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Canadian Literature
The University of British Columbia
Room 8
6303 NW Marine Drive
Vancouver, BC
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TELEPHONE: (604) 822-2780
EMAIL: Can.Lit@ubc.ca
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cl.manager@ubc.ca
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We acknowledge that we are on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam people.

Editorial

On Feeling History and Emerging Otherwise

Christine Kim

For this handover issue, our outgoing editor Laura Moss wrote the call for papers and oversaw the initial stages of the submission process for these four peer-reviewed essays and interview. I am grateful to her for setting up this special issue as well as for her support during this transition period. It is fitting that this issue should mark a conclusion of sorts to Laura's tenure as editor given her strong commitment to mentoring junior scholars. This issue on emerging scholars is the third one that the journal has published under her leadership, following *Emerging Scholars* (no. 226) in 2015 and the double issue *Emerging Scholars 2* (no. 228-229) in 2016. The CFP for *Emerging Scholars, Redux* indirectly references this sustained focus on emerging scholars when it notes many of the changes that have taken place around the world and within Canadian literature since that first special issue came out five years ago. Moss explains the impetus for turning to emerging scholars by observing that "We seem to be living in a state of sustained urgency. Urgent times prompt us to want to hear from emergent voices." Since the submission date for this special issue closed at the end of January 2020, the rhetoric of urgency has become even more pervasive in Canada as we have been hit by the first and second waves of COVID-19 and experienced the deepening of social and economic crises. Given these conditions, it seems particularly important to ask what exactly it means to designate something or someone as emerging, and, moreover, what work this does for the field of Canadian literature.

In *Canadian Literature*'s inaugural emerging scholars issue, the category of the emerging was largely taken up in terms of graduate students and

how they are trained to enter into scholarly debates. Most of the editorial for that issue was written by two emerging scholars, Sheila Giffen and Brendan McCormack, who were then PhD students in the UBC English Department working at the journal. They write about the expectations to produce groundbreaking scholarship, and note that such scholarly goals ingrain within us a tendency to "tur[n] away from a critical genealogy of thought in order to more decisively clear the way for innovation" (8). The colonizing dimensions of this metaphor of clearing the ground in order to produce new knowledge are impossible to overlook. But such an approach is also troubling because it assumes that new scholarship is valuable for its radical difference from the past, and this assumption limits our ability to recognize how the new often replicates what has come before it. Giffen and McCormack's editorial leaves us with important questions about how students are trained in the field of Canadian literary studies, in terms of the methods and debates they are taught to be conversant with, how they enter into them, and the ways in which they learn to assign value.

The conflation of the emerging with the new also poses challenges for reading practices. As a field, we need to pay attention to which voices and concerns tend to get characterized as emerging and the kinds of feelings, politics, and forces that are typically described as urgent. To work through this, I turn to Raymond Williams' categories of the emergent, the residual, and the dominant. With these terms, Williams gives us a vocabulary useful for understanding the complex ideological tensions within a particular moment. The residual is Williams' term for the past and he uses it to emphasize that the past is not passive. Rather, he argues, while the residual was "formed in the past . . . it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present" (122). Williams also demands that we think about newness in more nuanced terms as he points out the difference between the new and the oppositional, or as he puts it, what is "emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel" (123). The residual and the emergent mark different phases of culture even as they are always intertwined with each other. In this way, the new directions that emergent culture point us in are always actively produced through their relations to residual and dominant culture. While the emergent and the residual are useful critical tools that name the dynamic relations between past and present, they do not explain

the mechanics of what propels the emergent or walk us through what the emergent might do. How, for instance, might the emergent come to influence or even challenge the dominant social order? Williams provides some direction on how we might answer these kinds of questions when he tells us that if we want to better understand his cultural categories of the emergent, the residual, and the dominant, we need to engage with what he calls structures of feeling (127). Through this prompt, he directs our attention to the "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (132). I read Williams' emphasis on the need to account for affect and relation in our understanding of culture and its construction as arguing that embodied knowledge is central to the work of cultural transformation, and this is an insight that carries tremendous power these days.

Souvankham Thammavongsa is a good example of Williams' concepts as her recent Giller win marks her as a talented emerging writer for many, even though, as Beth Follett notes in her contribution to a forum published in this issue, Thammavongsa is not a new writer. That she has only recently come to the attention of a dominant public is evidence of how poets and small publishers are "under the radar of mainstream media, even while we build up and reinforce the very ground that is Canadian literary culture," as Follett puts it. Thammavongsa's work has long written against implicit expectations of what refugee texts sound like. Her spare and brilliant book of poetry *Found* shares insights about what it means to enter the world through refugee and migrant histories while preserving the details and dignities of those subjects. Thammavongsa's recent book of short stories, *How to Pronounce Knife*, continues this approach by writing about refugees and the children of refugees but refusing to fulfill dominant expectations of how these stories should look. Instead, Thammavongsa's stories showcase the desire to be loved and acknowledged by telling us about an older woman having a sexual reawakening, the indignity of being passed over for a promotion in favour of a teenaged boy, the loneliness of a mother whose daughter has grown up and left her behind, and a woman remembering her mother who left years ago and her father's refusal to grieve because he had done that when he became a refugee. These are, in other words, stories about everyday individuals who are marked by residual histories but not wholly determined by them. This forum on Thammavongsa's work was

curated by Vinh Nguyen and it includes the perspectives of editors and booksellers who have known the author since before the publication of her first book of poetry; critics working in Canada, the US, and Asia who read her work for its tremendous beauty and contributions to Southeast Asian diasporic literatures; and a piece called "There Are No Prizes" by Thammavongsa. In many ways, Thammavongsa is an apt illustration of what Lisa Lowe means when she argues that we can often only recognize the emergent in hindsight and not as it is actually emerging (19). And in other ways, Thammavongsa's writing can be seen as residual as it shows how "elements of the past . . . continue, but are less legible within a contemporary social formation" (Lowe 19).

Over the past few years, there have been many debates in Canadian literature about the continued marginalization of BIPOC, LGBTQI2S, and female voices. These questions about power, and perhaps more importantly about empowerment, have continued to demand our attention during these pandemic times. I am interested in looking closely at the multiplicity of emerging voices and forces and asking how they capture the attention of various audiences. Or to put it another way, how do the emergent and its readers come to form a structure of feeling? And for whom? This question of emergent intimacies is especially pertinent given how the imbalances of social power have become even more pronounced over the past year. For instance, the violent policing of Black lives has impacted Canadian post-secondary institutions, and many departments tried to formulate public statements against racism earlier this year. These actions happened as multiple forms of violence continued to be inflicted upon Indigenous peoples. We can think here about how the video of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief Allan Adam being assaulted by the RCMP sparked public outcry in June at the same time that protests were being held across Canada in support of Black Lives Matter. Other forms of racism have also increased; in places like Vancouver, anti-Asian hate crimes have risen by 878% in 2020 (Kotyk). And in addition to these forms of physical violence, many Indigenous peoples and racialized Canadians have become even more vulnerable during the pandemic because their access to health care is limited, they work as caregivers or in other front-line positions, or are at heightened risk for other structural reasons.

I want to return once more to Raymond Williams to examine the structures of feeling in contemporary Canada in order to ask whether they

might be changing and new dimensions may be emerging. If structures of feeling give us a means of thinking about "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (132), then this is perhaps another way of asking how the meaning of racialized and Indigenous life in Canada can be felt differently, a question that many people have been grappling with for a long time now. And I want to suggest that one way that structures of feeling can be transformed or perhaps emergent structures can come into being is through the recognition of experiences of oppression and common feelings. I am thinking here of Korean American poet and critic Cathy Park Hong's description of the flash of recognition that she felt when watching Richard Pryor's *Live in Concert* for the first time:

> It may be odd that I also felt a "shock of recognition" when I first saw Pryor. But watching Pryor reminded me of an emotional condition that is specific to Koreans: *han*, a combination of bitterness, wistfulness, shame, melancholy, and vengefulness, accumulated from years of brutal colonialism, war, and U.S.-supported dictatorships that have never been politically redressed. *Han* is so ongoing that it can even be passed down: to be Korean is to feel *han*. (54)

In my Korean diasporic literature class this semester, we talked at great length about the specificity of this emotion and what it might mean for Hong to equate *han* with Koreanness but also to recognize that *han* or something akin to it may be felt by non-Koreans. During these conversations, we explored structures of feeling as particular to peoples and tied to histories and places, and as shaping how we enter into conversation. Tiffany Lethabo King also writes about being transformed when she experienced what Hong calls the "shock of recognition." For King, listening to an Anishnaabe woman's story changed how she understood Black slavery and who she understood herself as being accountable to as the story "unmoored and disassembled me in ways that I and others did not expect" (ix). Hong's and King's anecdotes illustrate how powerful new insights can emerge when we feel histories, and how these can reorient the kinds of critical knowledges we seek to produce.

This special issue draws attention to emergence as a cultural process that involves complex negotiations with histories, institutional powers, and communities in a few different ways. We have essays by four emerging scholars, Shannon Claire Toll, Orly Lael Netzer, Geoffrey Nilson, and Charlotte Comtois, that engage with contemporary Canadian literature

and film in English and in French. Fred Wah's interview with Nicholas Bradley discusses the recursiveness in Wah's writing, a process of returning to earlier writing and reframing it that resonates with the dynamics of emergence. New also to *Canadian Literature* was a virtual poetry reading held in November organized by Phinder Dulai. Under the title of "Verse Forward: Poetry on the Front Line," Dulai brought together Kevin Spenst, Isabella Wang, Fred Wah, and Jillian Christmas to read their poetry, which spoke to themes of home, race, identity, and the environments in which we live. We are grateful to these poets, whose words and performances created a sense of much-needed community during the pandemic. A selection of their poems is featured in a special section of this issue. In addition to these poems, we also have poetry by John Barton, Changming Yuan, Bill Howell, Jen Currin, Kenneth Sherman, and Camille Lendor.

To think about emergence in Canadian literature is to reflect upon mutual histories, illegible presences, and the terms of recognition, amongst other matters. And it is to ask, what might happen to our conceptions of Canadian literature if we stopped seeing marginalized writers and critics as new and instead recognized the long histories from which they emerge? These are questions that I hope future submissions will take up as the journal continues to engage with Canadian literary and cultural work as well as the power dynamics and structures that influence how we read it.

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Kevin Spenst

The Geology of a Moment

> the stylus entered the system at the instance of trauma
> —Roy Miki

I left something inside a scream,
returned to the scene of the fire
now petrified in slow muteness,

a seeping cave that crept down
the wallows of my throat
A cave painting, like a potboiler

villain, tracked me with its
eyes. Someone got the bright
idea of taking animals down

from the walls and placing them
carefully below the skin
in needlework wonderments.

Undeterred, I tried to blend in
on the forearm of the horseman
who galloped around our house

waving a torch that bore
his countenance of curls and cries.
It was a lot to take in and

someone was bound to explode
in semantics, overdose
on recalcitrant symbols. Mayhem

eschewed, I crawled into
the deepest of basements,
pressed in by imagination's

limits. All I wanted was
to see the inner sanctuary of
my scream, so that I could go

in a clear understanding
of others, how quiet it was
here, outside the spears

from history's
burning skies.
Oh, yes, there you are.

Isabella Wang

Hindsight

The decade's interlude leaves us in suspense
before the final act falls.

Spring goes on without us. The caterpillars,
ripe out of their cocoons,

are eating our misery in weight
and growing too thin for the pendulum of the wind

carried with their wings by flight.

From behind private apartment walls, basement suites,
the cadence of children's footsteps

pass for May, June, July . . .

It's getting harder to believe this month,
that God doesn't exist when I have so much still to ask for.

Can't tell in this night, where we end,
and the universe begins.

I print out a picture of the sky
into a poem for her, so dark its edges disappear,

fall at the bottom of the inlet.
It will be months before Lao Lao receives it.

The woman writing to us in quarantine
will have run out of pages.

Fred Wah

Basalt

1.
between the raw lakes between the
creeks the volcanic province builds
difference into silence buzzing the
ravines with the Great Wall of thought
so that even the currents of air sculpt
the shape the water makes holds all its
early information in stones and sound
of water over creekstone lava done the
way flow talks that little hidden
fender of itself to measure whatever's
in the way not a mistake just a fissure
an isolated vent where the water will
find around the rocks intentional waves
an invert floor of floating worlds
another culvert for an old old story
the one that feels the river one way
and the other way downstream basalt
news the Pasco basin middle voice still
ebbs and speaks. And there are cracks.
Igneous is everything.

2.
Twin basalt Tsimshian masks. One looks in and back and the other looks out and forwards.

I asked her about her "alarm buddy," an alarm buzzer they're given to wear around their necks for emergencies. She seems to have misplaced it. So we comb through her

apartment. She goes to the dresser in her bedroom and opens a shallow drawer filled with little things, some jewelry, pins and strings and buttons and cases and little boxes and memorabilia from 93 years of a life. She stands looking into that drawer and shuffling through it continually for a long time, maybe 10-15 minutes before I go up to her and ask her what she's looking for. She doesn't know. Says "there's sure a lot of junk in here" and keeps picking up items, fondling, continually sifting, looking but not looking.

How to look when you don't know what you're looking for?

Is she looking inward (and backwards) or outward (not forwards but for words)

Her dementia here is an act of some kind of trans-. She is, in fact, in a trance.

Jillian Christmas

a mouth full of useless words

the elders would call it bone-tired
the way they could drag their hollow
through office buildings and infinite
corridors that led always to more work

now that our elders are leaving who will
teach us what to call this new feeling?
the bereavement that comes after we've
already lost too much and the next

exhaustion that follows the last, and
what will we call centuries of the same
with a promise of more, what will we
name the feeling of freedom slipping

through our fingers? I wake up in the
morning, my body already done in, I cannot
coax words from a still place or sense
from all of this disaster I can hardly taste

tomorrow's dreams on the breath of yesterday
and what am I supposed to call this river that
will not cease how do I harness this anger
that wants to sink my body like an

abandoned ship? Could we still call this a
beginning? a deep breath before a long race?
another and another and another chance
to prove our humanity to whoever it is that is

watching? call it a miracle if you have to
to survive call it unprecedented call it the last stand
the final say resilience with a straight face and
then wake up tomorrow and do it again

Nicholas Bradley

Huckleberries and HEPA Filters

Talking Place with Fred Wah

Fred Wah and I spoke for about ninety minutes on a Thursday morning in early October of 2020. He was at home on Kootenay Lake, while I was in Victoria. We talked via Zoom—par for the course in the time of COVID-19. I had intended to focus on Wah's most recent collection of poems, an expanded edition of *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, and on questions of improvisation and complexity that it raises. The first *Music at the Heart of Thinking* was published in 1987. Another volume of Wah's improvisations, *Alley Alley Home Free*, followed in 1992. The new edition of *Music at the Heart of Thinking* (2020) includes the poems from the two earlier books, both of which are now out of print, and adds to the sequence. We did eventually discuss *Music at the Heart of Thinking* at some length. But because we shared a video connection, I could look through Wah's window at a large tree and a slight haze. I was a little distracted. My own office window showed that we were in for another day of smoke from the forest fires south of the border. From my email correspondence with Wah, I knew roughly where he was, but not exactly, and I blurted out a basic question: "Where are you?" So we got to talking place.

In 2015, Talonbooks published *Scree*, a compilation of Wah's poetry of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.[1] That long book was a revelation to me. I had read most of his early volumes at one point or another, and I recognized the regional attachment signalled by the titles of *Lardeau* (1965), *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975), and *Limestone Lakes Utaniki* (1989).[2] Yet perusing the same poems as they are assembled in *Scree* granted me a heightened

understanding of his connection to a particular geography, and therefore to a particular history as well. The sheer extent of the book makes a powerful impression: it is over six hundred pages long. In a body of work that spans nearly sixty years, Wah has made a distinctive contribution to the literature, including the environmental literature, of BC.

He is moreover a major figure in Asian Canadian literature and contemporary poetry, and for many readers of this journal, Wah and his writing will require no introduction.[3] Wah was born in 1939 in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and spent his childhood in Nelson, BC. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he studied music and English at UBC, where he was one of the young writers responsible for the poetry newsletter *Tish*, which quickly became part of CanLit legend.[4] After further studies at the University of New Mexico and SUNY Buffalo, he began his teaching career at Selkirk College in Castlegar, BC, and later taught at the University of Calgary. As his remarks here indicate, these early experiences were formative, and seem to come quickly to mind. Wah has written some two dozen books. *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (1985) won the Governor General's Award for poetry; *Diamond Grill* (1996), a staple of university classrooms, is perhaps his most widely read work. He was Canada's fifth Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2011-2013), and in 2013 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada.

The conversation below is transcribed from the recorded video, and slightly condensed and lightly edited for clarity. Editorial interventions appear in brackets, and ellipses indicate trailings off.

Our Zoom session started with small talk about the strangeness of the medium. Fred then asked if I was teaching online, and I described my courses, one of which concerned the literature of mountains and mountaineering—which is where this transcription begins.

FRED WAH: So would you do [Gary] Snyder?

NICHOLAS BRADLEY: Yes, absolutely. *Danger on Peaks*, and some of the poems in *Riprap* . . .

FW: Right.

NB: From my point of view in Victoria, he's almost a local, so I try to sneak him in when I can.

FW: Good for you.

NB: Well, thank you for agreeing to do this interview. I really appreciate it.

FW: Well, you're welcome.

NB: And I wanted to say, first off, congratulations on the new book [*Music at the Heart of Thinking*]. I've been working my way through it—

FW: No need to do that—'cause it *is* work!

NB: It is and it isn't. It is hard, though. In one of your notes in the back of the book, you say that "You're not intended to 'get it.'"[5] I tried to take that to heart, and not to worry about it too much. To experience the poetry . . .

FW: I guess when I say that you're not meant to get it, I'm trying to dissuade the reader from expecting a kind of transparent meaning to be available to them. Most readerly expectations are to not have to spend too much time with all these words, to kind of get through it, maybe enjoy it, or figure it out or whatever. It's all based on improvisation. I don't want the improvisation to be halted or stopped, the way I don't want thought to be stopped.

NB: Let me ask, where are you?

FW: Right out here is Kootenay Lake. We live in a place on Kootenay Lake, the northeast shore, and it's an old family property of my wife's. We've lived here off and on for the last fifty years, and we built a cabin and a small home, and our children come and visit us, and our grandchildren come and visit us every summer, and swim, hike, and so forth. I grew up in the Kootenays, and fortunately, when I was looking for a job after graduate school, one of the first jobs that came along was Selkirk College in Castlegar—and this was in 1967, and the BC college system was just opening, it just started, and Selkirk College was the first college outside of Vancouver. And I got hired there, and so we returned. Both my wife and I are from Nelson, and we returned to the Kootenays, and I had never intended to—you know, when you're in graduate school, it's just a big open ocean, you don't know what might pop up. So we've been back here since 1967, other than forays at the University of Calgary, and now we live in Vancouver for part of the year, for half the year, and we still maintain this as our "root" place.[6]

NB: Right, I often see biographical notes that say you divide your time between there and Vancouver, and I've been curious about how much time you spend outside the city.[7] It sounds like a fair bit.

FW: Well, probably anywhere between three and a half to five months up here,

but this year because of this COVID situation, we decided to hunker down here a little longer. Usually we're back in Vancouver by now, but we're going to stick it through until the snow flies, I think, which is probably in a few weeks.

NB: How has the smoke from the fires been up there?

FW: Oh, it was horrible, as it was down the coast a little while ago. Yeah, that was pretty bad. But we've had forest fires up here quite badly, off and on, over the last ten to fifteen years. A couple of years ago I bought a HEPA filter and we put it in the house, so the house has great quality air inside, but going outside you have to wear an N95 mask with the forest fires. And that smoke from the States is starting to come in again today up here, so we have a haze, and they're warning us that it might return.

NB: It's the same here. They're saying it's not going to be as bad as it was the first time around. But we had a red sun this morning. Do you remember experiencing anything like this when you were a kid?

FW: No, and as a teenager I worked in the bush in summers, I worked on a fire suppression crew, and I worked as a timber cruiser, so we were around [fires]. But they never got that big, and I can't remember the skies being—that experience of a week and a half of intense smoke, I can't remember anything like that.

NB: Under normal circumstances, do you still get out walking, hiking, into the mountains? Is that part of your poetic practice now in the way it used to be?

FW: It's slowed down a lot, partly because of my body. I'm getting on, and my wife has had some hip trouble. We try to do a couple of hikes every summer with the family, camping trips and so forth, but this past summer we didn't. We got kind of sidelined with this virus business and juggling that with our family's time. So I get out walking pretty much every day, but I have to do a lot of work around *this* place, working outside, fixing the water system, things like that. I put a lot of physical energy into the place, but—anyway, yeah, I wish I could get out into the mountains more. I go huckleberry picking—that's about it!

NB: Because the start of your poetic career is tied to Vancouver and *Tish*, I tend to think of you as a Vancouver poet. But reading *Scree* gave me a richer sense of how so much of your writing comes out of the Kootenays. As Jeff Derksen writes in his introduction, "a continuity that runs through *Scree* . . . is the concept of place" (8).

FW: When I got into poetry in the late fifties, early sixties, in Vancouver, the *Tish* people that I was associated with weren't from Vancouver. I think maybe Jamie [Reid], yeah, I guess Jamie was from Vancouver, [and] Dave Dawson. UBC at that time, because it was the only university other than UVic in the province—and I think even in Victoria it was still the Normal School, the teachers' school—UBC was quite a wonderful place in the sense of it being a provincial university, because students were from all over the province. And all over the Northwest, a lot of American students too. The whole sense of geography wasn't *Vancouver*. In fact, we had this little thing in *Tish* with the "downtown poets," John Newlove and Gerry Gilbert, people who weren't out at the university, and *they* were the Vancouver poets, in a way, and we were [from elsewhere]—[George] Bowering, very Okanagan, and Frank Davey from Abbotsford, and me from the Kootenays.[8]

And then of course *Tish* ran for a couple of years, and then I went to Albuquerque for graduate school, and then to Buffalo, New York, for three or four years. The whole sense of place, the whole sense of the mountains, the water, the sense of the *geo* was very nostalgic for me. I just couldn't stop thinking of mountains and water and green. We left Albuquerque partly because I just couldn't stand the dryness there. I had to get back up north to some wetter climate. Anyway, place became a kind of necessity to hang on to because of the geographical distance I was from *this* place. So it became a nostalgic thing at first, but then, of course, returning here in the late sixties, and being back in this place, and actually getting into hiking and skiing—I was never a serious mountain climber, but backcountry stuff became a much more common thing, and the whole Kootenay ambience of rural small towns sort of took over, as a kind of prime attention.

I know that Tom Wayman and myself have given talks around the Koots here several times on the poetics of place, and he feels himself to be a "place poet" as well . . . I don't know what that means, a "place poet." It means ways to pay attention to place as a serious, almost spiritual, element in my life.

And in terms of poetics—I don't know how to jibe these two, except that it happens—I worked with Charles Olson in Buffalo for a couple of years. And Charles had this sense of place in Gloucester [Massachusetts], *The Maximus Poems*, and trying to reify America, reify the literal place that he was from . . .[9] So I kind of approach place on a poetic level through an Olsonian awareness or sensibility. And then also Snyder and [Lew] Welch,

people like that, were very important poets to me. I think probably the first time I thought I could take poetry seriously was reading Snyder's poem "Riprap." And I had just done a summer of riprapping! "Wow! Here's a poet talking about what I do! Gee, he does that too!" And it's a great poem, this poem "Riprap."[10]

So wanting to explore how the geography, how the physicality of place, the materiality of place, could become language, could enact itself in language, became a—well, it became my mode. I wanted to move into that, so a lot of those early pieces in *Scree*, the early books, *Tree* [1972], *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.*, they're attempts to ground a language that is responsive to the place the language is in, in a sense. But also, I was really interested in trying to find—because I've always approached poetry as improvisation, as music, as a kind of composition—I wanted to find ways that the language itself could come from the place.

A lot of my interest in rhythm, in the way language moves through a poem, was primarily physical, and it still is. Even *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, the improvisation I'm thinking about there is very specifically "blowing my trumpet," trying to do an ad lib, toking up enough breath to do a long phrase. That's why the prose poem, the asyntactic prose poem, became so interesting to me—how can I overrun the sentence and move past those limitations? Place and the physicality of place—and also, I would think, in the later work, not *theory* of place, but trying to contextualize it intellectually too—has become fairly important. So you're doing your course on mountain literature. I would love to get into that! I've never been a serious mountaineer, but I've read some of that stuff too, and continue to read accounts and journals. At one point, because of working with Olson at Buffalo, I really got into some of the fur trading journals, [George] Simpson and so forth. That kind of blew things open for me in terms of the North and Canada, and helped me figure out a Canada that I felt more sympathetic to, more than any other sense of the place as a *national* place.

NB: Did Olson have a sense of where you were from, any sense of the Interior?

FW: Well, I met him, he came out to Vancouver in '63, and his sense of Vancouver, I think, or his sense of *me* in Vancouver, was simply "I'm West Coast," "I'm Vancouver-San Francisco axis."[11] I took two courses from him, and one of the papers (if you want to call it a paper) I did was a long poem called *Mountain* [published in 1967]. I wouldn't say he *liked* it or

anything, that's not how he responded to poetry, but he was engaged by it. His imagination of what I was talking about was—I don't know what it was. He had never been here. I don't even know if he'd seen the West, or the Cascadia, that we're familiar with. He was sympathetic to the whole sense that a knowledge of place, or a concern of place, is one of the primary contexts open to a writer. And certainly [that was part of] his work on Gloucester and his community, trying to work through that historical sense, the Greek mythological transplant into North America . . . "I take space to be a fact"—as an American.[12] His whole concern with trying to flesh out this national thing, this American thing, was of interest to me. I had never thought of Canada in that sense, that *Canada* was a place. I still wonder!

I've always been a localist. The *local* is what I've been mostly interested in. A little bit James Reaney-ish too, I guess, that sense of paying attention to *literally* where you are.[13] But I was fascinated by Olson—his book *Call Me Ishmael* [1947], about Melville, and how he tries to take on America that way. I haven't tried to do that with Canada! There's just all kinds of thinking that goes on around it. The whole sense of the imagination—[Robin] Blaser's Image-Nation, and what that is.[14] I know it's there. In terms of a language, I'm more engaged with language as literal. It's not referential necessarily, or only referential, but actual. I don't know . . . I'm all over the place with this!

NB: What you're saying about the local makes me think about what it means to be writing in English in this place. Has your sense of being local changed in recent years as Indigenous concerns have become a larger part of provincial and national conversations?

FW: Oh, very much so. Since the mid- to late seventies, which for me was a real major turn in terms of addressing race. But then also in the late eighties, taking some of that and working and trying to inject it into the Writers' Union of Canada, which was an extremely white organization. I was one of the first members of the Racial Minority Writers' Committee, and we got working for a few years.[15] Our committee was myself and Daniel David Moses and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, two Indigenous writers, and that's how we started.

Lately, in the last ten years or so, Indigeneity has become a very, very strong thing. An instance of it is when I worked on my project *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.*, which is about Native rock paintings, and the need

I felt to find out what the Indigenous occupants of the Kootenays had to say about living here. Well, as it turned out, a lot of the anthropologists had ignored the Sinixt and the Ktunaxa locally, so we didn't have any journals or documentation, so I started looking for that. In fact, my very first sabbatical (though colleges didn't really have sabbaticals—my first leave from the college) was based on a project where I wanted to locate some of this material. I said, "There must be some material around." And there wasn't. And all I could locate, or the thing that really turned me on, was a book called *Pictographs in the Interior of British Columbia* [1968], by John Corner.[16] John was the provincial apiarist at the time, lived in Vernon. I met him a few times. And it was a stunning little book of beautiful drawings of the rock paintings. And we have a number of rock paintings, they're all over the province. That became a kind of document of Indigenous past for me.

Anyway, I went ahead with my poetic project, this transcreative attempt, playing or responding to these images in my own way, as a kind of translation project in the larger sense, an Erín Moure-ish sense of playing around with things. But then I remember feeling, in the early nineties, starting to feel guilty about that. Like, what was I doing? Did I step on someone's toes by doing this? And so I asked some of my Indigenous writer friends about that, and they said no, no, as long as you've done it with respect, it seems to be OK. But even putting it [*Pictograms*] in *Scree*, I hesitated. At the same time, in a sense, it's historical, it's for me, [but] it's not something I would do the same way now. And the poems are not meant to represent Indigenous sensibilities at all.

And then being in Alberta for fifteen years—although I was only there for seven or eight months each year—being more exposed to the treaties, Treaty 6, Treaty 7, around Edmonton and Calgary. And then, more recently, talking a lot with my friend Christine Stewart. She's done a lot of working with Indigenous writers, young writers, in Edmonton. She's given me a lot of ideas. I've been reading a lot too—a lot of the cultural theory around Indigeneity and Indigenous writing. I think it's exciting.

NB: I think you can see some of these changes in perspective in *beholden* (2018), your collaboration with Rita Wong.[17] *beholden* is obviously a poem of place, but I don't think you could have written it in 1983, say. It strikes me as a very of-the-moment encounter with place and the politics of the river—environmental politics, national and international politics, but

also Indigenous politics. Your part of the poem and Rita Wong's part both introduce the complexities of the place without trying to resolve them. Does that make sense?

FW: Yeah. There is no resolution, I think. Certainly not from poets!

I've known Rita for many years. She was a student of mine at U of C, and I've paid very close attention to her writing and her intellectual astuteness, particularly around Indigeneity. She's been very engaged as an activist, environmentally, and also with the Indigenous community. So working with her on the Columbia project was really very useful to me. It was an educational thing. Rita did most of the work! In terms of ferreting out information about the socio-political background of current Indigenous involvement in the Columbia. But I also am quite involved, at least locally, with the Columbia basin, because I live here part of the year, so I know a lot of the players involved in the Columbia River Treaty, people who are concerned about that. So the politics, and also because of the present level of Indigenous awareness or Indigenous desire, in terms of return of the salmon, return of the land, correcting those damned mistakes.[18]

I guess the poem, or the event of the poem, was really for both of us an exploration of how we could bring language to this idea, the idea of the river, not so much the river as a poem, but what's going on when we focus on the river in terms of language. Well, we both have a fairly similar kind of language bag to bring to it. I wouldn't say that our poetry is the same, but we both have an awareness of language and what it can do. Rita wrote her poem totally separate from me. We weren't sharing our writing as we were going along. When we were actually designing it, putting it all together with Nick Conbere, the designer, the resonance of the two lines frequently surprised me. But then we're fairly similar kinds of people in some ways. Rita's much more of an activist than I am. She's got a lot of youth and energy. And as we were working on that, her obsession was Site C. She's worked very hard on, and spends a lot of time still, fighting Site C, and the pipeline, and so forth.[19]

Tell me if I'm talking too much!

NB: No, not at all. You've mentioned Rita Wong and Christine Stewart. You're in dialogue with Christine Stewart toward the end of *Music at the Heart of Thinking* [Improvisations 162-69]. And you're in dialogue with a lot of other poets, and writers of various kinds, all the way through the book . . .

FW: Well, that's primarily what the book is—a way to respond to other texts. And art, and music, and so forth.

Christine's recent project was a book called *Treaty 6 Deixis* [2018]. It was kind of an eye-opener for me to try to get into what she was doing with that. So we talk a lot about it. She's picked up ways of working with language and syntax and grammar from working with Indigenous people up in Alberta. Her attention has been to try to come to, in a respectful way, some way of incorporating aspects of their knowledge. She wrote a beautiful essay for us in this book that Amy De'Ath and I edited, *Toward. Some. Air* [2015]. Christine had this wonderful essay, a combination of poetry and essay writing, that responds to this question of working within an Indigenous environment, and how to pay attention to that [see Stewart, "Treaty Six"]. And then her own book, *Treaty 6 Deixis*, which Talon published last year, gets at that whole thing. So I was interested in what she came up with. One of the most exciting things that Christine clued me in to was this notion of listening. This shut-up-and-listen type of thing. Listening as an act, as a mode of being present, not just to other voices, but to what's going on in the language, or what's possible in the language. Listening, of course, fits right into the whole notion of improvisation. One major aspect of the act of improvisation is listening to the possibilities of where one could go. Because nothing's predictable, so you have to listen, to yourself, and to other possibilities.

NB: Maybe you could tell me, since you just mentioned Talonbooks, what it's been like, with *Scree* and *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, going back to poetry that you first published a long time ago and bringing it out again in a new form.

FW: Well, *Scree* was a project of Kevin Williams, the publisher at Talonbooks. I think Phyllis Webb's *Peacock Blue* is the first in the series. It's a reflection of those earlier Talon books from around 1980, which were a series of books that Karl Siegler published. George Bowering, Frank Davey, Roy Kiyooka, Daphne Marlatt, myself, and a few others.[20] Collected volumes. At the time, for us writers, for our generation of writers, the whole notion of collections wasn't really that popular, wasn't a form that was happening that much. It is *now*. *Scree* becomes part of that idea of collecting some of these "older" poets.

Jeff Derksen was my editor for *Scree*, and he collated all the work in more or less a chronological way [see Derksen 4-6]. He asked questions, and talked about it. And I've always re-done, always re-presented, reprinted older stuff. A lot of *Waiting for Saskatchewan* [1985] was in other books before it. Not so much just to reuse old material, but using book composition as a way of framing, for myself and whoever might be interested, forms of writing. It's like you said, you looked at *Scree* and you got a bigger sense that place is an important aspect of what goes on for me. Well, I think that's true if you look at just about any one of those books, but it doesn't necessarily stand out as much as it does in *Scree*.

And with *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, the first two books came out of a publishing world where—those were smaller books and they went out of print fairly quickly, and so they weren't part of a discourse.

So Karl Siegler had proposed in the nineties, soon after Red Deer College Press went under and he bought the rights to their inventory, he said, "Oh, we should bring out, we should reprint *Music at the Heart of Thinking* and *Alley Alley Home Free*," the two volumes that I had published. So when Kevin Williams took over Talonbooks from Karl [in 2008], Kevin kept pushing that too. He said, "Oh, yeah, we're going to do this, we're going to put this together," and I said, "Well, I haven't finished writing it! I'm still writing stuff!"

So that's gone on for a long time. I don't write as much as I used to, so there wasn't another seventy pieces or so to add to it. In one sense, it's rather disappointing to get this old stuff together with the new stuff, and shape it—because I didn't rewrite things specifically, although I corrected spelling errors or some punctuation, and maybe changed some lines to pay more attention to the kind of rhythm I wanted. For me it's there [the book] as a kind of document of a project.

During the eighties when I started it [*Music at the Heart of Thinking*], I worked a lot with bpNichol. We taught together for several summers at Red Deer College, in the summer school of writing, and we talked a lot about the long poem, which was the primary attention of Canadian poets in the eighties. I remember the year he died, in 1988, we were teaching at Red Deer College, and Beep said, "Do you realize, hardly anyone's doing long poems anymore? I'm doing *The Martyrology*, you're doing this *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, and Robert Kroetsch is doing *Field Notes*, but everyone seems to be leaving it." I didn't actually ever think of

Music at the Heart of Thinking as a long poem, but it kept engaging certain improvisational methods. I guess he saw it that way, and I sort of agreed with that. I could think of it as a kind of project. I don't know if it is a long poem. It's kind of a long poem project. And, of course, the major aspect of the long poem for me is that it resists closure, resists ending. In that sense, it's a little bit like the serial poem. It takes on this character of seriality, and although it doesn't have the focus of a serial poem, it has a sense of longevity.

Actually, as I was finishing off the manuscript, I got this book by Stan Dragland [*The Difficult* (2019)]. Stan's a wonderful reader and old friend, always been very supportive of what I do. So I was reading his book on "the difficult," and he does some really interesting stuff in there. And he starts talking about *Music at the Heart of Thinking*, and I used one of his quotes as a blurb.[21] And I love that sense of the "terrieresque." "The terrier sinks her teeth in, never lets go." So here was a reader who was willing to take on that notion of the difficult. As most readers will see when they read this stuff, "Oh, this is difficult stuff," it's not really that easy to read through. I found that really sustaining, Stan's attention to that kind of writing as being quote-unquote worthwhile, worth paying attention to.

And I really got back into [William Carlos] Williams' *Kora in Hell* [1920] again, which has always been a very grounded book, basic book, for my practice of improvisation. What he did in *Kora in Hell* and *Spring and All* [1923] has been really quite important to me . . .

NB: How does improvisation actually work for you when it comes to writing? I understand it as a concept or metaphor. But what does it mean when you sit down to write?

FW: Basically, one word follows another. Or one syllable follows another.

One method, literal method, of improvisation for me has been what Robert Duncan called—I think he called it, it may have been someone else—the tone leading of vowels. I remember, as a young poet, hearing Duncan lecture when he was at UBC, talking about that whole notion of how phonetic rhyming, or the repetition of vowel sounds, could be tracked, and he showed this with particular poems, like "So much depends upon a red wheel barrow," and how some of those vowels are actually very, very rhythmically strict.[22] I was *fascinated* by that. And then working with [Robert] Creeley around about the same time, maybe a little later, Creeley

talked about the whole notion of stitching. That the words can get stitched together.[23]

I turned that into a pedagogical device in my creative writing classes, where I'd tell students, look, if you get stuck, you get stopped, just go back a few stitches, go back and pick up a stitch. Go back and get in a vowel, or a consonant. Go back and pick up something that you just had, and bring it forward. That sense of improvisation, of listening to yourself, listening to what you're doing, so that you can keep doing it. 'Cause I don't want to end. I have to have the material there to take the next step. It's not all random. If you're playing music, you have to follow the chord structure. Or you don't *have* to, but that's basically the grounding of improvisation, the chord structure, unless you're Anthony Braxton and you're just blowing all over the place. Anyway, things like that are literal. In the prose poem, I'm very attracted to that notion of the sentence as a syntactic unit, and the tyranny of the sentence in most of our writing, and in a lot of our thinking, becomes a little overriding sometimes. I was interested in the prose poem as a way of interventing the sentence as a device that stops thought, that stops language.

In terms of composition, where to make that leap from one group of words to the next group of words and how to get there—I find fascinating. A lot of it's based on sound and rhythm.

So it's literal, the improvisation is literal. It's also, in a sense, theoretical. As a young trumpet player, in high school, I loved finding out that, gee, you don't have to follow the notes. You can do what you want! I moved right from music into writing poetry with that same sensibility.

NB: So then how do you know when an improvisation is ready to make its way into the world and find readers?

FW: It depends on rhythm. In other words, you're saying, when is it finished?

NB: Yeah.

FW: I guess when I run out of breath. But there's also this whole sense, once again from music, of cadence. So not so much a logical, syntactic close, but a kind of rhythmic close, so the language plays out to the end, at the end. It lands there. And in my own mind, when I'm doing this, subconsciously or way back there, there's going to be someone else—the sax section's going to pick up, or something else is going to pick up from there. In other words, the piece isn't over, just my solo is. And some of the pieces end in the middle, end floating, but I'm always looking for that way to land. Cadence

is a way to land rhythmically and phonologically. Sometimes semiologically. Questions of repetition are very important in any kind of composition.

And once again it's a little bit like picking up a stitch. Picking up a stitch is just like repeating a sound . . . I don't know what question I was answering there!

NB: I think I was asking how you know when you're finished a poem that is, in a sense, unfinished.

FW: Yeah, I don't know . . . It's basically rhythmic, I think. And a lot of it has to do with repetition.

NB: What are you working on now?

FW: Look, I'm feeling quite old. I shouldn't say I'm feeling old—I *am* old. I don't write as much as I used to. Putting together *Music at the Heart of Thinking* took a lot of time and energy, and the *beholden* book was part of a larger project that Rita and I were involved in with some other artists.[24] So I'm doing a lot of these types of things, just Zoom stuff, virtual readings. We don't travel around and launch books anymore, which is fine by me. I enjoy the respite from the literary world, in a certain sense. I'm working on a project with Nick Conbere. He's the artist in *beholden*, he teaches at Emily Carr [University of Art and Design], and we're doing a public art project for Vancouver where we're doing a poster for twenty-nine transit stops. Vancouver has this public art thing where they invite artists to propose different projects, so Nick's doing a drawing. We're focusing on roots and trees, and I have to write a text. We're not quite sure how we're going to do this yet. So we're in the middle of that project.

I'm also up in the air in terms of writing. I'm getting—not so much tired of books, but I want to pay more attention to *writing as an act* rather than to publishing. There's so much focus these days on the publishing world, on the public world of writing. The other day I got this note from Talon saying CBC mentioned my book as one of thirty-seven books of poetry to pay attention to this fall. Thirty-seven! The number of poetry books that are published each year, it's just astounding. And the intention—I think unfortunately—of a lot of young writers is to engage with this public world of prizes and launches and getting their book out there—and I say "unfortunately" because it seems to involve a certain indiscretion towards the writing process. I mean, that's old-fashioned, I guess. I don't know—blah, blah, blah!

NOTES

1 *Scree* is one of several such collections published by Talonbooks. The series, which gathers the works of poets of the *Tish* era, includes Phyllis Webb's *Peacock Blue* (2014), Daphne Marlatt's *Intertidal* (2017), George Bowering's *Taking Measures* (2019), and Gladys Hindmarch's *Wanting Everything* (2020). Roy Miki's *Flow* (2018) also belongs to the series, although his poetry stands apart in terms of chronology.

2 The community of Lardeau lies on the northwest side of Kootenay Lake, on Highway 31. The Limestone Lakes area is in what since 1995 has been Height of the Rockies Provincial Park. The Japanese term is spelled with only one *k* in the title of Wah's book. Elsewhere he uses the conventional spelling *utanikki* (see *Music* [2020] 252). The word refers to a "poetic journal" (252).

3 For "contemporary" I could substitute "avant-garde," "experimental," or "innovative"; each term is appropriate but ultimately unsatisfactory. On the relations between the categories "avant-garde" and "Asian Canadian" as they pertain to Wah, see Yu. For a helpful list of earlier published interviews with Wah, see Wah, *Scree* 618-19.

4 Only fifteen years after *Tish* began, C. H. Gervais wrote that "[i]n a very real sense the amateurish-looking mimeographed magazine became a vehicle for probably the most cohesive writing movement in Canada" (7).

5 "I know this is not an easy poetry to read; it wasn't easy to write. You're not intended to 'get it'" (*Music* [2020] 258).

6 Wah and Pauline Butling have been married since 1962. Selkirk College was founded in 1966. Wah taught at the University of Calgary from 1989 to 2003.

7 Biographical notes: see, e.g., Wah, *Music* [2020] 266; Wong and Wah 152.

8 Reid was born in Timmins, Ontario, but spent his later childhood in Vancouver. Dawson was from Burnaby. Bowering was born in Penticton and grew up in Oliver. The Provincial Normal School in Victoria was absorbed by Victoria College in 1956. Originally affiliated with McGill University, the College was at that time attached to UBC. The University of Victoria was established as an independent institution in 1963.

9 Two volumes of *The Maximus Poems* appeared during Olson's lifetime. A third was issued posthumously in 1975. A complete edition of *The Maximus Poems* was published in 1983.

10 "Riprap" is the final poem in Snyder's book of the same name, first published by Cid Corman's Origin Press in 1959 and reissued in various editions. "Riprap" was also included in *The New American Poetry* (1960), a bellwether anthology (see Allen); that appearance gave the poem a wide circulation. Snyder glosses "riprap" as "a cobble of stone laid on steep, slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains" (1). From *Music at the Heart of Thinking*: "I'd thought he'd riprapped that wall of the page or my mind / with mountains creeks trees and gravel years ago" (*Music* [2020] 104).

11 From *Music at the Heart of Thinking*: "in '63 . . . Olson walked out to the cliffs at Point Grey oceanward falling west to 'placeless place'" (*Music* [2020] 38).

12 From Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* (1947): "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy" (11).

13 In terms of geography and poetic style, Reaney (1926-2008), whose locale was southwestern Ontario, might seem to have little connection to Wah. But I take Wah's somewhat unexpected reference to Reaney as a reminder that an extreme attention to

the local, as a literary strategy or shared ethos, can link otherwise disparate and dispersed authors (see Derksen 3, 8).

14 Blaser's *Collected Poems* (2006) includes twenty-six poems in the "Image-Nation" series. The coinage suggests a community of poets, whether living or dead. As Wah suggests here, the term is also a near-homophone of "imagination."

15 For more on the history of this committee, see Margery Fee's "The Trickster Moment, Cultural Appropriation, and the Liberal Imagination in Canada," first published in Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra's collection *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations* (2010) and reprinted in Reder and Morra's *Learn, Teach, Challenge: Approaching Indigenous Literatures* (2016).

16 The full title of Corner's book is *Pictographs (Indian Rock Paintings) in the Interior of British Columbia*. Wah acknowledges Corner's book in *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (see Wah, *Scree* 308).

17 *beholden: a poem as long as the river* is a poem in two voices that responds to the Columbia River. As it was originally published, the handwritten text "flows" over 137 pages alongside a map of the Columbia designed by Nick Conbere. The two strands of the poem, Wong's and Wah's, periodically cross each other and the river, remaining separate but speaking to each other in various ways. A note in the book indicates that "the poem, represented along a 114-foot banner of the entire Columbia River, has been exhibited as part of a number of gallery presentations displayed in the Pacific Northwest."

18 Wah chuckled at the pun. I had to type one word or the other, but "damned" and "dammed" are equally apt.

19 The Site C Dam on the Peace River, and the Trans Mountain Pipeline that runs across BC from Alberta. In August 2018, Wong was arrested at the Westridge Marine Terminal in Burnaby. A year later, she was sentenced to twenty-eight days of incarceration, which she served at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women in Maple Ridge, BC; she was released for good behaviour after eighteen days.

20 On the current Talonbooks series, see Note 1. The earlier books to which Wah refers include bill bissett's *Beyond Even Faithful Legends* (1980), Bowering's *Particular Accidents* (1980), Davey's *The Arches* (1980), Marlatt's *Net Work* (1980), bpNichol's *As Elected* (1980), his own *Loki Is Buried at Smoky Creek* (1980), and Webb's *The Vision Tree* (1982).

21 The relevant passage as it appears on the back cover of *Music at the Heart of Thinking*: "The probes are unorthodox and dense . . . exciting to the reader Stuart Pierson calls 'terrieresque.' (The terrier sinks her teeth in, never lets go.)"

22 Duncan used the phrase "tone leading of vowels" frequently, including in his lectures on Olson. See, e.g., Duncan 104, 168. The phrase is originally that of Ezra Pound (see Duncan 201). "So much depends . . ." is untitled poem XXII in Williams' *Spring and All* (see Williams, *Imaginations* 138).

23 Weaving and sewing are ancient metaphors for poetry as well as modern. *Rhapsody* is linked etymologically to both poetry and stitching. See Butterick: "Olson writes in a letter to Robert Creeley, 25 October 1950: 'How to sew (rhapsode: . . . meant, to sew together!)'" (102).

24 "other artists": see Wong and Wah [v], 149.

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John Barton

What We Live For

We stop for one night, our last bed cradled
By cloverleafs and strip malls, the theme parks

Closed, the missed magic we'd sought cooling, marked
By swampy vistas, lust lacking credo

Where desire's falling flat and stays so, greens
And reedy, blood-warm, slow-flowing aquas

Lacking depth as we spoke less, insect buzz
Outgunned by engine revs as we drove, keen

To sleep, wake, then fly silent and away
But hours after shootings in Orlando

You dream, out of reach but safe, while I hold
A candle, recall Latino men slain

Dancing at a gay club where we once would
Hate like love abrupt, unnoticed, not dead.

Shannon Claire Toll

Disordering Enactments and (Re)mapping the Reserve in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*

> [T]here are the Indians that have made it their business to make sure that the culture and the languages have survived—the omega man Indians. Every beating they take recharges their fuel cells, and instead of tapping out they dust themselves off and knuckle up and just move forward. We are all of us survivors, descendants of this Indian. Otherwise we wouldn't be here. In Mi'gMaq we call this person *matnaggewinu*, a warrior.
> —Jeff Barnaby, Director's Statement

Listuguj Mi'gmaw director Jeff Barnaby's 2013 film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* is a gritty tale of Indigenous survival and vengeance against the residential school system. *Rhymes* follows the experiences of Barnaby's teenage *matnaggewinu* protagonist, Aila (portrayed by Mohawk actor Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs), as she "knuckles up" against colonial forces that seek to subjugate her community. Set in 1976 on the fictional Red Crow Reserve (colloquially referred to as the Kingdom of the Crow), *Rhymes* offers mainstream audiences a "history lesson" concerning the reality of Canada's residential school system, and portrays the "legacy of shame" these state-sponsored, church-run institutions left in their wake (Patterson). *Rhymes* was released two years prior to the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2009-2015), the findings of which established what Indigenous people had known all along: that "the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal,

social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada" (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 1). Central to this endeavour was the residential school system, which separated over 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children from their families and forced them into these institutions, which banned all Indigenous cultural practices and sought to replace them with, in the words of Canada's first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, "habits and modes of thought of white men" (qtd. in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2). *Rhymes* imaginatively and emphatically rejects this credo, and inserts a young heroine who takes on her local residential school, and by extension, what Barnaby describes as the "totalitarian dictatorship that [the residential school system] inflicted on the communities of these Native people" ("Rhymes for Young Ghouls").

Barnaby's debut feature-length film, *Rhymes* contains violent and visceral portrayals of the impacts of settler colonialism. In a slew of previous horror shorts, including *From Cherry English* (2004), *The Colony* (2007), and *File Under Miscellaneous* (2010), Barnaby eschews creating what he terms "positivity porn," films that ostensibly celebrate Indigenous survival without acknowledging the manifold and overwhelming losses that occurred along the way (qtd. in DaCosta). As evidenced by the proliferation of articles concerning Barnaby's narrative films, the genres of horror and speculative fiction are uniquely equipped to portray and embody the violence inherent in settler-colonial structures, and have the potential to impact mainstream audiences in a manner that "academic works and complex investigations might not" (Vowel). My particular interest lies in Barnaby's use of the conventions of speculative fiction and comic book aesthetics to explore colonialism's manifold violent geographies, and Aila's ceaseless rebellions against them. By geographies, I refer to the space itself and the competing discourses that govern it: settler structures that seek to interpolate Indigenous people into a docile body politic, and the discourses of resistance found in the film's deployment of narrative fiction and aesthetic hyperstylization. To accomplish this, I apply Mishuana Goeman's (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) concept of Indigenous "(re)mapping" of space, which creates "decolonized spatial knowledges and attendant geographies that acknowledge colonial spatial process as ongoing but imbued with power struggles" (11-12). While Goeman is specifically discussing writing as a mode of (re)mapping, I see this concept at play in the varied anticolonial mobilities featured in the film.

These modes of discursive resistance disrupt settler geographies meant to impose "order" on Indigenous lands and bodies, as "(re)mapping is a refusal of the order by *dis*order" (Tuck and McKenzie 135, emphasis mine). In other words, the Indigenous enactments of artistic and bodily (re)mapping featured in *Rhymes* constitute a series of expressive refusals that highlight colonial incoherence and destabilize the settler state's variegated and tenuous frameworks of control.

First, I discuss the importance of the artwork attributed to either Aila or her mother, Anna, which is featured in key scenes in *Rhymes.* As works of anticolonial refusal, the murals, sketches, and graffiti mark spaces and presences (including spectral presences) that have been mapped over by settler legal, religious, and historical narratives. The artwork presented is crafted using comic book aesthetics, and each piece constitutes a call for what Sarah Henzi elsewhere describes as a "necessary change in world-view, a reflection on the direct link to a past of colonialism, and the undeniable connection to a contemporaneity of imperialism" (24). Secondly, I highlight a more abject but important set of (re)mappings that subvert the legal, economic, and religious apparatuses designed to contain Indigenous peoples and the threat their presence poses to the stability of the colonial state and its claims to dominion. Specifically, I will discuss the series of physical contaminations and bodily eruptions that target the hateful Indian agent, Popper. Popper's gleeful cruelty is met with resistant scatological eruptions and disordering enactments that (re)map what he believes to be the ontological boundaries that protect him and, by extension, settler-colonial domination of Indigenous spaces. Lastly, I illustrate how the (re)mapping effects of art and bodily disorder converge in the film's climax with a culminating act of anticolonial vengeance. Through its interrogation of settler "realities," *Rhymes* reveals that realist modes of comprehension fail to communicate the full terror of the residential school system, and the breadth of the violent colonial geographies that persist.

Decentring Settler Space: Time, Space, and Aesthetics in Comic Art and Speculative Fictions

The "place" of the Red Crow Reserve is mapped by the tentacled authority of St. Dymphna's School, which looms on a hill and threatens its children

with whispers of the "religified zombies" who reside there (*Rhymes*). The reverberating effects of settler colonialism and its traumatic impacts on children are a central theme in the film; besides the haunting presence of St. Dymphna's, children like Aila and her brother Tyler are further endangered by the ravages of addiction on the reserve. At the beginning of the film, Aila's mother, Anna, accidentally kills Tyler in a drunk-driving accident. In the aftermath, Anna dies by suicide, and her husband Joe is arrested, leaving Aila effectively on her own. The film then jumps ahead seven years, finding an adolescent Aila playing an integral role in a marijuana grow-op to pay Popper the truant taxes she and her friends "owe" to keep them out of St. Dymphna's. When their money is stolen by Popper in order to extort them further, Aila and her crew hatch a plan to break into St. Dymphna's and retrieve it, but Aila's home life is rocked by the return of Joe, who has been released from prison. While the Indigenous inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Crow are portrayed in an unflinching light, they find creative and at times ingenious ways to circumvent, undermine, and (re)map the authority of their settler interrogators.

To discuss alternative mapping requires first to acknowledge how myriad colonial schematizations of space have impacted Indigenous peoples in North America. These include the outright land grabs and treaties that attenuated or contained Indigenous landholdings, but also the mapping of Euro-American epistemologies of law, race, religion, and gender onto Native political and physical bodies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori) describes the "spatial vocabulary" of colonialism through the following terms: the "line" that functioned to "map territory . . . and to mark the limits of colonial power"; the "centre," which constituted the seat of colonial power; and the "outside," which was established to orient "territory and people in an oppositional relation to the colonial centre" (55). These spatial concepts illustrate settler logics of containment, particularly in reference to their positioning of Indigenous people as "outside" of power and interrelationality, as they pose both a literal and an existential threat to the perpetual extension of empire. Such settler futurities attempt to confine through constructed arbitrary absolutes which, in their repetition, became mistaken as objective designations of space with ostensibly objective rules governing its use. In *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, Eve Tuck (Unangax) and Marcia McKenzie emphasize that these "[s]ettler and colonial futurities

based on expansionist, capitalist, and racist assumptions necessitate practices of decolonization in order to re-prioritize Indigenous and land-based futurities" (4). One such methodology is Goeman's notion of "(re)mapping," which conceptualizes how Indigenous women have wielded creative practices to subvert colonial articulations of space.

In *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, Goeman's (re)mapping is rooted in discussions of "multiscalar discourses of ownership," what Katherine McKittrick describes as "narratives of displacement that reward and value particular forms of conquest" (3). Such discourses constitute an inextricable and interdependent series of structures and undergirding logics necessary to maintain colonial "ownership" of a place, and meant to supersede Indigenous presence. Goeman explains that as a young Indigenous girl occupying both Native and non-Native spaces, she developed an "adaptability and awareness of [her] own embodiment as [she] moved through tumultuous geographies constructed around differing and constantly shifting power structures" (1). In *Rhymes*, we see Aila enact the same "embodiment" as she navigates life on the Red Crow Reserve, which is marked by colonial containment strategies that seek to limit her mobility. Even the opposing names of the space itself indicate the tumultuous nature of its geography and governance: it is alternately referred to as the Red Crow Reserve, which reflects the colonial imposition of borders, and the Kingdom of the Crow, which is at once ironic and resistant. Aila must simultaneously familiarize herself with settler laws (so that she can effectively circumvent them) while obeying the rules of survival that her mother gave her, including "Never befriend an Indian agent," "Stay out of debt," "Take care of your family," and "[D]on't act like a badass if you can't fight. Ain't nobody above an ass-kicking" (*Rhymes*). As the local "weed-princess" and a perpetual truant from the local residential school, Aila traverses and reconfigures colonialism's "multiscalar discourses" in the form of literal and metaphorical geographies that govern the Kingdom of the Crow.

This destabilization is realized through *Rhymes*' multi-genre milieu and Barnaby's deployment of the fantastic conventions of comics, speculative fiction, and horror in the film. Historically, comic books have been a site of colonial fantasy and have often portrayed Indigenous people as antimodern stereotypes. Michael Sheyahshe (Caddo Nation of Oklahoma) explains

that forms of popular media, including comics, "mirror the emotional consensus of how mainstream America sees us," usually in the form of the hypermasculine warrior trope (qtd. in Henzi 23). However, Indigenous creators have harnessed the possibilities of popular media to craft their own interventions that "speak beyond linguistic, cultural, and intergenerational gaps, while bringing the mythical up-to-date with the contemporary within new spaces of diffusion and discussion" (Henzi 24). Indigenous comics address complex and painful topics that communities face, such as language loss, suicide, and settler violence, with stunning visual portrayals of resistance and cultural continuance. Specifically, the visuality of the medium has proven ideal for the preservation and "transmission of traditions and storytelling for future generations" (25). The role comic books and graphic novels play in the film's visualization can be seen in Aila's sketchbook murals, animation, and graffiti, which offer an alternative mapping of the Red Crow Reserve. The art featured in the film was the result of a collaboration between Barnaby and settler artist and activist Dan Buller, with the latter relying heavily on the "vision" that Barnaby shared with him (Buller).[1] By borrowing from popular media to bring his vision to life, Barnaby's film both engages with its troubled history of Indigenous representation and demonstrates its potential for cultural transmission.

The film's investment in the genre of speculative fiction is key to its identification and upending of multiscalar discourses that continue to undergird settler-Indigenous relationships. Judith Leggatt discusses how Indigenous creators of speculative fiction combine "science fiction and horror tropes" into a form that is capacious enough to portray the "immediate and intergenerational trauma of the institutionalized theft of Indigenous children, but also to situate the schools within ongoing colonial processes, and—most importantly—to suggest specifically Indigenous modes of regeneration" (137). In the context of state-sanctioned discourses of "reconciliation" that seem more invested in settler futurity, works of Indigenous speculative fiction emphasize Indigenous futurity, and therefore reject mere calls for reform that fail to dismantle colonial structures or centre Indigenous sovereignty. Kristina Baudemann discusses how speculative manifestations in *Rhymes* such as zombies and ghouls distort the ontological border "between imagination and reality to suggest that fiction provides important paradigms for understanding history:

as man-made horrors transcend what the human mind is capable of comprehending, resorting to art might remain as the only means of making sense" (156). As a work of art and a work that deploys art as a means of resistance, *Rhymes* presents a multi-faceted path toward regeneration: the film offers a creative interpretation of these "man-made horrors," while also centring a "mode of regeneration" enacted by its heroine.

Art as (Re)mapping: Sketching Survival and Irreconcilable Presences

The potential for artwork to enact anticolonial resistance is addressed as Aila and Tyler sit on the hood of their parents' car in the opening scenes of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. Their uncle Burner drunkenly exits the house and begins teasing Tyler about the "religified zombies" at St. Dymphna's, who eat Indigenous children's brains. To calm Tyler's fears, Aila puts her own drawings aside and opens her sketchbook, pointing to a drawing that Anna made for her of "Gunner," an Indigenous heroine who "likes to fight, dead people especially" (*Rhymes*). Gunner is presented as a warrior woman, outfitted with weapons and riding on horseback, connoting a sense of alluring mobility in opposition to the reserve's matrix of confinements. Her comic book aesthetic upends the traditionally masculine warrior trope, but her embodiment nevertheless adheres to colonial narratives of Indigeneity. She exhibits Plains Indian visual markers, complete with a breastplate and a quiver of arrows on her back, reflecting mainstream perceptions of a quintessential warrior rather than Mi'gmaq culture. In this sense, Gunner's rendering both romanticizes Indigenous representation and subverts its gender norms. Aila is clearly enamoured with the sketch and the power of maternal protection that it signifies, but Anna dies shortly after this scene, leaving Aila to take up Gunner's mantle as the protector. Gunner reappears in a subsequent scene years later, when Aila is spray-painting her likeness onto the door of her friend Maytag's van. The placement is meaningful, as Gunner is once again associated with mobility in a space where Indigenous movement is viewed as a threat and was in many ways effectively curtailed by the Indian Act via the reserve structure and the pass system. As Aila describes in a voice-over, "my world ends at the border of the reserve, where dirt roads open up to dreams of things you can never be here" (*Rhymes*). Gunner becomes an icon of what Aila wishes to be in the reserve as Gunner represents the possibility of

transgressing or escaping to greater dreams beyond the limitations imposed by colonial control.

These colonial borders, however, are reinforced when Popper and his cadre enter the scene to collect the truant taxes owed to keep Aila and her friends out of school. In reaction to Aila making a joke to her friends in Mi'gmaq language, Popper smears the paint on her Gunner portrait, remarking: "You take after your mother. She had a hand for this, huh? She used to run her mouth off too. That didn't get her anywhere but used up, dangling from a rafter" (*Rhymes*). Colonial gender norms themselves are an essential scalar discourse that declares ownership over Indigenous lands through valuations assigned to Indigenous women and by distorting strong traditions of matrilineal social and political leadership in many nations by associating them with wantonness and depravity (Anderson 100). In this scene, Popper's sadism is focused not on Aila's actual body, but on the body of work (Gunner) that represents her sense of self, her autonomy, and her maternal connection: her alternative mapping of her surroundings. He responds with cruelty to any signs of Aila's nonconformity, and he desires to totally limit her freedoms and expressive mobility. In the film, Gunner is both a symbol of feminine anticolonial defiance and a proxy victim of settler misogyny, smeared but not destroyed by Popper's abuse. The centrality of Gunner in these scenes serves as a warning to Aila to remember the "localized asymmetries of power and privilege" at work on the reserve, specifically "who can walk or travel safely in particular places based on identifications of race, gender, or sexuality" (Tuck and McKenzie 38). Even a portrait that represents Indigenous feminine mobility is too much of a threat and necessitates an overdetermined response.

Another exchange that illustrates the (re)mapping of settler structures occurs during an animation sequence later in the film, during which the violent geographies of Canada are brought into sharp relief. Channette Romero explains how the use of animation in Indigenous film productions "resists the ways in which mainstream animation historically has been used to legitimize and help continue cultural and material imperialism" (80). Moreover, as a form, animation is adept at adapting Indigenous storytelling conventions into a visual and aural format. This is exhibited when Ceres, Aila's surrogate grandmother and the leader of their marijuana grow-op, tells Aila the story of the "wolf and the mushroom," which is a grim

warning about the ravages of the residential school system. Ceres points at one of the drawings from the sketchbook—that of a postapocalyptic wolf, sinewy and skeletal, with a back that is grotesquely studded with mechanical gears and weapons. As Ceres speaks the beginning words in Mi'gmaq, "the drawings from Aila's sketchbook and . . . [the] oral story begin to coalesce, taking hold of the film's diegetic space and momentarily forcing it to pass into animation" (Doyle 44). The wolf emerges from the page onto the screen, travelling the desolate landscape searching for food. This aesthetic lends a sense of timelessness to the scene, as the story itself is a few generations old but the setting of its animated representation is a post-industrial wasteland, devoid of any natural life. The wolf arrives at a tree from which hang the bodies of Mi'gmaq children, and smashes into the tree until the bodies fall to the ground, where their "heads become as mushroom caps and their bones as stalks," as Ceres narrates in the voice-over (*Rhymes*). Hallucinating from hunger, the wolf consumes the children's bodies, and when he returns to his senses, he is so overwhelmed by intense regret and shame that he begins to self-cannibalize, consuming every inch of his own body from head to tail until he has completely disappeared.

When Aila asks Ceres where she heard the story, the latter responds, "Before they took me off to school, my mother told it to me," then points to the sketchbook, adding, "Your mother is telling it to you too" (*Rhymes*). As this exchange and animation sequence demonstrate, this is not a passive transmission of an old tale, but a multi-generational, active, and animating technology. As LeAnne Howe (Choctaw) writes, oral traditions combine "all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus" (42). The story is at once a macrocosmic rendering of the ravages of colonization and a microcosmic conveyance of ongoing Mi'gmaq suffering; in its telling, it memorializes children who were victimized by the residential school system, while also interpolating Aila and alerting her to danger. The story also undermines colonial discourses that dismiss oral tradition as static or primitive, and instead demonstrates the adaptability and continued relevance of storytelling as a conveyor of communal knowledge.

The "wolf and mushroom" sequence illustrates how extractive and exploitative colonial norms create false binaries between civilization and savagery, between the natural world and technological "progress." Indeed, this scene utilizes the same animation technology that often illustrated Indigenous disappearance as a means of narrativizing *settler* violence and its subsequent self-destruction. In the story, the wolf hunts down the children in a hellscape created by the technologies and weapons that constitute its very form, much in the same way Popper and the Indian agents utilize the Indian Act to extort, imprison, and abuse Indigenous children at St. Dymphna's. They are abetted by the Indian Act's legislation governing the education of Indigenous youth, which according to the film's epigraph granted truant officers the authority to "take into custody a child . . . *using as much force* as the circumstances require" (*Rhymes*, emphasis mine). Goeman writes that Indigenous "bodies are organized, categorized, surveilled, and made readable to the state," and in the case of the reserve, Indigenous children are rendered criminal or "truant," and the agents are appointed to control them (36). Like the wolf, the Indian agents are deluded into believing that their self-destructive appetite for violence and their legal dominion over the Kingdom of the Crow are warranted, unaware that these are also narratives that can be revised, restructured, or (re)mapped.

This scene also exhibits how art and speculative fiction combine to create slippages in linear conceptions of time, memory, and trauma. Ceres displaces her own participation in the storytelling, insisting that it is Anna who is "telling it to [Aila]" through the contents of her sketchbook, rendering Anna a *present* presence (*Rhymes*). While Anna appears as a zombie in multiple scenes, which ostensibly dehumanizes her, she is no mere horror trope. Instead, Anna's spectral manifestations evolve as Aila's memory of her appears to sharpen after this scene. Before, Aila dreamt of walking in a graveyard and encountering Anna as a shambling corpse who burst from her grave and commanded Aila to seek vengeance in a rasping, guttural voice. The next time Aila encounters Anna is when Joe drunkenly searches for her grave, crying out in Mi'gmaq that he dreams of her walking headless because she doesn't have a proper headstone, the result of the church's attitudes toward death by suicide. As Joe searches, Anna appears next to Aila, ghostly but not ghastly in form, and says "He misses me," to which Aila replies, "We all miss you" (*Rhymes*). And in a scene that will be

discussed later, Anna is fully restored to who she was before her death, and Aila experiences the joy of truly remembering her mother. This sequence of scenes demonstrates how Barnaby's film mobilizes the supernatural and technological tropes of speculative fictions to reimagine Indigenous resistance to the residential school system, upending settler notions of history as a discrete and linear progression and instead celebrating Indigenous narrative traditions as a reanimating technology.

Unfortunately, the return of Joe from prison intensifies Popper and his fellow Indian agents' propensity for violence and their dedication to maintaining their notion of order on the reserve. Midway through the film, Joe borrows a boat from a friend to seek solace on the lake, despite multiple warnings that it is illegal to take out a boat during this time of year. At first Aila wants to stop him, but decides instead to join him in this small act of transgression against colonial imposition on Mi'gmaq movement and land use.[2] When they are confronted by Popper and his cronies on shore, a fight breaks out. Aila tries unsuccessfully to defend her father, but her involvement leads to her being "admitted" as a pupil at St. Dymphna's. In a disturbing montage, we see Aila being "fitted for Dymphna's grace" (*Rhymes*), surrounded by grim and silent nuns who brusquely strip her of her clothing, bathe her, and then cut off her braids. This sequence is accompanied by non-diegetic "Christian liturgical music," which, "while more melodious, evokes both horror movie soundtracks and the role of the church in the schools" (Leggatt 138). This moment of bare realism captures the monstrousness found in these institutions; the nuns dispassionately strip away Aila's identity until she is almost unrecognizable, demonstrating how the "colonized turn into zombies in a dehumanizing system" (Baudemann 159).[3] Aila is shoved into solitary confinement, into what Popper describes as the "darkest, deepest hole we've got," and the door slams in her face (*Rhymes*).

Alone, Aila dreams that she is walking with the zombie manifestation of a young child, who was assumedly a victim and student of St. Dymphna's School. Through swirling fog, he leads her around the school to a mass grave full of the bodies of Indigenous children; like the tree from the wolf and mushroom story, this pit bears witness to the genocidal effects of the residential school system. Aila wakes and, overcome with grief, she picks up a rock from the floor and begins to draw on the wall of her cell, where

the forms of ghostly children take shape. In a voice-over, Aila wonders "how many ghosts wander down in this hole. How the devil doesn't let them go. Or how many got out that were ruined all the same" (*Rhymes*). These ghostly reinscriptions further dis-order settler time and memory; they are not the spirits of a bygone era, but instead are the existing victims whose presence, whether as spectre or survivor, subverts colonial narratives of schools as sites of "improvement" and instead reveals that their legacy is one of reverberating suffering.

This is a pivotal moment in *Rhymes*, when the audience is faced with the ghosts of the lost children and must acknowledge the human toll of the residential school system—a toll that must be *reckoned with* before "reconciliation" could possibly take place. Rather than embodying the "distorted perspective in which the living dead are the stuff of nightmares," the spectres that populate *Rhymes* "emancipate themselves from the colonial logic and begin to form a virtual community" (Doyle 50), one that stands in defiance of their attempted erasure. St. Dymphna's School was constructed to contain Indigenous children and bring them "grace" through the sacred teachings of the Church, but it is Aila who recognizes and marks this a "sacred site," (re)mapping St. Dymphna's walls and calling attention to the stories that have been silenced. While St. Dymphna's extends its control over the Indigenous people's lands and bodies, Aila's mural (re)maps the stolen and murdered children's presence onto this space, bearing witness to their suffering and disrupting the myth of "Dymphna's grace."

The final imbrication of art and speculative fiction in the film occurs when Aila retreats to the river after their siege on St. Dymphna's, which resulted in Ceres being murdered by Popper. Grieving, Aila ponders a drawing of an Indian chief in a headdress in her sketchbook and experiences a slippage in time, finding herself an observer of her own memory. She sees her younger self as a child tending a fire, while her mother paints the image of an Indian chief on a door. No longer a ghoulish presence, Anna is restored and beckons young Aila to help her, wearing the very white mask that Aila wears throughout the film. Baudemann observes that the painting is a "logo of Native resistance," and that the mask "symbolizes the activist art passed down to [Aila] from her own mother" (160). An audience to her own precious memory, Aila watches

as memory-Aila peppers her mother with questions. She asks why they were including a headdress in the painting when the Mi'gmaq didn't wear them; Anna responds that it "looks powerful" to certain people "because they're dumbasses" (*Rhymes*). When memory-Aila questions why they are painting at night, Anna responds that they are avoiding detection, because "two Indians drawing an Indian is [a big deal]. To some people that's scary and we could get in trouble for it" (*Rhymes*). Like the image of Gunner besmirched by Popper earlier in the film, the Indian chief portrait is a political threat to the "colonial geographies [that] 'enframe' state borders, assert control over state populations, and overdetermine action and contestation" (Tuck and McKenzie 134), and Anna's statement insinuates that "two Indians drawing an Indian" might similarly incur an "overdetermined action" by colonial authorities. Both instances highlight the tenuous and fragile lines that enframe colonial boundaries, and how Indigenous art is "subversive, powerful and unexpected, and runs counter to the colonial metanarrative" (Baudemann 160).

Erupting Bodies: Retribution and (Re)mapping of Colonial Borders

Early in the film, Aila declares that "you can turn anything into an artform" while rolling joints at the party held to celebrate Joe's return (*Rhymes*), demonstrating that her "weed business is a dark and dirty art," but art nonetheless (Baudemann 160). This section continues in the spirit of this ethos, though it examines a different expressive form: the "art" of vengeance in *Rhymes*. Specifically, I discuss the political power of the erupting/disruptive Indigenous body in the film and the threat it poses to settler power structures. On the reserve, youths such as Aila, Sholo, Angus, and Jujijj are literally commodified by the truant taxes they pay to avoid the grasp of St. Dymphna's, and they see other children taken away and abused by the system. In the film, "colonization is the repeated crossing of boundaries that must never be crossed, visualized as a violent trespassing of the most intimate boundary, that of one's own body" (Baudemann 154). Besides being commodified, we learn from Aila and the others that Indigenous children experience sexual, physical, and verbal abuse at St. Dymphna's. In retaliation, the youths leverage their limited power and the excesses of their own bodies to resist and counter-violate the bodily borders of the colonizer.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva discusses this fear of bodily contamination, of the "abject . . . the jettisoned object, [which] is radically excluded and draws [one] toward the place where meaning collapses," where the sense of a coherent self is destabilized (2). Feces and blood are among the "abjections" that violate settler hegemony in the Kingdom of the Crow by disrupting the multiscalar discourses of "identity, system, [and] order" (Kristeva 4) that comprise its ontological borders. Moreover, the "abject" is horrifying because it signals the impending wasting and death of a body; therefore, through their repeated abject attacks on Popper, the arm of colonial power on the reserve, the youths are attacking the structures that maintain settler control and, by extension, settler futurity. Popper's character arc is asynchronously punctuated by these excremental interventions. The first is a flashback narrated by Aila, and takes place at St. Dymphna's when Joe and Popper were teenagers: the flashback begins with a close-up of a young Popper's panicked face submerged in toilet water, held there by his Indigenous classmates when Joe, who was always looking to hone his "brawling" skills, steps in to defend him. Joe brutally beats Popper's attackers and the scene devolves into visual and aural carnage: blood spattered on walls, blood dripping from noses, and the exaggerated thud of fist on bone. Joe offers his hand to Popper "but there was already hate in the boy's heart"; Popper reports Joe as one of his attackers, and then Popper is given the honour of administering corporal punishment to Joe by knocking him out with a club while reciting the Evening Prayer (*Rhymes*). While Popper begins as the clear victim in this scene, it concludes with his first taste of church-sanctioned violence, which he turns into a lifelong obsession. In particular, he enjoys lording his authority over Joe and his family, including Burner and Aila, which makes him the target of further retaliatory, scatological violations.

Revisiting the scene in which Popper smears the paint on the mural of Gunner reveals how Aila uses bodily excesses to attack settler economic structures. When the Indian agents stop by to pick up the truant taxes from Aila and her friends, Milch throws Burner out of the car and remarks with disgust that Burner has "shit his pants" as a result of the beating he received for allegedly "befriending an Indian agent" (*Rhymes*). Popper orders Aila to bring their money, which she fetches from her hiding place in an outhouse.

In a voice-over, she supplies another pair of "rules" for surviving life in the Kingdom of the Crow: "Rule #2, stay out of debt. Indians can't understand debt. Don't get money. Indian agents don't speak Indian, they speak money. They speak it with their boots, they speak it with their fists. Speak it with their blood and bats. Rule #3, take care of your family" (*Rhymes*). The "debt" that Aila refers to was imposed by the Indian Act that gave churches and men like Popper the authority to wrench Indigenous children from their families and assimilate them as a Christianized population. Indeed, while money remains a singular focus for Aila and her friends, it is not because they "share in the dream of riches or property, of seizing power over other indebted subjects who would owe them in their turn" (Doyle 52). Instead, they engage with money by necessity, all the while recognizing its status as a vector of colonial control; to "get money" would be to speak the language of the Indian agents and the Crown, a language of abuse, of cultural and familial loss.

When Aila is met by Popper's gloating, she responds by asking her friends in Mi'gmaq if they know where she hides the money, and then quips that it's the "closest we'll ever get to having our asses kissed by an Indian agent" (*Rhymes*). Not only does Aila refuse the language of "money," if not its necessity to keep her out of St. Dymphna's, but she reveals in her own language that she intentionally conceals it in the outhouse as an act of retribution. This scene features two references to excremental incursions that violate settler borders: Burner's erupting body that disgusts Milch, and Aila's abjectification of the money, both of which are enactments of political retaliation. Burner's "erupting body" disgusts the Indian agents who contributed to his beating, and Aila's excremental degradation of the money transgresses the ostensible politics of civility that Popper represents. In this sense, both of these scatological expressions reflect the ongoing power struggle at the centre of these interactions, and (re)map the physical borders from the colonial Self to the colonized Other.

Later in the film, when Aila and her crew lay siege to St. Dymphna's to rescue her father and steal back all of the truant tax money, they also enact a particularly gruesome comeuppance for Popper. In a culminating scatological eruption, Maytag fills the pipes that lead to Popper's shower with excrement, courtesy of fellow Indigenous inhabitants of the reserve who were enthusiastic to "donate" to the cause. The result is a veritable

explosion of feces when Popper turns on the faucet to wash off his "shame" after sexually abusing pupils, a politically charged accusation for a lifetime of crimes against Indigenous people (*Rhymes*). The specific nature of this attack completes Popper's fecal arc, a grotesque trinity of scenes that mark Popper's character development from his origins to the pinnacle of his rage and sadism. Instead of being able to surreptitiously rid himself of the physical evidence of his abuse, he is showered in a metaphorical reflection of his excessive violence and cruelty. In a surprising but powerful act of (re)mapping in the film, Popper's own narrative of his religious, economic, and sexual domination over Indigenous people is marred by these scatological disruptions, which upend his sense of social order and superiority.

Popper's rage at this violation and his desperation to restore his sense of control culminates in a brutal attack on Aila and Joe back at their home, where he knocks Joe unconscious and beats Aila before attempting to rape her. A gun cocks behind him, and he turns to face Jujijj, who is pointing a shotgun at his head. Popper advances toward Jujijj, who shoots him in the head. As the shot makes its impact, Popper's blood is splattered onto the back wall, all over Aila's mural of "Tree God," a spectral horned figure. In an interview with *Film Pulse*, Barnaby describes the scene as the "big cathartic payoff" of the film, but also reveals that the scene has a subtle yet significant cultural "reckoning" that might escape many audience members (Patterson). Popper's blood is splattered over a "god-like figure" Aila painted that contains a Mi'gmaq "petroglyph on its mouth for God" (Patterson). The inclusion of this subtle artistic mark is profound: Aila mapped Mi'gmaq language onto this figure, and then Jujijj (re)mapped it with Popper's blood, creating an intersection of cultural continuation and colonial reckoning on a single piece of work. This is also the moment in which an erupting body, now the colonizer's body, intersects with the (re)mapping artwork of the film. The word itself, that of "God," is significant, as Popper, an agent of St. Dymphna's and representative of the church, used his authority to abuse the people whom he was meant to "save" by introducing them to the word of God; therefore, Popper's death, with his blood being shed onto the figure, is an act of retribution against the violence perpetrated by residential schools.

While this particular threat is neutralized by this abrupt act of retributive violence, it also demonstrates what Shaawano Chad Uran (White Earth

Anishinaabe) calls the film's "radical inability to reconcile individual agency with the need for collective restoration and justice." Popper is dead, Joe takes the fall for his death to protect Jujijj, and Aila is safe. But for how long? While the children formed their own "collective" uprising, they are effectively on their own. Joe is gone, Ceres has been murdered, and Aila is once again left to fend for herself and others in the face of an ongoing apocalypse. Popper's death did not bring down the walls of St. Dymphna's, nor did the children's vengeance plot fully disarticulate the web of colonial mappings that continue to delineate the social, temporal, and physical borders of the reserve. There is no blueprint for reconciliation offered in this portrayal of individual acts of vengeance and resistance against the multiscalar discourses of colonial violence and control, and *Rhymes* leaves the audience with an unsettling question: what comes next for the youths still ensnared in settler Canada's clutches? As Chelsea Vowel (Métis) writes, *Rhymes* "utterly rips apart the notion that by *beginning* to gather an account of the Residential School system, we are in any way done the last bit of truth telling we need to undergo in this country" (emphasis mine). So perhaps its insoluble nature is the point if Barnaby's film is to be a "history lesson," as the traumas of settler colonialism remain unsolved and unreconciled, and we remain at the "beginning" of this path toward reckoning. When Jujijj asks Aila "What do we do now, boss?" she shuts her eyes and the screen cuts to black. The film's final moment constitutes its final refusal to assure the audience that the work of decolonization and reconciliation is complete.

NOTES

1 To view Buller's artwork for the film visit https://williamdanielbuller.wordpress.com/2014/01/19/rhymes-for-young-ghouls/.

2 This conflict alludes to the raids perpetrated by Quebec Provincial Police against the Mi'gmaq over salmon fishing rights, which were captured in Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin's 1984 documentary *Incident at Restigouche*.

3 Lisa Jackson's (Ojibwe) award-winning short film "Savage" presents a compelling contradiction to this point, portraying the ongoing humanity of the children who have been zombified by the residential school system.

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Yuan Changming

By Definition of Preposition

Better not to end a sentence with a prep like 'of'
I don't remember when this rule I learned of

But since then I have become keenly aware of
The need to pay close attention to the grammar of

Every sentence I write in English, a language of
Choice over birth, which I did not begin until at age of

Nineteen to learn among heavily accented versions of
Mandarin practised on a Shanghai campus, a city of

Romantic or rhapsodic adventures. Yes, by definition of
Preposition, it is a function word expressing a relationship of

A name with another in most cases, & as the most common of
All preps, *of* denotes origin or cause with the shape of

O like a vagina to *f*--- into, the two letters as the theme of
This poem, with many other political concerns or lack thereof

Orly Lael Netzer

"A VR Empathy Machine"
Testimony, Recognition, and Affect on *Canada Reads* 2019

> In this [book] you are right in there, like you are in a VR empathy machine, and you are able to see it with your own eyes.
> —Ziya Tong, *Canada Reads* 2019, "Day Two"

The 2019 season of *Canada Reads* was labelled as the "One Book to Move You" edition. The affective resonances of the theme were strongly invoked over the four days of the live-streamed event—from references to books as "magic carpets that transport readers," to the idea of a book as "a VR empathy machine"—as each of the five panellists passionately debated the transformative capacities of their chosen text. The panellists even took their arguments a step further, suggesting that because readers will feel immersed in the worlds of the books being discussed, the texts have the power to effect pressing social justice change by transforming readers' positions on the issues they invoke. The panellists' arguments, then, were guided by the affective theme of the show, and they debated literary texts as vehicles for both political efficacies and civic ethics. In this article, I approach this season of *Canada Reads* as a site of shared reading that is mobilized for ethical and political public debate. In particular, I focus on the discussions surrounding the two books that became finalists in the 2019 season—*Homes*, a memoir by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah (with Winnie Yeung), and Max Eisen's memoir *By Chance Alone*—both of which were positioned in the show's production and discussions as testimonial accounts that present urgent rights claims directed at readers as humanitarian subjects in both national and global contexts. In my attention to the debates revolving around the two memoirs, I examine the ethics of affective recognition modelled by the panellists and framed by the show. Contouring the potentialities and limitations of the season's responses to literary testimony,

I suggest that while empathy-driven ethics may seem transformative, they simply mirror the deficiencies of political recognition and the cunning ways it functions to uphold the power asymmetries of the status quo.

My attention to *Canada Reads* is grounded in the show's consistently growing popularity, reflected, in part, by the phenomenon described by Danielle Fuller and Julie Rak as "the *Canada Reads* effect," "a way to name a spike in sales that turns the books on the show into bestsellers" (26). This effect has served to position the show as a significant agent in Canada's reading industry, one with cultural, economic, and political power. As a major agent in the nation's reading industry, and with testimonial accounts featured on the 2019 roster, the "One Book to Move You" season of *Canada Reads* offers a productive site for the exploration of "testimonial transactions," a concept theorized by Gillian Whitlock to account for the movements of testimonial literature in global markets and demonstrate how economic, cultural, and political agents shape the transformative capacities of testimony's calls for justice (*Postcolonial* 8, 68).

To develop my argument, I begin by discussing the pivotal role of affect-based ethical recognition in literary testimony, building on Whitlock's notion of testimonial transactions and how those shape and mediate the ethical responsibilities bestowed upon readers as witnesses. I then thread together discussions of the ethics of affective recognition in testimony with critiques of the politics of recognition in Canada, turning in particular to Pauline Wakeham's concept of "the cunning of reconciliation." Building on Elizabeth Povinelli's *The Cunning of Recognition*, Wakeham argues that reconciliation, grounded in political recognition, formulates a state-sanctioned framework to settle differences between "the Anglo-Celtic establishment and its 'others'" while maintaining "entrenched power hierarchies" (211). In my turn to Wakeham's theorization, I demonstrate how affective ethics of recognition mirror the cunning politics of recognition, effectively serving to render moot testimony's justice claims and its ethical demands of readers. Finally, I discuss *Canada Reads* as a produced site of shared reading and public debate, exploring how its design mobilizes testimony's justice claims and recognition-based acts of reading in service of a multicultural and humanitarian image of the nation-state. I thus conclude with a call to reconsider the models championed as honouring the responsibilities of reading as witnessing.

1. An Ethics of Recognition: *Canada Reads* and the Politics of Testimonial Transactions

The 2019 season of *Canada Reads* featured a combination of fiction, autofiction,[1] and non-fiction texts grouped under the thematic caption of "One Book to Move You," centralizing affective modes of reading as a means of social transformation grounded in nationalist ideals and designed for the betterment of the national community.[2] Of the five books featured in the season, three—the aforementioned finalists *By Chance Alone* and *Homes*, as well as *The Woo-Woo* by Lindsay Wong—were memoirs, while *Suzanne* by Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette (translated by Rhonda Mullins) was a work of autofiction, and *Brother* by David Chariandy was the only novel. In discussions centred on themes from heartbreak to love, hope, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion, panellists championed the one book they believe all Canadians should read in distinctively affective terms. The panellists take their arguments a step further, positioning their affective responses to the books as transformative acts that contend with urgent socio-political ailments facing the nation—from a mental health crisis in *The Woo-Woo*, to women's rights in *Suzanne*, systemic racism in *Brother*, and a rise in xenophobia and anti-Semitism in *Homes* and *By Chance Alone*, respectively.

Though *Canada Reads* has been produced and hosted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) since 2002, it is only since its tenth season that the CBC's annual "Battle of the Books" turned to a site of debate explicitly informed by civic ethics and national politics. From the outset, the show has been framed as a *Survivor*-type game show for books, invested in producing belonging to a nation of CanLit and mobilizing its power to foster and promote a community of readers who imagine themselves as part of a multicultural, humanitarian, and reconciliatory nation. And though this is indeed still the case, a major change occurred in 2012 with the introduction of non-fiction texts, which served to shift "the explicit aims of the contest" (Fuller and Rak 29, 42). In their article "'True Stories,' Real Lives," Fuller and Rak demonstrate that because of "the close connection between truth claims and memoir reading," when *Canada Reads*' "True Stories Edition" series aired in 2012, the inclusion of memoir redirected discussion away from literary merit and towards "ideas about 'Canada,' citizenship, and truth telling," triggering "ethically motivated reading practices" (42). Subsequent iterations of *Canada Reads*, Fuller and

Rak note, "have taken up different aspects of the ethical agenda raised in the 2012 contest, both thematically and in on-air discussions," pushing the format "toward issue-based reading" (42).

This shift is perhaps most evident in the 2019 "One Book to Move You" season, where the majority of texts were works of non-fiction and panellists mobilized the presumptive truth value of their books to interlace affect, national myths, and social justice claims. For example, even though she champions the only work of fiction on the list, former model and television host Lisa Ray presses the matter of *Brother*'s truth value and ties it to civic ethics. Pitching the novel on the first day of debates, Ray states:

> We've all heard the headlines but *Brother* takes you beyond, into the struggles of single mothers, into systemic racism that occurs right here in Canada, into loss, grief, kinship. . . . [Chariandy's] words grip you, they suck you into the story in such a way that all of our differences are erased and empathy grows. . . . What if the power of this book, *Brother*, to move you can actually change your perceptions and change your prejudices? ("Day One" 09:07-09:43)

Within the first sixty seconds of discussing the text, Ray mobilizes affect to evoke an ethical claim that transforms readers personally and collectively, moving from individual to national change. When *Brother* is voted off at the end of day three, and though she has continuously championed the novel's literary mastery as "a great addition to Canadian literature," Ray still presses the matter of *Brother*'s ethical urgency: "It's a book that all of Canada should be proud of, and at the same time all of Canada should read it because there are certain things we need to fix in our own country, today, before we move forward and open our hearts and minds to other people from outside the country" ("Day Three" 42:55-43:22). Ray's opening and closing statements, while driven by affect, suggest it is the truth value of *Brother* that invokes civic ethics—not as a universal humanist truth, but as a situated and historicized justice claim—positioning its readers as ethical subjects and agents of political change.

When Ray recognizes *Brother*'s truth, she does not merely address its portrayal of 1990s Scarborough; rather, she champions it as an urgent story of protest articulating a justice claim that Canadian readers must contend with despite its challenge to certain national myths they might hold, thus positioning *Brother* vis-à-vis the discourse of testimony. Testimonial texts can be defined as direct speech acts that activate autobiographical truth to

argue for an urgent justice claim (Yúdice 17), thus comprising a potentially transformative force whose agency is nonetheless finite, "limited by specific campaigns and era" (Whitlock, Postcolonial 5). Nuancing testimony as "the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression to a less oppressed other," Gayatri Spivak highlights that the power and responsibility of mobilizing testimony for social change lies in the hands of the addressee who agrees to recognize the subject's truth and its urgency (7). Spivak, Whitlock, and Yúdice, then, frame literary testimony as a discourse grounded in autobiographical truth but making a much more specific claim upon readers, invoking an ethical demand to bear witness and a responsibility to carry its truth to effect socio-political change.

Indeed, both truth and politics are invoked for all five texts featured in the 2019 season of *Canada Reads*, but three of the five contestants situate their texts not merely as "true stories" but rather as urgent accounts of injustice communicated to a more privileged other and pressing them to act for socio-political change, thus invoking the ethical responsibilities of readers as witnesses. From the outset, Ray mobilizes the discourse of testimony to position *Brother* as protesting systemic racism in Canada, calling Canadians to address the issue that resides in their own home before contending with other matters. Ray thus positions the novel *Brother* as invoking testimonial resonances, but it is only Abu Bakr al Rabeeah's *Homes* and Max Eisen's *By Chance Alone* that are situated in the competition as testimonies from the outset, as texts that bear witness to the effects of racism through humanitarian ethics. In other words, though Ray's interpretation of the novel champions it as testifying to racism in Canada, the urgent claims for recognition and justice in *By Chance Alone* and *Homes* are directly and distinctly articulated as testimonial in the memoirs themselves, and are thus framed along these lines both by their celebrity champions and the production of the show.

This framing of the five finalist books on *Canada Reads* begins with one-minute book trailers that promote each of the five books in the competition, and that circulate approximately two months prior to the debates. They interlace video footage of the authors as they narrate the introduction to their respective books alongside enactments of settings and images invoked in the texts themselves, and for the non-fiction or autofiction books these videos are peppered with family photographs. But

in the case of *Homes* and *By Chance Alone*, the trailers switch to newsreel and archival videography that shift the form of their introductions toward reportage or documentary-like discourse, and end with the writers' direct message to readers. Abu Bakr al Rabeeah states that "[he] really want[s] people to know that we are kind of the same, there is not much difference between us," while Max Eisen shares his father's command that "if [you] manage to survive, [you] must tell the world what happened here" ("Day One" 13:13-13:19, 15:10-15:15). Chuck Comeau (who defended *Homes*), a member of the punk band Simple Plan, and Ziya Tong (who defended *By Chance Alone*), co-host of the Discovery Channel's *Daily Planet*, follow the lead of the authors whose books they champion. They openly call on readers as Canadian citizens to honour the books' messages, welcome refugees, understand human suffering, and stand guard against racially-motivated hatred. The book trailers and panellist pitches thus call on the show's audiences to recognize the memoirs' ethical claims and political implications which urge readers to act against racism and anti-Semitism, and provide a safe and welcoming haven to refugees.

The discourse of testimony, then, is not merely about truth, nor ethics; at its core, it is primarily about recognition—who are positioned as readers and granted the power to recognize; what claims readers are invited to contend with, and which ones they are willing to; as well as how readers are expected to express their recognition, and what models they are afforded to mobilize it. As "the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other" (Spivak 7), testimony is addressed to implied readers who, regardless of their individual positionings, are more privileged addressees. Testimony implores them to recognize the truth in testifiers' accounts of oppression *as well as* mobilize their privileges as ethical subjects and political agents who can change the structural conditions that cause others' pain. When acts of reading testimony are situated within a produced site of shared reading that is invested in a particular national imaginary, testimony's addressees are expected to enact their recognition as members of the national community. In the case of *Canada Reads*, particularly during on-air debates, panellists are encouraged to perform recognition as members of a multicultural, humanitarian, and reconciliatory nation.

This is why the shift from truth to testimony in *Canada Reads* 2019 matters. As testimonial acts formulate protest stories, they necessitate readers'

recognition of their claims for justice and bestow testimony's addressees with specific ethical responsibilities, which readers are most often expected to fulfill through an "ethics of recognition," performed via affective responses (Schaffer and Smith 3). Introducing *Homes* immediately following the book trailer, a teary-eyed Comeau describes it as a text that "will fill your heart with empathy and compassion," "make you believe in the power of love, hope, and family," and "feel grateful that your kids don't have to fall asleep to the sound of machine guns tonight," suggesting that this kind of book is "the best antidote to senseless hatred" ("Day One" 13:25-14:05). With these affect-driven statements, Comeau performs the predominant mode of an ethics of recognition, enacting affective response as an ethical fulfillment of readers' responsibilities to testimonies, "generating public debate, sympathy, and outrage" (Schaffer and Smith 3, 5).

Yet, though this mode of recognition formulates the performance of an ethical response, it does not, and cannot, fulfill the demands of testimony. An ethics of recognition purportedly effects social change by triggering affective responses that "unsettle private beliefs and public discourses about the national past" (Schaffer and Smith 5). However, affect-driven acts of recognition do not necessarily require a reader's recognition of their own power or their accountability for their or their nation's complicity in the unjust systems attested to, and thus in effect these acts offer an empty shell of recognition too easily co-opted to maintain existing prejudices and power structures. In other words, given the urgency and tenor of testimony's justice claims and its demand for the "advocacy, responsibility, and accountability" of its addressees (Whitlock, *Postcolonial* 9), relying on an affective ethics of recognition as the predominant mode of response, and equating that response with the fulfillment of the role of readers as witnesses, is far too risky. The stakes are too high.

Championing *By Chance Alone*, Tong's opening statement warns that "one in five Canadian young people doesn't even know what the Holocaust is," tying this statistic to a nation-wide trend, as "hate crimes have skyrocketed by up to 47%" ("Day One" 15:43-15:58). With these contemporary references, Tong ties the story of survival of Auschwitz in *By Chance Alone* with social realities in Canada today, and positions the memoir as pressing and relevant to Canadian readers. She acknowledges Eisen's justice claim—which she cites from the epigraph as "'a reminder

to stand on guard against radical ideologies and never be bystanders'"—and draws attention to the gap between Canada's espoused humanitarian values and its current trends of anti-Semitism and racism ("Finale" 33:50-34:00). Describing the book as a "VR empathy machine" that transports and transforms readers ("Day Two" 36:38-36:43), Tong even calls on her fellow panellists to recognize and act upon their own cultural power now amplified by the show's platform, because "[r]ight now, we have a chance to talk to all of Canada. We have a chance to inoculate this country, by giving them a better chance at what they read" ("Finale" 37:05-37:33).

This is where the dangers and limits of affective ethics of recognition lie, as Tong's practice of reading formulates a mere performance of reading as an act of witnessing. She continuously invokes the empathic registers of Eisen's testimony as "a vaccine for your brain" designed to stop hate spreading like a disease ("Day One" 15:58-16:01), and equates feeling empathy with personal and collective transformation, with the fulfillment of her ethical responsibility and testimony's justice claim. Further, despite repeatedly referencing recent events, surveys, and statistics on xenophobia and anti-Semitism, Tong addresses neither historic nor current systemic anti-Semitism in Canada, nor any other racist policies that may have been fostering these trends. In fact, when addressing *Homes*, she even goes further to argue that while "Canada isn't perfect," "we have a country that is welcoming. . . . Year by year we are inviting more refugees, we are doing something right" ("Finale" 35:52-36:00).

Nonetheless, such modelling of an affective ethics of recognition is not Tong's alone. Whitlock theorizes "testimonial transactions" to account for the ways in which literary testimony moves in both national and global public spheres; namely, such movements are "embedded in global networks of traumatic memory and witness, campaigns for social justice, reconciliation, and reparation," and thus Whitlock treats testimony as a discourse that moves across cultures and markets to "record changing, historical thresholds of subaltern agency and dispossession" (*Postcolonial* 70, 8). These movements, Whitlock argues, demonstrate how the "visibility, legibility, and audibility" of testimony's claims have been framed in "tactical, contingent, and constrained" ways, mediating testimony's transformative capacities and thus shifting the responsibility to—and indeed the power over—testimony's claim from the testifying subject to the

ones receiving it (8, 68). Such transactions thus highlight the gap between testimony's transnational political aims and the highly-mediated realities of its circulation and consumption, shaping not only the survivor's speech act but more so the scope of readers' ethics of recognition.

Hence, while readers are certainly bestowed with an ethical responsibility to testimony's justice claim, they are also afforded the privilege of recognizing given their presumptive position as the powerful party in testimony's transactions. Here, the risks embedded in an ethics of affect-based recognition emerge to their fullest extent. The risk lies in the dynamics of recognition itself which centre the reading-witness rather than the testifying-subject, as "[t]he 'rights' that are attached to those who testify in human rights discourse, the emotional attachments created by benevolence and humanitarianism, and the humane recognition bestowed through empathic identification are privileges of the [reading] witness" (Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* 9). The trouble, then, lies with the dynamics of recognition embedded in the transactions of testimony. What may seem like ethical and transformative affective responses serve to entrench the very structures that testimony protests.

2. The Cunning of Recognition: Ethics in Service of Politics

The manipulative efficacies of privileging affective response as the fulfillment of the audience's ethical responsibility to testimony's claim for justice are perhaps best demonstrated by unpacking the transactions of empathic responses, "now framed as an affective 'solution'" which embodies a humanitarian ethics of recognition (Pedwell 28). Attesting to the power dynamics between the Black survivor-witness and the white abolitionist advocate, Saidiya Hartman traces the colonial routes of empathy and demonstrates its insidious roots, arguing that enacting an ethical response to testimonial literature through empathic avenues merely serves to entrench the racist colonial structures that justice and rights claims seek to dismantle (21-22). Carolyn Pedwell contours how the same dynamics persist in contemporary Euro-American "mainstream liberal narratives" which "pose empathy as universal . . . [yet] routinely take for granted a socially privileged subject as potential 'empathiser' . . . [who is] never required to consider that the act of 'choosing' to extend empathy can itself be a way to assert power" (39). Given the presumption of empathy

and empathizers as universalized, a single act of recognition serves to strengthen the reader's perception of themselves as an ethical humanist subject, while concurrently allowing them to ignore their power over the testifier's calls for justice, and potential (albeit varied layers of) implication in the conditions that cause the other's oppression.

In fact, relying on empathy as the aim of ethical recognition serves to create a distorted image of the testifying subject and the reader-witness as different but equal. In so doing, an ethics of empathic recognition obfuscates the power dynamics embedded in recognition, ignoring any need to contend with complicity and thus denying any collective or structural political responsibility. This is exactly the trouble that unfolds in *Canada Reads* 2019. As Tong and Comeau warn of the alarming rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism, they immediately move to position empathic acts of reading as the "antidote" or "vaccine" to the hateful epidemics they identify rising in Canada. But testimonial accounts are not magic solutions, despite being positioned as such during the third day of debates. Evidently, empathic readings of these books—even if they do function like VR empathy machines—have not magically solved any of these deeply-entrenched socio-political trends or the discriminatory racist structures they preserve.

In this sense, the power dynamics embedded in empathic ethics of recognition mirror the dynamics of political recognition, paralleling individual readers' power of recognition with that of the nation-state. In his critique of political recognition in Canada, Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard unveils its continuous strategic manipulation in service of maintaining the nation-state's neoliberal and colonial status quo, as what may seem like ethical and transformative responses serve to entrench the very structures that campaigns for recognition protest and seek to dismantle (437). Matt James further argues that the neoliberal logic of multiculturalism has been "transported and applied to the newly important terrain of historical redress," perpetuating a barter economy in which gestures of recognition serve governments to appease marginalized communities while making them "forsake more ambitiously reparative discourses and claims" (31, 41). Tracing the genealogy of contemporary state-driven reconciliation discourses through the paradigm of official multiculturalism from which they emerged, Pauline Wakeham draws on

Povinelli's critique of the politics of recognition. As she employs Povinelli's concept of the "cunning" dynamics of recognition in the context of the Canadian nation-state, Wakeham unveils "how the project of redressing injustices has been co-opted by the power bloc as a performance of white civility, an index of the supposed enlightenment of the Euro-Canadian establishment" (231).

The colonial roots and routes of political recognition campaigns also emerge in direct relation to Canada's foundational myth as a peacekeeping nation. Paulette Regan describes this myth as a strategic archetype—one that promotes the idea that Canadians and Crown policy established and sustained relations with Indigenous peoples in peaceful ways, formulating an antithesis to the American "frontier myth of regeneration through violence" (34-35). In contemporary Canada, Regan argues, the peacemaker archetype has contributed to the formation of the reconciliatory nation, and has been reincarnated in the deeply entrenched image of Canada as a humanitarian country with "an active role in the international peacekeeping arena in countries wrecked by civil war and ethnic violence" (107). The three myths—multiculturalism, reconciliation, and humanitarianism—are thus part of the same national mythology continuum, mobilized by the politics of recognition in ways that usurp the agency of communities in political justice claims, relegating claims to recognition as matters of the national imaginary. This is the cunning of recognition—publicly engaging with justice claims while situating justice as a cultural matter separate from the policies and realities of the state. Thus the gap between historic and continued realities of colonial violence is disguised and the values of the national creed are espoused, using the veneer of change in the nation to disguise the perpetuation of discrimination in the state.

When a cultural site like *Canada Reads* invokes testimonial discourse, the cunning of political recognition is then mapped onto the ethics of recognition in the transactions of testimony. As the site of public engagement with justice claims moves to cultural sites of public debate, the addressees of testimony become positioned as ethical subjects who enact recognition based on the values espoused by their national myths. In the case of *Canada Reads* 2019, testimonial transactions are performed through empathy and recognized vis-à-vis the mythology of Canada and

the positions of its readers as multicultural and humanitarian subjects. When discussing *Homes* and *By Chance Alone*, the intersection of empathic response and national mythology triggers panellists' perception of themselves as humanitarian ethical subjects who have the power and a responsibility to right a wrong. However, with the same stroke, the cunning nature of both political and affective recognition keeps the recognition and the reckoning of justice as fulfilled through individual empathy and personal transformation, without invoking any consideration of complicity or systemic change.

When asked how *Homes* can move readers to effect change, Comeau and actor Yanic Truesdale (celebrity champion of *Suzanne*) argue that "The war [in Syria] is still happening. People are still dying, and we could do something about it" ("Finale" 35:47-35:50). They suggest that readers of *Homes* should reach out to Muslim or refugee neighbours and colleagues, write and call their government representatives to inquire how they are responding to the war, and participate in electoral politics by voting to "make sure we don't bring in people that want to take [the act of welcoming refugees] away from this country" ("Finale" 36:09-36:20). Comeau and Truesdale thus situate reading testimony as an act that bestows readers with the ethical responsibility of bearing witness but push beyond empathy alone, demonstrating that to honour and fulfill their role of witnesses, readers must take further action. Nonetheless, despite warning against growing trends of anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiments, neither Comeau nor Truesdale challenge the myth, realities, or histories of Canada as a humanitarian and multicultural country. In fact, when invoking readers' power and responsibility as political agents, Comeau and Truesdale rely on this very image of Canada as a safe haven for refugees. Nonetheless, though they directly appeal to readers' civic power to pressure their elected representative to ensure that the country offers humanitarian relief, Comeau and Truesdale do not mobilize this same ethical appeal to suggest that readers should question whether and how Canadian governing and military institutions may be complicit in the very conditions that cause or sustain the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis it triggered. Thus, even as Comeau and Truesdale indeed perform a more complex and layered ethics of recognition that invokes readers' personal complicity and civic accountability, by keeping things personal they still perpetuate the cunning routes of recognition.

To fulfill the ethical demands and transformative potential of testimonial literature, its transactions necessitate audiences' active response; and in many ways, the readings of both *Homes* and *By Chance Alone* are performed by five panellists who understand themselves as humanitarian and multicultural subjects, empathically recognizing justice claims and strongly advocating for their recognition by others. In so doing, panellists take responsibility for testimonies' truths as both national and ethical subjects, and demonstrate a form of accountability by addressing the tangible ways in which these texts are urgent, right here, right now. Nonetheless, concurrently, the debates showcase how, due to the cunning dynamics of recognition—as both ethics and politics—testimonies' calls for justice are partially fulfilled at best, or left unanswered at worst, as the modelled forms of recognition preserve Canada's humanitarian myth and celebrate its multicultural brand. As discussions honour calls for kindness, forgiveness, and acceptance, they resist recognizing anything that would challenge the status quo, containing the calls for political change within the confines of the national imaginary. Thus, though debates revolve around political and ethical issues, they remain in a non-threatening cultural register, relying on affective responses and civil debate to air grievances, and rendering the urgent social matters reconciled as the nation has been moved to change.

3. Producing Ethical Recognition: Witnessing and The Reading Industry

Tong's closing statement highlights the power of panellists and the show to influence public debate "by giving [Canadians] a better chance at what they read" ("Finale" 37:27-37:33), and it is the audience's power that Comeau and Truesdale invoke when they urge readers to mobilize their civic privileges. But the power to mobilize readings of testimony for civic ethics is not entirely, nor even primarily, in the hands of readers alone. Whitlock's framework of testimonial transactions draws attention to the transformative power of testimony both as a privilege and a responsibility, as resting in the hands of the addressees—from publishers to editors, translators, educators, critics, scholars, marketing teams, social justice activists, human rights organizations, and other cultural agents—who mediate the circulation and consumption of testimony and thus frame its

claims, their recognition, and the models of ethical response. On *Canada Reads*, the models of affective and political recognition performed by the panellists are strategically mediated to audiences by the CBC and its brand.

As a product of the CBC, the show is tasked with performing certain cultural work and modelling particular reading practices in an attempt "to contribute to the development of a shared national consciousness and identity" (Canada, "Organization Profile—Canadian Broadcasting Corporation"). The show's production thus frames testimony's justice claims through the modes of recognition that the CBC seeks to foster for its target audiences, strategically navigating ethical demands vis-à-vis myths of the Canadian nation. Since its debut season in 2002, the show has been increasingly advancing its nation-building mandate through its formulation as a "mass reading event" (MRE). In *Reading Beyond the Book*, Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo define MREs as operating on multiple mass media platforms to mobilize "the belief in reading as an individually transformational, educational, therapeutic, creative, and even 'civilizing' experience" (5, 3). Fuller and Rehberg Sedo demonstrate that *Canada Reads* is an MRE that interlaces several common features of reality television in a radio show, formulating a cultural product that mobilizes market powers to shape national public imagination and debate through the kinds of reading acts it models and their reliance on affect as the inherent value of reading. In this sense, *Canada Reads* embodies Lauren Berlant's concept of an "intimate public" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 34), one that I argue was particularly predominant in the "One Book to Move You" season when all five celebrity panellists continuously invoke the affective themes.

But the framing of affective reading models far exceeds the 2019 season's theme or the panellists' arguments. The show's format itself serves to navigate the reading acts of its participants in an affective direction. The *Canada Reads* production team mediates both the texts and the reading acts they invoke to panellists and audiences alike: from the choice of celebrity champions, to the selection of titles sent to the panellists based on their expressed interests, the production of the book trailers, to the questions guiding debates, the number of debates and the time allotted to them, the daily elimination votes, the audience Q&A following debates, online chats with audiences during live-streamed events, and the "One

Book to Move You" theme which mobilizes a single pronoun to signal both an individual and a community. In fact, from the title of the show onwards, the production of *Canada Reads* identifies individual readers with the national community, strategically positioning them as the ethical subject and political agents with both the power and the responsibility to be affectively moved for the betterment of the nation.

The reading acts afforded to panellists, and thus modelled for audiences, are perhaps most transparently framed through the debate questions posed during the radio broadcast and live-streamed events. The range of questions during the 2019 season included: "How effective was *The Woo-Woo* in opening your eyes to a life experience or culture other than your own?" ("Day One" 17:25-17:35); "How effective is *Suzanne* at inspiring empathy and understanding?" (27:12-27:17); "What does *Homes* have to say about Canada today?" (30:06-30:11); "How immersive was the setting of *Brother*"? ("Day Two" 21:44-21:48); "How well written was *By Chance Alone*?" (18:02-18:04); or how the finalist memoirs inspire hope and why they need to do so ("Finale" 13:47-14:10). Such questions consistently thread affect-driven reading acts (which repeatedly result in teary-eyed or visibly emotional panellists) with the national imaginary, invoking both the personal and collective transformative capacities of reading. Yet, concurrently, the questions serve to direct attention away from the ethical demands and political efficacies of the texts, resonances that the panellists repeatedly return to and that the book trailers afford to both *Homes* and *By Chance Alone*. In this way, the questions guide the debate by positioning readers as agents of change while at the same time framing or signalling what kind of claims and change they should recognize.

As a competition promoted since 2006 with variations of the slogan "one book all Canadians should read" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 93), *Canada Reads* is designed to *feel* like an intimate yet transformative site for individual readers and the national community alike. However, when the ethical and political efficacies of testimony are introduced to this site of performing national belonging, the transformative aims of testimonial accounts and those of an MRE clash. The tension between *Canada Reads* as a project of nation-branding and a site of political debate has been identified by Laura Moss as early as the show's inaugural season. Moss identified a dangerous "depoliticization of the literary works," and warned

against the guile of depoliticized debates which perform inherently political work for the nation (7). While the inclusion of life narratives on the show has brought ethical debate to the fore, as Fuller and Rak demonstrate, it has also unveiled the tension between the socio-political critiques pronounced in the texts and the depoliticized brand of the show (29). As the concept of testimonial transactions and the 2019 season of *Canada Reads* demonstrate, the political efficacies of life stories are often directly articulated by the authors themselves (e.g., Eisen), but are certainly shaped by the mediation and reception of life narratives (see the book trailers). With the introduction of testimonial discourse, the tension between non-fiction testimonies' urgent ethical and political claims and the show's nationalist aims are heightened further, and Moss' warning still rings true. From the championed texts, to their mediation on the show and their modelled consumption at the debates, the transactions of testimony on *Canada Reads* 2019 placate any political claims that may challenge the show's CanLit brand. After casting the deciding vote that eliminated *Brother* at the end of day three, fashion stylist Joe Zee (who championed *The Woo-Woo*) explains that he voted against the novel because it lacked hope: while "we have to tell different stories and uncomfortable stories to understand the society we live in," he notes, "we are at such desperate times, we are at such a crossroads in this country . . . and I feel like we do need to inspire some hope" ("Finale" 13:58-14:36). Though Zee indeed recognizes the testimonial claims that Ray identifies in *Brother*, and acknowledges their tenor and urgency, he mobilizes affect-driven ethical recognition to turn away from *Brother* and towards *Homes* and *By Chance Alone*. He does so not because their truths are more urgent or important, but because they offer the show's intimate public—and by extension the nation—the kind of hope he believes Canadians need. This is not hope that Canadians can challenge their country's oppressive institutions, but hope that people will survive inhumane hardships and reach safe havens, or in other words, hope for a humanitarian, multicultural, and reconciliatory nation.

Indeed, as Fuller and Rak argue, once truth enters the debate, *Canada Reads* is no longer merely a game—it has high real-life stakes with distinct ethical and political resonances (26, 42). But as testimonial claims are introduced and texts' justice claims become the driving force, and as readers become positioned as witnesses, the tensions of nation, justice, and recognition are

pushed to the limits, because the ethical demands necessitate a political debate that is directed at unsettling national mythology and dismantling systemically discriminatory apparatuses of the state. Yet, as the 2019 *Canada Reads* debates demonstrate, the tensions embedded in the transactions of testimony reveal how its justice claims and ethical demands are placated through shared reading practices that strategically mobilize empathic recognition, which in turn serve to depoliticize public debate. The reading practices enacted on the show thus delineate the very limits of affect-driven ethics of recognition and unveil the ways affective recognitions map onto shared readings as acts of political recognition.

The power dynamics that tilt the tense scale between testimony's calls for justice and the show's aims lie in *Canada Reads*' production. As an MRE which fosters a site of shared reading that is designed to *feel* intimate and authentic, it is nevertheless—in more or less visible ways—a produced site, mediating the role of readers as witnesses and the responsibilities that role entails, not solely through the testimonial account but also, and perhaps more so, through the models which agents of the reading industry present to them. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo define the reading industry as "the various social and economic structures that together produce contemporary cultures of reading," namely "the organizations, institutions, and businesses that produce a series of cultural artifacts and events . . . [whose] primary product is not books . . . but the artifacts, programming, events, and literary adaptations that represent books" (17-18). *Canada Reads*' role in the reading industry is evident in, among other programming decisions, its continuous choice of celebrity panellists who represent a general reader yet carry cultural clout, as well as the CBC's promotion of each season on other popular shows such as *q* months prior to a season's debut. Further, the show has inspired viewing parties in public libraries and community halls, mock debates hosted on podcasts or public libraries, and even provincial MREs like "Manitoba Reads" or "One Book Nova Scotia." Alongside the mediation of literary texts during debates (with the use of affective thematics, books trailers, and debate questions), the show's significant influence on shared reading practices across the country serves to delineate the roles and responsibilities of its readers as humanitarian, multicultural, and reconciliatory subjects who are individually transformed by reading and feeling.

As "the *Canada Reads* effect" demonstrates, the show's brand is a major power in Canada's reading industry, and with the inclusion of true stories of protest, it has also become a significant cultural agent shaping the mediation of testimonial transactions in the nation-state. Attention to this shift and its implications matters because as a mediator of testimonial transactions *Canada Reads* has the power to both frame and perform ethical modes of engagement with testimony's justice claims in public debate, to model readers' roles and responsibilities as witnesses to literary testimony and as ethical citizens of the Canadian nation and state. *Canada Reads*' current modes of engagement with testimony fail the urgency and tenor of testimony's justice claims, given its acts of reading are both driven by and enacted through the cunning power dynamics of affective recognition and mirror those of political recognition. Primarily mobilized through empathic response, the ethics of recognition fostered by the show's production and performed during the debates merely formulate transformative facades, for both individual readers and the national community. And while the importance of affect should not be discounted as a vehicle that connects various publics with literature, reading, and political action, responding to testimony through an ethics of recognition that privileges affect as actual political change is not enough. Worse, it is cunningly dangerous because it moves to centre the national imaginary, without ever holding publics accountable for the histories and realities of the state. A push beyond empathy is thus urgently needed.

Writing this article in 2020 during a summer of local and global protests against systemic racism, at a time when, more than ever, Canadians are urged to "educate ourselves" on social justice and the gaps between espoused values and experienced realities, I see this shared reading site as both an obstacle and an opportunity for engagement with the ethical responsibilities of testimonial transactions. An obstacle because, in its current formulation, the public debates promoted by the *Canada Reads* brand merely operate as a mode of virtue signalling; an opportunity because a change to components of the show's production can usher a shift in shared models of reading, a shift that accounts for the privilege and responsibility of being an agent in the transactions of testimony. Indeed, MREs both rely on and foster intimate publics, and yes, the game show format necessitates swift resolutions; but *Canada Reads* has demonstrated its adaptability twice

before—with the incorporation of interactive audience components first integrated in 2011, and the shift to "issue-based reading" following the effects of the 2012 "true stories edition" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 93; Fuller and Rak 42)—and it may be time to change once again.

Since the problem with privileging an affective ethics of recognition lies in the power imbalances, dynamics, and structures it entrenches, then to responsibly and accountably bear witness to testimony, it is necessary to seek ways to foster practices of mediation and consumption that maintain agency—at least in part—in the hands of testifiers. As a site of re-mediating both the transactions of testimony as well as individual and shared reading practices, *Canada Reads* has the potential to do just that. Despite her reliance on affect as a transformative political solution, what Tong gets absolutely right in her championing of *By Chance Alone* is her commitment to Eisen's call in the epigraph "to stand on guard against radical ideologies and never be bystanders" ("Finale" 33:50-34:00). The logic of Tong's entire strategy is driven by Eisen's directive and she remains true to the guidance of the memoir's peritext. Like Eisen, the producers of testimony—from speakers, to editors, publishers, and marketing teams—often take great pains to mobilize the sites of negotiation encompassed in peritextual materials, to mediate testimony not as didactic strategies, but as historically, culturally, and materially situated contexts. *Canada Reads* is itself threaded in the epitextual fabric of Canadian literary texts. By mobilizing strategies that are already part of the show—from the production book trailers, to debate questions, audience participation, and other elements of the show—*Canada Reads* can push its intimate public and its CanLit brand beyond empathy. It can utilize the situated thresholds of testimony as entry points to testimonial transactions that do not stop at an ethics of affective recognition, but rather make space for affect, *while also* offering pathways to honour testimony's demands in increasingly layered, socially responsible, and accountable ways.

The final question of *Canada Reads* 2019 posed by its host, comedian Ali Hassan, asked how *Homes* and *By Chance Alone* can move readers to effect change ("Finale" 34:47-34:50). This question matters here, now, not because Hassan may be asking too much of books, but because readers may be asking too little of reading practices and shared reading sites. As testimony bestows its addressees with the responsibility for active and accountable

ethical engagement with its justice claims, the transactions of these texts serve to define and mediate what readers will recognize, gloss over, and how we will perform recognition and mobilize it. But, for the readers of *Canada Reads* (to borrow from Fuller's 2007 essay title)—whether as general readers, cultural agents on the show, or beyond it—it is time to demand more, it is time to contend with reading as witnessing.

NOTES

1 The *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* states that the term autofiction, coined by Serge Doubrovsky, describes "fiction, made from strictly real events and facts" (Gratton 86). Along with its counterpart, biofiction, autofiction relies on the inevitable overlap between autobiography and fiction, and challenges distinct divisions between the truth value of autobiography and the representation of fiction, stressing that autobiography is always a performance and never a transparent medium (Gratton 86). In their discussion of autofiction, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson add that "[w]hile autobiographical storytelling employs fictional tactics and genres, however, autofiction uses textual markers that signal a deliberate, often ironic, interplay between the two modes" (259-60).

2 Fuller and Rehberg Sedo indicate that the type of books featured in MREs are "discussible," hence selected texts "must never be too 'difficult' to decode in terms of their formal elements" and most often include "contemporary fiction in a realist genre" (48, 27). Since its debut in 2002, *Canada Reads* has almost exclusively featured novels, with the exception of five seasons that integrated non-fiction texts. The 2012 series was the first, and thus far only, season dedicated entirely to non-fiction. Following the 2012 "True Stories Edition," several seasons' short lists have featured combination of fiction, autofiction, and non-fiction texts, most prominently in the 2015 and 2019 seasons.

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Bill Howell

Further Surveillance

Polished sand falls through
an ageless hourglass.
Or is this just another lustrous lake
wishing for more sky?
Planetary mercury roils & rolls,
melts into its solitary self with no warning
of ill-fortune or unreturned love
as virtue becomes redundant.

Beyond the outward seeming,
whose side are you on anyway?
Once we're informed of secret plots
and possible treasonous invasions,
let's simply murder our predecessors,
reflect on the falling of the great,
and banish every faithless maiden.

Looking longer, we don't like what we're seeing.
And we don't have to ask how we're doing.
Older than we remember, who we might've been
checks out our chances.
Is this the best present we can give,
forgive, or live through?

By now our mirror seems to be taking
a short vacation from itself—
flattering us by pretending
we aren't still watching.

Geoffrey Nilson

"It was always what was under the poetry that mattered"

Reading the Paratext in *Once in Blockadia* by Stephen Collis

Narratologist Gérard Genette describes paratext as any elements of a book located around or between the main text of poetry or prose that "surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world" (1, emphasis original). The paratext

> is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or—a word that Borges used apropos of a preface—a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary . . . or as Philippe Lejeune put it, "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text." (Genette 1-2, emphasis original)

Paratextual elements can be placed in two distinct groups: the peritext—covers, titles, tables of contents, photographs, endnotes, citations, epigraphs, and any other material appearing with or within the book; and the epitext—elements outside the book including interviews, book reviews, correspondence, marketing materials, and alternate versions. To define the paratext is to describe its functional, pragmatic, spatial, substantial, and temporal characteristics.

The paratext forms a frame for the main text. The prefix *para* is derived from Ancient Greek meaning near, against, beside, next to, or contrary to.

The paratext acts as a mediation between the worlds of publishing and of composition, between the worlds of capital and of artistic meaning. Like the French *parasol*, the prefix also means to guard against or to provide defense from. While the need for a paratext is imposed on all published books, in this essay I focus on paratextual uses and misuses as they relate to my reading of *Once in Blockadia* by Stephen Collis. I am concerned with the paratext as a literary function of meaning, what Genette calls "the *illocutionary force* of its message" (10, emphasis original), with its anatomy and materiality, with its orthodox forms and unique permutations. Genette's method of structural analysis allows a comprehensive picture of the intertextuality at work in *Once in Blockadia*, and an active reading provides a unique understanding of Collis' poetry. Through this analysis I will highlight the complexities of interacting with a text that is forever unfinished for both the writer and the reader.

Once in Blockadia (2016) is the continuation of Collis' career-long, multi-volume long poem *The Barricades Project*, also including *Anarchive* (2005), *The Commons* (2007), and *To the Barricades* (2012). Where earlier volumes of *The Barricades Project* primarily focus on the poet's study of the past (the Spanish Civil War, the privatization of English common lands, the Zapatistas, and multiple French revolutions), *Once in Blockadia* creates poetry of direct action, where the speaker is participant: in the Tar Sands Healing Walk in Fort McMurray; on the front lines of the Burnaby Mountain protests against Kinder Morgan; at the 2011 Occupy demonstrations in Vancouver; walking in solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers in southern England. *Blockadia* is a refinement of the themes that recur throughout *The Barricades Project*, themes that "enact a political critique that scrutinizes certain culturally dominant ideologies—including those of neoliberalism and of cultural nationalism—at play within the public, urban realm" (Hanna 51), but it is also a book which realizes the poem itself will not be sufficient.

Books are often treated as disposable products with the main text valued and paratextual elements reduced to performative functionality. Every text demands a paratext, but not every paratext is used explicitly by the author or publisher as a site of meaning. In contrast, *Once in Blockadia* values paratextual creativity where the context, metaphor, and themes of the main text are supported and complicated by the paratextual elements,

where the materials around (or behind) the text are as important as the text itself: "It was always what was under the poetry that mattered" (31), Collis states in the collection. Collis, like Genette, dwells in the fringes and borderlands between the text and the paratext. I do not wish to claim that my reading is legitimate to the exclusion of others, but simply that it is a reading reinforced by the specific paratextual arrangement. My challenge is to read through the conventions of the paratext to the discursive life of the book. While every poem in *Blockadia* can be read as it appears on the page, it can also be read through the paratext, the coterie of connections that both frame and illuminate interpretation. As Collis confesses, "Everything I write is thus part of some inaccessible and inconceivable totality outside the work itself" (*To the Barricades* 144). *Once in Blockadia* must be read as a text and as a paratext. I cannot accept what is only on the page because the text prompts me to many other places. Collis uses the paratext as an active site of meaning, and my responsibility as an active reader is to respond to the myriad, often fractured forms in which the text speaks.

How the poetry was constructed: the allographic epitext

On October 30, 2014, Stephen Collis was sued by Trans Mountain Pipeline ULC, then a tentacle of Texas-based multinational energy corporation Kinder Morgan. Served in his office on the Simon Fraser University (SFU) campus with a court injunction and a $5.6-million civil lawsuit just prior to teaching a literature class late in the day, he was expected to be in the BC Supreme Court in Vancouver the next afternoon ("Kinder Morgan slaps").

How did an English professor get himself tangled in this legal web? Collis was targeted (along with Adam Gold, Mia Nissen, Lynne Quarmby, Alan Dutton, and the pipeline-opponent citizen's group Burnaby Residents Opposing Kinder Morgan Expansion, aka BROKE) because of continued support for protests on Burnaby Mountain that obstructed Kinder Morgan activities related to an application to expand the Trans Mountain Pipeline. The pipeline is an industrial corridor carrying crude and diluted oilsands bitumen 1,150 km from Edmonton, Alberta to the Westridge Marine Terminal in Burnaby, British Columbia. This classic example of a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) was purposely threatening, filed to instill fear in the defendants. It did its job.

"Personally, you feel pretty freaked out—when they start saying $5.6 million in damages," Collis told the *Vancouver Observer* ("Kinder Morgan slaps"). But underneath his initial shock with the litigation (and all that needed to be done to prepare for it, including reviewing nearly one thousand pages of documents) was a strident and steadfast resistance: "I feel outraged politically that this could happen in a democracy—that a massive foreign company can accuse you of trespassing on a park. That they can use the courts and their money and influence from barring you from your constitutional right to free speech" ("Kinder Morgan slaps").

Collis described his role in the Burnaby Mountain protests as one in which he was working with many others to stop the proposed expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline; in other words, he was participant (and sometimes spokesperson) in a public collective action. But during litigation, the corporation's lawyers "painted [him] as some kind of bandit ringleader," as Collis reflects, and for three and a half days tried to convince a judge he'd conspired against their interests ("Why Was Kinder Morgan"). The lawyers even used Collis' writing as evidence, excerpting passages from poems and blogs published to his personal website.

Ultimately, the court injunction to stop the protest was granted. The state ruled on the side of corporate rather than community interests, reinforcing the judiciary as protection for the powerful and not the public. Associate Chief Justice Austin Cullen was sure to note his admiration for the Kinder Morgan workers in his judgment, who, when faced with the "aggressive and threatening language" of the protest, "wisely chose" to retreat (Cullen). They were not forced back by the collective strength of the community and the revocation of social license to operate but, ostensibly in control of the moral right, made the decision to abandon the confrontation. Quick to demonize the protest as "a concerted and coordinated effort to thwart the [company's] representatives from performing their duties . . . through the use of unlawful means," Cullen is clear in which side he takes in the dispute. The court's primary concern: the company's bottom line.

"The Court Transcript" opens *Once in Blockadia* and is described by Collis in the notes as being excerpted from legal transcripts of the Trans Mountain litigation (133). The transcripts are part of what Genette terms the allographic epitext (9): allographic as in created by a third party and epitext as in originating outside the book. These excerpts thus have a dual

life, existing both outside the text in their original form and as paratextual elements in their excerpted form. Genette writes that "something is not a paratext unless the author or one of [their] associates accepts responsibility for it" (9), and so the excerpt that constitutes "The Court Transcript" can be read as "accepted" by the author by its inclusion in the text. Its selection can also be read as intended to portray Kinder Morgan in a specific manner for the reader, a "plaintiff" more concerned with breach of bylaw than with the ethics of their exploitive business, a portrayal made all the more irrefutable since it appears in its (lawyer's) own words. "The Court Transcript" defines the formal arrangement of *Once in Blockadia* as a poem built from parts; a poem that is a quote composed of other quotes, not only the voice of the speaker and supporters, but also of their opposition as well, of people and "a hodgepodge assembly of tree branches, discarded building materials, like boards, a sheet of Plexiglas, even an old mattress, computer keyboard and plastic Polaroid camera" (*Blockadia* 7-8). The location of "The Court Transcript" at the beginning of *Once in Blockadia* defines what is at stake for those willing to put their bodies on the line to resist resource extraction. They become a target for SLAPP litigation and possible settler-state criminal prosecution. Battle lines are clearly delineated with activists on one side of the court, and government and business interests on the other. Trans Mountain lawyers choose specific examples of Collis' writing to construct a narrative of his character and intentions, and Collis does the same to Trans Mountain with his specific excerpt from the litigation transcripts. The final lines of the poem—"underneath the poetry is a description of / how the barricade was constructed" (9)—are pulled from the mouths of the lawyers and used against them (and in the book's marketing materials). Collis appropriates the language and turns Trans Mountain's own words against them. This technique can only be understood by the reader through study of the paratext. "The Court Transcript" quotes from multiple sources and websites, and its form displays the compositional method of the text as a whole, constructing not only the speaker and supporters, but also what they oppose. The barricade is assembled with people and with oil barrels. The poem is built from language on the tongues of Collis and the Trans Mountain lawyers.

Less than three months after the injunction, Kinder Morgan filed a unilateral discontinuance of their related civil claim, in which they agreed

to pay all defendant court costs, and in doing so revealed their true intentions: to dissuade public protest and to uphold the capitalist status quo. By the time of the discontinuance, the protest action on Burnaby Mountain had ceased. Collis (as well as scientist Lynne Quarmby, also professor at SFU) had already settled by agreeing to discontinuance without costs, but the rest of the defendants would not cooperate, leading Kinder Morgan spokesperson Ali Hounsell to exclaim, "The others for whatever reason want to continue to bring this up, and want to continue to drag it out publicly, so instead of waiting for them to sign on, we went this other route" (qtd. in Moreau). Kinder Morgan was never in financial jeopardy that could justify civil litigation for millions of dollars, but there was a very real danger to their brand in the court of public opinion. As the case between Kinder Morgan and the defendants dragged on, there was widespread media attention, and in this light the discontinuance can be viewed as part of a corporate PR attempt to mitigate possible damage from the litigation by removing the story from the news cycle, as well as an attempt to demonize the defendants as unreasonable "others" who don't respect the rule of law.

The civil litigation narrative imbedded in "The Court Transcript" colours how the reader enters the text because it colours how the writer enters the text, and that narrative is only accessible through a paratextual reading. At the time of the Burnaby Mountain protest, Collis was already at work on the manuscript that would become *Once in Blockadia*, but the action influenced the collection and prompted it to become what Collis describes as "something of a poetic documentary of the struggle against the pipeline on Burnaby Mountain in the fall of 2014" ("Poetry against the Pipelines"). Read with only the peritext (the paratext included with the book), "The Court Transcript" is a flat repurposing of state documents as conceptual poem. Through a detailed reading of the epitext, whether media coverage, statements from Collis, or Supreme Court rulings, the reader gains a more complete understanding of the stakes which inform "The Court Transcript," as well as insight into its formal considerations. The distanced elements outside the book contextualize and complicate what the poem(s) can express for the reader, especially since these elements may be some of the first ways a reader could come to know the author and the text. The protests and subsequent litigation hang over the text like a rain cloud.

Artful disruptions: the temporal paratext

"Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" comes at the midpoint of *Once in Blockadia* and provides respite to the reader after the fragmented forms of "The Court Transcript" and other earlier poems. The poetic voice is no longer broken, distant, or obviously polyphonic, but proceeds with a familiar free-verse style that actively calls upon the English Romantic tradition. This change releases accumulated tension, highlighting how the reader equates the first-person point of view with the voice of the poet and craves that that voice would communicate a message in a unified way. The title emphasizes this personal shift—presumably a single human would be "reading"—and overall does much more to support the poem when compared with descriptive titles such as "The Court Transcript" or "Thirteen Trees." This evaluation of the metaphoric labour that a title must do in service of its poem is a paratextual consideration, one nearly inseparable from the composition of a poem. Titles are part of a book's original peritext, and appear with the inaugural publication of the book. "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" was "written during and after the Tar Sands Healing Walk in June 2014, in Fort McMurray, Alberta," Collis explains, and includes "material incorporated from William Wordsworth's poems and letters, and Dorothy Wordsworth's journal" (*Blockadia* 134). Taken from the book's endnotes, these bits of paratextual detail are also part of the original paratext; they perform the obligation of citation and biographical context, but they do not offer very much towards interpretation. Not all notes are created equal. They are one of the "borders, or absences of borders, that surround the eminently transitional field of the paratext" (Genette 319) and do not always reveal meanings.

"Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" is a long poem (some fifteen pages) that attempts to reckon with the legacy of the pastoral in a place of massive environmental exploitation, while engaging Wordsworth's method of walking the land to inform the introspection the poetry undertakes:

> Wordsworth—I feel you too!
> Though there is no mechanism
> To nuance this conversation
> Across the years—so I brought
> Your ruined cottages your
> Evening walks and Grasmere
> Homing here to the Tar Sands
> To stroll across northern desarts

> Not knowing how well you fit—
> The method of our walking
> From seeing to contemplating
> To remembering—is yours (62)

There is an acknowledgement of the tradition in which the poem follows as it questions how well that tradition fits with the contemporary world. The speaker labels the poem a "conversation," possibly with the Wordsworths included in the poem, but a conversation requires more than one voice, and the primary method for Collis in the poem (and throughout *The Barricades Project*) is "to mix appropriation of found material with lyric expression to the point that the one becomes indistinguishable from the other" (*To the Barricades* 143). Collis listens to the quoted Wordsworth and responds with his own lines, blending them into a single voice, but no reply is possible from the appropriated material. His nod to the Romantic pastoral is in contrast to the devastating scene of Fort McMurray and its "Fenced former forests of sand / Thick dark thoughts leaching / Heavy metal music machines" (64). Collis riffs on a Bruce Cockburn lyric with "We were walkers / In a dangerous time" (62). Like the song "Lovers in a Dangerous Time" and the threat of Cold War destruction it addresses, "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" stands with hope in the face of environmental collapse. The walkers, made up of activists both settler and Indigenous, "still drumming and / Still singing the elders praying" and "lodged / In the frail shrine of us aglow / Old technology of people together / Holding the line against changing weather" (70). The emphasis on solidarity here works to subvert the lyric "I" of the Romantic tradition and promote collectivity of planetary beings both human and non-human. It calls into question the continued dominance of the lyric voice in the poem, and acts as a signal to the reader that all is not as it seems with the poem or with Wordsworth's place in the tar sands.

The fundamental conflict in "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" is that it struggles with whether or not the poet can confront the legacy of the lyric poem while still writing with the conventions of that form. Collis inhabits qualities of Wordsworth's walking poems of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) written during his time in Grasmere outside the cultural and literary elite. Wordsworth was always more comfortable in the refuge of the mind than the reality of England during the Industrial Revolution, and "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" reflects his commonly accepted hagiography

as great champion of nature, beauty, and free, spiritual self-expression. It interrogates the usefulness of the pastoral in the specific geographic destruction of the tar sands, but does not seem at first to question Wordsworth or his use in a contemporary eco-political poem.

Collis writes, "I shy away from the pull of my own romanticism—but it never ceases to pull" (*Almost Islands* 95). For him, "drawing comparisons between beloved authors, between ourselves and those authors, we would claim as our own a kind of kin, we entangle ourselves" (*Almost Islands* 129). Collis consciously aligns himself with the legacy of Wordsworth, making Wordsworth and his writing part of the allographic epitext, and my reading of the paratext for *Once in Blockadia* must include a critique of this entanglement. Wordsworth provides many examples of his anthropocentric ecology, turning away from a youthful awe in the natural world and toward "hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity" ("Tintern Abbey"). Instead of seeing the forest in the trees, Wordsworth sees his own melancholy. He substitutes God for Nature to inject spirituality into what are essentially poems of realism:

> . . . and this prayer I make,
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy ("Tintern Abbey")

It is clear that even in 1798, Wordsworth's love of nature (and that of many of his time, class, and education) was based not solely on aesthetic grounds but on Biblical ones as well, that is, a love of nature that serves humanity. But Wordsworth may never have been as revolutionary or egalitarian as his association with English Romanticism suggests. Already raised in the halls of the aristocracy, Wordsworth's inheritance (by way of his father) from William Lowther, first Earl of Lonsdale, allowed him to marry in 1802 and live in relative financial stability. Then, in 1812, he became a full member of the British upper class with his appointment to Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland, which came with a yearly stipend, a position he would hold for thirty years until becoming Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom in 1843. It is much easier to wander lonely as a cloud when not struggling for bread to feed your family.

Collis authorizes Wordsworth by including his writing in the poem. He replicates Wordsworthian forms and methods to strengthen the

connection, but by lending the same delicate attention to the tar sands that Wordsworth did to daffodils, Collis (perhaps unintentionally) gives a glow of beauty to the horror:

> . . . wind
> Over dead water—I thought of
> Clouds where none lay
>
> Grey billows of moneyed dust
> Nickel and naught caught up
> In tracks of trucks—shadows
>
> Brittle butterflies and the liquid
> Crystal depths of dry grass (63)

There is a pleasing progression of one- and two-syllable words, and the vowels sing through simple nouns like wind, nickel, trucks, and dust. It is easy to be swept up by the emotion of the "liquid / Crystal depths of dry grass" but the metaphors acclimate the reader to the destruction, creating the same sort of "disaster porn" (66) elsewhere chastised in the text. "What strange adaptors we are!" (74) the speaker cries, conveying humans some special uniqueness, rather than suggesting the reality that humans are just another species that may succumb to extinction for their inability to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Maybe too this unique negative adaptation, whereby humans evolve conditions for themselves that are detrimental to their own survival, is what Collis is attempting to express. "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" inhabits hope and possibility for social change that is the time and place of the Healing Walk, rather than delving into the contradictions of Wordsworth. It is a specific community action that holds a utopian dream:

> Let me walk a little longer at
> Bodily scale—beings have always
> Been here—contemplating this
> Landscape and letting the flood
> Of memories of the future in
> Recollecting that time to come
> When none of us will be disposable waste (75)

Anthropocentrism seems to place humans (and maybe all living things) above the cycle of existence and death, manifesting a quaint future where "none of us will be disposable waste" that pacifies violence inherent to the natural world. Like heaven, it is a fictional utopia, impossibly doomed because it never really existed.

One gets the feeling that Collis attempts to construct the impossible (like an environmental utopia or a long poem that goes on for years) knowing that what is achieved in the book will only ever be a fraction of the intended goal, subject to all the flaws of reality. It is possible that Collis takes on the connection with Wordsworth in order to draw attention to the problems I define, and thus a close reading of the paratext is required. Literary readings of the paratext demand a dedicated reader "in the senses both of one widely read, and one alert to every artful disruption" (Macksey xii). Collis describes *Once in Blockadia* as a text that "tried to serve two audiences (masters?) at once, or was itself the result of a foundational undecideability that left [it] fractured and incomplete at its core" (56-57). Appearing in 2018 in his book *Almost Islands*, two years after *Blockadia*, this analysis is part of the delayed paratext, which Genette defines as any paratextual element that appears years after the original publication of the text. Collis uses the temporality of paratextual elements to represent the evolution of resistance movements. Collis' compositional meta-analysis echoes how a protest movement needs to consider thoroughly its actions and ideologies in the middle of attempting to manifest them. There is vulnerability in Collis' self-critique. The protest, like the poem, is always changing, developing, gaining ground, or retreating to safety. *Once in Blockadia* is part of the continuous, multi-volume *The Barricades Project*, and is always "unfinished," always being written. Collis makes changes on the fly in a metatextual relationship that links his commentary to the poem(s) it comments upon.

It is easy to see this "unfinished" quality when looking at an earlier version of "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands" that appeared in *The Goose* in February 2015, about a year before the publication of *Once in Blockadia*. This "prior paratext" (Genette 5) offers an opportunity to study the poem's evolution. If *Blockadia* is fractured and incomplete as Collis suggests, do the edits show that he intended it that way? The differences are obvious. The earlier version in *The Goose* is longer (with 543 lines compared to 377 lines) and Collis cuts a digression about a hiking trip near Port Alberni, British Columbia to keep the scene of the poem limited to the tar sands, as Wordsworth might have done when writing about a single walk in the Lake District. The earlier version is divided into a prologue and four numbered sections (rather than one unnumbered section), and the

stanzas extend down the page line after line (instead of appearing broken into smaller shapes and lengths). What begins in *The Goose* as

> Walking—we were old technology
> Biotic and slow moving
> Dropped into circuit
> Pilgrims circling on a
> Healing walk walking
> All day beating the bounds
> Of a single tailings pond (5)

through revision and the editing process becomes

> Walking—we were old
> Technology
> Biotic and slow moving
>
> Dropped into circuit
> Pilgrims circling on a
> Healing walk walking
>
> All day beating the bounds
> Of a single vast and dry
> Tailings pond (*Blockadia* 67)

A new line break between "old / Technology" promotes an alternate, almost comical reading of "we were old." This may refer to the walkers and to Wordsworth, the "old" influence in the poem. The long stanzas have in some places been structured into tercets which push back against the free-verse style, the extra white space like the brokenness of Wordsworth's anthropocentrism and the incompleteness of the pastoral in the face of the tar sands.

It may be impossible to know all the paratextual details regarding a text or their relevance to a reader, but the details that a reader does know will inevitably lead to different interpretations. Paratextual elements can appear or disappear at any time and location, and the paratext of any given literary work is constantly in flux; its ways and means vary depending on period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition. The most common time for a paratextual element to appear is with the original publication of the text, but the paratext can and does appear post and prior to the original publication. And when read in concert with the text, as with "Reading Wordsworth in the Tar Sands," these temporal disruptions create new interpretations, and enable a reader to track the writer and poem as they change over time.

Contested space: the publisher's peritext

The publisher's peritext, including the book cover, legal notes, credits, and title pages, is generally assumed by the reader to be controlled by the publisher. These elements are located around the main body of a literary text and appear with the publication of the book. Localized peritextual elements do not encompass all of the publisher's paratext, though. Typesetting and paper choice shape the text into the book, and these choices provide direct or indirect commentary on the text(s) they affect. As Genette writes,

> No reader can be completely indifferent to a poem's arrangement on the page. . . . Likewise, no reader should be indifferent to the appropriateness of particular typographic choices, even if modern publishing tends to neutralize these choices by a perhaps irreversible tendency towards standardization. . . . These considerations may seem trivial or marginal, but there are cases in which the graphic realization is inseparable from literary intention. (34)

For example, Toronto's Coach House Books prints on a particular Zephyr Antique Laid paper on a 1973 Heidelberg offset litho press. These qualities mark its books (and the books it prints for other publishers) both aesthetically and as a member of a particular quality group. The paper weight and printing methods convey economic significance, as the size, format, and materials of a book have historically been strong indicators of a book's literary value. Large formats, robust paper, and expensive binding materials are reserved for serious works or prestigious editions, and smaller sizes and inexpensive printing methods for popular literature or cheap editions (Genette 18).

Once in Blockadia usurps elements of the publisher's paratext with the desire to open the reader's experience and to subvert the elements of capital (the publisher) within the book object. Here I will explore typography, images, and cover art. Collis marks found text with typographic variety throughout *Once in Blockadia*. Verbatim materials from other sources (such as court documents and CBC Radio transcriptions) stamp themselves in a bureaucratic Courier type, void of emotion. The words of other writers flow in italics across the page, whether in epigraphs or included in a poem. Each one conveys, as in the Greek root *typos*, an impression to the reader. But these conventions are not always consistent in the text. Collis does not outline all the typographical variation in the notes for *Once in Blockadia*, and so this occasional ambiguity provides the reader with an interpretive role. One poem Collis does address is "Shell Scenarios":

What can we expect from the future?

all vehicles
comeback emitter
slowdown energy
comeback rise

adaptation
measures liquid
decoupling needs
decoupling further

we find old cans
soldering
the peak of
verifiable needs

we lick the last remnants
cutting tongue (53)

The poem is multi-page, each page with different ratios of black and grey type. Some poems have all black or all grey while others have only one word of grey or a few words of black. Most poems are balanced between the two shades. On a reader's first pass, it is difficult to discern what the method should be signifying. Both types use a "we" pronoun that conveys collectivity rather than opposition. The emotion the reader feels at "What can we expect from the future?" is continued with "we lick the last remnants / cutting tongue," further drawing the contrasting sections together. Yet, in the notes, Collis describes the poem as "in part, derived from an erasure of Shell Oil's 'Scenario Plans' available on the company's website," and that "the grey text is [his] additions" (134). Again, we see Collis' method of a poem that builds from his own voice and the voices of others. Time and again, a reading of the paratext reveals Collis' polyphonic barricade as his compositional and structural method.

Images also play a role in *Once in Blockadia*, a method that is consistent across *The Barricades Project* to varying degrees. Often images that appear within a literary text are simply selected by the publisher as aesthetically pleasing breaks, but those included in *Blockadia* reinforce connections to the main text. Earlier in the book, Collis includes colour photographs from *The Watchers* by Genevieve Robertson and Jay White, but here I would like to briefly explore two images created by the author, "photographs of Burrard Inlet and Grasmere . . . taken in 2015" (135).

The photographs are juxtaposed, facing each other on opposite pages, at the beginning of the poem "Home at Gasmere." There is an obvious resemblance between the locations depicted, and that resemblance is reinforced by the framing composition and tonal gradation. Mirror opposites strengthen the connection: where the foreground of the Grasmere image is light, the foreground of the Burrard Inlet image is dark; the dark hills of Grasmere are strikingly similar to the bleached cloud of Burrard Inlet, yet at the centre of both are thin bodies of water squeezed by their geography (a lake and a saltwater inlet, respectively). There is even a small island in the middle of the English lake near-perfectly doubled by an oil tanker anchored in the inlet. The images also serve the epigraph from Malcolm Lowry that follows them: "*. . . not because [Grasmere] reminds one of Wordsworth so much but because if we half shut our eyes we may be able to imagine we're back on Burrard Inlet*" (113). Lowry's authority on the relation is conveyed by his place in the history of literature in Vancouver. There is a particular authorial wink with the epigraph; Lowry lived for fourteen years in Dollarton, North Vancouver, in a squatter's shack on the shores of Burrard Inlet (biographical information is a paratextual element).

"Home at Gasmere" highlights Grasmere in Cumbria, England, as a false idyllic linked as much to the Wordsworthian pastoral as it is to the mines "of this landscape's past— / Graphite for the poet's pencil lead for / Bombshells and cannonballs at Seathwaite / Iron mines at Ulverton Thomas West" (115). Burrard Inlet, Vancouver, Canada, shares the distinction of being a false idyllic, a working port that sees 30-50 crude oil tankers and a total of about 3,160 vessels per year in its waters ("Marine Traffic Management"). When Collis asks the reader to see the similarities between Grasmere and British Columbia, he draws attention to the beauty, but also to the elements of capital and resource extraction that often linger unseen, whether as pipelines in the forest, mines concealed below the ground, or ships floating isolated offshore in the harbour.

Book covers have long been a contentious issue between authors and publishers. A relatively recent phenomenon in publishing starting in the early nineteenth century, before which the title page was the main source of the publisher's paratext (Genette 23), the book cover can include many different strands of information such as name of the author, title, genre,

price, dedications, illustrations, biography, promotional blurbs, and more. While these aspects of the book cover can be viewed as primarily functional, they remain a profound source of complication and deeper artistic or thematic indication of the content within the enclosed text. The cover is essentially a billboard for the text it contains and is one of the first sites a reader will engage with the book; "the most obvious function of the [cover or] jacket is to attract attention," notes Genette, and publishers often use means more dramatic than those for functional editions such as "garish illustration, a reminder of a film or television adaptation, or simply a graphic representation" (28) that alters or conflicts with the intention of the text. While publishers generally exert control over a book's cover, images can radically skew the perception of a text, and the cover remains a contested space for authors. In contrast to large publishing firms, much of contemporary Canadian poetry is released through small or independent presses in comparatively short runs, either wholly or partially subsidized by government funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and/or other national or provincial arts organizations. This reality diminishes the economic concerns that go into cover design; thus it is no surprise that poetry books see a more conscious alignment of the cover with the text it encloses, and provide greater control over that cover to the author.

Once in Blockadia, in similar fashion to its other paratextual elements, takes control of the book cover with the image *River Catalogue* (2015) by artist and ecocritic Genevieve Robertson. While there is no indication in the notes, Collis includes another work from the artist in the book and cropped images from the cover appear interspersed as breaks in the text, indicating that the choice to use the artwork was his. Robertson's artwork suits the book well, with its craggy forms like black shards of rock; the piece is aesthetically beautiful and carries an almost sinister air to its haunting of the page, as if promotional artwork by Stanley Donwood for some long-lost Radiohead album. But digging into the publisher's credits in *Blockadia* reveals a complication: *River Catalogue* employs "found bitumen, gouache, and charcoal" as its mediums. The materiality of these mediums defines them all as heavy producers of carbon emissions. Charcoal is produced from the burning of raw wood, gouache in a paint manufacturing industry that could be described as one of the most toxic on earth, and bitumen is the very petroleum substance against which *Once in Blockadia* forms its

barricade of language. The use of bitumen does not create tension with the thematic environmentalism of the artwork or the poetry, though. I would argue its use foregrounds the substance and in some way strives to make it beautiful, as all art strives to make its medium(s) beautiful. It does not illustrate a complicity with Big Oil, but conveys a willingness to continue using its products (or by-products or pollutions) when it suits a need, idea, or metaphor. By placing it on the cover, with its connection to marketing, *Once in Blockadia* is in a small way selling bitumen. When the artist (or the poet) uses bitumen as a medium, they transform it into an aesthetic object and amplify its use as a cultural and economic product. Petroleum is used in almost everything. The public, and especially artists and writers who are concerned with an ecological politics, may not have much choice about some of their uses of oil as a consumable, but using it as an artistic product is a choice within their purview. Without actually digging into the paratext of *Once in Blockadia* to find the material information of the Robertson artwork, a reader receives the work on purely aesthetic grounds. But Robertson's and Collis' use of bitumen as part of their creations also highlights the barricade method of composition, and their inclusion can also be read as a critique or commentary on the ubiquity of petroleum products in all parts of life. Like the "last oil barrel that will have anything to do with [the] mountain forest" (*Blockadia* 9), the reader hopes this is the last time bitumen will be used as an artistic medium.

Reading the notes: a literary praxis

What is under the poetry for *Once in Blockadia* are the people, the individuals, and the community of voices, or, as Collis describes, "a co-embodiment of the address 'Dear Common' that someone calls out to anyone else there" (*To the Barricades* 143). This is the unifying connection of the book and *The Barricades Project*. Collis is no "bandit-ringleader," as charged by Kinder Morgan lawyers, soapboxing his way to social change; his voice is one of many in a public movement. *Once in Blockadia* positions itself as a barricade of polyphony and poetic form constructed from an amalgam of material, both original and excerpted sources. This collectivism seems radical to the lyric poetry status quo that so often expresses itself with unified voice and contained interpretation, regardless of how long alternative compositional methods have been in use, because

it threatens the dominance of the author over the text. But Collis does not hope to negate the author (or himself); he wants to change its role in the composition of the book. The author's name performs the function of legal obligation but also that of assigning who controls the construction of a text (Genette 151), especially when the text in question contains found text or allographic content in abundance. Rather than author as sole creator or composer, *Once in Blockadia* is an example of the author as "conductor" of a text. More than simply arranging the parts into a cohesive whole, Collis performs the text while writing it through modulation of multiple sources and paratexts in the same way a conductor would modulate musicians in an orchestra performing Beethoven. This metaphor extends to the reader as well, as each will approach the text with their own subjectivity and thus create a new "performance" of the text.

This upsets the traditions of publishing and aims to influence the reader toward a comprehensive understanding of the work (and the world) rather than allowing the publisher to mediate that understanding. Any supposed difficulty in *Once in Blockadia* is not meant to create formal or thematic superiority, but rather it is to problematize and resist the expectations of reading. As Catriona Strang argues, "The very act of resistance insists on the (perhaps imaginary) existence of other options: *Not This*, by definition posits a *Something Else* . . . resistance also constitutes a turning away into another space or identity, a declaration of difference, separateness, and otherness . . . a breaking away, a discovery of new options" (xix). For Collis and *Once in Blockadia*, a *Something Else* becomes real in the text but also consists of a future where more people are taking their place together at the barricade in the fight for the common good:

> everything beyond the page
> what went unrecorded
> mattered most
> and goes on resisting
> as it can and as it must (104)

Reading *Once in Blockadia* as a contained text is very different from reading it as an open one that engages with the paratext in hopes of bridging some of the gaps between subjectivities. Some readers might consider Collis' overt use of paratextual elements a distraction from the poetry, might claim the author does not let the work speak for itself. If I am to believe Genette,

digging into the legal documents surrounding the litigation against Collis, dissecting the notes for details about the composition of the poems, reading previously published versions of poems, or studying the style and format of publication are each "subordinate to [the] text" no matter the "aesthetic or ideological investment in a paratextual element" (*Paratexts* 12). But on this point I disagree, because writing (and reading) through the paratext *is* letting a work speak for itself, only with all the tools with and within the book object at its disposal. Collis moves past Genette's theory of the paratext as subordinate; for *Once in Blockadia* every context is a paratext and every paratext becomes, granularly, part of the text itself.

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Jen Currin

The Local

"Poetry is local," my friend from St. Paul
once told me. I was living
in Portland at the time, rising
at 5 a.m. for a coffee shop job.
I didn't know if I knew any Multnomah people
but there were always so many strangers,
workers to share silence with
on the pre-dawn bus. The chill
in the air, February,
what frost smelled like
bending close to an iced windshield.
To be young and type lines
on a discarded typewriter in my brother's
dim room was my late
afternoon occupation. I never
went to bed early enough
and abhorred toast,
all breakfast foods.
My boss made one strangely
benign innuendo. Power:
I knew I was sexier,
knew my allusions
to the previous night's antics
kept the customers entertained.
People often asked me if I was
a native of that city.
I've always hated that expression.

Charlotte Comtois

« Nous aussi, nous aimons la vie quand nous en avons les moyens »

une étude des espaces, pouvoirs et affects dans *Le jeu de la musique* de Stéfanie Clermont

> Ils sont beaux avec hargne, avec humour noir. Ils ne veulent pas être winner.
> Ils trouvent ça loser, d'être winner.
> — Stéfanie Clermont, *Le jeu de la musique*

En introduction de son ouvrage *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam soutient que l'échec « allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhood to orderly and predictable adulthoods » (3). Selon lui, si l'échec va de pair avec son lot d'affects négatifs, il offre aussi la possibilité de se soustraire à une positivité toxique et hétérosexiste associant la réussite à la reproduction humaine et à l'accumulation de capital[1]. Dans son recueil de nouvelles paru en 2017, *Le jeu de la musique*, Stéfanie Clermont met en scène nombre de personnages évoluant à l'écart des modèles de réussite hétéropatriarcaux et capitalistes, des « marginaux dont on comprend qu'ils ont tout mis dans leurs idéaux et qui connaissent les lendemains difficiles des militants déçus » (Guy ARTS 3). Si *Le jeu de la musique* n'a encore fait l'objet d'aucune étude d'envergure, la critique littéraire a notamment souligné l'importance que prennent dans le recueil les motifs récurrents de la « dépression » (Côté-Fournier 53; Desmeules F3; Guy ARTS 3) et de « l'échec » (Côté-Fournier 53; Desmeules F3).

L'œuvre se compose plus précisément d'un prologue suivi de trente-trois nouvelles dépeignant le quotidien d'un groupe d'ami·e·s composé de

personnages bisexuels (Céline et Sabrina), trans (Jess), pauvres (Sabrina, Jess, Vincent et Kat) et racisés (Kat et sa fille Ruby). Ces nouvelles montrent les protagonistes adultes, adolescents, enfants, sans suivre d'ordre chronologique, le recueil entremêlant les existences de chacun·e, brouillant la temporalité comme les trajectoires. Bien que le recueil se trouve ainsi tissé de multiples perspectives, il présente une grande cohésion, celle-ci résultant certes de la récurrence des personnages entre les diverses nouvelles, mais procédant également d'une homogénéité thématique notable, attachée à la précarité sociale et psychologique des protagonistes, de même qu'à l'inhabitabilité des espaces dépeints.

Le prologue préfigure l'inhospitalité de ces derniers : une narratrice non identifiée y décrit un terrain vague, où elle faisait la fête avec ses ami·e·s avant que l'un d'elleux, Vincent, ne s'y suicide. Après sa mort, l'endroit, incarnant maintenant la souffrance de Vincent, est déserté par les fêtard·e·s. Selon la narratrice, « il n'y . . . a presque plus » (Clermont 14) de ces lieux « sans obligations » (13), de ces « lieux tranquilles où vivre et mourir en paix » (14), de sorte qu'il se profile une opposition entre cet espace singulier et le reste du territoire, qui, en contre-pied, serait caractérisé par les contraintes et l'intranquillité. Je souhaite corollairement analyser les articulations d'une double spatialité dans l'œuvre; l'une normative et anxiogène, et l'autre marginale, potentiellement chargée de valeurs divergentes. Car s'il n'y a *presque* plus de « lieux tranquilles où vivre et mourir en paix[2] » (14), c'est qu'il doit sûrement en rester quelques-uns. Qu'est-ce qui les distingue des localités plus normatives? Quels « ordres » (Halberstam) et « obligations » (Clermont 13) configurent ces dernières?

Afin de répondre à ces questionnements, je m'appuierai sur un cadre théorique conjuguant trois axes d'analyse : les spatialités « autres », les réseaux de pouvoir qui façonnent les subjectivités et les localités, ainsi que les affects des personnages. J'entends, conséquemment, employer la notion d'hétérotopie foucaldienne, relative aux emplacements pouvant « résult[er] d'une déviation de la norme » (Beneventi et Calderón 7), aux espaces « qui ont la curieuse propriété d'être en rapport avec tous les autres emplacements mais sur un mode tel qu'ils suspendent, neutralisent ou inversent, l'ensemble des rapports . . . » (Foucault 14)[3]. Je puiserai également dans les notions de dispositif (Agamben) et de dispositif spatial (Lussault), lesquelles postulent que les réseaux de pouvoirs,

discours et institutions jouent un rôle prépondérant dans la formation des subjectivités et des espaces. Ces derniers sont non seulement affectés par les dispositifs, ils en sont partie prenante, puisqu'ils jouent « un véritable rôle d'opérateur d'interactions[4] » (Dumont), c'est-à-dire qu'ils configurent les manières d'agir, et ce, bien que les agent·e·s puissent désobéir, échapper à ces configurations[5]. Selon le géographe Michel Lussault, les dispositifs spatiaux tiennent précisément d'« agencements spatiaux poss[édant] un caractère normatif et prescriptif marqué : ils constituent des modèles d'organisation de l'espace, porteurs intrinsèquement de modèles collectifs des bonnes pratiques sociales » (Lussault 201). Étant donné que dans le recueil, l'inhabitabilité des espaces normatifs découle principalement de dispositifs capitalistes et hétéropatriarcaux, je me pencherai d'abord sur les manifestations socio-spatiales du dispositif capitaliste, puis sur celles du dispositif patriarcal, pour finalement me concentrer sur les échappées du régime patriarcal. J'illustrerai alors comment les échappées du couple hétérosexuel sont potentiellement aptes à ouvrir un horizon pacifié aux personnages féminins.

« One day, I am going to grow wings, a chemical reaction, hysterical and useless[6] » : production et passivité à l'ère du capital

Les problèmes financiers des personnages se retrouvent en filigrane de plusieurs nouvelles. Ils sont toutefois mis de l'avant dans deux textes, « Emploi-Québec » et « L'employée ». Cette dernière nouvelle, suivant immédiatement le prologue, est narrée par le personnage de Sabrina, qui y raconte deux saisons passées à travailler dans un kiosque du marché Jean-Talon, parce qu'elle « ne sa[it] pas quoi faire d'autre pour faire de l'argent et parce qu['elle] ne sa[it] pas quoi faire d'autre que de l'argent » (Clermont 36-37). D'emblée, Sabrina se dit « prisonnière » (29) du marché Jean-Talon, où elle a l'impression d'évoluer dans « une pub pour le marché » (29) puisqu'il « ne [s'y] pass[e] jamais rien qui ne concorde pas avec l'idée du marché Jean-Talon » (29). Cette « idée du marché » est à mettre en rapport avec la notion de dispositif spatial. Considérant qu'il se révèle impossible de départager le marché de la publicité, et conséquemment l'emplacement du dispositif capitaliste, il se manifeste que l'espace même influence ses usager·ère·s. En effet, les dispositifs se rapportent à « tout ce qui a, d'une manière ou d'une autre, la capacité de capturer, d'orienter, de déterminer,

d'intercepter, de modeler, de contrôler et d'assurer les gestes, les conduites, les opinions et les discours des êtres vivants » (Agamben 31), et la publicité a bien pour visée d'influencer les comportements. D'autant plus que Sabrina se sent « prisonnière » (Clermont 29) du marché, elle est, de fait, « capturée » par le dispositif. Dans la mesure où les client·e·s posent « cette série de gestes (s'extasier, sortir son porte-monnaie, payer, repartir heureux) comme s'il s'agissait d'une saynète apprise par cœur » (33), l'ascendant d'un dispositif incitant la collectivité à « acheter acheter acheter acheter[7] » (35-36) paraît d'ailleurs patent. Sur ce point, il est intéressant de noter que *Le jeu de la musique* comprend une mention à l'auteur Georgio Agamben (105) et une autre au livre *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?* (309). Celles-ci laissent entrevoir les connaissances de Clermont en matière de dispositif et, malgré que ces mentions ne soient couplées d'aucun commentaire sur l'ouvrage d'Agamben, elles trahissent un cadre interprétatif pouvant influencer la diégèse.

Au dire de Sabrina, les employé·e·s se trouvent dépossédé·e·s de leurs qualités de sujet au marché. Celle-ci s'y compare et compare ses collègues à des « machines à empaqueter des gadelles et à compter de l'argent » (35)[8]. La narratrice se dit « décorative » (24), « un aspect parmi tant d'autres du cachet du marché Jean-Talon » (24), « comme le café chez un concessionnaire automobile : une gracieuseté » (24), et se pose ainsi en accessoire, en objet de consommation, voire en matériau même du marché, comme intégrée à l'espace. Dans un même ordre d'idées, tandis qu'elle passe ses jours de congé au parc à se « réjoui[r] d'être belle » (37) et à « échang[er] des regards ravis avec de beaux cyclistes » (37), une fois au travail, elle se souvient que sa beauté n'y est que source « d'accablement » (37) :

> Une chose de plus pour rendre l'expérience du marché positive aux clients. Je sentais les hommes essayer de capter une bouffée de mon odeur en se penchant pour respirer les fraises, comparant sûrement ma craque de seins à la courbe au milieu d'une pêche juteuse. Ils me jetaient des regards par en dessous . . . (37)

Sujet désirant au parc, investie dans une relation de réciprocité avec les hommes — elle échange des regards avec eux —, Sabrina devient objet de leur désir au marché, se trouvant plutôt appropriée par eux : son corps s'y confond avec la marchandise — la pêche —, son odeur se mêle aux fruits. Elle se trouve doublement objectivée, à la fois « machine » mise au service du capitalisme et corps féminin, mis à disposition des clients la réduisant à sa matérialité. L'influence du dispositif spatial est ici manifeste, le corps du

personnage prenant une valeur différente, n'étant pas soumis aux mêmes patrons sociaux d'un espace à l'autre. Cependant, la narratrice se « rebelle » (38) contre une telle saisie de son corps, et énonce : « Je laissais mes yeux s'embuer, se crotter et lancer des éclairs » (38). Elle renvoie finalement leur regard aux clients, en même temps que sa colère.

Paradoxalement, c'est lorsqu'elle se décrit comme objet que Sabrina met en lumière sa subjectivité, puisqu'elle se révèle alors consciente de son aliénation. Pendant une pause, Sabrina rédige « une liste sérieuse : Rester à Montréal vs Crisser mon camp en région » (25), sur laquelle elle écrit justement se sentir « aliénée » (27). D'un côté, elle considère qu'il n'y a pas de culture ou de réelles options de « vie sociale » (26) en région; de l'autre, elle dépeint Montréal comme un territoire où les emplois convenables sont rares, où les « proprios crosseurs » et les « patrons crosseurs » (27) pullulent, et où il règne une pauvreté ignorée par une majorité de citadin·e·s. Il faut ainsi voir que le marché Jean-Talon incarne le dispositif capitaliste dans le recueil, mais qu'il ne lui est pas circonscrit; celui-ci configure les espaces (boutiques luxueuses, restaurants chers, quartiers en voie d'embourgeoisement) et les comportements (égoïsme, tendance à la consommation) dans tout le paysage urbain :

> Tout me fait chier . . . le Petit Laurier, *Tout le monde en parle*, les boutiques de toilettage pour chats, les fish and chips à vingt dollars, le Mile-Ex . . . les centaines de personnes qui passent tous les matins devant le vieux quêteux, la madame qui vend *L'itinéraire* et les gens qui distribuent le journal *24h*, qui regardent par terre et qui s'achètent des cafés à cinq dollars au coin de rue d'après. (27)

Montréal se donne comme un espace fait par et pour les personnes riches — les patrons, les propriétaires —, reléguant les moins nantis aux emplois précaires et à la rue. En ressort que pour la narratrice, elle-même peu fortunée, il n'y a pas d'endroits possibles où bien vivre, l'échec se profilant à Montréal comme en région : « . . . c'est lose-lose. Je voudrais démissionner, mais pour aller où? . . . Ce dont je veux m'affranchir est partout » (27).

Appartenir au camp des perdants du capital n'est pas sans susciter l'« angoisse » (28) et la « nervosité » (29) de la narratrice. Elle est obsédée par le manque d'argent, celui-ci tenant du leitmotiv dans son discours semé de références à son « compte en banque qui ne dépass[e] jamais sept cents dollars » (28), son « compte d'épargne . . . où il ne rest[e] plus que deux cents dollars » (28), « l'argent [qu'elle] d[oit] à [s]es amis » (28), « l'argent

[qu'elle] d[oit] à la bibliothèque » (28) « l'argent [qu'elle] d[oit] à [s]on père . . . » (27-28). En cela, les affects de Sabrina diffèrent drastiquement de ceux des client·e·s du marché, qui fort·e·s de leur pouvoir d'achat, affichent une « fatigue bienheureuse » (20), un « sourire satisfait » (24), « s'enthousiasm[ent] » (32), « s'extasi[ent] » (33) et « repart[ent] heureux » (33). Illes trouvent leur bonheur dans la consommation, là où la patronne de Sabrina tire le sien du travail : « "On se plaint pas, han, Sabrina!" disait souvent madame Gélinas. ". . . On est heureux, nous autres, on se plaint pas!" . . . "Souris, ça fait passer le temps." » (40). S'entend ici la voix de la norme, voire celle de l'autorité — elle provient de la patronne —, enjoignant Sabrina à trouver une forme de contentement dans le travail. Cette autorité se trouve du reste surdéterminée par l'usage de la répétition et de l'impératif.

Plus qu'à un simple emploi alimentaire, c'est à une carrière que devrait aspirer Sabrina afin de répondre aux attentes sociétales :

> [Les client·e·s] s'imaginaient sans doute que je me préparais à retourner en classe . . . comme la plupart de mes collègues . . . La réalité était plus alarmante : ma job d'été ne déboucherait sur rien de plus qu'une période de BS . . . Je me sentais déjà vieille, je sentais déjà que j'avais manqué le bateau et que je pourrissais sous mes airs de fraîcheur et de santé. (39)

Sabrina se trouve en décalage avec la collectivité — la plupart de ses collègues — et en décalage avec la temporalité normative : elle progresse à un rythme qui la vieillit précocement. Pour elle, non seulement il ne se trouve pas d'endroit où bien vivre, ni à Montréal ni en région, il ne paraît pas exister d'ordre temporel qui lui convienne. Car au sein d'un espace-temps structuré par le dispositif capitaliste, dévier de l'ordre temporel évolutif, visant l'accumulation de richesses (Halberstam), peut signifier devenir victime de la précarité et de la détresse que cette dernière engendre.

À la fin de l'été, Sabrina se retrouve sur l'assistance sociale. Elle y restera pendant les quelques mois précédant son départ en Californie : « J'ai commencé à dormir jusqu'à tard dans l'avant-midi. J'ai épluché le désordre de ma chambre à la recherche d'un plan de vie . . . Mon cœur flottait, filamenteux et infecté, dans un flot incessant de Boréale et de Grolsch » (Clermont 41). La narratrice ajoute : « [J]e n'avais rien à faire » (41), mais il faut bien voir qu'elle décide plutôt de ne rien faire. Car le désordre ne meuble pas que sa chambre, l'espace domestique, il empiète aussi sur sa

temporalité intime. Sabrina préfère l'oisiveté et l'alcool à un « plan de vie » qui la ramènerait sur le droit chemin, à une forme d'« orderly and predictable adulthoo[d] » (Halberstam 3) où l'action, un faire capitaliste, aurait pour effet paradoxal de l'objectifier. Chez elle, lorsqu'elle ne fait rien, Sabrina n'est l'instrument de personne. À cet égard, il est possible de rapprocher sa conduite du concept de « weapons of the weak », que Jack Halbestam utilise à la suite de James C. Scott pour qualifier le refus du dominé de participer à un système conçu et contrôlé par le dominant : « The concept of "weapons of the weak" can be used to recategorize what looks like inaction, passivity, and lack of resistance in terms of the practice of stalling the business of the dominant » (88). En restant passive, Sabrina faillit à ses obligations socio-économiques; du même coup, elle se libère, à tout le moins provisoirement, de ce dont elle souhaite s'affranchir au marché[9].

« Don't be like the one who made me so old[10] » : quand les jeunes filles se soumettent aux grands garçons

Dans le recueil, les motifs de la passivité et de la détresse ne se rattachent pas qu'à des formes d'inadéquation aux préceptes capitalistes. La nouvelle « Le massage » rapporte un épisode où le personnage de Céline, alors adolescente, parcourt les rues du Vieux-Hull. La jeune fille est abordée par un étudiant à la maîtrise, Philippe. Devant un immeuble, l'universitaire lui propose de grimper sur le toit et Céline se convainc de l'y suivre, bien qu'elle ressente un important « vertige » (Clermont 48) : « C'est le début d'une longue vie de folles aventures. Vas-y, fonce! l'a finalement emporté ma fée Clochette . . . » (49) À l'instar de la fée dans *Peter Pan ou le garçon qui ne voulait pas grandir*, l'adolescente prend son envol : elle s'élève vers le ciel. Sur le toit, tandis que Céline et Philippe observent « le Musée des civilisations, la rivière des Outaouais, . . . le parlement illuminé » (49) et que Céline fantasme sur des escapades en solitaire, sur le pouce et en voilier, Philippe propose à Céline de lui faire un massage. Cette dernière accepte, mais Philippe cesse rapidement de masser ses épaules : « Pendant un moment son corps a totalement obscurci la vue que [Céline avait] sur la ville . . . Puis il a pétris [s]es seins » (50). Philippe ne demande pas son consentement à la jeune femme avant de lui toucher la poitrine. Malgré son inconfort, celle-ci attend qu'il termine de la masser, se détachant complètement de la situation : « Au bout d'un moment, j'ai cessé d'opiner

du chef et même d'écouter » (50). Alors qu'elle se voulait aventurière, Céline se voit plutôt reléguée à une passivité complète. Ajoutons que lorsque le corps de Philippe monopolise le champ de vision de Céline, il se superpose aussi à la ville. Son corps — l'imposition de son désir — bloque l'accès de Céline au territoire, fait écran au Musée des civilisations (un lieu de culture figurant l'ailleurs, le voyage), à la rivière des Outaouais (évoquant d'autres plans d'eau où voguer), au Parlement (le siège du pouvoir) et, par extension, à ses rêves d'évasion, de découverte autonome des espaces. Symboliquement, la ville, de même que la civilisation et le pouvoir, se déclinent au masculin.

Après le massage, Céline retourne chez ses parents et mentionne : « Quelqu'un quelque part avait dit qu'il ne croyait pas aux fées et la mienne était tombée raide morte » (51). En imposant sa volonté à Céline sans même considérer les siennes, Philippe ne reconnaît pas l'adolescente comme sujet. Dans la mesure où la fée Clochette incarne l'aventure, une figure d'autonomie, de liberté et de mobilité géographique — elle vole —, ne pas croire en elle implique aussi ne pas croire au droit des femmes à l'espace. C'est à tout le moins ce que saisit la narratrice : « Des passages de *Peter Pan* me trottaient dans la tête : "Maintenant, je suis une grande personne. Quand on grandit, on désapprend à voler." » (50). « Désapprendre à voler » signifie ici apprendre que l'aventure ne se conjugue pas aisément au féminin; le « devenir grande personne » se donne comme le passage du désordre de l'enfance, de l'« unruly childhood » (Halberstam 3), à un ordre spatial patriarcal.

Une autre nouvelle du recueil, « Criminel », narrée par Sabrina, met en scène une rencontre sexuelle entre cette dernière, alors âgée de seize ans, et le cousin de Céline, âgé de vingt-six ans. Elle se déroule dans la chambre du petit frère de Céline. Sabrina, qui de son propre aveu[11] a « tendance à tester [s]es pouvoirs de séduction sur tous les hommes et les garçons » (Clermont 72), « flirt[e] » (75) avec le cousin. Bientôt, elle subit toutefois plus qu'elle n'élabore le scénario de leur rencontre sexuelle : « . . . j'étais dépassée par les événements. Il me touchait de façon tellement rapide, rythmée et compliquée que j'avais l'impression d'être sur un plateau de tournage porno » (78). Le scénario patriarcal présent dans la pornographie traditionnelle, donnant préséance au plaisir masculin et véhiculant des codes sexuels associant le féminin à la position objectale, est de fait rejoué

par le cousin. Pendant l'acte, la presque totalité des paroles qu'il profère tient d'impératifs : « Ici » (77); « T'as pas le droit » (77); « Arrête, t'es folle, arrête . . . » (78); « Regarde, viens ici, regarde ma queue » (78). Autrement, il commente la « chatte » (78) et les « fesses » (78) de Sabrina, juge ses performances sexuelles — « Je te donne six sur dix » (78) — ou l'insulte : « Salope » (78). Il la réduit à son seul sexe — sa chatte, ses fesses —, s'arroge la position de juge, et donc d'autorité. Sabrina obéit invariablement à ses injonctions : « Il m'a pressée de le sucer . . . Étourdie, honteuse, je m'y suis mise » (78). En obtempérant, malgré son manque flagrant d'envie, elle s'assujettit au modèle sexuel patriarcal.

Il faut voir ici que le cousin orchestre le rapport sexuel de manière à dérober toute possibilité de contrôle à l'adolescente, qui spécifie : « J'ai suggéré qu'on fasse autre chose. "Salope," a-t-il dit. Il m'a fait basculer sur le ventre, m'a craché dans le cul et m'a pénétrée sans crier gare » (78). Sabrina n'a pas l'occasion d'exprimer de subjectivité désirante. Lorsque s'esquisse une opportunité d'énoncer ce qu'elle veut, le cousin la retourne contre le lit et étouffe sa parole dans l'oreiller : « "C'est criminel," a-t-il dit . . . La tête enfouie dans l'oreiller . . . j'ai su que je n'oublierais pas ces mots . . . » (78-79). La réitération du titre, « Criminel », souligne qu'un crime est bien dépeint dans la nouvelle : un viol.

Tandis qu'il a fait « très très très plaisir » (51) à Philippe de rencontrer Céline, cette dernière se trouve plutôt en proie à « la honte, la rage, la peur, la déception, l'envie, le regret, la gêne et le mépris » (51). Quant à la « jouissance » (79) du cousin, elle diffère du « vertige intense presque de la peur » (78) que ressent Sabrina : « Ce vertige . . . suffisait à lui seul à me faire haleter . . . d'une manière qui m'affolait et me dégoûtait de moi-même » (78). Il importe donc de départager le plaisir sexuel, miné par nombre d'affects négatifs, du bonheur; car du bonheur, Sabrina n'en éprouve pas. Il ne lui reste au final que la « prémonition [qu'elle] ne pourrai[t] parler de cette soirée à personne » (78), le cousin lui dérobant sa voix une fois de plus.

Si Sabrina a voulu « tester [s]es pouvoirs » (72) sur le cousin, ce dernier ne lui en reconnaît aucun. Dans l'œuvre, les adolescentes qui souhaitent s'écarter des modèles normatifs de féminité, se montrant désirantes ou aventurières, se butent aux désirs d'hommes dominateurs réactivant le dispositif patriarcal, que ce soit dans la sphère publique ou intime.

Catherine Dussault Frenette nomme d'ailleurs l'« usage de la force physique [et] le recours à une parole autoritaire » (299) comme constitutifs du dispositif de la contrainte, contrecarrant l'avènement d'une subjectivité désirante féminine. S'inspirant de Jessica Benjamin, elle ajoute : « La notion d'intersubjectivité suppose une tension paradoxale, mais nécessaire, entre affirmation de soi et reconnaissance par l'autre — l'effondrement de cette tension ouvrant potentiellement la voie à la domination » (38). Or c'est bien l'absence de reconnaissance de la part des hommes qui contribue à la domination de Sabrina et Céline — la fée de cette dernière meurt précisément parce qu'on ne croit pas en elle.

« Soon we'll be done with the trouble of the world[12] » : échappées du régime hétéropatriarcal

La nouvelle « Toutes celles que j'ai connues et aimées », narrée par Sabrina, informe la lectrice que Céline a finalement entrepris un voyage : elle se rend en Californie avec Sabrina. Cette dernière y rencontre Jess, avec qui elle sera en couple pendant neuf ans. Au cours de ces neuf ans, Jess, née garçon, entame une transition vers le féminin. Le couple qu'elle forme avec Sabrina donne à voir un modèle relationnel queer qui rompt avec les dynamiques patriarcales observées plus avant : « Quand la tension montait, . . . [l']un[13] de nous mettait *All I Really Want to Do* . . . : "I ain't looking to compete with you, beat or cheat or mistreat you" . . . Je ne veux pas te simplifier, t'étiqueter. Je ne te demande pas de voir comme moi . . . » (Clermont 291) Le couple, évoluant à l'extérieur des étiquettes — au prisme du queer, donc[14] —, compte deux sujets qui n'imposent pas leur désir à l'autre.

C'est ce qu'illustre aussi la seule de leur relation sexuelle faisant l'objet d'une description, se déroulant dans une cabane en haut d'un séquoia. En grimpant dans l'arbre malgré son vertige, Sabrina reproduit le geste que Céline avait posé des années avant, en outrepassant son vertige pour monter sur le toit[15]. Le texte met donc en relation ces deux scènes, tout en mettant en lumière les divergences entre l'une et l'autre. D'une part, Céline fait face à la civilisation et au parlement, alors que la cabane évoque la nature et l'enfance, une époque précédant l'entrée dans l'ordre social et les normes (Halberstam). D'autre part, Céline gagne en anxiété et en passivité, contrairement à Sabrina qui échappe aux deux en faisant l'amour avec Jess : elle « pleur[e] comme un corps [à] la fin d'une période de stress »

(Clermont 312) et prend en charge le déroulement du rapport sexuel. En atteste la liste d'actions qu'elle entreprend : « Je l'ai embrassée, je me suis assise sur sa poitrine et j'ai tout de suite senti monter un plaisir violent. J'ai pris ses mains et j'ai guidé ses doigts sur mes hanches » (313). Ajoutons que Jess se montre aussi désirante : c'est elle qui initie le rapport, se déshabille, déshabille Sabrina.

Il a déjà été mentionné que Jess opère une transition de genre au fil du recueil; dans d'autres nouvelles, il est aussi noté au passage que Sabrina et Céline désirent et couchent avec des femmes. En ne faisant aucun commentaire à l'égard de ces entorses aux modèles traditionnels, hétérosexuels et cis, la narration implique qu'elles sont anodines. Plus qu'à une normalisation[16] du queer, le recueil paraît en faire l'apologie, à tout le moins en sous-texte. Certes la relation amoureuse entre Jess et Sabrina n'est pas parfaite, mais elle est une des seules à être connotée positivement dans le recueil, à n'être pas traversée de violences[17]. Ainsi, cette « positivité » attribuée au queer s'étend aux affects de Sabrina : tandis qu'elle fait l'amour avec Jess, elle ressent « des vagues de soulagement, de reconnaissance, de bonheur, de mélancolie, d'impatience, de vertige et de fragilité » (313). Son vertige n'est alors plus teinté par la « peur » (78) et le « dégoût » (78) que lui inspirait le cousin. Spécifions que la cabane dans laquelle se déroule le rapport sexuel entre Sabrina et Jess surplombe le squat qu'habite cette dernière. C'est donc à l'extérieur du social que Sabrina accède au bonheur.

De manière analogue, le lieu de « paix » dépeint dans le prologue, le lieu du suicide de Vincent évoqué en introduction, se trouve aussi en périphérie de l'espace urbain : il s'agit d'un « lieu sans nom » (14) à l'extrémité du quartier Hochelaga, passé la rue Ontario. Cette absence de toponyme suggère d'emblée que l'endroit se situe à l'extérieur de la culture normative. Les toponymes sont autant de signes des puissances ayant opéré sur le territoire, de leur influence sur notre présent (Azaryahu, Foote et Ryan 2016). Que le lieu ne porte pas de nom laisse entendre qu'il n'est pas marqué par le social ou par les pouvoirs qui y sont attachés. Son anonymat laisse présager qu'il s'agit d'un lieu hétérotopique « suspendant, neutralisant ou inversant » ces pouvoirs (Foucault), un de ces « emplacements, qui permettent, entre autres, à des individus de se rencontrer, de se connaître et de se reconnaître, de vivre ensemble contre, tout contre ou d'une certaine manière, même à l'extérieur des normes dominantes et oppressives de la

société . . . » (Beneventi et Calderón 7). Pour accéder à ce « lieu sans nom », il faut se rendre « [d]e l'autre côté de la track » (Clermont 14), celle-ci se trouvant mentionnée à trois reprises à travers le prologue[18]. Cette insistance narrative, conjuguée au fait que les ami·e·s fréquentant l'endroit sont qualifié·e·s de « fous » (14), laisse entrevoir que ces dernier·ère·s se trouvent symboliquement « à côté de la track » : illes seraient dans l'erreur au regard de la norme. Il se déploie qui plus est une forme de langage « autre » dans le « lieu sans nom » : « Il n'y avait de béton que quelques îlots de *graffiti* par-ci par-là, et partout ailleurs c'était des . . . arbres en hauteur dont *les feuilles parlent fort* en été » (13, je souligne). Art, résistance et nature s'allient dans un amalgame discursif où règne l'indétermination, le sauvage. Le fonctionnement même de l'endroit échappe à l'entendement : « C'était un lieu vivant, où de l'eau . . . avait, *on ne sait plus comment*, trouvé les tuyaux et rempli d'anciens réservoirs . . . où des bancs de poissons rouges et blancs vivaient, *mystérieusement* . . . » (13, je souligne). L'eau suit son cours, sans qu'on ne sache si elle provient du sol ou du ciel[19], ce qui confère à l'endroit une aura de mystère s'accordant avec l'exceptionnalité du lieu, l'indétermination sémantique observée plus avant.

Cet espace arbore corollairement des caractéristiques de la *chora* sémiotique telle qu'elle est présentée par Julia Kristeva dans *La révolution du langage poétique*. Celle-ci est à la fois l'articulation de pulsions « préalable[s] à l'évidence, au vraisemblable, à la spatialité et à la temporalité » (Kristeva 23) et leur « réceptacle . . . nommé aussi espace . . . innommable, invraisemblable, bâtard » (23). D'une part, le « lieu sans nom » est un lieu qui n'en est pas tout à fait un, en ce qu'il n'est ni nommé ni balisé, sinon par sa distinction de toutes structures spatiales civilisées et civilisatrices — la rue Ontario, le chemin de fer; de l'autre, il y règne l'indétermination et l'invraisemblable, l'une et l'autre se répercutant dans la nature et dans le langage[20]. La *chora* sémiotique se donne aussi comme un « réceptacle . . . nourricier et maternel » (25) précédant l'entrée de l'individu dans la loi symbolique, celle du père et de Dieu. Or, référant au « lieu sans nom », la narratrice précise : « Ces lieux tranquilles où vivre et mourir en paix, il n'y en a presque pas . . . Et moins il y en a, moins on se souvient de cette autre vie, celle qui commence dans le ventre et qui éclate dans la gorge, dans les yeux, dans le sexe, dans nos langues qui touchent au soleil » (Clermont 14). Contrairement au reste du territoire, le lieu hétérotopique

offrirait donc les conditions d'émergence d'une vie « qui commence dans le ventre », non loin d'un réceptacle nourricier et maternel. On s'y baigne notamment dans des réservoirs d'eau grouillant de poissons que l'on pourrait associer, par enchaînement analogique, à autant d'univers utérins. La logique binaire présidant les conceptions traditionnelles du genre associe par ailleurs l'eau — l'humide — au féminin (Boisclair).

Cet espace « autre » prend les traits d'un territoire nourricier à plus d'un titre, en ce qu'il s'apparente également à une oasis, un « [î]lot de terrain, *apte à la végétation et à l'habitation humaine*, perdu au milieu d'espaces désertiques et dont l'existence est *généralement liée à la présence de l'eau amenée par conduites* . . . » (« Oasis », je souligne). En effet, en plus d'être magiquement irrigué, l'emplacement tient d'une des seules zones réellement *habitables* au sein de l'espace diégétique. Bien que le prologue offre peu d'indices sur les causes de l'intranquillité des personnages dans les espaces extérieurs au lieu hétérotopique, une analyse des autres nouvelles montre que la plupart de ces espaces sont moulés aux exigences du capital et des pouvoirs patriarcaux, et que ces dernières suscitent l'angoisse des personnages féminins. En ce sens, la configuration de l'espace intime dans la nouvelle « Max, Bob, John, Bruce et moi » est éloquente. La violence masculine y creuse jusqu'aux murs : « Il y a des trous de la taille du poing de Max dans les murs, mais [Kat] ne saurai[t] pas les agrandir pour [s]e sauver » (Clermont 95). Pour Kat, une victime de violence conjugale, l'appartement prend la forme d'une prison.

Le plus souvent, c'est en fréquentant de rares lieux préservés du joug masculin que les personnages féminins du recueil accèdent au bonheur. Citons à cet effet une autre nouvelle, « Un nid, un nœud », dans laquelle le personnage de Cassandre fuit son conjoint violent. Elle s'établit chez une amie et y rencontre le fils de cette dernière, « un petit cerf » (186), qui, en jouant avec elle à la cachette, lui offre un premier moment de paix : « Cassandre se dirige vers l'escalier, le cœur battant, pleurant presque de soulagement à l'idée de cet enfant qui s'est caché quelque part et qui attend qu'elle vienne le chercher » (186-187). En suivant l'enfant, Cassandre parcourt son territoire à lui, une forêt symbolique où les garçons peuvent être des proies — des cerfs — plutôt que des prédateurs, où l'ordre patriarcal ne semble pas opératoire.

Au final, il apparaît significatif que les protagonistes atteignent « la paix » dans le lieu hétérotopique où les « graminées sauvages dépass[ent]

les deux mètres » (13), et incidemment tout personnage le fréquentant. Sur ce territoire, la nature submerge le social; un désordre sauvage l'emporte sur un quelque ordre civil. On l'a vu, cet ordre civil normatif est structuré par le dispositif patriarcal qui dénie aux personnages féminins la position d'agente de désir, et les relègue à la passivité. La brutalité masculine sature la plupart des lieux publics et intimes du recueil — les personnages féminins y essuient les insultes, les coups, sont victimes d'agression sexuelle —, de sorte que la majorité des espaces apparaissent inhabitables. À l'inverse, dans des emplacements non encore policés, marqués par la nature, le féminin et l'enfance — la cabane, le « lieu sans nom » évoquant un univers utérin, la forêt du petit cerf —, il émerge la possibilité de se réinventer en dehors des impératifs de « la dialectique traditionnelle "homme-sujet/femme-objet" » (Dussault Frenette 297). Ces territoires de l'enfance qui apaisent les personnages contrastent également avec les espaces de production capitalistes, dont le marché Jean-Talon, lequel représente davantage la domestication de la nature, la recherche de profits, l'objectification des employé·e·s. Un poème de Mahmoud Darwich précédant la dernière partie du recueil débute par ce vers : « Nous aussi, nous aimons la vie quand nous en avons les moyens » (Clermont 321). Or, au fil des nouvelles, il apparaît que les personnages aiment la vie dans les espaces qui échappent aux structures normatives hétérosexistes et capitalistes — là, il est possible de jouer, de se baigner, de faire l'amour et la fête, d'accéder à une forme de bonheur.

NOTES

1 « I argue that success in a heteronormative society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation. » (2)
2 On peut toutefois difficilement concevoir le suicide de Vincent comme une mort sereine.
3 Selon Michel Foucault, les utopies correspondent aussi à cette description. La différence entre les utopies et les hétérotopies tient au fait que les utopies « sont des espaces qui sont fondamentalement essentiellement irréels » (Foucault 15), tandis qu'à l'inverse, les hétérotopies sont des emplacements réels.
4 Henri Lefebvre et Doreen Massey partagent des idées semblables. Ils ont suggéré que l'espace est produit par les pouvoirs sociaux, et qu'en retour, les sociétés sont produites par les espaces à l'intérieur desquels elles évoluent.
5 Les sujets détiennent la possibilité de se subjectiver autrement à partir des dispositifs qui les façonnent, en procédant à la variation de performances sociales (Butler).
6 Ces paroles sont tirées de la chanson « Let Down » de Radiohead, citée dans la nouvelle « Dans l'industrie » à la page 155.

7 Certes, il est question d'un kiosque de fruits, lequel ne saurait figurer le capitalisme à la même échelle qu'une grande chaîne de magasins, mais les personnages n'y agissent pas moins en concordance avec le dispositif capitaliste homogénéisant les sociétés et configurant les potentialités d'actions.

8 Pour Giorgio Agamben, « [c]e qui définit les dispositifs auxquels nous avons à faire dans la phase actuelle du capitalisme est qu'ils n'agissent plus par la production d'un sujet, mais bien par des processus que nous pouvons appeler des processus de désubjectivation » (Agamben 43-44).

9 Dans une autre nouvelle, « Emploi-Québec », Sabrina, après avoir fait une demande de renouvellement d'aide sociale, remet toutefois en question ses choix de vie : « Je regrettais tous les mauvais choix, toutes les journées à errer, à me prélasser qui m'avaient menée jusqu'ici, au bureau d'Emploi Québec . . . forcée de voir ces déambulations pour ce qu'elles étaient, des détours du droit chemin, des excuses pour ne pas mettre un pied devant l'autre et avancer dans la vie, du sabotage de petite conne » (142).

10 Ces paroles sont tirées de la chanson « Dream Brother » de Jeff Buckley, citée dans la nouvelle « Criminel », à la page 72.

11 La nouvelle « Criminel » est narrée par Sabrina après les événements racontés dans la nouvelle, mais il s'avère impossible de mesurer combien de temps a passé entre le temps de la narration le temps narré.

12 Ces paroles sont tirées de la chanson « Trouble of the World » de Mahalia Jackson, citée dans la nouvelle « Adieu », à la page 202.

13 À ce moment de la nouvelle, Jess s'identifie toujours au masculin.

14 « Le queer est donc postidentitaire. Il vise à se départir des étiquettes qui ne conviennent plus, désuètes et de surcroît oppressives : si elles satisfont les sujets qui s'y conforment, elles en font souffrir et en discriminent, stigmatisent, rejettent et excluent un grand nombre » (Boisclair, Landry et Poirier Girard 10).

15 Céline mentionne : « L'échelle était stable, mais j'ai été prise de vertige. Quelque chose à l'intérieur de moi a voulu m'empêcher de monter » (48), ce qui n'est pas sans faire écho à ce qu'énonce Sabrina, des années plus tard : « D'habitude, j'évitais la cabane, car je souffrais de vertige. Mais ce jour-là, j'ai pris mon courage à deux mains, j'ai agrippé l'échelle et je suis montée . . . » (311).

16 Il importe de distinguer la « normalisation du queer » de la « normativité queer ». La première concerne une absence de jugement à l'endroit du queer; la deuxième s'attache au fait de réduire les potentialités transgressives du queer en l'arrimant à des structures hétérosexuelles ou relevant de l'hétérosexisme.

17 En effet, en plus des deux nouvelles qui illustrent des scènes d'agression sexuelle à l'endroit de Céline et de Sabrina, deux nouvelles dépeignent des épisodes de violence conjugale où des personnages masculins brutalisent leur amoureuse, « Max, Bob, John, Bruce et moi » et « Un nid, un nœud ». Ajoutons que si un couple hétérosexuel, Zoé et Laurent, les colocataires de Céline, ne semblent pas violents l'un envers l'autre, ces personnages sont secondaires dans le recueil.

18 « Pour s'y rendre, il fallait aller jusqu'au bout de la rue Ontario, puis plus loin encore, puis dépasser les tracks de chemin de fer » (13); « Tu vois où c'est? De l'autre côté des tracks » (14); « Je ne sais pas s'il y a encore, de l'autre côté des tracks, tout au bout de la rue Ontario, des poissons qui vivent dans les réservoirs et des fous qui s'y baignent » (14).

19 « Je ne sais pas si l'eau souterraine (ou était-ce de l'eau de pluie?) remplit toujours les fausses piscines » (14).

20 Selon Marc Augé, « [s]i un lieu peut se définir comme identitaire, relationnel et historique, une espace qui ne peut se définir ni comme identitaire, ni comme relationnel, ni comme historique définira un non-lieux » (Augé 100). Puisque « l'espace autre » est caractérisé par l'indétermination identitaire, qu'il n'entretient pour ainsi dire pas de relations avec d'autres lieux, en étant trop éloigné, et qu'il ne présente aucune forme d'historicité, il est possible d'envisager le « lieu sans nom » comme une sorte de non-lieu.

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Kenneth Sherman

A Walk Along Lakeshore Drive

You pass lawns prim as golf greens,
boxed flowerbeds with hydrangeas
their inky blue looking as though
it would come off on your hands.

Garden pinwheels hum in the wind.

Eventually you come to the exception:
a dirt yard with two rusted cars,
parts of old dishwashers and AC units,
the netherworld of scrap metal,
grime and oil.

A tethered dog snarls on cue.

If you were to step inside the cabin
you'd find cold linoleum,
a flea market sofa and bed,
an embroidered view of the lake at sunset.
Maybe a rifle in the closet.

What do you find so unsettling?
The hint of violence?
Poverty?

Back in the yard grasshoppers whirr
like broken bits of machinery.
Sunlight thickens on your hand
like honey that's gone hard.

small, deferred

On Souvankham Thammavongsa's Writing

Introduction

Vinh Nguyen

What does it mean to live in this world?

Small and deferred like the tangerine, which is not an orange, never growing "awkward / with limbs heavy, skin thick" (19) might be an answer. Marking time and space with a hand-drawn, imperfect slash might be another. It is to insist that the letter "k" in front of the word "knife" is not silent. Or, to bend through glass like light. At the very least, write oneself into the centre of the story.

For close to two decades, and over the span of five books—*Small Arguments* (2003), *Found* (2007), *Light* (2013), *Cluster* (2019), and *How to Pronounce Knife* (2020)—Souvankham Thammavongsa has explored this question, giving Canadian literature and beyond a rich body of work to contemplate and take pleasure in. This forum brings together poets, editors, booksellers, and academics to reflect on the various "scales" of Thammavongsa's writing, from Canada to the transnational, the natural world to the labouring body, the nuclear family to histories of war and refugee migration, the miniscule to the transcendent. It concludes with a short piece from the author herself. Each of the contributions sheds light on the resonance and continued relevance of a singular voice in Canadian letters.

Small, deferred: always there, unyielding.

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Portrait of Small Artist as Brave Woman

Beth Follett

SCALE:
noun: a ratio of size in a map, model, drawing, or plan.
Similar: ratio, proportion.
verb: represent in proportional dimensions; reduce or increase in size according to a common scale.

It was Pedlar Press' fifth anniversary—2001—a party held in The Green Room in Toronto, at its old location, accessed through the back alley behind Bloor Street at Brunswick. A cavernous space. Dirty, cheap, fun.

I was seated at a long table, selling books and a fundraiser poster Stan Bevington had made, grateful for the speeches and the spectacle of Derek McCormack singing "The Book of Love" by The Magnetic Fields. Then: standing before me: Souvankham Thammavongsa, introduced by Jonathan Bennett, who was praising her poetry to the skies.

Impossible to tell how old she was. Sixteen? Twenty? (She was twenty-three.) Very small. Shy, or perhaps taciturn. Send me your work, I told her. And she did. Then she waited while I went through a year-long personal crisis that made communication with almost everyone unbearable.

Souvankham's *Small Arguments* was near perfect in manuscript form, and was launched in early December 2003, a party at Cameron House in Toronto (dirty, cheap, fun), with local luminaries in the audience. Dionne Brand was there, constant champion throughout the years, and, most recently, editor for Souvankham's *Cluster* (McClelland & Stewart, 2019). Souvankham took the stage as I lowered the mic. She said nothing, opened her palm, which held a small crank-handle music box, raised it to the mic, and played: Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.

And that, you might say, is the story of her life. Little Star, ablaze. Her brilliance is legendary among Canadian poets.

In August 2020, CBC Books placed Souvankham on a list of twenty-four Canadian writers "on the rise." Sorry, no, that particular star rose

a long time ago. Hidden in plain sight, which is the reality for poets and "small" press publishers alike, settler and BIPOC. We are under the radar of mainstream media, even while we build up and reinforce the very ground that is Canadian literary culture, the designated scale being disproportionate to our contribution. This has been said a million times over the decades and must still be said: "all the rich imaginings of activists and thinkers who urge us to live otherwise . . . disappeared, modified into reform and inclusion, equity, diversity and palliation" (Brand).

It has been said that Souvankham Thammavongsa writes about the overlooked, the small. In a 2004 review of *Small Arguments*, Anne Michaels called her a true subversive who knows that to whisper is how to be heard. Kate Cayley writes, "She's the kind of writer who conceals how technically brilliant she is. Her economy is astonishing—you feel yourself to be in the presence of someone who will not waste a second of your time, who will tell you exactly what you need to know, and who will only tell you the truth." Her writing is quiet, penetrating, economical. In loud, crass, indiscriminate mainstream culture, where the modified quick byte, the gross dollar, is all, a writer like Souvankham could have been swept out to sea early on, except for the scale of resistance that lives in the woman herself and in those who have witnessed and supported the luminosity of her life work.

Major themes addressed by Souvankham have been adaptability, chance, survival. From the poem "Perfect" in *Light* (Pedlar Press, 2013):

> . . . The math problems are easy.
> They are always about some guy who has to get
> to the other side. There's always an answer, a sure thing.
> You just have to work your way there. . . .
> . . . . . .
> I will keep my print small, filling up every blank space
> I can find like a Captain fixing leaks in a sinking ship. (20-21)

From that moment at The Green Room in 2001, cut to the 2020 release of Souvankham's first book of fiction, *How to Pronounce Knife* (McClelland & Stewart; Little, Brown and Company, US; Bloomsbury, UK), and her subsequent winning of the 2020 Scotiabank Giller Prize. Do not imagine that this award has taken her by surprise: what she has been up against all these years has been painfully obvious to her, her choices—financial,

social—clear. She has been a model of devotion, expressing herself as only she can, using silence, exile, and cunning as her tools, working her way to here, one brilliant word at a time.

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On Selling Books

Anjula Gogia

I am a bookseller who loves words but hates writing. But for Souvankham, I will write. Because of my love for her grace, for her deftness, for her vision.

I met Souvankham many years ago when I was co-managing the Toronto Women's Bookstore (TWB). First it was her zine *big boots*. I wasn't the "zine coordinator," but I was excited to sell it at TWB. Selling *big boots* exemplified what TWB was about: giving a home to writers who couldn't find one elsewhere.

Then, Beth Follett, publisher of Pedlar Press, came by with a beautiful (all of Beth's books are beautiful) book of poetry, *Small Arguments*. Now, this was my life before children, when I had the calm and space at home to read poetry. And *Small Arguments* captivated me. At the time, when there were very few books of poetry by Asian women in Canada, I adored the book. Not just because of who Souvankham is but also because of where she took me—a place inside myself, with my own family's history of

migration to Canada and struggles to fit in. Her words around language, community, and family resonated deeply.

"Here is a delicate and graceful hand naming the fragile materials of poetry" said Dionne Brand on the back cover.

And so, as any good bookseller does, I started to hand-sell Souvankham's book. Looking for poetry? I would ask. Here, try this. I loved it and so did readers. This was the age before the Internet was ubiquitous, before social media. Our customers relied on us to show them books they would have had no idea existed, unless they read a review. I wanted to share Souvankham's voice with our world—a voice I knew would likely get ignored and under-looked elsewhere. This was a time when "diversity in publishing" was not a buzzword. When our customers could not Google a list and find her writing. When very few big presses were publishing BIPOC writers.

People would come to us, as Canada's largest feminist bookstore, and ask us, "Show me the books by Black women, Indigenous women, Women of Colour," especially from Canada. Souvankham's books were a gift I could put in their hands and it did not disappoint. Being able to sell Souvankham's books in some ways exemplifies my *raison d'être* for being a bookseller: it is the labour of love, the connection, that one makes between writer and reader that can't be done in any other way.

Over the years Souvankham kept writing, and I kept selling books. Both of us with pauses. For family, for life, for work, for time.

And then word came out that Souvankham was branching into prose. Short fiction and a forthcoming novel in the works! Some of my favourite novels have been written by poets. *Anil's Ghost*. *Fugitive Pieces*. *What We All Long For*. I was eager to add her new one to my list.

Ah, and then winter came and Souvankham's book was finally on the list and I could not wait to launch it. Where to launch one of my favourite writers? Who to pair her with? Serendipitously, Dionne Brand agreed to host a conversation at the Gladstone Hotel, located on Queen Street West in Toronto. Full circle with Souvankham's first book of poetry. This would have been the highlight of my Spring 2020 launches.

Then COVID hit, and all was cancelled. But there with the grace of the publishing gods came *How to Pronounce Knife*. And in this new pandemic age I shouted it far and wide on Facebook, on Twitter, and masked at the

door of the bookstore. And not only did I shout it, but reviewers across North America listed it on every single must-read book of Spring 2020. Every time I opened Facebook there it was: *Chatelaine*, *Globe and Mail*, *New York Times*, *Quill and Quire*, and the list goes on and on. It became Another Story Bookshop's best-selling book of fiction in April 2020.

I loved Souvankham's writing back when no one could pronounce her name. I continue to love and sell her writing with *How to Pronounce Knife*. I can't wait to read and sell the next book and many more to come.

Pronunciations in Diaspora

Bryan Thao Worra

Among the new releases in short fiction this year was the debut collection by Lao Canadian writer Souvankham Thammavongsa, *How to Pronounce Knife* (2020), fortuitously released in April, which in the US is National Poetry Month and in Laos, the month of the traditional New Year celebration when we reflect on what has gone before and prepare for the times ahead.

The timing of her collection coincides with the forty-fifth anniversary of the Lao diaspora that began for many of us following the end of the wars in Southeast Asia. Today, almost half a million Lao reside in the US with roots as refugees. Thousands more are scattered in nations such as Canada, France, England, Australia, Japan, Thailand, Germany, Cuba, and even corners of French Guiana. Historians will quibble about whether the war began after the 1954 defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu that ended the colonization of French Indochina, and whether the conflict is distinct from the Vietnam War, or if the whole of the fighting should be called the "Secret War" or the "Second Indochina War," or the "American War," but what most readers will need to understand is that in the end, to avoid death, torture, and imprisonment, especially for assisting the US, a great exodus across the Mekong was necessary for thousands of families, and where they were resettled and how well they thrived in the decades after was anything but certain.

I became familiar with Souvankham's work first as a poet, with her wonderful 2003 collection *Small Arguments*, but it was in her 2007 collection of verse, *Found,* that I particularly appreciated the direction her writing would take. In *Found,* she explored ways to respond to the discarded notebook her father had kept in a refugee camp in Thailand, a life he had never fully spoken of to her while growing up. As fellow refugee poets, there is much I respect about her approach to navigating our journey, even though we met only once in person, in Minnesota during a 2015 gathering of Lao writers. In 2014, her third collection of poetry, *Light*, received the Trillium Book Award, which recognizes the excellence of Ontario writers and their works. This was a significant achievement. And so, it is with great interest that we see her turn her talents towards prose, where we clearly see Souvankham Thammavongsa's roots as a poet in almost every line.

How to Pronounce Knife is a groundbreaking collection for many reasons. It has invited comparisons to the work of Nabokov, and the surprising, warm humour and depth can remind many of the classic Asian American collection *Pangs of Love* by the late David Wong Louie. Among Lao writers specifically she has almost no peers in the Americas, with the only other major collection of Lao short prose in English being the late Outhine Bounyavong's *Mother's Beloved* published by the University of Washington Press twenty-one years ago. Since the end of the war, in the Western Hemisphere there have been fewer than forty-five books by the Lao diasporic community in our own words. The vast majority of our literary output has been poetry, children's stories, cookbooks, a memoir or two, and film and theatrical works.

Laos has long been ignored in literature, rarely figuring into various narratives, and often only in men's adventure stories and mysteries. One of the earliest mentions was in spy novelist John Le Carré's *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977) and the Doctor Siri series by Australian expat writer Colin Cotterill. Most Lao novels and short stories by writers in Laos have gone untranslated. *How to Pronounce Knife* provides a rare model of modern stories involving Lao people that don't involve someone getting murdered, dealing with crime, or fleeing immediate danger.

The magic of Thammavongsa's prose operates across several levels that are of relief to many of her peers and contemporaries. You don't have to be fully familiar with Laos to appreciate it, and she does not spend vast swaths of text as a literary tour guide, some "Explainer of All Things." If you

want to know more about Lao culture, you'll have to do the work yourself, even though she does not shy away from a Lao-centred experience. These are not melancholy stories falling into the usual tropes of Old Country-New Country, East-Meets-West-Fish-Out-of-Water stories that are typically in fashion for refugee stories presented to mainstream readers, and it should be clear that her perspective will be regarded as a classic, but she will not be the last word on our diverse experiences.

Whether it's the Halloween misadventures in her tale "Chick-A-Chee!" or reflections on what the music of Randy Travis meant to a Lao mother, or discovering the fallibility of a father in the titular "How to Pronounce Knife," we are given a chance to see a community journey from an intimate and refreshing perspective. We see a full range of emotions and questions, humour and deep reflections, that affirm our shared humanity and the importance of the best of our cultural traditions.

I am particularly enthused for her work because we are seeing some of the very first modern fictional characters of Lao literature in the Americas, complete with flaws and dreams and complex motivations. Will they go on to be as memorable and enduring as Don Quixote, Javert, or Wittman Ah Sing, or join Lao mythic heroines and heroes like Sinxay or Xieng Mieng? Only time can tell, but Thammavongsa has set a precedent well worth watching, and she has opened a door for many of her fellow Lao in diaspora to share their tales fully and freely. This is no small accomplishment, and it is a magnificent beginning for her journey as a prose writer, even as the poet in me hopes it is not too long before we also see more of her verse.

The Migrant Body's Work

Candida Rifkind

Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife* shifts between interiority and exteriority: she invites readers to look out at the world through her characters' eyes while we also watch them move through the worlds in which they find themselves, from school to

work to lovers' bedrooms. So much about these characters' relationships, between children and parents, between siblings, friends, and lovers, comes down to money, work, and buying entry into dominant white culture and what appears to be a more innocent and content life. As much as we watch her characters watching each other, and we sometimes see what they see, the economy of refugee gazes that structures these stories is always on a par with the other bodily senses, and *How to Pronounce Knife* is, amongst other things, a significant entry into narratives of the labouring im/migrant body in Canadian literature. There is a tenderness to Thammavongsa's descriptions of the smelly, sore, sexualized, labouring, at once excessive and lacking racialized migrant body that could be in productive dialogue with Adele Wiseman's highly embodied immigrant Jewish Winnipeg characters in *Crackpot* (1974), Dionne Brand's precarious Caribbean migrant women navigating Toronto in *Sans Souci and Other Stories* (1988), or the diverse labouring migrant characters in Mariam Pirbhai's *Outside People and Other Stories* (2017). Yet, there is a specificity to how Thammavongsa writes about Southeast Asian refugee and migrant labour in the twenty-first century, and some of this has to do with the way she writes about work and the body.

In "Mani Pedi," Raymond, an ex-boxer taken in by his sister to work in her nail salon, knows things about the women his sister employs that he thinks she doesn't know: "How they tried to get pregnant, but no babies ever caught on because of the chemicals from the salon. How their coughs started and didn't ever stop" (70). But it isn't just toxic chemicals that threaten the health and livelihoods of Thammavongsa's characters: Raymond has to take weeks off work because he develops warts on his hands from touching people's feet without gloves. But, the narrator tells us, the warts bother him less than an invisible contamination:

> It was the smell of feet. It got into the pores of his nostrils and took root there, like a follicle of hair. It was becoming a part of him, the smell—like spoiled milk. He could never forget what he did for a living because it was always there. He was beginning to taste the smell of feet at the back of his throat. (66)

The smell of male clients' neglected feet is a stench slowly dulling his senses and diminishing his body—he stops eating because he no longer enjoys food. But he can still smell, and when a female client on whom he has a crush is dropped off at the salon by a wealthy-looking man, "the smell of this man's cologne came in with her" (69). Raymond's heart is broken and his impossible

dreams dashed; his sister sees his face fall, "the way it would fall in the ring when he knew he was losing" (69). But Raymond could never win this round, and the story ends with a heartbreaking image of him and his sister sitting in her car, windows open, listening to the sounds of a family barbeque and children giggling, the soundtrack of middle-class innocence "like a far distant thing, a thing that happened only to other people" (71).

Things that happen to other people is also a theme in "Paris," in which Thammavongsa explores how the labouring refugee body is contained by the gendered, racialized, sexualized, and classed networks of power that structure workplaces. The Laotian women working in a chicken processing plant think that nose jobs, hairdos, and glamorous clothing might get them promoted to the front office by their sexual predator of a boss. But altering their bodies and trying to appear like the white wives of the company men can never unmark them as racialized others, and it can never insert them into nepotistic reproductions of managerial power. The narrator, Red, who distances herself from the other Laotian women's feminine performances, is a bystander when her boss is discovered by his beautiful wife, Nicole, having sex with a Laotian female worker in his car. In distress, Nicole runs over to the narrator, seeking comfort in a hug: "She grabbed Red and held her like they were the closest of friends, and buried her pointy nose in Red's neck. She could feel the poke" (23). The white woman's pointy nose that other Laotian women mimic through plastic surgery breaks the invisible boundary Red maintains around her body, and the story ends with both women crying, "but for different reasons" (23). The male boss' sexual exploitation of his female Laotian factory workers tethers these two women to each other, uncomfortably and without collapsing their differences.

And this is Thammavongsa's point: the things that happen to "other people" are also, in various correlations, inversions, and contortions, the things that happen to her characters because of the centrality of work and labour in their lives. The Southeast Asian refugee body in Canada cannot escape the racialized webs of class, gender, and sexuality that so frequently situate them on the ground, both figuratively and literally. In "Picking Worms," the narrator's Laotian mother's skill at picking live earthworms from farmers' fields for bait gives her pleasure—"Man, I love shit of the earth" (172) she says after every shift—but it will never get her the promotion she deserves. Instead, the narrator's fourteen-year-old white boyfriend, who

joins them on a lark, is promoted to manager and changes the way they pick. Her mother's organic, intuitive method of going barefoot and ungloved is prohibited; her health and productivity suffer because the boy manager's rules separate her physically from the earthworms she finds through touch and feel (177). And so she lives the contradictions of her refugee, racialized, gendered labouring body that is at once too physical for her physical job and too expert to be promoted to management. Throughout this collection, the characters' complex relationships are what elevate these stories beyond sociological or political exposé to rich explorations of the labouring body as also a loving, longing, knowing, and defiant body at once marked out for certain kinds of physical work and marked by it. The somatic focus of these stories offers a specificity of Southeast Asian refugee and migrant experience grounded in the labouring body that is always, both visibly and invisibly, seeking to transcend basic survival.

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Reading the Non-human

Joanne Leow

In the opening poem of her first collection, *Small Arguments* (2003), Souvankham Thammavongsa writes about the "only reading material" in her childhood home, the "old newspapers laid out / on the floor / to dry / our winter boots" (14). In the absence of conventional texts like books, the rest of the volume's poems take up the challenge of reading salt, water, fruit, weather, insects, and animals in meditations about memory, suffering, beauty, and loss. By paying attention to the non-human presences that surround the speaker, Thammavongsa's verses draw our attention to minute details that are usually overlooked. Her careful attention suggests a world larger and more entwined than the casual relationships that humans seem to have with these everyday objects and phenomena.

Metaphor functions in Thammavongsa's writing as a thing that hovers just out of one's grasp. A pear is a guitar, but not quite. A blood orange has not been struck and "yet there it is . . . stricken down" (23). A dragonfruit is almost a face with "a soft whiteness, freckled / with dark fragments" (25). Grapefruits have hearts, oranges have navels, the seed of a grape "is left unaware / of the body it will not become" (32). This incompletion marks the small arguments that Thammavongsa makes about these entities. In making these arguments, her poems resist a wholeness in their anthropomorphism that might suggest a form of mastery. Instead, there is a fearless plunge into the unknowable depths of cruelty that permeate the world, where even snow is abandoned, "left / or thrown aside; / the path / of every gutter" (40), where heaven turns away the grasshopper, there is no light to lead an ant's way, and the butterfly "knows / this is its last" (47). These almost-metaphors, or almost-personifications, thwart the reader's desire to draw simpler and more direct comparisons between the human and non-human.

This clear-eyed vision of our imperfect ability to describe animal, plant, landscape, and weather continues in her collection *Light* (2013). Thammavongsa's poems find revelatory perspectives to describe what we too often view as mundane and ordinary: a feather is part bone, like a plastic straw, but also like needles; "ash can have colour like life" (44); "A Volcano / is / what happens / when you try / to take / the sun down / from where it is" (60); and "The Dark / is light / when light / isn't here" (22). We see these flashes of insight again as her gaze expands outwards to the images in her short story collection *How to Pronounce Knife* (2020)—dead chickens whose "eyes [are] closed tight like they were sleeping" (13), "mould [that] looked like a field of black dandelions" (151), worms that are "stretching their bodies out into such a length that I wasn't even sure these were worms" (169). These nightmarish images remind us of our incomplete knowledge of the landscapes and entanglements with what Heather Swanson et al. have called "more-human-than-human-life" (M2) where "modes of noticing" (M7) are required. These are states of attention that require our "slowing down to listen to the world—empirically and imaginatively at the same time" (M8). Thammavongsa's bare yet precise observations of our limited sight seem particularly crucial in our time of distraction.

Indeed, the writer's singular voice and self-assuredness in the face of partial and fragmentary epistemologies recall Donna Haraway's question: "How can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?" (35, emphasis original). In this unfolding moment of climate catastrophe and of human and non-human peril, Thammavongsa's work gives us a purposefully flawed knitting of both in her images of brokenness, incompletion, and imperfection. Her words remind us of our smallness and ignorance while paradoxically refusing to capitulate to despair.

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Second Glances at *Small Arguments*

Warren Heiti

Souvankham Thammavongsa's first book of poetry is called *Small Arguments*. What is an argument? A kind of thought structure. A structure in which one thought—called the *thesis*—is supported by an organized set of other thoughts—called *reasons*.

In *Small Arguments*, the thesis is usually a thing. The poems think about things by attending to them.

*

There is a form of poetry which has been called *the thing poem* (Rilke) and *the elemental ode* (Neruda).

It focuses on a particular. But it thinks in images linking the particular with other things. For these reasons, the elemental ode may be described as a hybrid genre, one that flickers back and forth between this particular and its internal relations.

Its primary method of understanding is metaphorical: Zwicky's nuthatch is seen as a tiny crumhorn, "beady and antique," Neruda's handknit socks are seen as sharks, Crozier's clothes hanger is seen as a question mark, Rilke's broken statue is seen as a gaslamp turned down low.

If poetry had an essence, the elemental ode would be its distillate.

*

A FIREFLY

casts its body

into the night

arguing

against darkness and its taking

It is a small argument

lending itself to silence,

a small argument

the sun will never come to hear

Darkness,

unable to hold against

such tiny elegant speeches,

opens its palm

to set free a fire

its body could not put down (41)

The poem utters *light,* over and over, not as noun but as imperative.

It also makes a promise. In Thammavongsa's third book, *Light*, a colossal squid stares into the lightless abyss, its eyes, the size of dinner plates, waiting for the rarest photon.

*

The dragonfly's eye is composed of roughly thirty thousand facets, which generate a complex mosaic of imagery. While the human eye is sensitive to combinations of only three colours (red, green, and blue), the dragonfly's eye exhibits as many as thirty sensitivities (including to ultraviolet) (Futahashi et al. 1247). For the dragonfly, "the eyes / are the heaviest, / the most difficult / to carry" (56).

Unlike the human eye, it cannot close.

*

Inside its "small cathedral" (57), the snail is praying. The trees argue with gravity, the grasshopper keeps asking heaven for a place.

*

(In his lonely little mental cell, Descartes thinks that his inability to imagine the difference between a chiliagon and the shape of a dragonfly's eye is evidence of the body's existence.)

Meanwhile, growing up in the house without books, the poet never doubted it.

*

One of the first philosophers, from whom no writing survives, tells us that all things are full of gods.

Thammavongsa's poems defend the souls of fruit, insects, elements. In some, there is an almost forensic tenderness.

The poet slices into the worm and names and labels its parts.

The snow falls into "an open petal, / a trellised stem, / a metal fence" (39).

*

In *Found*, the speaker turns the same intense attention toward something rescued from the garbage: a father's scrapbook from a Lao refugee camp.

Seven of the poems are named after months in 1979. Each consists in a single diagonal line striking out the entire month. The wordless austerity of a petroglyph. If we look closely, we can see that each line is unique. We see what it means.

*

In *How to Pronounce Knife*, there is a printer who makes his own paper and mixes his own pigment for Lao wedding invitations. Each invitation is an individual. "He wore a headpiece with jeweller's magnifying glasses attached and went over every single letter on the invitations. He was determined to get the smallest of details exactly right . . ." (87).

*

Like Rilke under the inspiration of Rodin, like Neruda with his columns, his "slim stalks of celery," Thammavongsa sculpts her poems as though they were *things*. And they *are* things. The physicality of the poem matters, the exact placement of each letter on the graph.

"A Firefly" is fifty-six words shaped into three unstopped sentences. The rest is empty space. In its spareness, the poem is a spark in the void.

The first two sentences form the two quatrains of the octave, the third takes the entire sestet. An Italian sonnet, composed according to organic prosody. The volta marks the moment when darkness lets go.

The poem's most important rhyme—*argument* / *darkness*—forges a lyric harmony between the firefly and the massive force it resists.

The poem makes an argument for attending to the smallest things.

It argues not by debating, but by bearing witness.

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How to Pronounce Laos

Guy Beauregard

In their discussion of "The Cold War and Asian Canadian Writing," Christine Kim and Christopher Lee draw attention to "[a] significant moment in Canadian immigration history": the arrival in Canada of over sixty thousand refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Affecting lives in innumerable ways, this history of refugee passage has also become what Kim and Lee call an "important Cold War legacy that has impacted Asian Canadian writing" (268), notably in texts by Souvankham Thammavongsa, Kim Thúy, and Madeleine Thien focusing

"on matters of memory, generation, forced migration, and statelessness" (268). Turning to Thammavongsa's remarkable poetry collection *Found* (2007), and specifically to her poem "What I Can't Read," Kim and Lee observe that "the speaker prompts us to contemplate how Laos is represented and how such representations are intertwined with, and even bounded by, those of its neighbors, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and China" (269). In *Found*, such intertwining extends to include Canada as a presumed place of refuge as well as the unsettled legacies of the US bombing of Laos, inspiring me to think further about what I've elsewhere called *transpacific precarities* and how we might respond to texts that represent them, not only in North America but also in different sites in Asia, including at my home institution in Taiwan.[1]

The question of "how Laos is represented" has remained with me as I read Thammavongsa's debut collection of short stories, *How to Pronounce Knife* (2020). These stories cut sharply across lives marked by precarious conditions, with characters working in meat-packing plants or on farms, driving a school bus or working at a nail salon. Across many of these work spaces, the position of one's father, the shape of one's nose, and the colour of one's skin seem to determine who is eligible for advancement into managerial circles, and who is not. In the lead story, "How to Pronounce Knife," for example, the young protagonist

> listened as her father worried about his pay and his friends and how they were all making their living here in this new country. He said his friends, who were educated and had great jobs in Laos, now found themselves picking worms or being managed by pimple-faced teenagers. They'd had to begin all over again, as if the life they led before didn't count. (4)

The father then tells the daughter: "'Don't speak Lao and don't tell anyone you are Lao. It's no good to tell people where you're from.' The child looked at the centre of her father's chest, where, on this T-shirt, four letters stood side by side: LAOS" (4-5). The father's stern warning to *not speak Lao* and *not tell anyone you are Lao* sets in motion a powerful rhetorical device through which such warnings paradoxically keep attempts to speak and tell alive.[2] The irony made visible through the daughter's line of vision likewise keeps LAOS in sight, even as—and perhaps especially when—the protagonist struggles in and moves through the Canadian public school system and the specific forms of knowledge it assesses and rewards.

"If refugee is often understood as an aberrant condition," writes Vinh Nguyen, "then refugeetude is a condition of possibility, a method of knowing and affecting the world that holds on to the critical potential of refugeeness" (121).[3] In his circumspect account, Nguyen is careful to underline that this "condition of possibility" is far from assured. But if we take seriously Thammavongsa's writing as a sustained and ongoing "method of knowing and affecting the world," we may better understand how "Laos"—understood here as a signifier that is both locally situated and globally resonant—has not (yet) been adequately represented, a point also discussed by Bryan Thao Worra in his contribution to this forum. One way this inadequacy is made clear appears in the story "Edge of World" in which the narrator observes: "When my parents read the newspaper or watched the evening news, they never heard anything about what was happening in [Laos]. It was almost as if it didn't exist" (96). Thammavongsa's stories intervene in such circuits of representation—but this intervention is not simply a matter of providing new information or producing forms of positivist knowledge about Laos and its complex relations to Canada and other sites around the world. Instead, for variously situated scholars committed to thinking and writing about transpacific precarities, Thammavongsa's collection can be thought of as an important transpacific text that teaches us how to acknowledge—as the narrator movingly does in "Edge of the World"—the many things we do not, and perhaps cannot, know.

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NOTES

1 I've attempted to address these issues in "Transpacific Precarities: Responding to Souvankham Thammavongsa's *Found* and Rita Wong's *forage* in East Asia."

2 Homi K. Bhabha made this point in the 1990s in his discussion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*; see *The Location of Culture*, p. 18. See also Viet Thanh Nguyen's later articulation of this point in relation to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, pp. 194-95.

3 In mobilizing the term *refugeetude*, Nguyen builds upon the work of Khatharya Um

and the Critical Refugee Studies Collective. See Um's *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora*, p. 213; and the Critical Refugee Studies Collective's "Critical Vocabularies."

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Plots and Paths

Denise Cruz

I began writing this reflection on Souvankham Thammavongsa's *How to Pronounce Knife* by hand in an empty notebook. As I watched my sentences unfurl in black ink, I thought of the closing lines to one of my favourite poems, Thammavongsa's "Agnes Martin, Untitled #10," and couldn't help but imagine that she might approve. The first poem in Thammavongsa's 2013 award-winning collection, *Light,* "Agnes Martin, Untitled #10" closes with the lines, "the plot and path of a small single letter / The face of a country you can make yours: / the lines, the grids, the marks are here" (10). Whenever I teach this poem, my students and I collectively marvel at its playful reconstruction of openings and closings, bounds and rules. We talk about enjambment, the transition

from a colon to the lack of punctuation throughout the poem, the creation and disruption of structural patterns. We often end by discussing the materiality of the book itself. The paper that Thammavongsa chose for *Light*'s publication has a subtly ridged texture that evokes the grid-like layout of both Martin's original painting and the poem's layout on the page.

Thammavongsa has said that she often composes initial drafts of her poetry by hand using graph paper. She approaches the craft of writing with exactitude. This precision, the contrast between small, sparse lines and the blank expanse of a page, works alongside the shape of her poetic lines. Precise placement highlights the various scales and registers that inform her work, which are fuelled by a tension between "something" and "nothing." Thammavongsa once described her interest in this tension: "[I'm] interested in what a person can do when given the fewest possible resources . . . what a mind can do with what people call 'little'" ("The Trillium Conversations").

In Thammavongsa's poetry, attention to small details is pivotal because these details reveal what might be lost amid accounts of transnational and transpacific migration that stress urgency through enormity (the number of people, for example, affected by a global refugee crisis, or the lasting historical repercussions of transpacific violence and its aftereffects). It has been a pleasure to read Thammavongsa's fiction through the lens of her poetry. Like her poetry, Thammavongsa's fiction is compact, exact, economic, and sparse. It is also wry, moving, heartbreaking, and memorable. Her prose carefully layers sound and image. In the eponymous opening story of *How to Pronounce Knife,* for example, Thammavongsa's first paragraph plays with alliterative "n" sounds across five sentences ("note," "not," "notes," "no"). It's a subtle preface to a painful scene: the narrator's mispronunciation of the word "knife" in school and her realization and negotiation of what her Lao parents do and do not know. The opening repetition of "n" in various forms of writing (the notes) and negation (not and no) sonically and visually recalls forms of erasure (the silent "k" in "knife" and "know").

In *Light,* Thammavongsa includes a series of shape poems, laid out visually in similar ways but with subtle differences, like the outline of a puzzle piece that almost but does not quite fit. The repeated image also holds together stories in *How to Pronounce Knife.* "How to Pronounce

Knife" ends with the father and child working on a puzzle. They begin with the borders and fill in the rest. The image of a puzzle returns roughly a hundred pages later in the story "Edge of the World." In this story, the child works on the puzzle as a mother watches, and a map of the world emerges. When the puzzle is finished, the mother and child argue. "'Just because I never went to school,'" the mother says, "'doesn't mean I don't know things'" (102). This moment is a revelation for the child, who understands what her

> mother knew then. She knew about war, what it felt like to be shot at in the dark, what death looked like up close in your arms, what a bomb could destroy. Those were things I didn't know about, and it was all right not to know them, living where we did now, in a country where nothing like that happened. There was a lot I did not know. (102)

Recalling the content, imagery, and sonic and visual dynamics of those opening sentences in "How to Pronounce Knife," here Thammavongsa again highlights erasures, absences, gaps, and distance, redefining the meaning of "nothing" and what her characters—and we as readers—do and do not know. Her poetry and fiction examine hierarchies that subsume the small amid the large, from the experience of those rendered inconsequential by a nation-state, to the status of Asian Canadian writing alongside canonical Canadian works of literature, to the "minor" status of poetry in relation to prose as the primary genre for the study of race in North America, to our lingering assumptions and tendencies in the study of transpacific relations.[1]

NOTES

1 On the emphasis on prose in studies of Asian American literature, see Koshy; and Konzett.

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On Names and Resonances

Y-Dang Troeung

Souvankham Thammavongsa's name dances on my tongue with a singsong melody that reminds me of many of the sounds, cadences, and rhythms of Southeast Asia. When I gave a copy of Thammavongsa's book *How to Pronounce Knife* to my cousin, whose surname was once Phannavong, she immediately recognized the name: "Oh that's *definitely* a Lao name," she said. I told my cousin to start by reading the story "You Are So Embarrassing." I believed she would recognize something heartbreakingly true in this story: a resonance with the memories of how our mothers and sisters and aunts had worked on the farm grounds and the factory lines, year after year, as refugees in Canada; I hoped she would feel the twinges of excited familiarity, as I did while reading Thammavongsa's stories, at all the references to the joys and sorrows of rural small-town Canadian life as experienced from the vantage point of Southeast Asian refugees.

My cousin remarked that *How to Pronounce Knife* was the first book I had ever given to her by an author with a Lao name. Like Phannavong, Thammavongsa had that cadence of the many Lao names that rang throughout our childhoods: Sayavongs, Chanthavong, Phromprasack, Rasavong, Vongxay, Khampaseuth. These were the names that filled the wedding halls with seven hundred guests or more at a time; that created the ingenious worm-picking networks enabling Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotian refugees to survive in those early years of resettlement in Canada; that packed a single suburban home with dozens of extended family members for a ritual gathering such as a birthday party or a Lao Buddhist funeral. These names exerted a mental and affective pull for my cousin and me, a nostalgia for an intimate way of being and relating to family, to community, and to the earth and the land that I associated with my childhood days.

In a recent interview about "Writing Refugees," Thammavongsa discussed the multiple acts of refusal she has had to navigate as a Canadian author: her refusal to be relegated to the role of a Lao native informant;

her refusal to anglicize her name to make it easier for white audiences to pronounce, despite pressure from literary publishers. Thammavongsa stressed the importance of asserting those difficult-to-pronounce names that serve as indelible markers of our histories. These names are markers not because they represent something noble, heroic, or authentic about our racial or cultural selves, but because of how they move across fields of relations, creating intimate publics and lifeworlds that might otherwise be foreclosed. What Souvankham Thammavongsa's name signifies to me is a Canadian author's refusal to foreclose this possibility of community and encounter: with Lao history, with Southeast Asian people, with Asian diasporic communities, and with all people of colour whose names and beings have been traditionally read as "difficult" or unintelligible.

Thammavongsa's acts of disobedience place her within a long genealogy of women of colour writers who have similarly refused to be named or renamed. In Thammavongsa's work, I hear resonances with Anida Yoeu Ali's poem "What's in a Name?," in which the poet asserts that "My name knows my mother labored screaming for hours only to mourn a year later as she buried her sorrow" (2); with Larissa Lai's mythical protagonist in *When Fox is a Thousand,* who reflects that "A name must carry you into the past and the future. It needs roots to tap the water deep below the surface of the earth" (243). These writers assert the importance of being carried and transported by our names, that these roots need to be nourished and watered in order for the deep networks to remain sustainable.

Author Viet Thanh Nguyen has written about his experience of being "encouraged by generations of American tradition to believe that it was normal, desirable and practical to adopt an American first name, and even to change one's surname to an American one." Like Nguyen who "tried on various names" growing up in America, and like the character Chantakad in Thammavongsa's story who changes her name to Celine, I have worn many different names throughout my life, sometimes changing it out of embarrassment and exhaustion, sometimes out of fun and playfulness. In the end, I have always returned to the name that my parents gave me, the gift that tethers me to their past in Cambodia.

The story of our names, how we play with them and deploy them, says something about the changing landscape of Canadian literature. It gestures

to the shifting nature of who Canadian literature is being written *by* and *for*. On the cover of a book, Souvankham Thammavongsa's name demands a different kind of stop, pause, and attention. It says: this name is part of the work, part of the world and futures this book wants to make.

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There Are No Prizes

Souvankham Thammavongsa

There are no prizes when it is the first day of school. The children around you are all crying, clinging to their mothers, begging not to go. You do not cling to your mother. You know what this day means for all of you. You are five. You steel yourself and you don't look back. Not even as your mother sobs like the children around her. You tell her everything will be all right, and she is grown up now. There are no prizes when you know you will never have that shoe or dress. When the mould on the walls comes back. Over and over again. You will never live in that big blue house on the street. The one whose driveway you pretend to walk up when someone drops you off. There wasn't a prize for living in a van with your family. Not a single prize for doing all that math homework. Except the knowledge that the square of the Hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. And this fact would be this way, certain and forever. You make a wish on that moving light in the sky. "It's a plane,

stupid," someone says. But you make one anyway because you've never seen a shooting star. A wish is a wish. There isn't a prize for having been there. There isn't a prize for you when you are told, "That's nothing," or "That's not a living," and you write anyway. There isn't a prize when you ride a bus three hours every weekend for four months. There isn't a prize for not leaving. There isn't a prize for knowing exactly who you are. There isn't a prize when you crawl underneath your office desk to sleep. No prize when you count bags of cash five levels below the basement. No prize, at all, when you lose the job you have had for fifteen years and have to start all over again. There isn't a prize when the lights in the room dim and a space clears, and you think it'll be different this time around, and it turns out just all the same. Certainly no prize for what you had to do, and there won't ever be. There's just no prize for telling the truth. Not even a jury to gather and deliberate. No prize for keeping the herbs on the balcony. No prize for feeling the sunlight on your face in the morning. No prize for that afternoon in the park. There was a bee. He said, "If you blow on it, they go away." There is never a prize when it rains. There isn't a prize when you turn forty-two. There is just a number divisible by two. Not that you don't want, but that want can't ever be anything right now. Isn't it better to have something that can belong to you? There isn't a prize for the near misses, the failures, the things you left off the page to get what you can on the page. The playground is full of children. They are walking unsteadily and look like they will fall over. None of them are yours. And it is probably too late for you. Keeping wood to wood. Having never carried a split. I live in this world too, you say. And there is no prize for that. In the end, there are just worms. Crawling and stretching out. You want to drop them all. But everyone wants this job and your mom got you in. So you hold on. The Styrofoam cups are filled. The door will remain locked. And you will put a finger up to the peephole so no one can see your open eye.

Camille Lendor

TTC

Waiting in the subway
minding your own business
listening to Sister Sledge

ZOOMPH

The train speeds by
hits you
in the face
with dust
warm rodent fecal-laden dust

You hold your breath until the doors slide open
You walk in – scrambling indecisively for a seat
and it smells

The most curious of smells.
Your nose points in every direction.

Garbage?
No.
Urine?
No.
Alcohol?
No.

It smells like unbathed skin and stale scalp and hopelessness
and old cigarette smoke and poor circulation and you can't help
but inhale because you wonder how
suffering could have a smell.

Rebirth of the Flesh

Barney Allen; Gregory Betts, ed.
They Have Bodies: A Critical Edition. U of Ottawa P $29.95

Reviewed by Krzysztof Majer

Reinscribing a text which, in its own time, had minimal circulation can be a tricky procedure: expectations are high, as are the stakes in the critical game when alternative histories and traditions are hypothesized. Gregory Betts' presentation of Solomon Barney Allen's debut novel, *They Have Bodies*, now published as part of the admirable Editing Modernism in Canada project, is a case in point. "Allen's novel was disappeared"—as Betts puts it in his very informative introduction (xii)—seized by the Toronto police on obscenity charges soon after its publication in 1929, and, in effect, erased from the history of Canadian literature. The deliberate violence to the novel is made clear by the editor when he calls *They Have Bodies* "the first sacrificial entry of the Canadian literary avant-garde" (xliv).

Betts is ideally suited to the task of resurrecting and re-examining Allen's suppressed text. A poet himself, he is the author of *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* (2013), and he has prepared several critical editions of Canadian modernist works, including the poetry of Raymond Knister as well as Bertram Brooker's short fiction and essays. Betts' work can be seen in the context of a broader, revisionist trend in studies of modernism and modernity, where hegemonic conceptualizations of phenomena such as the avant-garde are reconsidered and pluralized. Allen's novel receives a meticulous treatment, with an extensive critical introduction, a set of explanatory notes, and an appraisal of textual emendations. Not the least impressive accomplishment here is the reconstruction—from scant sources—of the writer's life, such that his intriguing personality is thrown sharply into focus.

It is in the context of the 1920s avant-garde, Betts argues, that *They Have Bodies* ought to be read: as a work ahead of its time in terms of both political thrust and formal daring, unmatched in the Canadian context until the advent of Elizabeth Smart, Sheila Watson, or Leonard Cohen in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, respectively. As Betts demonstrates, the act of censorship by the Toronto police, affording the writer no legal means of defending his work, both deprived the

Canadian modernist tradition of a milestone and considerably blunted the edge of Allen's literary innovation. Although he went on to publish three more novels—*The Woman's Doctor* (1933), *Toronto Doctor* (1949), and *The Gynecologist* (1965)—his diminished career turned out to be, as Betts declares, "a nearly forty-year progression from avant-garde experimentation to commercial pulp romance" (xxv).

As per the title, Allen's novel focuses on carnality, and more precisely on the social consequences of unbridled passion in the sanctimonious upper class, represented by the intertwined families of the Gilberts and the Taylors. In short, the set of wealthy, smug Torontonians emerge from the sex scandal at the novel's centre practically unscathed, leaving behind them a trail of victims—young women who work as housemaids and secretaries. The Gilberts and Taylors are the sort that F. Scott Fitzgerald described in *The Great Gatsby* as "careless people": those who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness . . . and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (179). Betts is right to point out that *They Have Bodies* is, perhaps most of all, a bitter satire on Toronto's upper crust, unmasking "systemic abuse of power . . . [and] a culture of normalized sexual harassment" (xii). With God, Law, and Money on their side (the inclusion of a bishop, a justice, and a businessman in one family is a telling detail), they are bound to triumph.

The clout which Betts ascribes to *They Have Bodies*, however, is due also to its formal aspects: the ubiquitous ellipses (or, in Betts' phrasing, "extreme punctuation" [xi]), the abrupt shifts in perspective and "dialogic indeterminacy" (151), the loosening of grammatical categories, and the extensive use of the interior monologue. Allen's novel is an early example of the influence of *Ulysses*—which at the time, as the editor reminds us, was still banned in Canada, and would remain so for another twenty years. Yet, having established Joyce's modern odyssey as a reference point, Betts is right not to insist upon too close a relationship between the two works, and, instead, to link *They Have Bodies* more broadly to Freudian psychoanalysis (itself, of course, an important intellectual component of the modernist project). Ultimately, it is a popular version of Freudianism—with its well-disseminated categories of libido, repression, and sublimation, its linking of the sexual and the social—which is dominant in *They Have Bodies*, and which seems to propel Allen's subsequent novels. I believe that it is precisely this narrowing and intensification of focus which, despite the shared obscenity charges, makes Allen's debut ultimately quite unlike *Ulysses*. Betts also convincingly argues for Canadian parallels in the modern-realist paradigm (e.g., the work of Morley Callaghan), from which Allen's text appears, at first glance, to formally distance itself.

One must, however, acknowledge the many ways in which *They Have Bodies* manifests a modernist aesthetic. Much is made by Betts, rightly so, of the novel's self-consciousness: its tongue-in-cheek subtitle (*A Realistic Novel in Eleven*

Chapters and Three Acts); the heterogeneous structure itself, allowing shifts to the dramatic mode to point up the cheap theatricality of family drama; the ellipses, signalling narrative disturbance, cuts, and deliberate omissions, perhaps evocative of experimental film editing. Another remarkable feature of the novel, as the editor points out, is how it imagines and stages its own censorship—in the form of "the Joynsett blasphemy case" (32), tried by Justice Taylor, in which the offending artist is punished with six months' imprisonment in the Ontario Reformatory. To those aspects highlighted by Betts one ought to add the wildly improbable names of various trading partners (perhaps indebted to Fitzgerald's famous catalogue of Gatsby's guests) which pepper the turgid flow of Horace Gilbert's almost entirely commodified thought in the ninth and tenth chapters. Here we find the likes of Hunniset & Beescombe, Snizzlewood & Snozzleworth, Papassmachass & Perlapoodas, Brumley & Grumley, and Winterbottom, Frost & Sleighman.

The very lexicon also bears signs of experiment, but in this aspect the novel seems less successful. Invention of this sort occurs most frequently in the thoughts of Horace Gilbert, the reprehensible paterfamilias-protagonist. He is a surprising fit for such attempts at linguistic volatility, since his speech seems the most dated, leading his lover, the housemaid Olive—roughly his daughters' age—to call it "that funny little old language . . . that nobody else seems to know" (54). His dialogue is rife with phrases such as "dash it all," "in the deuce," "jolly," "oh rot," and "no end of a cad," which makes him sound as if he has stepped out of *Daisy Miller* rather than a work censored on the grounds of obscenity. Yet his interior monologue features many adjectival coinages with the *-ish* suffix, such as "Mary Magdalenish" (53), "Joan of Arcish" (99), "indecentish" (82), "aristocratish" (98), "come-hitherish" (94), and "hair-on-the-backish" (97). Apart from these, also in their nominal morphings, and the odd sequence of clustered adverbs ("grouchily, surlily, sullenly, disgruntedly" [87]), there is little linguistic experiment per se. Curiously enough, the effect is the opposite of that (perhaps) intended: instead of the nasty, liberating freshness afforded by a Joycean "snotgreen" or "scrotumtightening," the coinages in Allen's novel, perhaps in keeping with its carnal focus, resemble a nervous tic.

While its formal experimentation brings mixed results, *They Have Bodies* certainly succeeds in exposing systemic misogyny, and in foregrounding desire as the driving force of the "machine age" (xv)—or, for that matter, any age. Unsurprisingly, from a contemporary perspective, the "obscenity" on which the original censorship pivoted is preposterous. The passage once deemed particularly distasteful concerns two employees at the company office—entirely marginal characters—on top of a "new glass-topped mahogany desk" (96), "going at it like a couple of dogs in a hay-loft" (96). The paradox here—that, far from naturalistic verisimilitude, the offending fragment is a simile, with the "hay-loft" thrown in for a poetic touch—is instructive: apparently it was by portraying the elite of Toronto as lustful, self-righteous hypocrites that Barney Allen truly transgressed.

The novel's obsession with physicality is emphasized through a series of bodily metaphors, often relating to the society as an organism threatened by disease. For example, when Horace's socialist daughter Kay wants to help a mentally disadvantaged child, she learns from a psychologist that "the scientific view is to lop him off like a gangrenous leg" (26). After Miss Nelson (the secretary fired by Horace for rejecting his sexual advances) demands an explanation, he questions the need for "raking up old sores" (128). To Horace's outraged father-in-(literal)-law, Justice Taylor, the affair with Olive is likewise a "running sore" which must be effectively cauterized (112). On the whole, flesh seems to be a necessary evil, but its rank stench—as Taylor calls it during one of the family conclaves—ought not to be aired publicly.

"Sexuality," Betts argues in his introduction, "obtrudes on all interactions, obstructing both business and social events, distracting and subverting all conversations" (xxx). Nor is the impulse restricted to the generally permissible. Enraged and aroused, Horace Gilbert may be turning over in his mind the phrase "Now what in the deuce was a wife for anyway?" (82) (with possible echoes of Stephen Dedalus' angry "What else were they invented for?" [50]), but the object of his attention is not his "plump, gold-blonde" wife Peggy (54). A concatenation of desire, supposedly originating in Olive's forbidden body—and denied in turn by several women, the secretary and Peggy among them—erupts in a tempestuous affair with his best friend's wife, the grotesque-bodied Ruth Polton. And yet, on closer scrutiny, Horace's passion reveals still other, more illicit, roots.

From the start, an incestuous air hangs over Horace's fling with Olive. When he defends his feelings as paternal—because Olive "has had a very stony time in life" (57)—he is only half lying. Correspondingly, the encounters with his "flapperish" eighteen-year-old daughter Mona, whom he thinks of as the "choicest of the lot," are always awkward and erotically charged (39). He cannot rid himself of the memory of her "shaking herself into a frock" (89) and of a kiss she gave him ("Well, that was more like . . ." [40]), and when she sits in his lap at the company office, he upbraids her as he would an illegitimate lover ("[C]an't you see we're not alone [. . .] None of that . . . Pull your skirts down, young lady . . ." [67]).

However, Olive is not just a working-class version of Mona, and thus a safer locus of rerouted desire. Throughout, she is given peculiar descriptions, the most common of which is "ogreish" (5); several members of the Gilbert household seem to agree on this demeaning term, with its plainly classist tinge. We soon learn, however, that Horace considers Olive "masculinish and yet strangely fascinating" (19). This recurrent thought about her body's "unnatural" aspects (here, for once, the *-ish* suffix performs marvellously, marking a troublesome indeterminacy) makes him notice that Olive's "torso front" and "torso back" are like those "of a welter-weight prize-fighter" (21). All this culminates in an effusion of compliments that seems directed at Olive's hair colour, but manages to praise a number of other attributes: "That you should be strong and fenickity [*sic*] and healthy and rosy and

broad-shouldered and without breasts, is delightful enough. But that you should have *red* hair . . ." (52). There is an undercurrent of queerness here, a far greater threat to the Gilberts' and Taylors' hypocritically genteel stability than they are able to imagine—at least in the pages of Allen's novel.

A number of other issues could have sparked stimulating discussion if the novel had been read and examined at the time rather than summarily dismissed as indecent. Consider, for instance, the stabs Allen takes at the enshrined memory of Canadian involvement in the Great War—a mere decade after the fact. It is not just the case of Peggy Gilbert questioning her husband's devotion to his service at Vimy and Amiens: "'Oh, why are you so stubbornly loyal to these shadowy things of the past?'" (24). A more staggering blow is delivered by the plot itself: Horace Gilbert and Fred Polton, supposedly bound by their fidelity in the field of battle, covet and bed each other's wives. The moral authority of the lost generation seems already eroded, as is the supposed respectability of the two men's jobs: Gilbert is a businessman, Polton a defence counsel.

From a contemporary perspective, it is also fascinating to consider *They Have Bodies* as an early novel written in English by a Jewish Canadian author, predating A. M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* by a good two decades. As we know from Betts' introduction, Allen came from a family of Russian immigrants who arrived in Brantford, Ontario, via Pennsylvania, and who went on to become pioneers of the film industry as well as builders of luxury venues such as Allen's Danforth Theatre in Toronto and the Allen Theatre in Calgary. While *They Have Bodies*, with its distinctly WASPish perspective, offers no direct problematization of Jewishness, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the treatment of social/ethnic outcasts. A glaring example is the relationship between Horace and a young "Italianish" painter, Mario Kandor, who proposes to his daughter Betty (68). The name—with possible echoes of "cantor"—is meaningful, since the painter manages to elicit a rare moment of truth from the disingenuous protagonist.

Horace Gilbert is no Poldy Bloom, no spiritual father to any bumbling Telemachus. His prudish sense of order and decency abhors notions of modern art and Bohemianism, and his storied first name offers a humorous contrast to a remarkably tedious mind. He repeats the platitude that Kandor "paints with a bludgeon and then tries to bludgeon you with his painting" (23); more importantly, he spurns the young man as a "bounder" (23). Unlike Bloom—Dublin's tolerated, self-conscious alien—Horace Gilbert wields social power in Toronto; he detects and polices otherness in Kandor, demanding: "How do we know what sort of tainted stock he may have sprung from? What's his nationality anyway? Is it Italian? If so, then why does he hide it? If not, why not?" (23). At a crucial moment, repelling Kandor's half-hearted gesture of reconciliation, he blurts out: "I've no wish to have you for a near relative . . ." (69).

Unlike Betts, I hesitate to call Allen's text a "*chef-d'oeuvre*" (xii); I believe a more measured response to this significant yet flawed novel will, in the long run, serve

it better. One thing is clear: in 1929, *They Have Bodies* deserved to be treated as a morally courageous, aesthetically imperfect instance of modernist fiction by a fledgling writer, and to be judged on its artistic merits—not according to some misconceived notion of moral rectitude. Resurfacing today, after nearly a century, it cannot but appear dated in some aspects, even as it proves remarkably progressive in others; it certainly takes pride of place among experimental Canadian novels of the interwar years.

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Drilling Down

Marianne Apostolides
I Can't Get You Out of My Mind. Book*hug $23.00

Josephine Boxwell
Unravelling. Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

These two novels explore the ambivalent emotions and motivations that underlie communal and familial relationships. They also emphasize the reverberating aftershock of pivotal incidents on both individuals and Canadian communities, metropolitan and rural. Marianne Apostolides' latest book, *I Can't Get You Out of My Mind*, interlaces an intellectually engaging discourse on attachment and desire with an intimate picture of the primary character, Ariadne. The almost-cliché phrase in the title becomes a tool to probe the very concept of "mind" through its inclusion of a quirky relationship that is part of a study on artificial intelligence. The narrative is both agonizing and darkly humorous, exploring the fabric of Ariadne's dissertation research on desire, her addiction to an unsatisfying relationship with a married man, relationships with young adult children and aging parents, and philosophical exploration of attachment and commitment itself. The narrative is most engaging when it delves into psychoanalytical theory and raises questions that have driven both scholarly and creative meditations on the impulse to connect with others. It becomes less successful—though still fascinating—when it takes the reader into the arena of AI and its appropriation for both constructive and harmful purposes. The author's extensive bibliography at the end of the novel underscores her thorough and incisive research into studies of brain mapping. It does not present any definite position but leaves the reader to ponder the limits of scientific study, the mysteries of love, and the painful yet compelling repercussions of being in relationship. Intriguingly, most of the exploration takes place within

Ariadne's own "mind," so that its effect demonstrates both our isolation and our need for connection with others.

While Apostolides delves into the mystery of mind and human connection, Josephine Boxwell's *Unravelling* drills deep into the motivations—both personal and political—that result in tragic public events, and the consequences of these events on individual and communal lives. Alternating between two characters' perspectives, and multiple time periods, a child and an elderly woman become inextricably connected through a catastrophic disaster at a sawmill in the fictional Stapleton, British Columbia. More extraordinary is the way this tragedy and its catalysts are rooted in multiple layers of buried history—displacement of Indigenous peoples, the disappeared casualties of BC's growing economy, the use of areas for nuclear testing, Japanese internment camps, and Chinese contributors to the building of BC's economy—hidden beneath the town's placid surface of coffee shops and local gossip. Elena Reid loses her father during the explosion, but unknowingly uncovers the shocking underbelly of her community's past and present. Caught in an increasing mental fog of dementia, the elderly Vivian Lennox—pillar of the Stapleton community—is haunted by the disaster and her own complicity in it. While these two characters are central in the narrative, the novel simultaneously unravels the roles and motivations of multiple family and community members. From the "old Chinese cemetery" and its ghosts, to the living ghosts that are the consequence of the explosion at the sawmill, Elena inadvertently slips into a whirlpool of shame and human suffering, represented in the river that runs through the town. The narrative is most powerful when exploring these perspectives—and the reader learns much about the "ghost towns" that are one of Boxwell's personal fascinations. It loses intensity when it dips into the genre of mystery or crime story, closer to the end of the book. While we are compelled to learn the truth about the disaster and what happened to Elena's father in the explosion, the story becomes less personally engaging; it pulls the reader back with its final exploration of Vivian's increasingly solipsistic thought patterns, but resists identification of heroes and villains in the tragedy. The reader is drawn to empathize even with Vivian as she is caught in the desire for vengeance by the family of the victims.

The novels *I Can't Get You Out of My Head* and *Unravelling* are evocative of the Prince's final rebuke to the adults in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate, / That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love . . . all are punish'd." While these two novels both address the tangled nexus of love and hate, familial bonds, sorrow and longing, they have distinct approaches, audiences, and settings in their attempts to drill down into human experience, motivation, and history. Both explore the collateral damage of contemporary inquiries and initiatives in psychology and history, ultimately underscoring the power of narrative to draw us into the lives and minds of others. While I read *Unravelling* as an engrossing study of character, I serendipitously learned much

about the individual lives caught in the building of BC and Canada in general. Similarly, the superficially titled *I Can't Get You Out of My Mind* probes the psychological depths of obsessive attachment, the implications of AI, and the neuroscience of intimacy. Both novels ultimately invite intellectually challenging reflections on old questions, and on the uses and abuses of scientific enquiry in contemporary Canada.

Slivers and Gaps

Tammy Armstrong
Year of the Metal Rabbit. Gaspereau $21.95

Jennica Harper
Bounce House. Anvil $18.00

Alex Leslie
Vancouver for Beginners. Book*hug $18.00

Reviewed by Andrea MacPherson

New poetry collections from Tammy Armstrong, Jennica Harper, and Alex Leslie showcase the breadth and depth of contemporary Canadian poetry. These poets are fearless in their voices and their approaches to subject matter. Travelling from skyscrapers to airplanes to rural walks in Nova Scotia, each of these collections highlights these accomplished poets working at the height of their talents.

Jennica Harper's fourth book of poetry, *Bounce House*, is a long poem that "contains the uncontainable." The collection navigates the uncertainty in raising a child while caring for a dying parent. Harper writes, "This is not a story. I want to narrativize / but the planks don't meet clean. It's all / slivers and gaps between the slats," and this quite accurately summarizes the way the poems shift and overlap, the way each poem both builds and responds to the next, as if they are in an intimate dialogue. The poems balance, sometimes uncomfortably, between the brimming joy and liveliness of childhood, and the grief and sorrow of death. Harper is not afraid to dig beneath the surface of the poems to reveal the honest—and sometimes difficult—truths in life: the imperfections of parenthood, the frustrations of death, and all the messes in between that make up the human experience.

The poems in the collection are created in a four-couplet shape which acts to further "contain" the poems, resulting in an appealing compression. She writes, "Once, within twenty-four hours, I'd washed / both their hair. Each fine & lightly waved," and this parallelism is indicative of the many ways that the poems act as mirrors to one another, the light catching each moment just so. Harper's style is spare, but her images and turns of phrase arresting; the intimacy she renders in mundane moments such as washing hair illuminates the intimacy and physical intensity that comes with being both a parent and a caretaker for a dying loved one. Despite the darkness in some of the subject matter, Harper's poems remain

airy, due in large part to the physical structure. There are no easy answers or easy solutions within this collection, but the long-poem sequence lets us immerse ourselves in the experience.

Tammy Armstrong also seeks to immerse her readers in her collection *Year of the Metal Rabbit*, her fifth book of poetry. The poems in this collection travel the terrain of often-rural Nova Scotia, drawing heavily from the natural world. The poems are populated with flora and fauna, and the atmosphere becomes thick and weighted, fully revealing specific landscapes. Armstrong writes, "I barely noticed / when summer swaggered off / and autumn's low burn cindered / its mobile weather," and this captures the meditative quality that runs through these poems. The poems are lyrical in their construction, the language careful and fresh to reveal the narrative.

Landscape, in general, is an important aspect to Armstrong's work. This ranges from the blustery Maritimes to coastal Mexico, and Armstrong is particularly adept at allowing these dynamic landscapes both to ground the reader and to further amplify the surprising turns in the poems in unexpected ways.

Unexpected is also an apt word to describe Alex Leslie's second poetry collection, *Vancouver for Beginners*. Leslie's poems are ingenious and complex, following versions of Vancouver past, present, and future. The poems both document and interrogate the city itself, considering the positioning of its habitants during the rise of development, the opioid crisis, and all the other daily realities of life in a busy, frustrating city. Leslie explores pivotal moments in Vancouver's history, including Robert Pickton, the inevitable earthquake threat, and the gentrification of the Downtown Eastside. Leslie is a thoughtful and cerebral writer, and these demanding and difficult topics are explored in a precise and profound manner.

The pieces within this collection fluctuate between prose poems and more traditional poetic structures—some dense, some shorter vignettes, coupled with startling language and sharply drawn images: there is a "house built of fishbones and compasses," "a taxi bargains with seagulls," and "bodies were dragged down with the timbers for counting." Leslie creates reverberations within the poems, and the collection feels like a collage, fragments of a larger narrative, each one essential. Every poem is assured, every word chosen for its weight, and the result is a beautiful collection that is both inspired by, and lamenting for, a city that is never satisfied.

Long Poems, Serial Poems: On Writing Writing

George Bowering; Stephen Collis, ed.
Taking Measures: Selected Serial Poems. Talonbooks $49.95

Reviewed by Alessandra Capperdoni

In delving into this recently published collection, we have proof of what we already suspected of George Bowering's work. Few poets have been able to produce such a vast poetic corpus. Few poets have interwoven so intimately writing and life. I first met Bowering many years ago through his voice—a reading that left me under a spell. But the image of him that comes to mind when reading his poetry is the body of the writer at his desk, writing, incessantly writing.

The volume, curated and introduced by Stephen Collis, is part of the Talonbooks Collected series of poetry, which includes some of the closest of Bowering's fellow poets and friends—Phyllis Webb, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and Roy Miki. Not surprisingly, this volume can be only a narrow selection of his work—a Complete Poems publication would have required several volumes.

Every selection implies a choice of inclusion and exclusion. Here the form of the serial poem provides the formal logic of the assemblage. But then one has to ask oneself if such logic, which is suggested by the subtitle to the volume, is not a playful gesture: isn't it true that to a larger or lesser degree all of Bowering's poetry performs a seriality of sorts? Is seriality in the compositional process of the author or in the reading process of the audience? In his introduction, Collis is right in situating the seriality of Bowering's poetry in the context of the procedural poetics that were the marker of much post-1960s poetry in Canada, from the TISH group to the language poetries of later decades. Marjorie Perloff, following Jacques Roubaud, describes the "constraint" of procedural poetics as "a *generative* device" rather than external form (25). In Bowering's long poems, the constraint operates through the form of seriality as well as the chance occasion for constructing it: rather than external form, seriality is turned into "thematic property of the poem" (Perloff 25). In *Genève*, for example, the occasion is given by leafing through a pack of tarot cards and in *Allophanes* by the compositional frame of Robin Blaser's classes, which Bowering was attending while writing, whereas in *Autobiology* the compositional device is provided by "things that have happened to me physically and had their effects mentally" (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books* 43-44).

Seriality also brings forth the presence of the many dialogic partners in Bowering's poetry. The "serial poem" was Jack Spicer's description of writing that would bring into the poem chance and non-chance, the known and the unknowable, as well as the procedure of "dictation" in order to dissolve the expressive mode of the poetic ego. To what extent Bowering actually follows Spicer's "in joke" advice cannot be addressed in the short space of this review but there is no denying that rather than falling prey to an "anxiety of influence" the poet keeps conversing, wrestling, sometimes sparring with the models of

his youth. The presence of Spicer is felt in many of these poems, especially up to *Kerrisdale Elegies*, alongside Spicer's fellow poets of the San Francisco Renaissance, Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan. But we also recognize the modality of Charles Olson's projective verse, his composition by field, the poetic kinetics of breath and physiology, rhythm, and a new stance toward reality. Many poetic figures traverse Bowering's poetry. Alongside the principal reading referents of what was later to be described as language poetry—the experimentations of Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams, H. D. and Pound—Bowering includes and resituates into the present the "Other" experimentations: nineteenth-century Romantic English language poetry, P. B. Shelley and Blake; as well as the French, Baudelaire and Mallarmé; but also the many poetic voices of an increasing field of poetics from Canada. The dialogic quality of the long poem becomes evident not only in the response to other poetries and poetic figures, but also in the way in which various worlds and various poetic principles are hosted in co-existence without being mechanically absorbed into the consciousness of a dominant poetic voice. We find the incorporation of incompatible material alongside a plurality of what Bakhtin would call consciousness-centres, and while a musing (lyrical?) poetic voice is always detectable, it is not a voice of merging consciousness. The ego, here, is not master in his own house.

The poems are arranged chronologically, from 1967 until 2013, with each seriality punctuating a "time," and a tempo, in Bowering's writing. *Baseball: A Poem in the Magic Number 9* opens the sequence and it is difficult not to recognize in this choice not only the trait of the poet's personal mythologies (Bowering's love for baseball) but an organizational mode of language as language-at-play-in-the-world and at the same time a cue to the author's poetic friendship with Jack Spicer (the poem is dedicated to Spicer, and Spicer is mentioned *in* the poem). The great hits of postmodern poetics of the 1970s and 1980s are all included—*Genève*, *Autobiology*, *At War with the US*, *Allophanes*, and *Kerrisdale Elegies*—with the addition of three works from the 1980s rarely taken up by critics: *Smoking Mirror*, *Irritable Reaching*, and *Delayed Mercy*. The selection from the 1990s is more restricted, including *Do Sink* and *Blonds on Bikes*, whereas the new century is represented by *His Life* and *Los Pájaros de Tenacatita*.

Reading the poems in sequence produces an effect of estranging stupor, taking the individual series out of its own book-length containment and resituating it in a different thread of possibilities. The chain of significations multiplies and reveals previously uncovered traces. It rearranges the very idea of form. Different serialities are deployed but the procedure of working through constraints maintains a certain coherence and the book itself takes on the quality of a book-length poem—it is up to the reader to uncover further openings. Distinct features of Bowering's poetry also concretize in a new light: the phenomenological quality of his poetry, the poetic eye's movement toward objects and places, the intersection of geographies and histories, the body as, to quote Merleau-Ponty, "my-being-in-the-world"

that thwarts the imaginary of the ego, but also the play of traces in the "work" of language, and writing as an act of translation.

The latter feature merits a separate comment. The translational quality of Bowering's work takes up diverse dimensions. When directly following the chosen poet, Bowering calls his poems "imitations," possibly "variations," possibly in line with Duncan's term "derivations." They are gestures that always reveal his stance as a "faithful" reader. Some of these cases are more overt, such as *Autobiology* with Gertrude Stein and *Kerrisdale Elegies* with Rilke, but Bowering's writerly engagement with the many poets that traversed his life, either as books or as live friends, is testified by the many traces they leave in his poetry. Many are Canadian poets, primarily of his generation or close by, so that as readers we are gifted with an archeology of writing in the mode, to cite Duncan again, of writing writing. But translation is also the translation of experience in the world without falling into the expressive, the exploration of the connection between language and the sensorial, language and the world through which we live and see, hear, touch.

Such a phenomenological and translational stance toward reality is woven into the fabric of the poetry formally, conceptually, and politically. The title of the collection, *Taking Measures*, cues William Carlos Williams' line that "[a]ll verse is measure" and his work *The Desert Music*, suggesting the musical measures of tempo, measures of movement across space, as well as the movement of pen or typewriter in the compositional act. But they are also the measures that irrupt into the reality of life, as the line from *At War with the US* reminds us: "There comes a time / when we must / take measures." The political is not a background in Bowering's poetry. It is shown discursively in the perceptual disruption of normativity (as in the commodifying processes of the social world that *Kerrisdale Elegies* brings into visibility) or in the echo of dramatic events invading the intimacy of our lives (the Vietnam War and the War Measures Act in *At War with the US*).

This book is a must-read or reread. And for those who wonder what it offers anew from the vast corpus of individual publications that we have already encountered, and probably own, I suggest a reread of two poems: the moving nightly responses to the world of poetry of *Delayed Mercy* and, perhaps the most embodied of them all, the elegiac *Do Sink*.

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Tracking Pasts: *The Wild Heavens* and *Cardinal Divide*

Sarah Louise Butler
The Wild Heavens. Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Nina Newington
Cardinal Divide. Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Julie Cairnie

The Wild Heavens, by Sarah Louise Butler, and *Cardinal Divide*, by Nina Newington, both feature women narrators who are on journeys to unlock secrets about their pasts that seep into their presents. There are several ways in which Sandy's and Meg's stories are linked: the characters are born in the 1950s and the present of the texts is the early 2000s; the settings are Western Canada, specifically the British Columbia Interior, and Edmonton and the Cardinal Divide; and both characters are parented by men who aren't their biological fathers. Most significantly, Sandy and Meg are orphans, and this status forces them to live with degrees of uncertainty about their pasts. In exploring the ways in which the past seeps into the present, the texts challenge readers to rethink the narration of Canadian histories, familial and socio-political—a key point in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) on the residential schools.

Sarah Louise Butler's first novel, *The Wild Heavens* takes place throughout the course of one day in the winter of 2003. Sandy, who is fifty-one, wakes up to see large tracks in the snow that belong to Bigfoot/Sasquatch/Yeti, who is referred to as "Charlie" throughout the text. More than thirty years earlier, her young husband had disappeared one evening pursuing Charlie, and Sandy is determined to follow these tracks and uncover some truth or clarity about what happened to Luke. The novel moves back and forth between shorter chapters that describe Sandy's quest and longer chapters about her childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and early middle age. There is a fairy-tale quality to the text, including the narrator as a motherless child. Sandy is orphaned at the age of seven and moves from Ontario to the BC Interior to live with her grandfather, a veterinarian with a research passion for Charlie. There is even a life-sized sculpture of the creature in their cabin's living room. A single mother and her young son, Sandy's future husband, occupy the nearby cabin. The two children form an intimate bond that lasts into young adulthood, although there is a brief separation when "our world was breached by the man who would later dwell in my nightmares." The novel presents the tangible danger of intimate partner violence, and the more complicated threat and beauty of Charlie and the BC Interior Sandy snowshoes through in her pursuit of the truth. The novel explores the limits of knowing, and Charlie's confusing and sometimes faint tracks are potent reminders of this.

Cardinal Divide, a second novel from Nina Newington, takes place over seven weeks in 2001, but has a time frame that spans a hundred years. Meg Coopworth

has no memory of her life before she arrived, on foot and dishevelled, at the farm of an older couple on the outskirts of Edmonton in 1968. Even her age is uncertain, but she assumes she is around forty-two. The novel shifts between Meg's workplace, Dreamcatcher Lodge, an addiction recovery facility, and the farm where her widowed father lives. Early in the novel, Ben summons Meg to the farm: "At the risk of sounding melodramatic there is something we need to talk about before I die." Often seen as Cree, Meg wonders if her adoptive father will divulge that she is a child of the Sixties Scoop. Instead, he tells her, "I'm a woman." Meg struggles with the disappointment of not knowing her origins and with anger about her parents' "lie." A new friend and co-worker, Doug, who is Métis, helps her to negotiate both the mystery of her origins and her father's unfolding story. He asks, "Does he talk about Native people in his stories?"—and his question confirms Meg's discomfort: "Suddenly I get it, what's been tugging at me. Dad's whole story, from when he landed in Canada until he became Ben, there's not a single Indian." By fusing the stories of Dreamcatcher Lodge and Ben's story of arrival and change, the text breathes new life into narratives of settler/Indigenous encounters and histories. Ben's story and sense of identity as non-binary is understood as Two-Spirit, which is a reframing of queerness through Indigenous epistemologies. The Cardinal Divide in the foothills of the Rockies serves as an evocative metaphor for the co-mingling of stories and histories.

There is a hint at a meeting of stories in *The Wild Heavens*, between Sandy's orphaned state and an Indigenous friend of her grandfather's, Jacob, a victim of the Sixties Scoop ("an orphan like me"); but it is a connection that is considered and then dropped. Likewise, in *Cardinal Divide*, there is no easy symmetry between Ben's hidden identity and Meg's uncertain roots. All of the stories in these two novels are ambiguous, and in many respects, unresolved. It would be too convenient to force closure on these "dark chapters in Canadian history," as Stephen Harper would say and attempt in 2008. In Canada in 2020, we are still tracking our pasts, presents, and futures.

Engaging with a Remediated Archive

Jason Camlot and Katherine McLeod, eds.
CanLit Across Media: Unarchiving the Literary Event. McGill-Queen's UP $39.95

Reviewed by Patricia Demers

This collection of provocative essays illuminates the ways different modes of archival practice document, catalogue, and remobilize CanLit from the 1950s to the present. Instead of envisioning the archive as a repository of colonial containment or CanLit as a cohesive fixity, editors Jason Camlot and Katherine McLeod organize the sixteen contributions to highlight institutional procedures, presence, and absence at literary events and archives today. Concentrating on "social and ideological contexts"

in the diverse systems of value of the archive and thereby "unarchiving" through engaging with a remediated archive, the contributors draw as much attention to the archive's loss and erasure as to its circulation and potential transfiguration.

Available search engines are not always helpful, but their gaps are revealing. Linda Morra's examination of the CBC's "dispersed and uneven" archive for radio producer Ira Dilworth attends to the privileging of broadcasts as cultural agents. Morra argues that this archive creates "a narrative of Canadian history" rather than an analysis of the decisions underpinning corporate infrastructure. Katherine McLeod treats the thirteen episodes of Phyllis Webb's TV program *Extension* as a mediated literary event, while noting what is left out in archival descriptions. A combination of circumstances guides several arguments. Deanna Fong considers Roy Kiyooka's omnipresent tape recorder and the consequent "messy structure of eventness." Marcelle Kosman historicizes the controlled circulation of pulp magazines as "a strategy to forestall a socialist revolution." Catherine Hobbs advocates "ecologies of meaning" by combining sound, video, and literary fonds.

The linkages connecting significant literary events and locations, a remarkable feature of this collection, strip away nostalgia in favour of archival evidence or its lack. Jason Camlot addresses the fall 1963 Foster Poetry Conference, an Anglophone gathering in Quebec, where no women were invited and for which Ralph Gustafson's tape recording remains a mysterious absence. Karis Shearer looks at the summer 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference where the contributions of invited poet Margaret Avison were neglected and the extensive work of an organizer's wife is not mentioned. Andrea Beverley reconsiders the Women and Words Conference in the summer of 1983 at UBC, noting the scorn of excluded male poets, the limited orders for audiotapes, and the unused videotape recordings. Resourcefulness is also on display, as in Felicity Tayler's assessment of the "linguistic space" of Montreal's Véhicule Art, Dean Irvine's use of new-media technologies to collaborate on digital repatriation of "the [I]ndigenized commons," and Joel Deshaye's speculation about the "instructive performative moments" during the almost-empty space of a commercial break in a televised interview with Irving Layton.

The remediated present archive extends an understanding of diverse practices with forceful élan. Clint Burham views the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada testimony as orature. Jessi MacEachern attends to unarchiving as the creative interventions of poet Lisa Robertson's palinodes. Karl Jirgens theorizes the role of "experiential sensations . . . oscillating between past and present" in the walking tours of Janet Cardiff and George Miller. Darren Wershler cautions about the "inherent instability" of space-biased media, observing that research about digital archives pays "almost no attention . . . to questions of sustainability." Jordan Abel's moving transcribed archive relates his positionhood as "an intergenerational survivor of residential schools and an urban Indigenous person" through dismantling Marius Barbeau's "distorted colonial representation of Nisga'a knowledge" and simultaneously articulating an Indigenous voice.

Not short of speculation about possible remedies and alternative arrangements, this valuable collection is full of newly opened-up archival pathways to reimagine CanLit.

Parallel Stories

Michael Crummey
Most of What Follows Is True: Places Imagined and Real. U of Alberta P $11.99

Kevin Major
Land Beyond the Sea. Breakwater $19.95

Shane Neilson and Sue Sinclair, eds.
Parallel Universe: The Poetries of New Brunswick. Frog Hollow $35.00

Reviewed by Tracy Whalen

Parallels are at their core relational: they occasion comparison and suggest resemblance, correlation, simultaneity, and a corresponding course. Between parallel stories lies the potential for resonance, a lively spark, a surprising insight. What might parallelism—in a spoken address, narrative plot structure, and critical anthology—teach us? Three recent publications from Atlantic Canadian writers offer insights on this score.

Michael Crummey's *Most of What Follows Is True* is the written version of his 2018 Kreisel Lecture at the University of Alberta. In this talk, Crummey explores the "vexing relationship between fiction and truth." What kinds of liberties can fiction take? What ends justify creative departures from the so-called real? The lecture progresses through parallels, examining works that navigate a similar course between fact and fiction: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Lisa Moore's *Open* and *Alligator*, Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*, Howard Norman's *The Bird Artist*, and Crummey's own *River Thieves*. These parallels bring into relief the question of whether there is something greater to be served by deviations from the factual—whether, to quote Stan Dragland, fiction "thickens the real." Crummey discusses, favourably, books that pursue truth over the real and, less favourably, those whose inaccuracies are self-serving, even insulting. *The Bird Artist* really gets things wrong: early-twentieth-century outport Newfoundlanders drink coffee and eat scones, dine on lobster, buy bottled milk, eat copious amounts of sea bass, and speak in a bookish, mid-Atlantic prose style. Crummey calls Norman out (and calls him an "arsehole") for a self-serving appropriation of place and its people—most egregiously, the Beothuk people. In a self-reflective move, however, Crummey acknowledges that he, too, might be called out for creative licence. We learn that, for all Crummey's metacritical acumen, *River Thieves* gets it wrong with the inclusion of honeybees. A reader later informed him that there are no honeybees in Newfoundland. Crummey argues, ultimately, that "the parallel reality" of a fictionalized world, as in *The Shipping News* and Paul Bowdring's

The Night Season, can enhance our understanding of the real. All creative writers appropriate the world to some extent—and might get things wrong—but sensitivity to an evocative, true, and aesthetically meaningful depiction is key. A couple of Crummey's key insights owe much to the thinking of Stan Dragland, which he acknowledges, but the lecture offers all the same a well-illustrated and engaging commentary.

Kevin Major's historical fiction *Land Beyond the Sea* chronicles the sinking of the passenger ship SS *Caribou* by a German U-boat on October 14, 1942. It traces the parallel storylines of the German commander, Ulrich Gräf, and those on the ill-fated ferry, most notably the steward Johnny Gilbert, who survives the disaster. This parallelism encourages identification with the enemy German lieutenant who launches the torpedo, his life uncannily similar to that of the young Newfoundlander who feels its blast. While different from each other in charisma and leadership skills—Gräf is much more confident and developed a character—both young men yearn for love, and eventually find it with nurses Elise and Eva; both are restless, sensitive souls who live on the sea; both are changed men when they return to their families for a short spell after the dangers of war; and both have devoted, anxious mothers and complicated relationships with father figures. Both also have connections to Newfoundland—one by birth, the other through some deep, inexplicable, and immediate attraction. Seeing the island for the first time, the German is captivated by its coastline and "lofty cliffs indomitable"; he wants to roam the island with a sketchbook, an appreciation that will likely endear him to Newfoundland readers. The narrative underscores the power of war over both men's lives. Especially in the case of Gräf, the war defines him. He understands himself in terms of third-person, war-bestowed categories: "[a] submariner has his life aboard his U-boat and his life ashore, and when the two intersect, he is never anything but a misfit"; "[a] U-boatman aims to fill his nights with memories"; and "[a] commander worth his rank takes no satisfaction in human torment." In the setting of a "goddamn" war, the two men meet (but not really) at two critical narrative moments that bookend what is an engrossing, if occasionally contrived, plot.

Shane Neilson and Sue Sinclair's edited collection signals the theme of parallelism in its title, *Parallel Universe*. The book proves that poetry in New Brunswick—specifically, the poetry of women, Indigenous peoples, Latinx Canadians, chapbook writers, and those outside the academic world or privileged classes—is pulsatory and alive, but lives a quiet, underacknowledged parallel life in literary discourses that favour prose and, it seems, other provinces. *Parallel Universe* includes academic papers, interviews, reminiscences, and reviews to celebrate poets who have been "quietly respected instead of publicly praised," or overlooked altogether. This is a universe where writers (too many to name individually) make things happen. They write—a lot. In this "least studied" province, poets publish chapbooks, gather in pubs and living rooms, produce long-running international

literary journals like *The Fiddlehead*, host Poetry Weekends, and sustain through collective effort and love small presses like Frog Hollow. The book is a veritable celebration of life and language: it includes words like "locavore," "cumulonimbic," and "slumgullions," and complete stanzas of poetry that might stop the reader, mid-breath, with their beauty. There are, as is unavoidable, gaps in the anthology—it doesn't include French articles or poetry, for example—but it makes a strong and persuasive case for this parallel universe to intersect more often and more visibly with other literary circles in Canada.

"memory knows no compromise"

Amy Fung
Before I Was a Critic I Was a Human Being. Book*hug $20.00

David Groulx
From Turtle Island to Gaza. Athabasca UP $19.99

Reviewed by Cornel Bogle

"I write poems no one reads" is a line that confronts the reader towards the end of David Groulx's *From Turtle Island to Gaza*. Groulx, an Anishinaabe writer, declares his obscurity, signalling the ongoing erasure of Indigenous voices in the settler Canadian state. Indeed, structural, material, and symbolic violences enacted against colonized peoples by settlers are foregrounded in Groulx's latest collection of poetry, which entwines the experiences of Indigenous peoples in settler Canada with those of Palestinians. Structured as a series of terse lamentations—often addressed to Palestinian poets—Groulx relies on confounding imagery to repudiate the settler mythologies which dubiously legitimate ongoing displacements, occupations, and violations of Indigenous peoples and their lands in Canada and Palestine. Emphasizing shared experiences of colonialism, Groulx's poetics offers an invitation to Palestinians for not only political solidarity, but a kinship based on shared convictions that

> this soil is sacred
> like water
> My land is holy
> too
> and
> from it
> I cannot be severed

and a shared hope for self-determination.

Groulx's anti-colonial poetics is a far-reaching one, always reaching, and always offering. Invitational diction affirms this in lines like "[s]ing me Fanon," "[d]ance with me once more," and "create a space with your words and whisper it / to me." Within these lines are propositions for a sociality that exceeds the constraints of coloniality, a sociality that is imbued with eroticism and an embodied poetics of

song, dance, and whispers. While the sensuality of relationality is invoked through these lines, other moments in the collection rely upon a collective voice to lament the material and spiritual struggles of life under settler colonialism. The vacillation between the personal and collective voice is a striking feature of the collection, and it creates resonant moments where entanglements and similarities in the historical and contemporary struggles of Palestinians and Indigenous peoples in Canada become evident. Haunting questions like "Where should we go? / You and I / Where can we go?" and "[h]ow can the settler / be our master?" signal this weaving together of different yet similar geographies and histories. Lines like "we know / memory knows no compromise," and "[o]ur lives are unpalatable to them" present the colonized in relation to the colonizer. The power of these lines—and indeed, the entire collection—is that they require readers to consider their own positionalities and complicities with colonialism.

Amy Fung's writing has been enriched by engaging with works by Indigenous writers and anti-colonial artists like Groulx. Fung, a first-generation racialized Canadian settler and art critic, interrogates Canadian multiculturalism, settler colonialism, and migration in her debut collection of narratives, *Before I Was a Critic I Was a Human Being*. I am keen to call the contents of Fung's collection narratives because she is ambivalent herself about what exactly the pieces in the collection are—describing them in the prologue as "chapters or short stories" and "fictionalized non-fiction"—but is nonetheless certain about what they do, which is to suture the life stories of immigrants to the land. Fung's framing of her collection is compellingly audacious as she considers her writing to be "the equivalent of extremely long land acknowledgement[s]." This is audacious for multiple reasons: the first being that she embraces the genre of the land acknowledgement in a time when Indigenous writers have expressed growing disappointment with the absorption of such acknowledgements into neoliberal institutions and empty settler political rhetoric; and secondly that Fung tries to offer an account of what it means to be a racialized settler in Canada, a task whose implications are an ongoing site of debate.

Fung's narratives are varied, ranging from stories about migration, childhood, and self-revelation to accounts of travel and cross-cultural encounters, as well as a few moments of art criticism. Informing all the narratives are two arguments: the first being that the structural conditions of settler colonialism and capitalism are a detriment to human and more-than-human relations, and disproportionately affect the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada. By staging this argument, Fung formally offers a stimulating meditation and rehearsal of critiques of settler colonialism in Canada, without mimicking academic discourse. The second argument this collection puts forth is that all immigrants to Canada are implicated in the colonial order which oppresses Indigenous peoples. Fung writes that "immigrants eventually become settlers under colonial mentality." This is a claim that is certainly contested by scholars in Black studies and by Métis educator Chelsea Vowel, who asserts that

settler colonialism's inherent anti-Blackness forecloses any possibility of considering enslaved peoples and their descendants settlers. Consequently, Fung makes an intervention in ongoing discourses about race, settler colonialism, and Indigeneity that is worthy of further examination. Both Fung and Groulx compellingly challenge their readers to consider the state of their political commitments, as well as the implications of their presence on the lands they inhabit.

Limbs, Limits, Love

Beatriz Hausner
Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart. Book*hug $18.00

Julie Joosten
Nought. Book*hug $20.00

Reviewed by Neil Surkan

Two new collections from Book*hug explore the possibilities of love and desire at the limits of language while differing drastically in tone and form.

At once densely allusive and intriguingly tactile, Beatriz Hausner's *Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart* weaves literary tradition, pop-punk, and kinky corporeality into poems that take up both the cerebral yearning of courtly love and the friction of bodies "flow[ing] one into the other." Drawing on sources as disparate as Dante and Blink-182, Hausner's kaleidoscopic conception of desire flickers and folds across time:

> Long and not so long ago and into
> another time where want lives in the folds of time and the space
>
> between in the threshold where we are sex that is heart becoming
> and bestowing one to the other. Sex understood sex misunderstood.

Equal parts intricate tapestry and sweaty duvet, the collection brims with idiosyncratic ecstasy.

"The goddess changes form often and usefully," begins the speaker in "A Story of Egypt, Twisted": so too do the texts in this book. Beginning and ending with long poems comprised of couplets stretching across the page, the middle section of the collection also features compact, staggered stanzas from which single words float into space. While some sections of these poems can feel alienating with their propulsive line breaks, elliptical phrases, and onslaughts of mythological goddesses and pop culture references, they come alive when read aloud. Startling refrains and audacious assonances—take, for instance, the moments when "sisters moan in a blessed tone as the trombone groans" in the opening poem—create a melodic, fast-paced music that celebrates connection while scrambling it: an interplay of "gloom // dance // gloom."

Julie Joosten's *Nought* could just as fittingly be titled *Knot* or *Not*; in poems that snarl and twist, the speaker meditates on presence and absence—"the ways of becoming what love will / have been"—pushing language to its brink. And yet, as

often as these poems *dis*place the physical world, they also *re*place the way bodies appear in relation to one another, and in relation to time. "Thought" becomes "an affair of the skin," and the future appears as "thick as fur." The influence of Lisa Robertson seems to drive *Nought*, and the tenderness of Daphne Marlatt's love poems also shines through, but Joosten's wordplay has its own unmistakable brilliance. (Re)phrasings from these sequences are sure to reverberate in readers' minds, refreshing the sensorial palimpsest of the present, well after the book has ended. In remarkable feats of what she calls "vernacular perception," as she searches "for a form" to "hold the ineffable," Joosten writes a world with "a stranger luminescence"—a world as mysterious as it is loaded with insight. In what must be a contender for the pun of the decade, bodies "dress in slips and shifts," as do all forms of matter that vibrantly populate these suites. "On Anemones" is particularly astonishing; it begins by inching down the page before unfurling into a moment of riveting, ineffable clarity:

> [T]he words were
> floating and I watching and them
> dissolving and letters reflecting
> then strokes then dots and
> my hands were
> a hum [ ].

These poems don't just fill silence: they contain it.

Journeys into and through

Nadine Ltaif; Christine Tipper, trans.
Journeys. Guernica $20.00

Randy Lundy
Field Notes for the Self. U of Regina P $19.95

Reviewed by Sunny Chan

"Andalusian Exile," in Nadine Ltaif's poetry collection *Journeys*, begins not in Andalusia but in an urban park in Montreal at the "corner of Ontario and Saint Urbain," the Parterre du Quartier des spectacles where outdoor events are often held. It is from there that she muses on Tarsus, an ancient city in today's Turkey. The line "Nothing leaves its mark" is contradicted a mere two lines later: "Only fragments of writing / recount the commerce / between Tyre and King Hiram." Tarsus did leave a mark: in these records, as a historic city in the bustling Adana-Mersin metropolitan area today, and even in a village in Lebanon called Tarshish. This paradoxical push-and-pull embodies many other themes that recur throughout *Journeys*, including the poet's Arab identity, diaspora, how civilizations pass into dust over time, and the role of women in that passage of history.

"Between Relics and Disappearances," the poem immediately after "Andalusian Exile," contemplates this paradox from another angle. It is short, only seven

lines long; the speaker struggles to reconcile that "Wars wipe out / populations and towns" while "we are / on the other side / of the small screen." There can be violence and safety at the same time, whole populations wiped out while others flourish, existences seemingly obliterated and yet recorded for posterity. Ltaif's journey through Spain takes her to Guernica, a town whose name is now synonymous with both the highest artistic achievement and the cruellest violence, and to Seville, which wears its history of Muslim rule, Catholic conquest, and Jewish persecution on its face.

Ltaif also journeys to India, where she sees "India's influence / on Islamic civilisation." From that vantage, she views the historical lives of Indian women as direct predecessors of her own, the unwilling girls chosen for maharajas' harems and those who stand in solidarity with their sisters against injustice as part of her own history. In the section called "Hamra," named after a neighbourhood in Beirut, the poet journeys to "the land of our Phoenician ancestors," the home she left when she was thirteen to flee the Lebanese Civil War. The hotel she stays at—an unrenovated place in the centre of Hamra, which is otherwise filled with high-fashion stores, trendy restaurants, popular nightclubs, and students from the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University—is a hub of the juxtapositions that proliferate in these poems. The hotel is cheap in an expensive neighbourhood, with furniture from the 1970s, while Hamra bustles with modernity. The front desk is staffed by a receptionist who is "veiled / wearing heavy make-up" and "[w]elcoming / in perfect English." There is also a striking juxtaposition between a culture run through with diaspora, versus one not. The waiter at the Beirut cafe she patronizes for breakfast every morning asks her name, traces it back to her grandparents' names, and figures out that he has family in Brazil who know her grandfather's brothers; meanwhile, her Québécois in-laws "received me at their table, fed me without asking me about my origins, or my identity."

Randy Lundy's *Field Notes for the Self* also documents journeys. Like Ltaif's, these journeys go into the past and the self, but unlike hers, they also travel to towns on the Prairies, as well as through the seasons. Lundy, a member of the Barren Lands Cree First Nation, is deeply interested in bringing together Eastern religions, Christianity, and Cree spiritual practices. An epigraph quotes the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a key scripture of Hinduism, and the speaker continually highlights connections and blurred boundaries, such as "A story about St. Francis. No, it was / about Bodhidharma. They didn't know each other. Except they did." Later in the same poem, Lundy connects Taoism's acceptance of the teachings of Buddha to understanding the life and death of wildlife, and how these cycles affect the village. The topic returns in other poems: "You know you should seek the dharma as a medicine, that if you were wise you would go inside and smudge, cleanse yourself in the smoke of sweetgrass." In Hinduism, *dharma* means the behaviours that bring you closer to the right way of living, which Lundy unifies with the Indigenous practice of smudging.

Where Ltaif's journeys are centred on the human experience, on human history and culture, animals abound in Lundy's poems. Sometimes they are metaphorical, sometimes portentous, but always they are as much a part of life as anything that might happen to you. He writes about a girl whose father died a week ago, whose lack of sadness he briefly imagines as a bird flying away from her: "You know when it disappears it has flown into an adjacent world. But it is not a symbol. The owl is a real bird. // That's what you want to tell the girl." Most of the poems are in free verse or prose, and his sureness in these forms helps his project of foregrounding the realness of his subjects.

Memory is a continuing concern in the collection: remembering lost loves, fathers, childhood, generational violence, and forgetting these things too. The speaker says, "It's only a memory. It carries no meaning. Nothing that lasts." And yet like Ltaif's Tarsus, it has lasted, it carries meaning in this verse. Throughout the book, there are hints that Lundy is trying to get at different kinds of forgetting without stating them outright. There is the kind of letting go of what has passed, as taught by Buddhist monks: "contemplation of *no-thought*, meditating on *no-* / *mind*, and you, your being-in-the-world, circumscribed, once again, by / memory, that old curse." There is also the kind of oblivion you never realize is happening until you try to recall something, and the kind you wish for when you want to forget something but cannot. Through perceptive nuances of language, Lundy navigates the curse of memory through nostalgia, regret, and the turning over of life beyond our individual biographies.

"Dragging Baggage"

Shani Mootoo
Polar Vortex. Book*hug $23.00

Traci Skuce
Hunger Moon. NeWest $19.95

Reviewed by Shoshannah Ganz

The pairing of Shani Mootoo's *Polar Vortex* and Traci Skuce's *Hunger Moon* is entirely accidental. I chose an author whose work I knew and an author new to me. I have been reading Mootoo's work for close to two decades, while this is my first exposure to Skuce's short stories. The characters and concerns of the works are quite different; however, read together these works do offer some interesting resonances in their explorations of desire, longing, relationships, and family. Read online, during a time of social distancing, the intimacy of family life and the feeling of solitude, or lack thereof, particularly resonate in both works.

Shani Mootoo's fifth novel, *Polar Vortex*, published in 2020 with Book*hug, will not disappoint readers of Mootoo hoping for further development from her earlier work. In my initial read I was reminded of Dionne Brand's *Theory*,

particularly by the central character Priya's dissection of her current relationship and what it seems to reveal about herself and her identity. The question of how relationships shape who we are works across both works. However, the meditation on relationships in *Polar Vortex* is far from academic and the sexual identity explored is more fluid. The story is slowly, but tensely, teased out along emotional lines that could leave the reader questioning their own relationship choices and how social media, desire, dreams, and secrets can move into the present to reveal unpleasant truths about ourselves and our relationships with people we think we know. The central characters, Priya and Alexandra, meet each other and are introduced to the reader at a point in their lives when they both have pasts. While we learn very little about Alexandra's past, we are led to believe that she is open and honest with Priya and frustrated with Priya's closed nature and secrets. Priya seems to be hiding things from her partner, the reader, and herself. She has taken active measures to disconnect from her past self and her relationship, in particular, with Prakash, a man she has known for twenty-nine years, who like herself is of Indian descent. This seems particularly important given that she lives in a small town where no one understands or shares her cultural background; in this setting, she is often left emotionally on the outside even if people are not overtly racist. The central tension is produced by Prakash's impending visit and what it reveals about Priya's past and present selves. The writing is subtle and emotionally compelling, and the reader is left to meditate on questions of the intersections of race and culture, sexuality and desire, and the past and present.

Traci Skuce's debut short story collection, *Hunger Moon,* published in 2020 with NeWest Press, traverses the rocky terrain of childhood and young adulthood. Written in clear and precisely honed prose, the thirteen stories are loosely connected with images of motherhood and single motherhood, first relationships and relationships in decline, tree planting and travel, friendship and family. The accidental pregnancies and resulting choices and struggles with pot-smoking, unmotivated, and uninspiring men are particularly compelling. The constant suckling needs of babies and the exasperation and depression that sometimes burden motherhood are presented as particularly raw and compelling. These stories should come with a caution to any woman living through quarantine with small children. The stories of young women trying to figure out what to do with their lives and how to live with the children and men that are part of their lives would probably be interesting and worthwhile for young readers. Young university-aged students might particularly identify with the struggles between the beliefs of the rational mind and the spiritual longing for connection and meaning in their lives. Many of the stories are rather open-ended and leave the reader with the sense that the resolution and living out of these lives is not fated, but depend on choices to be made in the future. But there is a forceful emptiness and uncertainty that brings the lives of these mostly separate characters and stories together, whether the character is hiking in Australia or tree planting in northern Ontario.

I would gladly read both of these authors and these particular works again, preferably in hard copy, and recommend these works in terms of language, story, and character, and their engagements with larger questions of life and meaning. With both, I found moments of delight and surprise.

Playful Disruption

Juliana Pivato, ed.
Pictura: Essays on the Works of Roy Kiyooka. Guernica $25.00

Johanna Skibsrud
The Poetic Imperative: A Speculative Aesthetics. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Dougal McNeill

The "redemption of Language," Roy Kiyooka announces in his *Pacific Rim Letters*, "is a real issue mired within the tissue" of ideology. How to press through the mire? Begin "with the body and its / ah! Myriad extensions," the poem continues. That "ah!"—with its disruption of Kiyooka's line's flow and with its promise of revelation— is an example of what Johanna Skibsrud, in her expansive, restless, and rewarding collection, would call "the poetic imperative": those moments when knowledge is produced "through active intuition" and when poetry functions "not as a repository of received knowledge, but rather as a playful disruption of sense and logic aimed at eliciting unexpected connections." Kiyooka's trans-media work, mixing painting, writing, photography, and sound recording drew widely and generously from his personal history, his social world, and his travels to fold generative material into his poetry, compiling a rich archive of examples of the process that Skibsrud describes as the ways in which "human being is constantly being activated within and through language and knowledge." The thrill of Kiyooka's writing, for this reader anyway, comes with its expansiveness, its reach, and its eagerness: the *Transcanada Letters* and *Pacific Rim Letters* in particular want to leave nothing out, and offer readers multiple points of contact and chances for reflection. Juliana Pivato, in her introduction to *Pictura*, praises Kiyooka's "generous diffusion": generosity is a keyword in her collection. Kiyooka, Pivato tells us, "readily experimented with legibility through form and possessed an intensity that was activated by complexity, density and excess." She places his writing in imaginative relation with the tradition Skibsrud traces, transgressing the critical boundaries that fence off modernist, postmodernist, and experimental verse—a tradition of poets who have sought ways to expand "the poetic" into non-linguistic materials. Poetry, for Skibsrud, "takes place in the intersection between" mimesis and magic; "both creative and mimetic," this poetry manages "imitation of" and "deliberate departure from" lived reality. Her genealogy of writers affiliated with this lineage offers a productive way of reading Kiyooka anew. Kiyooka's focus on the limits of the imagination—and on the

ways racialization, structural oppression, and exclusion can stunt the self-forming possibilities of the "self-reflexive, provisional, and speculative terrain of human being" that Skibsrud celebrates—offers politicized nuance and ethical reflection.

The Poetic Imperative: A Speculative Aesthetics is short (under two hundred pages), but not slight; its chapters rattle through crucial debates in contemporary aesthetic theory and shoot out insights like so many sparks from wheels on a track along the way. Skibsrud is drawn to poetry working "at the unstable limits of subjectivity and knowledge": open in its "intimacy with strangeness and uncertainty" and drawing out "the interplay between conscious recognition and what cannot be said." Particularly drawn to multimedia artists and writers conscious of the poem as a moment of performance, Skibsrud develops her argument by way of paired readings, joining together Canadian, American, and European poets in comparative accounts. Her range of reference is pleasingly expansive and unexpected—from Wallace Stevens to Douglas Kearney, pulling in Angela Rawlings, Muriel Rukeyser, M. NourbeSe Philip, Anne Carson, Erín Moure, and Christian Bök, among others—and her theoretical and critical interlocutors range from Agamben to Solnit. If all of this leaves the reader occasionally short of critical breath, the intelligence, daring, and drive of each essay rewards rereading. Listen up!

Pictura is more tightly bound but no less rewarding, and makes no attempt to fix Kiyooka within any critical frame. After all, as Juliana Pivato asked at the book's online launch, how do you account for an artist that would not be contained? Her contributors answer this question by attending to Kiyooka's boundlessness, with fine chapters on the Roy Kiyooka Audio Archive by Deanna Fong, on *Transcanada Letters*' "conceptual bookwork" by Felicity Tayler, and two on *The Artist and the Moose* and its afterlives. A full scholarly apparatus, including a useful bibliography, chronology, and two previously hard-to-locate critical works (one an essay by Roy Miki, the other an interview with Sheila Watson), adds to this collection. The collection's title is "a reference to the invigorating pull that endures between acts of sight and acts of speech," and there are rewards for the reader as they are pulled between Kiyooka's visual and audio legacy and his written work, between his utopian enthusiasm and his melancholy registering of the ongoing history of racism and colonialism. Kiyooka notoriously resisted "the nouning of his identity," Tavleen Purewal notes in an aphorism typical of *Pictura*'s combination of elegant stylishness and critical insight, and each essay takes the measure of how his poetic determination to verb his life responded to attempts at nouning by others. Veronica J. Austen, in a bravura reading, draws out how "the 'inglish' Kiyooka creates" is not "merely a textual language" but also "one that makes use of the communicative potential of the visual." Reading Kiyooka's oeuvre whole without reducing its myriad parts is a difficult task, but one the essays collected here manage with wit, sensitivity, and care.

Particulars Remembered

Bronwen Wallace; Carolyn Smart, ed.
Collected Poems of Bronwen Wallace. McGill-Queen's UP $39.99

Reviewed by Lorraine York

At the time of writing, over thirty years have passed since the death of Bronwen Wallace, at the age of only forty-four in 1989. And for a poet whose reputation soared rapidly in the final decade of her life, the lag between her death and this publication of her collected poems feels especially protracted. In the space of a mere seven years during the 1980s she published four collections (the fifth, *Keep That Candle Burning Bright*, was published posthumously). As a feminist academic in my late twenties, I experienced the 1987 publication of Wallace's third collection, *The Stubborn Particulars of Grace*, as a major event, not the least because it involved a move from the smaller, independent, Canadian-owned Oberon, the publisher of her previous collections, to the more mainstream McClelland & Stewart that had been bought by Avie Bennett the year before. For a woman poet working in Canada in the 1980s, such a shift bespoke canonization, a wider readership, literary renown. And then, two years later, she was gone.

So to say that this collection is long overdue, as people typically do on these occasions, risks radical understatement, and we might productively ask ourselves why it has taken so long to bring back into print the works of a major Canadian feminist poet. Much is owed to the volume's editor, poet and close friend Carolyn Smart, for painstaking work and—one can only say—exquisite care. (The unpublished early manuscripts that appear in the volume derived from Smart's personal collection, and her annotations of the poems are helpful and unfussy.) And much is owed to McGill-Queen's University Press for realizing how important a project this is. I could play the reviewer's game of picking teeny editorial nits (why is the early work gathered together at the end of the volume, when one of the rationales of the collection is to allow readers to read through Wallace's work from early to late?). But this is the time to place nits aside and ask more important questions about Bronwen Wallace's poetic legacy.

First of all, reading through the collected poems has taught me that Bronwen Wallace's poetic powers maintained a level that was consistently high; it is amazing to me how she could have published all of those collections in one decade without having included more poems that were less successful. But for the most part, all of these poems hit their mark, most resoundingly. Wallace's trademark has often been described as digressive narrative, but given the powerful impact of these poems, I would describe it as laconic intensity. A woman sips her coffee at a kitchen table. And the world erupts.

Often, for Wallace, that eruption took the form of violence directed against women: a subject that many were not prepared to take seriously as poetic material. As Smart recalls, Wallace read at the League of Canadian Poets AGM the year that the discussion of a motion to form a Feminist Caucus was interrupted by a

member yelling, "If there's going to be a feminist caucus, then there should be a Nazi caucus." As new scholarship is showing us, the formation of politically progressive groups within professional literary unions in this country has long been attended by reactionary pushback and continuing exclusions. But within that hostile atmosphere the poems of Bronwen Wallace asserted their place, and plumbed what she called in "the complex possibilities / of common things." And violence against those who identify as women was, as it is today, common.

Wallace was always clear about her poetic mentors, and among them Al Purdy has always held pride of place. As I read through her poems, early to late, what I see, thanks to this collected edition, is Bronwen Wallace turning the poetic modes and cadences of Purdy to a purpose that was antipathetic to Purdy's ethos: feminism. And this is truly remarkable; Wallace, while clearly spellbound by Purdy's language and emphasis on locality, was more than ready to use those master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

To a degree. As my echo of Audre Lorde might move readers to reflect, Bronwen Wallace's political poetry operated along the axes of gender and class but did not include race or sexuality to any great extent. As Smart observes, "She was fierce in response to class and gender bias." But a reading of these poems, early to late, also tells us much about the exclusions practised by white women's feminisms of the 1980s in Canada (and elsewhere) that could not help but mark Wallace's poetry. Certainly, she was aware of racism; in *Signs of the Former Tenant*, she writes about the anti-South Asian racism of WASP suburbia, but the women Wallace most often writes about, drawn from her white, rural, Protestant ancestral community, are elided so easily, in Wallace's poetry, with a universal "woman." And the framework for thinking about women's sexual lives in the poems is persistently heterosexual. Reading front to back in Wallace's collected poems, I think about how the habits of mind she displayed there, of relentless self-critique, an abiding desire for social justice, and that constant willingness to rethink her assumptions that she learned as a political organizer, would have allowed her, had she lived longer, and had she chosen, to listen to the critiques of 1980s straight white feminism that surely would have come her way.

She would, I am sure, have rejoiced in the emerging writers who have been since 1994 the continuing beneficiaries of her legacy, as recipients of the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for emerging writers: most recently, the non-binary poet John Elizabeth Stinzi. It is important, though, as we reassemble the works of the previous generation of feminist poets, that we pay them the respect of assessing them in a way that does not reinforce the exclusions of the past and reassume those exclusions as normative. Bronwen Wallace herself would have expected no less of us.

A Tribute to Munro

J. R. (Tim) Struthers, ed.
Alice Munro Country: Essays on Her Works I. Guernica $29.95

J. R. (Tim) Struthers, ed.
Alice Munro Everlasting: Essays on Her Works II. Guernica $29.95

Reviewed by Christine Lorre-Johnston

The two companion volumes of critical studies devoted to Alice Munro's works and edited by J. R. (Tim) Struthers pay tribute to Munro's art of the short story. Since Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013, several such critical volumes have appeared. What distinguishes Struthers' double publication is first its length, with an impressive total of more than 850 pages, and the variety of voices that can be gathered in so many pages: Struthers embraces the reception of Munro's works in a broad, generous, eclectic way. The two books thus include early scholarship on Munro: eleven of the nineteen contributions in volume I, and seven of the twenty contributions in volume II, a few of which have been revised, were previously published. That includes pieces by Louis K. MacKendrick, editor of the first book of criticism on Munro's work, and W. R. Martin, author of the first full-length study on Munro's work. The volumes also include work by two scholars at doctoral and masters' level, and a whole range in between, from seasoned to more recent Munro readers. Contributions are by academics, several of whom are also fellow writers (Jack Hodgins, George Elliott Clarke, and many others), as well as Munro's friend Reg Thompson, editor and publisher Douglas Gibson, and biographers Catherine Sheldrick Ross and Robert Thacker. Most authors are from Canada, and a handful from the US, the UK, and France. Some contributors appear in both volumes. Each volume obviously has a specific focus, as suggested by the titles, but regrettably there is no introduction in either.

The first volume, *Country*, echoes the importance of locale in Munro's work, which early on earned her the label of "regional writer," a label that she rejects, as a colloquial naming of the region of southwestern Ontario as "Alice Munro Country." The attention paid to "country" in Struthers' book reflects not simply Munro's interest in southwestern Ontario, also known as "Souwesto," but also that of Struthers, who is himself a native of London, Ontario, and has spent most of his career at the University of Guelph. The book starts with some personal tributes, with a literary tour of Munro places by Douglas Gibson; a personal response by Judith Thompson to "Spelling," and another by John Lee to "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"; James Reaney's "ABC to Ontario Literature and Culture"; and Reg Thompson's recollection of the day Munro received the Nobel. Then follows an unpublished 1988 interview of Munro by Struthers, mainly on *The Progress of Love* (1986). The rest of the volume is made up of essays that focus on place: Dennis Duffy reflects on Munro's historical fiction in "Meneseteung" and *The View from Castle Rock*; Alec Follett on Munro's sense of "wonder" at her region

in *The View*; Coral Ann Howells on the intimacy of place in several stories. John Weaver proposes to read Munro as an interpreter of Ontario cultural history. Ian Rae analyzes how Munro's mapping is done in "Walker Brothers' Cowboy" in relation to British colonization. George Elliott Clarke interprets Munro's associations in *Lives of Girls and Women* with Italian culture and Blackness as part of a sexual liberation process. W. R. Martin and Warren U. Ober examine the notion of change in small-town Ontario in "Spaceships Have Landed." William Butt analyzes characters' dual need to both conform and transgress in "Open Secrets." Shelley Hulan construes ethnicity and class in "Powers" in the way Nancy "gypsifies" Tessa. Ailsa Cox reflects, as a writer and MA creative writing instructor, on what can be learned from (re-)reading "Meneseteung." Louis K. MacKendrick analyzes narrative voice in "Meneseteung" as it navigates between history and life. Marianne Micros studies poetry and the figure of the poet in "Meneseteung." The volume ends with a bibliography of 401 entries on Munro's work or related topics.

The leading thread in volume II, *Everlasting*, is the resonance of Munro's stories—how they stay with the reader. The volume opens with four essays that focus on Munro's style: Charles May analyzes the form and mystery of the short story as seen by Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, and Munro; Catherine Sheldrick Ross examines the place of material personal to Munro's life in *Dear Life*; Michael Trussler explores the notion of assemblage as literary technique, focusing on "Vandals"; Megan LaPierre studies musicality in two stories and the "Finale" of *Dear Life*. The subsequent essays are each devoted to the final story of one of Munro's fourteen collections: W. R. Martin considers the links between Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades* and Joyce's *Dubliners*; Gwendolyn Guth studies social class in "Dance of the Happy Shades"; Neil K. Besner comments on the role of the epilogue in *Lives of Girls and Women*; Louis K. MacKendrick studies metaphor in "The Ottawa Valley." Lawrence Mathews reflects on Munro's art of narrative disarrangement in *Who Do You Think You Are?*; Timothy McIntyre on the representation of the real in "The Moons of Jupiter." Karen Houle writes on generations in "White Dump"; Tracy Ware on comedy in "Wig Time"; Janice Fiamengo on sin in "Vandals"; Sandra Sabatini on mothers and daughters in "My Mother's Dream"; Héliane Ventura on language in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"; Struthers on myth in "Powers"; William Butt on messaging in "Messenger"; Dennis Duffy and Monika Lee, respectively, on historicism and fractal fiction in "Too Much Happiness"; and Robert Thacker on the mother in the "Finale" of *Dear Life*.

The two volumes thus form a compendium of essays on important, well-established critical paths into Munro's work—on place, on ending—making existing articles available in book form and offering fresh ones on these topics, with many truly enlightening contributions. The limits of the two books are found in the way they leave out important veins of recent critical work related to affect, care, aging, and disability, approaches that suggest new ways of reading Munro and are highly significant to many contemporary readers.

The Ripple Effect

Amanda Hale
Mad Hatter. Guernica $29.95

Rhea Tregebov
Rue des Rosiers. Coteau $24.95

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

Twelve years in the planning and six in the writing, *Mad Hatter* is an intense and tragic book, a synthesis of fiction, memoir, and creative non-fiction. Its primary subject is the misguided political endeavours of Christopher Brooke, an early disciple of Oswald Mosley, an organizer for the British Union of Fascists, and eventually a self-styled prophet of the rebirth of the Kingdom of God—destined to rise, preposterously but also distressingly, out of the ashes of Hitler's failed campaigns. Brooke is a credible figure: not violent, not wilfully cruel, but naive in a way that borders on reckless endangerment—not only of his family name, but of his wife, his fortune, and his children. Amanda Hale understands this personality as well as anyone can, for she is the daughter of James Larratt Battersby (1907-1955), a British pacifist who aligned himself with Mosley and the rise of fascism in the 1930s, was detained as an enemy sympathizer, and (after the war) promoted an increasingly insurrectionist movement known as the League of Christian Reformers. *Mad Hatter* is thus both a reconstruction of historical events and a family history. Hale has allowed her imagination to fill in the gaps in the record that are now unknowable; in writing this book, she has also found a way to come to terms with a heritage that cannot have been anything less than painful and scarring.

As befits the material, multiple points of view are employed in this narrative. Brooke himself is seen mainly from the outside, preserving the incomprehensibility of his motives. Two first-person narrators provide moving but contrasting perspectives on his actions and their effects. Mary Byrne, a young Irish servant, gifted with second-sight, is an engaging and clear-eyed narrator, a truly marvelous creation. Her astuteness is balanced by the confused impressions of Katie, Brooke's fourth child, a replica of the author herself in a childhood damaged by uncertainty and family strife. Over and against the personal and emotional upheavals at the centre of this book, the wider world is also explored—the realm of politicians, magistrates, prisons, labour camps, demonstrations, rationing, air raids, and (very much in the shadows) the horrors that Hitler was unleashing throughout Europe.

Though collaboration between the two authors seems unlikely, *Mad Hatter* is connected to *Rue des Rosiers* by the stepping stones of history, a path that leads inescapably through the death camps of Germany and Poland, the establishment of the state of Israel, the displacement of the Palestinian people, the Arab-Israeli wars, and comes full-circle (or nearly so) to the acts of terrorism that began to be perpetrated in European cities in the early 1980s. Indeed, connecting these dots is the main business of Rhea Tregebov's novel. The grenade and gun attack

that occurred in a Jewish delicatessen on rue des Rosiers in Paris in August 1982 is the book's climactic moment. This atrocity is prefigured from the start by the nightmares and obsessions of its central character, Sarah Levine, a young woman who has come to regard history (both public and private) as a doom-filled balance sheet in which nothing goes uncounted. Unmoored and indecisive as a result of her own missteps, by a sister's attempt at suicide, and by the shadow cast by the Holocaust, she ends up in Paris by a combination of chance and destiny.

The steps that lead Sarah to Rosenberg's deli are mirrored by those of Laila, a young Palestinian whose own uprootedness is both spiritual and literal. Without knowing it, the two cross paths many times in the streets of Paris, notably in the vicinity of a wall spray-painted by Laila's lover with his vengeful proclamation: *Mort aux juifs*. He, of course, is the gunman who completes the arc of history or, in the stark calculus that Sarah eventually rejects, who adds another entry to the long balance sheet of tooth for tooth and wrong for wrong.

Amanda Hale and Rhea Tregebov should meet, if it is not presumptuous to say so. Their paths through history appear also to have intersected in unfathomable ways, and they share an understanding of how the most consequential events can arise out of the toss of a coin, the distortion of a truth, the anxious pursuit of symmetry, the rigid logic of the obsessed. Tregebov has her protagonist ponder Theodor Adorno's remark that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz. Having read these books, I respectfully disagree.

All What Jazz

Fred Wah

Music at the Heart of Thinking: Improvisations 1-170. Talonbooks $24.95

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

Music at the Heart of Thinking, by Fred Wah, is a book of outlandishly playful and extravagantly difficult poems. The first instalment of Wah's *Music*, published in 1987, consisted of sixty-nine poetic "improvisations" collected under the same title as the present volume. A further three dozen poems in the series (plus a sequence of "Artknots") appeared in 1992 as *Alley Alley Home Free*. The new edition collects the poems from the original *Music* and from *Alley Alley Home Free*, and extends the series: thus the subtitle *Improvisations 1-170*. Because the series does not always proceed by whole numbers (Improvisation 4 is followed by 4.1 and 4.2, for instance), and because it allows for idiosyncrasy (as with Improvisation "Eighty-Something"), the book in fact contains over two hundred poems. Many are paragraph-long prose poems, but Improvisation 104, in thirty-five numbered parts, spans eleven pages. All in all, the expanded edition is a relatively lengthy book of poetry, yet it does not end in a way that precludes further improvisations. On the contrary, it leads readers to expect still more *Music* in the key of F;

it leaves open the possibility that the series is open to possibility. This despite the faintly apocalyptic mood of Improvisation 170 ("Presence") and its contemporary references: "the smoke was heavy in Oregon and British Columbia," Wah writes, while the US is "trying to MAGA the universe."

Wah's poems constantly aspire towards the spontaneous condition of jazz. The familiar analogy between poetry and music is complicated by the merely semantic aspect of language; if the sound or structure of a given poem could be described as jazz-like, its words still convey lexical meaning, no matter how little regard is shown for syntax or complete sentences. Wah's improvisations "contest the syntactic and the narrative"—in his phrase, "the two tyrannies of literature"—and attend instead to the music and thought made possible by language as it "stumble[s] over itself." The difficulty of the poems emerges, in part, from the tension between the near-freedom implied by improvisation and the constraints of denotation. It is also a function of what Wah takes to be the elusiveness of meaning: "To say: 'I don't understand what this means,' is, at least, to recognize that 'this' means. The problem is that meaning is not a totality of sameness and predictability. Within each word, each sentence, meaning has slipped a little out of sight and all we have are traces, shadows, still warm ashes." The reader's problem (if it is a problem) of not understanding what an individual phrase or line means is alleviated by the connections that crop up among Wah's poems. In Improvisation 113, the portmanteau "Lake Frank O'Hara" links (improbably) the American poet of the New York School to the scenic lake in Yoho National Park, and sends readers back to Improvisation 4.2, which mentions the Canadian poet Jon Whyte, who was as devoted to the Rockies as Wah is to the Kootenays. What it all means, I can't say, but much of the enjoyment of reading *Music* consists in such associations, which lie just this side of what I. A. Richards called "mnemonic irrelevance." It is likewise a pleasure to hear the new poems in the context of the old, and vice versa.

Beyond the comparison to jazz, the term "improvisations" nods, as Wah explains, to *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920), by William Carlos Williams. Despite his importance, however, Williams is but one player in a large cast. Wah's poems of dialogue name, borrow from, or otherwise allude to countless writers, from Fenollosa to Olson to Mallarmé to Avison to Blake to Creeley to Whitman to Duncan to Hesiod to Wordsworth. Artists are also prominent: Duchamp, Ernst, Cézanne, Beuys, Schwitters, Emily Carr. Certain improvisations respond in a sustained fashion to bpNichol's *The Martyrology* (1972-1993), Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Gail Scott's *The Obituary* (2010), Christine Stewart's *Treaty 6 Deixis* (2018), and various other works, the well known and the obscure alike. The impression is of a tour of Wah's library, the guide given to riffs rather than exegesis.

In her review of the first edition of *Music at the Heart of Thinking* (in *Canadian Literature* 126), Margery Fee proposed that "what Wah writes can . . . be co-opted into an avant-garde tradition that has little ultimate impact, however revolutionary

its ideas." And in a review of *Alley Alley Home Free* (in *Canadian Literature* 185), R. Alexander Kizuk noted that the book and its predecessor "invite an audience that is highly educated and hip to the latest developments in literary theory—in other words, eclectic, detached, and academic." Both reviewers suggested, in short, that the improvisations are hermetic. It seems that Wah agrees: "I know this is not an easy poetry to read," he observes in the new edition; "it wasn't easy to write." But for readers perplexed or intimidated by his range of references, or by the detailed index, Wah offers encouragement: "My hope is that you can share with me those detonations and silences we often unexpectedly come upon between words, syllables, letters, sounds, and rhythms: the minding and the music; the amulets of surprise coherence; the shapeliness of our imaginations at the threshold of language."

The book concludes with a witty photograph of the author *à la mode du jour*. Who is this masked man, other than a responsible citizen? *Music at the Heart of Thinking* reveals little of Wah himself, at least not directly, yet shows his mind and ear at work over three decades and more. This "not . . . easy poetry" is a record of his listening to "a syllabic river of sound breaking up into speech" (Improvisation 160). Readers may join Wah "on the bridge listening, not lost at all but listening." Although our COVID masks cover our mouths, they leave our ears exposed and unstopped.

Articles & Forum

Guy **Beauregard** is a Professor at National Taiwan University and an Associate Member of Simon Fraser University's Institute for Transpacific Cultural Research. His work over the past decade has appeared in *Amerasia Journal*, *Canadian Literature*, *Concentric*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *Tamkang Review*, and *West Coast Line*. Most recently, he has co-edited *The Subject(s) of Human Rights: Crises, Violations, and Asian/American Critique* (Temple UP, 2020).

Nicholas **Bradley** is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Victoria. He is the editor of *An Echo in the Mountains: Al Purdy after a Century* (2020), and an associate editor of *Canadian Literature*.

Charlotte **Comtois** poursuit ses études doctorales en études françaises à l'Université de Sherbrooke. Ses recherches portent sur les représentations de la mobilité géographique au féminin dans le roman québécois depuis les années 1930. Elles ont fait l'objet d'une publication dans la revue *Études francophones* en janvier 2020 et paraîtront dans un ouvrage collectif portant sur l'œuvre de Suzanne Jacob, lequel sera publié aux Éditions du remue-ménage. En 2019, elle a obtenu le prix ALCQ Barbara-Godard. Elle est également chargée de cours à l'Université de Sherbrooke, où elle enseigne la littérature des femmes.

Denise **Cruz** is an Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. Her research documents and explores national, regional, and global dynamics in Asian North American, Filipinx, and US literature, culture, and history, with special attention to gender and sexuality. She is the author of *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina* (Duke UP, 2012).

Beth **Follett** is the founder and publisher of Pedlar Press, a Canadian literary house. Her first novel, *Tell It Slant* (Coach House, 2001), a retelling of Djuna Barnes' 1936 novel *Nightwood*, was met with critical acclaim. Her second novel, *Instructor*, will be released by Breakwater Books in 2021. Follett's poetry, prose, and non-fiction work have appeared in *Brick, Best Canadian Poetry 2019,* and elsewhere. She lives in St. John's, NL.

Anjula **Gogia** is events coordinator at Another Story Bookshop. She is the former co-manager of the Toronto Women's Bookstore, and has worked at Between the Lines, PEN Canada, and Amnesty International. She loves to read, cook, and hang out in the sun.

Warren **Heiti** lives in Nanaimo where he teaches in the Departments of Philosophy and Liberal Studies at Vancouver Island University. He is the author of *Hydrologos* (Pedlar, 2011) and co-editor of *Chamber Music: The Poetry of Jan Zwicky* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2015).

Orly **Lael Netzer** studies life writing and ethics, focusing on practices of reading as bearing witness to literary and art-based testimony in contemporary Canadian culture. She is the Research Facilitator for the HM Tory Chair program for Life Writing at the University of Alberta, has co-edited special issues of *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* and *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies,* and has published work

in *Canadian Literature* and *Postcolonial Studies*. Lael Netzer has also served as a member of the Canadian Literature Centre's executive board, and an editorial assistant for *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*.

Joanne **Leow** lives as a guest on Treaty Six Territory and the homeland of the Métis. She is Assistant Professor of decolonizing, diasporic, and transnational literatures at the University of Saskatchewan. Her most recent research is in *positions: asia critique*, *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, and *Journal of Asian American Studies*. Her first book manuscript theorizes the relationship between cultural dissidence and urban planning in Singapore. Her essays, fiction, and poetry have been published in *Brick*, *Catapult*, *The Goose*, *ISLE, The Town Crier*, and *Ricepaper Magazine*. Her ecocritical SSHRC-funded project "Intertidal Polyphonies" is archived at intertidal.usask.ca.

Vinh **Nguyen** is Associate Professor of English at Renison University College, University of Waterloo. His writing can be found in *Social Text*, *MELUS*, *ARIEL*, *Canadian Literature*, *Life Writing*, and *Canadian Review of American Studies*.

Geoffrey **Nilson** is an MA student in English at Simon Fraser University and the author of four poetry chapbooks. Recent publications have appeared in *filling Station*, *Hamilton Review of Books*, *CV2*, and *Sweet Water: Poems for the Watersheds* (Caitlin, 2020). He is the BC-YK Regional Representative for the League of Canadian Poets.

Candida **Rifkind** is Professor in the Department of English at the University of Winnipeg, where she specializes in graphic narratives and Canadian literature. She is co-editor of *Documenting Trauma in Comics: Traumatic Pasts, Embodied Histories, and Graphic Reportage* (Palgrave, 2020); *Canadian Graphic: Picturing Life Narratives* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2016), which won the 2016 Gabrielle Roy Prize; and a special issue of *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* on "Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in Graphic Life Narratives" (2020). Her monograph, *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada* (2009), won the 2010 Ann Saddlemyer Prize.

Souvankham **Thammavongsa** is the author of four acclaimed poetry books—*Small Arguments* (Pedlar, 2003), winner of the ReLit prize; *Found* (Pedlar, 2007); *Light* (Pedlar, 2013), winner of the Trillium Book Award for Poetry; and *Cluster* (McClelland & Stewart, 2019)—and the short-story collection *How to Pronounce Knife* (McClelland & Stewart, 2020), a *New York Times* Critics' Choice and winner of the Scotiabank Giller Prize. Her stories have been shortlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, won an O. Henry Award, and appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Paris Review*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Believer*. She has been in residence at Yaddo and performed her work at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. She was born in the Lao refugee camp in Nong Khai, Thailand, and was raised and educated in Toronto, where she now lives.

Bryan **Thao Worra** is the Lao Minnesotan Poet Laureate and holds a Joyce Award, an NEA Fellowship in Literature, and over twenty other distinctions for his creative writing. An internationally published author of nine books, he serves on the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans in addition to numerous community roles in Southeast Asian refugee resettlement and the arts. His current book of poetry is *Before We Remember We Dream* from Sahtu Press.

Shannon **Toll** is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Literatures and Cultures of North America at the University of Dayton. Her research interests include Native literary studies and theory, gender studies, performance studies, and film studies.

Her work on contemporary Indigenous literature and performance has been featured in *Transmotion* (2019), *Studies in American Indian Literatures* (2018), and *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (2015). Her current book manuscript, *Oklahoma's Indian Princesses: Native Women Performing Back to Power*, studies the impact of modernist Indigenous Oklahoman women who performed as "Indian Princesses" in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

Y-Dang **Troeung** is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of British Columbia. She specializes in transnational Asian literatures, critical refugee studies, and global south studies. She is currently completing a book manuscript on the afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia. At UBC, she is a faculty affiliate of the Asian Canadian Studies and Migration Program (ACAM), an Associate Editor of the journal *Canadian Literature*, and a 2020 Wall Scholar at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies. Her recent publications can be found in *Canadian Literature*, *Brick: A Literary Magazine*, *Amerasia Journal*, and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*.

Fred **Wah** is a BC poet who has published books of poetry, fiction, and criticism. His book of prose poems *Waiting For Saskatchewan* received the Governor General's Award in 1986 and *So Far* was awarded the Stephanson Award for Poetry in 1992. *Diamond Grill* was published in 1996 and won the Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction. *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity* was awarded the Gabrielle Roy Prize for Writing in 2000 and *is a door* won the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize in 2009. Two recent poetry books involving collaborative projects are *Sentenced to Light* (2008) and, with Rita Wong, *beholden: a poem as long as the river* (2018), both published by Talonbooks. His most recent publication is *Music at the Heart of Thinking: Improvisations 1-170* (Talonbooks, 2020)

Poems

John **Barton** lives in Victoria, BC. Jillian **Christmas**, Jen **Currin**, Kevin **Spenst**, Fred **Wah**, and **Yuan** Changming live in Vancouver, BC. Bill **Howell** and Camille **Lendor** live in Toronto, Ontario. Kenneth **Sherman** lives in North York, Ontario. Isabella **Wang** lives in Port Moody, BC.

Reviews

Cornel **Bogle** and Patricia **Demers** teach at the University of Alberta. Nicholas **Bradley** teaches at the University of Victoria. Alessandra **Capperdoni** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Sunny **Chan** lives in Toronto, ON. Shoshannah **Ganz** teaches at Memorial University. Dorothy F. **Lane** teaches at the University of Regina. Christine **Lorre-Johnston** teaches at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. Andrea **MacPherson** and Hilary **Turner** teach at the University of the Fraser Valley. Krzysztof **Majer** teaches at the University of Łódź, Poland. Dougal **McNeill** teaches at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Neil **Surkan** teaches at the University of Calgary. Tracy **Whalen** teaches at the University of Winnipeg. Lorraine **York** teaches at McMaster University.

Impurity
Larry Tremblay
Translated by Sheila Fischman

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Music at the Heart of Thinking: Improvisations 1–170
Fred Wah

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Sophie Bienvenu
Translated by Rhonda Mullins

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Taking Measures: Serial Poems
George Bowering
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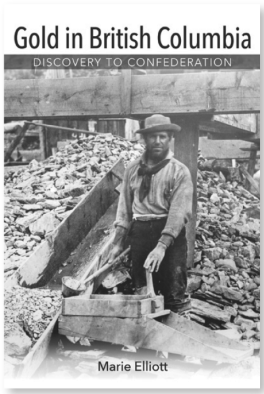

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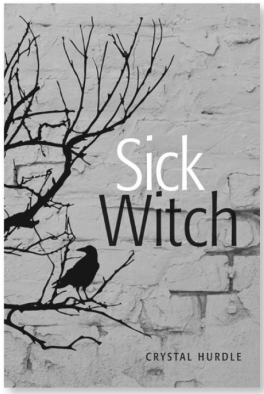

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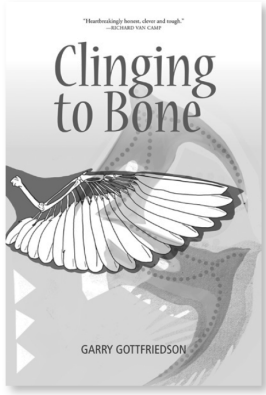

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