like desperate
dew.
your knuckles wiped the evidence,
my tongue flitted against the last of it cradled
on your sinuses, bringing white fisher boy
home down the dreaming moon.

Two Takes on *Jonny Appleseed*

"But there were tender stories too": Economies of Care

Joshua Whitehead
Jonny Appleseed. Arsenal Pulp $17.95

Reviewed by Dallas Hunt

Towards the end of Joshua Whitehead's Giller Prize-longlisted debut novel, *Jonny Appleseed*, the eponymous character's mother has a dream wherein she and Jonny are fishing, surrounded by slightly sneering, masculinist members of an Indigenous community. In response, Jonny and his kin continue to fish, ignoring these men (and the harmful imaginaries they embody and perpetuate), eventually catching enough fish to feed an entire community. This moment, as well as several others in the novel, are scenes wherein tender economies of care are exhibited by and between different characters, and in this way contest the violent logics of settler colonialism, the gender binary, and heteropatriarchy that structure the lives of Indigenous peoples in the text.

Much of the book centres on Jonny and the women in his life—his kôhkom, his mother, the ever-resourceful Peggy, and his friend Jordan—as well as Tias, Jonny's primary source of queer longing, love, and desire in the novel. These characters and their interactions with Jonny are governed by everyday economies of being in relation to one another—whether that's bumming or gifting a cigarette, preparing a home-cooked meal of Mennonite meatballs from an intergenerational recipe, or dining and dashing in joyful glee—and they exhibit the ways Indigenous peoples "get on" in the world, within and against environments that have tried to eliminate Indigenous communities in rural/reserve/urban geographies for centuries. Whitehead's sketches of these relational obligations stand in contrast to the prohibiting and censoring modes of being embodied by the Indigenous men who fish in Jonny's mother's dream. Whitehead thus depicts the ways Indigenous peoples can be in kinship with one another in a good way, in a way that potentially supersedes, troubles, or comes into conflict with the dominant modes of politics and governance that proliferate within (some) Indigenous communities (which is to say, the masculinist acts and mentalities that centre men and their primacy "on the land").

Ultimately, Whitehead conjures a world, a literary landscape wherein the characters in his text circulate and operate within these everyday economies of care for one another, oftentimes because or in spite of the "home[s] that squeezed the queer right out of [their] languages." Whitehead generously and generatively furnishes a new home for these characters to thrive in, a home wherein our languages are wonderfully and crucially queer and queered, and a home that can house all of our relations without subjecting them totally to the violent logics of settler-colonial cis-heteropatriarchy. *Jonny Appleseed* is an indispensable read for

not only Indigenous peoples but Indigenous communities as well, one that makes room for the "tender stories" of care and relation between queer, Two-Spirit, and Indigenous women characters. kinanâskomitin to Josh for this gift.

A Decolonial Love Story

Joshua Whitehead
Jonny Appleseed. Arsenal Pulp $17.95

Reviewed by Amei-lee Laboucan and Jennifer Hardwick

Joshua Whitehead's debut novel, *Jonny Appleseed*, is a story of decolonial love in a colonized world. Jonny is a Two-Spirit Indigiqueer "glitter princess" preparing to travel back home to his mother after her husband dies. In the week leading up to his journey, Jonny alternates between joy, love, grief, and rage as he reflects on family, growing up on the rez, personal and collective trauma, and leaving home to chase dreams and desires in Winnipeg.

Among *Jonny Appleseed*'s many gifts is the way its characters defy colonial stereotypes and validate the experiences of Indigenous youth. The story will resonate with readers who, like Jonny, grew up eating "beef stock and canned tomato soup and huge chunks of hamburger" and know what it is like to scroll through "a million posts about missing girls" on Facebook.

Whitehead writes with candour and humour about love, lust, sex, and fetishization in a world mediated by smartphones and dating apps. Jonny uses modern technology to facilitate sex work, allowing lonely men to fetishize his culture as a quick cash grab to get back to the woman who needs him most—his mother. Jonny's work and love life—punctuated by text messages that are "as powerful a slap as slamming down the landline" and apps that make arranging rendezvous easy—emphasize the ways his identity is cultivated through interplays of technology, the colonial gaze, and personal agency.

Kinship is central to Jonny's life. His love triangle with his best friend and lover, Tias, and Tias' girlfriend, Jordan, highlights the expansive and complex nature of intimacy. Although Jonny has come out to his family, he feels "a wave of shame" whenever he is associated with being Two-Spirit, and he and Tias keep their relationship a secret. Despite this, they share a deep love built through the unveiling and healing of traumas. This connection is not lost on Jonny, who notes that "an NDN 'love you' sounds more like, 'I'm in pain with you.'" Although he is intensely jealous of her, Jonny also comes to love Jordan for her fierce acceptance and protection of those close to her.

It is not unusual for Jonny to find protection and love from the women in his life. He has unwavering love for the matriarchs in his family, indomitable women who guide their kin "on their way back home" and accept Jonny for who he is. Nearly all of Jonny's memories contain a lesson from his mom, his Kôkum, or his aunt. These lessons and Jonny's love for Tias form the heart of the book.

Jonny Appleseed puts a spotlight on trauma, racism, sexism, and the effects of homophobia on Indigenous bodies, minds, and hearts. Jonny and his kin bear the grief of child apprehension, rely on passing skin tones to stay safe, and find everyday tasks such as catching a cab impeded by racism. However, at its core, the novel is about the strength of Indigenous kinship. Wise and funny, relatable and revolutionary, *Jonny Appleseed* is a much-needed novel that captures the violence of colonization and celebrates the power of decolonial love.

Cultivating the Game

Angie Abdou and Jamie Dopp, eds.
Writing the Body in Motion: A Critical Anthology on Canadian Sport Literature.
Athabasca UP $34.99

Reviewed by Suzanne Zelazo

> Sport, like art, is about potential and possibility, dreaming and doing what it takes to shape that dream into reality.
> —Priscila Uppal, *Winter Sport*

In their collection of essays on Canadian sport literature, editors Angie Abdou and Jamie Dopp navigate the very potentiality and possibility the late Priscila Uppal was referring to in her own attempts to tease out the interstice of sport and literature. Beyond the important (if fairly obvious) conceptualization of sport as a metaphor for human experience, a critical engagement with the ways sport is itself a language is still very much underexplored. What Uppal was after, and Abdou and Dopp are cultivating, is a *conversation* between seemingly disparate disciplines of sensory experimentation.

Still an emergent area of study, sport literature has much to teach us about the somatics of our socio-cultural expressivity. *Writing the Body in Motion* reflects the bias in Canadian sport literature towards hockey versus other sports, and although the editors explain their attempts to diversify the collection, five of the eleven essays are hockey related. The replication of this bias is, however, important for understanding the critical genealogy, particularly for readers new to the field. Yet, the essays on hockey offer something original. Take, for example, Sam McKegney and Trevor J. Phillips' "Decolonizing the Hockey Novel: Ambivalence and Apotheosis in Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*," a powerful consideration of the ways hockey is bound up with a very particular kind of national identity, underscoring, as the authors write, "how the contradictions embedded within public discourse on residential schooling are mirrored by those relating to the social function of hockey in Canadian culture."

Where they do seek to move outside the bias of dominant sports, the editors include two essays on women's swimming, as well as Laura K. Davis' consideration of Alexander MacLeod's "Miracle Mile," a short story about running, belonging, and identity-building. Elsewhere, Cory Willard's ecocritical investigation of Thomas Wharton's *Icefields* considers mountaineering as a means to transcending the self.

Whereas Abdou's own sport-based novel *The Bone Cage* to some extent creatively theorizes an embodied cognition of the athlete sensitizing her way through the world, *Writing the Body in Motion* could benefit from a stronger contextualizing apparatus. Nonetheless, the collection is an essential contribution to the field—one that activates our own sensory explorations, whereby the boundaries between self and other begin to erode and possibilities of connection arise. In amassing these essays, the editors ask a series of crucial questions: What does it mean to write a body in motion? In what ways does such writing narrativize identity, exploration, and consciousness? The answers are, of course, up to a new generation of scholars and thinkers. In the introduction, Abdou insists: "[W]e hope our book will move our conversation forward." It's certain they already have.

Finding the Correct Light

André Alexis
Days by Moonlight. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Paul Barrett

Small-town Ontario is not typically the first location that springs to mind when one thinks of lycanthropy, witchcraft, drug-fuelled hallucinations, and bar fights featuring live owls as projectile

weapons. Yet, André Alexis' *Days by Moonlight* reimagines a number of small Ontario towns as the sites of such activity. Eschewing the contemporary CanLit trend towards realist, dry narratives, Alexis' latest work offers a surreal, joyous, and playful adventure. Indeed, Alexis' closing "Note on the Text" dismisses contemporary expectations that Canadian writing lean towards the documentary, stating that this is "not a work of realism . . . but one that uses the real to show the imagination." Part sociological account of small-town Ontario life, parody of Canadian stereotypes of politeness, reflection on artistic life, love story, meditation on grief, and philosophical tract, *Days by Moonlight* finds Alexis' imagination in fine form.

Part five of Alexis' planned quincunx, *Days by Moonlight* fits nicely into the series: Father Pennant from the first novel, *Pastoral*, makes an appearance that will lead careful readers to reassess his earlier depiction. *Days* begins with botanist and illustrator Alfred Homer accompanying Professor Morgan Bruno on a trip in pursuit of a missing Canadian poet, John Skennan. Homer is mourning both the end of a relationship and the death of his parents and is, therefore, more than happy to join the Professor on his trip. Alexis revels in the differences between his two guiding characters: the Professor's love of language and his obliviousness to the realities of his world blend nicely with Homer's melancholic affect. The two care for one another in a way that makes this far more than just another buddy road narrative.

The places they visit may be familiar in name—Nobleton, New Tecumseth, East Gwillimbury, and others—yet Alexis' rendering transforms them into a Homeric odyssey. Or is it a Dantesque hellscape? Their pursuit sees them visit the "typically Canadian" Pioneer Days in Nobleton in which the locals donate a home to a local poor family, burn it down a year later, and allow the poor family to keep it only if they can save it from the fire. In Coulson's Hill, they witness an Indigenous Parade: a form of "symbolic restitution" in which people are invited to throw tomatoes at townspeople dressed as the Fathers of Confederation. In Schomberg, Black residents maintain a public code of silence to honour the racist silencing of their ancestors. As the journey progresses, the absurd gives way to the fantastical, including a return to a seemingly prelapsarian garden.

While the stated goal of their adventure is to track down Skennan, Bruno explains that they're really "looking for the *correct* light," the particular detail "that'll illuminate the work." Whether the focus of that light is Skennan, Canadian poetry, "what you could call a 'Canadian instinct,'" mourning and regret, or the enterprise of the imagination more generally, Alexis masterfully navigates the landscapes, interior and actual, of Alfred's journey.

Perhaps my only critique of the novel is that Alexis sometimes strains too far to accommodate the absurd and hilarious within the framework of a novel of ideas. A few rare moments find the characters acting as mouthpieces in philosophical debates, à la *Fifteen Dogs*, in a manner that detracts from their characterization. Yet these unconvincing sections of the text are minor. *Days by Moonlight* is an inspired, strange book that secures Alexis' place as one of Canada's most interesting writers. Where so much contemporary Canadian writing is sombre and humourless, Alexis' latest work will spin readers and critics alike who will be confounded trying to untangle parody from beauty from hilarity from insight.

More Life

Mike Barnes
Braille Rainbow. Biblioasis $19.95

Brenda Leifso
Wild Madder. Brick $20.00

Shane Neilson
New Brunswick. Biblioasis $17.95

Reviewed by Neil Surkan

New collections by mid-career writers Mike Barnes, Brenda Leifso, and Shane Neilson capture bewildering experiences of grief, upheaval, intimacy, and wonder, but differ in their treatments of form based on the poets who inspired them.

Opening Mike Barnes' *Braille Rainbow* feels like hang-gliding into a hurricane. Beginning with "Admission Suite"—a series of poems written in 1977 when he was a patient at St. Joseph's Hospital after being misdiagnosed with acute schizophrenia—the collection immediately lives up to its (fabulous) title by confounding the senses with "radical incoherence." Rife with illusions and ambiguities, "Admission Suite" hurls us into the turbulence of Barnes' past: in the poem "nightmare," for instance, the speaker ricochets between sedation and immense suffering as "the body" (which he notably does not refer to as *his* body)

> sends its prickling missive
> warning of the skin-web and the filth of the spider
> sitting hairy-legged where the hair was
> holding the head rigid preparing to suck
> the mouth an incredible jelly-bag of filth

Conversely, the rest of the collection rides in the eye of the storm. As might be expected from poems written years later, the disjunction between "Admission Suite" and the rest of *Braille Rainbow* is palpable. Barnes' turn to more meditative, balanced forms seems inspired, at least in part, by early Chinese poetry, of which he describes himself an avid reader. Even as Barnes writes about his mother's struggle with dementia, a sense of equanimity persists; in "Drinking Frappuccinos on a Dementia Ward," for instance—one of the most riveting, subtle, and moving poems in the entire collection—the speaker and his mother sit in "peace" while "sipping, being beyond / names."

Whereas the poems in *Braille Rainbow* span forty years, Brenda Leifso's *Wild Madder* begins in autumn and travels incrementally through months and seasons, with titles that linearly follow the calendar, as her speaker marks changes within herself and in the landscape of Kingston. Confessional and earnest, Leifso's poems interplay the tension between the set schedules and routines of domestic life—parenting, housekeeping, walking the dog—and the cycles of death and renewal she sees in the natural world. Inspired by Louise Glück, Jan Zwicky, Don McKay, and, most explicitly, her mentor Anne Simpson, Leifso often privileges careful observation of her environment, described with vivid metaphors: docks that "surrender like skeletons to grass," ice pellets "with the flash and certitude of salmon scales." And yet, much of the collection dramatizes the speaker's battle to overflow her "high-walled heart" as she endeavours to write "one fucking thing that's true / or calm or reads like one long, slow exhale." The poems strive to arrive at moments of awe or wonder, but they often end with the speaker lamenting her inability to feel as profoundly as she thinks she should. Even at her most dejected, though, Leifso perseveres. In "Navigation in Winter," for instance, though the speaker despairs that "maybe the door will always be closed, / a music-less cold / that will not crack open to meaning," she reminds herself of her responsibilities: "the children will want / bagels for breakfast / with honey and jam."

In his latest excellent collection, *New Brunswick,* Shane Neilson also focuses on the particulars of place. His poems, however, expand and contract to take in

political, economic, and cultural concerns while somehow doubling as moving, intimate elegies and meditations on family. *Somehow* comes to mind repeatedly when reading this collection: the book's six sections are as ambitious as they are impressive in the ways they renovate and reimagine the long poem form. From its opening timeline-poem, to sequenced stand-alone lyrics, to hybridized crowns of sonnets, *New Brunswick* consistently surprises. Philip Larkin, Patrick Lane, Robert Lowell, and Alden Nowlan lurk in Neilson's melodic rhymes and persistent rhythms, but his courageously genuine intimations make his voice unmistakable. In Part III, "A Broken Crown on the Neilson Family Table," a riveting elegy in which the speaker remembers his father, fraying form merges with surges of overwhelming emotion as the speaker thinks through what it means to "come from the same / land but differ." The poem begins with stand-alone sonnets before its stanzas begin to run together then break down as the speaker relays how "*Grief* came // to judge imperfections by causing further flaws. . . . Some call this purpose, others // call it pain." Subtle and multifaceted, these are poems that juggle more feelings and more forms than most—and more life.

Bodies and Languages

Gwen Benaway
Holy Wild. Book*hug $18.00

Ali Blythe
Hymnswitch. Goose Lane $19.95

Anna Marie Sewell
For the Changing Moon: Poems and Songs. Thistledown $20.00

Reviewed by Sarah Dowling

In her preface to Gwen Benaway's new book *Holy Wild*, Anishinaabe visual artist Quill Christie-Peters writes, "exploring the relationship I have to my body is challenging and painful within a settler colonial project that continues to organize itself through the violence of cis-heteropatriarchy." Christie-Peters' three critical terms—body, settler colonial, and cis-heteropatriarchy—illuminate Benaway's poems, which explore the difficulty and the beauty of life as an Indigenous trans woman in English and in Anishinaabemowin. These terms are also useful for reading two other recent collections: Ali Blythe's *Hymnswitch* and Anna Marie Sewell's *For the Changing Moon: Poems and Songs*. Read together, the three collections offer provocative insights into the ways in which our relationships to language and to our very bodies are shaped by settler colonialism and its cis-heteropatriarchal sex-gender system.

Benaway's *Holy Wild* is a revelation. Building upon her previous books, *Passage* and *Ceremonies for the Dead*, *Holy Wild* offers an intimate record of family history, sexual and romantic partnerships, and the burdens of navigating racist and transphobic violence. Benaway charts a new direction for the confessional lyric: *Holy Wild* emphasizes the many layers of mediation that direct and circumscribe confessions. While confessional poetry typically proposes that readers receive the speaker's truth directly and willingly, Benaway's footnoted Anishinaabemowin makes clear that the very language in which a confession is offered already privileges particular auditors over the confessing supplicant. Throughout the book, her poems describe the myriad ways in which the truths spoken by Indigenous trans women are ignored, minimized, or banished to the realm of willed unknowing. In her careful hands, these crucial stories are not only subject matter; they are the means by which the social structures that shape confession are interrogated, and by which confessional lyric itself is reconfigured:

> I am not a confession
> you make in secret
> not a servant of God to rest my hands

on your face and forgive you
for sins I don't believe in.

Blythe's *Hymnswitch* also makes an important contribution to the field of trans poetics, particularly to the florescence of confessional poetry written by trans people. Combining allusions to Greek mythology and reflections on sobriety with references to sex and surgery, his poems entwine multiple processes of becoming, refracting each through the others. Throughout the collection, one finds little moments of linguistic surprise: "hot rod bodies," or "the bumpy postal services / of love and sex." Blythe uses short, deliberate lines—most less than five words long—grouped into unrhymed couplets, tercets, and quatrains. These constrained stanzaic spaces house discussion of daily moments of being in one's body and being with one's intimates. Blythe's attention to the quotidian, to structure, and to the ways in which both are pierced reflects the power of cis-heteropatriarchy, as well as the ways in which our lives can never be reduced to its strictures:

A man is going crazy
because he has seen
a colour no one else has

but there is no way
to prove it exists
for no one but him.
It's the colour of my jacket,
I'm certain. I'm going to need it.
It's almost spring.

Like *Holy Wild*, Sewell's *For the Changing Moon* moves beyond standard English, drawing upon the resources of Lnuisi, French, Spanish, Cree, Anishinaabemowin, and numerous nonstandard Englishes in order to renew the material of poetic expression. In each of the book's five sections, one of the poems is about a chickadee learning Anishinaabemowin from "a virtual dictionary / left online to reach back to the broken lines of human teachers." In addition to pushing beyond the limits of language-as-usual, Sewell exceeds the speech-based rhythms that characterize so much contemporary lyric poetry. Her book, after all, collects poems "and songs": some pieces specify particular chord progressions or tempos for live performance. In attending to the distinctive rhythms of different languages and in evoking aurality through frequent references to music, Sewell emphasizes the physical, somatic grounding of our relationships to language. Highlighting the "broken lines" that divide communities, her poems challenge readers to forge new connections in defiance of settler colonialism: "In the face of this monstrous pity renew the call: / All hail the molecular divine / conjugal marvel of life." Many of Sewell's poems explicitly demand action, offering another means of taking poems off the page. Like Benaway and Blythe, Sewell demands this transgression not only in service of art but also in service of life.

A Witnessing

Cassandra Blanchard
Fresh Pack of Smokes. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Angela Kruger

At once a memoir, an archive, and a debut poetry collection, Cassandra Blanchard's *Fresh Pack of Smokes* demands a witnessing. Across three sections of startlingly raw prose poetry, an autobiographical "I" recounts tales of surviving sex work, abusive relationships, drug addiction, police violence, psychosis, jail, racism, trauma, and all the places you can be disappeared in Vancouver, predominantly in the city's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood. Blanchard's poetry is utterly genuine, precious in its hovering at the midpoint between careful intimacy and absolute candour. Poems are not long, but they are commitments. Each is a solid block of text which unfolds in seemingly cathartic

release, accumulating by the end of the collection in a difficult mass—and this mass reflects the political thrust of Blanchard's work: it takes up space. On the page and beyond, these poems are a powerful testament to the resilience of people (particularly women) living in the DTES, and are revealing of the injustice that calls for such resilience.

The reader is pulled swiftly into relation with the speaker, who addresses "you" directly—"you have no idea how many men see / working girls . . . probably your boyfriend or husband"—and who maintains a colloquial tone throughout the collection, as if always in conversation with "you." Following a legacy of poets writing from the DTES, such as Bud Osborn, the Thursdays Writing Collective, and countless others published on building walls, in hearts, newsletters, zines, and chapbooks, Blanchard's poetry is positively layered in the residue of the everyday. The "I" draws "you" in. The DTES and the community dwelling in it exert a force, impelling "you" to engage more deeply with questions of place, knowledge, and morality.

Of course, these are political questions. While no poem identifies itself or the collection as a work deployed explicitly for the political, *Fresh Pack of Smokes* nevertheless does political work. By inviting the reader into conversation and then asserting space to recount certain experiences, *Fresh Pack of Smokes* works, politically, in at least three ways. First, it recognizes many people in Vancouver who have endured waves of attempted erasure and are at this moment fighting for their right to remain, despite rapid gentrification of their home. Second, it implicates the reader in these configurations of power, asking "you" on multiple registers: *what—or, indeed, who—is the matter*? Third, it complicates preconceived notions of the DTES. For a neighbourhood that is so often simplistically reduced to moral badness in descriptions such as "Canada's poorest postal code" or "Skid Row," *Fresh Pack of Smokes* represents an opportunity, perhaps, for a kind of cultural intervention, should we, as readers, grapple with the stakes of this witnessing.

As a whole, *Fresh Pack of Smokes* exceeds itself. The commonplace yet visceral content and the uninhibited, casual tone across the collection foster a unique relationship between speaker and reader which, in my experience, underlines the importance and the responsibility of bearing witness.

Murder and Sin in T-Dot

Randy Boyagoda
Original Prin. Biblioasis $19.95

Mary Lou Dickinson
The White Ribbon Man: A Mystery. Inanna $22.95

Reviewed by Carla Harrison

Woven into the fabric of two distinctly different plot lines by two stylistically opposed authors is one thread which, against all odds, connects these stories, albeit tentatively. This thread is the Six, the Big Smoke, the Queen City herself: Toronto. Randy Boyagoda's *Original Prin* and Mary Lou Dickinson's *The White Ribbon Man* are both set in the 416, and neither author shies away from featuring the city. While Boyagoda's descriptions of his home city serve as stark juxtapositions to the unfamiliar, exciting, and dangerous Middle Eastern city of Dragomans, Dickinson's include landmarks that create a sense of familiarity for her Ontarian readers, allowing them to explore themes such as murder, betrayal, faith, and community in a comfortable atmosphere.

Boyagoda introduces us to Prin, who is, like the author, a university professor from Toronto. As a Catholic who tries to be good, Prin operates according to his sense of duty in all areas of his life: raising his four daughters, maintaining his passionless marriage to his well-meaning wife, and helping his sinking university to stay afloat.

However, his dedication wavers when Prin is diagnosed with prostate cancer. Feeling shaken, mortal, and anointed, he accepts an opportunity to participate in a liaison meeting with a group in Dragomans that is willing to buy the university, thus saving it and Prin's colleagues from redundancy. Prin's wife vehemently opposes the trip, not only because of the dangers of travel in the Middle East, but also because accompanying Prin is Wende, the svelte, single seductress whom Prin dated before settling down into the good Catholic life. Despite his wife's best efforts to dissuade him, Prin and Wende head to Dragomans for a trip that will change their lives forever. Boyagoda masterfully combines hilarity (one of my favourite moments is when Prin and his father are heckling their Kiwi tennis opponents: "It's my serve, you jailbird son of a kangaroo"), spiritual exploration, and horrific excitement. He manages to manoeuvre his reader so that when the shocking climax happens, we feel just as stunned as the unprepared protagonist.

Unlike Boyagoda, Dickinson keeps her characters at home, showing that we don't need to look far to find monstrosity; we may even find it in our own holy places. Dickinson focuses on the tightly knit community of a downtown Anglican church shaken by the discovery of the body of a murdered woman in the basement washroom. *The White Ribbon Man* is Dickinson's first crime thriller, yet she uses the narrative structure developed in previous works to explore the mystery from multiple angles and perspectives. We meet and come to know Dickinson's characters, the congregation, through their reactions to the dead body and their statements to Detective Jack Cosser as they attempt both to help the investigation and to remove themselves from suspicion. On the face of it, Dickinson's novel is a classic whodunit. But this book engages us on a much deeper, more substantial level because she uses the genre to explore important and timely questions about humanity. Who are we when nobody is looking? In times of trial and uncertainty, do we unite as communities, or do we splinter? What does it mean to be accepting of others' lifestyles and choices while also maintaining personal and spiritual ideals? How well do we actually know and trust each other? Even if the novel does not offer succinct answers to these questions, we are left pondering them ourselves.

In terms of style and content, Boyagoda's and Dickinson's novels could not be more different. And yet, at the heart of each is an underlying comfort and familiarity that offsets the tumultuous, sometimes sinister, subject matter. Both authors allow their beloved city, Toronto, to take on a supporting role. Whether Prin is struggling with matters of faith and a midlife crisis, or Detective Cosser is uncovering a congregation's guilty secrets, the city offers the kind of comfort that hangs around in the background, never making itself conspicuous, yet always there. It's the kind of comfort we can only find when we go home.

Love under Capitalism

Dionne Brand
Theory. Penguin Random House Canada $27.95

Reviewed by Natalee Caple

> Does she see me there, dressed in paper,
> dressed in the cuts on my fingers from turning pages?
> —Dionne Brand, *Theory*

Dionne Brand's engrossing new novel, *Theory*, experiments with the genre of the campus novel, employing the restricted perspective of a first-person narrator to recount a tale of love affairs and work. This "I," through which the reader views the novel, resists characterization by being both unnamed and ungendered, which also prevents the reader from confidently asserting the sexuality of the speaker. What is the effect of departing from the naturalized straight white male anti-hero narrators written by Philip Roth or Kingsley Amis, and asking the reader instead to occupy the interior life of a person over several relationships which affect the narrator's perspective on the self at work? The effect is twofold. As Brand writes, "I knew, and they knew, that academia was a place for perpetuating class and class privilege." The text reveals the history of the academy, and the campus novel, as capitalist and colonial, and populated accordingly; and it highlights reader complicity in the elision of all but white characters, and the naturalizing of capitalist values in previous fictions.

Is it possible to revive the genre without a radical breaking of genre contracts, such as we saw with Suzette Mayr's slipstream campus novel/supernatural tale, *Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall*? *Theory* floats dangerously close to the whirlpools and toothy monsters of sexist literary tropes. The novel is structured around three sections named for lovers (the fourth explores the relationship with the narrator's dissertation), and this structure begs the question "How is this different?" The novel must amplify and transcend the familiar to succeed in interrogating the genre. This means that the characters, including the childhood love who dies tragically and haunts all future affairs, familiar from Vladimir Nabokov and James Joyce, must achieve more than the usual lover/muse vehicles for the protagonist's journey. Brand's supporting characters are active and live socially complex lives that extend before and beyond the narrator. The narrator is not a professor, lusting after students, but an ABD graduate student at the mercy of an exploitive system, in the limbo of sessional work. As such, the narrator reminds the reader of the quotidian reality of academic life, which offers the most and least secure employment. The narrator's situation illustrates complex socio-economic privilege and precarity. Simultaneously, the book provokes self-examination of the reader's relative privilege.

Theory is a book that shows its hand, cites its borrowing, and surveys diverse contemporary and historical thinkers from Walter Benjamin to Rinaldo Walcott. But it is also a book about the dangers of reproduction, the reproduction of bad systems, genre expectations, trauma, gender paradigms, and flawed analysis. Ultimately, the major difference from other campus novels comes, for me, as a reader, because the undescribed self of the narrator opens the door for the reader to conflate the narrator's experiences with that of the described lovers, their inability to be within or without each other completely, what they make of each other. Simultaneously, the narrator is a projection of the reader, and so *Theory* becomes what it describes, a book about context and encounter, perspective and relationship, and thus invites readers to analyze their own reception. *Theory* interrogates assumptions about masculinities (as a plot point as well as a theme) and sexual relationships, inviting the reader to ask what, if anything,

is important about positionality to a reading of this novel. Readers can only blame themselves for problems with naming, gendering, or judging, because the narrator/self that they project both is and is not from inside them.

Brand's writing is perilously sublime, the love stories in *Theory* so sincere and fleshly that they are hypnotic. At times, Brand must work to remind the reader to be suspicious of the narcissistic narrator—for example, by having the narrator express satisfaction at the death of a supervisor who might present obstacles to their success, or by having the narrator acknowledge that a fragment of theory just professed is contradictory. And yet, the novel interrogates the self-awareness of the narrator, who thinks constantly and simultaneously about the enmeshment of life and theory, about specific and valued bodies and their conditions, and about capitalism and its shadows, always in a mode of non-reconciliation, of intimate compartmentalization. Our unreliable narrator is not humanized by the story; they are human start to finish, historically situated, a product of economies, capacities, and experience, vulnerable and privileged, and worthy of compassionate critical examination—just like their unreliable readers.

Quarrelling with Ghosts

Julie Bruck
How to Avoid Huge Ships. Brick $20.00

Eve Joseph
Quarrels. Anvil $18.00

Deanna Young
Reunion. Brick $20.00

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

Julie Bruck's fourth full-length book of poetry, *How to Avoid Huge Ships*, borrows its title from an out-of-print mariner's guide. While the connection appears tenuous at first, by the end of the collection, it becomes clear: both books are obsessed with the idea of avoiding the inevitable. In the original, the inevitable involves boating and related disasters, while Bruck's poems explore the human, the inevitability of loss and grief, in a distinctly compelling way. These poems unfold in a lyrical, narrative style, examining everything from aging parents to a young boy possibly committing suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge. The often melancholy tone pairs well with themes of memory and mortality, producing a kind of echo throughout the collection. In "Last Baby Girls of the 1920s," Bruck deftly recreates the lives of her mother's dear friends. She spans decades with sharp insights and precise images, such as "another who always wrapped her neck / in bright scarves as if maimed, though / she wasn't." Throughout, the poems are surprising—the moments appear to be small moments, small stories, but Bruck's generous observations make them more expansive. They both define and evoke these specific moments in memory.

The collection is broken into six sections, yet each one retains the meditative quality of Bruck's writing. The use of alliteration is subtle yet effective in reinforcing this meditative feeling—the poems read with ease, but offer complex observations of human nature and the frailty of life. Many poems navigate death in some form, from terminal illnesses to aging parents, but despite the solemnity of the subject matter, Bruck's language and images remain light, airy. In "Inheritance," she writes about the death of her mother through the frame of cleaning out her apartment. Here, Bruck deftly balances the sombre subject matter with said airy imagery: "[she] never replaced her hope / chest towels or sheets, no matter how frayed or thin."

Deanna Young also explores the past in *Reunion*, her fourth book of poetry. The poems move through time, delving into the past and its ghosts in relation to the current memory of events. Young uses perspective

and form to fully inhabit each poem, and in this way, the poems remain fresh. In the opening poem, "Ghost Prayer," ghosts from the past are directly addressed, and welcomed into the narrative. This effectively positions the collection's thematic content, but also asks that the listener (and presumably the reader) allow "Love / and mercy, mercy and love" to speak first. Young uses voices that range from immediate and intimate to larger and more communal. In this way, the landscape of the poems feels both familiar and surprising.

Young also uses a variety of forms to create a distinct atmosphere and tone. There are ballads and prayers, free-verse narrative poems, and prose poems; each form offers something new and distinct in terms of shaping the poem, bending the narrative in a specific way. Part of the success is due to the liberal use of Biblical references, and sometimes what feels like sermons embedded in the poems. The actual narratives within the poems are both accessible and closed to the reader; often the actions are implied rather than revealed, as in "Witness," where the speaker says "the monstrous / speech of my father / which cannot be written down." In this manner, the poems are demanding, asking us to forge connections and reverberations between narrative braids. Young's language is spare and taut, further heightening the eerie effect. There is a decidedly Gothic feeling to the landscapes of the poems, both in their psychological nature and in the use of the pastoral to further highlight the darkness within the collection. The ghosts welcomed in the opening poem populate the narratives throughout, creating a kind of chorus—the ghosts are always there, always watching, as Young reveals in the titular poem, "Reunion": "the warm-blooded creatures / thrashing about / and whimpering above."

Eve Joseph's third collection, *Quarrels*, is a slim volume of prose poems. The poems are untitled, and the collection is broken into three parts. The second comprises ekphrastic prose poems based on photographs by Diane Arbus. The pieces in this collection read as a hybrid of flash fiction and prose poems—straightforward vignettes coupled with startling language and distinctly drawn images. There is "the moon hiding in a bowl of blood oranges," and "the blue coffin of trees." Joseph manages to create connections and reverberations within the poems, and they feel like fragments of a larger narrative, distinct moments and memories that form a sort of collage for the reader. Characters appear and disappear without definition or explanation, creating a slightly surreal tone. In one, the speaker says "my mother was a white sheet drying on the line" who "taught me how to iron the creases out of a man's shirt after all the men had disappeared." Natural imagery populates the poems, from descriptions of the sea to rain-streaked windows, a variety of birds in flight, and "little moons spilled on the floor." These tangible details help to ground the reader, balancing the surreal with the recognized.

The poems in part two, detailing Arbus' photographs, are especially effective. Joseph not only beautifully and precisely describes the photos, but also offers insight to the subject matter and composition. In this way, she recreates not only the images themselves, but a larger framework of interpretation. This becomes a dialogue about art, as Joseph reimagines the circumstances revealed through the photos. In "The Junior Interstate Ballroom Dance Competition": "Nobody told them that posing in the empty gym would be awkward like waking in a stranger's bed." Joseph gives voice to the people captured on film, and this in turn allows readers greater access to the (imagined) images before us. Joseph deftly moves between perspectives and voices, each one distinct and engaging, while consistently offering images that stay with the reader long after, "lit like lanterns floating into the night sky."

Bromance and Empathy

Grant Buday
Atomic Road. Anvil $20.00

Dina Del Bucchia
Don't Tell Me What to Do. Arsenal Pulp $17.95

Reviewed by Natalee Caple

Atomic Road by Grant Buday is a speedy genre-bender with a woman problem. It melds the campus novel with a road-trip bromance, telling the story of vengeful academic Clement Greenberg, who travels with French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser across the Canadian prairies and the northern American states after Althusser murders his wife, and in the middle of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Greenberg hopes to persuade a contract killer travelling with them to kill his academic rival Harold Rosenberg once Althusser has been dispensed with. The writing is vivid and the novel propelled by fine descriptions of its historical settings. The narcissism of the two academics is satirized well in their blasé but extreme statements. Moments meant to humanize often reveal something monstrous, as when Greenberg has a pang of nostalgia for his estranged son, David: "Behold his offspring, a creature, a miracle of the most primal order, not to mention proof of his virility. A went into B and boom, C, his son was born—with a little help from what's-her-name." The characters are meant to be sexist and some details are factual. For example, Althusser did strangle his wife to death. Althusser's severe mental illness (he had schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) is, however, unfortunately flattened into a simple desire to be "free" of his wife's oppressive love. The novel is at its best when describing a kind of ideological hurricane with an apocalyptic aesthetic that captures America facing the nuclear age. In many ways, Buday admirably crafts an argument that the rise of toxic masculinity is behind the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

But the inequity of the treatment of women in the writing fails to provide needed counterbalance to the clever stylization of three intellectual men on a journey towards bodily death. Sometimes the descriptions of women are just dated, as when one is described as "shapely" or when others briefly appear to provide release. Other times the descriptions are grotesque: "Her complexion beneath the freckles resembled canned meat and he imagined her entire face sliding out of a can." References to artists and thinkers famed for a kind of über-masculinity and/or as icons of Americana, such as Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Jackson Pollock, and Andrew Wyeth, frame the story within a dominant culture that figures women as outsiders or as sexual objects. This may be true of 1960s America, and even of the brutal coolness of some men in each other's company. Nevertheless, without a foil, without an alternative vision of women, the sexism, which includes a real woman's murder, is normalized.

Female anti-heroes drive the muscular empathy machine that is the short-story collection *Don't Tell Me What to Do* by Dina Del Bucchia. These stories build empathy by relieving censure. In the title story, a young woman named Alex steals rolls of coins from one lover to leave another and attempt escape to an idealized memory of the West Edmonton Mall. As determined, calculating, cruel, anxious, and sad as Alex is, Del Bucchia manages compassion for her as someone being traded, while simultaneously rendering her victims (Gus and Robert, two older men, friends, who both want to install her as girlfriend in lives under renovation) human and able to be hurt. The ache of doing wrong, of lives not fitting for men and women both, is amplified by the hilarity of raunchy prose where things literally break all the time, skirts rip in change rooms, and furniture smashes during sex.

The settings are deep-fried in the familiar: bars, cubicles, funeral homes, basements, snowbanks; everything is cheap but nothing is cheapened. Del Bucchia's misfits make deeply flawed plans; in one story, a woman tries to gift her way into her colleagues' lives only to activate a deadly allergy to balloons, alienating the very people she wants to admire her. Del Bucchia's emphasis on the distance between desire and outcomes dismantles the usual stereotypes of working-class people as hapless and ordinary or acting out of numb greed; from the child pressed into service at a beauty pageant, to a cult leader struggling to market the illusion of perfection, these brash stories conjure uncanny ripples of self-doubt, the unconfidence of the inner self. Del Bucchia's debut is combative, compassionate comedy that amplifies and celebrates the failures of those who cannot cope with class and gender norms, nor be polite ad nauseam. As Kittany the cult leader says, "[m]aking a person loveable, herself included wasn't as easy . . . [h]ow she appears, every selfie, every Snapchat, every statement she makes. They can't be statements. That's for politicians. She has to remain genuine."

Possible Moves

Paul Carlucci
A Plea for Constant Motion. Anansi $19.95

Barbara Sibbald
The Museum of Possibilities.
Porcupine's Quill $19.95

Reviewed by Krzysztof Majer

The short story form suggests suspicion towards totalizing gestures, a preference for the fragment over the whole: an ambition to focus on "a single grain of sand," as Steven Millhauser would have it.[1] The two collections under review engage interestingly with totality and fragmentation. The structure in both is tripartite, where smaller wholes are assembled to suggest interconnectedness. While Carlucci's volume offers a theatrical division into Acts I and II, separated by a thirty-page Intermission, Sibbald splits her book of "shadow-box narratives" into three titled parts—the middle composed of flash fictions, mostly light in tone, and the last united through the character-narrator, familiar from Sibbald's *Regarding Wanda*. Although Carlucci's strategy implies the development of a single action over time, the two Acts, made up of naturalistic accounts of lives pushed to the limit, are marked by their localities (in the first chiefly Canadian, and mostly African in the third), while the Intermission shifts into a somewhat satirical take on the post-apocalyptic.

Generic boundaries are more porous in Sibbald's *Museum of Possibilities*, where a sense of otherworldly menace at times strains the realist mode; this is true especially of the remarkable title story—addressing the uncanny nature of art—and a few others ("Lucid Dreaming," "Burden of Anxiety"). Elsewhere, Sibbald shows herself a capable metafictionist ("Things We Hold Dear"), while her outwardly gentle ironic take on the male/female divide proves insidious ("Bitter Butter," "Funeral Hats"). And yet this is an uneven book, where the shadow-box metaphor—suggested on the back cover and promising "condensed, concentrated scenes"—applies much better to some pieces than to others. For instance, parts of the Wanda Stewart section seem less focused, with the prominent exception of "The Normal Blur of Myopia," where a few of the volume's preoccupations are concentrated in a poignant optical metaphor.

Unevenness also mars *A Plea for Constant Motion*. Carlucci's talents are indisputable, as is his writing's energy and drive—perhaps one of the title's many meanings. If Sibbald's stories shimmer with an aura of possibility and alternative, Carlucci's world—here as in his other two collections—is one of blind, narrowing alleys, of shattered illusions and rude awakenings, where manipulation and

abuse are the norm. All this is delivered in a language shot through with dark, infectious humour and an almost palpable nastiness. It is enjoyable to watch *Plea*'s attuned, rich narratives unfold, building on a seemingly minor detail, storing up a thick layer of semantic density. Almost equal to the pleasure, however, is the discomfort of seeing some of them devolve, over the final paragraphs, into sensationalism, relying on poorly motivated, violent shifts—unexpected at first, increasingly predictable with time. When Carlucci's stories hit the mark, they do so admirably, as in the chilly opener, "My New Best Friend in Exile," which demystifies back-to-basics male bonding, or "Rag," full of well-paced intra-crew scheming. Another example is the marvellously tense "Even Still," where "the classic British Columbian divide" is deconstructed much more effectively than in the meandering Intermission, whose overly parodic buildup fails to support an intense payoff. If Act II, portraying such localities as Accra or Lusaka, veers dangerously close to stereotype in its emphasis on corruption and duplicity, it is often the colonial mindset that is on trial, as with the gender and racial power struggles played out against the Hemingwayan backdrop of natural selection in "Hippos." If Gordon, that story's protagonist, happens to know Africa well, for some of the other dumbfounded whites it "jumbles nonsensically past."

In Steven Millhauser's Blakean pronouncement, behind the short story's "fraudulent modesty" lies its "terrible ambition": the single grain of sand contains not just the beach, but the entire world. Similarly, Mrs. Petali's shadow-boxes in the title story of Sibbald's collection eerily enclose the past, the present, and many futures. The exhibits in *The Museum of Possibilities* add up to an enthralling spectrum of feminine experience, from early inculcation of gender stereotypes, sexual explorations, the highs and lows of youthful female friendship, to the malaise of marriage, and the roads to autonomy and creativity in middle age. Carlucci's stories—well-oiled machines set in perpetual motion—offer glimpses of very different territory: a coherently bleak, stifling, and oppressively male world, in which a Zambian preacher may prove as reprehensible as an Ontarian from a cleaning crew. While flawed, both collections certainly contain stimulating examples of new Canadian fiction, demonstrating once again that Sibbald and Carlucci are writers to watch.

NOTE

1 Steven Millhauser, "The Ambition of the Short Story". *New York Times*, Sunday Book Review, Oct 3, 2008. https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/books/review/Millhauser-t.html

Reimagining Women's Histories

Lori Cayer
Mrs Romanov. Porcupine's Quill $16.95

Suzanne Zelazo
Lances All Alike. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Heather Olaveson

Poets Lori Cayer and Suzanne Zelazo turn to the past for inspiration for their latest publications: both *Mrs Romanov* and *Lances All Alike* reimagine the lives of historical figures while privileging female voices. Cayer's long poem provides an intimate first-person interpretation of the political, familial, and emotional life of Alexandra Feodorova, last tsarina of imperialist Russia and affectionate wife of "Nicky" II. Divided into two sections pre- and post-incarceration, the text traces the narrator's life from childhood to firing squad, where some beautiful turns of phrase describe violent, bloody events, such as the lines "*plaster behind erupting with sprayed stars // I am gone where light explodes*." Although the speaker claims to "twist from focus," Cayer is adept at empathetically illustrating the tsarina's rich inner emotional world and

her relationships within the domestic space. Particular attention is given to the tsarina's terror and guilt over her treasured son's haemophilia—a "ruinous sceptre passed down"—and to her relationship with the polarizing mystic Rasputin.

Cayer juxtaposes her characters' richly textured private lives with rising social unrest, political struggle, and ravening gossipmongers. She captures the delicate balance of the Romanovs' Inside and Outside Worlds and the fragility of their highly scrutinized lives through the motif of Fabergé eggs, "those bejewelled manifestations of us / . . . / arrayed on the mantel." Although I initially wondered about her decision to format the text almost exclusively in paired lines with no end punctuation, these sometimes disjointed lines perhaps nod to and contrast epics' heroic couplets and speak to the characters' fragmented and uncertain lives.

While Cayer provides a glimpse into the emotional experiences of a highly public figure, Zelazo constructs a "conversation" between Mina Loy and Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, two modernist poet-artists who, despite their commonalities, did not interact. This promising experimental project uses processes of excision, overwriting, and collage to merge and tease out new readings of their poetry, setting them amongst their esteemed male contemporaries Joyce and Faulkner. Mirroring its content, the text is divided into four "Excisions," the first containing poetic scraps stitched together in a dense and somewhat obscure Dadaist collage. Here, the em dash becomes a visual suture culminating in the poem "'Cut Pieces': Mina and Elsa at the Arensbergs," which consists solely of dashes positioned to resemble syntactical units.

Zelazo's project of feminist recovery comes to light in "Needlepoint," where the voices of previously silenced female artists announce,

> we are a century of catastrophic echoes,
> a riot of stones
> hurled . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> missiles unfurled,
> rapture on our lips
> where the sutures were.

Zelazo gives voice and body to female artists who have often been historically and unjustly suppressed, making these "[d]aughters of deco / echo of sunshine / forever and always and sometimes." The text requires an active reader, though, as its dense yet beautifully fragmented imagery and syntax can sometimes be difficult to navigate; however, Zelazo's writing certainly inspires further reading about these fascinating artists.

Des triangles amoureux imprévus

Simone Chaput
Les derniers dieux. Blé 21,95 $

Lyne Gareau
La Librairie des Insomniaques. Blé 19,95 $

Robert Lalonde
Un poignard dans un mouchoir de soie. Boréal 20,95 $

Compte rendu par Magali Blanc

Laissez-moi vous raconter l'histoire d'une déclaration d'amour faite à l'écriture. Que ce soit sous forme de réécriture (*Les derniers dieux*, Simone Chaput), de pièce de théâtre (*Un poignard dans un mouchoir de soie*, Robert Lalonde) ou de récit (*La librairie des insomniaques*, Lyne Gareau), chacun des trois auteurs nous invite à plonger dans des univers où la magie de la création littéraire brille de mille feux.

Dans *Les derniers dieux*, Simone Chaput s'inspire d'un des poèmes du célèbre *Livre des métamorphoses* d'Ovide. Thierry Sias (subtil clin d'œil au fameux Tirésias), écrivain en panne d'inspiration, part se retirer

dans une maison près de la mer afin d'y écrire son nouveau roman. Là, il décide de prendre le temps de méditer sur sa relation avec son ex petite amie, Nathalie, et sur ce qui accrochait entre eux. Or, il a du mal à connecter avec ses émotions et se rend compte qu'il peine à comprendre les femmes en général. Un jour, alors qu'il se promenait dans la forêt, il vient à offusquer les dieux. Intransigeants, ces derniers le punissent et à son réveil Thierry devient Thérèse. Submergé par un volcan d'émotions et une tornade de questions, ille (pronom neutre) est contraint de subir le sort qui lui a été jeté pour sept ans. Non seulement un triangle amoureux émergera de cette situation, mariage entre Thérèse et Julien, puis entre Thierry et Lo Shen, mais de plus il semble que le mythe de Tirésias serve de toile de fond pour traiter un sujet bien actuel : la condition des personnes transgenres. Sous l'identité de Thérèse, Thierry puni par les dieux, doit apprendre à vivre dans le corps d'une autre, accepter ses nouvelles émotions, envies et attirances, mais, par-dessus tout, il doit apprendre à s'accepter. Malédiction ou bénédiction, ille expérimente une nouvelle facette de la vie qui jusque-là lui était inconnue.

Récit sur les relations polyamoureuses et non genrées, ce roman est une histoire qui s'inscrit dans son temps. Et c'est avec délicatesse que Simone Chaput nous invite à découvrir l'incroyable monde des *Derniers dieux*.

Dans *Un poignard dans un mouchoir de soie* de Robert Lalonde, nous assistons au théâtre de la vie de Romain, Irène et Jérémie. Plongé.e.s *in medias res* dans les vies de ces trois compatriotes, nous sommes témoins d'un autre triangle amoureux avec pour vecteur commun, Jérémie.

Romain est professeur de philosophie, Irène actrice de théâtre, et Jérémie, un jeune homme mystérieux. Pour des raisons bien gardées, Jérémie fait appel au soutien et à la compassion de Romain et d'Irène lors de rencontres inopinées. Enfin, c'est ce qui semble paraître . . . Jérémie séduit ses deux amis, qui plus tard tomberont tour à tour amoureux de lui, et les amène subtilement à lui venir en aide. Par des jeux de devinettes, de secrets à dévoiler et d'énigmes à déchiffrer, Jérémie, tel le Petit Poucet, sème des indices sur son passé, sa vie avec son père et son frère, ainsi que la mort mystérieuse et non élucidée de son frère et d'un vieillard qui a fait la une des faits divers. Y aurait-il un lien entre tous ces évènements? Ou bien s'agirait-il simplement d'un jeu? Tout est judicieusement mis en scène pour piquer la curiosité du professeur de philosophie et de l'actrice. Tous deux y trouveront un intérêt assez fort, à tel point que le lien qui les unit perdurera.

Une nouvelle fois, la relation polyamoureuse est exploitée ici. Tous trois s'aiment de manière équilatérale, tel un triangle amoureux parfait. On n'a que faire de l'âge et des potentielles remarques extérieures. Tantôt amical, tantôt fraternel, ce sentiment transcende les limites de l'amour conventionnel entre deux personnes, mais ce qui importe, en fin de compte, c'est Jérémie.

Dans un tout autre registre, *La librairie des insomniaques* de Lyne Gareau nous plonge dans l'univers de l'ancien professeur des écoles, Alex. Au cours d'une nuit d'errance, Alex déambule sur l'avenue Broadway à Vancouver à la poursuite d'un chat gris qui semble l'inviter à le suivre. Après quelques zigzags dans les rues transversales, le chat disparaît, et laisse place à une librairie pas comme les autres. Celle-ci recèle des mystères et n'est ouverte que certaines nuits. Le plus souvent on y arrive par hasard, et lorsqu'on la trouve, un monde littéraire s'offre à nous. On a la joie d'y faire de nouvelles rencontres autant littéraires que personnelles. Ainsi Alex s'entichera de la charmante Mélodie, se fascinera du libraire Viateur et reconnectera avec son ancien élève de maternelle, Frank. Seulement, Alex a fait vœu de silence et a décidé de devenir

ermite. Il souhaite se couper du monde et de toute relation verbale, mais il veut s'isoler tout en restant entouré. Un choix pour le moins particulier dans une ville telle que Vancouver et une société si « connectée ».

Bien qu'il y ait une pointe de réalisme magique, le récit reste ancré dans son temps. Le choix délibéré du vœu de silence d'Alex intrigue et interroge ses pairs; et la question subsiste : « pourquoi maintenant? ». Son nouveau travail en tant que gardien de nuit correspond parfaitement à son désir d'isolement et de solitude, mais il va devoir reconsidérer sa position lorsqu'il fera face à une période de transition dans sa vie. La surveillance, le contrôle H-24 de ses moindres faits et gestes, l'injection d'une puce électronique dans son cou, nous rappellent gentiment une problématique d'ores et déjà abordée par un autre écrivain en avance sur son temps : George Orwell dans son *1984*.

Plus qu'un roman sur le silence, ce livre nous invite à reconsidérer notre place dans la société, en particulier, la relation que nous entretenons avec nos congénères les plus proches et ceux auxquels nous ne pensons pas nécessairement.

Ces trois romans partent du désir d'écrire une histoire ou de lire des histoires. Cependant, ils vont bien au-delà et abordent des sujets actuels et importants. Il s'agit davantage d'apprendre à se connaître, voire à se réconcilier avec soi-même puis avec les personnes. Un beau message d'altruisme.

Black Canadian Archives

George Elliott Clarke, ed.
Locating Home: The First African-Canadian Novel and Verse Collections. Tightrope $21.95

Reviewed by Paul Barrett

George Elliott Clarke's *Locating Home: The First African-Canadian Novel and Verse Collections* arrives at an auspicious moment for Black writing in Canada. Clarke's latest collection of early African-Canadian writing joins Karina Vernon's *The Black Prairie Archives: An Anthology* and Whitney French's *Black Writers Matter* (both 2019) as texts that map important new territories of Black writing in Canada.

Clarke's volume is a collection of "firsts": the first novella published by a Black Canadian woman, Amelia Etta Hall Johnson, and the first poetry collections from a "born-in-Canada Black" man and "African-Canadian woman." These three entries, alongside Clarke's introductory essay, constitute the entirety of this "too-brief anthology" that is, hopefully, the first foray into uncovering the archive of unrecognized Black Canadian writing. Indeed, it is surprising that Clarke's volume is not more extensive; in his introduction he describes the import of Martin R. Delany's *Blake* and Lennox John Brown's *The Captive* to the early African-Canadian canon, yet these texts are missing from the collection. *Blake*'s absence is understandable, as the text is widely available elsewhere. Yet *The Captive*, a 1965 play staged in Ottawa in which four Black men kidnap a man trying to organize a Canadian chapter of the KKK, is notably missed.

The works Clarke collects are uneven. He describes Johnson's novella, *Clarence and Corinne; or, God's Way*, as a "Christian comedy," yet the humour was lost on this reader. Rather, the novella is dry Biblical allegory in which the titular characters are rewarded for pious behaviour during a

series of improbable trials. While Robert Nathaniel Dett's collection, *The Album of a Heart*, contains a range of forms, his handling of formal verse, dialect, and lyrics is mostly just competent. There are, however, some interesting moments, such as in "The Traumerei," wherein Dett suggests the transformative and ambivalent power of music in a manner evocative of Esi Edugyan's *Half-Blood Blues*:

> Oh music—of the holy arts most high!
> Shall these poor hands thy subtle power employ
> Thy holy essence may I understand
> Till feeling these the very stones and trees
> Acknowledge me their master! Once again
> I would have made decision—but a sense
> Of something yet to come appr'ended me.

Anna Minerva Henderson's collection, *Citadel*, is far more compelling: her familiar and startling depictions of Saint John demonstrate her careful and considered poetic vision, while her meditations on faith and love are genuinely moving. Furthermore, her poetry offers a depiction of Black New Brunswick and Black Britishness that brings George Grant and W. E. B. Du Bois into a challenging dialogue:

> The heart of Saint John is King Square, laid out
> Like the Union Jack, so in plan and name
> (Though quite unconsciously there is no doubt)
> Making to Loyalty a dual claim.

Clarke acknowledges that these writers "are—yep—obscure"; however, they "jet an inkling of Black Canuck literature" such that a writer like Johnson "belongs primordially to the African-Canadian canon." Yet what is at stake in this primordial uniting of Blackness and the nation, or in Clarke's (sometimes strained) efforts to draw thematic and formal links between his authors and contemporary writers like Suzette Mayr and Wayde Compton? Indeed, while Clarke's introduction sidesteps the history of his more vitriolic exchanges with Rinaldo Walcott, the questions that animated their debate in the 1990s and early 2000s continue to haunt these newly uncovered texts: are they part of a tradition of "Black Canuck literature" or, to quote Walcott, do these writers practise "a deterritorialized strategy . . . consciously aware of the ground of the nation from which it speaks"? Are these things one and the same?

To push the question further, is it relevant that Johnson moved from Montreal to the US at age sixteen or that Dett only lived in Canada for the first eleven years of his life? Perhaps not, but it does suggest that we lose some understanding of the manner in which these works travel when we force them into national frameworks. Indeed, such contemporary texts as Vernon's anthology, French's collection, and David Austen's *Fear of a Black Nation* discuss Black writing here with no reference to Canadian nation in their titles. Does the framing of these critical works and Clarke's authors as "African-Canadian" adequately articulate the forms of cultural expression and transmission at work in these texts? These questions have been taken up in some recent criticism by scholars such as Katherine McKittrick, Camille Isaacs, Winfried Siemerling, and others. Clarke's introduction might have engaged their important contributions to offer a more nuanced account of the relationship between nation and diaspora.

Locating Home does important work to further debunk the notion that Canadian literature was a white enterprise until the 1960s. It remains to be seen, however, whether these recovered texts will spark the imagination of today's writers or remain primarily of interest to the scholarly community. Will today's Black Canadian writers find themselves "Locating Home" in this archive of early Black writing, or will they draw upon other sources for their inspiration?

Productive Uncertainties

Stephen Collis
Almost Islands: Phyllis Webb and the Pursuit of the Unwritten. Talonbooks $24.95

Giulia De Gasperi and Joseph Pivato, eds.
Comparative Literature for the New Century. McGill-Queen's UP $110.00

Robert McGill
War Is Here: The Vietnam War and Canadian Literature. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Dougal McNeill

Phyllis Webb's Canada is "unreal estate," a "fantasy that changes" as she changes. Webb's genius, for me, is in her art of indecision. Poems "of failure," line breaks splitting and troubling the meaning of a sentence, all those expanses of white page in *Naked Poems*: Webb offers readers what her poem "Flux" calls "an unbaptizing touch," worrying what seemed assured, unsettling what was settled, prompting glances to "the particular, the local, the dialectical, and private." The three books under review carry on, in different registers and fields, the work of unbaptizing Canadian unreal estate. All blur, helpfully, the distinctions between critical and creative writing, and all incorporate potentially salutary forms of failure into the projects.

Stephen Collis, a celebrated poet himself, is the author of an earlier study, *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good* (2007), blending criticism and creative writing. In *Almost Islands* he pushes these terms closer together, offering nuggets of something akin to prose poems, some less than a page long, with a cumulative argumentative and emotional force. Collis turns to Webb's writing and example "for renewal," looking for ways for poetry "to have geography and a map." Webb, in Collis' treatment, is, especially in the poems of *Wilson's Bowl*, "a bellwether of the complexities of writing poetry on this far-flung and deeply entangled West Coast," and her career a confrontation with an essential problem: "how to write *as a settler in the wake of colonization*—how to write, *in this place*, under the signs of liberty and justice, in ways that do not entirely erase the history of erasures?" A recognition of those erasures—the "many-fouled lines dragging us down in the historical deep," Collis calls them—marks, *Almost Islands* suggests, a crucial break (and breakthrough) in Webb's poetic career. This argument develops in loops via Kropotkin, Emily Dickinson, William Morris, (auto) biography, the politics of naming, and some gloriously evocative passages responding to southwestern BC. *Almost Islands* is a prompt book, critical rumination, memoir, and lyrical gift, a work offering "porosity" in the relationship between art and politics. If Collis sometimes substitutes verbal gestures for sustained argument, as, for me, in his evocation of the "biotariat," this is part of his book's political force and poetic beauty.

War Is Here: The Vietnam War and Canadian Literature is a more straightforwardly scholarly work, but Robert McGill brings to his study a novelist's ear, indicated not least by his title's nice punning play with Northrop Frye. McGill seems to have read every poem, novel, and playscript written in Canada about the Vietnam War, and his survey of changing Canadian fantasies of Vietnam and the US uses these to finesse and trouble some familiar nationalist accounting. Canadian identity, for McGill, is

> dialectically connected to Canadians' perceptions of America and what is going on there. Consequently, as long as the Vietnam War continues to provoke the American consciousness, it will have a place in Canadians' minds, too.

The mythology of Canada developed by the new nationalists in the 1960s and 1970s continues to have influence "whenever people describe the country as liberal, peaceable, humanitarian, hospitable, and harmoniously multicultural"; this myth was shaped, *War Is Here* compellingly

demonstrates, through creative responses to the Vietnam War. This is no simple celebration of the "peaceable kingdom," however. McGill is struck by how much of "war-era Canadian writing about Vietnam" was "concerned with the war's implications for Canada," and he has canny observations to offer on the ways in which the nationalist association of Canada with Vietnam, ranged against the threat of the US, ran "the risk of instrumentalizing Vietnamese people's suffering, even as it depends for its efficacy on the reader's empathy with their plight." Images of Vietnam (and, by association, Canada) as a woman violated sexually by the US were connected, McGill shows, to older discourses gendering the Canada-US relationship, and, "in seeking to make visceral Canada's complicity in US domination," authors often "ended up promoting a conservative sexual politics." McGill pulls off the difficult critical trick of balancing critique and appreciation, survey and analysis, and, along the way, he offers some lively and convincing arguments for treating as war narratives texts that make no explicit accounting with Vietnam—Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* especially. All this alongside an attentive unpacking of "figurative language and rhetorical devices" in George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*, a close reading of forms of ekphrasis in Canadian responses to the ways the war was represented and narrated in news media, and soundings of the "covert nationalist voice" in twenty-first-century Vietnam narratives. Inspiring in an era when literary studies and humanistic scholarship seem everywhere under threat, McGill demonstrates the intellectual-historical value of careful, sustained *explication de texte*.

Comparative literature has always been about creative failure and Webb's "the particular, the local, the dialectical." As a discipline it is, as Linda Hutcheon observes in her foreword to *Comparative Literature for the New Century*, "fruitfully un-disciplined," "healthily contrarian," and fond of "self-conscious self-interrogation." The essays collected here reflect this, although a melancholy air haunts them all, one prompted by the administrative philistinism in higher education and anglophone incuriosity. Joseph Pivato suggests ways in which a collective Canadian "unreal estate" might make these provinces an ideal place for comparison. With around one-third of Canadians from cultural backgrounds neither English nor French, translation and its failures are a part of Canadian life. "We understand the limits of translation," Pivato argues, and Derridean *différance* is a fact of everyday life. The essays Pivato and Giulia de Gasperi have collected, especially Dominique Hétu's on Canadian dystopia and George Elliott Clarke's on epics failed and unfinished, show the productive power of uncertainty, worry, and "an unbaptizing touch" in multilingual criticism prepared to take its time over misunderstanding as much as translation.

Uncovering Truth in Memoirs

Pauline Dakin
Run, Hide, Repeat: A Memoir of a Fugitive Childhood. Viking $24.95

Alexandra Risen
Unearthed: Love, Acceptance, and Other Lessons from an Abandoned Garden. Viking $24.95

Reviewed by Nanette Norris

I wish Pauline Dakin's story were not true but am achingly sure it is. My own parents were going through the throes of a 1960s divorce when my mother donned a dark wig and glasses in order to walk the few short blocks to her lawyer's office, convinced that her every move was being shadowed. My mother, like Dakin's, was ordered to live a "chaste" life or lose custody of her children. Like Dakin, my brother and

I lived with constant tension. My mother, like hers, would have given anything—*anything*—to have been able to tell her story, to have found a sympathetic, adult ear. Dakin's mother found solace in a man of the cloth, a man with "delusional disorder," who was so convincing that her entire wounded family was swayed, if only for a time. Hardest of all, for me, was to read how this delusional behaviour affected the children; they understood so little of why their lives were marked by menace, tension, vigilance, and isolation. Pauline, like me, suffered from depression when she was only twelve years old. Being hunted by the Mafia, government protection, secluded prisons, Morse code messages . . . who would believe such things? But then, nine hundred followers of Jim Jones died in 1978 by drinking a powdered drink mix. In 1997, thirty-nine members of the Heaven's Gate cult took their own lives in order to release their spirits to meet up with the passing Hale-Bopp comet. Dakin's book shows how willingly we believe the unbelievable. The reconciliation in *Run, Hide, Repeat* is poignant and much needed, as the adult Pauline pieces together her life's narrative with the benefit of knowledge and perspective. If she's anything like me, she's shaking her head at the success of this unburdening creative nonfiction, whose balanced, thoughtful ending masks some still-open wounds.

Run, Hide, Repeat and *Unearthed* have in common the search for unknown personal history, that unveiling feeling of memoirs that act a little like whodunits—or a lot like, in the case of the former. But that's where the similarities end. Whereas *Run, Hide, Repeat* is a page-turning gallop of revelations, *Unearthed* requires savouring. Whereas *Run, Hide, Repeat* grips you with the sheer necessity of getting at the truth in the horrid web of falsehoods and delusions that, in our present era of fake news, reverberate well after the pages of the book are closed, *Unearthed* never quite gets there. It is self-indulgent as it focuses on the author's sense of somehow having been abandoned, like her garden. The revelations about those who never parented her as she would have wished are dwarfed by her attempts to heal while uncovering her garden. Whereas Dakin had no stability, no friends, and no past, and presents a fragile present, Risen has a loving husband, a great son, a best friend of twenty-one years, an involved sister, and a living mother, who is, however, in serious decline. I get it—that's a difficult stage of life—but at least, for most of the book, she is alive. If *Unearthed* suffers in comparison with the urgency and vitality of *Run, Hide, Repeat*, it is nonetheless a delicious read for those who enjoy the art of discovery and the Zen of gardens, which are interwoven as the author discovers the truth of her parents' war-torn past and the events that resulted in their difficult marriage and emotionally absent parenting. Both books are true to the art of the memoir, peeling back layers of the faithfully and the poorly remembered to create a new whole.

What Kind of Debut Are You

Degan Davis
What Kind of Man Are You. Brick $20.00

Jason Freure
Everyone Rides the Bus in a City of Losers.
ECW $18.95

Reviewed by Geordie Miller

Avocado toast may indeed be what they mean when they talk about millennials, but a truer embodiment of modern city life is the barista. Overqualified and underpaid, the barista daily dons their customer service smile for the losers and winners of the long economic crisis alike—the indebted as well as the portfolioed. Us and Them. You know who "They" are, and Jason Freure knows you know. He doesn't linger with the long-standing antagonism; his debut collection

movingly moves through the city's streets and public transportation infrastructure, doubling back again and again to wryly catalogue the myriad losses of artists and service economy workers. Of those, like "the hostesses" in "No One Goes to Prince Arthur Anymore," who

> stand out on the empty cobbles with smiles
> about to break into back-rent tears
> while the owners hunch over wineglasses
> watching the Food Network

The "no one goes anymore" phrasing faintly registers capital's ("Their") rapid, relentless remaking of the city in its own image.

The city in question is Montreal, and Freure poignantly confirms Georg Simmel's thesis that metropolitan individuality is shaped by an anonymity that cuts both ways. No one knows your name, so you are free to roam, sketching unselfconsciously: "they're too busy to care, / too used to mutterers and self-urinators / to mind a young man with a notebook." Also, though, no one knows your name because maybe no one cares about you and your unselfconscious sketches; put differently: "It was a poetry reading on Super Bowl Sunday." Enough said. The anxiety that such indifference produces finds its form in Freure's arresting use of anaphora, which amplifies where all the manic resolutions his poems inhabit end up, i.e., in loss, the same old beginnings. As "Montréal," the penultimate poem in this full collection, opens, it's already over: "City of breakdowns, city of leaving, city of failure."

"Monkey," a striking poem in Degan Davis' debut collection, summons Montreal through a memory of former Canadiens defenseman P. K. Subban "cannoning the puck at near- / impossible angles into the net, an ecstatic / geometry." The remembered joy of witnessing Subban's brilliance is curtailed "all at once" by a man's racist remark directed "comradely" to enjoin Davis in white supremacist bile. Davis repeats the man's epithet, which gives the poem its title, but the poet significantly leaves open the question of whether his response to the racist microaggression was enough: "My voice small / Does he even hear it?"

The epigraph to Davis' collection, from Alice Oswald's *Dart*, describes "Proteus, / whoever that is . . . / driving my many selves from cave to cave." Davis indeed draws on "many selves" to take measure of men and masculinities, past and present. The narrative impulse that defines several of Davis' poems is most strongly realized in two sections, "Shoebox" and "Where There Is Music." The best of these poems tell good stories as they intimately address, among others, Louis Armstrong, Ronald Regan, Chet Baker, and Davis' father.

And then there's Sonic Youth. Davis wears a record store t-shirt parodying the album cover of Sonic Youth's *Goo* in his author photo, but the resonant lyrics of theirs in the context of these two debuts come from *Daydream Nation*'s "Teenage Riot": "Looking for a man with a focus and a temper / Who can open up a map and see between one and two." Look no further.

Remembering Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland

Laura K. Davis and Linda M. Morra, eds.
Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland, Letters.
U of Alberta P $39.95

Reviewed by J. A. Weingarten

Laura K. Davis and Linda Morra's *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland, Letters* has obvious connections to the several volumes of Laurence's letters already available (for instance, *A Friendship in Letters* and *A Very Large Soul*) and to Sam Solecki's delightful, but extremely brief, selected letters of Jack McClelland (*Imagining Canadian Literature*). The book is also a complement to biographies of Laurence and McClelland,

as well as to the available histories of McClelland & Stewart. But *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland* is not just an extension of these earlier publications nor is it merely a collection of letters; it is a spiritual map of its central figures (especially Laurence) and a guide to Canada's cultural landscape since 1960.

Arguably, *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland* feels a bit more like *Laurence's* book than McClelland's. From scholarly studies and word-of-mouth anecdotes, McClelland will doubtlessly be remembered as one of the architects of Canadian culture; his ceaseless fight to promote and sell Canadian writers earned the admiration of the writers whom he represented. The letters in this book mostly reinforce that image, though they deepen readers' knowledge of his character by offering examples of his misogyny and occasional insensitivity (issues that Davis and Morra also address at length in their introduction). Generally speaking (and this isn't a criticism of the book), the letters do not house too many surprises about McClelland's character. Of Laurence, they reveal more. The letters bolster her stellar reputation just as well as they do for McClelland, but there is also a fuller view of Laurence's life *in* the publishing industry than most readers have seen before. The letters depict her reluctance and shyness, her wit and brilliance, and her generosity toward many of the biggest (and smallest) names in Canadian literature during the 1960s and after. Indeed, a major achievement of this book is its insight into Laurence as a major cog in the wheels of Canada's publishing and arts scenes.

This oft-overlooked aspect of Laurence's career—her role as a cultural worker—is something to which the editors of *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland* are very attentive. And, rightfully so: it is important to understand, as Davis and Morra say, that Laurence "opened opportunities . . . for a younger generation of writers" not just as a literary model, but also as a pillar of personal support to those around her and as an outspoken feminist who advocated for female writers and editors. These letters offer abundant evidence of Laurence's tireless efforts to support aspiring and strong women in literary circles (Adele Wiseman and Alice Munro, for example) and the publishing industry (Alice Frick, Leslie Cole, and others).

Equally striking in the letters is Laurence's unbreakable backbone. She clearly did not tolerate fools—or foolishness (from the critics, colleagues and peers, and even McClelland himself). As a case in point, Laurence slams McClelland after he lectures her about the marketing and production risks involved in releasing three books too closely together: "I resented your [remarks] so much that it was very fortunate for the both of us that you were not present at the time, otherwise I would have clobbered you with the nearest solid object available." And even though Laurence sounds tough as nails in many of these letters, she also reads as exceptionally modest; discussing her early draft of *A Jest of God*, she tells McClelland, "It is not a fashionable subject; it is not filmable." An amusing statement, given that less than two years later, *A Jest of God* would be adapted into the Academy Award-nominated film, *Rachel, Rachel*.

Few epistolary volumes have as strong a claim to true importance as *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland*, which captures the life and character of both an essential Canadian writer and one of the most industrious publishers in Canadian history. More than that, though, the book captures several generations, offering a broad look at copyright, the changing technology of publishers, political discontent in Canada, the burgeoning national literary scene, general readers' and reviewers' conservatism (Laurence thus hilariously exclaims in one letter, "SCREW ALL REVIEWERS"), and writers' creative

process. (Particularly noteworthy is the editors' facsimile of Laurence's annotations on a letter McClelland sent containing his first impressions and criticisms of *The Diviners*; Laurence spiritedly rejected many of his suggestions). Davis and Morra say much about these unique angles in their introduction to the volume, which thoroughly situates Laurence and McClelland in, and pits them against, their era. Some readers may take issue with the size of this book—admittedly, there are some "routine" letters that feel dispensable—but the volume, overall, is a vital contribution to Canadian letters and a touching tribute to two titans who guided the development of Canadian literature after 1960.

Shifting Grounds

Sarah de Leeuw
Outside, America. Nightwood $18.95

Kim Fahner
These Wings. Pedlar $20.00

Kelly Shepherd
Insomnia Bird: Edmonton Poems.
Thistledown $20.00

Reviewed by Jenny Kerber

Sarah de Leeuw's latest collection, *Outside, America*, combines a geographer's eye for landscape with personal meditations on travel, dissolving human relationships, and environmental change. The poems are frequently built on surprising juxtapositions of imagery, location, and scale; the opening "Rogue Stars," for instance, links astronomical phenomena with the retro toy Lite-Brite, while in "Drone Notes on Climate Change," digital footage of belugas in Hudson Bay reveals "white punctuations on an old / elementary black board." Meanwhile, "What Women Do to Fish" draws women's daily bodily care practices (e.g., taking birth control pills, exfoliating) into dialogue with aquatic life as at once victim and ally, raising complex questions of threat and self-protection. The first half of the collection also movingly explores the conflicted mixture of guilt and relief that accompanies the illness and death of a loved one who lives far away.

The second half of the book tours American sites ranging from Brooklyn to LA to Oklahoma, doing what de Leeuw's writing often does best: using a geographically distinctive element to illuminate human relationships and the subtle ways they disintegrate or coalesce. In the final poem "Honeymoon Island State Park, Florida," the shifting sands of a relationship conclude in the lines, "there was one island, but now / there are two, slender and separate." There is great tenderness in these poems, yet the emotion never feels overwrought, counterbalanced as it is by a high degree of craft, formal experimentation, and keen attention to a series of manufactured and natural curiosities woven uneasily together into a common life.

Kelly Shepherd's *Insomnia Bird* adopts a narrower focus on the city of Edmonton, but echoes themes that arise in de Leeuw's work, especially concerning life in resource-dependent communities. Shepherd's poems portray a city wrestling with rapid growth through the 2000s oil boom, and test fashionable vocabularies of the "green city" against the actual pressures of accommodating the flora and fauna that thrive and struggle there. The results are often bracing and sardonic, illuminating the risks of forgetting a city's natural and cultural history amidst a rising tide of consumerism and suburban sprawl. Magpie appears as a wry observer throughout, playing the role of augur, disturber, and opportunist in ways that parallel the city's human inhabitants and their pecking orders. The poems quote liberally from urban heritage proposals, municipal ordinances, and PR communications, offering glimpses of how the urban actors they are designed to manage don't necessarily conform to the

best laid plans: caraganas crack sidewalks, coyotes snatch housecats, and jackrabbits nibble gardens. Shepherd's magpie strategy of quoting from civic documents doesn't work equally well in every poem, but in many moments this aesthetic throws into relief the devil's bargain of building communities on fickle resource economies. Such fickleness emerges clearly in a poem like "#ALBERTASTRONG," which illustrates how the tightening of the oil patch revives social resentments formerly buried under piles of money:

> *You're either with us*
> *or you're against us,* say the people
> who only a week earlier
> hated the place they had to go to work.

If Alice Major is the laureate of the city's office towers, Shepherd asserts a strong claim in this collection to writing its blue-collar experiences from the ground up.

Sudbury-based poet Kim Fahner contemplates several forms of landscape in *These Wings*—especially the shores of Lake Erie and northern Ontario. The collection includes many ekphrastic poems addressing works by well-known painters such as Alex Colville and J. M. W. Turner, but in places Fahner also offers an innovative twist on the approach in sequences that variously address a series of photos of Frida Kahlo and of Janet Cardiff's sound installation *The Forty-Part Motet Sequence*. In the former, Fahner takes the reader into experiences of illness and frailty while also conveying the persistent inner strength of a fellow artist; meanwhile the latter nicely captures the shifting slivers of sound and sensation generated by Cardiff's multi-voiced, ephemeral work. Late in the collection there is also a memorable sequence that contemplates the practice of floriography in an exhibition at the Canadian War Museum. In these poems based on a soldier's letters home during the First World War, flowers become a language of sensuality, fragility, and endurance. While the collection as a whole is less unified than de Leeuw's or Shepherd's, much of the writing is nonetheless polished in craft and presentation, and illustrates a writer deeply engaged with her surroundings, whether snowshoeing on a starlit evening or exploring the darkened corners of a gallery.

Beyond Autonomy

Sarah Dowling
Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism. U of Iowa P $105.59

Reviewed by Gregory Betts

The idea of autonomy, of individual or national independence and the freedom to live by one's own law, that has dominated so much of Western literature and thought (and especially the imagined personal freedom of lyric poetry) contradicts many of the lived realities of interconnected citizens in the twenty-first century. Indeed, in response to global, transnational crises like climate change, colonialism, and (related to both) neoliberalism, Sarah Dowling's *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism* proposes a turn to polymodal and translingual frames to denaturalize the poisonous legacy of such autonomous ideologies. She hones in on a very limited number of texts by American, Canadian, and Indigenous authors as representative exemplars of a new way of encoding multiplicity into texts that challenge North American monolingual settler-colonial culture.

Translingual Poetics sets the coordinates for a shift in thinking and analyzing poetry, extending the discussion of translation beyond the binary mode of movement between two languages. By looking closely at specific multilingual texts, and connecting them to broader debates about colonialism, personhood, and

neoliberalism, Dowling offers a convincing case for textual polyvalence and linguistic multiplicity. She identifies her antagonistic forces clearly: "one of the most important effects of colonial violence is its dramatic narrowing of the scope of knowledge and of the possible forms of communication." Against this limitation, she presents texts that foreground collective experiences of loss or violence. These experiences accumulate and establish the complexity of forces acting against marginalized communities. The lyric, she argues, in its traditional mode of self-expression and its habitual monolingualism, is insufficient in addressing systemic oppressions. Too often, the lyric mode has had the unintended effect of re-inscribing autonomous and coherent individuals at the expense of her preferred cacophony of difference. As the band of options narrows by the twinned juggernauts of colonialism and neoliberalism, the lyric voice reinforces the narrowing.

As she drills down into the rotten husk of the Western canon, Dowling addresses the thorny problem of personhood—a question of legal encoding and cultural admittance—by asking who gets in, who is left out, and, more importantly, by what terms (and in what language) are they permitted entry. This frame advances her critiques of lyric singularity, and helps to explain the recent preponderance of experimental, avant-garde writing by authors from marginalized communities. Over the course of the book, she chooses just four poems and seven books of poetry (by Garry Thomas Morse, Paul Martínez Pompa, Cecilia Vicuña, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, James Thomas Stevens, M. NourbeSe Philip, Myung Mi Kim, Anne Tardos, Rachel Zolf, Jordan Abel, Layli Long Soldier, and a collaboration between Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Enrique Chagoya, and Felicia Rice) to bear the weight of her analysis. In the close readings, these texts are put forth as exemplars of complex theories and intricate philosophies. It is a lot to ask of such a limited range of texts. Zolf's *Janey's Arcadia*, for instance, becomes emblematic of a correction to philosophical misinterpretations of Hegelian notions of subject formation. Though Zolf is not an Indigenous author herself, Dowling uses Zolf's text to exemplify Indigenous critiques of misinterpretations of Hegel's model.

The poetic examples are, overall, well-chosen and effectively interrogated, but I found myself wanting more—wanting the book to delve into so many more examples of complex translingual poetics, if only to elaborate on the nuances of this field, and to consider the significant volume of work already being done. Erín Moure's work on polylingual citizenship, for instance, or Nathalie Stephens/Nathanaël's work on translation and entre-genre, or Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's prize-winning Franco-Innu poetry that unpacks the overlapping colonialisms in Quebec, amongst the work of many other practitioners, each adds density to a portrait of the field. Dowling's discussion of "monolingual settler states" is certainly more responsive to the American context, and somewhat dismissive of Canadian bilingualism (let alone official trilingualism in Nunavut) and the negotiation of overlapping colonialisms navigated through language history. Dowling's book, though, is not a history of intersections between language policy and poetry, and prefers broad transhistorical frames—the five hundred years of settler colonialism, for instance—to situate the complexity of single books, poems, and lines of verse. There is a delightful whiplash in shifting between such scales of apperception.

Let me be clear: Dowling's book makes it easier to begin to investigate the nuances of such vast colonial enterprises as Canada and the US and their linguistic landscapes. In these contexts, Dowling's discussion of the apostrophe as an exercise in reclaiming personhood (or resisting objectification) or

her attention to Elizabeth Povinelli's "formal meconnaissance" both help to elaborate strategies of resistance and self-assertion, defiance and ambivalence. If we ground the self in mutual recognition and intersubjectivity (without the mediation of the state), as Hegel once proposed, then the poetic object shifts from being a medium for self-expression. Instead, poetry becomes a nexus point for re-remembering and experiencing the difference already encoded in language, especially as that difference is reflective of vast histories. Translingual poetry, furthermore, becomes the embodiment of living in an ongoing world of difference, lush with the "colonial cacophony of linguistic collision."

An Incontestable Beauty

Esi Edugyan
Washington Black. HarperCollins $33.99
Reviewed by Paul Watkins

Washington Black—the third novel by Esi Edugyan and her second to win the Giller Prize—depicts the life of Washington (Wash) Black, who rises above the conditions of his time to shape a life based on his imagination, intelligence, and artistic talent. Wash seeks freedom and dignity in a society that would deny him the right to be fully human. The novel opens when Wash is eleven years old (it is narrated from his perspective as an eighteen-year-old) on Faith Plantation in Barbados in 1830. The contrast between a young and curious Washington and the injustice of his brutal surroundings is provided through the recollections of his older self: "What I felt at that moment, though I then lacked the language for it, was the raw, violent injustice of it all." Edugyan does not shy away from the "unspeakable acts" of slavery and the way that slavery continues to affect Wash even when it is abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833. Edugyan's writing—from her careful plotting to her complex characters—speaks a veritable truth about what it means to be truly free.

Wash's life changes forever when the brother of Erasmus (the ruthless plantation master), Christopher (Titch) Wilde, arrives. A young scientist and abolitionist, he chooses Washington, on loan from his brother (largely because he is the right size), for his project, the "Cloud-cutter," which is essentially a hot-air balloon that he plans to launch from the highest peak overlooking the plantation. Titch opens a world of possibility and wonder for Wash. Looking down from Corvus Peak, Wash gains a new perspective: "I stood shaken, confused by the incontestable beauty." Washington has also been tasked with drawing what he sees, and it is here that his talent as an artist and great mind emerges. While Titch's intentions seem pure, his character often draws from liberal guilt and self-righteousness, exemplified early on by his shock at Wash's talent for drawing and scientific inquiry: "Your mind. I had not expected it."

Another experiment with the Cloud-cutter project causes a hydrogen explosion that leaves Wash's face scarred. His somatic markings—from his burns and his Blackness—follow him throughout the narrative. As he says, "[m]y colour was already one burden; my burns made life unconscionable," and this double burden is evident in the pity and violence he experiences. The unexpected death of a white man sets the story in motion and allows for Washington's transformative journey into tentative freedom and adulthood. Escaping on the Cloud-cutter with Titch, Wash travels to the eastern coast of the US, and then to the far north of the Arctic, Nova Scotia, London, Amsterdam, and finally Morocco. He learns quickly that there is a large world that he is excluded from because he is Black. Rather than let the world be closed to him, Wash seeks his freedom and finds dignity through art and science. Told in four parts

and covering six years, the novel provides a portrait of Washington's life, as well as the social conditions of the time.

In Part Three, Washington creates a life among the Loyalists in Nova Scotia on the edge of the Bedford Basin. He suffers various humiliations, including being beaten and urinated on by his white colleagues. He learns that racism and violence exist beyond the plantation, and that freedom in Canada is relative to whiteness. These sad moments are punctuated by joy as he rededicates himself to art and science: "the sense of freedom was intense." His artistic practice leads him to meet Tanna Goff, an artist who unabashedly wears trousers and defies rigid categories of womanhood. Wash ends up becoming an assistant to her father, a natural scientist, and his relationship with them opens up his desire for knowledge and, as he gets dangerously close to Tanna, his desire for love. As with an earlier character named Big Kit, who has a voice like "rough music," I wanted a little more of Tanna, as both characters detail experiences for women of colour during this time. Like Edugyan's other Giller-winning novel, *Half-Blood Blues*—an engrossing novel about Americans, Afro-Germans, and Jews playing jazz in Nazi Germany—*Washington Black* fills a lacuna by depicting Black characters of immense talent who are forgotten to history simply because of the colour of their skin. As Wash decries: "And what will it bring me in the end? Nothing. My name nowhere."

Washington Black concerns bondage and freedom, as well as love and redemption. Edugyan's prose is immersive as we travel from the cane fields of Barbados to the deserts of Morocco. Ultimately, Wash wants to belong, and science becomes a great equalizer for him: "No matter one's race, sex, or faith—there were facts in the world waiting to be discovered." Categories of race, ability, sexuality, language, and ethnicity do not define a person's worth. Rather, it is a person's mind and actions that define them. *Washington Black* says this much and speaks truth and beauty. We are fortunate to have a great mind like Edugyan's to tell this remarkable story.

"Patchwork Crazy Quilt"

Carla Funk
Every Little Scrap and Wonder: A Small-Town Childhood. Greystone $29.95

Reviewed by Natalie Boldt

Metaphors come to us (in language and in poetry) full, elastic, and semantically kinetic but not inexhaustible. With use, they empty out, become clichéd, and, finally—sometimes—fail to register as metaphors at all. Follow the etymological trails of most terms in a modern language, writes Owen Barfield in *Poetic Diction,* and you will find that that language, "with its thousands of abstract terms and its nuances of meaning," is "nothing . . . but an unconscionable tissue of dead, or petrified, metaphors."

The conceit that binds together Carla Funk's new memoir—and first work of creative non-fiction prose—is the "patchwork crazy quilt," a familiar image (minus the "crazy," perhaps) but an apt one in this case given that *Every Little Scrap and Wonder* is, indeed, quilt-like in its configuration. Like a quilt, it is quirky and colourful. It is also delightfully patchworked—a reminder that while we may solidify our lives into narratives, memories return to us in bits and pieces: revelatory only in retrospect.

Weaving together stories from one year in her life as an adolescent growing up in Vanderhoof, BC—a place resonant with "logging trucks and God"—Funk puts little effort into bending or forcing her memories into a straightforward chronicle of childhood. "Even now, I lay myself down in pieces," she writes,

> become the handiwork . . . as if a glowing needle pulls a thread through all the child-

> hood years, binding all the broken parts—dead dog, lost tooth, weird hymn, burnt hand, beer breath, sad eyes, torn shirt, bloodstain, cracked bone, split lip, hard smile, junk pile, flat tire, black ice, road home, locked door—each fragment lifted from the ash and dust, set right, and given back to wonder.

Though the memoir is structured seasonally (divided into four sections, each with six chapters), each chapter could, in fact, be a standalone essay. Some of these essays are meditations on childhood faith—that paradoxical combination of naiveté and natural wisdom—some on social affectation, on ritual, or on family, but each is rendered in the language and with the creativity one might expect from an experienced poet.

Like *Head Full of Sun*, *The Sewing Room*, or others of Funk's collections, which draw on her religious tradition (Funk was born and raised in a Mennonite church), *Every Little Scrap and Wonder* makes use of spiritual imagery, symbols, and practices, but mixes metaphors and alters idioms to offer new insights into an old faith and, now, the age-old experience of growing up. Like her poetry, Funk's prose is also thoroughly unaffected, and she does a marvellous job of balancing lofty poetic insight with straightforward and funny descriptions of childhood experience: boogers, bowel movements, and, in the case of this author, butchering-day grotesqueries.

Kin to a photo album, this book is a kaleidoscopic peek into Funk's childhood, life in the BC interior, and the quirks and profundities of religious community. It is also a beautiful meditation on the meaning-making exercise that is remembering.

L'art et ses issues

Pierre-Louis Gagnon
La disparition d'Ivan Bounine. Lévesque 27,00 $

Isabel Vaillancourt
Ça va aller. Lévesque 18,00 $

Compte rendu par Alexandre Gauthier

À la lumière des événements qui ponctuent l'actualité des dernières années et du niveau général du discours de nos dirigeants véhiculés par les médias, les vertus, l'utilité de l'art sont dans notre société souvent remises en question. Or, l'utilité de l'art n'est peut-être pas nécessaire, mais elle est bien réelle. Les deux œuvres présentées ici sont très différentes tant sur la forme que sur le fond, mais elles nous rappellent l'impact que peut avoir l'art et la littérature en particulier sur la société, mais aussi sur l'individu.

Ça va aller d'Isabel Vaillancourt est un carnet littéraire, sorte de genre hybride qui donne à l'autrice toute la liberté nécessaire afin d'aborder les sujets de son choix dans une perspective qui se situe en dehors de la fiction, mais autour de son processus d'écriture, de son rapport à l'art, de son rapport à la vie. On suit l'autrice à travers les derniers moments de la vie de son conjoint qui souffre de démence. Elle bâtit son carnet un peu comme un roman. Elle crée de véritables atmosphères en situant et en décrivant de manière très précise son environnement dans lequel elle évolue et duquel elle s'inspire. On voit très bien la rue Sainte-Bernadette, on ressent l'hiver, la neige qui tombe. Elle présente aussi une série de personnages qui gravitent autour d'elle : son amant bien entendu, sa chatte Annabelle, le vagabond qui lui rend visite, sa famille. À ces personnages s'ajoutent tous ces artistes — peintres, auteurs, compositeurs — qui l'accompagnent également. En effet, tout au long de l'ouvrage, Vaillancourt réfléchit à voix haute sur ses lectures du moment, confrontant ses opinions, ses visions à celles de ces artistes et de ces scientifiques,

réfléchissant ainsi à sa propre condition d'écrivaine. Mais à cause de l'aspect nettement biographique du récit, elle s'attarde surtout à sa condition de femme vieillissante qui se demande bien ce qui l'attend après la mort de son conjoint. Elle cherche dans son travail d'autrice certes, mais dans ses lectures, dans la peinture, dans l'art au sens large la salvation ou à tout le moins un début de réconfort, une réponse à ses questions existentielles. La multiplicité des tons et le passage du spirituel à l'extrême quotidienneté font de ce carnet un discours à la fois sincère et touchant sur la vieillesse, la vie, la mort et propose un solide témoignage en faveur de l'art.

Dans *La disparition d'Ivan Bounine*, un « thriller politico-littéraire » de Pierre-Louis Gagnon, on change complètement de registre même si la littérature fait encore ici partie de la galerie de personnages. Ivan Bounine, récipiendaire du prix Nobel de littérature en 1933, est un écrivain russe installé en France et honni par le régime de Staline suite à la publication de son journal *Jours maudits* en 1925. Gagnon s'intéresse précisément à la période précédent le couronnement de Bounine. Aleksandra Kollontaï, ambassadrice soviétique à Stockholm est chargée d'empêcher le comité Nobel de récompenser Bounine en suggérant plutôt la nomination de Maksim Gorki. Alors qu'elle connait peu de succès, tout l'appareil diplomatique russe sera mis au service de cette affaire afin de prévenir l'humiliation que pourrait subir l'URSS suite à la réception du plus prestigieux prix littéraire par un dissident. Rapidement, l'affaire Bounine prend une ampleur disproportionnée et provoque un important jeu de coulisse qui implique les gouvernements français et suédois. Tout au long de l'ouvrage, on rencontre une myriade de personnages — politiciens, académiciens, écrivains, diplomates — que l'auteur décrit avec soin. En ce sens, il parvient à esquisser le contexte de manière très efficace et ce, même s'il s'agit d'un contexte historique que nous ne connaissons pas nécessairement. Par contre, la description, nécessaire, étant très longue, les rebondissements se font parcimonieux et l'action arrive assez tard et le tout manque certainement de spectaculaire. Par contre, il s'agit d'une véritable incursion dans les arcanes du monde diplomatique de l'époque et les portraits des divers acteurs politiques étant particulièrement bien faits, le roman nous donne le goût d'effectuer nos propres recherches et d'en apprendre davantage sur cette époque mouvementée. L'ouvrage nous rappelle également l'importance des intellectuels, des écrivains et de la littérature au début du XX^{e} siècle et leur réelle influence.

Traces de vies

Patricia Godbout
Bleu Bison. Leméac 17,95 $

Louis-Philippe Hébert
Un homme discret. Lévesque 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Chiara Falangola

Bleu Bison est le premier roman de Patricia Godbout, traductrice et professeure titulaire à l'Université de Sherbrooke. Un début littéraire touchant et attachant qui s'inscrit dans le deuil familial et le devoir de mémoire. La mort des proches et, en particulier, les suites de ces pertes scandent les différents moments du récit, dont le fil rouge se tisse justement dans cette coexistence de la vie et de la mort. Du décès du père à celui de la mère, en passant par le suicide tragique du frère cadet Louis, la narration à la première personne nous amène par bribes dans les entrailles de la vie des disparus et des survivants. Ce récit fragmentaire de la mémoire familiale — qui suit le chemin des souvenirs, des lettres, des tableaux, des carnets personnels, des objets variés contenant les traces des vies individuelles pas complètement ouvertes au déchiffrement — décrit le parcours du deuil de la narratrice et de

ses proches en tant que « non-témoins et réceptacles de récits troués ». Le temps de la narration, coïncidant avec celui du deuil, se déplie en tant que « temps de transition avant que ne s'écrive la suite ». Ainsi, le temps s'arrête dans la quête errante de la voix narrative à travers la description et la réflexion sur les différentes reliques qui se posent en tant que différentes étapes de la pérégrination du récit. Le style dépouillé ne dédaigne ni la parataxe ni un lyrisme simple qui semblent naturellement accompagner le ton élégiaque de ce court roman. Un seul désir reste inassouvi : le lecteur reste sur sa faim quand arrive l'épilogue qui semble clore le récit de manière trop hâtive.

Un homme discret, avant-dernier roman du romancier, nouvelliste et poète québécois Louis-Philippe Hébert raconte l'histoire de l'investigateur privé Julien Loiselle qui, à la suite d'une attaque terroriste, en profite pour matérialiser le changement d'identité en Octave Damphousse, changement planifié et convoité depuis longtemps. À la surprise du lecteur, cette nouvelle identité n'implique pas de métamorphose, ni d'évènement particulier, mais semble plutôt exaspérer et mener à leurs extrêmes conséquences des tendances qui étaient déjà présentes chez Loiselle. Damphousse s'installe à Montréal et commence une drôle de filature du quartier du Mile End pour devenir, à son tour, l'objet de la filature de ce qu'on découvre être le narrateur plus tard dans le texte. Le « discret » du titre est à interpréter non seulement dans son sens courant de réservé, mais aussi selon son acception étymologique de séparé, divisé, discontinu — et, pour rester fidèle à la trame des explosions dans le roman — éclaté. Loiselle-Damphousse est un homme-ombre, dissocié de la réalité comme de soi-même. L'idée d'un *Feu Mathias Pascal* contemporain dont le récit se construit a posteriori, à la troisième personne, en partant par les carnets du protagoniste, est intéressante, mais la succession narrative en soi et la quête identitaire négative semblent manquer de justification, peut-être, aussi, à cause des divers éléments disséminés dans les premiers chapitres du roman qui restent sans suite.

Somme toute, un livre sur la solitude et la hantise du vide contemporain à lire.

Myths and Memories

Sarah Henstra
The Red Word. ECW $19.95

Sheila Heti
Motherhood. Knopf $29.95

Reviewed by Heidi Tiedemann Darroch

In their recent novels, Sarah Henstra and Sheila Heti consider contemporary women's expanded sexual and reproductive choices in the context of a long history of oppressive gender roles, including classical and mythological antecedents. While Henstra's central character recalls the charged campus dynamics of her young adulthood, Heti's narrator dissects her own qualms about whether she wants to become a mother.

Throughout Heti's *Motherhood*, the narrator (who is not named) fears that having a child would dilute her sense of vocation as a writer; conversely, she worries that missing out on the experience of motherhood will leave her feeling bereft and incomplete—perhaps even as a writer. She muses about the painful sources of her ambivalence:

> Maybe I feel betrayed by the woman inside of me who can't bring herself to do this thing. Or maybe I feel betrayed by my mother, for not devoting herself to me and creating whatever loving memories must be created in a child to make her want to repeat the process again. Or maybe it's a part of me that goes deeper than that—my lifelong desire to leave my family and never be part of a new one. (128)

Oscillating between these and other concerns—her partner's frustrating unwillingness to share responsibility for making

the decision, her friends' hopes that she will join them in the experience of motherhood—the narrator gradually works her way through to a resolution that she can live with, aided by coin tosses that grant sometimes confounding yes/no responses to her questions.

At times *Motherhood* can seem claustrophobic in its relentless focus on the narrator's own feelings and her apparent lack of empathy. She chafes at the loss of attention and love from her child-bearing friends, noting "I resent the spectacle of all this breeding" as they "turn with open arms to a new life, hoping to make a happiness greater than their own, rather than tending to the already-living." But as the novel explores how the narrator is one in a long line of grieving women, her family's history informed by mostly silenced Holocaust experiences of devastating loss, Heti conveys a more nuanced portrait of the character's anxiety to sustain connections.

Classical tropes and myths are central to Sarah Henstra's *The Red Word*, winner of the 2018 Governor General's Literary Award for English-language fiction. In Henstra's first novel for adult readers, several young women attending an Ivy League college during the 1990s become devotees of a charismatic women's studies professor; her popular course on classical myth and gender helps inspire her students' radical thinking about power, violence, and retribution.

As the novel opens, Karen, the narrator, learns of the death of an old friend whose memorial service is coincidentally slated to take place in the city where Karen will be attending a conference, and not far from their college. The trip precipitates memory of her second year of college, when she was inducted into a tight-knit circle of women who shared an off-campus house. After a series of incidents at a notorious fraternity that included allegations of drugging and sexually assaulting unwitting victims, the women hatch a plan to expose the arrogant assailants. But their approach leads to unanticipated damage, and Karen struggles to make sense of her role and responsibility. At one point, Karen interrupts her roommates' critique of sexual violence and misogyny to pose a crucial question: "Are the right people suffering for your actions?"

The Red Word poses uncomfortable questions about sexual agency, gender, and power, exploring recent concerns with campus rape culture through the perspectives of students from a previous generation, not long after the Montreal Massacre altered discussions about the salience of feminism. Henstra's writing vividly conjures up the fervent convictions of her characters in this intensely allusive work where each section is named for a classical term or rhetorical device. While illuminating how ideological commitments can prompt dangerous choices, Henstra does not single out feminism as the problem, but rather a surfeit of self-righteousness. *The Red Word* is a compelling and provocative novel that merits broad discussion.

Both of these novels take seriously the idea of moral choices and accountability. They consider how the ramifications of individual decisions ripple outwards as women confront the inadequacy of social scripts that consign them to roles—girlfriend, student, daughter, mother—that are not capacious enough for these restless, thoughtful protagonists to inhabit without chafing.

Rethinking the Breakup

Kelli María Korducki
Hard To Do: The Surprising, Feminist History of Breaking Up. Coach House $14.95

Reviewed by Mandy Len Catron

Breaking up is hard to do. We've all more or less agreed on this since Neil Sedaka's impossibly catchy tune cemented the phrase in the public consciousness in 1962. But, as journalist Kelli María Korducki points out, the challenges of breaking up are not evenly distributed. For today's women, the freedom to leave a relationship is still relatively new. And the choice to exercise that freedom can be both difficult and empowering, in a society "whose institutions continue to uphold the nuclear family as its foundation."

Hard To Do: The Surprising, Feminist History of Breaking Up is part of Coach House Books' Exploded Views collection, a series of "probing, provocative essays" published as short books. In both tone and perspective, *Hard To Do* fits neatly alongside recent books including Kate Bolick's *Spinster* and Rebecca Traister's *All the Single Ladies*. What begins as a blend of personal reflection and incisive cultural criticism segues into a history of the past two hundred years of courtship, marriage, and divorce in Western culture. Though the book seems, at times, unsure of its voice, which veers from irreverent to dense and scholarly, it is most engaging when Korducki uses her own experience as a launching point for examining the uniquely feminist concerns of breaking up. "My dreams for myself were bigger, louder, more insistent than my dreams for an us—any us, even hypothetical pairings that would never exist," she writes in the introduction, conveying a sense of longing and possibility that was, she observes, largely unavailable to previous generations.

Each chapter traverses ideas in ways that are surprising and engaging, even if the purpose of a particular historical anecdote or tangent isn't always immediately apparent. The lengthy list of citations includes everything from Taylor Swift to Ovid, from Simone de Beauvoir to marriage historian Stephanie Coontz. With such rich material, footnotes or page numbers (rather than a single alphabetical list) would help connect readers to the wealth of texts from which Korducki draws.

In her conclusion Korducki returns to the current moment, where, she notes, "[heterosexual] women are the likeliest to file for divorce, and those of us who do are happier afterwards." This fact gets little further reflection, but it seems crucial to understanding where we've arrived. Though breakups are typically framed as failures or disappointments, Korducki implies that they are just as often openings for new and better lives for women. In the final paragraph, she looks toward the future: "Maybe we will recognize the value in different types of close relationships in a way that lifts the existential pressure currently bearing down on romantic partnerships." I found myself hoping her sharp, sincere voice from the introduction would linger a bit longer here, reminding us that, though breaking up is still hard to do, it also ushers in new possibilities for the lives of the next generation of women and femmes.

Not Another Book About Landscape

Sarah Wylie Krotz
Mapping with Words: Anglo-Canadian Literary Cartographies, 1789-1916. U of Toronto P $65.00

Reviewed by Claire Omhovère

Mapping with Words rests upon the geocritical axiom that literary representations of space modelize the world they unify and render intelligible through the features they select, organize, and invest with aesthetic value. After such critics as D. M. R. Bentley and Misao Dean who have preceded her in

this direction, Sarah Wylie Krotz demonstrates that for the Anglo-Canadian writers of the nineteenth century, poeticizing the world was equivalent to cultivating it. Yet, if her study qualifies as literary geography, it is not owing to the landscapes her selected sources made memorable, but rather to the mental maps their authors elaborated to navigate the spaces that were opening as Canada was moving from the age of exploration to the age of surveying and settlement.

The corpus spans the period that extends from the British acquisition of New France, as portrayed in Thomas Cary's *Abram's Plains* and Adam Hood Burwell's *Talbot Road* (Chapter 1), to the poetic and territorial negotiations informing Duncan Campbell Scott's 1916 "The Height of Land," another long poem penned during the drafting of Treaty 9 (Chapter 5). The central chapters give pride of place to other locodescriptive genres such as the sketch in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (Chapter 2), the botanical charts of Catharine Parr Traill (Chapter 3), and the travelogue with George Monro Grant's *Ocean to Ocean* (Chapter 4). Krotz devotes her concluding chapter to David Thompson's extraordinary accomplishments as an early explorer, cartographer, and historian of the American Northwest. The book also includes a beautiful appendix comprising ten of the historical maps on which the author relies to illustrate the affinity she posits between textual and geographical mapping.

Although her analysis is indebted to the conceptual reversal Baudrillard initiated when he argued that the map precedes the territory, Krotz remains on the safe side of the *ut pictura poesis* principle in much of her close reading. The linearity she spots in Cary's and Burwell's heroic couplets reflects more than it initiates the ordering of colonial space contemporaneous to their composition. Her response to Scott's poem, in which the "uneven rhyme pattern catch[es] something of the rugged, asymmetrical beauty of the Precambrian shield," also supposes an analogical coupling between text and reality that diverges from the modelization maps usually privilege.

More convincing are the irregularities of the terrain Krotz's colonial text-maps strive to cover and, sometimes, unexpectedly enhance. Grant's account of the Northwest, for instance, erases Aboriginal traces when the land is viewed from a distance, but the Indigenous toponyms that intrigue him, with the stories embedded in them, occasionally cause his mapping to shift and reveal an unexpected sensitivity to the plight of Indigenous people. Krotz's valuable analyses of scale variations in Moodie's sketches and of Traill's views on Indigenous ecology are just as effective in their refreshing of accepted views regarding Canada's colonial literature.

Déambuler dans le « temps » et dans l'imaginaire d'un pays

Valérie Lapointe-Gagnon
Panser le Canada : une histoire intellectuelle de la commission Laurendeau-Dunton. Boréal 32,95 $

Jean Morisset
Sur la piste du Canada errant : déambulations géographiques à travers l'Amérique inédite. Boréal 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Louis-Serge Gill

À peine un an après qu'ait été célébré le cent-cinquantième anniversaire de la Confédération canadienne, Boréal fait paraître deux ouvrages fort riches pour comprendre certaines facettes de ce pays métissé et multiculturel.

Dans *Panser le Canada*, Valérie Lapointe-Gagnon nous invite à revisiter un moment important de l'histoire intellectuelle du Canada : la Commission royale d'enquête sur le bilinguisme et le biculturalisme, communément appelée la Commission Laurendeau-Dunton. Tenue sur

quatre-vingt-treize mois, soit presque huit années, cette dernière avait pour mandat de redonner une « unité » à un pays de plus en plus confortable dans ses divisions entre paliers provinciaux et fédéral. Fort à propos, cette commission arrive à point nommé et « s'inscrit dans un contexte particulier, où prévaut la volonté plus affirmée que jamais de trouver les voies d'une cohabitation sereine entre les « deux peuples fondateurs » à l'aube d'un nouveau siècle pour la fédération et devant les menaces représentées par la peur de l'annexion aux États-Unis et la montée de l'indépendantisme ». La commission d'enquête comme objet d'étude repense la méthode historiographique, entre autres puisque l'ouvrage aborde la singularité du contexte dans lequel la commission s'est formée. À cet égard, la chercheuse relève bien « l'importance des commissions d'enquête dans le développement et la formation du savoir scientifique » à une époque donnée.

De cette manière, Lapointe-Gagnon ne se contente pas de retracer les tenants et les aboutissants de cette commission dans une démarche chronologique. Et c'est là tout l'intérêt de l'ouvrage. *Panser le Canada* amène le lecteur à la rencontre d'une communauté d'intellectuels (des écrivains, des professeurs universitaires, de hauts dirigeants et une « ménagère » en Gertrude Laing, seul membre féminin de la commission), tous convoqués pour réfléchir à la situation et palier la scission entre le temps réflexif que permet la commission par ses nombreuses consultations et le temps politique qui se solde bien souvent par des résolutions rapidement adoptées au gré des sessions parlementaires. En ce sens, l'utilisation des notions d'événement et de *kairos* (grec pour « moment opportun ») pour « voir si certains événements se sont déroulés hors du temps linéaire pour atteindre un moment qui a sa propre dimension temporelle . . . » renouvèle certainement la manière d'envisager d'autres événements singuliers et surtout, le rôle des acteurs qui y ont pris part, dans leurs affinités comme dans leurs divergences. En somme, « [l]a notion de *kairos* permet de saisir le sens de l'événement et l'intensité des moments », notamment l' « ambiance ». De fait, cette notion permet aussi de saisir la sensibilité de l'historienne. D'ailleurs, comme le souligne Lapointe-Gagnon en conclusion, cela ouvre de nouvelles perspectives pour « penser les femmes comme sujets politiques, comme des actrices à part entière de l'histoire politique et intellectuelle, dont elles sont trop souvent évacuées ».

Hors des balises de l'analyse finement menée par Lapointe-Gagnon, Jean Morisset, géographe et professeur d'expérience, nous invite à un autre voyage : l'exploration du Canada tel qu' « imaginé » dès l'arrivée de Jacques Cartier et tel que vécu par les coureurs des bois et autres explorateurs du continent. Après leur arrivée, les premiers Européens ont tôt fait de créer des alliances avec les nations autochtones. Incidemment, un métissage inévitable s'est opéré et les premiers « Canadiens » sont nés. Ni Français, ni autochtones, ces descendants francophones des premiers colons ont arpenté le territoire d'abord pour se l'approprier, ensuite pour mieux le connaître.

Dans cette optique, Morisset met son talent d'écriture à retracer la piste de ce « Canada errant » qui, si l'on se fie à l'imaginaire franco-américain, s'étendait de l'Alaska à l'Amérique du Sud. Par une série de propositions et de réflexions intéressantes, l'auteur nous entraîne dans les forêts du Nord, dans les plaines, plus à l'Ouest, au Mexique et au Brésil. C'est que le Canadien, cet individu profondément exilé de lui-même, a plus en commun avec le Mexicain et le Brésilien qu'avec son voisin états-unien. L'unique différence réside certainement dans le fait qu'au Canada, c'est le conquérant qui s'est proclamé de l'identité du conquis. Polémique, cette proposition n'en est qu'une parmi d'autres.

À titre d'exemple, le chapitre « Sur les traces de l'imaginaire franco », qui convoque à la fois la poésie de Gaston Miron, les récits de voyageurs français, des réflexions d'Octavio Paz, ainsi que des impressions et des expériences plus personnelles à Jean Morisset, nous aide à saisir comment un peuple minorisé en vient à entretenir une haine de lui-même et de son passé. Hélas, la Conquête a empêché les Canadiens de s'affirmer contre leur mère patrie. Par conséquent, l'européanisation des manières de faire, des manières d'être, de concevoir le territoire et la culture est toujours latente et Morisset la débusque même dans les années 1960 avec l'apparition du substantif « québécois », retour vain aux origines françaises d'un « habitant » pourtant à la fois Français, Anglais, Espagnol, et autochtone. En ce sens, Morisset revient à Lionel Groulx qui aurait considéré ce métissage comme un mythe. De fait, il a longtemps été bon ton de faire taire le « sauvage », de le « nationaliser ». Si l'auto-analyse du Canadien dure depuis bientôt quatre siècles, force est de constater qu'elle n'aboutit qu'à peu de résultats.

Au gré des « déambulations géographiques à travers l'Amérique inédite », le lecteur aura peut-être quelques difficultés à retrouver ses repères, voire à s'identifier aux diverses origines relevées par Morisset. Pourtant, si l'on se sent parfois désorienté par les nombreuses idées soulevées et les sources sollicitées, peinant en conséquence à saisir le fil de l'argumentation, il n'en demeure pas moins que la riche pensée ici déployée et le plaisir manifeste de raconter un Canada inédit font de cet ouvrage, tout comme celui de Valérie Lapointe-Gagnon, des incontournables en cette époque de réconciliation.

Dare to Be True

Jenny Manzer
My Life as a Diamond. Orca $10.95

Jean Mills
Skating over Thin Ice. Red Deer $14.95

Kagiso Lesego Molope
This Book Betrays My Brother. Mawenzi $18.95

Reviewed by Anne L. Kaufman

Reading each of these books felt like a powerful individual experience; reviewing them together is in some ways exactly the right thing to do, and, in others, risks diminishing the potential impact each book could have on its readers.

When I first picked it up, I knew nothing about Kagiso Lesego Molope's *This Book Betrays My Brother*, a novel set in South Africa and originally published in 2012. The narrative unfolds slowly, moving inexorably toward betrayal on multiple levels. Naledi, the narrator and younger sister of Basi, makes it clear from the beginning that she is working her way up to an account of something horrific; the wealth of evocative context she provides along the way allows her to approach the tale of this incident on her own terms. Basi is the first boy born into Naledi's family in generations, and occupies an elevated position in the entire extended family. Naledi's parents see their two children differently, which seems like a good thing in the abstract, but which places Basi beyond criticism of all but the most trivial sort. The family's move up the hill from the township further isolates Naledi and inures her to a set of attitudes toward girls and women that later resonate with Basi's actions to produce deep trauma. By the time Naledi is a paralyzed observer of her brother's crime, she has already learned a set of cultural and familial lessons about her own responsibilities. This is a beautifully written and absolutely haunting novel. Naledi's voice and story stayed with me for a long time after I finished reading.

The book does contain potential triggers for survivors of sexual assault.

Imogen St. Pierre, the protagonist of Jean Mills' *Skating over Thin Ice*, wrestles with the effects of her early childhood while living a relatively isolated life as a musical prodigy. Forced into a boarding school in her mid-teens, she finds a friend in another new student, Nathan McCormick, a hockey prodigy. Music and hockey might seem an unlikely combination of passions, but the work of this novel lies in presenting Imogen and Nathan as connected by their experiences of celebrity and the expectations of others. The narrative is less about music and hockey than it is a meditation on being exceptional. Imogen is socially awkward in ways that are painful for a reader to experience, while Nathan is both an extraordinarily gifted hockey player and capable of extreme violence. Their friendship is healing for both Imogen and Nathan, but does not replace their respective passions, making their unlikely connection feel more genuine. This book will speak to a set of readers who don't often see themselves in the texts they read.

The title of *My Life as a Diamond* suggests (to a fan, at least) a book about baseball, as elite player and narrator Caz negotiates his family's move from Toronto to Washington State through the community provided by a new team. It is quickly obvious that middle-school student Caz and his parents are using the move to leave behind his former female identity, and this book is a welcome addition to the growing collection of transgender-themed reading for younger readers. The diamond in question comes from a saying Caz's Nana has about the effects of pressure. Jenny Manzer does a wonderful job evoking an authentic voice for Caz without making him too precious, and his parents' and grandparents' voices and reactions ring true as well. Caz flourishes in his new community. He finds that he has the strength and support he needs to stand up to the bully who tries his best to out Caz in a very public way. From issues like sleepovers to his musings about how life will change when he hits puberty, ten-year-old Caz's range of experiences feels right for the target age group (ages nine to twelve). A lovely book indeed.

The Delicious Core

Dave Margoshes
A Calendar of Reckoning. Coteau $17.95

Randy Lundy
Blackbird Song. U of Regina P $19.95

Emily Ursuliak
Throwing the Diamond Hitch.
U of Calgary P $18.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall

"You dream . . . of tiny seeds / planted and sprouting songs / deep in gray-brown bellies." In Randy Lundy's poem "Benediction" these closing lines provide a perfect metaphor for three new collections of poems by Randy Lundy, Dave Margoshes, and Emily Ursuliak. All three books are strongly narrative, telling stories of grandmothers, girls on horseback, and memories of an ordinary childhood, and in all three books, the writers take us through the delicious bodies of the poems, to find the small, essential seeds of human experience.

The poems in Dave Margoshes' new collection, *A Calendar of Reckoning*, offer that gift of giving us a moment that stays with us all day, and maybe into the next. His images hold our attention, like bright apples in an orchard of ordinary trees. Here is one of his best, from his poem "Ashes":

> I skin the last smoke, take its innards
> in the palm of my hand, dry and granular
> as broken ash. When I feel ready I step
> out of the car,
> walk into the copse of trees near the
> garage
> and scatter my father's remains.

His poems are quietly meditative and while meditative poems can be pedantic, he never

falls into that trap. What I admire most about this work is that his poems are hard and sweet: no showing off, no extra weight, just the densely packed core of story and truth, often in the final lines of his poems. In "Birthday" he ends with "*I was there,* / he said, *I saw it,*" and it's an ending that's earned. Another favourite is the end of the poem "The Clearing" about a moose that looks in the writer's window: "I bowed my head and wished her safe passage / in a world not made for innocence, curiosity, near-sightedness."

In *Blackbird Song,* Randy Lundy creates a unique structural pattern throughout his book. He creates pairings of poems, like a call and response, or like the larger, outer meal and the dense, richer core. The first poems in the pairings are longer, and more narrative, and then the following poems are spare and dense. For example, his poem "A Prayer," weaves the narrative of the speaker's grandmother with a story about a frozen bird. Then the poem following, titled "Woman Who Taught her Grandson to Love," is a six-line poem that distills the ideas of the longer poem into one hard, beautiful seed:

> One day the entries stopped
> sudden as the heart/in a palm-sized
> feathered body
> at forty below zero.

This kind of doubling—a longer narrative then a haiku-like image that distills it—is unique for a collection of poetry. It's exciting to see this kind of structural innovation in a book of narrative poems.

In her debut collection, *Throwing the Diamond Hitch,* Emily Ursuliak also writes stories; these are about her grandmother and her best friend on an epic adventure they took in the 1950s. This is the most conventional narrative of the three books, as we follow the two young women across the wild landscape on horseback. If Margoshes specializes in ending his poems with memorable images, Ursuliak knows how to begin a poem. Each poem begins with a small explosion of taste: "The land refuses maps / a rebellion against any / straight path on paper" ("Piebald Eyes Meet Their Match"). Another memorable opening is: "The hotel and its broken / geography, up on jacks" ("Keremeos"). Like any good novelist, she knows how to hook us, and make us want to keep reading. The poems spin out in a satisfying way, but it's those openings that really stick in our throats: "Thickened spit clings to the bit and tries to drip, but stretches" ("Two Kinds of Diamonds"). Each of these poems is a small explosion of taste, and each draws us onward, wanting the next one.

All three of these poets show mastery of technique, particularly in poetic storytelling. And any one of these books will provide a satisfying afternoon walk, an immersion in light and leafy shade, beneath a richness of poems to pick and savour.

Ideas in Things

Gillian Roberts, ed.
Reading Between the Borderlines: Cultural Production and Consumption across the 49th Parallel. McGill-Queen's UP $110.00

Reviewed by Dougal McNeill

Schitt's Creek streams on Netflix here in New Zealand, but I have a hard time convincing friends that it is Canadian and not American content. Stevie's fear of a single life in Saskatchewan—to me an evocative aside—carries no argumentative weight with my doubters; special pleading for what Stephen Henighan asked for in the "commitment to local detail" is under-read by consumers used to reading, in this other settler colony with a more powerful neighbour, the unspecified as American.

A better approach to understanding this simultaneously Canadian-produced and globally consumed product, suggest the

essays in Gillian Roberts' thoughtful and wide-ranging edited collection, would be to eschew content analysis for a focus on the mechanics, economics, and methods of television production and distribution. The book's contributors, Roberts tells us, examine

> what actually happens in cross-border cultural production and consumption by tracing the cross-border movements of cultural objects, some of which are conventionally understood and circulated as Canadian, and some as American.

Rather than focusing on the battles over provenance that animated earlier nationalisms, these essays pay attention to what is *generative* in the many crossings cultural products make, from development to circulation, between Canadian and American spaces. What happens to Canadian romance novels, and to their writers, as they negotiate an American market accustomed to seeing itself as the universal audience? How do Canadian media workers operate as part of the "international pit crew" in the digital effects industry? What do the inscriptions and images of the Underground Railroad Monument in Detroit and Windsor reveal about how race and racism are acknowledged, or deflected, in state narratives of Canadian identity? These are just some of the questions prompted by the collection's varied, lively chapters.

Reading Between the Borderlines works in the best traditions of cultural studies, bringing the skills of attentive close reading and literary analysis to unexpected, but significant, objects. No ideas but in things! Michael Stamm's fascinating chapter on the politics of content and the *Chicago Tribune* starts not with text but with trees, and follows the "lifecycle of a printed text" from Canadian forest to Chicago breakfast table. Similarly, Richard Sutherland's chapter on music corrects the scholarly focus on "the nationality of musical content" by exploring the "(largely industrial) means by which it circulates." The Canadian recording industry has been, he points out, for most of its existence "a manufacturing industry." Alyssa MacLean's work on the Black open letter shows how the border "facilitated" transformations in Black agency and action.

The result of a 2014 conference in England, *Reading Between the Borderlines* reads as a moment preserved rather than dated. Its chapters circle back on the project and assumptions of Harper's Conservative government, giving them an eerie relevance. In the Trump era, early-century enthusiasms over globalization and cosmopolitanism feel more distant than ongoing battles over racialized subjects, exclusions, and fears. Canada's recent past tells us something about America's present.

Darkness Visible

Genevieve Scott
Catch My Drift. Goose Lane $22.95

W. D. Valgardson
In Valhalla's Shadows. Douglas & McIntyre $32.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

In both Genevieve Scott's *Catch My Drift* and W. D. Valgardson's *In Valhalla's Shadows*, darkness hides beneath the surface of families, communities, and landscapes; it is manifested in both literal darkness at night and the secrets that come to light through the novels. In a Canadian setting, that darkness can often be ignored or even denied, but these two powerful, multifaceted stories transform the reader by making it visible in painful, tragic, and haunting coincidences. Both novels shine a metaphorical flashlight on shadowy characters, relationships, and intergenerational injury, in the midst of a busy metropolis and in the small settlements along Lake Winnipeg, respectively.

Catch My Drift, Scott's first novel, alternates between the perspectives of mother and daughter, Lorna and Cara, as they share the intense and often distressing

experiences of women at various stages of life. The title's "drift" is the intergenerational spillover of broken relationships, broken dreams, and encounters with love and loss. Lorna works in an office to support her daughter, while her ex-husband, Alex, abandons his parental role for a mission of self-discovery. Alex, who first enters Lorna's life after her dreams of being an Olympic swimmer are quashed because of a car accident, is frustratingly self-involved already—a one-time actor who lacks focus and seeks Lorna's assistance as tutor. The Lorna of the past, narrated through individual chapters, sabotages her own chances at success for the sake of romantic love with a man who clearly takes advantage of her. She becomes pregnant, and she and Alex share the illusion of a nuclear family, even while Alex is repeatedly unfaithful and certainly unreliable. The pattern is repeated again in Lorna's blossoming relationship with her superior at work, an affair that again results in abandonment and loss.

Cara is a fascinating character in her own right, haunted by disturbing behaviours, the response to what she labels "hell thoughts." When Lorna steps in to encourage Cara to take tennis lessons as a way to focus and build confidence, Cara's reflection on her increasingly violent and aggressive pattern of thinking is described in a metaphor of a predatory world beneath the surface of her mind: "All my regular thoughts are like little fish, spinning around and minding their own business. But the hell-thoughts are sharks. They eat up everything."

Remarkably, the mixture of pathos and humour is gripping in these interwoven stories, reflecting the isolation of both mother and daughter, and their inability to share their struggles. While some scenes verge on absurdity, and the characters on one-dimensional caricatures, the overall impact resonates with sincerity. In one particularly moving vignette, Cara develops what she believes is a close bond with her father after he spends time at a commune in Michigan called the "Black River Peace Center." He helps Cara prepare for her driving test, but inadvertently reveals that this involvement is a way of facilitating his own living arrangement with a woman he met at the Center. When the day of the road test arrives, Alex does not appear to pick up Cara, and Lorna instead takes her to the test centre, the tension and disappointment palpable even while hidden in shadow. As Cara notes, "[n]othing about this day is how it's supposed to be." Her behaviour is both believable and heartbreakingly poignant; the interlacing of perspectives invests the reader in both characters' emotional turmoil. There is, in the end, no grand epiphany, reconciliation, or resolution; there is, however, a redemptive element in these ambivalent and complex relationships.

While *Catch My Drift* focuses on an urban setting and the deep connections between mothers and daughters, *In Valhalla's Shadows* is the legacy of Valgardson's first novel, *Gentle Sinners*, which unravels the uneasy coexistence of stiflingly dogmatic Christianity and Norse pagan mythology in Icelandic settlements along Lake Winnipeg. After noting the shadowy figure of Sigfus in *Gentle Sinners*, and his surprising claim that he finds solace in an abandoned church, I was intrigued to see a similar church on the cover of *In Valhalla's Shadows*, along with a mysterious pastor who assures the main character that if his soul did not need healing, "you wouldn't be here" to fix the damaged cross that adorns the roof. The interlake territory so familiar to Valgardson emerges with more depth and complexity, inviting us into the shadowy world of coexisting sacred spaces, and a blend of intellectual engagement, emotional attachment, and a variety of spiritual practices and belief systems.

Valgardson's novel is a masterpiece that interweaves the mythic and narrative elements of *Gentle Sinners* in a more gripping and comprehensive way, with contemporary

elements of missing and murdered Indigenous women, PTSD in first responders, Norse mythology and ancestry, and the positive and toxic elements of community. Valhalla's secrets begin with the discovery—by the main character, Tom Parson—of a dead body on the shore of Lake Winnipeg, but they touch on issues as banal as extramarital flirtation, tension between small-town locals and tourists who feed and exploit the Valhalla economy, the prevalence of addiction, and underworlds of drugs and prostitution. Unlike the contrapuntal narrative of *Catch My Drift*, this novel is dominated by Parson's perspective as he seeks refuge from his failed marriage, psychological and physical trauma and distress, career loss, and estrangement from his two children. In interviews, Valgardson stresses that the characters have counterparts in reality, but are never copies and mostly composites based on "a village in my mind . . . made up from a lifetime of experiences." The uneasy relationship between Icelandic immigrants and mainstream English city-dwellers is combined with the underlying connections between these immigrants and First Nations peoples, who are often linked by hunting and trapping. The novel reminds us of the uneasy redemption of disgraced people seeking a state of grace in the context of pain and loss, and the restorative power of interpersonal connection and mutual acceptance of brokenness. Like *Catch My Drift*, *In Valhalla's Shadows* underscores powerfully the inability of characters to escape their pasts, or even to change lifelong patterns of thought and behaviour, while offering hope of some glimpse of grace in a state of disgrace.

À la trace

Madeleine Thien
Nous qui n'étions rien. Alto 32,95 $

Matthieu Simard
Les écrivements. Alto 23,95 $

Compte rendu par Véronique Trottier

Le roman de Madeleine Thien est une symphonie où s'entremêlent les destins de deux familles aux existences morcelées par les événements qui surviennent dans une Chine d'abord ébranlée par la guerre civile et la guerre sino-japonaise, puis par la révolution culturelle chinoise. Les voix des personnages, amalgamées aux discours qui les traversent, tels la musique de Bach ou de Prokofiev, les poèmes retranscrits ou mémorisés, les préceptes du président Mao, les dénonciations publiques, les paroles des amis disparus, créent une polyphonie singulière et finement orchestrée. Héritière des mots, des silences et des blessures de cette famille élargie, et par-delà la distance géographique et temporelle qui la sépare d'elle, la narratrice entreprend, à partir du Vancouver où elle a grandi, de reconstituer l'histoire de ces vies, interrompues prématurément ou restées en suspens pendant des années. Par cette forme d'archéologie de soi, elle tentera de trouver la source de ce sentiment d'altérité face à elle-même, de cette dissociation, de cette impression d'incomplétude qui l'isole et la fait souffrir.

Car ce sentiment d'être étranger à soi-même, d'inadéquation avec le monde, tous les personnages qui peuplent l'univers du roman en font l'expérience douloureuse, dans cette Chine communiste qui assigne à chacun son rôle et où l'individu doit rompre avec lui-même à l'intérieur d'un univers rétréci. Ils semblent en effet évoluer aux confins de la réalité, poussés vers des trajectoires improbables.

Les « fouilles » de la narratrice s'effectuent entre autres à partir du *Livre des traces*, un roman sans début ni fin, dont la famille

amie de son père a fait son journal de bord et un rempart contre le vide et l'oubli, y relatant sa propre histoire à travers le récit original. Ce document fragmenté permet à Marie, Ma-li, Li-ling ou Fille, elle-même fragmentée et marquée par le manque, de reconstituer l'histoire de ces inconnus familiers, dans une chronologie imparfaite, une histoire située à la limite entre réalité et fiction, continuité et rupture, présent et passé. Comme les notes et les mots qui prennent sens dans leur lien avec les autres, Marie pourra habiter davantage le monde en ralliant ces horizons disloqués qui l'ont formée et dont elle porte en elle la mémoire. Au terme de ses recherches, elle ajoutera à ce palimpseste ses propres traces, enrichissant encore cet univers infini comme la poésie, la musique et l'amour, dont sont remplies les traces humaines.

Dans *Les écrivements*, partout sont les traces d'un passé facticement enterré qui confine le présent dans un réel partiellement accessible et réduit l'avenir à une plongée toujours plus profonde dans l'isolement. Seule la libération de cette mémoire *empêchée* permettra finalement à Jeanne de renaître au monde et de reconnecter son destin et celui de Suzor, amoureusement puis tragiquement liés.

Brisés par une expérience traumatique en URSS à la fin des années 1950, les deux amoureux n'ont fait que survivre à leur vie, emmurés dans un espace de souffrance et en perpétuel décalage avec le monde. Isolés ensemble, ils ont vécu ce simulacre d'existence avant que Suzor, un jour de décembre, quitte Jeanne, ne laissant derrière lui que traces dans la neige et désœuvrement. Durant quarante années, passées comme une errance dans le désert, Jeanne a cohabité avec le manque, au milieu des empreintes dissimulées de leur vie commune : un trou soigneusement préservé dans le mur de la cuisine réaménagée, des boutons cachés dans les entrailles de la maison, un placard condamné rempli des affaires de Suzor et un cahier à ne jamais relire, dans lequel ont été colligés tous les souvenirs heureux de leur passé commun. Paradoxalement, comme les autres vestiges de cette vie d'avant, le cahier conserve ce que la narratrice s'évertue à oublier. Et comme les autres traces, ces écrivements l'accompagnent où qu'elle aille, ne sont que présence dans l'absence, tout comme les cicatrices laissées par cet hiver en URSS et l'amour perdu.

Quand elle apprend que Suzor est atteint de la maladie d'Alzheimer depuis un an et demi, tout ce que Jeanne a scrupuleusement refoulé ressurgit et l'urgence des retrouvailles se fait sentir. La narratrice conçoit avec horreur la perspective de cette nouvelle perte et de cette solitude renouvelée par la défaillance de la mémoire du seul qui sait avec elle.

Après une courte enquête et un petit périple sur les traces de son amoureux perdu, Jeanne retrouve un Suzor à la mémoire altérée, laissant impossible tout retour en arrière, supprimant l'idée même d'un ultime déchirement. Devant l'évidence de cet effacement naît une forme de sérénité, de plénitude dans la présence, rendant le cahier et les paroles inutiles, et redonnant au présent ses droits.

Woman Listening

Miriam Toews

Women Talking. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Natalie Boldt

Miriam Toews needs no introduction. Her newest novel, however, does. "Between 2005 and 2009," writes Toews in an explanatory note, "in a remote Mennonite colony in Bolivia . . . many girls and women would wake in the morning feeling drowsy and in pain, their bodies bruised and bleeding, having been attacked in the night." Initially attributed to "wild female imagination" and then to Satan, the attacks were

eventually traced, correctly, to members of the colony—many of them relatives of the women—who had been using animal anaesthetic to render entire families unconscious and rape the women in their beds. In 2011, a Bolivian court found eight men guilty in the assault of over 130 (some reports state 300) women and girls ranging in age from three to well over sixty.

In spite of the international coverage that this trial received, relatively little is known about the women's reactions in the days and even years following these appalling events. Toews' novel, *Women Talking*, picks up the story in 2009, shortly after the remaining able-bodied men have left the colony to post bail for the attackers, and imagines the kinds of conversations that might have taken place among the women with the men *in absentia*. In the two-day window before they return, eight women and one man (the local schoolteacher, who is their scribe and the book's narrator) meet in secret to discuss their options—in Toews' account, the option to (1) stay and do nothing, (2) stay and fight, or (3) leave and start over. The narrative that results is poignant and powerful and, much like Toews' earlier work, a delicate balance of darkness and light.

In the tradition of her first novel, *A Complicated Kindness*, Toews' *Women Talking* communicates the harms perpetuated by a religion that has been—and still is—wielded with a will to dominate alongside a gentler version: one that yields to experience, empowers through love, encourages forgiveness, and, when forgiveness is impossible, relies on grace. Certainly, grace for one another is something that her characters have in abundance and it, along with their resilience, anger, and, yes, even humour, is what makes them memorable. Like Nomi, Elf, and Yoli before them, the women in this novel are wonderfully round. From the patient matriarchs Greta Loewen and Agata Friesen, to fierce Salome (who, the narrator tells us, took a scythe to her daughter's abuser), to the two youngest women, Autje and Neitje, who roll their socks down "rebelliously (and stylishly) into little doughnuts" and wear their kerchiefs around their wrists, these are women I want desperately to know. In their variety, they are also a collective reminder that, as one character muses, there is no right way to respond to trauma: "responses are varied and one is not more or less appropriate than the other."

Women Talking is a difficult novel, but it is well supported by Toews' careful storytelling, the exacting—and sometimes conflicting—insights of her characters, and the obvious skill that went into crafting them. Well-wrought and thought provoking, *Women Talking* is Toews at her very best.

Those Were the Days

Tom Wayman

If You're Not Free at Work, Where Are You Free? Literature and Social Change: Selected Essays and Interviews (1994-2014). Guernica $25.00

Reviewed by Robert David Stacey

The first book I ever reviewed was Tom Wayman's *The Astonishing Weight of the Dead* in 1994. At the time, I didn't fully appreciate the virtues of Wayman's aesthetic; eventually, though, I became a fan. When I discovered his essays and anthologies on work and "New Work Writing" later that decade, I felt I had found a kindred spirit. Wayman was one of the few voices in my new world—the world of academic Canadian literature—who spoke to the values of my old world, the working-class company town in which I grew up. Wayman's insistence that work—whatever form it took—*mattered* and ought to occupy a more significant place in our creative and cultural production resonated with me very strongly.

If You're Not Free at Work, Where Are You Free?, which collects essays and interviews completed between 1994 and 2014, is the fourth collection of its type. Unfortunately,

Wayman does little to extend or update his ideas about work, literature, and society first articulated in 1983's *Inside Job*. It's been thirty-five years; the ground has changed dramatically under our feet; yet Wayman continues to talk about blue- vs. white-collar work, the perils of deindustrialization, the work week, the job site, and so forth, in ways that fail to help us better understand the rise of affective, symbolic, and other kinds of "immaterial" labour with their own management structures, partitions of time, and forms of remuneration. What *is* new is a certain tone, a bitter nostalgia that colours the collection as a whole. I share many of Wayman's misgivings about the contemporary political situation, but there is critique and there is complaint. This, to me, seems more like the latter.

The centrepiece of the collection is a rather long essay entitled "Avant-Garde or Lost Platoon? Postmodernism as Social Control," a version of which was originally published in *Canadian Poetry* in 2015. Attacking postmodernism in 2015 is a little like denouncing disco in 2015, but Wayman is not really taking postmodernism to task so much as he's bemoaning everything that's happened in academia in the last forty years. Hence his list of "postmodern" thinkers, the adoption of whose ideas has led to the destruction of "Post-secondary institutions . . . as lively centres of unbridled inquiry and protest": Lacan, Derrida, Shklovsky, Bakhtin, Barthes, Lyotard, Foucault, Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva, and Spivak. One could write an equally long essay about the weirdness of this list. It's unclear to me how carefully Wayman has read the work of these theorists; none of it is discussed in any detail. Instead, Wayman mostly relies on second-hand quotations from journalists and commentators to support his view that postmodernism represents a conspiracy devised by the "intellectual elite" to undermine class solidarity and defuse social protest. Even more frustrating than Wayman's conviction that the above list is somehow both coherent and representative of something called "postmodernism" is the notion that it actually exhausts the "academic" perspective. He genuinely seems unaware that there are plenty of theorists whose work tends to *support* many of his own points.

It's difficult to discount Wayman's complaint about the "turbidity of postmodernist critical essays, with heavy use of jargon substituting for clarity of idea." But Wayman seems uncomfortable with complexity and difficulty in writing as such. The only writing and thinking of any value are that which can be read and understood by anyone under any circumstances. I strongly disagree. Among their various other duties, academics are paid to think for a living. Often, that thinking requires that they adopt a technical vocabulary or push language beyond its ordinary usages. It seems strange that Wayman's famous respect and admiration for the specialized way things are done in other jobs should not extend to the academic context. Instead, his position in this essay and throughout the collection is very close to that of the populist anti-intellectual (like, say, Margaret Wente) who sees academic research in the humanities as nothing more than a calculated attempt on the part of a privileged cabal to bamboozle young people and defraud the public purse.

Wayman's chief concern here—and in the collection as a whole—is that a theory-obsessed academy has encouraged "obscurantist" forms of writing, especially in poetry, that are deleterious to the common good. The point is arguable. But claims to the effect that "postmodern" writers are like "real estate speculators who trash natural environments or existing neighbourhoods for profit but call themselves 'developers'" suggest that the real issue here is that Wayman feels his own "neighbourhood"—earnestly staked out over a fifty-year writing career—has been similarly "trash[ed]" by

self-regarding hucksters with a diabolical hatred for anecdotal lyric. It is unfortunate that so commendable a writer, teacher, and organizer as Wayman should feel so mistreated. But the essay seems like payback for old hurts rather than a constructive intervention on behalf of the future.

There are some bright spots, however. The essay "Against the Smiling Bastards," for example, is an excellent bit of social history recounting Bill Bennett's war against BC's civil service and other labour organizations, his Socred government's persecution of Nelson's David Thompson University Centre, which was forced into closure, and the subsequent emergence of the Kootenay School of the Arts. It also provides one of the more detailed accounts of Vancouver's Kootenay School of Writing, which Wayman helped establish, but eventually came to be associated with the very kind of writing he abhors. The collection concludes with a set of informative and engaging interviews that have the fortunate effect of mitigating some of the misplaced rancour of that central essay. Though not entirely free of the grumpiness and generation-baiting detectable elsewhere in the volume, the interviews remind the reader of the commitment to and confidence in people that have inspired Wayman's various labours in the commons.

The Spice Box, Old and New: Defining the Field of Canadian Jewish Writing

Ruth Panofsky

Nearly four decades have passed since 1981, when Lester & Orpen Dennys issued *The Spice Box: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Writing* under its historic imprint. At the time, few such anthologies existed and *The Spice Box*, co-edited by Gerri Sinclair and Morris Wolfe,[1] was hailed as a landmark collection. Among other works, it included English translations of Yiddish verse by J. I. Segal and Rokhl Korn, poems by A. M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Miriam Waddington, and prose by Ted Allan, Adele Wiseman, and Mordecai Richler, authors widely recognized for having brought Jewish writing to the fore in Canada. *The Spice Box* was instrumental in delineating the field of Canadian Jewish writing and soon became an important title for Lester & Orpen Dennys.

In 2015, when the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto launched the New Jewish Press—in 2018, the imprint was acquired by the University of Toronto Press, giving it a new authority and a wider reach—co-publishers Andrea Knight and Malcolm Lester invited me to edit *The New Spice Box*, an anthology that would pay homage to its predecessor—long out of print—and bring together distinctive contemporary voices.

This essay probes the editorial imperatives underlying two complementary anthologies, the one historic and the other contemporary. When *The Spice Box: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Writing* was issued in the early 1980s, it marked the growth of Jewish literary activity in Canada over the course of the twentieth century. *The New Spice Box: Canadian Jewish Writing* was launched in May 2017 and its scope and perspective are expansive: the volume summons the past as it moves toward the present.

I contend that widespread notions of Canadianness, on the one hand, and Jewishness, on the other, influenced editorial selection of the specific representations of Canadian Jewish writing in the two iterations of *The Spice Box*. Much of the work included in the earlier collection, for example, was explicitly concerned with the various ways national and cultural identities converge. In a somewhat ironic reversal, writers in the 2017 collection are more inclined to explore their cultural inheritance by returning to a historical past that is rarely rooted in Canada. By surveying the editorial focus and literary content of *The Spice Box* old and new, this essay shows that each collection invokes prevailing ideas about nation and culture to further its larger project of defining the field of Canadian Jewish writing.

In their respective attempts to contest and realign the parameters of the Canadian literary canon, each of *The Spice Box* editors, whether or not they acknowledge doing so, traverses the valuable terrain of established cultural capital. In their introduction to *The Spice Box* of 1981, co-editors Sinclair and Wolfe claim they "just wanted to bring

together the best writing . . . on the subject of being Jewish in Canada" and did not establish "firm ground rules" for their project (v). In contrast, my editorial introduction to *The New Spice Box* self-reflexively outlines the methodological approach that guided my selection of "original and varied responses to the intersectional complexities of cultural and national identity" (xi). Nonetheless, both sets of editorial practice—the one implicit, the other explicit—effectively serve to intervene in the canon of Canadian literary works.

By overtly situating Jewish writing as Canadian writing, *The Spice Box* of 1981 sought to lay new cultural ground. Its editors saw a complementarity between Jews, whose long memory of "[c]enturies of hatred . . . forced [them] . . . to define themselves," and Canadians, who had "the shortest" of memories and lacked a clear sense of themselves (vii). Thus, Sinclair and Wolfe mapped Jewish culture onto what they figured as the open literary landscape of Canada. In doing so, they posited the possibility that Jews had not only made the "journey from the *shtetls* of Europe into the mainstream of modern Canadian life"; in fact, they were suggesting that Canadian culture had made a place for and was enriched by Jewish sensibility, knowledge, and experience (Sinclair and Wolfe ix).

Canada served as a necessary backdrop for the probing of Jewish identity in *The Spice Box*. For much of the twentieth century, when the writing collected in *The Spice Box* was coming to life, Canada was perceived as a relatively new nation. This perception, though never tenable, proved to be liberating for many of the writers featured in the 1981 volume. Here, Canada offered a modern frame of reference and the opportunity to read Jewishness and its age-old struggles anew.

Authors such as Ted Allan, Miriam Waddington, Eli Mandel, and Shirley Faessler, for example, wrote in advance of the 1982 publication of Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*, a signal text that exposed the systemic racism that denied refuge to European Jews during the Second World War—it has since been reissued several times and now serves as a dire warning against such malicious practices—and well before 1988, when multiculturalism as government policy was legally enshrined. For these writers, the arrival and settlement experience of Jewish immigrants to Canada was paramount. Thus, *The Spice Box* was an anthology of Jewish Canadian writing, its subtitle phrased so as to emphasize cultural and/or ethnic identity over national identity. By positioning Jewish writing as Canadian writing, however, co-editors Sinclair and Wolfe sought to broaden the literary canon, an undertaking that was as bold as it was deliberate.

The setting of Montreal is central to Ted Allan's 1949 story "Lies My Father Told Me," which evokes the adult narrator's loss of childhood innocence and coming of age. The narrator lovingly recalls being seated atop a wagon with his rag peddler grandfather, pulled along by their old horse Ferdeleh "through the dirt lanes of Montreal . . . holding our hands to our ears and shouting at the top of our lungs, 'Regz, cloze, botels!'" (83). The mood of the grandfather, who was born and raised in Russia and remains devout, improves when he reaches Mount Royal. The setting inspires him to extol the virtues "of the great land that Canada was, and of the great things the young people growing up were going to do in this great land" (84).

The climax of the story, which hinges on the death of both the grandfather and Ferdeleh and on the betrayal of the narrator by his own father, shows the influence of the modern setting of Canada on the traditions and values imported from Eastern Europe. The narrator's father, who shows open

disdain for his father-in-law's faith, has embraced the secular life. His demeanour (he does not wear a beard) and his behaviour (he does not pray, attend synagogue, or observe the Sabbath) are governed by the freedom he claims and the agency he asserts in the new world of Montreal. More importantly, he eschews the moral strictures of Judaism by acting unscrupulously. In an ironic undercutting of the grandfather's prediction that native-born Jews will see great achievements, the story ends with rejection of the Canadianized father. Here, the loss of the old ways and the personal cost that comes of embracing the new is enacted ambivalently on Canadian soil.

The poet Miriam Waddington, for whom identity is a complex mix of recent and historical events, knows herself as "someone from / Winnipeg whose bones ache / with the broken revolutions / of Europe" ("The Nineteen Thirties" 111). She withstands the insult "*dirty Jew*" and the wounding question from a streetcar conductor on Winnipeg's Selkirk Avenue: "*your father is / a Bolshevik isn't / he little girl?*" ("Why Should I Care" 115). Later, as a social worker in Toronto, she feels a kinship with the "twice outcast . . . Jewish whore" who strolls Jarvis Street and who she salutes as a sister: "I will recognize your face[,]" she asserts ("The Bond" 112-13). For Waddington, Winnipeg and Toronto engender a sense of divided cultural identity. Both cities, which serve as the loci for many of her poems, are the sites where her Jewishness is seen and experienced as a mark of shame and difference.

Poet Eli Mandel records a similar duality. Born and raised in Estevan, Saskatchewan, a small town near the Jewish farming colonies that were established in the province between 1886 and 1907, Mandel is unschooled in the Hebrew he reads on gravestones in the Hirsch Community Jewish Cemetery, now a historic site. Nonetheless, he so feels himself a "jewboy" that he takes part in a memorial service marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, held at the YMHA (now the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre) in downtown Toronto. Afterwards, he pays homage to his ancestry with a "poem becoming the body / becoming the faint hunger / ing body" of the millions who "drift / smoke from chimneys and ovens" ("On the 25th Anniversary" 119-20). Mandel's sense of Jewishness takes root in an unlikely place: the Canadian prairie that proved inhospitable to early Jewish settlers. Like Waddington, however, he, too, proclaims himself a Jew in a Canadian landscape far removed from the ashes of recent Jewish history.

Shirley Faessler's 1969 story "A Basket of Apples" unfolds against an earlier backdrop of historical suffering—the persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe—and private anguish. It tells of a long, arranged marriage that unites two impoverished immigrants, a husband from Romania, a contrary man whose first wife dies giving birth to their fourth child who does not survive, and his second wife from Russia, an accommodating woman who grows up as an illiterate orphan and whose childhood is one of servitude. Set in the insular Kensington Market neighbourhood of Toronto, at the time an enclave of Jewish newcomers, it describes a life of shared hardship in a city that is never truly home to the couple. Yet, Toronto fosters connections in the form of reconstituted families and new emotional bonds. As he lies dying in hospital, the husband finally admits that his wife is "a good woman" and entreats his daughter to care for her stepmother after his death (Faessler 105). First, however, she must take her stepmother to the Canadian National Exhibition: "It wouldn't hurt you to give her a little pleasure" (103). Although he was always averse to taking her himself—"Me?" he asks, "What would I do at the Exhibition?" (104)—he wants to convey appreciation for his devoted and hardworking wife who made a

loving home for him and his three children. Exhibition Place, a fairground far removed from the hardscrabble day-to-day life of Kensington Market, is a site of pleasure and promise amid profound pain and loss. By the story's close, having "booked two seats for the grandstand" to "see the fireworks" at the Exhibition, the stepdaughter signals the possibility of moving forward that comes of having laid down familial roots and having overcome trials in one's chosen home (Faessler 109). Toronto is no haven, but it is a city where families rebuild and new alliances form. In that, Faessler's husband and wife are equally fortunate.

Today, many prose writers and poets feel themselves adequately anchored in this country and the once pressing need to make sense of an unfamiliar land and culture has given way to a desire to scan the past. As a result, writers have turned to historical subject matter as a means of investigating and contextualizing the Jewish experience in Canada, past and present. In fact, the cultural contingencies of present-day Canadian life, as recorded by Helen Weinzweig, Kenneth Sherman, Eva Hoffman, and Naim Kattan in *The New Spice Box* of 2017, have led to a transnational probing of profound historical complexities, which may be apprehended though never resolved through writerly explorations of Jewish identity. Consequently, in subtitling *The New Spice Box* I felt called to revise past practice and to put the accent on Canadian over Jewish writing.

In selecting material for the volume I was guided first by its title, with its emphasis on newness. *The New Spice Box* showcases work that is fresh and relevant, profound and lasting—problematic as it may be to assign such literary merit. A desire to uncover the twin touchstones of original expression and writerly craft, and to balance the representation of genres, styles, and authorial perspectives, underwrote my editorial deliberations.

The poems, stories, and essays featured in *The New Spice Box* show that there are innumerable ways in which literature is both Canadian and Jewish in orientation, countless ways in which Canadian Jewish experience is written into literature, and multiple ways in which writers identify as Canadian and Jewish. Much of the writing is recent, although some of it is historic. While it does not replicate content included in *The Spice Box*, it does feature stories by Helen Weinzweig, Matt Cohen, and Seymour Mayne, writers represented in the 1981 collection. Omitted are others who treat Jewish subject matter but, for a variety of reasons, choose not to self-identify as Jewish writers.

Helen Weinzweig's "My Mother's Luck" of 1989, the opening story in *The New Spice Box*, though centred in Kensington Market where the protagonist Lily lives and works as a hairstylist, also returns to Poland, where she was born and raised. Presented in Lily's inimitable voice as she prepares to send her daughter, Esther, on a return trip to Europe to visit a long-absent father, the extended monologue, assigned the ominous date of 6 July 1931, offers an encapsulated history of Polish Jewry.

Lily's personal narrative of unremitting difficulty—punctuated by advice she gives her daughter—reconstructs the past as it moves fitfully toward a present and future located, however uneasily, in Canada. Details of her past trials, first as a mistreated daughter and then as an undervalued wife, inform our reading of Lily's fortitude and resilience. We come to understand her defiant attitude, born of female subjugation in Poland and honed in Toronto, where she faces public scrutiny as a divorcée raising her daughter alone. She adapts old ways to new challenges and has few regrets—she reflects on the past as merely having shaped her—an indication of the confidence that comes of having had the opportunity in Toronto to make personal choices and to

live according to her beliefs. In the end, Lily is certain of her legacy to her daughter. "I brought you up right" she declares, and Esther is thus braced for the dangerous world her mother knows intimately (Weinzweig 16). Lily may have learned to live by her wits in Poland, but that knowledge also serves her admirably in Canada.

Essayists in *The New Spice Box* concede the effects of the past on present lives. In his 2009 essay Kenneth Sherman recollects his grandfather as a man who, soon after arriving in "the New World," achieves success as a custom tailor and does "not spend much time looking back" at life in his native Poland (94). His grandfather thrives, however, by dint of three qualities that are rooted in the hardship of his Eastern European upbringing: a heightened intuition, a keen work ethic, and a pragmatic realism.

When asked to recall his hometown of Lipsk, Sherman senior recites telling details. He remembers its "extreme poverty" and its size: "it was so small that if a horse stood on the main street his nose would be out one end of the town and the tail would be out the other" (Sherman 95-96). All comedy aside, he condemns Europe as "a sewer"; still, he lacks a sense of history in Canada and asks the rueful question that provides the title for his grandson's essay, "who knows you here?" (96). Though Sherman's grandfather can reflect on a meaningful life, his formative experience has held sway over his many years in Toronto—so much so that belatedly, after having overcome much adversity, he still cannot resist weighing his European past against his Canadian present.

Eva Hoffman's 1989 memoir describes her own existential crisis when she arrives in Canada in the 1950s. Vancouver is the physical and metaphorical site of Hoffman's "primal scream" of "birth into the New World" (188). The city does not feel welcoming to the dejected adolescent, who must accompany her survivor parents from Kraków, Poland to Canada's west coast. Like so many immigrants, Hoffman's parents seek freedom from oppression and new opportunities for themselves and their daughter. Hoffman, however, is uneasy in Vancouver, whose urban newness seems to mirror her own newcomer status. She abhors its suburban homes protected by pristine gardens and set against the backdrop of forbidding mountains, the dearth of old buildings, the bland food and lack of culture. More significantly, Vancouver neither sparks nor encourages her intellect. She leaves as soon as she can, escaping to Texas on a university scholarship. Hoffman's hostility toward Vancouver renders the city as a liminal frontier that is still being settled. Here, though she feels unmoored in an unscripted cityscape, her aspirations for the future are kindled and nurtured. Thus, in preparing Hoffman for her inevitable departure, Vancouver proves to be an invaluable stop on her trajectory to becoming a future writer and intellectual.

A more nuanced valuing of the past and an understanding of its influence on the present is evident in Naim Kattan's essay "Cities of Birth," first published in 2005 in English but conceived in French, in which he imaginatively traverses the cities that have shaped his life. Kattan can be read as a perpetual exile who leaves his native Baghdad for Paris, travels to Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, Berlin, and Tel Aviv, and works in Ottawa for nearly twenty-five years while commuting from nearby Montreal. The city where he has "chosen to live" and which "has become . . . like one love combining . . . with all others" holds Kattan (200). In Montreal, the "walls crumble, and we are here and elsewhere, elsewhere and here" (200). Open to global influence but bound to Montreal, Kattan's identity is fluid. A contemporary example of the wandering Jew, he enjoys the privilege of moving freely about the world—both literally and creatively, by way of past experience—secure

in the knowledge that Montreal will always welcome his return.

A tie to Canada—even when it is deemed a cultural wasteland, as Hoffman characterizes Vancouver at mid-century—undergirds the interest in distant histories observable in contemporary Jewish writing. Today, the country invites embrace for its cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity; at the same time, it is open to censure for its historic failings and cultural contradictions.[2] The writers I chose to feature in *The New Spice Box* admit that complexity; they also feel sufficiently joined to Canada that to move beyond its borders—either physically or metaphorically—frequently leads them to reaffirm their ideological and geographical connections to a country that stirs their creativity.

My attempt to read *The New Spice Box* of 2017 in relation to *The Spice Box* of 1981 brings continuing tensions and aspirations into relief: my editorial impulse to reorient the canon of Canadian writing toward greater inclusivity, and my desire to frame Jewish writing as Canadian writing; the degree to which writers have always struggled with the complexities of Canadian Jewish identity, and the creative lengths they have gone to showcase Jewish sensibility and experience within a Canadian context. In 1981, pioneering co-editors Sinclair and Wolfe ventured to define a new literary field. More than three decades later, this editor looked beyond established parameters and outward to a future in which writers will probe new intricacies of Canadian Jewish life.[3]

NOTES

1 Both were trained as literary scholars. At the time, Sinclair taught at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and Wolfe at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University) in Toronto.

2 Since an overview of those failings, which entails a shameful history of racism, lies outside the scope of this essay, I reference only the crime of cultural genocide enacted against Indigenous peoples through Canada's government-sponsored Indian residential schools, an institutional system in place from 1831 to 1996.

3 Volume two of *The New Spice Box*—the anthology was conceived and contracted as a two-volume project—will be published by the University of Toronto Press under the New Jewish Press imprint.

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"The cultures of Orient and Occident must be together in the character, imagination, and ideas of the writer": A Conversation with Naim Kattan

Ahmed Joudar

Naim Kattan was born in Baghdad in 1928, and descends from a longstanding Iraqi Jewish community. He began his education at the University of Baghdad in 1945 before being awarded a scholarship to study French literature at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1947. In addition to his interest in French literature, Kattan also was drawn to Arabic literature. In 1951, when he was in Paris, the Iraqi embassy rejected his passport renewal because of his religion, forcing him into exile. In 1954, Kattan decided to immigrate to Canada and has since spent much of his life contributing to the development of Canadian culture and literature, particularly in Quebec. Kattan has written more than fifty books and articles in French. His literary works deal with physical, emotional, and linguistic estrangement, displacement, and struggle. His narratives resonate with tensions especially recognizable to displaced people as they draw on the diversity of his life experiences, often located between different cultural trajectories and connecting the persistence of the past and the hegemonies of the present.

Kattan has received several important honours and awards, including being made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1983, a Knight of the National Order of Quebec in 1990, and a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in 2002 for his lifelong contribution to international francophone culture. In 2004, he also received the Prix Athanase-David, and in 2006, he received an honorary degree from Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec.

What follows is a record of an oral conversation that took place on May 10, 2018, in Paris, France, between Kattan and Ahmed Joudar, an Iraqi PhD student at the University of Szeged. The conversation was originally in Arabic[1] and the patterns of spoken language have been maintained in this version. The speakers discuss a range of topics including Kattan's early writing experiences, the reasons he was exiled, the Jewish community in Iraq, Kattan's views about cultural differences between East and West, cultural diversity in Canada, and characteristics of his first novel, *Farewell Babylon* (published originally in French as *Adieu, Babylone* in 1975).

Ahmed Joudar (AJ): Through your activities and contributions in literature and culture, it is clear that you started writing at an early age. Can you tell us about the beginning of your first writing experience? And how did it evolve?

Naim Kattan (NK): In fact, I wrote my first article at the age of fourteen, which was published in *Al Majalla* journal with the help of editor Thu Nun Ayoub. Between 1944 and 1947, I participated with the Iraqi poet Bland Al-Haidari in the publication of the *The Lost Time* journal [*Al-Waqt al-Dha'i*] to which I contributed for three issues. At the same time, a group of young people (Jamil Hamoudi, Nizar Saleem, Khaled Al-Rahal, Samir Al-Sheikhli, and Adnan Raouf) were meeting in one of Baghdad's cafés, where we discussed how to create a new Iraqi culture and how to develop Iraqi literature because we believe[d] Iraqi culture [was] great and important; therefore, it must be spread worldwide. Our group was composed of different religions and nationalities (Muslims, Jews, Christians, Kurds, and Arabs). We did not think about differences; we had a common goal to develop Iraqi culture.
We believed in the development of culture through the establishment of an Iraqi

magazine on a global level or at least in Arab countries because all the journals and magazines that were coming to Iraq were issued in Egypt and Lebanon. There was no Iraqi journal or magazine known at least in the Arab countries. At the time, we had prominent poets such as Al-Rasafi and Al-Zahawi in Iraq, but they were not known in Beirut or Cairo and their works were not read or criticized by Arab critics. After several meetings, we decided to establish an Iraqi magazine called *Modern Thought* [*Al-Fikr al-Hadith*]. These are my contributions when I was in Iraq.

AJ: Did you continue to write in Arabic magazines after you left Iraq?

NK: When I was in Paris, I continued to write in Iraqi and for Arab magazines. I wrote weekly articles in the *Al Shaa'b* newspaper that was published in Baghdad, and I was also writing in the magazine *Al-Al Adib* which was published monthly in Beirut.

AJ: In 1947, you left Baghdad for Paris to complete your studies, but after you had completed your study, you did not return to Iraq [but] immigrated to Canada. Can you tell us why you did not return to your homeland? Was it because you did not want to go back or were forced?

NK: In 1951, I was in the late days of my studies. I went to the Iraqi Embassy in Paris to renew my passport, but I was surprised that the embassy took my passport and rejected [my request] to renew. I felt I had lost my identity so I had only to find a new home. After I completed my studies, I decided to immigrate to Canada where I live with my family now.

AJ: Why did you not choose France as a new home after you were forced to be in exile, where you spent part of your life in Paris and speak French very well?

NK: In fact, I consider Paris [to be my] second birth city after Baghdad, where I learned a lot and which embraced me in the most difficult circumstances. It was easy to get French citizenship but for youths who got French citizenship, they went to Algeria to fight against Algerians. As I am an Arab, I did not want to participate in a war against the Arab countries so I decided to stay in France as a refugee for a temporary period and then decided to immigrate to Canada.

AJ: Have you continued to write in Arabic-language magazines after you migrated to Canada?

NK: Since I arrived in Canada, I no longer write in Arabic because I am a Canadian writer who writes in French language, and all my works after immigration to Canada were published in French first and then translated into other languages. Nevertheless, I still listen and read some Arabic books and journals as well as the Quran because the Quran is great and has great meanings as the Torah and the Bible do.

AJ: You mentioned in one of your previous interviews that your first literary book was issued fifteen years after you immigrated to Canada. Why did you wait so long?

NK: In fact, I was born in Iraq, so my mother tongue is Arabic and my original culture is Arab. I love Arabic and even when I was in school in Baghdad, I was the first among the pupils in the Arabic lesson, where I kept in mind many Arabic poems. Therefore, Arabic is my language and the language of my ancestors, which I consider as a part of me. It is not easy to leave the original language and write in a new language. Yes, I waited fifteen years to write my first literary book in the French language, although I speak French fluently and have written several articles in French.

In addition to French, I learned several other languages (English, Hebrew, Italian, Dutch, and Portuguese) and travelled to a large number of countries where I learned different cultures, but I retain Iraqi culture and still have relations with the Arab and Oriental society. Although all my articles and literary books are in French, I believe that the original culture should not be left.

The immigrant writer must integrate different cultures in his/ her work because each culture is complementary to the other. The writer must not be divided between East and West cultures. The cultures of Orient and Occident must be together in the character, imagination, and ideas of the writer.

I wrote a lot in French about works in America, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, as well as South America. When I was director of the Canada Council in Quebec, I always advocated the unification of both parts of Canada (French and English) because I thought they were supposed to be together and that Canada should unite. We must not reject any culture with preserving our original culture and identity. When I visit any country in the world, I say to them, "I am a Canadian born in Baghdad." I do not reject my original identity and my original culture despite my forced displacement from Iraq for more than seventy years.

AJ: Do you think that waiting for fifteen years is too long for a literary writer? Was it possible, after three, five, or even ten years, to write a literary book?

NK: In my book *Reality and Theatre*, I mentioned how an Iraqi Jewish writer moved from Orient to West (the distinction in the life between Orient and Occident), the different relations of life and culture between East and West. I think that life in the West is theatrical while in the Orient is real. For instance, Jews or Muslims do not show their plays in the temples or mosques, while Christians present their plays in the churches. Not only theatrical in religion, but also in politics. Stalin, for example, was born in Georgia but became leader of the Soviet Union and made theatrical in the Soviet Union. Hitler, too, was not from Germany. He was Austrian but he made from Nazis a play in Germany. In addition, for example, if we take Hungary when it was under the Austrian Empire, most Hungarian writers wrote in German despite their Hungarian culture and language, so their relationship with the German language was not a real relationship but was theatrical because of the dominance of the Austrians over culture and language.

AJ: Does the novel *Farewell Babylon* represent the real image of Iraqis' community and culture at the time?

NK: Certainly, anyone who reads the novel *Farewell Babylon* will have a real picture of [the] Iraqi community, especially the Baghdadi community. It symbolizes the image of Iraqi mosaics in the twentieth century which had different cultures, religions, and nationalities. When I was in Iraq, we were a group of young people [who] met together in order to create a new literature.

AJ: Are the events and stories that you mentioned in *Farewell Babylon* considered true and especially what the Jews were subjected to, such as the Farhud?

NK: All the events that I mentioned in the novel are factual and represented the era of Iraq between 1935 and 1948, especially the Farhud incident in which a large number of Jews were killed [as well as] the theft of some Jewish families in Baghdad.

AJ: The beautiful trilogy *(Farewell Babylon, Paris Interlude*, and *The Promised Bride)* represents a series of three different societies, each part completing the other parts. Why did you not mention the protagonist's name in the first part while you mentioned it in the second and third parts?

NK: Well, when I wrote the first part, it was a struggle with memory to codify the events that took place in Iraq at that time. The hero was the narrator himself. But the second and third parts shifted the style of the novel in writing the events and characters.

AJ: In the novel *Farewell Babylon*, you mention an important story where the hero's leg had broken, and his mother had to try to hide anything that symbolized Jewish[ness] before his father could take him to the Muslim district in Bab Al-Sheikh to treat

him. Does it mean that the Jews were living in isolation in Baghdad?

NK: No, the Jews did not live in isolation. When I was eleven years old, I always went to Muslim areas such as Haider Khana and met other friends in Muslim cafés. I also went with my grandmother to Adhamiya and Kadhimiyah to participate in Muslim celebrations. The Jews were working with their colleagues (Muslims, Christians, Arabs, and Kurds) in the same institutions and they usually met at celebrations or cafés.

AJ: The Jews obviously love their original homeland (Iraq). Why did they leave Iraq?

NK: The Jews did not leave Iraq but were forced to leave it and I was one of them. When I left Iraq to [go to] Paris to continue my study, I did not think I would not return to Iraq. In fact, the problems began after the chaos that followed the fall of the government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, before the British forces could control the city. The Farhud happened and ended the next day after the British forces entered Baghdad. Therefore, the Jews were forced to leave Iraq and some of them were harassed and exiled from their government jobs. The situation may have changed somewhat when Saddam took power, since he was not against the Jews, but against anyone who never had loyalty to him, for example against the Shiites.

AJ: The term "Bedouin" is repeated in the novel *Farewell Babylon* more than once. One of the critics claimed that the writer of the novel insulted the Iraqi people by using this term. What do you mean by "Bedouins" in the novel?

NK: When I was fourteen years old, I had a passion to discover what Iraq was at that time. We (a group of friends) always went to rural areas near Baghdad and Babylon as an example of the Musayyib area. We usually met farmers there and [they] were very kind and generous people regardless of our religion or nationalism. But they were poor and uneducated, therefore, I used the term to refer to the residents of rural areas in Iraq in that era.

AJ: In the incident of the Farhud that you mentioned in the novel *Farewell Babylon*, were the "Bedouins" the only ones who participated in that incident?

NK: No, the "Bedouins" were not the only participants in the Farhud but also other groups attacked the areas inhabited by Jews in Baghdad and tried to kill and steal from them.

AJ: We have talked a lot about the incident of the Farhud. What was the reason for the Farhud? Was it for political reasons or just a group of poor people who came to steal the Jewish district?

NK: When Rashid Ali al-Gaylani was the Prime Minister of Iraq in 1941, at that time the German Nazis were occupying Egypt. At the same time, military leaders and some Iraqi politicians collaborated with the Nazis against the British. The incident occurred during the period between the collapse of the government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and the British entering into Baghdad. The incident (Farhud) was almost three weeks when Jews were robbed because the Jews were rich and had important positions in the state.

AJ: In the second edition of *Farewell Babylon*, there is an addition to the title to become *Farewell Babylon: Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad.* Why did you add "Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad" to the title?

NK: In the first part, I mentioned in the title "Babylon" because it represents the first place of the Jews after their exile to Iraq by Nebuchadnezzar. But in the second edition, Baghdad was added to the title because all events revolve around the character of a young Jew who grew up in Baghdad.

AJ: Has *Farewell Babylon* been produced as a film?

NK: So far *Farewell Babylon* has not been produced as a film; perhaps in the future it will be produced. But I wrote a script for

another story called "Karam," discussing the relationship between Iraqi and French culture, and signed with a producer to produce a film.

AJ: The last question is about multiculturalism in Canada. What is Canada's program to preserve cultural diversity?

NK: Canada is a federal parliamentary democracy that is officially bilingual at the federal level. Multiculturalism is one of Canada's most important achievements and a key element of Canadian identity. It is a cultural mosaic that encompasses a mix of diverse cultures.

NOTE

1 The translation from Arabic to English was completed by Ahmed Joudar and approved by Naim Kattan.

Forum, Articles & Opinions and Notes

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.

Sally **Chivers** is Director of the Trent Centre for Aging and Society and Professor of English and Gender & Women's Studies at Trent University. She is the author of *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema* (2011) and *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives* (2003), and the co-editor of *Care Home Stories: Aging, Disability and Long-Term Residential Care* (2017) and *The Problem Body: Projecting Disability and Film* (2010). Her ongoing research focuses on the cultural politics of disability and aging, especially through literature and film.

Lily **Cho** is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at York University. Her book, *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (2010), examines the relationship between Chinese restaurants and Canadian culture. Her SSHRC-funded project, *Mass Capture: Chinese Head Tax and the Making of Non-Citizens in Canada*, focuses on Chinese Canadian head tax certificates known as "C.I. 9's" and explores the relationship between citizenship, photography, and anticipation as a mode of agency. Her essays on Asian Canadian literature and culture have appeared in *ARIEL, Canadian Literature, Canadian Journal of Law and Society, Citizenship Studies, Interventions, Postmodern Culture,* and *Studies in Canadian Literature.*

Carrie **Dawson** is the Dean of Arts and Science at Mount St Vincent University. Her recent scholarly work focuses on the representation of refugees and undocumented people in contemporary Canadian literature and culture.

Ahmed **Joudar** is a third-year doctoral candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Szeged, Hungary. His research focuses on postcolonial studies, Canadian literature, exile, immigration, multiculturalism, transculturation, cultural diversity, and hybridity. In Canadian studies, he is especially interested in cross-cultural writers who live in-between different cultures and how they have reflected their experience in their works.

Jenny **Kerber** is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. She teaches and researches in the areas of Canadian literature, environmental humanities, border studies, Indigenous literatures, and the literature of sport.

Aislinn **McDougall** is the Visiting Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities in the Department of English at the University of Utah. She grew up in Lumsden, SK, where she began her academic studies at the University of Regina. She completed both an MA and PhD in English at Queen's University in Kingston, ON. She specializes in contemporary North American literature and Digital Humanities in both critical and creative contexts.

Ruth **Panofsky** is a Professor in the Department of English at Ryerson University, where she specializes in Canadian literatures and cultures. She is the editor of *The New Spice Box: Canadian Jewish Writing* (2017) and the award-winning two-volume *The Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington: A Critical Edition* (2014). Her most recent publication is *Toronto Trailblazers: Women in Canadian Publishing* (2019).

Jamie **Paris** is an Assistant Professor of English at Corpus Christi College at the University of British Columbia. His doctoral dissertation focused on the tragedies of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. Dr. Paris' work is focused on intersectionality, with a specific interest in whiteness studies and critical race studies. This has led him to spend more time studying contemporary Canadian and First Nations literature and culture. This paper is part of a larger research project exploring non-dominative masculinities in contemporary Canadian Black and First Nations literature.

Gillian **Roberts** is Associate Professor of North American Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of *Discrepant Parallels: Cultural Implications of the Canada-US Border* (2015) and *Prizing Literature: The Circulation and Celebration of National Culture* (2011), editor of *Reading between the Borderlines: Cultural Production and Consumption across the 49th Parallel* (2018), and co-editor, with David Stirrup, of *Parallel Encounters: Culture at the Canada-US Border* (2014).

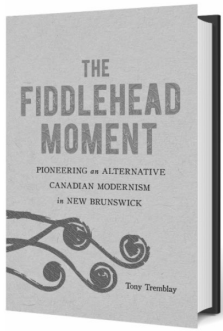
Rosemarie **Savignac** est doctorante en études littéraires à l'Université du Québec à Montréal sous la direction de Lori Saint-Martin. Dans la concentration en études féministes, elle a déposé en 2017 un mémoire intitulé « Écrire après la passion : stratégies épistolaires, survivance de l'amour et ironie vengeresse dans *Folle* de Nelly Arcan ».

Karina **Vernon** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Toronto Scarborough where she researches and teaches Canadian literature with a special focus on black Canadian literature, archives, critical race theory, multiculturalism and black-Indigenous solidarities. Her book *The Black Prairie Archives: An Anthology* (2019) brings to light a previously hidden archive of black writing, from the eighteenth-century black fur traders to contemporary writers. She is currently at work on two SSHRC-funded projects: *Black Art and the Aesthetics of Spatial Justice*, and, with her collaborator Winfried Siemerling, *Call and Response-ability: Black Canadian Art and the Politics of Relation*.

Poems

Franco **Cortese** lives in Thorold, Ontario. Cyril **Dabydeen** lives in Ottawa. Adrian **De Leon** and Prathna **Lor** live in Toronto. David **Martin** lives in Calgary, Alberta. Melanie **Pierluigi** and Meredith **Quartermain** live in Vancouver, BC.

Paul **Barrett** teaches at Concordia University. Gregory **Betts** teaches at Brock University. Magali **Blanc** and Mandy Len **Catron** live in Vancouver. Natalie **Boldt** and Heidi Tiedemann **Darroch** live in Victoria. Natalee **Caple** lives in St. Catharines. Sarah **Dowling** and Suzanne **Zelazo** live in Toronto. Chiara **Falangola** lives in Providence. Alexandre **Gauthier** lives in Gatineau. Louis-Serge **Gill** lives in Trois-Rivières. Jennifer **Hardwick** teaches at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Carla **Harrison** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Dallas **Hunt** teaches at the University of British Columbia. Anne L. **Kaufman** teaches at the Milton Academy. Jenny **Kerber** teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University. Angela **Kruger** teaches at Queen's University. Amei-Lee **Laboucan** lives in Surrey. Dorothy F. **Lane** teaches at the University of Regina. Andrea **MacPherson** teaches at the University of the Fraser Valley. Krzysztof **Majer** lives in Poznan. Dougal **McNeill** teaches at Victoria University of Wellington. Geordie **Miller** teaches at Mount Allison University. Nanette **Norris** lives in Bainsville. Heather **Olaveson** lives in Millgrove. Claire **Omhovère** lives in Montpellier. Robert David **Stacey** teaches at the University of Ottawa. Neil **Surkan** lives in Calgary. Véronique **Trottier** lives in Alma. Emily **Wall** lives in Douglas. Paul **Watkins** teaches at Vancouver Island University. Jeffrey Aaron **Weingarten** teaches at Fanshawe College.



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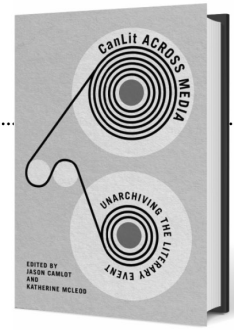

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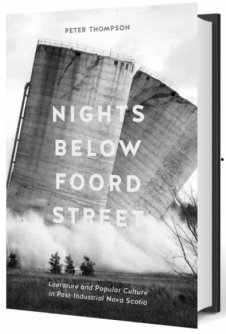

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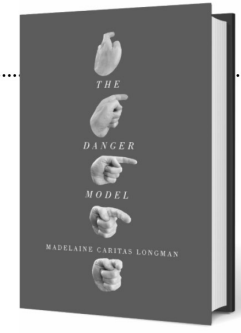

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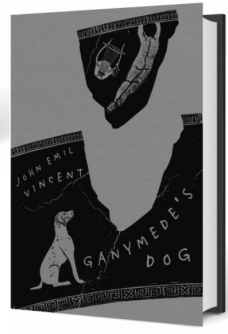

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