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

Editorial

In Return

Christine Kim

Looking backwards is an activity that many of us are doing these days as we observe the public health orders around social distancing, travel, and other restrictions and wonder what the future will look like and when it will arrive. The articles in this issue by Andrea Beverley, Thomas Hodd, Margaret Steffler, Melanie Dennis Unrau, and Vikki Visvis, as well as the forum on Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies* curated by Paul Barrett and the narrative inquiry contributed by Botao Wu, share this preoccupation as they turn our attention to earlier moments in order to re-examine literary texts, objects, and historical eras, to invoke and rethink earlier critical methodologies, and to revisit individual and collective memories. This common investment in the past is a noteworthy coincidence and one that transforms this general issue into an unplanned but shared project of returns. I take these common interests, as articulated within this issue and also as they circulate more broadly within our readerly and critical communities, as a provocation to think about what drives such acts of return. I am interested in thinking through our desires to return to earlier moments and understanding what it is that each of us imagines we are doing *to* the past as well as *for* the present. Are we in need of fuller, more accurate depictions of history? Different aesthetic representations of the past? What are the principles that guide our interpretation of whether something is a better representation or more useful critique than those that preceded it? And how do the histories of fields, institutions, and places shape how we enact these returns now?

To guide my thoughts, I turn to Laura Kang's *Compositional Subjects* (2002), which examines how Asian American women are produced as objects of knowledge for the humanities and social sciences. While this may seem like a counterintuitive place to begin an editorial on the topic of returns in Canadian literature, *Compositional Subjects* can be read as being in dialogue with *Scandalous Bodies*, the subject of this issue's forum on the book's legacy twenty years after it appeared in 2000. Published within a couple of years of each other, both texts critically reflect upon practices of knowledge production by examining how objects are made legible and also how critics are located within these circuits. Kang's and Kamboureli's projects differ in terms of their specific goals, as *Scandalous Bodies* uses diaspora and ethnicity to unsettle the settler nativism of Canadian literature whereas *Compositional Subjects* uses Asian American women to critique disciplines, but they share a common interest in representation and disciplinarity.

Compositional Subjects analyzes the figuration of Asian American women by laying out a set of questions about how we see objects, and these are lines of inquiry that can be extended to Canadian literature as a field. Kang focuses on four common representations of Asian American women, not with the intention of replacing misrepresentations with more truthful representations, but rather to shed light on the historical conditions, methodologies, and ideologies that produce particular compositions (Kang 3). At the same time, the writing of difference and the representation of Asian American women are also analyzed as problems of disciplinarity, and Kang recognizes disciplines themselves as being "particular, partial, and ever-shifting formations" (4). Central to this critique is an understanding of how disciplinary constraints shape how objects are apprehended and in turn how disciplines reproduce themselves through their norms:

> The animating struggle within a discipline is not so much *about* fidelity/infidelity to an external object of study but *around* internalized rules and norms of a "methodological field" that binds but also fractures its practicing agents, or "disciples." Disciplines are made, sustained, and transformed by these disciples as much as these practices also discipline these knowing subjects. (4, emphasis original)

Drawing on Arjun Appadurai's argument that diversity is typically seen as the voice of the minor, and that disciplines claim the voice of the major, Kang argues that the way Asian American women are reduced to "belated and still minor objects of study within established disciplines works to preserve

those disciplines' authority as a progressivist accumulation of knowledge of all subjects within liberalism's promise of universal representation" (4-5).

I find the questions that Kang raises about disciplinary formations and the discipline's relations to its internal logics and external objects profoundly generative in relation to Canadian literature. *Compositional Subjects* outlines how Asian American women are constructed by disciplines such as literary studies, film studies, and the social sciences, and its approach can be used as the beginnings of a method for considering how the kinds of minor subjects Kang discusses come into view for Canadian literature. In a similar vein, we might ask how literary studies as a discipline constrains and also enables the legibility of minor subjects as seen by different Canadian literary critics, represented within various classrooms and on syllabi, and read by specific juries in particular years. How and when are the disciplinary norms broached in order to make room for other considerations of the social worlds of these minor subjects? In addition to reflecting upon how Canadian literature constructs its objects of study, how can we also understand the ways in which Canadian literature sees its relations to the discipline of literary studies? As a field with multiple and complex relations to colonialism and imperialism, both in relation to Indigenous and racialized communities as well as to British and American cultural and political imperialisms, how have literary disciplinings worked to produce a sense of legitimacy for Canadian literature? In other words, what are the historical and ongoing negotiations between the terms "Canadian" and "literature"?

Within the terrain of literary criticism, texts are often read in terms of their aesthetic and political value. Formalist matters and social representation are concerns raised when scholars debate questions such as which texts deserve to be read more widely, how some texts and writers are made minor while others are reinforced as major, and as we critique the structures that uphold these relations of power. For the purposes of this editorial, the debates about the aesthetic and political dimensions of texts interest me because of the ways in which they shed light on the imagined purpose of the field of Canadian literary studies and how the field has responded to questions of relevance and audience, answers that have shifted over time as have our explanations for what literary studies can do, most recently with the ongoing crisis of the humanities.

While the formal and social dimensions of texts are often assumed to be separate, Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan make a compelling case for thinking of them differently. In their new book, *The Teaching Archive* (2021), they recontextualize eminent scholars of the past by supplementing their scholarly publications with their teaching materials, such as syllabi, handouts, and lecture notes. By expanding the record of literary studies beyond monographs and articles, Buurma and Heffernan interrupt conventional narratives of the discipline, including the belief that it has historically been shaped by a "contrapuntal method war" that "depict[s] formalist and historicist methods as dramatically opposed" (9). In their chapter on J. Saunders Redding, a noted scholar of African American literature, Buurma and Heffernan show how the aesthetic and social dimensions of texts are not distinct principles but rather constrain each other in practice. They address Redding's belief that notions of pure literature and romantic authorship had serious consequences for Black writing, as "these ideals functioned to segregate disciplinary knowledge, rendering African American writing unliterary and African American lives and letters unhistorical" (107). Through his teaching and writing, Redding grappled with this problem of disciplinary knowledge, and specifically with how "realism often reflected not the world but the social values of a specific class of readers and granting institutions" (114). For example, in his project *No Day of Triumph* (1942), Redding depicted Black lives throughout the US South outside of the conventions of documentary realism (Buurma and Heffernan 116) and, in so doing, produced "a new vision of American life unbounded by the narrative conventions that valorize racial or familial belonging" (116).

It is worth noting that Kang makes a related point in her analysis of how Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) has been canonized in literary circles as an example of ethnic women's autobiography: "Tellingly, the book's generic classification and disciplinary belonging have been more easily assumed when it is read as exhibiting a social or cultural *difference* from some privileged, primary axis of identity" (33, emphasis original). By this Kang means that Kingston's text is frequently read as an autobiography whose value is derived from being a socially representative account of Chinese American life and therefore "read as *other than* literature by literary critics and scholars" (64, emphasis original). Kang distinguishes

herself from other scholars that read these debates as racist or culturally ignorant mistakes and instead focuses on how "the autobiographical fixation of the book has been crucial to this canonization by affirming the socially inclusionary capacities of literary studies" (63). The critiques raised by Kang as well as Buurma and Heffernan about how aesthetic values have been used to reinforce the dominance of certain subjects and genres are useful to hold onto as we reflect upon the shifting internal rules that cohere Canadian literature as a discipline and its relations to the worlds that intersect with college and university classrooms and literary institutions, but also extend beyond them. Here it is worth bearing in mind Buurma and Heffernan's point that "[w]hat we stand to gain by recovering the syllabuses that Redding carried north, then, is a model for integrating reading lists that rejects the analogy between inclusion on a syllabus and inclusion in American political life" (113). I take up the questions raised by Kang, Buurma, and Heffernan not because they are new ones, but rather because they remind us of the recursiveness of these debates and that we still need to negotiate them within the context of this discipline.

A similar impulse can be seen in *Scandalous Bodies.* Kamboureli reminds us in her interview with Myra Bloom in this issue (as she cites from the book's preface) that her approach is "not the kind that views a text as a sovereign world, but one that opens the text in order to reveal the method of its making, the ways in which it is the product of an ongoing dialogue between different realities" (xv). The forum on *Scandalous Bodies* in this issue returns our attention to the text and more broadly to the methodologies we use to approach Canadian literature. In his introduction to the forum, Barrett asks how a return to *Scandalous Bodies*' critique of Canadian literature resonates twenty years later and how it may guide our thinking today, citing Alicia Elliott's questioning of how the field continues to repeat its mistakes. We can read the forum as an attempt to transform the field and perhaps even "shatter the mirrors of repetition" (Kamboureli 6). Andrea Davis, for example, advocates for an approach that thinks through race, and Blackness in particular, noting that this is an aspect missing from *Scandalous Bodies.* Davis argues that in order to move beyond the limits of multicultural critique, critics must consider how "Black Canadian writing is also informed by a different set of questions / problematics than those emerging from other ethnic groups, including the

legacy of slavery and complexity of Black identities marked by repeating experiences of fragmentation—not just hybridity." In her contribution, she turns to the work of Dionne Brand and M. NourbeSe Philip, who find in poetry "a new grammar of Black being." In addition to devising new questions that enable us to attend more carefully to the lifeworlds of minoritized subjects, the forum also prompts recognitions of the critical conversations that informed *Scandalous Bodies*. Sarah Dowling reminds us that, in addition to being in dialogue with Canadian literary scholarship, *Scandalous Bodies* also participated in debates about bodies, haunting, and grief, but that the book's affinity with these wider discourses has tended to be forgotten. "Perhaps this was simply because the nation-based framing of most literary criticism—even a work like *Scandalous Bodies*, which troubles national frameworks by attending to ethnicity and diaspora—artificially separates texts with similar critical frames," notes Dowling. Her essay reminds us of the distinction between the conversations that inform our reading and writing practices and the ways in which our work gets taken up, thereby underscoring "the cultural and political syntax of our communities."

The articles in this issue pose related questions for their readers. In "Rig Talk and Disidentification," Melanie Dennis Unrau draws our attention to the mechanisms of forgetting that are embedded in petroculture formations. She examines two collections of poetry about oil work published during different oil booms and over a thirty-year span. The forgetfulness of petroculture becomes visible through the writing and reception of these two works and is understood in relation to settler-colonial claims to land, the boom and bust cycles of the economy, and readerly tendencies. Andrea Beverley also takes up environmental concerns in her essay "Uranium Mining, Interdisciplinarity, and Ecofeminism in Donna Smyth's *Subversive Elements*," which analyzes Smyth's text as an underexamined contribution to the archive of environmental literature from the 1980s. Positioning Smyth's book within debates about environmentalism and alongside contributions by notable figures such as Margaret Laurence, Beverley highlights the literary activism of ecofeminists. A return to earlier feminist approaches is also part of Margaret Steffler's project as she offers a reading of Miriam Toews' *Women Talking*, a novel that depicts three generations of Mennonite women in the

fictional colony of Molotschna as they share stories to critique patriarchal violence. Steffler draws on influential feminist theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray to examine the women's dialogues about gender inequity and violence. Reflecting on what it means to encounter these fictionalized dialogues now given the impact of the #MeToo movement, Steffler notes that "there is nothing new in the stories women are telling, but there *is* something new in the underlying urgency to heed women's feelings and narratives." Vikki Visvis also poses questions about what it means to return to earlier narratives in her essay on Frances Itani's *Deafening*, a novel that engages with D/deaf education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Visvis examines the novel for how it represents debates over sign language and oralism as illuminating anxieties about national exclusion, and considers these depictions in terms of historical realism and historical revisionism. She explores what it means to write "a configuration of nation where the D/deaf as able-bodied function as a metaphor for a fit, healthy, and adaptive Canada." The final article in this issue, by Thomas Hodd, also pushes these conversations about genre and historical inattentiveness further as it directs our attention towards Will R. Bird's war fiction, which was informed by Bird's experiences serving in World War I as a sniper and a rifleman. Re-evaluating the dearth of critical attention paid to Bird's writing despite the wide readership it reached, Hodd asks us to consider how questions of genre (i.e., short story vs. the novel) and those of military rank (non-commissioned vs. officer) may have contributed to the forgetting of a popular writer. In addition to these articles, this issue contains a reflection on homes, past and present. Botao Wu employs a creative-critical method to reflect upon his experiences of growing up in China and the stories that shaped his understandings of place, inquiring with poetry into how he carries these memories with him during his migrations to Vancouver and other cities and as he continues to search for physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual homes.

Taken together, the contributions to this issue present readers with an opportunity to reflect upon the ways that our disciplinary constraints shape how we return to history, and upon our particular investments in returning to the past. These contributions open up ways for thinking of Canadian literature in terms of the methodologies, objects, writers, authors, and institutions that shape it as a field. This is also the final issue that our

designer George Vaitkunas will prepare for us. George has been a valuable member of the *Canadian Literature* team for over twenty-five years, and #243 marks the one-hundredth issue that he has designed for the journal. We are grateful for his contributions to the journal over the past decades and wish him all the best in his retirement.

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Beatrice Achampong

The Beauty of Rage

Let my rage be my guiding light

Let it call forth the flaming red fury
of the disappearing skies

Let it unsettle the tranquil blue waters
as it divides again the timid shores

Let it break the earth
so as to cause the green terrain to crumble to pieces

Only when those colors escape to unite
would my rage cease to exist

Melanie Dennis Unrau

Rig Talk and Disidentification in Peter Christensen's *Rig Talk* and Mathew Henderson's *The Lease*

> *Rig Talk* seems to be a controversial book. Basically seems the academics don't understand what the book is about and quickly pass moral judgment on all those heathen folk who dirty their hands.
> —Peter Christensen, Letter to Glen Sorestad (1982)

Peter Christensen's *Rig Talk* (1981) and Mathew Henderson's *The Lease* (2012) are poetry collections about oil work published during different oil booms, three decades apart. While the texts share many remarkable similarities, this article focuses on their use of vernacular "rig talk" that positions the speakers as ambivalent insiders among oil workers. As the language of production in the oil patch and the petrostate, rig talk is petropoetics, a discursive formation and world-making project in which everyone is implicated. Rig-talking petropoetry simultaneously reproduces and critiques the classist, ecocidal, settler-colonial, racist, misogynist, homophobic, and ableist structures of an extractive industry in which workers are both perpetrators and victims; it figures oil workers as vital makers and theorists of our petromodern predicaments. This article draws on cultural theories of disidentification to consider rig talk as a way for oil workers and other petrocultural subjects to position ourselves as complicit, dependent, resistant, and in solidarity in relation to the poetics of extractive industry, petrocultures, and the petrostate.[1] Part of a larger project on poetry written by Canadian oil workers, it uses a focused reading of *Rig Talk* and *The Lease* to demonstrate

the existence of a decades-long tradition of Canadian oil-worker poetry that can serve as a touchpoint for literary and cultural studies of Canadian petropoetics in the burgeoning field of petrocultures or the energy humanities.

Rig Talk as Petropoetics

Literary criticism has treated the recent boom in Canadian oil-worker poetry as a new phenomenon.[2] In "Canadian Petro-Poetics: Masculinity, Labor, and Environment in Mathew Henderson's *The Lease*" (2014), a foundational text in the study of both Canadian oil-worker poetry and a more broadly defined Canadian petropoetics, German ecocritic Judith Rauscher describes Henderson's *The Lease* in terms that could also describe Christensen's *Rig Talk*:

> His poems both construct and subvert an imagined working-class masculinity forged by the hardships of petro-labor and marked by exaggerated misogynist heterosexuality as well as a celebration of technological domination over the land. In the process, the texts explore the possibilities and limits of a proletarian ecopoetics sensitive to patterns of subjection of both land and people. (104)

Yet, Rauscher names only *The Lease* and Dymphny Dronyk's "The Patch Poems, 2006" (2007) as examples of poetry about oil work written from an "insider perspective," and as exceptions to the rule that "much of Canadian petro-poetry since the 1970s is written from the viewpoint of a concerned yet distant observer" (101, 109n7). Similarly, in a 2016 lecture, Henderson describes writing *The Lease* while completing an MFA at the University of Guelph as "walking into an empty space" in Canadian poetry because "there hadn't really been anybody writing about this particular scene" ("Navigating" 05:38-05:48). Such accounts of oil-worker poetry coming out of only the most recent Canadian oil and gas boom (2004-2014) overlook Peter Christensen's 1981 collection *Rig Talk*, a foundational text for a disavowed and forgotten tradition.

Any account of Canadian petropoetics as both resource logic and resource aesthetic[3] must treat with suspicion claims to so-called "empty space." Oil and gas production in Canada is premised on forgetting, first through the myth of *terra nullius* that underpins settler-colonial claims to Indigenous land and resources, and subsequently through the erasure of memory involved in the boom-and-bust cycles of a staples economy. As francophone petrocultures scholar Dominique Perron observes, the movements of the boom-and-bust cycle, "while predictable, seem to

provoke an invariably renewed astonishment on the part of provincial and federal governments, as if they were all affected by a collective amnesia, helpless in reaction to this rather frequent phenomenon" (615). It is because of such forgetfulness that Canadians and Albertans can, as oil-worker poet Lindsay Bird writes in her book *Boom Time*, "swing fat and hammocked / between bust and bust" (43), failing to plan or save for the next bust or for the end of the fossil fuel era. Such forgetfulness also contributes to the sense, common among the oil-worker poets I study, that each of these writers is alone, writing into an empty space rather than a tradition; thus, the white Canadian drilling fluid specialist and poet Naden Parkin expects no response when he challenges readers of his book *A Relationship with Truth* (2014) to "[n]ame another oil worker constructing poems" (38). Canadian petro- and ecocriticism must resist the overlaying of a boom-and-bust mentality on our analyses of culture because it isolates individuals in the petrostate and serves to keep them, as Perron observes, "*in their place*" (606).[4]

Rig Talk is a product of the era of the oil shocks and boom of the 1970s, published during the brief regime of the National Energy Program (1980-1985) and the rise of Western alienation in Canada before the glut of 1982 and the bust of 1986, at a time when oil was greasing the gears of an ascendant neoliberal ideology and oil companies were already researching the "greenhouse effect." *The Lease* was published in the last hoorah of the boom that peaked in 2008 and then made a recovery after the financial crisis and before the new bust of 2014—in the era of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, an Albertan, whose tenure was marked by deregulation and industry-friendly policies, as well as an apology to survivors of the Indian residential schools in 2008, absurdly followed by his claim the following year that Canada has "no history of colonialism" (Ljunggren). Treating *Rig Talk* and *The Lease* as part of the same tradition brings their historical contexts into conversation with one another, as points of situated knowledge in an ongoing process that Christensen and Henderson participate in, observe, and critique from the inside.

The insidious forgetfulness of petroculture is not the only reason Christensen's *Rig Talk* has been overlooked: it was not well received at the time of its publication. The endorsement on its back cover written by Canadian work poet Tom Wayman emphasizes the book's significance as work literature: "Peter Christensen's RIG TALK brings us, for the first time in contemporary writing, an insider's look at the harsh and difficult

working life in the oil patch. These are tough poems about a terrible job, destructive no less to the people who work at it than the landscapes it scars." Wayman has long argued that work writing is authentic and potentially transformative when it is written as an "inside job"—that is, from the insider perspective of a person who has done the work (as opposed to that of an outsider who has done research on the work [see Wayman]). For Wayman, both the "tough" or "stark" style of the poetry and the balancing of ecological and labour concerns are appropriate for insider oil-work poetry. Despite support from advocates of work poetics such as Wayman, however, *Rig Talk* was heavily criticized for its plain, literal, and rough language and imagery; for Christensen's seeming "acquiescence" to a violent masculinity (Smith 17); and for what reviewers saw as a disconnect between Christensen's work poems and nature poems.[5]

In one review, Francis Zichy writes, "Christensen is committed both to the world of big machines and tough men, and to the natural world, and he is puzzled and disturbed by their incompatibility, but he finds no way out of the bind, and often fails to discover the language that will bring his concerns to life" (11). Zichy portrays Christensen as an unskilled poet who fails either to choose between or to overcome the stereotyped, ideological positions of the oil worker and the nature poet. Yet, when Christensen comments in a 1982 letter to his editor at Thistledown Press, cited in the epigraph above, that the literary reviewers misunderstand "what the book is about" and focus instead on the individualizing, classist question of who has clean or dirty hands, he suggests that it was the literary critics who lacked the language to describe his project. In contrast to a conception of nature poetry that falsely assumes that nature can be separated from culture, labour, or industry, Christensen's poetics is more accurately described in the terms Rauscher uses for *The Lease*—terms that were not yet in use in literary criticism in the 1980s—as *proletarian ecopoetics* and *petropoetics*.[6] What *Rig Talk* is about is no mystery, yet it eluded Christensen's critics: it is about petropoetics, a material and cultural process that brings together "the world of big machines and tough men" and "the natural world," to explosive and devastating effect. Christensen's term for petropoetics is *rig talk*.

Christensen is a white settler poet who was born to immigrant parents in rural Alberta and who worked as an oil rigger, seismic helper (or

jughound), and gravel truck driver during the oil boom and shocks of the 1970s. *Rig Talk*, his second poetry collection, is dedicated to "the Province of Alberta" and illustrated with pencil drawings of workers, non-human animals, and oil rigs by Jacqueline Forrie. It features cowboy-style poems in Christensen's characteristic mode of "tough imagism—clipped lines, flat observation, stark visuality" (Cochrane 206)—with several poems reading as truncated or censored sonnets. *Rig Talk* is divided into three sections. The first, "Oil Rush," contains documentary poems about oil work, spoken by a persona of the poet who narrates as

> Roughnecks work the deck
> Spin chain
> couple uncouple steel
>
> the nights pass like noise[.] (25)

After the accidents described in "Wild Fire" and the concrete poem "The Driller Makes a Mistake," the young worker who went "Up North" (10) with aspirations to become "[a] big man" (14) realizes that "I am an expendable machine" (32). A subtle metaphor compares workers to the Christensen-brand drill bits, labelled with Christensen's own surname on their sides, that were commonly used in the 1970s and 1980s, so that the workers in "Graveyard Shift" trip pipe all night to retrieve and replace a diamond drill bit, "worn smooth" (24), that symbolizes what the industry does to workers (see the Christensen Diamond drill bit in Figure 1). The second section, "A River Begins Here," is a suite of ecopoems focused on the natural world and the worker's relationship with it—as a site of home, work, and recreation; as a victim of pollution and ecocide; and as a voice of critique against extractivism and colonialism. For example, "River Dance" reproduces and subverts colonial tropes by recalling "the last dance" of the Bighorn Stoneys on their territory before it was flooded in 1972 by the Bighorn Dam and the politicians who "raise themselves over the earth" to make a "dead river" (38). The final section, "Rig Talk," is made up of vernacular poems in the voices of residents of the oil patch and workers off the job. These are often parodic (but seldom funny) performances of a harsh masculinity that leave open the question of whether the acts of abuse and negligence—of getting "so drunk on the same old shit" of misogyny, racism, and lateral violence (56)—are committed by Christensen or someone else.

Figure 1. Christensen Diamond drill bit from the 1970s-1980s. Photo courtesy of the Canadian Energy Museum. Used with permission.

Although the coming bust, the long-term impacts of neoliberalism, the widespread public knowledge of climate change, and the crisis of abandoned and orphaned oil wells in Western Canada were yet to come, *Rig Talk* foreshadows them through the speaker's ambivalent participation in the hubristic poetics of an extractive industry. Embodying, if not necessarily believing in, ideologies of progress, upward mobility, misogyny, and settler-colonial ownership of the land, the speaker works "[s]eventeen hours a day" in a booming and dangerous industry (16); blows up animals, trees, and rocks "for fun" (18); and enables or perhaps perpetrates assaults on Mother Earth and women (15, 50-52, 57). Yet, in ways that suggest solidarity but may also be appropriative, he also links exploited workers with polluted rivers, abused women and animals, dispossessed peoples, and nature at "the end of the chain" (43). He calls out holier-than-thou consumers of oil and petrochemicals in a culture where "Everything Must Be New," responding to the illusion that some citizens of the petrostate can have clean hands with the petropoetics of an oil worker who says, "I do not forget / my place among things" (61). He implicates poetry in rig talk as too much "talk talk talk" that overwrites and "owns everything" (58); and, for good measure, he implicates the reader, "you," through his occasional use of second-person narration when "you cram into the camper" going up north (10), "[y]ou drill another hundred feet" (24), and "you dive from the catwalk" after lighting the cigarette that starts a rig fire (31). In the disorienting, wide-ranging, and scale-jumping poetics of *Rig Talk*, individual culpability is beside the point, and rig-talk-as-petropoetics is what geographer Kathryn Yusoff calls a "collaborative project" between humans and fossil fuels ("Geologic" 781). This project keeps all of us in our places by upholding the myth that only some of us are oil workers.

Christensen's speaker performs versions of rig talk that range from the talk of oil workers to a resource poetics of oil and the material-discursive structures of the Albertan and Canadian petrostates. *Rig Talk* provokes questions and offers warnings about what the industry was making of Alberta, blurring the lines between material and cultural production, poets and petropoets, and oil workers and other petrocultural subjects. As a synonym for petropoetics, *rig talk* emphasizes that oil workers are not only petropoetic objects, taking their place in a system where "[t]he plains are alive / with the campfires of millionaires" (9), but also petropoetic subjects,

fluent in the language of oil production and positioned to interpret and cut into its power dynamics. Rig talk is a world-making project in which Christensen implicates himself as both exploiter and exploited, "sky man" and "expendable machine" (14, 32); yet rig talk can also be a non-innocent, disidentificatory means of resistance that may be effective because it is what Wayman calls an "inside job."

Rig Talk as Disidentification

Disidentification is a linguistic and performative mode through which gestures or speech acts enact both complicity and resistance; its transformative potential lies in its rejection of the idea that subjects must be constituted as either for or against dominant ideology. Marxist philosopher and linguist Michel Pêcheux first used the term in *Language, Semantics and Ideology* (1975; English edition 1982), in which he lays the groundwork for a "*materialist theory of discourse*" after Louis Althusser (60). According to Althusser, ideology must constantly be reproduced through the interpellation and the consent of subjects. Pêcheux demonstrates that such reproduction happens both through the seamless identification of the "good subject," who accepts and embodies the discursive formations of dominant ideology, and through the outright refusal of the "bad subject," who "*counteridentifies* with the discursive formation imposed on him [*sic*]" and yet still serves to strengthen it (157). As an experimental, transformative refusal of the subject positions on offer, disidentification involves taking up "*a non-subjective position*" (158) that works in an "epistemological break" where meaning has broken down (136). It turns ideology "against itself" and produces the grounds for a resistant politics (195)—for Pêcheux, a proletarian politics (150).

Cuban American queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz draws on queer and critical race studies to make an important intervention in Pêcheux's theory by bringing together disidentification and performativity in his *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999). As Muñoz demonstrates through his study of disidentifications like Pedro Zamora's queer, Latinx, and HIV-positive "counterpublicity" on the early reality-TV show *The Real World* (147), disidentification can look like mere complicity, parody, or mimicry of normative or majoritarian ways of being, but it is also resistant. For Muñoz, the critical ambivalence of

disidentification suggests modes of solidarity that can accommodate difference, disagreement, and desire. Muñoz was influenced by the work of Judith Butler, who emphasizes, in her own assessment of Muñoz's work after his death, the implications of disidentification for solidarity and resistance. She argues that identification is not identity, that it always introduces "noncoincidence and difference," and that "it reveals itself to be disidentification from the start" (5). For Butler, solidarity is not necessarily sameness, agreement, or identification: "We don't need to identify with one another, but we need to converge at the site of our disidentification" (18). Muñoz's theory of disidentificatory performativity and its implications for broad-based solidarity are key to any subsequent work on disidentification, including my analysis of rig talk as being concerned with class, gender, sex, race, and land.

As *Rig Talk* shows, everyone has a place and does work in the material-discursive structure of the petrostate, including the oil worker and the nature poet, who are both complicit in settler colonialism and extraction. From its beginning, *Rig Talk* blurs the distinctions between the speech of poets, oil workers, readers, and the rigs themselves, using a disidentificatory strategy that Muñoz calls "tactical misrecognition" to put subjects out of place and disrupt petrocultural discourses and power structures (168). In the opening poem, the speaker visits a drilling rig and is mistaken for a labourer looking for a job. He tells the driller, "I'm writing / a book about rigs"; the driller responds, "*Well it's about gawdam time / somebody wrote about us,*" and offers the speaker a tour (7). The speaker establishes his own credibility as a work poet not only through his familiarity with the rig and his donning of a hard hat, but also by describing the way the driller first misrecognizes him and then endorses his writing. Yet, the speaker is also careful not to appropriate the driller's speech. If tactical misrecognition allows the poet to be recognized as a worker, it also allows the driller to be recognized *as a poet* who does not need another poet to speak for him. Christensen uses italics to show the driller's voice breaking through the narration of the speaker.

The driller and the poet enact an additional misrecognition: "a book about rigs" is taken by the driller to mean a book about oil workers ("*us*"). Thus the poem introduces under erasure the idea that the book is also about the "talk" of the rigs themselves. In Christensen's poems, where

"A touch from a spinning drill stem / can leave you dumb broken" (25), and Forrie's illustrations, where dark steel rigs tower over the soft bodies of workers (see Figure 2), rigs represent power, capital, settler-colonial ownership, and the indifference of oil executives and consumers who exploit and objectify workers. The workers, in turn, exploit and objectify

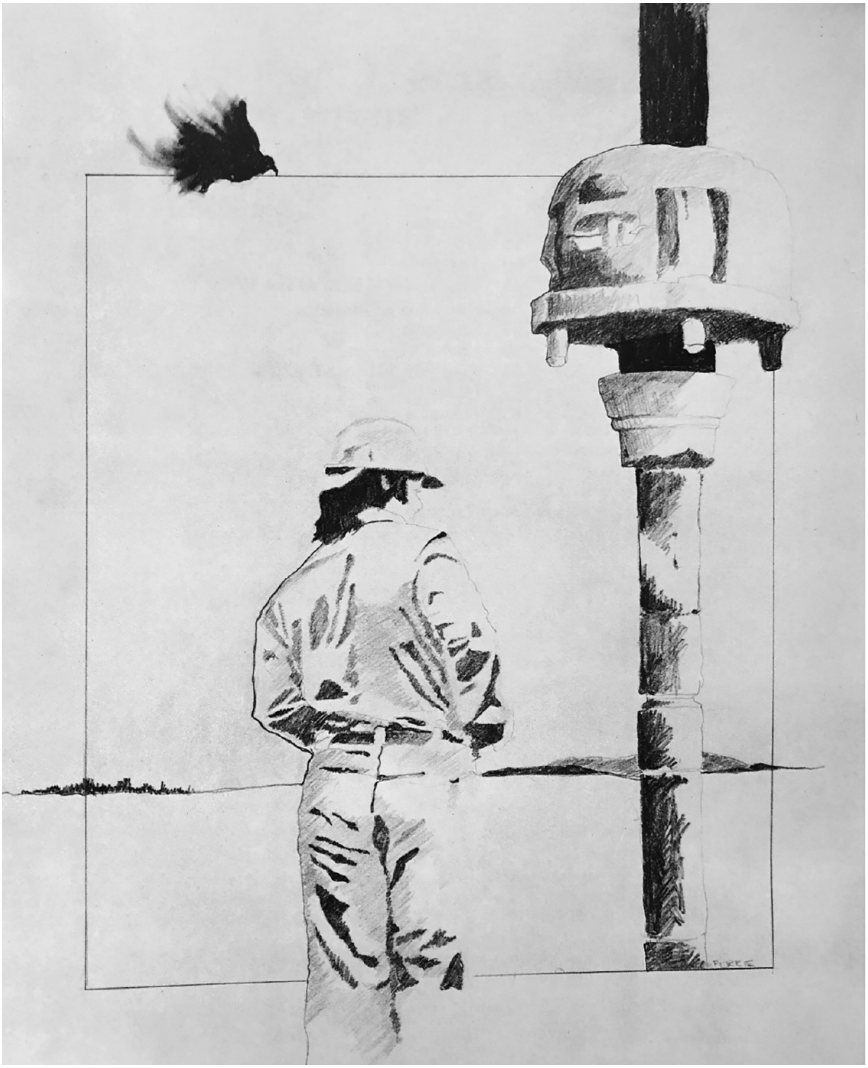

Figure 2. *Rig Talk* illustration by Jacqueline Forrie. Used with permission.

women, non-human animals, and the land, playing their part in a system predicated, as ecofeminist scholar Carolyn Merchant has shown, on a modernist, colonial, and misogynist ideology of "the death of nature." Yet, if rigs are often treated as tools, inanimate objects, or metaphors in *Rig Talk*, they also exceed or shift such categories, with both the poems and Forrie's illustrations showing rigs breaking out of their frames, twisting, and bursting into flames. Accidents, blowouts, and fires shake up the poetry, speaking the power and resistance of the land itself when a non-human power comes

> rushing up from the earth core
> fifteen thousand feet
> rushing up
> to greet the fire
> and celebrate a new sun[.] (31)

Rig Talk is complicit in a Canadian linguistic and literary tradition that Okanagan Syilx writer and scholar Jeannette Armstrong describes in her poem "Threads of Old Memory" as "meant to overpower / to overtake" (184). Christensen fails to escape or transcend the way of being on the land that he refers to as being "New Here" (15). Yet, in moments when land talks through the rigs, exceeding, subverting, and breaking the discursive formations of extraction, *Rig Talk* gestures toward, or longs for, what Armstrong calls "land speaking," Indigenous discursive traditions where human beings can be harmonious with a wider "land language" (178). Workers have intimate knowledge of the land's resistance to colonization, objectification, and extraction. Although they suppress that knowledge through the boasts, threats, and violence they use as inadequate strategies for "Keeping Fear Away" (18), each invocation of *rig talk* is also a reminder that nature is not under human management or control.

The final poem, titled "Rig Talk," closes the book by further opening up disidentificatory positions for oil workers. I quote the poem in full here:

> I wonder at the power
> of the men
> I work for
> They make me
> rough like their talk
>
> I laugh with them

when they say
they are not afraid
of women
  sex
  manhood
  ANYBODY (67)

Although it can be read—unimaginatively—as a young poet's claim to have been corrupted by his coworkers, this poem is filled with the irony and double meaning of disidentification. Spoken from a more wizened perspective than a poem earlier in the book in which a young boy looks up to oil workers as "Heroes" (47), the word *wonder* in the line "I wonder at the power" signals "wonder and dismay" (Zichy 11)—both awe and a questioning of power. *Power* refers simultaneously to the power oil workers hold over one another in the tight hierarchy of a rig, the labour power appropriated by the bosses, the fuel the workers extract from the land, the power they claim illegitimately over others, and the terrifying-yet-repressed power of the land. As the earlier poems show, "the power / of the men" is fleeting and also includes disempowerment and danger. This is signalled by the implied bracketing of the words "of the men," which makes power, in its multiple senses, what the speaker works for. While the statement "[t]hey make me / rough" seems to deflect responsibility or blame from the speaker, I take this as another tactical misrecognition, spoken by a worker who is also "worn smooth" by oil work. The line break after "[t]hey make me" highlights the dynamic through which energy workers are the underappreciated makers—the disavowed poets—of petromodernity, who can only make all of us rough by offering glimpses of the rough working conditions and the ecological sacrifices through which our ways of life are actually reproduced.

Christensen begins the second stanza by having the speaker say "I laugh with them," making a tenuous and disidentificatory distinction between *laughing at* and *laughing with* the performances of oil workers who claim not to be afraid of "ANYBODY"—not the sublimated power of a feminized earth that the worker counters with "sex," nor the impossible interpellation into "manhood." *Laughing with* mingles respect and critique—in this case, a critique that comes not from the outside but from the workers themselves. In light of the stories told in the preceding poems of workers burned alive, broken, or narrowly escaping such fates, as well as stories of how workers

cope with ever-present fear, the speaker invites readers to laugh with them, too. The speaker knows he has plenty to fear, and knows he is not the only worker who laughs at the idea that misogyny, extraction, destruction, and denial are the only appropriate responses to fear.

Rig Talk closes with the suggestion that the conditions of oil work position all workers and indeed all Canadians as disidentificatory subjects, interpellated into identities that Muñoz describes as "toxic" or "spoiled" (185)—identities similarly exposed by Métis scholar Warren Cariou when he asserts that in Canada we all have "tarhands." Caught as we are between wonder and dismay, Christensen shows solidarity by speaking as an insider instead of setting himself apart as better or purer than other workers. He identifies with oil workers by doing extractive labour; by performing a fearless and violent masculinity; by going along with hazings, abuse, and homophobic jokes; and by showing disdain for the land that he and other workers live and work on. Being a complicit insider rather than a judgmental outsider allows Christensen to show that oil work always involves disidentification; that workers see through, laugh at, and are sickened by these performances; that they care about the land; and that they do not necessarily agree with or give consent to the millionaires or the petrostate. In moments of crisis, danger, and self-awareness, rig talk articulates and embodies petrocultural disidentification as a form of petropoetic theory, critique, and resistance.

Rig Talk and Disidentification in *The Lease*

Mathew Henderson is a white settler who was born and raised in Prince Edward Island, but who moved to Alberta the year he finished high school and his father took over an oil and gas production testing company. Henderson worked as a production tester in Alberta and Saskatchewan for a year before starting university, then in the summers for several years after that. Henderson's first book, *The Lease* is a collection of lyric, narrative, confessional poems that mimic the talk of workers and focus on the interior life of a conflicted production tester. In a petromodern pastoral where "cows gather in darkness near the edge of the site, / scratching thighs against steel tankers" (8), and where the job of the production tester is to "[t]end the rusted steel like a shepherd" (9), the oil patch is a resource frontier that can no longer be mistaken as natural or pristine,

where the oil-worker poet both represents and critiques extraction and overconsumption. Many of the poems are written in the form of the sonnet—especially of PEI-born poet Milton Acorn's Jackpine sonnet, "a short poem with a dialectical play of argument" that is "not always limited to fourteen lines" and that need not rhyme (16). Henderson's poetry accommodates the speaker's abuse of and affection for the "dead prairie" he inhabits (7), his equation of ecocide and misogyny, and the mixture of admiration and contempt he expresses for his coworkers and himself.

The reception of Henderson's book has been overwhelmingly positive, including a glowing review in *The New York Times* (Garner) and shortlistings for the Trillium and Gerald Lampert awards for poetry; settler Canadian poet Matthew Tierney calls it "universally loved" (Tierney and Henderson). In fact, *The Lease* seems to be beloved for the same characteristics for which *Rig Talk* was rejected—for expressing a workerly language and tone that are "honky-tonk-plain or Tonka-truck-tough" (Clarke), for performing and critiquing a stereotyped toxic masculinity (Rauscher 105), and for refusing to take sides between workers and the land. In his review of the book, Africadian poet, playwright, and literary scholar George Elliott Clarke praises *The Lease* but also critiques its privileging of class over race: "Intriguingly, Henderson writes often of Caucasians 'coloured' by sun, oil, or gas, but seldom about 'the Natives,' whose land is being looted of its resources. 'Colour' is pronounced, but it's class that's privileged."[7] Instead of adopting Rauscher's lens of *proletarian ecopoetics* to interpret this text, I read *The Lease* as rig talk and petropoetics as a way to tease out what it says not only about labour and ecology but also about gender, colonialism, and race.

In Henderson's poem "What You Do," the narrator responds to the sexist and racist talk of one of his colleagues by disidentifying: "When he talks you quease and pull away, but grow a little / more like him for all your shutting up" (64). Like Christensen, Henderson uses a line break to show that the narrator of his semi-autobiographical poetry is both made sick and simply *made* through oil work and rig talk: the narrator *grows up* and *grows to belong* in the hypermasculine, sexist, homophobic, racist, and violent culture of the oil patch. Like the speaker of *Rig Talk*, the workers in *The Lease* frown upon too much talk. In one poem, the narrator describes low-level workers as "hands" who "wring oil from the earth" and "do not speak"

(48); in another, coworker Dave expresses disdain for "This one guy" who "goes and gets himself a shrink who gets him on comp / because he had a *traumatic experience*," a guy who, according to Dave, does not know "what work *is*" (52).[8] The workers suppress speech and emotion, converting their anger and fear into violence against women, non-humans, and themselves. Yet, the narrator breaks with the prohibition on so-called *bitching* and "howling" by using the mode of confessional poetry to address a presumed audience of sympathetic and complicit readers (30, 67). Disidentification registers in *The Lease* through the narrator's confessions of the aches and pains, anxieties, failures, and feelings that he silences in his day-to-day work, as well as through his portrayal of the talk that passes between oil workers when they think no one else is listening. By admitting his feelings of both disgust and familiarity, and by incorporating rig talk into his own speech throughout the book, the narrator refuses interpellation as either a good poet who exists at a remove from the bad workers or a good worker who shows complete loyalty to the extractive industry that pays his bills.

With the exception of a couple of vernacular poems spoken in the first-person voices of other oil workers, the poems in *The Lease* use present-tense, second-person narration to implicate poet and reader alike in the narrator's actions as well as his fearful and guilty feelings about them. When the narrator commands himself, "Now open the fucking well and walk the pipe like a healer, / your ungloved palm hovering over the unions" (10), his imperative phrasing places readers as workers along the pipes, pipelines, and commodity chains of the oil and gas industry, preventing them from counteridentifying or assuming a comfortable distance from the poems. Yet, he also blocks identification, as in the poem "Who Are You Out There?" in which the narrator says, "You're no part of it. You can only watch" (14)—referring at the most literal level to the production tester who watches roughnecks working on a rig, yet also reminding readers that *you* are an outsider and a voyeur. In the closing poem, when the narrator accuses both the reader and himself of "faking, lurking," he worries simultaneously about how he will write about his former coworkers after leaving the industry and about the way readers might also betray the workers—about whether "you turn them over in the end" (67). Such narration by "you" puts the reader in a position of "reflexive spectatorship," a position which Jennifer Wenzel argues is a promising mode for solidarity

(*Disposition* 167). It resists what Wenzel calls the "*unimagining*" (*Disposition* 18) of the role of the oil worker in Canadian culture, which Henderson has described as an "empty space" but which also takes the form of stereotypes. In such a reflexive situation, readers may "quease and pull away," yet they may also recognize their dependence upon and likeness to workers like the narrator. *The Lease* shows that rather than full identification or belonging, the critical ambivalence of disidentification is what it feels like to be an oil worker, or to be in solidarity with workers.

The disidentificatory poetics of *The Lease* comes together around the central question of the text: what is the lease? Pêcheux describes the "shake-up" of the epistemological break (139), where meaning breaks down because it turns out to be ideological and where disidentification opens up as a possibility, in relation to a question: "What I am referring to here is that work of the unthought in thought whereby the very terms of a question, with the answer it presupposes, disappear, so that the question literally loses its meaning while new 'answers' form to questions which had not been asked" (137). The shake-up around the lease brings together the exploitation of land, workers, women, and Indigenous and racialized peoples, an epistemological break that the workers in *The Lease* discuss with one another. In one of the portrait poems, the narrator tries to explain what the lease is to his coworker Todd:

> and the lease, you have to tell him,
> is just where you work. No, *Where you work*
> *is the lease*. Confusing because it isn't beer
> or smokes or a car stereo system. (38)

Despite his mocking of Todd for being "slow" (38), the speaker is also confused by the location, dimensions, and meaning of the lease. If the italics in this stanza signal Todd's speech, it is Todd who understands that the lease is more than "where you work": it is also a discursive formation that creates the material conditions through which "you" sell your labour power, own or live on the land, and understand your place in the world as an oil worker. The narrator works on the lease, but the lease is also where he lives, as a resident of the oil patch with the mineral rights for his family's land leased by an oil and gas company.

In "Washout," the narrator remembers his father teaching him how to knead dough while "there was a man outside punching holes in the earth, / making your mother's windows buzz and rattle" (10). Having a "man outside"

the family home is a violation—one that is compared to a violation of the mother's body. The treatment of the narrator's home as just another lease parallels both the tenuous and shifting definitions of women in the oil patch as wives, mothers, sisters, or "just pussy" (35), and the way the workers themselves are treated by the industry and consumers as "tanned gears" or replaceable tools (14). The man is another worker, doing what both the father and the narrator do outside other homes in a system that Perron has described, following Denis Duclos, as *autophagic*, where "individuals' and markets' sustainability depends on consuming what they produce in order to survive in a neoliberal economy" (612). What the narrator and his father are meting out as oil workers is also what they are being fed as oil-patch residents: dispossession through abstraction, alienation, and violence. This dispossession is predicated on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, an origin and ontology of the lease that is nearly always outside the frame of Henderson's poems.[9] The whitewashing of dispossession in "Washout" suggests reading the poem alongside Kainai/Sámi filmmaker Elle-Maíjá Tailfeathers' short film *Bloodland,* which depicts drilling for oil as drilling into the body of an Indigenous woman. Tailfeathers made the film using funds from a distribution cheque from an oil-and-gas lease that the Blood Tribe Chief and Council signed without the consent of band members. It links harm to the earth with gender, racial, and settler-colonial violence. The epistemological break around the lease, and the intersecting forms of dispossession and harm the lease encompasses, requires what the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls a "Deeper Dive" into the documented links between oil and gas extraction and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in particular, including the negative impacts of "man camps" and transient workers in local communities. Like rig talk, the lease is a synonym for petropoetics that can attend to its land, gender, and racial politics.

In the poem "You Ask Your Father What a Lease Is," the father answers the narrator's question with seemingly unrelated information, "about the geese beyond / the aqueduct, how they turn the sky grey, / how as a teen he never put his gun away dirty" (17). From his complex and compromised position as a landowner and production testing contractor, the father responds to the lease with an ethics of hard work, responsibility, and care, but also with a sense of entitlement to abundant and cheap natural

resources that seem to be there for the taking. Yet, like Todd and the narrator, he is unable to put the lease into words. In the stanza that follows, the narrator draws his own conclusions about the lease:

> The lease is meaningless: a square paced
> first by seismic workers, and then your father,
> and then by every other man you know.
> But you've always pulled meaning from nothing,
> and when he leads you to an empty field you
> tear grass in fistfuls, read the roots like a will. (17)

The narrator considers the lease as a square of land, paced by men who represent ownership by the father, ownership by the province, and ownership by the oil and gas company that leases the mineral rights. The repeated act of pacing, emphasized by the iambic metre of the line "and then by every other man you know," demonstrates that the claims of settler-colonial ownership and industry leases must constantly be reproduced by ideological subjects—that, as the narrator observes, "[t]his place repeats itself" (8), and that it must repeat itself or fall apart. The speaker feels that as a poet he should know how to "[pull] meaning from nothing" in the way that wills, leases, surface rights agreements, and the treaties that underpin them do; but when he goes looking for meaning or metaphor in the "empty field" and in the roots of the grass he pulls from the ground, the epistemological break only widens. The empty field is a colonial *terra nullius* that the narrator knows is not empty. Although he might "read the roots like a will," looking for his inheritance and his claim on the land, he finds something more radical lying there at the root, in the double meaning of *will.* His extractive approach to meaning as something he can take from the land comes up against the will and sovereignty of the land itself, and of its original Indigenous caretakers, which persist despite the repeated pacing of the lease. Although the narrator may judge fellow worker Dave for "the shit he says" and for having a racist attitude toward "the Natives / who sleep, curled up, on his hometown streets" (61), what lies at the root of the lease is the colonialism and systemic racism from which the narrator benefits, which, as the ground of petropoetics and the petrostate, allow him and Dave to sleep safely but illegitimately on stolen land.

In the relations structured by the lease, power and wealth flow upward while abuse and violence trickle down. Henderson represents workers as abusers and money-counting beneficiaries in this system, yet also as

victims—terrorized gophers (18), drowning kittens (49), and broken men. The devaluing of workers' lives through the lease can be seen in their discussions of which body parts they would cook or lose "for an even million" (31) and their visceral responses to the news of a fatal blowout where "the pipe swung so fast it took one guy's face / clean off" (54). The lease legitimizes an extractive industry's use of the land and of workers' bodies. Although it seems to provide the workers with identity, freedom, and a way of life, it also takes away from these things, offering them only temporarily and at a high cost. In the epistemological break around what the lease is and means, it can be seen as a compromise that workers might not continue to be willing to make.

In the poem "Joe Talks about Snubbing," coworker Joe describes a job he "won't even do" that pits the lives of workers against the will of the earth:

> But yeah, it's tripping under pressure.
> Basically pushing pipe down a hole
> that wants to push you back. It's when
> the patch itself gets so goddamn angry— (63)

The story drops off here because it reminds the narrator of another story about Joe sharing how to "avoid the nipple" and pleasure a woman (63). In the third stanza, the narrator—"you"—sets the scene, complete with Joe's "dirty or freckled" elbows and his miming, "darting his tongue / in and out under the imaginary tit" (63). The final stanza is narrated by Joe again:

> Right there, that's what they like,
> just underneath. Get your tongue
> in there, boys. My ex-wife, real good girl,
> Christ, she giggled like fuck for that. (63)

Through this seeming accident of memory, the narrator shows Joe expressing the unthought thought that oil and gas extraction—"punching holes"—is comparable to rape. The contrast between the ex-wife's pleasure and the earth's anger shows that everyone—including Joe, the narrator, and "you"—knows that the land is more than dead nature or "a mindless, submissive body" available to be exploited and leased (Merchant 190). In a situation where it becomes clear that Mother Earth does not consent, Joe reveals a disidentificatory ethics of what he "won't even do" for money or for the industry.

The narrator knows he is subject not only to "the wills of men / who will you" (50) but also to the will of the land, which oil work pits him against, in a battle the narrator expects to lose. Rather than expressing the climate-change

denial that readers might expect from an oil worker—a stereotyped denial that I have not found in poetry by oil workers—the narrator characterizes the lease as a deferral rather than a denial of the eventual triumph of nature. He expresses a cynical "hope" in the persistence, for a little while longer, of oil work and of the lease itself:

> As if hope alone could tend the ocean,
> could hold it above you just a while
> more before it crushes the record
> clean, ravines the prairies and scrubs
> the sum of your summers to
> bent steel beams, cracked alfalfa. (50)

The lease is a hope to delay the consequences and the dangers of petromodernity, represented here by the rising seas of climate change or the Genesis flood. Unlike rig talk, the lease has a finite temporality that leaves the workers waiting, individually and collectively, for the catastrophe or transition when the lease will be up and they will no longer be oil workers.

The epistemological break is not in itself a resistant politics; it is only an opening for a politics to emerge. Muñoz writes, "disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (31). The narrator of *The Lease*, in response to both the sight of a coworker who lost a hand in an accident and the panicked feeling he has every time he opens an oil well, says "[y]ou wait" (49 [see also 31]). The only explanation of what he waits for is the metaphor of a drowning man who waits "for a hand or hook to pull you from this place" (49). This sense of waiting comes from the disidentification that Butler notes is part of identification from the start, and the narrator appears to wait with urgency but without knowing what he waits for. He waits for a change that could be a blowout, an accident, the automation of his job, a flood, a collapse in oil prices, a strike, a shutdown, a green energy transition, or a politics of reparation and of giving land back to Indigenous peoples. His waiting is a dormant or deferred form of resistance, a critical ambivalence that hides behind his "hope" for things to remain the same. Perhaps the worker waits for a hand extended in solidarity among a critical mass of workers and Canadians ready to redefine what they will and will not do for the petrostate. Perhaps the cracked code of the lease serves as raw material—a hook—for critiquing extractivism and imagining alternatives.

After Rig Talk: Toward a More Comprehensive Study of Petropoetics

Christensen's *Rig Talk* is a foundational text in Canadian petropoetics, as both an early example of oil-worker poetry and a founding theorization of petropoetics as a world-making project that extends beyond poetry to the work we all do to produce and reproduce fossil fuels, CO_2, inequity, and dispossession. Against the idea that oil and gas workers are hypocrites, dupes, or too implicated in the system to understand it, *Rig Talk* and *The Lease* demonstrate that workers are uniquely positioned to theorize and resist petropoetics. Disidentificatory rig talk is urgent cultural work that articulates oil workers' desires for the transformation of the relations of petromodern production and the settler-colonial petrostate. It creates openings for solidarity between oil workers and other Canadians in the differences, desires, fears, and hypocrisies that make all of our petromodern identifications also disidentifications. I close here with a call for continued scholarly work on Canadian petropoetics, and for solidarity with workers' organizations such as Iron & Earth that advocate for a just energy transition that is good for workers and Indigenous peoples.[10]

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NOTES

1 Sourayan Mookerjea describes Canada as a petrostate, which he defines as "a polity that is subordinated and restructured according to the needs of either the Big Oil multinationals or the global political economy of oil or both" (331).

2 Recent poetry collections written by oil workers include Dymphny Dronyk's *Contrary Infatuations* (2007), Naden Parkin's *A Relationship with Truth* (2014), Lesley Battler's *Endangered Hydrocarbons* (2015), and Lindsay Bird's *Boom Time* (2019). For a timeline and analysis of oil-worker poetry in Canada, see Unrau.

3 See Wenzel, "Afterword: Improvement and Overburden."

4 Italics in quotations throughout this article retain the original emphasis of their source.

5 For citations of all reviews, see Unrau, p. 95.

6 Lynn Keller cites Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2000) as the first use of the term *ecopoetics* (10). Bate describes ecopoems as "imaginary parks in which we may breathe an air that is not toxic and accommodate ourselves to a mode of dwelling that is not alienated" (64), but Jonathan Skinner defines ecopoetics as being concerned with practices of dwelling not in an idealized natural world but rather in the compromised ecologies that humans actually affect and inhabit. *Rig Talk* is ecopoetics in this expanded sense;

it anticipates what Keller calls "poetry of the self-conscious Anthropocene" (*Recomposing*).

7 This statement must also now be read in light of George Elliott Clarke's recent collaborations with and defense of Stephen Kummerfield [now known as Stephen Brown], a white poet who was convicted of manslaughter and served a short sentence for the 1995 murder of Pamela George, an Indigenous woman and poet. Clarke shows here that Henderson's privileging of class over race is not neutral; recent critics of Clarke, including Misty Longman (Saulteaux) of the ta-tawâw Student Centre at the University of Regina, have likewise argued that academic freedom should not be privileged over respect for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and their families (see Allen and Bridges).

8 Unknowingly, it seems, Dave references Philip Levine's poem "What Work Is" and its exploration of an epistemological break.

9 Oil work, as what Andreas Malm has called "*primitive accumulation of fossil capital*" (291), is predicated on the prior and ongoing accumulations of settler colonialism, racism, and patriarchy (see Coulthard; Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*; Federici).

10 See ironandearth.org.

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Andrew Faulkner

Duplicate Worlds

The headache divides the patient
in half. Now the patient is in
two places at once.

The patient is in a surplus position.
Please, the patient would like
to be re-sewn. By whose hand,

whose needle? The patient isn't picky.
The patient is a buoy whose prayer is a tide.
Can the tide also drown? The patient

expects to find out.
Advil is a symptom. It has a morphology,
a path of progression. It can worsen.

Is Advil also a patient?
The patient has not considered this.
What happens to the body

when it crowds itself out?
The patient is purple with wondering.
Like a bruise, shadow

of a shadow's edge.
Disease is a condition
that afflicts only the living.

The patient would like to keep living.
How to be a symptom of living,
the patient would like to know.

Andrea Beverley

Uranium Mining, Interdisciplinarity, and Ecofeminism in Donna Smyth's *Subversive Elements*

> I believe that the question of disarmament is the most pressing practical, moral, and spiritual issue of our times. I'm not talking about abstractions.
> —Margaret Laurence, "My Final Hour"

Forty years ago, the possibility of uranium mining in Nova Scotia ignited controversy and debate that led to a provincial inquiry and, ultimately, a moratorium on uranium mining in the province. Those who protested this resource extraction held both local and global concerns: they worried that the mining would have disastrous environmental and health consequences for the region, and they opposed the production of uranium destined for the nuclear arms industry. In the late Cold War setting, questions of nuclear armament and the threat of global destruction were prominent in the Canadian public sphere, as elsewhere. Anti-nuclear peace advocacy was experiencing one of its global peaks in the early 1980s (Wittner 164). When Margaret Laurence delivered her address "My Final Hour" to the Trent University Philosophy Society in 1983, she outlined the international geopolitical contexts that gave rise to the fear of planetary nuclear destruction.[1] Her presentation, from which I quote in the epigraph, was published in the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *Canadian Literature* (no. 100, 1984). She writes of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the anti-nuclear work of Dr. Helen Caldicott, cruise missile testing, American national security, and Canada's capacity for anti-war and

disarmament mobilization. Though she does not specifically describe the connection between Canadian uranium and the bombs dropped on Japan—a connection that Marie Clements explores in her 2002 play *Burning Vision*—she does denounce Canada's complicity in nuclear arms production (Laurence 194). This industry complicity, along with the menace of "nuclear holocaust," were concerns behind the anti-uranium protest movement that emerged in Nova Scotia (190).

Upon learning that several multinational corporations were searching for mineable uranium in Nova Scotia in the late 1970s, citizen groups quickly formed to oppose such prospecting (Leeming 103; Smyth, "Uranium" 10). The Women's Institute of Hants County, Nova Scotia, was a key player in alerting residents to the prospect of uranium mining and its attendant dangers (Leeming 104). One of the people made aware of uranium prospecting via the Women's Institute was writer and Acadia University English professor Donna Smyth (Smyth, *Subversive* 11-13). Against the geopolitical backdrop described above, Smyth became an environmental activist, covered the uranium controversy for local newspapers, was sued for libel by a prominent pro-nuclear chemist, and published a novel that directly portrays the struggle to ban uranium mining in the province. Smyth's activism, and her textual documentation of the movement, have impacted the ways in which this story is told, decades later. Her anti-nuclear advocacy is cited as an example of women's activism in *Canadian Women's Issues: Bold Visions* (1995), and historians of Nova Scotian environmentalism draw from her writing as a primary source (Pierson and Cohen 378-79; Bantjes and Trussler 185, 190, 191; Leeming 105, 123, 129). Smyth's 1986 book, *Subversive Elements*, functions as an archive of the uranium controversy: it reproduces newspaper articles from the period, and one of its main plotlines is distinctly autobiographical, recounting the protests and inquiry from the perspective of an environmental activist. Though it is not a memoir (or at least, it is not *only* a memoir), it does provide an important first-hand account of the movement and is narrated from a first-person perspective that Diana Brydon identifies as "autobiographical documentary" (45).

One of *Subversive Elements*' contributions is thus its representation of the ethos and issues surrounding uranium controversies in the context of 1980s Canada. Given the nation-state's longstanding and ongoing capitalist

and colonial exploitation of the land, there is a substantial literary corpus depicting resistance to, and the effects of, natural resource industries. Anti-extractive, anti-colonial works by Indigenous writers are foundational to this corpus; examples related specifically to uranium include David Groulx's mining poems in *A Difficult Beauty*, Richard Van Camp's "The Uranium Leaking from Port Radium and Ray Rock Mines Is Killing Us," and Clements' *Burning Vision*, mentioned in my introductory paragraph. On the East Coast, a region particularly defined by natural resources industries, *Subversive Elements* takes its place among Atlantic Canadian fiction such as Percy Janes' *House of Hate*, Sheldon Currie's *The Glace Bay Miners' Museum*, and Lisa Moore's *February*. *Subversive Elements* constitutes a rather unique contribution to this thematic corpus because it depicts *averted* resource extraction, but the book is not only about environmental protest. In fact, it includes a whole other narrative plotline and addresses a wide range of other themes and topics. This essay pays attention to the literary qualities of the novel and explores how its themes, form, and structure enact complex connectivities. Despite elements that seem to clash, such as the two very distinct main stories, the book is ultimately invested in non-dualistic connections. *Subversive Elements* is a postmodern, multi-generic, interdisciplinary, and widely intertextual book that invites readers into the kinds of connective, holistic thinking that the narrator herself uses to understand environmental issues. After establishing the essential heterogeneity of the novel as seen in its intertextuality and interdisciplinarity, I will argue that representations of silence and language constitute one point of connection between the two plotlines, and that these representations illuminate the novel's environmental concerns through ecofeminism. In our present moment of energy megaprojects, unprecedented climate change, and global environmental activism, I look back to *Subversive Elements* and its historical context, when fear of environmental destruction was likewise, but differently, manifest.

Within the structure of the novel, the narrative that Brydon characterizes as autobiographical documentary is narrated by Smyth herself, or by a Smyth-like authorial persona. I will refer to this narrative as "the uranium plotline." In these sections, the narrator recounts aspects of her life in rural Nova Scotia as she gardens, raises goats, builds a greenhouse, and becomes an environmental activist. She co-founds an organization called Citizen

Action to Protect the Environment (CAPE) through which she protests prospective uranium mining in Nova Scotia while also writing about the controversy for local newspapers (Smyth 24). The sections of this narrative vary in style and tone. Some offer personal anecdotes of amateur goat husbandry while others present factual information about the history of uranium and its connection to the nuclear industry (e.g., 55-58, 113-19). The second primary plotline, which, like the narrator, I will refer to as "the Last Novel," tells the story of Beatrice and Lewis. They meet and fall in love when Beatrice visits Lewis, a monk, for spiritual guidance. Lewis grew up with two aunts and served in the British army in India during World War II before entering the monastery, where he experiences depression and serious doubt about his calling. Beatrice had a wide range of relationships and careers before meeting Lewis, from vaudeville performance with her mother to co-management of a publishing house in Paris. The Last Novel describes Beatrice and Lewis' life together up to Lewis' sudden death, while also recounting their back stories through alternating episodes. These episodes are dramatic in the sense that they involve intense emotion and striking plot twists, as when Beatrice finds her husband in bed with her mother (150), or when Lewis languishes wretchedly at an altar, imagining himself as a "vile worm in the dust" (158).

Clearly these two narratives are very different from each other in terms of characters, settings, themes, and tone. This distinctiveness is emphasized in the summary on the back cover of the novel when it refers to "two seemingly unrelated strands—a highly romantic and unlikely love story and a timely account of the controversy surrounding uranium mining in Nova Scotia." Structurally, the Last Novel plotline constitutes a *mise-en-abyme* because the narrator of the uranium plotline is actually writing the Last Novel (Sandrock 93). This is made clear in the opening sections when the narrator refers to the process of writing Beatrice and Lewis' story (Smyth 14, 17). She calls attention to her authorship in the first segments of the Last Novel through statements such as, "For two years I've been trying to write a novel" and "I call them Lewis and Beatrice" (14, 17). However, the first-person narrator quickly disappears from the Beatrice and Lewis sections, allowing their story to unfold parallel to the narrator's plotline. Many of the Last Novel segments begin with "Beatrice said:" or "Lewis said:"—further emphasizing the characters rather than the writing practice

behind the story—until the end of the novel when the narrator declares, "I have finished the Last Novel" (254). Although it is clear that one narrative technically frames the other, the reading experience for the bulk of the book suggests two parallel tracks: the first-person narrative, and the love story. The movement between the two tracks is frequent. Within the 263-page book, there are almost thirty separate sections of the Last Novel. On the one hand, this structure emphasizes breakages: there is a potential whiplash effect as we start-stop-start between the plotlines. On the other hand, the frequent changes can also be experienced as connective, as if two strands are being twisted around each other, or we are moving between two sides of the same coin.

The transitions between the two narratives are typographically signalled through three diamond-shaped bullet points in the section breaks, often accompanied by one or two indented quotes. Through direct quotation, Smyth brings in a rather stunning array of intertextual references. In fact, even before readers of *Subversive Elements* encounter the narrator or any characters, we learn of the wide variety of sources interspersed throughout the book. Just beyond the requisite copyright page, *Subversive Elements* opens with a list of publications excerpted in the novel. The titles demonstrate the range of citation, moving from Theodor Adorno's critical theory text *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* to a manual on dairy goats, to an article on plutonium (5). Following this bibliography, we turn the page expecting to encounter the beginning of Smyth's narrative, only to find three lengthy quotations over two pages: the first taken from a 1649 British Diggers pamphlet, the second from C. H. Grandgent's commentary on Dante's *Paradiso*, and the last from C. G. Jung's foreword to the ancient Chinese divination text, the *I Ching* (6-7). When the narrator addresses us directly on the following page, her "Dear Reader" feels intimate after the historical and thematic breadth of the citations and bibliography. Right away, she describes something that is smaller, local, focused, and domestic: the process of preparing soil for her garden in rural Nova Scotia. We soon learn that there are goats around and the garden could connect with the Diggers quote since Diggers cultivated unclaimed land to establish it as communally owned—but otherwise, we are not sure how Adorno, Jung, and Dante will relate. In addition to verbatim quotations, there are a handful of reproduced newspaper articles in the novel, five of which take

up its closing pages. There are also many in-text allusions to other texts. In some scenes, historical authors themselves make appearances. Samuel Beckett wins a poetry contest that Beatrice co-organizes (112), and later, Beatrice becomes quite close with Dylan Thomas (163-67).

In addition to—and partly because of—its pronounced intertextuality, *Subversive Elements* is a profoundly interdisciplinary novel. Science, theology, psychology, religious studies, literature, communications, women's and gender studies, agriculture, and journalism all figure in the book. The interdisciplinarity of the novel goes beyond simply having themes or topics that relate to a variety of disciplines. Through characters' conversations, didactic passages, and citation, the book explicitly draws on a range of fields of knowledge. For example, in one passage of the uranium plotline, the narrator references Marshall McLuhan to discuss media coverage of uranium protests as she draws on medical expertise to explain the dangers of exposure to uranium ore (66-67). In the Last Novel plotline, Beatrice, Lewis, and the monastery's abbot discuss the value of psychoanalysis, with Beatrice drawing on her personal experience with sex psychologist Havelock Ellis to convince the monks of the value of a "modern medical approach" (210). In the former example, media theory meets medicine and science; in the latter, psychology dialogues with theology. In some ways, the interdisciplinarity of the novel emerges from the centring of the first-person narrator. She mostly absents herself from the Last Novel sections, and large portions of the uranium plotline are information-driven and not particularly confessional. However, she is the narrative consciousness behind all the heterogeneity: she is the one tending goats and gardens, writing a love story involving characters with diverse interests, and engaging in an intense "self-education process" to understand and protest uranium mining (Sandrock 80). In this way, the interdisciplinarity of the novel is an effect of its realism, and is further compounded by the fact that the narrator is actively researching an interdisciplinary topic. In support of her activism and journalism, she is educating herself about the uranium industry, nuclear arms production, mining-related environmental and health hazards, and government regulation of resource extraction. The uranium plotline showcases her growing knowledge, beginning with her first cognizance of the issue in 1981 (Smyth 11, 13), and ending with Nova Scotia's 1985 extended moratorium on uranium exploration and Smyth's court win against a prominent nuclear

chemist (258, 262). In didactic passages, we learn along with the narrator. For example, she explains radiation from the work of Pierre and Marie Curie up through the twentieth century (30-33), and later, the history of uranium mining in Canada (113-19). She adopts a staunchly interdisciplinary approach to her topics, noting connections and complicities. In the radiation passage, for instance, she counters the idea that this is a uniquely scientific topic by stating, "Recent discoveries in quantum physics have taught us that we see what we want to see. We are really in the realm of metaphysics. And politics" (33).

Taken as a whole, the interdisciplinarity, intertextuality, and distinctive plotlines form a book that is deeply heterogeneous. Indeed, in one of the few critical studies of *Subversive Elements*, Kirsten Sandrock notes its "large corpus of intertexts" and the "thematic and stylistic heterogeneity" of the novel, which she describes in terms of polysemy, polyphony, and inter-generic hybridity (77-79). These descriptors emphasize the diversity of components in the book—the different topics, styles, language registers, voices, allusions, and genres between its covers. In its eclectic blurring of boundaries, *Subversive Elements* is quintessentially postmodern fiction. Its postmodern "self-consciousness," its concern with its own "status as fiction, narrative, or language," as Linda Hutcheon famously theorizes postmodern fiction (612), are evident in the *mise-en-abyme* of the Last Novel and through the narrator's comments on the history of fiction and the practice of literary analysis. Just as there is a novel within the novel, there are musings on fiction as a genre within this (multi-generic) piece of fiction. In introducing the Last Novel, the narrator explains why she calls it so: "The Last Novel. Meaning the last one *I* shall write but also accumulating meaning in the sense of a disappearing species" (Smyth 14). In a quick, characteristic interdisciplinary move, the metaphor of the "disappearing species" connects her comment on the literary marketplace with the book's overarching concern with environmental degradation. She uses this same metaphor to introduce a longer section on the history of English fiction: "If fiction is an endangered species, it is fair to ask what the function of this species is in our society" (48). Such metafictional passages are examples of the interdisciplinarity and postmodernity of *Subversive Elements*, but they also offer interpretive hints to readers because the narrator explains how she thinks fiction works. Beginning her explanation with "the most basic element of fiction is story,"

the narrator offers the example of a story of seeing a dog standing in the middle of a road: "On the one level, the abandoned dog is simply an object of passing interest. On the fictive level, he becomes a character in a crisis. He engages our attention, our sympathy. By a sleight of hand, 'reality' is rearranged and we acquiesce. This acquiescence of the audience is vital to the fictive process which depends upon audience" (48-49).

How, then, does *Subversive Elements* orchestrate our own "acquiescence," engaging "our attention, our sympathy," particularly when its eclecticism may seem disorienting at first, as students have reminded me? I posit that for Smyth's implied reader, the heterogeneity of the novel is experienced as invitational, not alienating. The apparent disconnectedness between the two plotlines, or between disparate intertextual sources or disciplinary ideas, intentionally *invites* readers to form connections and links. As Sandrock argues, "Smyth undermines traditional demarcations between genres and raises the readers' awareness of the interrelatedness of different societal voices" (81). The readers' connective work thus mirrors the work of the narrator as she also seeks to understand connections between things that might seem very far apart from each other, such as her backyard garden and multinational uranium corporations, or nuclear power and misogyny. Early on in the book, a quotation from Herbert Read's *The Origins of Form in Art* reads,

> To the extent that it is deeply rooted in daily life, art can no longer, in its simplest expression, be presented as mere fiction. This means that the imagined work is no longer presented in its "invented" or abstract naivety, but tends to contain a force which is borrowed or extracted from the most banal and the most trivial reality. We have entered the *age of collage*. (14, emphasis original)

The passage connects to *Subversive Elements*' generic hybridity and its depiction of the everyday, but it also offers the useful metaphor of collage to conceive of the book's patchwork of citations and topics as forming a whole, integrated piece of art.

Images of webs have a similar metaphorical tenor and recur throughout the book. Like the disparate pieces of a collage, the strands of a web remain distinct from each other but also intersect and overlap to form a whole structure or system. The first occurrence of "web" comes at the end of the narrator's description of the steep learning curve that accompanied her environmentally-motivated lifestyle change. She concludes by evoking

"[a] multiplicity, a complexity of relationships. A new web" (Smyth 9). Because she has just described organic gardening, this "web" suggests ecosystems, a connection made more explicit in a subsequent passage: "The disappearance of the several species contained within the ecological systems that have evolved over thousands of years in the rain forests will alter everything, including our climate. This web of nature contains us and sustains us" (38-39). Humans are part of the ecological web ("Me, the garden, the goats, we are part of a web which sustains us as we sustain it" [129]) and form their own social webs ("we are webbed in, connected to each other. Our human eco-systems are as vital as the ones we observe in nature" [179]). Webs suggest interdependency and complex connectivity, eschewing the limitations of binary or dualistic thinking. The narrator identifies dichotomous conceptions of reality as being at the origins of a number of large-scale problems. For instance, in a section that denounces the gaslighting of women environmental activists, the worship of scientific objectivity, and the distractions of capitalist society, she deplores the gendered mind/body split: "[I]ntellect is split off from the world. The female is body, the male the severed head . . . intellect has been allowed to function apart from body and emotion and intuition and imagination" (146-147, 148). In another essayistic passage, she criticizes the binary thinking that undergirds xenophobia, resulting in "the world split in half like a rotten apple. Us and Them. Black and White. Left and Right" (83).

In other words, not only does the web metaphor offer a way to conceive of the formal and stylistic qualities of this book, but it also represents the kind of thinking that the narrator upholds: web-like conceptions of reality over dualist ones. Shifts in thinking, to her, necessitate shifts in textual strategies, circling back to form and style. "New art, new society," she proclaims, "Nothing more, nothing less" (108). It is thus not surprising that both plotlines are interested in cultural movements and paradigm shifts, such as feminism, modernism, environmentalism, and postmodernity. In the Last Novel, Beatrice remembers what it was like to experience a shift in perception that also relates to "new art" when she recalls her time in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, when "surrealism was . . . a new way of seeing" (80). The narrator of *Subversive Elements* is also embracing ways of perceiving the world that are new to her and artistic forms to represent those perceptions.

Once we recognize the extent to which the narrator's worldview *and* the book's themes and narrative strategies are shaped by complex connectivity, we see that resonances between its two "seemingly unrelated" plotlines are to be expected—and that it might take some work to find them. One important example of a strand in this multi-genre web involves language and its absence, a theme in both plotlines. In keeping with its postmodern linguistic self-consciousness, *Subversive Elements* partly signals its engagement with language through wordplay and meditations on the resonances of particular words, such as "subversive" (107, 214). In addition, language is crucial to character development in the Last Novel and is a major part of the narrator's environmental analysis in the uranium plotline. Already, the structural device of the fictional *mise-en-abyme* and the narrator's comments on the place of literature in society signal a focus on language. The narrator's concern that fiction is a "disappearing species" is juxtaposed with the powerful role that literature plays in the lives of the Last Novel characters, particularly Lewis. Although Lewis entered the Greystones monastery with great conviction (69-70) and felt "free" for the first few years (121), he eventually begins to feel imprisoned—not within the monastery but within himself (140). He becomes afraid, depressed, and withdrawn, much to the alarm of his superior, the Abbott (140-46, 155-60). One sign of his inner entrapment is an aversion to language, the "loss of his voice" (Sandrock 95). When the Abbott asks him what troubles him, Lewis refuses to respond: "He had learned speech was risky. . . . They all wanted words from him. Couldn't they see how useless words were. When Christ was not risen, words were cold and damp as the tomb where Christ lay buried in his heart. He had no idea why God had abandoned him. Silence" (Smyth 141-42). This sense of silence is out of character for Lewis, a teacher of literature (the monastery has a school) who loves the deft wordplay of debate and has published a volume of poetry (97, 122, 190). After Lewis barely responds to the Abbott's query, he opens a letter from his friend and former fellow monk, Gordon. The line from the letter that repeats in Lewis' mind is "I have never met anyone as eloquent as you" (143, 145). The letter details Gordon's own decision to leave the monastic order and this, along with Gordon's affirmation of Lewis' eloquence, begins to pull Lewis back to life. In the next passage that features Lewis, he stumbles upon the abandoned baby bird that will be part of his rejuvenation (159).

Subsequently, Beatrice arrives, bearing a name that already connects her to Dante's beloved guide and muse (and, more problematically, with Lewis Carroll's child muse Beatrice Hatch). For Lewis, Beatrice is indeed a kind of divine feminine figure who encourages him to write poetry, try psychoanalysis, and eventually fall in love (190-95).

Lewis' retrospective commentary on this time of healing identifies intersections between creative literary expression, his evolving sense of faith, and Beatrice as his sacred guide:

> Lewis said: Writing poems is an act of faith. I let go of what I know and wait for what I don't know to take shape in words. It's like waiting for a miracle. I often wondered why it was the women who brought word that Christ was risen. Are miracles easier for them? When I met Beatrice I began to understand. (189)

Beatrice also fosters healing, albeit temporary, in the life of another writer character, a fictional version of canonical Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. At the request of Thomas' wife, Caitlin, Beatrice accompanies him to a countryside cottage where he sobers up and begins to write poetry again. As with Lewis, the movement from silence back to poetics signals and fosters healing: "'Chain, change, chance.' The words dropped through the ceiling like pebbles into a pond. His voice carried through the small cottage, a benediction upon her head, her dwelling place. Thank God, Dylan was sober and working again" (163). Dylan's poems-in-progress benefit Beatrice as their recipient ("a benediction upon her head"); she is both muse and ideal reader. When Beatrice later meets Lewis, she becomes Lewis' reader too. She tells him how much his poems moved her and explains that her work in publishing has led her to conclude that poets are "recording angels" (190-92). As a reader, muse, and publisher, Beatrice is a catalyst and shepherd of writing without being a writer herself, as the text clearly states: "Did Beatrice ever try to write herself? No" (108). An implicit question follows: Does Beatrice play a powerful, pivotal role in these male writers' lives, or is she relegated to a supportive role as per the longstanding gendering of literary muse figures and in keeping with the gender dynamics of her era? The narrative is conscious of the tension between Beatrice as a major or minor actor in literary production, a tension that is underscored through the association between Beatrice and Mary, mother of Jesus (195). The wooden sculpture of Mary in the monastery's Lady Chapel is a touchstone location for Lewis as he grapples with his inner turmoil (156-58).

In an epiphanic moment, he realizes that the Mary statue looks like Beatrice (195). Like Beatrice, Mary can be perceived as a secondary figure in a male hero's story, even as she can also be revered for her power and agency. The novel's ecofeminism, which I will address below, is manifest here in the tension between recognizing countercultural womanly wisdom and denouncing the structural misogyny that relegates women to supporting roles.

As Beatrice helps others move to self-expression, the uranium plotline also depicts silence and speech, moving beyond the level of the individual. In the scene in which Dylan Thomas, under Beatrice's watch, begins composing poetry again, Beatrice imagines the nascent poem "spreading through the house, curling tendrils around the granite lintel, overrunning the doorstep outside" (166). These poetic tendrils are a fitting image for the literary references spreading and curling within and between the narrative segments of *Subversive Elements*, which references Henry Vaughan (24), William Blake (34), Oscar Wilde (131), and many others. Immediately following the poetic tendrils scene, the book switches back to the uranium plotline, where there are also silences that must be broken. The section lists a number of people who were partially or entirely silenced for speaking publicly against the nuclear industry and uranium or plutonium mining. Among others, the list includes filmmaker Ian Ball, scientist and peace activist Rosalie Bertell, and Donna Smyth herself, who was sued for libel by a prominent nuclear chemist (167-70). By speaking out, these individuals break the silence around a controversial topic but risk being silenced themselves if they are perceived as a threat by those invested in resource extraction and nuclear power (107, 169). Earlier in the novel, the narrator asserts that "mainstream politics depends on complicity and silence and the people's unquestioning acceptance of the decision-making process" (107). Anti-uranium, anti-nuclear environmental activists are subversive when they "break silence," a silence described as lurking, immersive, dreadful, insidious, and effective (107). What is seen in the lives of individual characters in the Last Novel is here displayed at the societal level as well: language (speech, text, cultural production) "overruns the doorstep" to counter a corrosive silence (166). However, without diminishing the forces of alcoholism, depression, or oppressive institutions in Lewis' and Thomas' lives, we can still draw a distinction between their interior, personal

silences and the structurally imposed silencing of dissident voices. While silence and speech are themes in both plotlines, the silencing accomplished by powerful industry players in the uranium plotline is of a different order than the silences of Lewis' crisis of faith or Thomas' loss of voice.

In addition to demonstrating how mining and nuclear proponents attempt to silence their detractors, the narrator also denounces industry deployments of speech and language. In her overview of the health risks of being exposed to radiation such as that produced by uranium mining, the narrator asserts, "In this discussion, language is absolutely crucial" (30). She dissects the ways in which scientific or expert language can alienate concerned citizens or blur reality, such as the use of the word "safe" in relation to radiation exposure (33), the complete avoidance of the term "carcinogenic," or choosing the adjective "biologically effective" rather than "dangerous" (30). Reflecting on what does get said by uranium companies during public consultation, she notes that "complex, technical discussion of relative safety and relative risk" ostracizes community members (139). Consequently, at one point in the provincial inquiry, the narrator and her fellow activists worry that "highly technical testimony would leave most of the general public bewildered and confused" (235). This is a strategy that Thomas Gerry identifies in his essay "The Literary Crisis: The Nuclear Crisis," published in the same period as *Subversive Elements*. He argues that pro-nuclear governments "deliberately obfuscate the underlying insane reality with jargon and other forms of 'misinformation,' leading people to believe that because of the complexities, the whole matter had best be left to the experts" (Gerry 298). Herb Wyile makes a similar observation specifically in relation to resource extraction in Atlantic Canada, where the "glossy rhetoric" of the oil industry conceals real risk and exploitation (84). Smyth's commentary on the manipulative language of the inquiry is akin to the points made by these literary critics. Further, because the novel highlights the elasticity and power of language through its linguistic play and metafictional elements, we trust the narrator to be skilled in rhetorical analysis, giving substantial weight to her parsing of industry jargon.

In addition to diagnosing industry prose as propagandistic and stifling, the narrator also sees it as emblematic, even deterministic, of the pro-nuclear military-industrial-government complex (Smyth 169). Two passages that mirror each other state, first, "'Overkill.' 'Megadeaths.' You are what you

speak. Or you disappear one reality and try to replace it with another by merely changing a name" (120); and later, in a formally unique passage:

> overkill
> megadeaths
> acceptable risk
> limited nuclear war
>
> "They" are what they speak
> "They" are:
>
> thrust
> penetration
> power
> Male power (169)

Margaret Laurence highlights the same nouns in "My Final Hour," arguing that "such words as 'overkill' and 'megadeath' do not convey in any sense at all what would really happen" (191). Whereas Smyth proposes a near-metonymic relationship between "Them" and their vocabulary, Laurence faults these terms for misrepresenting the realities of nuclear apocalypse: "[T]he jargon of militarists is a distortion and a twisting of language, of our human ability to communicate" (191). Smyth's analyses of how language both represents and reproduces oppressive power is also evident in her essay "Getting Tough and Making Sacrifices: The Language of War in the 1980s," published in the 1989 collection *Up and Doing: Canadian Women and Peace*. As the title suggests, Smyth scrutinizes the aggressive discourse used to mobilize support for military spending and international military action. In the essay, as in *Subversive Elements*, Smyth's denunciation of these strategies is grounded in an ecofeminist stance. As Sandrock has charted in her analysis of *Subversive Elements*, the narrator associates uranium and nuclear industries with misogynist oppression (100-03). Resource extraction is construed as "[m]ale power" that violates the "she" of the Earth (Smyth 93). This ecofeminist approach is strategically essentialist, making a point about gendered power through sweeping equations of man-oppressor and woman-oppressed. Perhaps the most explicit example of this stance comes in a passage that deconstructs the "central cultural myth: progress" as "the phallic thrust into the future. . . . Alternative energy sources and systems have bad press and a bad name: 'soft' energy. Associations with femaleness. Hard energy: hard-on" (127-28). Through her feminist lens, the narrator

deliberately genders the simplified dualisms of nature versus technology, alternative versus mainstream, and sustainability versus destruction.

The narrator also recognizes one way that misogyny overlaps with the dismissal of environmental activists: both women and environmentalists are derided for being excessively emotional (146, 149). For the narrator, there is actual overlap between these two groups. In her Nova Scotian context, anti-uranium advocacy is initiated by the Women's Institute (11) and is connected with broader women's anti-nuclear activism such as that associated with Rosalie Bertell, who "wears a button saying she is a feminist for peace" (168). The narrator asserts that "the 80s environmental and peace movements are charged with women's energies and commitment," offering the example of Witches Against Nuclear Development in Ontario (149). Insofar as anti-uranium activism is also anti-nuclear, it is indeed part of a long history of women's anti-nuclear peace activism in Canada. In her overview of this activism, Barbara Roberts demonstrates that Canadian women have protested nuclear weapons since the 1945 US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that their activism can be seen in continuity with pre-World War II Canadian women's peace movements (293-96). The 1960 founding of Voice of Women (VOW), which Penni Mitchell calls "one of the most successful women's organizations in Canada," was catalyzed by a call for women to mobilize for disarmament (Dean 285; Mitchell 145). This felt urgent in the context of Cold War controversies over the North American Air Defense Agreement (NORAD), the deployment of nuclear missiles over Canadian territory, and concern over the environmental and health impacts of radioactive waste (Dean 286; Mitchell 145). Although the women of VOW also intervened in other issues, for them "the paramount global issues . . . were the threat of annihilation from nuclear war and from the proliferation of nuclear arms and the hazards to health from nuclear arms testing" (Pierson and Cohen 376).

At the time of the uranium controversies documented in *Subversive Elements*, VOW had a "tremendous following" among women in Nova Scotia (Bantjes and Trussler 193). In 1985, Halifax was the location for an international gathering on Women's Alternatives for Negotiating Peace, organized by VOW with representation from thirty countries (Roberts 298). Many of the Nova Scotian members of VOW were also involved with key environmental organizations in the province, such as those that

participated in the provincial uranium inquiry (Bantjes and Trussler 192). And like Smyth's narrator, some of those women brought feminist and ecofeminist perspectives to the consultations (Bantjes and Trussler 190). Thus, the passages of *Subversive Elements* that employ ecofeminist discourse connect to the real-life activism of Smyth's context and to the broader history of Canadian women's peace activism, while also offering conceptual and ideological standpoints from which to critique resource extraction in the experimental prose of the book. In fact, the novel's overall insistence on the intricacies of webs and interrelations provides a counterbalancing backdrop for the sometimes essentialist binaries of ecofeminism. Still, the 1980s ecofeminist reliance on a woman/man gender binary may strike us as problematic, as does the fact that a novel so invested in issues of land and environment makes little mention of Indigenous sovereignty or environmental racism in Mi'kma'ki, where the uranium plotline unfolds.

Returning briefly to the Last Novel narrative with ecofeminism in mind, we can see that Beatrice's womanly intelligence is meant to exemplify the ecofeminist valorization of matriarchal wisdom. Passages that denounce "hard-energy: hard-on" present woman-nature as victim, but passages that proclaim Beatrice's and the women activists' influence connect to the ecofeminist belief in women's environmental knowledge. Beatrice offers Lewis exactly what he needs to be rescued from the patriarchal institution of the priesthood. And Beatrice's salvific powers are not only for Lewis and Thomas. For instance, Beatrice nurses her friend Caitlin (Dylan Thomas' widow) through a period of intense grief and suicidal ideation. Her methods include the maternal practices of breastfeeding and lullabies: "[H]er breast she offered Caitlin's mouth and she clung to Beatrice like a stone and Bea sang, dilly-dilly, the silly little song all the night through" (Smyth 202). Caitlin, who is associated with Christ through stigmata imagery (174-75), is cast as the (female) Christ-child in this scene, and Beatrice, already strongly associated with the Biblical Mary, is the Marion comforter. This all-woman recasting of the sacred Mother-Child dyad connects to ecofeminist understandings of women's healing powers. It also likely reveals the influence of Rosalie Bertell, whom the narrator mentions as a mentor in the feminist peace movement (30, 167-68). In her summation of Bertell's ecofeminist perspective, Lisa Rumiel notes that in the 1980s,

Bertell's work was "unapologetically shaped" by her "belief in women's unique role in caring for, nurturing, and protecting the earth" (143). As a member of the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, Bertell and her anti-nuclear ecofeminism were "deeply enmeshed" with progressive Catholic theology (138). Clearly, the narrator of *Subversive Elements* chooses to employ and subvert sacred Christian iconography in her affirmation of womanly power.

This religiously inflected subversive feminist imagery connects to the novel's ecofeminism and provides an example of the kinds of connections that can be drawn between the two very distinct stories. Though we might come to *Subversive Elements* out of a curiosity about environmental activism, a literary analysis that considers its experimental features and disparate plotlines deepens our understanding of how those environmental issues are depicted. In this essay, I have considered one specific thematic web involving language, silence, literature, gender, and environment. The formal and structural features of the novel emphasize pieces that are both discrete and integrated: two story strands wrapping around each other, particular voices evoked and placed in intertextual conversation, and whole disciplinary discussions seen in relation one to another. As Diana Brydon points out, in *Subversive Elements* "the dual texts remind us of the connections linking even apparently disparate material and tying us all to each other" (45-46). This is not to suggest that the novel's webs or collages are perfect; important connections are elided, such as that between settler colonialism and resource extraction. The heterogeneity of the novel invites us into the connective thinking that undergirds the narrator's environmental activism, and indeed her larger worldview, even as that worldview is rooted in Christianity, a Eurocentric literary canon, and second-wave feminist environmental consciousness raising.

From our current vantage point, there are aspects of *Subversive Elements* that feel strikingly familiar, most notably the sense of urgency around the future of the planet. We can add this understudied novel to our bibliography of environment-related literature, while contextualizing it in relation to 1980s Canada. At the same time that Smyth and her fellow activists were fighting against the uranium and nuclear industries in Nova Scotia, Margaret Laurence asserted that "the question of disarmament is the most pressing practical, moral, and spiritual issue of our times" (Laurence 189). *Subversive Elements* engages with this "most pressing" issue from the kind

of complex, holistic perspective evoked by Laurence's declaration, albeit with the limitations and blind spots emerging from its positionality and historical context. Further on in "My Final Hour," Laurence specifically grounds her anti-nuclear stance in her identity as a writer. She evokes a long history of dissident artists and asserts that "artists, the real ones, the committed ones, have always sought, sometimes in ways prophetic and beyond their own times, to clarify and proclaim and enhance life" (196). She writes, "I believe that as a writer . . . as an artist, if you will . . . I have a responsibility, a moral responsibility, to work against the nuclear arms race, to work for a recognition on the part of governments and military leaders that nuclear weapons must never be used and must systematically be reduced" (195). Laurence and Smyth are very different from each other in terms of fame, career trajectory, and literary style, but clearly they share this conviction. And if writers shoulder a responsibility to depict their anti-nuclear convictions in their creative writing, then it is through attention to the literary details of that creative writing that we perceive the craft, subtleties, limitations, and strengths of their literary activism.

NOTES

1 Literary critics such as Nora Foster Stovel, Laura Davis, and Thomas Gerry have discussed Laurence's anti-nuclear stance, which extends beyond this one essay. As this article goes to press, Stovel has just published an edited collection of Laurence's short non-fiction writings which includes a section on nuclear disarmament.

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Jagjeet Sharma

Wind chimes

Wind chimes
        vibrate to sunset colours
        over cookie cutter homes
tinkling through
flower planters
        along walkways
vegetable gardens
        bathed in cold water
their fill for the day

Wind chimes
        vibrate to sunset colours
        over cookie cutter homes
their tinkling persists
as winds get stronger
        minds taken off COVID-19
        eight weeks in captivity
        seems like eternity
        unable to wrestle its
        strength, might
        this virus
        snatches our breath
        breaks it into pieces

How many more
laid to rest
before it shrivels,
retreats

Spring has come
and gone
slight heat of the summer
is upon us
no signs of a let up

Wind chimes
        vibrate to sunset colours
        over cookie cutter homes

Margaret Steffler

Breaking Patriarchy through Words, Imagination, and Faith

The Hayloft as *Spielraum* in Miriam Toews' *Women Talking*

In Miriam Toews' novel *Women Talking* (2018), three generations of Loewen and Friesen women meet over two days in the hayloft of Earnest Thiessen's barn in the fictional Mennonite colony of Molotschna, modelled on the real colony of Manitoba in southeastern Bolivia.[1] When August Epp, the minute-taker of these meetings, claims that as the mere recorder of the discussions it does not matter what he thinks, Ona Friesen asks him a question that resonates throughout the novel: "How would you feel if in your entire lifetime it had never mattered what you thought?" (Toews 117). Even though August's life has included moments when it did not matter what he thought—he was excommunicated from the colony as an adolescent and has recently returned from England as a marginal community member, a teacher who lives in a shed—the perpetual condition of not mattering at all belongs, without question, not to August Epp but to the women of the colony. August's puzzling presence in the meetings is crucial beyond his practical role as translator and recorder. He provides an outside, male perspective that results in the hayloft becoming a relational, interactive, and dialogical space, thus putting into play an exchange of words and ideas that initiates movement, change, and the future. *Women Talking* depends on a concentrated contact zone or, more accurately, a *Spielraum*, a "playing space in which there is an opportunity for a dialogue" (77), to apply the term and concept used by Magdalene Redekop in her book *Making Believe: Questions about Mennonites and Art* (2020). In the extraordinary move to liberate themselves from patriarchal violence, the

women in the hayloft confront entrenched binary thinking in ways that recall and converse with formative feminist theory. The persistence of rigid divisions and oppositions between men and women in Toews' fictional colony of Molotschna and the real colony of Manitoba accentuates the need for continued and renewed discussions of gender inequality and oppression in a 2020 world existing within and in response to the #MeToo movement. There is nothing new in the stories women are telling, but there *is* something new in the underlying urgency to heed women's feelings and narratives—to listen attentively, pay deep attention to what is being said, and take women's words to heart.

As I look back at earlier feminist theory, particularly the work of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, I am struck by how much work remains to be done in breaking reductive binary thought. Two recent studies, Redekop's *Making Believe* and Katherine Bergren's *The Global Wordsworth: Romanticism Out of Place* (2019), in their considerations of time and place as flexible, have not only contributed to my emphasis on the hayloft as a dialogical space, but also influenced my reading of Toews' novel as conversing with early French feminist theory and repurposing the work of Romantic poets. Redekop works with the concept of an "anachronic renaissance" developed by art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood to study the flowering of Mennonite literature in the province of Manitoba in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In their book *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010), Nagel and Wood challenge concepts of chronology, progress, and enlightenment by understanding that a work of art, while based in a specific time and place, points "backward to a remote ancestral origin, perhaps, or to a prior artifact, or to an origin outside time, in divinity" (9). As further explained by Redekop, this "move to regenerate by moving into the past" can promote nostalgia but is "also intrinsic to positive revolutions" (9). She maintains that *Women Talking* "contain[s] the quality characteristic of anachronic renaissance: the urge to go deep into the past, confronting skeletons and talking to ghosts, and the desire to savour the sweetness of new growth as you move forward and begin all over again" (209). The hayloft in its embodiment of the qualities of an anachronic renaissance functions as a space of dialogical encounters and a contact zone between temporalities and between regions, rooted in, but not limited to, older and newer Mennonite settlements in Europe and the Americas. It is

"a place of making believe within which to find new ways of exploring old questions" and is also affected by what Redekop identifies as "an Anabaptist vision that always insists on beginning again and again" (161, 210).

In *The Global Wordsworth*, Bergren, who focuses on cumulative transformations of bodies of work over time rather than regeneration through looking back, outlines how a "global" approach "strives to hear conversations between Wordsworth and writers who repurposed him" (14). She describes a "reorientation" in which

> the field of global Romanticism becomes a product of not just scholars but also authors around the world who read and responded to Romantic writing—thus a product of not just the past few decades but rather the past two centuries—as long as Romantic poetry has been traveling the globe. (17)

Toews contributes to this reorientation and repurposing, nudging readers of *Women Talking* to negotiate and probe the words of William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge into a new context rather than exclude or dismiss them. In this way, the hayloft hosts yet a further temporal contact zone between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries and another spatial contact zone between northern and southern hemispheres. Global readings and anachronic renaissances depend on spaces of dialogism; the hayloft in Toews' novel and the novel itself incorporate August Epp and canonical Romantic poets in order to develop vibrant exchanges that turn words into conversation leading to action. Redekop concludes her discussion of Toews' novel *Irma Voth* (2011) by claiming that "all artists, at their best, touch on the deepest parts of our humanity when they open us and them up to dialogue. These examples of flawed and broken community are ways of reimagining us and them" (117). This opening up and reimagining of "us and them" is exactly what Toews and her characters attempt and achieve in *Women Talking*.

The emphasis on "us and them" has been a focus of academic criticism of Mennonite/s writing for some time.[2] My own identity as a non-Mennonite positions me as a reader and critic on the outside. Hildi Froese Tiessen's influential work on moving beyond binary tropes stresses the value of unfixed "in-between" worlds situated far from "oppositional essentialisms that have, for decades, confined the Mennonites and their writers"—writers who more recently "have demonstrated that the conventionally bounded and hierarchical binary categories of insider and outsider, home

and exile reveal little about the complex personal and cultural situations in which contemporary Mennonites live" (500). Past and present form another binary paradigm central to the rich body of critical work on Mennonite literature. As Robert Zacharias argues in *Rewriting the Break Event: Mennonites and Migration in Canadian Literature* (2013), retellings of the past attempt "to multiply, rather than narrow, the possible meanings and forms of the community" (70). The dialogical space of the hayloft reverberates with these familiar and energetic moves toward creative reimaginings of entrenched binary oppositions. In her article "Representations of Melancholic Martyrdom in Canadian Mennonite Literature," Grace Kehler argues that in seeking "a restoration of the ties between self and community," "both must be receptive to difference and to disagreement in order to inaugurate new, vibrant inter-relations" (182). More specifically, in her article on *Women Talking* as parable, Kehler points out how the women's discourse "supercedes binaries (flesh and spirit, here and after)" as the women "forge a language from the scraps of theology permitted them" in order to leave the colony and rediscover their faith ("Miriam Toews's parable" 38, 39). Toews places her novel and the hayloft firmly within those familiar binaries of us and them, inside and outside, past and present, initiating playful and painful collisions from which newness and action emerge.

The meetings in the hayloft are held to decide how to respond to the horrific rapes and assaults repeatedly inflicted on women and girls by eight identified men within the colony. In her prefatory "Note on the Novel," Toews explains that *Women Talking* is "a reaction through fiction" to the rapes that took place between 2005 and 2009 in Manitoba Colony, "a remote Mennonite colony in Bolivia" (vii). While research has been undertaken on the religious, historical, and social contexts of such cultures and communities, Toews turns to speculation and imagination in her creative response.[3] She strikingly refers to her novel as "an act of female imagination," appropriating the phrase used by members of Manitoba Colony to dismiss the so-called "stories" of the victims (vii). Despite the extreme violence and violation, the women in Toews' novel do not simply banish men just as they do not exclude their words. The question of what to do about the men, particularly those not implicated in the rapes, increasingly informs the difficult decisions undertaken by the Friesen and

Loewen women on behalf of the vulnerable members of their society. In deciding whether to do nothing, stay and fight, or leave, the women include and consider the men, beginning with the young, elderly, and infirm, but also thinking about others who are loved and would be missed if the women and children were to leave. Among the many complexities faced by the decision-makers is the knowledge that, as Ona Friesen states, "several of the people we love are people we also fear" (53).

When Earnest Thiessen asks the women if they are plotting to burn his barn, one of them replies in brilliant Toews fashion that "there's no plot, we're only women talking" (179). The lack of a plot on the part of the women and in the novel itself, which evokes *l'écriture féminine*,[4] grants freedom to the three generations of the two families to talk, laugh, play, sing, and weep. This is a novel of talking and affect rather than plot and action. By drawing in August Epp as recorder and translator of the meetings, Ona and the other women provide him with the opportunity to not only witness but also be moved and changed by the words spoken and emotions shared. His presence, by invitation, eliminates the type of resentful anger identified by Luce Irigaray in her observation that "men [get] angry about women-only meetings, wanting to penetrate them at all cost" ("Bodily Encounter" 34). The rage associated with men, familiar to August from listening to his mother's reading of Flaubert's "Rage and Impotence" (Toews 213), belongs, in this case, to the women. August eventually realizes that "there was no reason for the women to *have* minutes they couldn't read. The purpose, all along, was for me to *take* them" (215, emphasis original). And it is in his role as listener, *taking in* the words, that August performs perhaps the most important act in this powerful novel. Taking minutes means that he must concentrate on the words of the women talking. August, who is considered by some to be a "half man" (134), "an effeminate man who is unable to properly till a field or eviscerate a hog" (72), a "*schinda*" or "one not clever enough to know how to farm" (61), shares a degree of suffering and low status with the women of the colony and is thus in a position to hear their stories. He receives the words, takes them in, translates them from the oral language of Plautdietsch (Low German) into English, and releases them in concrete print onto the page. But he does more than passively listen, receive, translate, and write. He probes, challenges, contradicts, accepts, and reinforces the women's words.

At one point in this process August records how, in the midst of petty disagreements, Greta Loewen urges the women not to waste time by "passing this burden, this sack of stones, from one to the next, by pushing our pain away" in a game of "Hot Potato" (177). Instead she urges them to "absorb it ourselves"—"Let's inhale it, let's digest it, let's process it into fuel" (177). August has the opportunity to do with words what the women do with pain—inhale, digest, and process them. Such absorption grants power to women's language to provoke action that confronts systemic patriarchy. Toews urges all participants to inhale, digest, and process words into fuel—fuel that feeds a fire of rage that will not be quenched until conditions change. All of this hinges on the necessity of listening to women's words from beginning to end as they emerge from emotion, thought, and body and are formulated into speech and print. The foundation of the shared word within a contested space promotes playful interchanges and, to quote Redekop, "affirms the value of just being with others in a place where we make believe together" (210). It is crucial that the interactions in the hayloft play out between genders, generations, old and new worlds, former and contemporary times. Boisterous disagreements and differences do not end in forced resolutions or closures; instead tensions, contradictions, and diversity persist, moving forward into regenerative change, renewal, and action.

Men's Words

Although sympathetic to the condition of the women in the colony, August Epp automatically works within the context of literary men, namely Shelley, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. August is saved by a woman in England—a librarian who befriends him, recommending and facilitating his return to Molotschna Colony. In confronting a degree of vagueness when probing his origins, she quotes the first line of Shelley's "Ozymandias": "*I met a traveller from an antique land*" (Shelley 109 qtd. in Toews 10, emphasis original). The librarian's hunch about Epp is quite accurate. Although he is an outcast rather than a traveller, he, like the sonnet's traveller, comes from an oppressive land experiencing the potential downfall of its destructive patriarchy as lodged in the colony's bishop, Peters the younger, and his team of elders. Like the sonnet's sculptor, August reads and understands the passions of the dictator, in his case as revealed by the women's words in the hayloft; and, like the sculptor, August records the cruelty and arrogance

of the dictator and system. Although the minutes are read by nobody but August, he is an important audience of one, marking the crucial beginning of a process through which a single listener is given the capacity to see, hear, and act. And August's written words in the form of Toews' novel are, of course, being read by many.

August, like the British librarian, resorts to the words and ideas of men. He refers, for example, to retrospective contemplation as conceptualized by Wordsworth in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" in order to contrast "vacant" and "pensive" (Wordsworth 191) moods with the explosive turmoil of Salome Friesen's rage. Salome, who attacked the rapists with a scythe, possesses, according to August, "no Inward Eye . . . , no bliss of solitude. She doesn't wander. And she is not lonely" (Toews 21). Salome's three-year-old daughter, Miep, was "violated by the men" and is on antibiotics that must be procured outside the colony to avoid gossip (43). August uses Wordsworth's poem in an attempt to convey the emotions of the victimized women by articulating what they are not—by emphasizing what is forever denied them. At this point there are no words to describe the devastation of the trauma being released and shared in the hayloft—only indirect words pointing out what does not exist. Repurposing Wordsworth's lines gestures back to the nineteenth century and the pastoral landscape of the Lake District—contexts that are not particularly applicable to the historical migration narrative and places leading to the settlement of Molotschna colony. Although Epp may simply be carelessly applying British Romantic concepts, language, and flowers out of place and time, the allusion to Wordsworth's poem is relevant in a more "global" sense in terms of its structural progression from "the actual to the imagined, from lived experience . . . to remembered experience" (Bergren 45). In bringing Wordsworth's daffodils into the hayloft, Epp accentuates the women's remembered experiences as flashes of nightmares as opposed to blissful recollections of pleasure. Even more devastating, the contrast draws attention to the women's inability to remember at all due to being rendered unconscious—by an anaesthetic meant for animals—when raped.

In his own stories, August tries to inspire his listeners and impose morals. As the women come up with various interpretations of his allegorical story of the ancestral colony by the Black Sea in Odessa, the story expands to encompass as many meanings as there are listeners. August reductively

refers to these unexpected responses as "misunderstanding[s]" (Toews 35), exposing his assumption that there is only one way to hear a story. His didactic intentions are undercut by the playfully expansive and suggestive conversation that emerges in which the women collectively define soft tissue as "the skin and the flesh and all the connective material . . . anything that protects the hard tissue, like bones or anything rigid," and understand that soft tissue is more "resilient" but "decomposes much more quickly in the end" (35-36). August adds "that soft tissue is often defined by what it is not" (36), a piece of information he later repeats after the women have left the loft (201), and he registers what he has learned—that this method of negative definition applies to women, himself, and all others who are branded "not men." The women have taught August one of Irigaray's main points, which is that "the 'feminine' is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex" (*This Sex* 69). August's supposedly simple story has been taken in all directions by the women, leaving the storyteller stunned, admonished, and diminished, but eventually changed. The rage, love, and imagination of the women in the hayloft do not permit them to accept a singular interpretation, particularly a simplistic and didactic one.

It is August's reading of Coleridge that draws attention to his need for more expansive and careful reading. Calling him "the great poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge," August uses the poet's 1808 lecture on education to introduce the women to the poet's "cardinal rules of early education: 'To work by love and so generate love. To habituate the mind to intellectual accuracy and truth. To excite imaginative power'"(Toews 77). August thus emphasizes Coleridge's belief that "'[l]ittle is taught by contest or dispute, everything by sympathy and love'" (77).[5] Working within the traditional binary systems used by Coleridge in his lecture, August advocates the so-called "female" approach of sympathy and love over the more "male"-oriented contest and dispute. In addition to falling into the limitations and divisiveness of binary systems and thinking, August is reading selectively, failing to consider Coleridge's ostensibly less palatable ideas from his Lecture XI: "Women are good novelists, but indifferent poets; and this is because they rarely or never thoroughly distinguish between fact and fiction" (Coleridge 318). In the same essay, Coleridge maintains that "the common modern novel" or "fashionable lady's novel" lacks

imagination, failing to develop judgment and morals because "it incites mere feelings without at the same time administering an impulse to action" and "afford[s] excitement without producing reaction" (318-19). The lecture concludes by relegating human thought itself to a binary of "passive or active" (319). What August has not yet learned—and what Toews is pointing out as the writer of a "fashionable lady's novel"—is the limitation of thinking in terms of dualistic oppositions, the danger of relegating feelings to a category of "mere," and above all the divisiveness resulting from the separation of language and experience into male and female words and worlds.

Women's Words

The words and work offered by early French feminists, particularly Irigaray and Cixous, serve as intertexts in *Women Talking*.[6] It is shocking to realize how strongly the calls for change advocated by this formative work still resonate today. The women in the hayloft, through talking, essentially dismantle what Cixous in "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" calls the metaphor of the "double braid" (63) based in "dual, hierarchical oppositions" (64). In 1975, Cixous regarded the situation as "urgent":

> Now it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallocentrism—bringing to light the fate dealt to woman, her burial—to threaten the stability of the masculine structure. . . . What would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble? (65)

Cixous identifies one result of such crumbling, should it occur: "So all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently" (65); the retelling, however, depends on the *different* telling of the stable stories that initiates the crumbling in the first place.

Cixous' argument that "[m]ale privilege [is] shown in the opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he uses to sustain himself" (64, emphasis original) highlights one of the most basic of the binary oppositions promoting patriarchal control in the community portrayed in *Women Talking*. An impatience with the limitations of binary thinking is voiced by Agata, the eldest of the Friesen women, who urges the others to "put aside the animal/non-animal and forgiveness/non-forgiveness and inspirational/non-inspirational and soft tissue/hard tissue/new skin/old skin debates" (Toews 38). As the women deconstruct the binary oppositions that identify them as

passive and obedient, they demonstrate other ways to tell stories, based in the metaphorical and non-linear.[7] Their illiteracy is intended by the elders of the colony to control them, but fails to do so; a focus on orality and the body bypasses the written and read word in favour of a playful and powerful expression of ideas and emotion through speech and movement. The women's language reveals the pluralistic "female imaginary" (28) described by Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One* as opposed to the hysterical model assigned to the women by the men in the colony. Both conceptions are connected with the woman's body, but the pluralistic orgasmic imaginary is freed from the restrictions and misrepresentations of hierarchical structures and binary oppositions associated with the hysterical. Cixous looked ahead to a time of radical transformations that would usher in a "bunch of new differences," but claimed in 1975 that "we are still floundering—with few exceptions—in Ancient History" ("Sorties" 83) or, in Ann Liddle's translation of Cixous, in "the Old order" (97).[8]

One of the colony's responses to the rapes, as Toews makes clear in her "Note on the Novel," is to dismiss the women's words as the "result of wild female imagination" (vii). In throwing this expression at one of the women, the bishop Peters reduces "wild female imagination" into "three short sentences" by applying "forceful punctuation after each of the words" (58). This aggressive curtailment of women's imagination into truncated one-word sentences emphasizes Peters' dependence on a form of persuasion that evades truth by blocking the flow between words and thus between ideas. Peters crudely and bluntly shuts down objections. It is clear that he not only distrusts the emotional and imaginative but is not even conversant with them. He is one of those men who, according to Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, views women's words as "contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason"; such words are "inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand" (29). In order to listen effectively, Irigaray cautions one to "listen with another ear, as if hearing *an 'other meaning' always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them*" (29, emphasis original). Because woman "is indefinitely other in herself," she can be "said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious" (28). According to Irigaray,

"'she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning" (29). Peters experiences this type of bewilderment in his inability to discern coherent meaning. August, less bewildered than Peters, is learning to listen without judgment, without a dependence on grids and entrenched codes, and without violently breaking stories into fragments. As he witnesses and records the women's words, August begins to be guided by a vague awareness of the complexity of the women listening to what takes place within their individual and communal bodies, which Irigaray would identify as that which takes place "within themselves," "*within the intimacy of that silent, multiple, diffuse touch*" (29, emphasis original). Although August's understanding is partial and tentative, it signals the importance of a man learning how to listen attentively to women's bodies and words.

The translation of Plautdietsch to English is a process not unlike the translation of the women's emotions from intimately private spaces to words shared in the hayloft. As August performs the translation of Low German into English, he works at it rather than relaxes into it; he focuses on getting the words down on paper and feels relief at his ability to hold and contain the fluid, pluralistic, emotional, and playful language in the concrete logic and reason of print. He mistakenly assumes that the women feel the same way. In reminding Mariche that she must "act natural," Agata Friesen, as August explains, "has used a Low German expression for which there is no easy translation to English. It pertains to a type of fruit and to winter" (Toews 55). Even though August is aware of the complexities of translation, particularly when bringing the oral words of an esoteric language spoken by so-called illiterate women into a written form of "standard" English, he remains surprisingly oblivious to the nuances of the process and the persistence of his own prejudices and limitations. Just as the translation of Low German to English compromises and flattens the oral language, so August's disregard of the women's metaphorical language and complicated narratives consigns those words and stories to what Irigaray identifies as "the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology" and positions of "waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) 'subject' to reflect himself, to copy himself" (*This Sex* 30). When Agata names her physical affliction as "edema," for example, August detects "a note of pride in her voice" and declares, in one of his parenthetical comments scattered throughout his narration, "(There

must be satisfaction gained in accurately naming the thing that torments you)" (Toews 69). The assumption that such a condition can be adequately contained in a single word accentuates August's limited understanding of the way in which the women are talking in the hayloft. He pounces on the medical term as a sign of progress, but in his condescending comment fails to understand that he is condoning a concise and exact language that can never contain these experiences and emotions.

Despite such limitations, August is aware of the dangers and shortcomings of the language and comparisons he offers. As a result, rather than using his education to argue against or deny the women's ideas, he tries to quell his objections in an attempt to understand what the women are actually saying. He restrains himself, for example, from lecturing Ona when she describes the setting sun as a traitor and coward. Tempted to explain the science of "hemispheres," which he would have offered complete with the moral that "by sharing the sun the world could learn to share everything" (2), he instead goes along with Ona's playful narrative. Her words hold more truth and depth than their surface suggests, and her knowledge is not as limited or naive as August initially assumes. The sun as traitor and coward is deeply relevant and "true" as a signifier of how time and existence have played out in Ona's life thus far. She is talking beyond plot, fact, and science, and August possesses enough intuition and imagination not to challenge or contradict her, but to respect the profound potential raised by her creativity and wisdom. It is also clear that his willingness to take in and listen to Ona's words is the result of his deep affection for her and is essentially an act of love, opening him to possibilities of faith that challenge his skepticism. Ona's thoughts and stories are nimble, in contrast to the very sedentary limitations of her physical existence. Irigaray argues that if women

> could have access to the imaginary of their desires, they would, rather, always be in movement, at home everywhere, finding their security in mobility, their *jouissance* in movement. . . . But if they are to do that, they cannot stay where they have been put. They must, rather, be able to leave the property in which they have been legally confined, so as to try to find their own place(s). ("Poverty" 91)

The strain between movement and confinement as articulated by Irigaray provides insight into Ona, whose increasing dependence on desire and the imagination challenges stagnancy through a drive for mobility.

The women wrestle with ways in which language is used to evade the truth, as in euphemisms such as the colony's reference to the rapists as "unwelcome visitors" (Toews 49). They discuss distinctions between words such as "fleeing" and "leaving" (41) and argue about the accuracy of the term "insurrection" (91) with respect to their plan. In response to Mariche Loewen's criticism of the way the Friesen women are "extolling the glory of precise, accurate language, of using the correct word" (91), Ona Friesen proposes, "[w]e will name it [the plan] properly when we have the details in place" (92), demonstrating a non-aggressive use of language that follows meaning rather than prescribes it. Similarly, by suggesting that the "women can create their own map as they go" (84) rather than following one already made, she promotes flexibility and possibility.

The nimble playfulness of the women's narratives contrasts with August's earnestness. Elaborate stories and styles, including the use of extended metaphors, are plentiful, but not always appreciated. When Agata says that "[a] road is many things," for example, August notes that "[t]his type of 'Friesen talk' (what Mariche characterizes as 'coffeehousing,' although she has never been to a coffee house) exasperates the Loewens" (59). At the point when the women are getting ready to leave the colony, Agata, even though a fan of metaphor, insists that they "must stop talking through flowers" (168). But when there is time and opportunity, playfulness flourishes. Agata's story of the dog and raccoon (23), for example, is received with mixed reactions by the women, leading to competing interpretations, outbursts, gestures, philosophical arguments, discussions of dreams, quibbles, challenges of logic, considerations of theological cruxes, exaggerations, wordplay, humour, arguing, and crying. The presence of *affidamento*, the feminist encouragement of entrustment based on the recognition of differences among women,[9] is apparent in this scene, particularly with respect to age and generations. This recognition enables positions of power to shift into rearrangement. The two youngest in the group, Neitje Friesen and Autje Loewen, both sixteen years old, express their detachment from the arguments and interpretations by swinging on rafters, kicking at straw bales, and playing a clapping game under the table, providing in a very literal sense what Redekop, in *Making Believe*, identifies as the importance of play through movement (320-21). Their energetic and embarrassed desire to break from the group, particularly when

hymn-singing occurs, manifests itself in a type of fun and play that actually connects them to rather than separates them from the others.

Redekop points out how in Mennonite texts music often "floods in and destabilizes the printed word, moving dialogue to a non-linguistic level" (223). Autje and Neitje braiding their hair together draws attention to the joining of separate strands and sections of hair in a style similar to the bringing together of women's voices and parts in the harmonized hymn-singing. Unlike Cixous' double braid, which carries the heavy metaphor of established "dual, hierarchical systems" ("Sorties" 64), this braid, created by and connecting two teenaged girls, playfully subverts the binary hierarchies of Cixous' metaphor. The musical parts that provide the harmony, like the strands of hair creating the braid, combine to form the whole while drawing attention to their separateness upon which the intricate beauty of the creation depends. The strands of arguments, however, remain unresolved. The hayloft, like Toews' novel, is "a place where you accept and live with contradiction" (Redekop 321)—indeed, where you revel in it to the point of creating harmony and something new out of separation, diversity, and difference.

The "Wild Female Imagination" at Work in the World

Toews leaves the women and the reader in process, flow, and flux; rigidity has been exchanged for movement, which is a positive first step. The concept of slow and long time has been conveyed by Ona in the story of the migrating butterflies and dragonflies, who often arrive at their destination led by the grandchildren of those who started the migration (Toews 81-82). Patience is a key ingredient in this journey to an unknown world that can only be conceived of through faith and the imagination. Redekop draws attention to Jesse Nathan's essay on Mennonite American poetry, "Question, Answer," in which he identifies a "Mennonite *inflection* or *accent*" in the way these poets keep asking questions (Nathan 190, emphasis original). Nathan notes that "[t]here is no closure, and there is the embrace of this lack of closure," resulting in "the invention of new answers, surreal answers, parodic answers, paradoxical answers, confessional answers" (190). Redekop sees this "question-and-answer rhythm, this invoking of the conventions in order to challenge them" as "coming from the deepest roots of the anarchic dissenting tradition that is the Mennonite legacy" (43).

The conclusion of *Women Talking* embraces this dissent and lack of closure. Agata, in conversation with Ona, proposes that the women can only gain a much-needed perspective with distance, and so they have a duty to leave in order to find an inclusive balance that is "rational, understanding AND loving and obedient" (Toews 109). Agata's suggestion does not meet with unanimous agreement, but the commitment she expresses to "pacifism, love and forgiveness" is generally accepted as the basis of faith (111), with love constituting the first step from which all else follows. In acknowledging that it is their faith rather than Molotschna that is their homeland (151), the women become mobile and can declare that they are "not fleeing" but have "chosen to leave" (208). Such leaving does not mean forgetting, but turns to the past in order to fold it forward into the future—not by adopting Wordsworth's passively pensive mood, but by asking questions and inventing answers that challenge the stagnancy imposed by entrenched binary oppositions, particularly those based in gender.

Forgiveness arises throughout the women's discussions as the most difficult challenge they face. Ona asks, "[I]s forgiveness that has been coerced true forgiveness?" (26); and the group realizes the perversity of a system that requires them to ask forgiveness of specific men in official positions who were, in unofficial positions, the very ones who raped them and their children (94). The women wrestle with many of the complexities discussed by Jacques Derrida in his work "On Forgiveness," most prominently the understanding that "[e]ach time forgiveness is effectively exercised, it seems to suppose some sovereign power," that if "one only forgives where one can judge and punish, therefore evaluate, then the putting into place, the institution of an instance of judgement, supposes a power, a force, a sovereignty" (Derrida 59). The women of the colony yearn for a "forgiveness worthy of its name"—"a forgiveness without power" (Derrida 59). Feelings of love, forgiveness, and justice are complicated by the possibility that "the attackers are as much victims as the victims of the attacks" in the sense that all are "victims of the *circumstances* from which Molotschna has been created" (Toews 123, emphasis original). In the end, the importance for the Friesen and Loewen women lies in the comfort and confidence of being able to make distinctions between "feeling" and "knowing": the list includes feeling guilty but knowing they are not guilty; feeling homicidal but knowing they are not killers; feeling lost but

knowing they are not losers (159). Feeling and knowing continue to exist in dialogical tension and contradiction, joining other unresolved distinctions that cannot be forced into union. In her discussion of Toews' *Irma Voth*, Redekop argues that "[w]e cannot stop ourselves from constructing us and them oppositions. We can only forgive each other for doing it and then reimagine them once again. Irma is every person, standing in for all of us as she translates and mediates the world around her" (115). Instead of providing an Everyperson, Toews offers in *Women Talking* a women's collective verging on a human collective, which translates and mediates the world from the hayloft, a *Spielraum* in which play between us-and-them oppositions looks back, in the spirit of anachronic renaissance, in order to move forward while faithfully reimagining future spaces as places not just of talk but of conversation. This playful and promising transformation of space shows us the "wild female imagination" hard at work in the world of us and them.

NOTES

1 Molotschna is the name of an actual colony founded in Russia by Mennonites who emigrated from Prussia in 1803 (Redekop 14).
2 See the introduction to *Mennonite/s Writing Bibliographies* for the origin of the term "Mennonite/s Writing."
3 The "ghost rapes" in Manitoba Colony in Bolivia have been the subject of extensive media coverage. See, for example, Friedman-Rudovsky. For scholarship on gender within Mennonite communities in Bolivia, see Warkentin; and Hiebert.
4 For a discussion of *l'écriture féminine*, see Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa."
5 See Robinson 221. August is quoting Coleridge's 3 May 1808 lecture on education as cited and documented by Henry Crabb Robinson's letter of 7 May 1808.
6 Ron Charles refers to Irigaray in his review of the novel. In her article on *Women Talking*, "Miriam Toews's parable of infinite becoming," Grace Kehler discusses Irigaray's "Divine Women" from *Sexes and Genealogies*.
7 For an outstanding discussion of the novel as a feminist parable, see Kehler ("Miriam Toews's parable"), who reads the metaphor as "a quintessentially participatory form of communication" rather than a "didactic or proscriptive" one (37).
8 While all other references to "Sorties" are from the complete essay as published in *The Newly Born Woman*, I refer to Ann Liddle's translation of this particular excerpt here because it resonates with the real and fictional colonies explored by Toews.
9 For discussions of *affidamento*, see Irigaray, "Women-Amongst-Themselves: Creating a Woman-to-Woman Sociality."

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John Reibetanz

Song and Dance

No feathered pinions uplift them, yet they sustain themselves on transparent wings. They . . . utter only the tiniest sound. Houses, not forests, are their favourite haunts.
—Ovid, *Metamorphoses IV, 410-14*

At first they sought shelter there
millions of lifetimes before

human voices echoed through
caves later given back to

these winged refugees who'd fled
snapping jaws in the forest

The resonant limestone walls
became a recital hall

amplifying tiny sounds
from throats hanging upside down

piping their high-pitched greetings
these felt-covered sacks of song

Their voices became their eyes
navigating the darkness

more deftly than any bird
thin-boned wings sweeping upwards

the alert oversized ears
and panache of Fred Astaire

Light flashed behind them reveals
a Venice of red canals

flowing through wings more cape-like
than butter- or dragon-fly

a thousand beats per minute
no vampire's this dancing heart

Vikki Visvis

Deaf Canada

Disability Discourses and National Constructs in Frances Itani's *Deafening*

In its depiction of the sign language and oralism debates, which surrounded D/deaf[1] education in North America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Frances Itani's *Deafening* (2003) alludes to a historical link between nation and deafness. Grania O'Neill, a deaf girl from Deseronto, Ontario, reveals the existence of the "oral and manual training" (82) debates in her interactions with Fry, her best friend at The Ontario Institute for the Deaf in Belleville: "[Fry] was a good student at the American school and there is little she cannot communicate in the sign language. But her old school began to shift exclusively to the Oral Method, and it is for this reason that her parents have moved her back to Canada" (91). This shift to oralism may begin in the United States, but it eventually seeps into the Canadian education system, confirming Clifton F. Carbin's summation in *Deaf Heritage in Canada* that "the history of Canada's deaf people is closely tied to that of their counterparts in the United States" (12). As Fry explains: "*Superintendent says Oral Method is the future—now we copy United States. Some teachers already discourage use of sign. Who can believe that deaf children will stop creating language with their hands? . . . Already, we hear of children being punished for using sign*" (Itani 321).[2] Nation figures in these debates by revealing more than Canada's pedagogical reliance on the United States, however; the politics of nationalism additionally explain why "during the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, sign language was a widely used and respected language among educators at

schools for the deaf, [but] by the end of the century it was commonly condemned and banished from many classrooms" (Baynton 33).

Douglas Baynton argues the movement toward oralism satisfied a US policy of national assimilation, which gained prominence at the end of the nineteenth century in response to an influx of immigration and attendant increases of diverse foreign dialects throughout the country's linguistic soundscape. He explains:

> Until the 1860s, deafness was most often described as an affliction that isolated the individual from the Christian community. Its tragedy was that deaf people lived beyond the reach of the gospel. After the 1860s, deafness was redefined as a condition that isolated people from the national community. Deaf people were cut off from the English-speaking American culture, and *that* was the tragedy. (33)

As a result, metaphors of deafness evolved from "ones of spiritual darkness" to "metaphors of foreignness" (40). In response, "educators worried that if deaf people 'are to exercise intelligently the rights of citizenship, then they must be made people of our language'" (Edward C. Rider qtd. in Baynton 40) by abdicating sign language, perceived as yet another foreign dialect, and adopting spoken English. Therefore, Baynton surmises that "oralism was about much more than just speech and lip-reading. It was part of a larger argument about language and the maintenance of a national community" (40). As Jason A. Ellis confirms, "the methods debate has never simply been a question of pedagogical preference. It has . . . tak[en] on . . . national . . . overtones" (372).[3] Itani's *Deafening* recognizes similar anxieties about national exclusion in Canada for the D/deaf. Although constructions of nation in Itani's Canadian setting differ from those in the United States at the time—in that *Deafening* formulates "Canada" during a transitional moment between identification with the British Empire and Canadian cultural independence—the imperative to assimilate into an "abled" nation, what Grania calls "blending in" (Itani 371) by imitating aural proficiency, persists. As Grania concedes, "every deaf person was an expert" (371) at assimilating into his or her social environment due to very real threats of ostracism from a nation that does not accommodate bodily diversity.

The historical realism of *Deafening* is undoubtedly sensitive to accurate representations of D/deaf people and communities excluded from the nation; however, I argue the novel simultaneously engages in subtle historical revisionism by mobilizing disability discourses to suggest deafness as

able-bodied is foundational to Canada's national identity during the period. In doing so, the novel offers an idealized model of the Canadian nation, premised on the D/deaf, that is inclusive, not exclusive, of difference. Specifically, *Deafening*'s historical realism recognizes the exclusion of the D/deaf from an "abled-bodied" nation. In Itani's novel, World War I and small-town hearing-abled communities particularly function as metonyms for a Canadian nation that enforces the medical model of disability, which inscribes a quantifiably "abled" or "normal" body and, thereby, marginalizes the D/deaf on the basis of stigmatized bodily difference. However, the novel simultaneously enlists disability discourses that characterize the deaf body as able—whether through a critique of silence as deficit, a challenge to the separation of the senses, or the rehabilitation of the wounded World War I soldier—that changes the contours of the nation in ways which unsettle strict historical realism. Rather than adhering to normative historical accounts, which recognize Canadian national constructs during the period as founded on principles of exclusion, Itani's novel uses Grania as a national metaphor to reimagine idealistically the early-twentieth-century nation as premised on the deaf body and, by extension, prioritizes the principle of socio-cultural inclusion. This intersection between nation and disability ultimately innovates conventionally narrow representations that either figure the "abled" body as the sole metaphoric manifestation of national fitness or use disability as a trope for ruined, broken nations; instead, *Deafening* celebrates a new configuration of nation where the D/deaf as able-bodied function as a metaphor for a fit, healthy, and adaptive Canada. In doing so, the novel risks reducing its D/deaf and disabled characters to simplistic national tropes; however, by offering a layered, dynamic depiction of deafness—as individual experience, communal affiliation, wartime coefficient, or social construct—the novel refuses to flatten deafness to a one-dimensional narrative function.

If deafness intersects with nation, then, the novel's historical realism configures the nation as "abled" through representations of the Great War and the hearing-abled small town, which operate as metonyms for a "fit" Canada that relies on the medical model of disability. Baynton's connection between deafness and nation finds support in disability studies. As Lennard J. Davis posits, "the disabled body came to be included in larger constructions like that of the nation. We have only to consider the cliché that a nation is made up of 'able-bodied' workers, all contributing

to the mutual welfare of the members of that nation" (*Enforcing* 74). Sally Chivers locates a similar national construction in the Canadian literary tradition, citing Margaret Atwood's *Survival* as "invok[ing] a fit national body" (877). As Nicole Markotić puts it in *Yellow Pages* (her research-based, imaginative reconstruction of Alexander Graham Bell's interventions in the Deaf community), "Canada is a mythical country where you get better if you're sick" (12). In its historical realism, *Deafening* conforms to early-twentieth-century constructions of nation as "fit" and "able-bodied," even if Canada was at a precarious moment of cultural transition between its status as a colony of the British Empire and an independent nation. It does so through its metonymic treatment of World War I and small-town, hearing-abled communities. The metonymic links between World War I and an abled Canadian nation are apparent in Grania's hypothesis about her husband Jim Lloyd's reasoning for joining the war effort despite her reservations: "It was someone else's war. Grania knew what Jim would say: *This is our war, too. We are needed*" (Itani 185). The plural possessive adjective "our" refers to Canada, and suggests World War I belongs to the Canadian nation; in effect, participation in the Great War has a contiguous association with productive citizenship in Canada. Similarly, small-town Deseronto is also a metonym for Canada; panoramic spatial imagery makes the small-town "Main Street" conceptually contiguous with the whole nation: "A second bedroom window looks over Main Street and the Bay of Quinte, a large bay that slips in from the great Lake Ontario, which is part of the border between Canada and United States" (6). World War I and small-town Canada specifically function as metonyms for a nation that privileges the ideology of ability—what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson coins the "normate" (8), which is "the preference for able-bodiedness" (Siebers 9)—by relying on the medical model of disability. According to Sami Schalk, the medical model of disability "defines bodily and cognitive differences as individual medical problems to be treated and cured by professionals and obscures the various ways that society influences how bodily and cognitive differences are interpreted, valued, and treated" (174). Through explicit references to medical assessment and diagnosis, the novel reveals that both the war and the small town enforce able-bodiedness by practising the medical model. Colin, Grania's deaf friend, attempts to enlist in the war by "using his considerable lip-reading skills" to bluff through

"the physical exam," but the "*Doctor*" designates Colin unsuitable when he notices his deafness (Itani 180). Similarly, Grania's mother, a member and representative of small-town life, relies on a medical determination to accept Grania's status as "'totally deaf'" (70) and, thereby, not a member of the "normate."

Because the medical model of disability underpins the novel's metonymic treatment of Canada, the D/deaf risk exclusion from the nation as presumably unfit. As Davis explains, "the emphasis on nation and national fitness obviously plays into the metaphor of the body. If individual citizens are not fit, if they do not fit into the nation, then the national body will not be fit" (*Enforcing* 36). Representations of World War I in *Deafening* reveal the potential for this exclusion from the "abled" national body. Despite Colin's numerous attempts to pass the physical examination, "even knowing that the army didn't need deaf boys" (Itani 118), the military ultimately denies him access to the war and, by association, the nation. The "*white feather*," which two women "*pinned . . . to* [Colin's] *overcoat*" (183), encourages a diagnostic spectatorship that aims to shame him socially as a military coward; however, because Colin "wanted badly to do his bit in the war but . . . was not going to be allowed" (187) as a deaf man, the white feather is less a signifier of Colin's cowardice and more a marker of discrimination: Colin does not fight because he is deaf and, thus, considered disabled. Although contemporary Deaf studies acknowledges the controversial implications of conflating the terms "disability" and deafness because the Deaf view themselves as a linguistic subgroup with their own culture, language, and community "within the larger structure of the audist state," and so "do not regard their absence of hearing as a disability" (Davis, *Enforcing* xiv), the historical context of the novel makes clear that in early-twentieth-century Canada, the ableist majority defined deafness medically, not socially or culturally, and cast it as a deficit tantamount to disability. By conflating deafness with disability my aim is, thus, not to offend the Deaf but to register the historical discourse that underpins the novel. The construction of deafness as disability in this episode ultimately reinforces Davis' assessment that those perceived as disabled by an ableist majority are "not of this nation, [are] not a citizen, in the same sense as the able-bodied" (91).

The small town as metonym for the nation similarly refuses to accommodate bodily diversity. This penchant is evident in Cora, the self-appointed

representative of Deseronto, whose authority her daughter, Jewel, reinforces through the value figuratively conferred by both Jewel's name and her residence in the political centre of the nation, "Ottawa . . . close to the Parliament Building" (Itani 250). In her disdain for Grania, the "very existence" of whom "seemed to offend Cora" (252), Cora enforces the reductive characteristics historically associated with deafness, which Christopher Krentz summarizes as "callousness, insensitivity, evil, insanity, isolation" (24); "'weak[ness], stupid[ity], or savage[ry]'" (29); "inferior[ity] or even malevolen[ce]" (46); "innocence" (103); "infantil[ism]" (105); "incomplete[ness,] and dependen[ce]" (108). Mamo, Grania's grandmother, attributes Cora's disgust to the dehumanizing limitations of stereotype: "'Cora has a narrow way of looking at the world'" (Itani 252). The essentializing power of stereotype is also apparent in the town's assessment of Grania as potentially "stupid" (xiv) and dependent (139). For the town, the deaf body is not only physically but also linguistically "other," which Grania acknowledges when she meets Fry and Colin on a Deseronto street: "The two friends were signing rapidly, Colin too. It was only after a few moments that Grania sensed the two women watching and looked up to see that they had stepped down to the cleared boardwalk and were staring as if the three friends were performing a sideshow" (364). The description of sign language as a "sideshow" echoes the earlier "spectacle of the strutting dwarf" who confidently walks "on his short thick legs down the centre of Main Street" (40): the town perceives both as exhibiting differences fitting of marginalization. In effect, Harlan Lane might recognize two competing constructions of deafness, namely, "deaf as a category of disability" and deaf as "designating a member of a linguistic minority" (80). However, the parallel between what the novel refers to as "dwarf" and the Deaf suggests that the small town and, in a broader sense, the nation conflate all those who diverge from the ableist norm, whether in terms of physical or linguistic difference, and designate them "as outside the citizenry" (Davis, *Enforcing* 78).

Although metonymic constructions of nation undoubtedly exclude the D/deaf, Itani's novel also reconfigures the nation in Grania, who functions as a metaphor for Canada. Scholars such as Clare Barker have connected disabled characters with national constructs: "disabled characters also have narrative and aesthetic functions. . . . 'Broken' bodies

may signify partitioned countries, troubled minds represent a nation's collective trauma" (106). Davis also suggests this link when he notes there may well be figurative meanings ascribed to deafness (*Enforcing* 81). *Deafening* makes possible an interpretive reading that ascribes Grania, and by extension deafness, the metaphorical status of Canada. Specifically, Grania's metaphorical national status is not solely restricted to concepts of D/deaf nationalism, what Michael Davidson recognizes as "a vital cultural heritage, forged through sign language" ("Cleavings" 5). As a cultural designation, D/deaf nationalism was initially "monolithic" and "based on signing," but more recently allows for "multiple constituencies of a post-nationalist Deaf culture" (5). However, in the context of this argument, Grania's metaphorical status extends beyond D/deaf nationalism to the broader national concept of an able-bodied "Canada." The novel's tendency to establish figurative links between character and nation as country is especially apparent in Jim's friend named "Irish," whose moniker has clear allegorical allusions to the nation of Ireland. The most overt connection between a nation and deafness is in monarchies where the "crown," a metonym for the monarchic state that functions as an engine of imperialist Empire, represents deafness; for instance, the novel mentions "*the 6-year-old son of the King and Queen of Spain*" who remains "*deaf and speechless*" (Itani 183) and "'[t]he father of King Albert of Belgium . . . a deaf man. He was known as the Deaf Duke of Flanders'" (269).

However, Grania's metaphoric links to nation are not so overt; they are, instead, the product of subtle allusions to the character of Anne Shirley in the *Anne of Green Gables* series, who is, of course, a well-known early-twentieth-century national allegory for Canada. As Cecily Devereux acknowledges, Anne is "a discursive site for what can be understood in ideological terms as the interpellation of national identity; 'we' read Anne as part of being 'Canadian'; 'we' recognize in Anne signs of 'our' shared 'Canadianness,' and in that process recognize (or constitute) ourselves as national subjects" (12). Grania may not exhibit Anne's garrulousness, but she does share her archetypal "red hair" (Itani 107), her intelligence (7, 78), and her resilience (137). Grania may not be a literal orphan—in fact, she enjoys a devoted family—yet once she enters The Institute for the Deaf, she must confront her feelings of orphan status. As her "Dulcie" interior monologue acknowledges, "*Dulcie was an orphan who lived at the school for*

the rest of her days" (88). Later, Grania "thought about the nights she had lain at the dormitory at school during her first year away from home. . . . [H]er lips raced through the chants: . . . *Don't let me be an orphan*" (342). The allusions to *Anne of Green Gables* accumulate in the character of Jim, Grania's husband, whom she internalizes as an intrinsic part of herself, "held . . . in her chest" (194): he is from "Prince Edward Island" (113), the famous setting of the series, and is an orphan (127). In keeping with L. M. Montgomery's reliance on the romantic formula of triumph over adversity, Grania, like Anne, is highly adept at absorbing recurring tutelage; adapting to her family, local community, and a larger social world; and overcoming both personal and social obstacles. Ultimately, Grania's name may mean "love" (36), but its spelling ties her to Canada: "*Gráinne*. But unless people were Irish they wouldn't know how to pronounce the name when they saw it written. 'We'll spell it the English, the Canadian way,' [Mamo] told Agnes. 'Grania'" (36).

If Grania is a metaphor for the nation, then, she, her deafness, and Canada intersect in positive ways: the novel characterizes all as highly *adapt*able. Grania's deafness is her defining trait; in fact, Donna McDonald argues that "Grania's deafness [is] an all-consuming shaper of her personality" (180). McDonald, a Deaf author and critic who has a direct embodied experience of deafness, has gone so far as to question the success of Itani's literary project by arguing that deafness "defines [Grania's] identity in its entirety . . . cannibalizing Grania by denying her . . . access to other elements of her persona" (182). In doing so, McDonald astutely suggests the novel veers dangerously close to equating personhood with disability. However, if we accept McDonald's argument that *Deafening* reduces Grania's character to a "one-dimensional" "cipher for deafness" (181), then, this analysis develops McDonald's reading further by asking: if Grania *is* deafness, what does her deafness mean in the novel?

I argue that if Grania is deafness, then the metaphorical links between Grania and Canada also extend to deafness and Canada; however, rather than adhering to derogatory stereotypes that figure deafness as lack and impediment, the novel foregrounds its status in Grania as able and productive. In Jay Dolmage's terminology, the novel can be said "to resist normativity through disability epideictic: searching for the refusal of negative disability stereotypes, praising and accentuating disability" and

"restoring the virtue of the denigrated" (223). In effect, the novel's depiction of deafness in Grania disrupts the assumption that "the Deaf constitute a threat to ideas of nation . . . and good citizenship" (Davis, *Enforcing* 82); instead, Grania and deafness, much like Anne Shirley, are valued as exemplars of good citizenship.[4] Grania's reminiscence about her and other deaf students' patriotism exhibits their positive intersections with nation:

> She thought of the children at school when Cedric [their teacher] had raised his ruler like a baton at the front of the crowded Assembly Room . . . One King, One Flag, One Fleet, One Empire. The children's hands had shaped the signs of loyalty, their earnest young bodies standing smartly to attention. She had been one of those children. (Itani 186)

Similarly, in her interpretation of adept citizenship, Grania notes the superiority of Colin over members of the community who purportedly defend the body politic and brand him a coward: "It would take courage to ignore the insults of people who did not know half as much about conducting themselves with dignity as Colin did" (187). These episodes reveal that like those who view the Deaf as a linguistic subgroup, as opposed to a category of disability (Davis, "Deafness" 882), the novel's treatment of Grania and the D/deaf "see[s] their state of being as defined not medically but socially and politically" (882). Thus, in its metaphorical treatment of Grania, the novel tends to rely on the "social model [of disability], in which disability is accepted as belonging to society as a whole, not just people with disabilities"; in turn, it interprets deafness as "merely a category of difference and not a pathology" (Wheatley 18). By focusing on disabling environments (such as the reductive medical assumptions displayed by the military and small town), as opposed to an impaired body, the novel emphasizes Grania's ability and value. Ultimately, the parallel between Anne and Grania does not negate Grania's bodily differences but highlights their status as equally able-bodied.

Specifically, the novel values Grania, and in a broader sense Canada, by reconsidering silence, a common metaphor for deafness, as a deficit. As Christopher Krentz explains, "the ubiquity of silence" as a "trope in nineteenth-century hearing accounts of deaf people . . . make it appear that deaf people live in an utterly soundless world and are soundless themselves" (76). The novel certainly conflates silence and deafness: "The silence [is] where [Grania] lived" (Itani 137). This association traditionally

has negative implications because, as Davis notes, "[s]ilence is the repressed other of speech. A brief scan of the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals the metaphorical use of 'silence' to stand for . . . death, absence, meaninglessness" (*Enforcing* 108-09). Even though silence, a "socially and ideologically determined" historical construct (Rosenfeld 318), "took on new contours" in the nineteenth century to "become a commodity, a form of luxury" (323) in the wake of increasing urban noise pollution, the novel recognizes the conventionally negative connotations of silence: it is tantamount to death (Itani 232, 267), threat (236), and the existential emptiness associated with deafness (77). However, *Deafening* simultaneously challenges these implications by acknowledging that silence and, more generally, deafness are not simply absence or lack; instead, silence also "protects" (171), offers "comfort" (196), provides "safety" (196, 200), functions as an intimate form of communication (143, 146), and enables personal and community connections (130, 184). Indeed, the novel challenges the tacit privileging of sound over silence in responses to deafness when it acknowledges that in the theatre of war silence is, at times, preferable to sound: "There was no silence in that place. The boys went mad from the sound" (305). In effect, the novel confirms Krentz's conclusion that metaphors of silence "fail to represent deaf experience because they focus only on the inability to hear or speak, leaving out deaf people's community, language, and manner of being" (76). The novel likewise reveals the limitations of the metaphor, for silence does not solely define Grania and the Deaf community. During Grania's time at The Institute for the Deaf, students transmit sounds, breaking the silence that purportedly imprisons them: "They shout into the air" and "they roar out of the silence inside them" (Itani 87). The novel's ambivalent treatment of silence, therefore, not only exposes traditionally reductive approaches to deafness but also encourages a reconsideration of silence as "death, absence, [and] meaninglessness" (Davis, *Enforcing* 109): silence can also be tantamount to life, presence, and meaning, attributes that characterize Grania, the D/deaf, and, as figurative extension, Canada.

Grania's metaphoric national fitness is further apparent in her challenge to the separation of the senses, which relies on the notion, popularized in the nineteenth century, that the ear is the only organ that can process sound. Jonathan Sterne, in his examination of sound as "an artifact of the

messy and political human sphere" (13), posits that the contributions of Alexander Graham Bell, Johannes Müller, and Hermann von Helmholtz in the nineteenth century "mark a turning point in the history of ideas about hearing" (62). Their mechanical understanding of the ear and hearing meant that definitions of sound depended on the functioning ear (57); as Sterne explains, "Müller wrote over 150 years ago that 'without the organ of hearing with its vital endowments, there would be no such a thing as sound in the world, but merely vibrations'" (qtd. in Sterne 11). As a result, "like Bell, Müller posited that each sense is separate because its data travel down separate nervous highways" (Sterne 60). As Müller puts it, "each sense is functionally and mechanically distinct from the others" (qtd. in Sterne 60). Itani's novel alludes to this mechanical approach to physiology in its discussion of Bell's "profound study of the human voice" where he "has actually taken apart the human larynx and all its accessories as if it were merely a telephone" (120-21), a machine. Helmholtz's later elaboration of the mechanical function of sensory organs reaffirmed the separation of the senses: "'each organ of sense produces peculiar sensations, which cannot be excited by means of any other; the eye gives sensations of light, the ear sensations of sound, the skin sensations of touch'" (qtd. in Sterne 63). What Sterne terms "the separation of the senses" means that "each sense—hearing, sight, touch, smell, taste—[is] a functionally distinct system, [is] a unique and closed experiential domain" (62). Because "the separation of the senses" instrumentally links sound to the ear, "Bell understood deafness, fundamentally, as a human disability to be overcome, not as a condition of life" (39). Thus, in the "separation of the senses" paradigm, deafness is equivalent to deficit; it is the functional absence of the only organ—the ear—that can process sound.

However, Grania's synesthetic visual engagement with sound challenges this understanding of deafness as deficit; her visual processing of sound reveals that the senses are not distinct but interdependent and compensatory because they can aid one another. Although Grania hopes that "'Graham Bell['s] . . . profound study of the human voice'" (Itani 120) will help deaf students "have a better chance for learning" (121), her response to sound does not conform to the nineteenth-century auditory discourses to which Bell contributed. Rather than designating Grania's lack of a functioning ear a disability, as Bell would, the novel's understanding of sound is more

in keeping with John Bulwer's much earlier assessment of audition. As Elizabeth B. Bearden explains, "Bulwer (1606-56), an English physician who . . . treated Deafness . . . contravenes disparagements of Deafness," first, by "refus[ing] to view Deafness as a privational defect of nature; he considers Deafness a natural variation of the human form with definite advantages," and, second, by "refut[ing] the exclusion of sign language and other forms of what he calls ocular audition from natural law" (34). Predating the "separation of the senses" in the nineteenth century, Bulwer's "ocular audition" emphasized the "interdependent nature of the senses for Deaf people specifically, focusing on techniques in which vision assists hearing, such as signing and lipreading" (38). In Bulwer's phrasing, "ocular audition" "may inable you to *heare with your eye*" (qtd. in Bearden 39). Grania exhibits a similar "hearing eye" (Bulwer qtd. in Bearden 41) when she desires "'to go to the ocean . . . to see that big sound'" (Itani 148) or when she tries "to see the sound of the wind" (322). When "Grania sees a word here and there as her glance flits from face to face" (63), she, to use Oliver Sacks' terminology, "*see*[*s*] the 'voice' of words" (Sacks 134). The consistent focalization of the third-person external narration from Grania's perspective also emphasizes her functional reliance on the eye to process her sonic environment. In fact, sound is not only visual for Grania but also tactile: "'I feel your song. . . . I listen to your body'" (Itani 134), she explains to Jim. Like the English writer Josephine Dickinson, whose Deaf poetics, according to Jessica Lewis Luck, reveal that sound is visual, Grania opens up a "hearing-listening space that incorporates more than the tiny organ of the ear . . . shifting the locus of sound experience from the voice and ear to other important sites of sound-processing" (Luck 171), such as the eye. In doing so, the novel challenges audist biases, which designate the ear as the sole receptacle of sound, and lauds the deaf experience as highly adaptive.

This capacity for adaptation becomes a crucial trait for rebuilding the nation, a strength apparent in Grania's rehabilitative interactions with Kenan, her injured brother-in-law. In the figure of the wounded soldier, two tropes for nation—deafness and World War I—intersect. Grania makes this connection when "she thought of the soldiers returning, the ones who had been deafened during the war. There were so many in this area of Ontario, classes were being held in the Belleville school, in the

same rooms in which she had studied as a child" (Itani 371). Arguably, the soldiers' deafness represents the physical costs of war: in accordance with the medical model, World War I renders them damaged and, as a consequence, disables the nation. In A. J. Withers' terminology, "the 'fit'" soldiers, who were once "heroes for the nation," "had become 'unfit'" (36). Kenan's injured body, shell shock, and "silence" (287) register the fall of the soldier as national hero. This transition is reminiscent of prominent British war poetry, such as Wilfred Owen's "Disabled" (1917), which, Davidson explains, "regards the disabled veteran as a de-sexed, pathetic figure"; thus, "[w]hatever heroics serving his country offered to the young man, has become a cruel joke," and "disability [in this war poetry] is the . . . figure of damaged embodiment against which the statistically normal body may be compared" ("Paralyzed" 84-85).

However, rather than using the soldiers' deafness and Kenan's injuries solely as tropes for damaged nations outside the "normate," *Deafening* shifts the signification of disability by making it a rehabilitative site of empathetic identification and linguistic exchange. In David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's terms, "rather than signify disability as a symbol of cultural ruin" (13) or "social collapse" (165), the novel "narrate[s] the experience of disability as a social and lived phenomenon" (13) in ways that invest it with positive metaphoric contours for the nation. Specifically, Grania's deafness facilitates Kenan's recovery because she is able to identify with his feelings of emotional isolation and debilitating fear: "'Both afraid.' . . . *Yes*. He *was* afraid" (296-97). She also elicits his first communicative exchange since returning from the war by recalling her childhood neologism "poom" (297), her word for "fart." Kenan responds to the memory with his first expression of mirth and a willingness to return to the world of signification by having Grania use sign language to teach him to sound out words: "Words tumbled from Kenan's mouth. Lesson over for the week. They joined their right hands, and squeezed" (299). Kenan's imperative to learn, articulated in the very mandate Grania used as a child—"*Tell*" (301)—becomes the title for Itani's next novel, which charts Kenan's development.[5] *Tell* clarifies the crucial role Grania plays in Kenan's rehabilitation:

> Grania had helped him to recover the language inside himself, the language of words he had not been able to utter after he had come home. He had heard people well enough. . . . But his own words had stormed and tangled inside his

> head. He hadn't been able to separate them into patterns. In some strange way not fully understood, he'd had to relearn the language he already knew. The bridge between, while he was stuttering his way back to speech, was Grania's sign language. (16)

Grania and Kenan forge a powerful rehabilitative alliance that may aim to return Kenan "to speech" and, thus, a desirable "norm" of able-bodiedness but does not rely on "administrators and doctors" who, in the medical model, "became the ultimate experts about disability and disabled bodies, rather than disabled people themselves" (Withers 48). Instead, by collaborating in a lived experience of disability, they counter the "static" universalism of the "angry war veteran" stereotype (Mitchell and Snyder 25). Metaphorically, therefore, Grania and Kenan's therapeutic contract offers an idealistically imagined model of nation where deafness and disability enhance the body politic through adaptive healing.

By idealistically reimagining the early-twentieth-century nation as premised on the deaf body, the novel deviates from normative historical accounts, which recognize constructions of nation during the period as founded on principles of exclusion. In her study of disability in Canada, Maria Truchan-Tataryn acknowledges that "disabled experience has been omitted from th[e] fluid process of negotiating Canadian identity" (qtd. in Chivers 885). Chivers confirms that only "with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a shift begins toward a perspective of disability as part of the diversity that Canadian society embraces" (890). Specifically, Withers, who understands that "the concept of disability is socially constructed and historically contingent" (35), explains "how disability was discursively produced in Canada" during World War I on the basis of exclusion (33). The increased visibility of physically disabled veterans returning from the war meant that disability could not, as it had before the war, exist "secluded [and] hidden-away" (36); in response, federal policy and discourse constructed "citizenship as necessarily self-sufficient and disability as a loss in economic productivity" (33). By approaching disability in accordance with the medical model, Canadian federal policies socially excluded the disabled who could not "participate in the labour market" (38) on the basis of inefficient capitalist productivity (31). Such policies, therefore, perpetuated the principles of eugenics, "an increasingly dominant discourse with respect to disability" during the period, that "classified people into

two broad categories: those who were fit (generally white, straight, middle- or upper-class non-disabled people) and those who were unfit (everyone else)" (36). Unlike Grania and Kenan's rehabilitative interactions, which anticipate the social model of disability by emphasizing collaborative responses to and destigmatization of the disabled body, the construction of disability in Canada in the early twentieth century emphasized diagnosing perceived pathology and correcting those who could enter the labour force. If, as Withers attests, "citizenship and economic productivity were interlocked" (44), then the disabled who were unable to produce found themselves outside the semantic field of nation.

However, configurations of nation as a narrative construct in the novel enable a reimagining of Canada during this period not as exclusive but as inclusive of difference. In keeping with the influential work of Benedict Anderson, who theorizes that the nation as a cultural construct manifests, in part, by its print culture, and subsequently of Homi Bhabha, who studies "the production of the nation as narration" (209), the novel presents nation as a story that is subject to change. In her contemplation of Ireland, Grania points to nation's status as evolving narrative invention, what she terms a "word picture":

> The beautiful land called Ireland. . . . The picture she had always had in her head was the one her grandmother had given her through story. With the sinking of the *Lusitania,* Mamo's word picture was being replaced by another, one that held murky waters and dark sea and drowning babies washing up through waves. (Itani 117)

Unlike this revision of "Ireland," the novel's retelling of "Canada" through Grania's story does not opt for a macabre narrative but one of optimistic egalitarian inclusivity. This emphasis is, to a degree, apparent in the romance narrative between Grania and Jim, which resists the period's discourse of eugenics that aimed to maintain a clear distinction between the "fit" and "unfit." As Withers explains, "eugenicists attempted to steer human evolution by preventing or discouraging the breeding of those classified as unfit" (36). Alexander Graham Bell notoriously applied the same reasoning to deafness, so as Grania recognizes, he "worried himself over marriages between deaf people," fearing they would produce deaf progeny, "even though he had worked with deaf children in Boston when he was a young man, and had married a deaf woman himself" (Itani 120). Unsurprisingly, Krentz notices that literary "male hearing narrators seem unwilling to contemplate a romantic

deaf-hearing relationship" in nineteenth-century American literature because it might risk blurring what had become a naturalized distinction between the abled and disabled (118). In the novel, Cora crudely iterates this assumption when she evaluates Grania's prospects: "'Who will marry that pitiful child when she grows up? . . . If they don't find someone deaf and dumb, she'll end up living with her mother the rest of her days'" (Itani 55). However, Grania's relationship with Jim resists the exclusivity in eugenics discourses and celebrates, instead, an inclusive deaf-hearing romantic attachment that was "full of hope" (113). Ultimately, if Grania is a national metaphor on the basis of her parallels with Anne Shirley, she does not conform to what Devereux believes Anne—at least in part—represents: an early-twentieth-century Canadian "ideological framework of emergent nationhood" (24) defined on the principle of exclusion. Instead, Grania as national metaphor encourages inclusivity of the D/deaf and disabled by drawing attention to their adaptive "fitness."

By using Grania and her deafness as a national metaphor in this way, the novel risks reducing its D/deaf and disabled characters to simplistic tropes, using deafness as what Mitchell and Snyder term a "narrative prosthesis," where "disability pervades literary narrative . . . as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (47). Mitchell and Snyder recognize this prosthetic function extends to national tropes, which typically depend on a binary logic that presumes national "health" is the antithesis of the disabled body: "One cannot narrate the story of a healthy body or national reform movement without the contrastive device of disability to bear out the symbolic potency of the message" (63-64). *Deafening*, however, skirts this kind of narrative prosthesis by not exploiting essentialized, derogatory tropes of disability as overdetermined metaphors for nation. Unlike Cedric's editorials, which "flattened the [Deaf's] voices until they merged to become one," Itani's novel highlights "the voices [that] refused to be flattened, [which were] what Grania looked for—voices that were too distinct to be made to disappear" (119). Grania not only seeks these voices; she is also a metaphoric embodiment of what these voices represent: a unique, able, and adept Deaf woman, not a "flattened" "opportunistic device." While the novel might submit to stereotypes of the D/deaf as "stupid" (xiv) and dependent (139), it simultaneously challenges them by representing Grania as intelligent (7, 22, 78) and strong (137), thus offering a

nuanced, shifting depiction of her deafness rather than a default extreme in a binary spectrum. *Deafening* does not metaphorically belabour overt, stale tropes, but offers a tangible model of an able and inclusive nation through Grania and her lived experience of deafness.

Ultimately, while Grania and her deafness function as a subtle national metaphor, deafness is not reducible to nation; instead, deafness is layered and dynamic, whether as individual experience, communal affiliation, wartime coefficient, or social construct. Like the sign language Grania learns at school, deafness is an unstable signifier, "unpredictable" and "forever changing" (Itani 43). Thus, deafness might characterize Grania's individual experience, but it also extends to the collective experience of the students at the school, which "contributed to the rise of a distinct . . . group identity" (Krentz 35) for the Deaf based on "concepts such as hybridity and affiliation" (14). The novel reveals not only this "hybridity" in the diversity of Deaf students' life paths (Itani 113) and voices (119), but also their "affiliation" through shared education (84-85), publications (84), and employment (180). However, the novel also recontextualizes deafness by examining it within the theatre of war as both a physical and psychological phenomenon (272). These shifting configurations of deafness reveal, as Baynton recognizes, that "the meanings of 'hearing' and 'deaf' are not transparent . . . and cannot be apprehended apart from a culturally created web of meaning" (33). In Itani's novel, these meanings intersect with nation but are not limited to it. Therefore, *Deafening*'s revision of Canada as a nation premised on Grania's lived experience of deafness celebrates it as a vehicle with which to generate independence, pleasure, empathy, and responsibility, but does not reduce it to a single metaphoric function.

NOTES

1 My use of the terms deaf, Deaf, and D/deaf conforms to the definitions of the Canadian Association of the Deaf—Association des Sourds du Canada. The term "deaf" refers to "people who have little or no functional hearing." It "may also be used as a collective noun ('the deaf') to refer to people who are medically deaf but who do not necessarily identify with the Deaf community. In addition, children who are deaf are usually referred to as 'deaf' because they may not yet have been socialized into either the Deaf or the non-Deaf culture. If they use Sign as their first language, they are referred to [as] 'Deaf.'" The "big-D" "Deaf" is "a sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on sign language. Their preferred mode of

communication is Sign." The term D/deaf is "used as a collective noun to refer to both those 'Deaf' people who identify with the Deaf culture and those 'deaf' people who do not" ("Terminology").

2 The frequent italicization in quotations throughout has been retained from Itani's novel.

3 Ellis' analysis of the oral-manual training debates in Canada generally conforms to Baynton's findings. In nineteenth-century Canada, sign language was the preferred method of communication, especially in Quebec, because Catholic religious orders believed sign language would make "deaf French Canadian youngsters into good Catholics" (375). However, in the early twentieth century, oralism in Canada, like in the United States, gained prominence. In 1922, the Toronto Board of Education introduced into the city's public schools "the pure oralist method of instructing the deaf" (371), which met with opposition from the Deaf community, particularly the Ontario Association of the Deaf (372). Like Baynton, Ellis recognizes the importance of nation in this shift, citing the British Royal Commission on the Blind, the Deaf and Dumb (1886-1889), which "raised fears that deaf people were . . . 'a possible toxin to the state'" (377). However, unlike Baynton, Ellis emphasizes the influence of the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf, held in Milan in 1880, as "a pivotal moment in transnational deaf history" (376) because "at Milan, the oralists . . . passed resolutions" that declared "their intention to suppress sign language" (376). After Milan, Ellis acknowledges, "signing declines over time in Canadian schools" (376). By 1907, the Ontario School for the Deaf (OSD) "had embraced oralism," and "by 1927, there were just three teachers who used sign language left at the OSD" (376). See also MacDougall; Clarke and Winzer; and Beggs, who trace a similar historical arc in Canada.

4 However, inherent differences persist in the ways the two characters function as national tropes, particularly in their reception and symbolic function outside the novel. Whereas *Anne of Green Gables* "is one of the best-selling English-Canadian novels ever" (Devereux 12) and "Montgomery's heroine has emerged" as a "'national icon' . . . 'right up there, with the moose, the beaver, the Mountie, and the Habs'" (13), Grania's metaphoric national status is neither so ubiquitous nor so absolute. Unlike Anne, who has become synonymous with nation, Grania's metaphoric national role manifests subtly in the novel and is but one of several figurative implications linked to the character. For instance, Rūta Šlapkauskaitė argues that "deafness [is] a metaphor for postmemory" in the novel: "The deafness of the female protagonist furnishes the perceptual structure of the First World War as a sonorous event," revealing the novel's "concern for how the past *resounds* in us" and "creating a moral premise for remembering through empathy" (209).

5 In this way, *Deafening* challenges the "'kill or cure' imperative" that "introduce[s] disabled characters only to 'solve' their 'problems'" (Mitchell and Snyder 164).

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Neil Surkan

Pathetic

A chinook arch, like a loose tarp,
lipped across the evening sky
while we were out walking the dog.
Muscling up to a dome of snow,
he shoved his head in past the shoulders,
pulled out something wrapped in foil.

Next morning, it was twelve degrees.
Slush splattered the curb, buds
spangled the trees, crabgrass flexed
in round sun patches. The sudden
heat was so persuasive,

even the river, celery green,
appeared between soft flaps of ice
like remorse on the bewildered
face of a forceful denier
who, beholding certain proof, whimpers
"Human, only human."

And then, as is also human,
clamping down again, the world
reverted, cold as before, except
where, having briefly melted,
it froze harder, slipperier.

Thomas Hodd

A Casualty of Genre
The War Short Stories of Will R. Bird

Dubbed "the unofficial bard of the CEF" by Jonathan Vance ("Soldier" 27), Will R. Bird (1891-1984) enlisted in 1916 and served as a sniper and then as a rifleman with the 42nd Battalion; he saw fighting at Passchendaele, Amiens, Arras, and Cambrai, and was awarded a Military Medal for bravery for actions at Mons, Belgium, on the last day of the First World War. Furthermore, unlike many of his fellow combat veterans, Bird decided to write about his battlefield experiences soon after being demobbed. Over the next few decades he would publish a host of articles and a handful of non-fiction books about the Great War, his most celebrated work being the soldier-memoir *And We Go On* (1930). Yet Bird was more than a war memoirist: he was also a war novelist and short-story writer, and over a two-decade period beginning in the late 1920s he published at least fifty war short stories, the first ones appearing in 1927 (possibly earlier), as well as a novel, *Private Timothy Fergus Clancy* (1930). Indeed, as Ian McKay and Robin Bates have noted, "The war gave Bird a vast fund of stories and a constituency of veterans eager to hear them" (133).

Criticism on Bird's war fiction, however, is practically non-existent, with glosses by Vance in *Death So Noble* (1999) and a handful of lines in a 1953 MA thesis by Lillian Hunter Matthews representing the bulk of the scholarship.[1] One reason for this lack of critical focus on Bird's war fiction can be attributed to the fact that many of his stories were published in short-lived pulp magazines and official government publications, and so quickly fell out of print.[2] A second contributing factor may be the historical favouring of the novel among scholars of Canadian war literature.[3] But with

the recent reissue of his primary works, such as David Williams' edition of *And We Go On* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2014) as well as my own anthology *A Soldier's Place: The War Stories of Will R. Bird* (Nimbus, 2018), scholars are invited to reconsider Bird's contributions to Canada's war literature. As I hope to demonstrate, the stories he published during the interwar period are especially deserving of critical attention, since they offer readers a compelling portrayal of the Canadian soldier's First World War experience that is neither uniquely romantic nor realist in treatment. Instead, Bird navigated a middle way between these two aesthetic poles by offering short stories that privileged the humanity and brotherhood of soldiers over their combat deeds. What's more, his stories arguably served as a form of literary catharsis for the thousands of veterans who read and responded to his work.

It is instructive to consider first where Bird published his short stories. Reaching across the publication spectrum, his war fiction appeared in both mainstream as well as specialty magazines, including *Maclean's*, *Canadian Magazine*, *Busy East of Canada*, the *Toronto Star Weekly*, and *Collier's*, among others. But of the three main outlets for his work, the first two were pulp magazines, one of which was fairly short-lived: *Canadian War Stories*, for instance, was started in 1929, but ceased production in February 1930 as a result of the stock market crash (Vance, *Death* 178); it had advertised itself as "'an alert Canadian magazine depicting romance, fact and fiction, gallant acts and deeds of war heroes'" (qtd. in Vance, *Death* 177). An examination of Bird's publication credits through various bibliographical sources suggests he published eight war stories in this magazine. Comparatively, the US periodical *War Stories* ran from 1926 to 1936 (Tennyson 440), and largely "glorified the military engagements of the Great War and cashed in on a sense of nostalgia . . . for the first war" (Drowne and Huber 180); not surprisingly, because of the magazine's longevity, Bird succeeded in placing at least sixteen of his combat narratives in *War Stories*.[4] Equally important is the fact that the intended readership for both of these pulp magazines was primarily the working class. As Erin Smith describes in her study of readership in pulp magazines in the early twentieth century:

> Scholars concur that pulp magazines targeted those who were in some way marginal readers—adolescents, the poorly educated, immigrants, and laborers. . . . Pulp publisher Harold Hersey maintained that most readers were office or factory girls . . . , soldiers, sailors, miners, dock-workers, ranchers, rangers, and others who worked with their hands. (205)

Bird's third main publishing outlet for his war short stories was *The Legionary*. Launched in May 1926 to replace the *Canadian Veteran*, it was self-styled as the "official national magazine of the Canadian Legion." It has enjoyed a long publishing life, continuing as *Legion Magazine* after 1968. As for Bird, his popularity with *The Legionary* is readily apparent: in addition to his non-fiction pieces that appeared regularly in the magazine's pages, Bird published more than a dozen war short stories in *The Legionary* between 1927 and 1936. What's more, *The Legionary*'s readership was almost exclusively Canadian veterans, and so the stories in this journal were ultimately meant to serve a more experienced and knowledgeable audience than that of *War Stories* and *Canadian War Stories*—although as noted above, soldiers were considered a main reading consumer of pulp magazines.

This short survey of Bird's publication history reveals that he was not only able to produce stories over a sustained period of time, but was also able to produce a considerably large number of them—the majority of which were intended for the soldierly reader. But Bird's prodigious output cannot be explained solely as that of a fledgling writer needing quick financial turnaround, particularly given the fact that his stories were immensely popular during the interwar period. On the contrary, I would argue that the main reason Bird was able to write so many publishable war short stories is because the form readily lends itself to articulating the soldier experience. Mary Louise Pratt argued in 1981 that "if the short story is not a 'full-length' narrative [like the novel] it cannot narrate a full-length life; it can narrate a fragment or excerpt of a life" (183)—a concept alluded to earlier by Norman Friedman (1958), who contends that "a major change [in a character], *because it includes perforce more aspects of the protagonist's life*, tends to be longer [in length] than a minor change" (111, emphasis mine). This idea of the short story as a "fragment" rather than the "complete life" of a protagonist is well suited to the war writer of the interwar period, not just because it functions as a metaphor for postwar life (one recalls T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"), but also because the "fragment or excerpt of a life" reflects well the soldier experience: daily life is not a single narrative, but a series of actions (march here, attack there, rest here, dig here, wait there) which, among the non-commissioned ranks, is often not explained in terms of the big picture. For obvious reasons, regular soldier-writers tended

not to see or experience or study the war in sweeping terms of *le grand récit*, but in short, fragmented, life-and-death moments. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of Canada's popular Great War soldier-novelists—Ralph Connor (Charles Gordon), Philip Child, Leslie Roberts, George Godwin, and Peregrine Acland—came from the officer class, whereas war short-story writers like Bird, Harold Fraser Cruickshank, and W. Redvers Dent were from the non-commissioned ranks.[5]

Related to this notion of the short story as a literary "fragment" is the form's displacement of time in comparison to the novel. Ian Watt suggests in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) that the genre's early evolution was influenced by Locke's defining of individual identity as "an identity of consciousness through duration in time," and that "many novelists . . . have made their subject the exploration of the personality as it is defined in the interpenetration of its past and present self-awareness," leaving Watt to espouse "the novel's insistence on the time process" (21, 22). Lukács also includes time as one of the genre's central pillars, arguing that "[o]nly in the novel, whose very matter is seeking and failing to find the essence, is time posited together with the form" (122). Yet the short story's shorter page length (and hence its ability to be consumed in one sitting), as well as its frequent portrayal of a small handful of characters operating in a tightly defined social arena, makes the passage of time of lesser importance to the writer than to the articulation of the protagonist's epiphany—as evidenced by James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), for instance. As Michael Trussler notes, "The short story's inclination for hovering over one specific temporal horizon affects the ways in which the genre positions itself against the movement of historical progression" (560-61). Trussler also observes that

> [s]hort stories, through brevity, and their tendency to depict a single temporal horizon, often create a special dynamic that invites the reader to project . . . his or her [*sic*] 'prejudices' against a given text; but at the same time, such a text contains an unknowable element. The short story does not so much create the vast, interconnected cosmology that writers such as Barth associate with the novel, as it presents a hermeneutic condition of crisis. (575)

These ideas of the "unknowable element" as well as the "condition of crisis" implicit within the genre reflect as well the conditions experienced by soldiers in a theatre of war, who are not only tasked with attacking an unknowable Other but also engaged in intelligence gathering in order to succeed.

As to the stories themselves, a cursory examination of Bird's narratives reveals that he seldom portrayed epic battles, and that time was of secondary or even tertiary importance to his literary objectives. Instead, the short story form afforded him the ability to depict the smaller events that made up the bulk of the real war experience: a nighttime trench raid; the taking of a machine gun nest; the watching of the line; the discovery of an occupied building. Even when larger battles are described, as for example in one episode of "White Collars: A Tale of the 'Princess Pats,'" published across the February and March issues of *The Legionary* in 1932, the narrative is not omniscient or broad in scope. Instead, the reader's perspective is always connected to the soldier-protagonist:

> Renforth was standing by McCann when a single gun fired from some point ahead. With a jarring crash that seemed to lift him, the barrage opened. It was indescribable. The deafening clamor reverberated in a mighty unison, and it seemed as if a cataract of rushing things were pouring overhead. Far ahead Renforth saw a continuous play of flashes, and twin red lights, breaking high. He tried to ask Bull their meaning but could not hear his own voice. ("White Collars," February 1932, 13)

What's more, many of Bird's stories follow a format whereby the protagonist is named in the first paragraph and is soon tasked—or chooses by his own will—to undergo a mission. The mission, brief as it is and singularly focused, is already cognate to the short story form. Sometimes the missions are straightforward: investigate a crater or go on a raid. At other times the mission is more personal, such as wanting to avenge a friend's death or needing to escape from a German tunnel. Furthermore, the majority of stories are told from the perspective of the enlisted man, so officers are regularly painted in a negative light: in the story "Sunshine," for example, which appeared in the July 1929 issue of *The Legionary*, a bossy officer obsessed with rank and order is revealed as a coward on the battlefield; similarly, in "Strike Me Pink!", published in the June 1930 issue of *War Stories*, an acting sergeant is berated by a major for going on patrols and life-saving missions instead of writing reports about them for the major to submit to his superior. Yet a handful of Bird's tales also depict the soldier learning to trust his officer. One sees this, for instance, in Bird's first story in *The Legionary*, appearing in July 1927, titled "His Deputy."[6] "Red" McLean is a tough, wiry soldier from the 2nd Battalion of the Nova Scotia Highlanders who keeps finding himself in situations where he is

subjected to the orders of a commanding officer who shares his name, Murdock Malcolm McLean. "Red" spends much of his time avoiding his perceived doppelgänger, thinking he is "going to outdo him in courage" ("His Deputy" 14). But in the end, the officer saves Red's life and Red finally accepts their shared fate—in effect, they become brothers in valour.

Reinforcing this notion of brotherhood-in-arms, or learned social levelling, is Bird's diversity of soldier-protagonists. Rather than keeping to Canadian protagonists, Bird portrayed characters who were Irish, Canadian, Newfoundlander, American, Australian, British, even German. Such an observation may be easily dismissed as a marketing tool, since it allowed Bird to tailor the nationality of his soldiers to the nationality of the publication he was targeting (such as including US soldiers in stories pitched to American magazines like *Collier's* or *War Stories*). However, this decision may also reflect Bird's belief in the universality of the soldier experience—that is, while the locations of assaults or offensives can be linked to specific historical events and battalions, the activities and experiences of the soldiers were invariably similar. Moreover, while Bird dismissed Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) and other anti-war books for being "putrid with so-called 'realism'" (qtd. in Vance, "Soldier" 28), it is telling that such an international list of portrayals of characters from different nation-states is reminiscent of Harrison's own dedication to *Generals Die in Bed*: "To the bewildered youths—British, Australian, Canadian, and German—who were killed." But Harrison, who dedicated his novella to all fallen soldiers, portrayed only one type of soldier-protagonist; namely, the disillusioned fighter-turned-pacifist. Bird, however, portrayed those who lived as well as died; those who succeeded as well as failed; those who fought and those who fled; those who believed in and those who opposed the war.

Bird's soldier-protagonists also tended to be outsiders or marginal figures, such as the Irishman, the French Canadian, the American embedded in a Canadian battalion, and the sergeant who grew up in the outback. One poignant example of this outsider trope is Gerald Marrack, the protagonist of "Boots!", which appeared in the November 1929 issue of *Canadian War Stories*. Assigned to the "Warwicks" (Britain's Royal Warwick Regiment), Marrack is a "newcomer" to the regiment as they push towards Passchendaele. More importantly, the four men with whom he becomes friendly are

portrayed as being broadly representative of the soldierly situation: Chicken is the nervous soldier, unsure about going into battle; Fitzherbert is the pacifist, declaring that "[t]he whole sordid game is rotten and we're fools to stand for it. I don't want to kill any man—I've no hatred for anyone" ("Boots!" 40); Skinner, the corporal, is the eager soldier, who looks forward to battle because "it'll give us a chance to get our bayonets into some of them squareheads" (40); and Matthews is the level-headed soldier who keeps to himself and just does his job. As for Gerald, he rejects early on the vehement pacifist attitude of Fitzherbert as well as the bloodlust of Skinner, whose hunger to kill is reinforced by a nearby woman:

> Gerald was startled by [Fitzherbert's] vehemence. . . . His words were well-chosen and his argument disturbed Gerald, yet stirred him to resentment. . . .
> The old woman hovered near them, waiting for her pay. "Hate?" she quavered. "Hate Boche. Kill-kill-kill." Gerald shuddered and arose. He didn't want to talk. In a way he despised them both. (40)

In other words, Gerald is sympathetic to neither the pro-war nor anti-war camp; instead, he gravitates towards the quiet, reasonable, and pragmatic soldier: "[Gerald] wanted to get back to Matthews" (40).

Much of the narrative revolves around Gerald's complaints about his ill-fitting boots. But this image quickly becomes part of the universal symbolism of suffering soldiers. As his company gets closer to the front, for example, Gerald stops at a prisoner's cage and initially looks at the Germans with contempt: "He spat disgustedly. They stank of stale perspiration, they seemed stoic, calloused parts of a system" (41). Yet a bit later, Gerald realizes he and his mates are part of the same system: "Then he remembered the top boots the Germans wore. War was hell on both sides" (41). This statement demonstrates another aspect of the story's narrative strategy: it is presented as a third-person limited point of view, though at several key points the reader is provided with Gerald's thoughts and reflections on what he sees and experiences. Functionally speaking, then, the narrative's indirect discourse not only enables the reader to "see" the story as Gerald sees it, but asks the reader to consider and/or weigh ethical issues confronted by the soldier as they are presented. In fact, as Gerald moves closer to the front he sees more instances of death, causing him to briefly rethink his position: "He looked for Fitzherbert, he wanted to talk with him, perhaps only to agree that war was murder" (41). But when

Fitzherbert appears, and reminds him they will have to "crawl through this swamp after other men, who happen to wear a different uniform, and kill them or get killed" (41), Gerald becomes conscious once more of the "same resentment he had felt before" about Fitzherbert's position, and decides instead that "he should pity the fellow" (41). Dramatically, Matthews later reveals that Fitzherbert is also a "newcomer," thus complicating Gerald's attitude towards Fitzherbert's anti-war platitudes.

When they go over the top, Gerald loses Chicken in the rush, and finds himself confronted by three Germans. He survives the fight, although he is "sickened" for having killed a man with a bayonet (42). Furthermore, when he glances over to another melee, he briefly "considered avoiding [it]" before "the urge that was part of his conscience drove him on" (42). In other words, Gerald's brief moments of doubt and self-repugnance are quashed as he allows his "conscience" to dictate his actions. Significantly, Gerald soon learns from Matthews that the bloodthirsty, pro-war Skinner is dead. The next day, Chicken is also killed when the stretcher party trying to bring him back from the line is blown up; their new defensive position is also attacked, but the heroics of Matthews, Gerald, and Fitzherbert help repel the attack. The experience of war has not only affected Gerald, but it has also shaken Fitzherbert's anti-war position: "Fitzherbert stared at the sprawled figures that marked the limit of the Hun advance, then tore rags from the half-buried great-coats with which to clean his rifle. 'I hope they come again,' he said hoarsely. 'We got them sweet that time'" (44). As for Gerald, he finds himself shifting towards the anti-war position Fitzherbert had previously occupied, conscious of how "[h]is finer instincts, his inner self, had been dulled as if the spell of the Salient had drugged him" (43). Equally powerful and symbolic is the moment when Gerald decides to look in a mirror after the German attack is over:

> Gerald sank in his corner, resolved that he would not leave it again. He was too tired, could never go back now if they were relieved, away back on those tortuous winding duckwalks. The torn haversack was at his feet and he saw that a steel mirror was wrapped in the towel. He picked it up and gazed into it. The reflection shocked him. He saw gray-green features, like those of a dead man, eyes fixed and staring. He hurled the thing from him. (44)

This symbolic dehumanizing, his transformation from new soldier to "gray-green features, like those of a dead man," is startling and repulsive

to Gerald. Such self-loathing, however, is fleeting, for shortly after a relief party arrives, Gerald unleashes sudden anger: "Searing, lightning-swift rage galvanized Gerald into surprising swiftness. At a single moment he swung his gun from the parapet and as it came pressed the release. The stream of bullets struck the relief party" (44). The moment is a surprise to both his comrades and the reader. But we soon learn that the reason for Gerald's rage is not some new-found pro-war sentiment, but instead a sense of conscience and truthfulness/fairness: when he and Fitzherbert are lying on stretchers after the fight, Gerald reveals that the members of the relief party were Germans in disguise, and that he had recognized them by their boots. More importantly, at this moment the narrator is close to Gerald as he confesses to the reader his pleasure—not so much for having killed the enemy, but for having saved his comrades: "Gerald glowed with pride. He was proud of the part he had played, glad that he could rest indefinitely" (45). Fittingly, at the end of the story Gerald gains the courage to publicly ask Fitzherbert about his change in attitude about the war:

> So Fitzherbert had fought to the last. "The whole sordid game is rotten." The words echoed in Gerald's ears. "I thought you—you didn't like fighting, that sort of thing," he said slowly. "I heard a lot at some Objectors' meetings I attended," said the weak voice. "Now I know it was all rot. I'm glad I was with you and Matthews." (45)

Thus, while "Boots!" begins with soldiers taking rigid ethical positions on the war, the ongoing psychological and emotional questioning as a result of battle forces some to adapt or even abandon their previously held beliefs. The seemingly "pro-war" stance of Gerald Marrack and Fitzherbert at the end of "Boots!" is less about the "fight is right" mentality and more about an acknowledgement of the courage required to fight a war at all.

Another concept key to Bird's understanding of the psychological make-up of the soldier is his "finer instincts." An idea first introduced in "Boots!", this notion is examined more fully in one of Bird's later stories. Aptly titled "The Finer Instincts," this story appeared in the December 1931 issue of *The Legionary*, and it overtly challenges the propagandistic belief of Allied superiority in morals as well as arms, and the notion that the Germans are "mechanically clever and systematic, but they're totally devoid of the finer instincts of the white race" ("Finer Instincts" 6). This story recounts the experience of Sergeant John Keene, whose belief in the war machine is

challenged by one of his men, Corporal Ashley. But soon Ashley is killed in battle and Keene is wounded, and the loss of Ashley affects Keene deeply, shaking his preconceived notions about war as an act of glory and courage; instead, while waiting to be bandaged up, "the biggest thing" he desired was to "get across the channel. To get away from the war" (10). What soothes and heals Keene's psychological wounds, though, is the sound of a violin whose notes are transformative: "The music that evening began on a sadder strain. It seemed as if the player were tired, perplexed, lonely, but after a time courage crept in, courage that was contagious. It was penetrating. Keene was a soldier again" (11). Moreover, what Keene (and the reader) learn at the end of the story is that the music—assumed by Keene to be that of a fellow Allied soldier—is played by a German soldier also being treated in the field hospital, one whom Keene had seen at the moment he was wounded. This story, then, is a poignant message about empathy and universal brotherhood, as well as an emblem of Bird's belief in the capacity of art to heal.

A related, equally poignant tale of the German as soldierly brother is "If You Were Me," a thinly veiled version of Bird's own war experience. Published in two instalments in October and November 1929 in *The Legionary*, it tells the story of a group of Canadian Highlanders fighting in Mons at the end of the war. As members of the group are killed, the narrative focuses increasingly on Corporal Morton and his internal turmoil relating to his desire for revenge and his suspicions of war's futility: "Morton . . . cursed so luridly that he had been ashamed of himself. The war over. Who cared? He hated everything" ("If You Were Me," November 1929, 16). Moreover, Bird's story resists the demonization of the enemy so frequently used in earlier, more propagandistic fictions about the war (see Webb, "'A Righteous Cause'"). Rather than being depicted as the "evil Other," the German is, at the end of this story, portrayed in a sympathetic fashion, almost as a brotherly "self." Instead of killing him as revenge for his friend's death, Morton provides the German with a disguise so he can escape. This selfless act, along with Morton's shaking of the German soldier's outstretched hand, is a moment of both recognition and healing which brings about a kind of catharsis for Morton, allowing him to "lay down to sleep without a dread of the morrow" (November 1929, 33).

Both the portrayal of the vengeful soldier's catharsis as well as the image of "artistic" healing in "The Finer Instincts" speak to another possible

reason for the popularity of Bird's war short stories: namely, they served as a form of bibliotherapy for veterans. This concept, first introduced in 1916 by Samuel McChord Crothers in "A Literary Clinic," was considered a fairly straightforward form of therapy, in which the book acted as "a literary prescription put up for the benefit of some one who needs it" (293), and where, as Crothers suggests, "[e]ach generation produces some writer who exerts a powerfully stimulating influence on his contemporaries, stirring emotion and leading to action" (294). More importantly, bibliotherapy appears to have been embraced by the military early on in the war, as evidenced by Theodore Wesley Koch's *Books in Camp, Trench and Hospital* (1917)—which discusses how "[b]ooks and magazines are being supplied in great numbers to the British troops" and that the four branches of libraries supplying these materials are "of a common work for the wholesome entertainment and mental well-being of the troops" (5). One could posit that Bird's war stories served a similar function. Indeed, Vance ("Soldier"), Tim Cook, and more recently Monique Dumontet have all suggested that Bird's balanced depictions of both the good and the bad in the soldierly experience contributed to the "immense popularity of Bird's works among veterans" (Vance, "Soldier" 28). But matching this balanced approach to his material was Bird's further attempt to portray the soldier as an inherently human figure, whose struggles are real and universal—regardless of nationality. Bird also attempted to depict, in several of his stories, the effects of trench warfare on the psyche of a soldier. In short, if there is a mimetic-realistic element to Bird's war short stories, as critics have suggested, it is by and large a form of psychological realism which his fellow veterans would have had little trouble relating to, even if they could not voice those feelings themselves. What's more, understanding Bird's short stories as bibliotherapy would be in keeping with Cook's observation of how memoirs of the Great War operated "[l]ike some of the poignant trench-inspired poetry that helped soldiers cope with the suffering in the trenches, or at least provided a more robust language or 'grammar' in which to express suppressed feelings" (75). Indeed, as Ian McKay and Robin Bates note, "Just as Bird personally found that writing gave him a form of occupational therapy as a wounded soldier, his stories take on the dimensions of communal therapy for an entire generation wounded by the Great War" (156).

Ann-Marie Einhaus argues in *The Short Story and the First World War* (2013) that war short stories "helped contemporary readers reflect on, evaluate and come to terms with their own experience of the war by offering a wide range of different fictional interpretations to choose from" (6). But in Will R. Bird's case, this "coming to terms" was intended specifically for the soldier. Indeed, Bird's war stories were propelled forward by the actions of his soldier-protagonists; but those actions were inseparable from their psychological consequences. Bird engages in what one might call aesthetic therapeutics for the thousands of veteran readers who identified with not only the material situations he described, but also with the emotional and psychological turmoil each one of his soldier protagonists exhibits. Furthermore, I would contend that Bird's war short stories performed this function to an even greater extent than his memoir, since the stories were cheaper to purchase and more accessible to less-educated soldiers in terms of length as well as language; they also offered a more diverse set of psychological and emotional situations and thus could speak to a wider soldierly audience—supported by Bird's own efforts to consistently offer relatable portrayals of the soldier as Everyman. Or as his daughter Betty Murray acutely observed only a few months after her father's death: "Writing about [the Great War] undoubtedly provided a therapy, just as reading those same stories must have helped so many" (qtd. in Sullivan 13).

At the beginning of *And We Go On*, Bird tells the story of a new recruit who foresaw his own death, suggesting that part of his reason for writing his memoir is to "reveal a side of the war that has not been given much attention, the psychic effect it had on its participants" (4). If true, then his war short stories act as a kind of literary corollary to his soldier memoir. While *And We Go On* was a crucial accounting of his First World War experience and, until quite late in the memoir, a description of collective soldierly experience, in his short stories Bird continually depicted the consequences of those experiences, giving voice not so much to the politics of war as to the emotional and psychological effects it had on the individuals who participated in the conflict.

It must also be remembered that Will R. Bird was not alone in his short-story endeavours. Many other Canadians published war short stories in a host of popular and pulp magazines as well as newspapers during the

interwar period, including Frank Miell, Harold Benge Atlee, J. G. Sime, Harold Fraser Cruickshank, and W. Redvers Dent, to name a few.[7] But like Bird, almost all of their stories are long out of print, and exist only within institutional archives as part of a vast "cultural reservoir" (Einhaus 20). Hopefully this essay will stir scholars to undertake additional literary recovery efforts and critical discussions about Canada's war short stories to better understand how this underserved genre of war writing fits into our understanding of Canadian war literature during the interwar period.

NOTES

1 Surprisingly, Zachary Abram offers no commentary on Bird's fiction in his doctoral dissertation on Great War narratives. Likewise, Peter Webb, in his 2007 doctoral dissertation *Occupants of Memory: War in Twentieth-Century Canadian Fiction*, only addresses Bird's *And We Go On* and *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*.

2 This lack of accessible copies of Bird's war stories for reprint purposes is compounded by the fact that Bird never published a selected or collected edition of his war short stories, although his collection *Sunrise for Peter and Other Stories* (1946) includes several stories set during the First World War. Consequently, anthologies that include war stories by Bird are infrequent and often include only one example of his work. See, for example, Alice Hale and Sheila Brooks' *Nearly an Island: A Nova Scotian Anthology* (1979); Fred Cogswell's *Atlantic Anthology: Volume 1, Prose* (1984); Jane Dewar's *True Canadian War Stories* (1989); and Muriel Whitaker's *Great Canadian War Stories* (2001).

3 The past thirty years have witnessed a growing critical discourse dedicated to the Canadian war novel, a growth that has followed two main trajectories. The first trajectory examines novels that were produced during and immediately following the First World War, a body of scholarship that includes Eric Thompson's "Canadian Fiction of the Great War" (1981), Donna Coates' "The Best Soldiers of All: Unsung Heroines in Canadian Women's Great War Fictions" (1996), Dagmar Novak's *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (2000), Jonathan Vance's "The Soldier as Novelist: Literature, History, and the Great War" (2003), Colin Hill's "Generic Experiment and Confusion in the Early Canadian Novels of the Great War" (2009), and Zachary Abram's "The Comforts of Home: Sex Workers and the Canadian War Novel" (2016). The second critical trajectory involves examinations of contemporary responses to the Great War, such as Sherrill Grace's *Landscapes of War and Memory: The Two World Wars in Canadian Literature and the Arts, 1977-2007* (2014), Neta Gordon's *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I* (2014), and Alicia Fahey's doctoral dissertation, *Remediating the First World War: Literary and Visual Constructions of English-Canadian Cultural Memory* (UBC, 2017). Joel Baetz's recent *Battle Lines: Canadian Poetry in English and the First World War* (2018) represents the only book-length treatment of Canadian poetry of the Great War period.

4 It is difficult to verify how many short stories Bird published in these pulp magazines, since there is no complete holding of either *War Stories* or *Canadian War Stories* at any library or institution. Another problem with the identification of Bird's fiction is

that Brian Douglas Tennyson's terminological usage varies in his description of entries, sometimes "story," other times "fictional story" as well as "short story." A third challenge is that there are a number of discrepancies between Tennyson's bibliography and Phil Stephensen-Payne's massive, although by all appearances comprehensive, online magazine index (www.philsp.com/), particularly for *War Stories*.

5 One exception to this correlation between novel writing and the officer class is Harold Benge Atlee, who was a medical officer but who wrote mostly war short stories; see Tennyson 22-23. Arguably, Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*, because of its fragmentary and episodic nature, as well as its shorter length, could be classified as a long short story rather than a novella—and thus in keeping with my correlation, since Harrison served as a non-commissioned member in the Canadian army.

6 "His Deputy" first appeared in the April 1927 issue of *The Busy East of Canada*. Bird reprinted several of his war stories, sometimes under different titles.

7 Atlee was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia, and became a medical officer with the Irish Fusiliers; Miell emigrated to Alberta from Stratford, England, in 1911 and enlisted in the 50th Battalion in 1915; Dent was born in Toronto and served in the 74th Battalion. For a full description of these soldier-writers, see their entries in Tennyson's *The Canadian Experience of the Great War: A Guide to Memoirs* (2013). Born and raised in Alberta, Cruickshank was perhaps best known for his air war stories; see Don Hutchinson's biographical entry on Cruickshank at *Age of Aces Books*.

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Clayton Longstaff

Gesture

The picture is faded. Its edges pinched,
the corners curling in. A print,
I'm told, of a painting
that's since been lost.
The name of a man
my grandfather knew is scribbled
in the bottom
left corner. Following it, a hand
more legible (a different hand?):
"Woman Kneeling."

Shrivelled, shrinking from the sun, she
won't see a delicacy
of God's will lay rot to waste.
Especially not a fruit so sweet (her personal
as the cherries ripened on this particular tree. favorite?)
Maritime historians have labored to evince
that she in "gleaning"—
an arbitrary distinction to be sure.
Despite her efforts, what they may,
the cherry skins hang loosely off their pits,
indifferent to decay.

No longer ruddy
like red of cherry but morose, sickly
even—a bruise
or spilt wine on cloth, flooding
the fabric's stitching; coursing through and

clotting its impossible network of veins. Claims
the body for its own, like rust.
Even the paint on the original looks irritated.

The tree itself is just out of view.
What the painter saw fit to include:
stretch of green lawn, dappled with
amber light soft and subdued; cherries,
a ceramic bowl and a woman, kneeling.

The woman's bending shadow forms a pool
around her. In it she dips her hand.
With vague deliberation
extends her fingers in the soil
the way the painter might have dipped his brush:
a gesture both distilling time and freeing it.

Forever kneeling. The sweetly scented summer air
forever hugging the day once more
before the season turns—before,
like the painting and its painter,
the print is pinched from view.
And with it, her.

Forum

Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies* at Twenty

Introduction: A New Set of Questions

Paul Barrett

Twenty years ago, Diana Brydon called on Canadian cultural critics to generate "a new set of questions" that might liberate us from a collective obsession with the "geographical fallacies, mating loons, and nostalgia for lost Edens" (14) that had dominated Canadian critical imaginaries for decades. For Brydon, the critical work of the early 2000s reconceived of Canadian writing through the lenses of race, diaspora, and Indigeneity in a manner that unsettled old paradigms of CanLit. This forum echoes Brydon's call to generate new questions by returning to Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000) twenty years after its publication.

Kamboureli begins *Scandalous Bodies* by noting, "This book could be seen as the other of the manifesto on ethnicity that I wanted to write but never did" (1). The false promise of the manifesto, Kamboureli argues, lies in its "messianic message" and its attempt "to rise above history. It is intended to take us beyond the cultural predicament of historical repetition, to defy determinism. Its historical value is posthumous, for a manifesto wants to be judged by the future it announces" (7). While Kamboureli refuses the "power and seductiveness" (7) of messianism and manifesto, her work has announced a future of sorts: a future for thinking about nation, citizenship, and literature against the "hold that nativism has on Canadian literature" (8). Twenty years after the book's publication, this forum collects eight critical engagements with *Scandalous Bodies* in the

interest of thinking through the challenges that Kamboureli confronts, the difficulties and provocations of her text, and how looking back might help us understand our present moment.

This historical work is particularly relevant for our field of Canadian literature. When Alicia Elliott rightly asks, "How is CanLit continually making the same mistakes?", part of the answer is that too often Canadian cultural criticism neglects its own history. In particular, we forget the histories of artists and critics who have resisted racism and white supremacy in CanLit in order to challenge, reject, or transform the field. M. NourbeSe Philip, for instance, laments the debates and controversies of the past few years, particularly as

> [t]here was no reference to that earlier debate that had raged across Canada's literary community; indeed, there was no attempt to contextualize the discussions within the relatively recently lived history of the Canadian literary community itself, further cultivating even greater erasure around socially important issues, particularly those related to racism. (104)

The eight pieces assembled for this forum mark a small effort to return to that "recently lived history" by reflecting on *Scandalous Bodies*' achievements, limits, and continued contributions. How have our articulations and readings of ethnicity, race, diaspora, and Indigeneity transformed in the twenty intervening years? Do we see anything redeemable in CanLit? Where Kamboureli sets her argument against a vision of settler "nativism" at the turn of the century, how does her focus on diasporic and ethnic subjectivities conflict with Indigenous expressions of nationalism? How do we read Kamboureli's eclectic selection of texts, her movement between the texts of government policy and literature? Why does she not include a conclusion? How have changes in the labour market transformed how we think of intellectual labour, particularly as many of our brightest minds are excluded from these discussions by virtue of their tenuous employment?

Each of the contributors to this forum marks, in their own way, the import of *Scandalous Bodies* to their thinking. Kit Dobson and Libe García Zarranz note the prevalence of scandal in the present time of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with the emergence of new biopolitical regimes. For Zarranz, Kamboureli's use of "negative pedagogy . . . driven by the ethical imperative to practice responsibility" offers a model for criticism

and teaching alike. In his contribution, Dobson reflects on the etymological and theoretical relations of scandal and embodiment to expand Kamboureli's framework to non-human animals and the environment. My own contribution to this forum echoes Dobson's and Zarranz's critique while investigating the relationship between ethnicity and race as well as the political efficacy of discourses of scandal.

Andrea Davis and Asha Varadharajan consider the values of Kamboureli's engagement with multiculturalism via the language of ethnicity. For Varadharajan, the violent police killing of George Floyd, and the killing of many other Black men by the police in Canada and the US, indicates the limits of an engagement with the politics of identity and multiculturalism. In what ways, Varadharajan asks, do the discourses of identity fail to challenge the necropolitics enacted against George Floyd, Albert Johnson, Andrew Loku, Dudley George, Colten Boushie, and many others? For Andrea Davis, Black women's writing provides a compelling archive that challenges CanLit's imaginary as well as the community of others implicit in Kamboureli's "ethnic" community. Davis seizes on the prevalence of the discourse of ethnicity, rather than race, in Kamboureli's text to insist on the singular contributions and criticisms by Black women to Canadian literature.

Malissa Phung considers her own ambivalent relationship to CanLit: she wants to contribute "to finally extinguishing CanLit's 'dumpster fire'" even as she "never want[s] to abandon the liberating and affirmative, even if highly sedative, possibilities of foregrounding . . . different bodies and texts in the study of literature in the Canadian academy." In a related fashion, Sarah Dowling reads Kamboureli's attention to bodies, and her use of the figure of the angel of history, as emblematic of a particular critical vision wherein we "retroactively grieve the vulnerability of particular bodies" and "lament the violence of history." Both Dowling and Phung consider what it means to write critically in a manner that does not "abstract ourselves from the wreckage" of our field and history, but, rather, writes from within the "cultural and political syntax of our communities" (Dowling).

Finally, in her conversation with Smaro Kamboureli, Myra Bloom explores *Scandalous Bodies*' method, its goals, and how Kamboureli reads it today. Bloom's reflection opens up the analysis of the text's legacy into a

broader conversation about the field of CanLit. Together, Kamboureli and Bloom explore "the trend of sociological approaches to literature" and the import of close reading to contemporary criticism. Their conversation also marks a rare opportunity to read two critics in CanLit engaged in serious, sustained discussion of the field and their work.

This forum is a small gesture towards historical thinking in Canadian literature and an effort to connect today's debates and concerns to the work of the past. *Scandalous Bodies* is an important text, but my hope is that this conversation leads to discussions of equally important works: Daniel Coleman's *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006), Rinaldo Walcott's *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada* (1997), George Elliott Clarke's *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature* (2002), M. NourbeSe Philip's *A Genealogy of Resistance* (1997); the list could go on. To quote Brydon again, "[t]he questions proliferate, and there is thinking to be done" (25).

I would like to sincerely thank Myra Bloom, Andrea Davis, Kit Dobson, Sarah Dowling, Malissa Phung, Asha Varadharajan, Libe García Zarranz, and Smaro Kamboureli for their careful thinking, wonderful writing, and important provocations in this forum. Their contributions open new pathways and raise important questions; the strength of this forum is a result of their excellent work. Thank you also to Christine Kim and everyone at *Canadian Literature* for making this forum possible.

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New Correspondences

Paul Barrett

Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies* begins with the chapter "Critical Correspondences: The Diasporic Critic's (Self-)Location." This chapter is the "other of the manifesto on ethnicity" that Kamboureli "wanted to write but never did" (1). She describes feeling that "[her] study was in search of a different author" (2), partially because both the genre of the manifesto and the content of her ethnic study prove impossible in her political and critical milieu. Describing the Canadian critical scene of the 1990s, she experiences "the various events and debates of those years as if they belonged to a 'revolutionary moment,' yet [she] also felt suffocated by the tendency of the sides involved to reduce them to 'brutal simplicities and truncated correspondences'" (2, quoting Stuart Hall). Kamboureli's struggle to resist these simplicities, to read the present historically, and to embrace the productive power of turbulence while refusing essentialisms, strategic or otherwise, is familiar to us today.

In the shadow of her manifesto on ethnicity, we get a different mode of criticism, one which reads the articulation of diasporic identities and cultural differences as "not a simple joining of two or more discrete entities" but a continued "transformative move of relational configurations" (Brah 110). Kamboureli employs her own "Diasporic Critic's (Self-)Location" to challenge the pervasive "denial of complexity" (2) of identity, enunciation, representation, location, text, and interpretation. This mode offers relief to her (and our) "personal and academic weariness" that results from "the seemingly tangible gap that separates academic discourse from social reality" (2). Her opening chapter is thus a self-reflexive navigation of her own complex positioning as critic and public intellectual that begins by posing the questions to scholars and writers alike: "[W]ho are we? Whose interests do we represent beyond our own academic interests? Who do we write for, and why?" (2).

These difficult questions are still with us: how do critics, particularly in the field of Canadian literature, use their training to not merely discuss and describe but to intervene in public life without resorting to reductive

simplicities or polysyllabic posturing? Thinking about our field today, how do we offer complex and historically minded analyses of CanLit that are attuned to the necessary critiques of the past few years? Part of my interest in Kamboureli's work, twenty years after its publication, lies in her struggle to find a way out of this bind through her diasporic framework of "critical correspondences." Rather than surrender the signs of Canada or CanLit, she rewrites them through a series of "transformative move[s]" (Brah 110) that break "the hold that nativism has on Canadian literature" (Kamboureli 8) and instead inscribe diaspora, ethnicity, and difference as frames that render the project of CanLit both legible and unfamiliar. Reading her work today, I ask: How do we position ourselves in relation to the critical discourses and debates of the past? What forms of "Relational Knowledge" (168) and kinds of correspondences have Canadian critics taken up in the twenty years since *Scandalous Bodies* was first published and how do we self-locate today? How has the lexicon of our criticism transformed and how does that change the stakes of our critical engagement?

Scandalous Bodies is the product of an era, and one detects the assumptions and possibilities of that era in the text. Kamboureli writes from a position of institutional security that is simply not a reality for many of today's critics. As I read, I wonder; who is not speaking and how have neoliberalism and precarity silenced the correspondences of generations of critics? Similarly, Kamboureli's method, a sort of philological approach that reads texts socially and society as text, maintains a critical distance that may be less common in today's more activist-minded criticism. She thus describes Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* "as a complex text that gave me both the distance and the proximity I needed to read Canadian multiculturalism" (21).[1] Does this simultaneous distance and proximity still appeal to us or do we, feeling the effect of living in perpetual "emergency time," eschew critical distance in order to attend to the urgent political questions that animate Canadian criticism today?

In many ways, *Scandalous Bodies*, along with a number of other texts, helped to break the hold of two dominant trends in Canadian criticism, what Frank Davey in 1992 identified as the "aesthetic/humanist ideology" (13) of Canadian criticism and a competing "nationalist" (13) ideology. For instance, Sam Solecki, writing *one year* before Kamboureli, attacks what he calls the "soft or postmodern multicultural attitude," namely the view that "all value

judgments are relative . . . and all cultural artefacts are equally important or of equal value and relevance. No centre, no margin, no majority, no minority, everything and everyone of equal value and significance" (24). Solecki's coded defence of a white vision of Canadian literature is precisely the sort of nonsense that subsequent critics have challenged.

I have been in correspondence with *Scandalous Bodies* since first reading it in the early 2000s. Indeed, one of the first things I realized in my present rereading was the extent to which my own criticism of Canadian multiculturalism is indebted to Kamboureli's thinking. I was also struck by Kamboureli's adroit movement between the texts of government policy, journalism, theory, public debate, and literature. Yet I also notice that the discursive aspects of Kamboureli's "texts" appear overdetermined; Kamboureli wants discourse to do *a lot*. I wonder how a more materialist approach to the events of the Writing Thru Race conference, the Oka standoff, or the history of residential schools might have pulled Kamboureli's analysis away from the discursive.

Diaspora is a key term for linking, disseminating, *corresponding to* a range of voices that enables Kamboureli to unravel the Gordian knots of identity and articulation, discourse and action. Less a mobile army of metaphors and more a framework of comparative difference, she theorizes and practises how the "constant disjoining and relinking of the chain of events that constitutes diasporic experience" (38) transforms not only diasporic subjectivity but also seemingly stable conceptions of nation and ethnicity.

Yet Kamboureli's opening discussion of Benjamin's angel of history and her rereading of that figure in *Wings of Desire* needs to be tempered by recent analyses of the import of place and the continuing power of nation to structure diasporic and national imaginaries alike. What spectral logic links the Janus-faced figure of diaspora with the resiliency of nationalism? When Gilroy argues (*Against Race* 2000) that diaspora "offers a ready alternative to the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging" (123), he resists, like Kamboureli, the grip of "nativism" on culture and identity. Yet, in the twenty years since *Scandalous Bodies*' publication, Indigenous attention to the importance of place and "rooted belonging," postcolonial assertions of other, resistant modes of nationalism, as well as differentiation between voluntary and forced migrations, have challenged the focus on hybridity and the mobile subject.[2]

Further, for a book concerned with bodies, Kamboureli is primarily attuned to the body as discursive, symbolic, imaginary; the language of ethnicity that pervades the text obscures the differences between racialized bodies. She draws on Fanon, for instance, to interpret the white supremacist gaze depicted in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, yet we must also consider the differences between how Black and Asian subjects are imagined within that scopic frame. Fanon is not describing the act of diasporic or "racial interpellation" (Kamboureli 187) in a general sense but, rather, the corporeal alienation, the "amputation," "excision," and "hemorrhage" of Black embodiment experienced within the "racial epidermal schema" (Fanon 112). As the activism of Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, and a range of recent scholarship have all shown, diasporic and racialized bodies are managed, disciplined, and attacked according to how they are racially imagined within a white supremacist schema.

While the language of ethnicity in *Scandalous Bodies* does not fully develop how settler colonialism and white supremacy function complementarily in Canada, the text does provide a compelling framework with which to think about how citizenship is embodied and racially differentiated. Kamboureli has mapped the terrain that has made many subsequent analyses of race and white supremacy in Canada possible. Further, if the "scandal" of embodied ethnicity has shifted in recent years, there remains a continued "effort to force the national imaginary to confront multiculturalism through body images, images already racialized and ethnicized" (Kamboureli 89). How, then, do today's politics of inclusion and diversity, so readily co-opted by capital and government alike, reinforce the "sedative politics" (82) that Kamboureli discerns?

A return to Kamboureli's analysis of the "sedative politics" of multiculturalism, and the continued scandal around race in Canadian writing, historicizes today's emergent fascism to reveal its roots in past polemics against the inevitable failures of multiculturalism. The angry voices that accused multiculturalism of silencing a white majority now find their views reflected in calls to "Take Canada Back" and in more extreme articulations of xenophobia and racism. Yet, Kamboureli is also carefully attuned to the productive power of official and critical multiculturalism to both manage difference and to reframe citizenship and nation from the margins. We see that productive power when Kardinal Offishall insists "I

am multiculture" or in Maestro's "Black Trudeau," where he rewrites the script of Canadian identity from the vantage of the Black diaspora. Thus Kamboureli's careful reading of both the productive and repressive power of multiculturalism goes beyond simplistic conceptions of "the facade of equality and multiculturalism" (Wang 149) or the "lie" (Walcott 396) of Canadian multiculturalism.

Kamboureli's analysis of "scandal" is also helpful for us today, particularly as scandal itself has become something of a routine mode of engagement in contemporary criticism (fuelled, no doubt, by social media). The rise of the discourse of scandal suggests a shift away from once-vaunted critical distance towards immediacy and timeliness, or is it presentism? Certainly the scandals of Canadian literature are real; they are significant and they merit extensive analysis and material change in our critical, professional, and personal practices. Scandalous criticism has demonstrated its capacity to call out, to identify, to demand change. But how far can a criticism of scandal take us? How can it resist being erased by yet another scandal or being co-opted by institutions via public acts of symbolic repentance? What avenues of transformation or reconstruction are closed off when scandal or outrage become our default modes of engagement?

In this respect, perhaps one of the most provocative and promising aspects of returning to *Scandalous Bodies* is to query scandal as a critical mode and to refuse to surrender the sign of CanLit to a singularly scandalous reading. Kamboureli's philological, "elliptical" (Beauregard 145) approach enables her to carefully attend to the subtle, conflictual, and productive dimensions of CanLit as signifier and discourse. For instance, in her analysis of criticism of Frederick Philip Grove, she acknowledges that while "the development of Canadian literature *as* Canadian has been integral to the political and cultural discourses constituting Canadian identity," it is also "this kind of negotiation of imperial and colonial signs, of complicity *and* resistance, of metropolitan aesthetics *and* cultural differentiation, that refuses Canadian literature the immutability" (35, emphasis mine) of a fixed signifier.

In place of the singular reading of CanLit as scandal, her analysis predicts Karina Vernon's recent comments that "[n]ot only is there a genealogy of struggle in CanLit, there is a genealogy of struggle *as* CanLit. What I mean is Canadian literature *as a critical discourse*" (14, emphasis

original). The criticisms of the past few years have demonstrated the many failings and scandals of CanLit, yet the work remains to uncover this genealogy of struggle. Joshua Whitehead offers the image of CanLit as "a collection of mirrors that have amalgamated into a reflective system spelling out nationalism—a whole thing rather than a web of fractures" (164). This is certainly one formation, but the critical task implied by Vernon, Kamboureli, and others is to dispel the illusion of the mimetic or "reflective system spelling out nationalism" and instead uncover the "web of fractures" that lies beneath.

If *Scandalous Bodies* marked, for many of us writing today, one beginning of how to read Canadian literature against the grain, centring racialized writers and bodies while gesturing towards work that remains to be accomplished, then how might we continue to read the "genealogy of struggle *as* CanLit"? Another way of thinking about this is if CanLit truly is in ruins, we might see those ruins as also "the threshold of what Canadian literature has become since those 'strangers within our gates' took it upon themselves to cross the boundary separating those who are silenced, who are written about, from those who give voice to themselves" (Kamboureli 132). If we are on such a threshold, then how do we develop a critical practice that historicizes; that reads the world textually, but not just as text; that puts race, diaspora, Indigeneity, land, gender, and embodiment into troubled dialogue while also recognizing the partiality of one's own view and the need to listen and learn? Kamboureli offers one model, via the experience and framework of diasporic dislocation as an eclectic method of engagement that refuses strategies of containment and instead pushes beyond the "Manichean delirium" (Fanon) of the nation and diaspora, CanLit and its other.

NOTES

1 The protagonist of Dionne Brand's novel *Theory*, Teoria, insists that "[a]ll my life I've sat at an angle, observing the back and forth of other people's lives. . . . I excelled at finding just the right distance from actions and conversations" (6). Brand's satirizing of academia, and theory in particular, undercuts scholarly fascination with "finding just the right distance." Brand's book is such a fantastic trap for academics that any interpretation inevitably renders us the punchline of her joke.

2 See, for instance, Pheng Cheah's *Spectral Nationality*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-resistance," Daniel Coleman's "Indigenous Place and Diaspora Space," Rey Chow's *Writing Diaspora*, or David Chariandy's "Postcolonial Diasporas."

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Scandalous Bodies at Twenty: An Interview with Smaro Kamboureli

Myra Bloom

The following interview took place over email between September 28 and October 8, 2020 in Toronto.

MYRA BLOOM: You begin *Scandalous Bodies* by describing your struggle to position yourself as a Greek Canadian scholar within the political/disciplinary landscape of Canadian culture and criticism. This is a question you revisit again, through an explicitly decolonial lens, in your introduction to an issue of *University of Toronto Quarterly* (vol. 89, no. 1, 2020) that you recently co-edited with Tania Aguila-Way. There, you explore what you call the "aporia of solidarity: affirming, enacting, and living in solidarity while respecting the incommensurability of differences and engaging with the persistent and resistant politics that render some losses grievable and others ungrievable" ("Introduction I," 7). I want to ask how (whether?) this formulation has helped you address your own questions of self-identity, and how your self-understanding (as a scholar, citizen, diasporic subject) has evolved in the intervening years.

SMARO KAMBOURELI: Let me start by expressing my gratitude to Paul Barrett, Kit Dobson, and to the other contributors, for revisiting *Scandalous Bodies*. It's gratifying to know that a younger generation of colleagues finds it relevant today. And my thanks to you, Myra, for the opportunity to reflect on it and my thinking in the intervening years. So, about my identity as a Greek Canadian framed in terms of my writing then and now. I don't know where to begin, but here it goes. The aporia of solidarity may be a recent formulation for me, but my sense of the incommensurability of identity differences has always been part of my thinking, even when I was not yet able to put it into words. I was writing *Scandalous Bodies* in the middle of a period—the 1990s debates—that was as tumultuous and mind-changing as the one we live in now. That "moment" had a formative impact on me. By that time I had already gone through the shock of discovering that I was an other in the eyes of others, and had developed a very sharp sense of the

difference and tension between being and becoming, of the "nervous state" (to echo Homi Bhabha) embodied in hyphenated identities. Perhaps the most important thing I got out of that period was the realization that I had to reckon with my ethnic whiteness and its ambivalences in ways that I had not done before. So, in one word, it's unbelonging that defines me.

MB: Can you talk specifically about how your Greek heritage has shaped this sense of "unbelonging"?

SK: Being a Greek in the diaspora carries the brand of being an Orientalized white, for modern Greek identity is inflected by the ambivalence of being a part of and apart of the West. Greek modernity has always had to contend with the heritage of ancient Greece, the four hundred years of colonial history under the Ottoman Empire, and the European construction of Hellenism. I was conscious of this before I came to Canada, but in the course of my research for *Scandalous Bodies* I came across James Woodsworth's *Strangers Within Our Gates*, where Greeks were described as "parasites." That put things into perspective, which was further complicated by my accent. Funny, isn't it? I'm stating this in the past tense, but it's a condition that persists. I'm a white woman who can pass as a "normative" Canadian until I open my mouth. Not much has been written about the burden of accent. Rey Chow is a notable exception. She writes about Derrida's embarrassment about his French accent—not a proper French accent apparently—and talks about how the linguistic impurity of an accent can place the speaker right on the border of discrimination.[1] I always pause because there is no box I can check to declare how my accent others me in the ears of others.

More specifically about my Greek background, unlike many diasporic scholars who are embedded in their communities, and whose work often revolves around these communities, I've never had a close relationship with the Greek Canadian diaspora, never felt the need to belong this way. Not that I disavow my cultural background but my sense of not belonging in the Greek diaspora is mutual, for in the eyes of the Greek communities I tried to relate to in my early years in Canada, I was not a good fit either. So, who I have become as an immigrant comes from my affiliation with different communities and through friends—people of colour—whose activism has taught me, and continues to teach me, a lot. That's how I've learned the rewards and discomforts of solidarity—by unbelonging, being "there" but

not being one of them. I suppose this is one thing I mean by the aporia of solidarity: how to come to terms with the fact that I share a ground with others even though I know I tread on it in different shoes, that I belong, yet all the while knowing that I could be asked to step back because of my white body. So, by the time I had started writing *Scandalous Bodies*, I was profoundly aware of the pitfalls of essentialist notions of identity, of ethnic absolutism.

At the time, multiculturalism had already become an entrenched policy, one whose presumably egalitarian agenda was already belied by how it had been instrumentalized as much by politicians as by writers and academics. I found it ironic that all of a sudden virtually everyone was writing about what we then called ethnic authors, that the ethnic other, in all its pathologies and incommensurabilities, had become a beloved topic, while little was done to address systemic problems. It was this recognition—the scandal of it—that got me writing *Scandalous Bodies*.

So, that was then. Where do I find myself now? Hard to say in a few words. I find this moment to be similarly scandalous, and my sense of unbelonging remains equally pronounced, albeit in ways that are inflected somewhat differently. I believe, wholeheartedly so, in the urgency of the issues that have galvanized the field recently, but I feel I'm outside the fray of things partly because I'm not on social media and partly because I resist the righteousness that often characterizes some of the recent debates. I'm troubled by the name-calling, the rushed way people pass judgment, the implications of the new social and academic protocols that are meant to address racism, sexism, settler culture, but which often only help advance white liberalism or a culture of containment and intimidation.

MB: In *Scandalous Bodies,* you railed against the gap between academic theorizing and lived realities, and in his essay in this collection, Paul asks, "[H]ow do critics, particularly in the field of Canadian literature, use their training to not merely discuss and describe but to intervene in public life without resorting to reductive simplicities or polysyllabic posturing?" (Barrett 124-25). His question is rhetorical but I'm wondering whether you have an answer.

SK: I tried to figure out this issue by writing an essay about "Public Intellectuals and Community,"[2] an essay in honour of Roy Miki. Perhaps not surprisingly, the trope I used in that essay, one I borrowed from Alphonso Lingis, is also about unbelongingness. I deploy his notion of a community

of those who have nothing in common to uncouple identification from community, idealism from solidarity. You see, I'm leery about idealism, about any certitude as to who might hold the right answer, or what that answer might be, to the issues that call for action. I agree with Chow that idealism has a history of violence, a violence akin to fascism: not as in Nazism but in the way Foucault describes it in his Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*—"the fascism in us all" (xiv) is how he puts it—the desire to dominate even though we set out to act against domination. One thing that I know for sure is that the dichotomy between theory and lived reality is false. Theory is not to be understood only as an abstract system of thought; action is already embedded in it. Perhaps it helps that I'm Greek and thus cannot but hear the word in Greek. Theory from *theorein*, a verb, means to look at; a *theoros* is a spectator. For me, then, theory is already about bearing witness, which I take to be the first step toward solidarity and action. I'm not suggesting that all scholarship is activist, but rather that what we do within the academe, even on the page, can be activist, a manifestation of solidarity. One space we all share as scholars is the university. This is our shared lived reality, and, God knows, there is still a lot of work to do within our institutions, though scholars and poets like Len Findlay, Lillian Allen, Rita Wong, Stephen Collis, and Larissa Lai exemplify, each in their own distinct way, how academic citizenship can extend beyond the university.

MB: The Canadian critical landscape has been transformed in recent years with the dumpster fire metaphors, the publication *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, and other events you have referred to elsewhere as "CanLit's scandalous zeitgeist" (Kamboureli, "Introduction I" 18). Do you think the politics of scandal have lost their efficacy in "the age of outrage"? How does your writing/academic practice envision a different mode of critical engagement?

SK: Outrage is the right word, but I think we need to hear it as a polysemic sign. There is no shortage of things that provoke, should provoke, outrage. So, no, I don't think scandals have lost their efficacy; if anything, they've gained more critical purchase. I think the way I define scandal in my book—as a sign at once of excess and transgression, of violation and indignity—still stands. What has shifted, at least in my understanding of things vis-à-vis CanLit, is that often the response to scandals is scandalous

itself. Call me old-fashioned but I believe that, no matter how we think of CanLit, it is first and foremost about books. The Niedzviecki case was about Indigenous writing, but most of what is associated with the CanLit scandals as of late has to do with bodies, with the behaviour of particular individuals. I'm uncomfortable with today's tendency to metonymize individual bodies with CanLit. And to me it's highly ironic to call CanLit a dumpster fire at a time when it's never been more inclusive, indeed more hospitable to debate. Not to mention that reducing CanLit to scandals, and doing so in the name of solidarity, has become a way of gaining cultural capital while foreclosing other, perhaps quieter but more productive, ways of seeking solidarity and making a difference. In other words, I think that there are alternative framings than that of dumpster fire, and I resist the assumption that any single movement, no matter its media currency, has a monopoly on the ethics of CanLit.

MB: It's interesting that you still see books as the main substance of CanLit—lately this has felt less and less the case to me: even the sign "CanLit," which once primarily denoted a literary corpus, has shifted to signify a "field of cultural production," to use Bourdieu's phrase.

SK: I'm not denying for a moment that CanLit has to be understood as an institution or as a field of cultural production. I've written extensively about this, the need to undiscipline the discipline, to recognize how its political unconscious is imbricated in how we profess the profession. I've mentioned books as just one example of why I'm troubled by some of the recent developments. Books are themselves the result of discursive processes, and they have their own materiality. If the argument that CanLit is in ruins today is based exclusively on the aberrant behaviour of some individuals, then something elemental is missing there. I don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. It's one thing to respond to a particular incident and another to conclude from such an incident that, because a CanLit author has done or said something offensive, the entire field, or their own work, is tainted. Unethical actions demand to be addressed, justice has to be served for all involved, but I don't think this imperative can materialize by weaponizing CanLit against itself.

CanLit may very well be implicated in all this, but there is, at least in my mind, an undecidable relationship between the lives of texts and the lives of those who produce them. My role as a reader is not to police or

authenticate the person behind the signature on a book. As far as I'm concerned, there is an irreducible relationship between who I am and what I do as a reader *and* how I behave alongside and beyond this relationship. To eliminate this gap would bring about closure, would deny the liminality of both subject positions and of texts, would mean operating from a totalizing understanding of both literature and subjecthood. If we stick for a moment longer with the lexicon of today and of my twenty-year-old book, it would be scandalous of me to respond to the compelling force of an event by relinquishing this undecidability; I would respond, yes, but I would do so not necessarily wearing the hat of a CanLit scholar.

MB: In the disciplinary context, it feels to me like the trend of sociological approaches to literature has made close reading a rare commodity. I therefore found it especially refreshing to revisit *Scandalous Bodies,* which scaffolds its arguments on extended engagements with specific texts such as Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* or Kogawa's *Obasan*. I want to ask you about your methodology in that book, which you've taken some flak for. Some reviewers were unhappy with its eclecticism, calling it "unsystematic" (Christine Wiesenthal) and "a personal reading of texts" (Joseph Pivato). Paul's essay posits that a less discursive approach would have been more effective in grounding your analysis in material conditions, including the lived experience of racialized subjects (Barrett 127). How do you answer these critiques?

SK: I'm a literary scholar, an interdisciplinary literary scholar who doesn't want to lose sight of textuality, be it literary or critical. As to the reviews of *Scandalous Bodies* you mention, I can understand why Joe would find some aspects of my approach to be personal. That was when self-location became politically *de rigueur* for the first time. The personal elements, though, are mostly evident in the opening chapter, whose focus is on the diasporic critic's (self-)location. As for Christine's comment, she's right. I make it clear from the start that, "strictly speaking, this book lacks a cohesive syntax," that it doesn't "present a single argument," that it doesn't "adhere to a single method of reading" (*Scandalous* xiv). I deliberately resisted a single "theoretical model or systematic approach" in order to "let specific texts give shape to my readings" (xiv). So, close reading is "the single privileged approach" (xv) in the book. But I also clarify that the kind of close reading I practise there is "not the kind that views a text as a sovereign world, but one that opens a text to reveal the method of its making, the ways in

which it is the product of an ongoing dialogue between different realities" (xv). This is what I mean when I refer to the undecidable, irreducible relationship between the literary and the non-literary. Hence my contextualizing Grove and offering a close reading as much of his *Settlers of the Marsh* as of his lecture tours, and doing so alongside my discussion of the prison system and [Clifford] Sifton's immigration policies at the time. That was my way of taking a canonized author outside of the canon's domain, outing him as an ethnic writer while exposing in the process (at least I hope I did so) CanLit's complicity. I considered that to be a useful methodological intervention that turned on its head the desire to be part of the canon at the same time that we put this canon down. And talking about multicultural fatigue and sedative politics, or engaging with the genealogy of "yellow peril" in the chapter on *Obasan*—these were similar critical gestures. That was how I engaged with racialization and racism.

So, I think that book has a lot to do with what Paul refers to as the material realities of racialized bodies—obviously not in the way that meets his parameters of an engaged approach, but in my own way. As for close readings, I love close reading as much as I love theory. I think close readings are a great and useful antidote to theory. In my essay "Reading Closely" about Asian Canadian writing, I reflect more extensively on the productive work that I think reading closely can do. That essay, too, got me some flak, but this is absolutely okay by me; this is how we can have a healthy debate. A colleague who criticized that essay was surprised that I greeted him warmly when I ran into him at Congress. I was taken aback by his surprise, for when I write a critique, I critique a text, not the person who wrote that text, and I guess I expect the same from others. Some of the CanLit arguments today are so personalized and so absolutist about what constitutes justice, they foreclose dialogue, they sour personal and collegial relationships, they muffle any dissent from their position. I'm troubled and saddened by this. Only once in my life I kicked a lit author out of my house who attacked me on CBC, but I was in my twenties and didn't know any better.

MB: Curiously, *Scandalous Bodies* closes with an analysis of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* but does not conclude in a traditional sense. Kit Dobson suggests in his essay that the silence left by the book's abrupt ending leaves space for the reader to initiate their own critique of dominant historical and cultural narratives. Can you talk about your decision not to write a conclusion?

SK: I must confess that what is curious for you and other readers comes naturally to me. I hate conclusions. I find them redundant and boring. And because I hate them, I find it hard to write them. Conclusions are closures; they foreclose interpretive possibilities. I'd rather leave it up to my readers to reach their own conclusions. So, Kit is right about the silence that he says comes after the chapter on *Obasan*; it is a silence that awaits the speech of others.

MB: In *Scandalous Bodies,* you draw inspiration from Walter Benjamin, who writes that "our task is to bring about a real state of emergency" ("Theses" 257) if we want to create meaningful political intervention. Speaking as we are in the middle of a pandemic, climate catastrophe, and huge mobilizations against anti-Black racism, the rhetoric of emergency certainly feels germane. Do you feel optimistic that our responses to these crises can bring about meaningful social change?

SK: Benjamin also says, in his essay "Critique of Violence," that violence resides in the foundational moment of nation-states, that it is a product of both nature and history. This suggests to me that we cannot run away from violence. The thing is, the emergencies we're confronted with today are not new; they have a long genealogy. I remember Yeats' "Leda and the Swan," a poem I used in my teaching to talk about how violence can change the course of history, how it gives birth to a new era by destroying another. It's a beautiful poem about a horrible myth. But there came a moment when I couldn't bear it any longer, never mind that I approached it through what I call in *Scandalous Bodies* negative pedagogy. That the rape of Leda is seen as serving the purpose of ushering in an epochal shift is not the kind of mythic or historical paradigm I can stomach. Zeus, the ruler of gods and humans, was a murderer and a serial rapist. It was a terribly unsettling and instructive epiphany, for I had grown up with these stories; they were my fairy tales.

This is a roundabout way of saying that it's very difficult to try and put in perspective, let alone engage with, meaningfully so, all these crises, which reminds me of something Zygmunt Bauman said, that crisis is the normal state of humanity. I don't know if it's the pandemic that has exacerbated my sense of what we're up against, but these days I'm not very optimistic. The murder of George Floyd, that of Ejaz Choudry, and all the other killings of Black people and people of colour by the police on both sides of the Canada-US border this past summer, the fact that such acts have long become

habitual occurrences, that most of us experience the tragedies they cause and the responses they elicit only as media spectacles—all this is hard to bear.

Under lockdown this summer because of COVID-19, I felt like that woman in Dionne Brand's *Inventory* who watches global violence unfold on her TV screen. I wanted to reread that book but couldn't; it was, still is, at my office where I haven't gone since mid-March. What makes it hard for me to be optimistic is the recognition that often what we learn from a particular crisis is not necessarily or easily transferrable to solutions that might avert another, that perhaps crisis has a way of both shocking us into action and numbing our responses. But crisis can also be extremely generative. The momentum that Black Lives Matter has garnered over this summer is a good example of this. But I recognize, too, that it's very hard to sustain this momentum. It takes its toll; it can burn you out. Still, I don't think we can afford to give up just because there is no end to the catastrophes surrounding us. This is where solidarity comes in.

MB: If you were writing *Scandalous Bodies* now, what other writers would you be considering? What texts do you see intervening in the debates about Canadian literary culture and national identity in important ways?

SK: I don't think I would write a book about diaspora alone. Because diaspora has become so diasporized, because it's no longer a marginal/ized field, I would put it into dialogue with Indigeneity. This is how I frame diaspora in the essay I recently wrote on the topic for the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia for Literature*, specifically through Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) poem *Talking to the Diaspora*. I'm interested in the intersections between diasporic and Indigenous narratives; in other words, in sites that produce literary solidarity, sites that emerge when we read these bodies of work alongside or through each other.

To answer your question more directly, there are three books I'm particularly interested in: Rawi Hage's *Cockroach,* David Chariandy's *Brother*, and Thomas King's (Cherokee) *The Back of the Turtle*. My interest in Hage's novel comes from my understanding that it goes against the grain of diaspora studies, particularly its primary concern with belonging. His protagonist is not the kind of other that elicits sympathy or empathy; he's sexist, manipulative, a thief, a kind of misanthrope. How can you love or identify with a character of this sort? Not easily, if at all. And, yet, I love that character; I love him because of his resistance to belonging. So, I guess we're back to where we started, my sense of unbelongingness.

And this is precisely one of the things that fascinates me about Gabriel in King's novel, that he's marked by a similar unbelongingness for reasons that complicate the unbelongingness in Hage's text, not to mention that what plagues Gabriel's consciousness is the ecological catastrophe he feels responsible for. Gabriel embodies disaster, yet, true to his name, he also annunciates hope. At the end of the novel he's home but not at home, and the community he moves in and out of is one that includes a fascinating assortment of characters, including a Taiwanese family. As for Chariandy's novel, I would look at it from the perspective of the figure of the artist, for it announces an important shift in CanLit. The figure of the artist has traditionally been a white figure. Of course Dionne Brand [in *What We All Long For*] has given us Tuyen, but Chariandy has given us Jelly. So, I'm interested in the figure of the artist as a Black DJ, as a hip-hop artist, who may also be queer, who says preciously little in the novel, who's virtually homeless, but who can make community happen. The moment when he goes grocery shopping and comes back to cook a meal is so poignant. I love Jelly. So, that would be my challenge, how to bring together this cast of characters, not in the sense of "reconciliation" but in a sense that might offer some answers to the aporia of solidarity. I would go about this with Garry Thomas Morse's (Kwakwaka'wakw) line, "the myth of being *clean*," as my guidepost.

NOTES

1 See Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (2014).
2 See Kamboureli, "'i have altered my tactics.'"

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The Powers of Representation and Transgressive Fires: Reflecting on the Impact of Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies*

Malissa Phung

When I first became aware of myself as a diasporic subject, in both the object and subject sense of the term, I was a young, naive English undergraduate student enrolled in the only Asian ethnic literature course offered by the University of Alberta's English department in the 2000s. Until I took that Asian American literature course with my

first mentor Teresa Zackodnik, it never occurred to me that members of my ethnic and diasporic community could produce a body of literature that was worthy of scholarly study. Actually, it had never occurred to me that such a body of cultural production even existed. I, of course, always knew that a canon of Asian writers existed in Asia. But diasporic writers writing in English outside of Asia that looked like me? Asian American writers like Maxine Hong Kingston, Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Monique Truong, and David Henry Hwang? Or Asian Canadian writers like SKY Lee, Larissa Lai, Rita Wong, or Kim Thúy? That was never on my radar. And it's not that I never aspired to write any literature of my own. Almost every young, bright-eyed English major aspired to do so. It's just that if I had conceived of myself as a writer, it was always as a writer or a woman writer but never as a diasporic writer.

On the advice and encouragement of my first ethnic literary studies prof, I went on to feed my latent hunger for Asian diasporic writing by working with her mentor, the late Donald Goellnicht, in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster. It was here that I trained in the fields of critical race and diaspora studies through a transnational, postcolonial, and Indigenous studies framework that freed me from following any single scholarly approach or disciplinary methodology. Even though my doctoral project read Indigenous and Asian relations through the works of Asian diasporic writers situated in Canada, it was never framed first and foremost as a "CanLit" study. Theoretically informed by crossing the disciplinary borders of CanLit, my research was situated comparatively within and beyond Asian Canadian studies, and unapologetically so.

I provide this bio to situate myself as a diasporic settler scholar who has always worked in and around the institutional boundaries of CanLit, yet never fully fit well within the field. I also offer this bio in order to contextualize the scholarly kinship that I feel with Smaro Kamboureli's 2000 book *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*. Published twenty years ago, *Scandalous Bodies* was one of the first critical studies of ethnic writers in Canada that focused on their diasporic contexts. And it did not offer a singular unified approach to do so. Nor did it select a buffet of diverse ethnic and diasporic voices to form a multicultural survey of Canadian ethnic literature that would have just ended up reifying their marginality, or worse, re-commodifying their difference. Much like how

ethnically diverse communities demand careful attention to their own cultural, historical, and ideological specificities, Kamboureli adopted a "negative pedagogy" (*Scandalous* 25) by opening her analysis to a wide range of literary and cultural texts that informed and shaped her approach to studying diasporic literature and subjectivity in Canada, ranging, surprisingly, from a 1987 German film, Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*; to a 1925 classic CanLit novel, Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh;* to representations of multiculturalism during the 1980s and 1990s in Canadian media, state policies, and the philosophical work of Charles Taylor; to literary anthologies of ethnic writers published in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s; and concluding with a classic Asian CanLit text, Joy Kogawa's 1981 *Obasan.* In each of these close readings, Kamboureli incisively demonstrates a method of reading ethnic texts not as mere reflections of an ethnic writer's identity but as autonomously transgressive and excessive (xv) representations borne out of politically lived contexts and unequal power relations that often solicit competing knowledges about how we have come to understand and reproduce ethnicity and difference.

During the 1990s, at the time of her writing, there were very few adequate models for analyzing diasporic cultural production in Canada; or at least from Kamboureli's perspective, there were very few effective scholarly treatments available in CanLit that would also do so without reproducing the problems of ethno-essentialism or re-entrenching the asymmetrical power relations of the Canadian state and its multicultural others. But since the publication of *Scandalous Bodies*, her work has helped to transform the practice of literary and cultural criticism in Canada, foregrounding the critical importance of studying race, ethnicity, diaspora, and gender in the field of CanLit even as its academic and mainstream publishing institutions were, and remain to this day, epistemological and corporeal spaces that overwhelmingly privilege systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, and (settler) colonialism.

If CanLit continues to burn in a raging "dumpster fire," a phrase that Alicia Elliott (Haudenosaunee), Jen Sookfong Lee, and countless others (see McGregor, Rak, and Wunker) have used to describe a recent period of political scandals in the late 2010s exemplified by moments such as the Steven Galloway and UBC Accountable affair; CanLit's #MeToo movement; the blazing fall of Joseph Boyden; *Write* magazine's despicable Appropriation

Prize; and Rinaldo Walcott's very public break-up with CanLit (see Kamboureli, "Introduction I"; and van der Marel), then what is a diasporic non-white settler critic such as myself to do? To riff on The Clash, should one stay or should one go?

Reflecting on the scholarly and cultural impact of *Scandalous Bodies* at the close (or renewal?) of this past fiery decade has left me leaning with much ambivalence towards staying in CanLit, even if I only ever held one foot in the field. Aside from the contributions that it has made to render race, ethnicity, diaspora, and gender legible and worthy of study in the Canadian literary establishment, what makes Kamboureli's book relevant in our current political climate are the questions that it raises about the politics of self-location, the imperative placed on all critical thinkers, but perhaps now more so than ever on racialized, diasporic, Indigenous, female, and non-binary gendered critics, to position ourselves in relation to our critical practice and objects of study. What is the answer to finally extinguishing CanLit's "dumpster fire"? How can we work to make its academic and publishing institutions less oppressive and exploitative for the current and future generations of scholars who teach, write, study, and publish critically and creatively in this field? Is it ever enough to include and foreground differently excessive bodies and texts in our academic and public institutions? Or will such acts of inclusion always remain part of a slow and incessantly futile diversity project given all of the systemic racial, colonial, and socio-economic barriers that have and may continue to keep the CanLit student body and professoriate overwhelmingly white and/or economically privileged (see van der Marel)? These are intersecting neoliberal concerns that we must consider and challenge more than ever as we await the full societal and socio-economic brunt of the present COVID-19 pandemic on the academic-industrial complex.

Twenty years ago, *Scandalous Bodies* profoundly revealed how institutions of all kinds inevitably find ways to co-opt and manage difference, that is, questioning if difference could ever gain any sustainable visibility and meaningful inclusion. These mechanisms can be highly "sedative" (82), as Kamboureli warns us, especially for those of us who have come to represent or study such bodies and texts in the academy, and particularly if we are not careful in how we read and locate these differences. Yet two decades later, history seems to keep repeating itself:

unequal power relations between and amongst subjects and their social contexts appear more entrenched than ever. However, as much as I have grown wary of the raging "dumpster fire" that has become—or has always been—CanLit, I would never want to abandon the liberating and affirmative, even if highly sedative, possibilities of foregrounding and including the cultural production of different bodies and texts in the study of literature in the Canadian academy. It is what seduced me to join the discipline back when I was a young and clueless undergraduate English student in the late 2000s; it effectively seduced me enough to pursue a precarious academic career in the humanities that incurred unsustainable levels of debt for most of my twenties and thirties. But if we are to move forward and continue to find ways to thrive in this field of study, perhaps one way to do so would be to fight for the right to not be contained, to find and advocate for more flexible, autonomous, and transgressive ways of reading and thinking and producing critical works within and beyond institutional boundaries, much like the methodological approach to studying and theorizing ethnicity and difference that Kamboureli so insightfully developed in her book at the turn of the millennium.

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Which Scandalous Bodies? Black Women Writers Refuse Nation Narratives

Andrea A. Davis

We mark the twentieth anniversary of Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies* (2000) in the midst of a global pandemic and demands for racial justice. It is difficult to ignore these conjoined moments as we re/consider the location, function, and impact of diasporic literatures in Canada—an increasingly diverse and complex body of work that by necessity is involved in border crossings, moving both within and outside the nation-state. While Kamboureli's formative text was motivated by a discrete set of questions about the place/displacement of ethnic literatures within specifically national conversations about multiculturalism, a consideration of how the terrain of Canadian literature may have shifted in the years since its publication and the provocations that remain unaddressed provides a timely opportunity to rethink the relationship between diasporic literatures and the Canadian state. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which Black Canadian literature as a particular cultural intervention, and its modes of interrogation, what Sylvia Wynter calls "counter-signifying practices" (268), allow us to identify a set of paradigms that exceed both the category of ethnic literatures and the limits (physical, ideological, and political) of the nation-state. How might a discussion of Canadian ethnic literatures need to shift to account for Black women as writers and critics? In attempting to provide a preliminary response to this question, I draw on NourbeSe Philip's introduction to *Bla_k* and Dionne Brand's "An *Ars Poetica* from the Blue Clerk," both published in 2017, the sesquicentennial of Canadian Confederation.

The 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act, although an expansion of previous policy, was only twelve years old at the time of the publication of *Scandalous Bodies*.[1] The passage of the Act, as Kamboureli demonstrates, generated significant media and academic responses throughout the 1990s about the nature and place of cultural diversity in Canada. I read *Scandalous Bodies*, therefore, as an attempt to situate Canadian ethnic

literature less as a product of its global origins and entanglements and more firmly within a corpus of Canadian literature, culture, and politics. While eschewing the role of literary historian, Kamboureli nonetheless presents an important twentieth-century survey of Canadian ethnic literature, moving from a discussion of F. P. Grove's European universalism in the mid-1920s, to the function of anthologies and anthologizing in the mid- to late-twentieth century, and ending with a reading of "history as a montage" in Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan* (1981).

I find Kamboureli's reflections about the possibilities and limits of Canadian multicultural policies in making space for diverse literatures in Canada particularly useful. Identifying multiculturalism as "sedative politics" that recognizes diversity while keeping intact "the conventional articulation of the Canadian dominant society" (82), she critiques Canada's official policy as primarily a social and political tool meant to control the terms of cultural diversity and difference. With multiculturalism written into official law, Canadians could oscillate between practices of "disavowal and scandal" (83)—on the one hand pretending that the "problem" of diversity had effectively been "managed" while treating moments of perceived multicultural excess as scandalous. This critique of multiculturalism was not new, appearing in such works as Philip's essays in *Frontiers* (1992), Rinaldo Walcott's *Black Like Who?* (1997), Roy Miki's *Broken Entries* (1998), Eva Mackey's *The House of Difference* (1999), and Himani Bannerji's *The Dark Side of the Nation* (2000), published in the same year as *Scandalous Bodies*.[2] Kamboureli's early intervention, however, specifically sought to locate a critique of multiculturalism alongside a consideration of the history and reception of diasporic and ethnic literatures in Canada to disrupt an "Us and Them paradigm" (xiv) and articulate the means by which it might be possible "to learn to live with contradictions . . . without fetishizing difference" (xv). She seeks a "mastery of discomfort" (130), a kind of "negative pedagogy" (25), which recognizes the "failure to know the Other" as an opening into new forms of relationships (130). The use of the word failure, she clarifies, is a means to eliminate "the yoke of the capital 'O' . . . to release ethnic subjects from their condition of marginalized Otherness" (130).

What her work never quite makes clear, however, is the identity of the privileged or unified national subject she both invokes and critiques:

"It is because I think *we* still have a long way to go that I do not speak in emancipatory or messianic terms" (130, emphasis mine). Does the invocation of a "we" as knowable subject supersede the "Us and Them" paradigm she is seeking to disrupt, and in such a scenario, when does one cease to reside among "them" on the outside or margins of the nation and come to occupy the space of the we/us? Who are the "we" who have the power to finally release the ethnic subject from her "condition of marginalized Otherness"? Unlike Kamboureli, who can choose to resist a "politics of self-location" (6), Black women as writers and critics are always already located in their work, not as a function of self-representation but as a product of history. Their virtual erasure from Kamboureli's critique of multiculturalism and recording of Canadian ethnic literatures signals the extent to which practices of making history *and* literature function in service of nation-state narratives that cannot adequately account for Black women's presence and imagination.

It is indeed difficult to decipher where Black Canadian literature fits within Kamboureli's definition of ethnic literature, or even what she means by ethnic. Her goal, she argues, is not to "define ethnic diversity" but "to problematize difference," refusing to join the "debate about the semantic and political differences between diaspora and ethnicity" (xiv). While she mentions some well-known Black Canadian writers tangentially, like Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke, and includes Lorris Elliott's *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada* (1985) and Ayanna Black's *Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent* (1992) in a list of ethnic anthologies, Black Canadian literature does not figure as a category in her discussion.[3] While this was clearly not the project she set out to do, it is important to point out that thinking through race, and Blackness specifically, differs from thinking through ethnicity. Since Black Canadian literature is both multi-generational and immigrant, it must account for the presence of a long tradition of Black writing in Canada going back two hundred years, including slave narratives as well as contemporary writers like George Elliott Clarke and Sylvia Hamilton, who are at least seventh-generation Canadians. Black Canadian writing is also informed by a different set of questions/problematics than those emerging from other ethnic groups, including the legacy of slavery and complexity of Black identities marked by repeating experiences of fragmentation—not just hybridity. Neglecting

race as a mode of thought and community, thus, elides possibilities beyond a critique of multiculturalism.

When we understand Black Canadian literature as being both within and exceeding nation, reading and thinking with this literature opens up questions that are not merely about its location within the Canadian literary canon, a critique of cultural marginalization, or a desire to transcend marginalization. Black Canadian literature has work to do in the world because of the unfinished project of freedom. Rather than simply demarcating marginality, it is interested in how one acquires agency, freedom, and even humanity. In the face of what Walcott calls Black diasporic "catastrophe" ("The Black Aquatic") and Philip names *Maafa,* from the Kiswahili word for "terrible occurrence" or "great disaster" (*Bla_ck* 33), Black Canadian literature must continually interrogate the deep ruptures caused by colonialism even in the absence of a language that can articulate the depths of such a catastrophe. Black people "cannot, try as we might, cauterize the wound of colonialism: it suppurates, bleeds sometimes, extrudes pus, sometimes appears healed but aches always" (Philip, *Bla_ck* 16). How does one speak or write this kind of injury?

In "An *Ars Poetica* from the Blue Clerk," Brand invokes Christina Sharpe's notion of "dysgraphia" to mark the limits of language and narrative in enunciating the weight of suffering that has accrued from transatlantic slavery and its aftermaths. As Brand argues, narrative attempts to respond to this dysgraphia of disaster necessarily reproduce and import the very language of the dysgraphia: "We are people without a translator. The language we use already contains our demise and any response contains that demise as each response emboldens and strengthens the language it hopes to undermine" (60). As a result, "the Black body in narrative is always spectacular, always spectacularised, marked. The dysgraphia, of dominant and of dominating narratives, unwrites, and makes incoherent, Black presence as presence" (60). Exceeding Kamboureli's too-easy category of ethnicity, the Black body as a particular kind of "scandalous body" becomes lodged in the archives of a narrative history that is unable to transmit or sound "a tomorrow, beyond brutalisation" (59). Brand argues that it is in poetry—"with its capacities to deposit and unearth plural meanings, with its refusals of a particular interrogative gaze" and its undermining of the roles of the reader/critic—that a Black female writer

may better locate the possibilities for "a grammar in which Black existence might be the thought and not the unthought; might be" (59).

These concerns about language, content, and form repeat in Philip's chapter. As she explains, "I continue to be plagued by working with language that was fatally contaminated by its history of empire and colonialism, and having no language to turn to in order to hide or heal" (Philip, *Bla_ck* 32). She finds herself perpetually hunting, searching for the words that do not exist in Canada's official languages of English or French to translate Black experience and thought. Like Brand, it is primarily in poetry that she finds the rudiments of a new grammar of Black being: a tool that enables her to understand her "own theorizing about the why, how and what I write" (32).

Looking back at her long career as a writer of Trinidadian descent in Canada, Philip further identifies her location in relation to the nation-state through metaphors of unfixity and disappearance. In recognizing her multiple locations as "Black, African-descended, female, immigrant (or interloper) and Caribbean," she discerns the ways in which these identities precipitate "hostilities within the body politic of a so-called multicultural nation" (13). As a result, she writes "on the margins of history" and "in the shadow of empire," forced to function "against the grain as an unembedded, disappeared poet and writer" (13). Yet, while Canada—a place in which she counts herself as "among the 'unbelonged'" (15)—is one of the two places she calls home, she neither desires nor seeks attachment to a nation-state: "Labels remain, but I am now considerably older and embrace the idea that while indigenous to the world, I remain exiled, possibly permanently" (15). The project of thinking and writing Black existence as "the thought and not the unthought" (Brand 59)—of thinking against the impulses of the nation—positions both Philip and Brand as diasporic interlocutors and wayfarers. Commenting specifically on her relationship to the settler-colonial state during Canada's celebration of its sesquicentennial, Philip asks: "Can one ever be/long on what is essentially stolen land? Even if not stolen by you. And if there exists no word to describe one's state or condition in relation to where one lives, is one permanently erased?" (*Bla_ck* 34). Echoing a critique of the politics of multiculturalism, she chooses to enter "the idea of Canada" not through Kamboureli's "negative pedagogy" or in search of some kind of reconciliation with the state, but "through the land" (34). Such an entrance opens up the "possibility of being in a relationship of

integrity and truth" with Indigenous peoples while also recognizing that in a world "in which we have all been uprooted from ourselves . . . belonging must begin to embrace the idea of fluidity and movement" (34-35).

In the search for language and resistance to the idea of the scandalous/spectacularized Black body, Brand and Philip refuse the easy containment of nation narratives and their articulation of a "we" as unnamed and, therefore, unchallenged subject. They are ultimately less concerned with a national struggle between "Us and Them" and more committed to the project of reimagining their freedoms in all the places in which they may live. Likewise, as a diasporic reader/critic, I see my role as both attending to the dysgraphia of catastrophe and dreaming different futures with the writers who have sustained me in this country.

NOTES

1 The entrenchment of Canadian multiculturalism in Canadian law took place over a seventeen-year period following the 1971 introduction of a federal policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. Multiculturalism was subsequently recognized in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 and a new policy of multiculturalism was enshrined into law with the passage of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988.

2 Critiques of multiculturalism have continued to proliferate. For additional perspectives see Barrett, Davis, Fleras, and James.

3 Kamboureli also references Makeda Silvera's *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* (1991), which includes work by well-known Black women writers, like Dionne Brand and Audre Lorde, but it is not an anthology of Black or Canadian literature exclusively.

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Justice, Not Identity: What a Woke Multiculturalism Looks Like

Asha Varadharajan

> You say you believe that 'all lives matter'
> I say I don't believe the fuck you do
> —Stevie Wonder, "Can't Put It in the Hands of Fate"

Anyone who leafs through *Scandalous Bodies* or who ponders its memorable moments twenty years after its publication cannot help but be overcome by a profound déjà vu. Smaro Kamboureli's elaboration of multiculturalism's logic of containment rather than of tolerance, accommodation, or indeed hospitality; her attention to the production and representation rather than the definition of difference; her diagnosis of how ethnicity comes to oscillate between sanctioned exoticism and dangerous excess; and her affirmation of a "mastery of discomfort" (130) in refusing to assimilate or appropriate the Other's differences continue to resonate in our all-too-discomfiting present.

But reliving the pleasures of her book's idiosyncrasies and insights also made me squirm—has so little changed that multiculturalism continues to

sedate rather than emancipate? Kamboureli describes her book as shaped by the rift between discourse and action—her argument reveals that the Multiculturalism Act's "rhetoric of normalization" (102) serves not to guarantee the aspiration to equality and dignity but to regulate difference (101). Kamboureli's keen awareness that the legitimation of ethnicity lapses all too readily into taming its incommensurability motivates her to reject "the futile promises of a utopian project" (xv); instead, she advocates learning to live with contradiction and asymmetry, "shuttling between centre and margin while displacing both" (130). Her modest claim for her book, therefore, is that it seeks to interrupt rather than alter the present it inhabits (6).

The normative embrace in which multiculturalism encloses the ethnic subject, Kamboureli demonstrates, must be characterized less as "force or violence" (102) and more as the insidious operation of hegemony, of power that defines Canadianness and effectively demolishes resistance to such conformity and homogeneity. The dominant discourse of multiculturalism, in Kamboureli's view, simultaneously disavows and fetishizes difference; that is, ethnicity must signify transgression and contamination for the politics of recognition to seduce and sedate. The law, in Kamboureli's scheme of things, exercises a disciplinary function in reconstituting the body politic and narrating nation.

The title of her work, however, alludes to the corporeal and the material rather than only the discursive and the symbolic, while remaining attuned to and troubled by the problematics of mediation and enunciation. In this regard, Kamboureli asserts that the word "scandal" is a sign "also of violation and indignity" (xv). I take my cue from this assertion because recent events such as the Tyendinaga standoff and the protests and toppling of monuments in the wake of George Floyd's death indicate that the need of the hour may be less about the politics of identity and difference and more about what Walter Benjamin would call the relations among law, violence, and (in)justice. Kamboureli cites Amy Gutmann's comment that dominant narratives of multiculturalism could be assessed in light of their implementation of justice (Kamboureli 101-02; Gutmann 176), but does not develop this argument except to indicate that neither social cohesion nor cultural relativism resolves conflicts. Put another way, our attention needs to shift from the rhetoric of normalization that renders ethnicity both undifferentiated and essentialized to the necropolitics of extremity. George Floyd's "I can't breathe" searingly

illustrates the meagre superfluity of a life for which "nobody bears the slightest feelings of responsibility or justice" (Mbembe 37-38). In the context of the routine and casual violence and the threat of incarceration that Black, Indigenous, and mentally ill bodies and persons suffer, "constructive dialogue" (Kamboureli 129), necessary as it is, is unlikely to suffice if only because the boundaries that circumscribe the other (129) are, precisely, impermeable. In light of Floyd's suffering and humiliation (he is, of course, representative rather than alone in his plight), Kamboureli's comment about how Naomi's body in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* both "bears the stain" and "dissolves under the weight" of history becomes even more poignant and apposite (187).

I chose Stevie Wonder's lyrics as my epigraph because they deploy enunciative position to such startling effect. Kamboureli discusses enunciation in the context of critical responsibility and the ambivalences of positionality, but my interest is in what enunciation makes politically possible. Like Kamboureli, Wonder is skeptical of "emancipatory gesture[s] in the name of homogeneity and unity" (Kamboureli 101). The enunciative position of Blackness refuses to suspend disbelief in the expansive gesture that includes "all lives," illuminating the exclusion that makes such largesse possible. Kamboureli struggles with the determinism of historical repetition despite or perhaps because she refuses to speak in messianic terms; for Wonder, change is too important to leave "in the hands of fate." The rift between discourse and action may never be sutured; nevertheless, "expos[ing] the contents of history" acquires meaning and momentum when it serves "also to change history's shape" (Kamboureli 221).

I want to conclude by turning to Kamboureli's discussion of "the striptease of our humanism" (117) that Frantz Fanon undertakes. Her critique of Charles Taylor's misreading of Fanon is well taken and, I would add, Taylor's failure to feel unsettled by Fanon's determination, as Sartre describes it in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, to root out "the settler which is in every one of us" (qtd. in Kamboureli 117) is telling, to say the least. But Fanon's scathing denunciation of Europe, that never ceases speaking of Man while murdering men wherever it may find them, is also a cry of rage and disappointment in the failure of humanism to live up to its vaunted ideals. When this suspicion on my part is juxtaposed with Mbembe's poignant depiction of a superfluous life "whose price is so meager that it has no equivalence, whether market or—even less—

human" (37-38), I want to interpret both humanism and universalism counterintuitively to account for Floyd's exclamation "I can't breathe," his embodiment of worth in and as breath, as life itself. In this moment, Floyd dreams simply of being human, equivalent to anyone and everyone else.

How might the discourse of multiculturalism affirm its responsibility to life without disciplining or commodifying difference?

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Grief, Bodies, and the Production of Vulnerability

Sarah Dowling

I'm not sure when I first read Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies*, but in revisiting it to write this piece I'm struck by certain groupings or affinities that I hadn't previously noticed. The groupings that I'll address here position *Scandalous Bodies* within scholarly discussions that take place outside of the field of Canadian literature, or that stretch across any number of bodies of humanistic scholarship and into the realm of activism. Without suggesting that a move away from the disciplinary specificity of Canadian literature is a move toward a literary-critical big kids' table, and in acknowledgement of Kamboureli's "desire to release [her]self

from the hold that nativism has on Canadian literature" (8), I'd like to consider some of these alternate groupings as one way to assess the ongoing utility of *Scandalous Bodies* upon its twentieth anniversary. This book can be located within a broad-based critical interest in melancholy, haunting, and grief that takes place at the turn of the millennium; Kamboureli's engagement with Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) places her work among a diverse array of theoretical and literary-critical texts that seek to prioritize the work of affect—most particularly grief—in the interpretation of history, doing so in order to question the still-dominant idea that progress and perfectibility structure the passage of time. In addition, and perhaps more obviously, *Scandalous Bodies* participates in the preoccupation with bodies in academic discourse, activist debates, and everyday speech evident in the last quarter of the twentieth century and enduring through to the present. This ubiquitous emphasis on bodies—as opposed to, say, subjects or persons—emerges from an imperative to question the colonial, racist, and patriarchal foundations of subjectivity as well as the legal formalism of personhood and citizenship in ways that highlight vulnerability as both a general condition and a grounding political priority.

I'd like to consider how *Scandalous Bodies* participates in these two discourses in order to question what seems to have become a critical consensus: that our role and enterprise as literary critics (or, perhaps more broadly, as humanists) is to retroactively grieve the vulnerability of particular bodies and to lament the violence of history—the "wreckage," to use a term of Benjamin's (257). My goal in asking this question is not to critique Kamboureli or her important volume, still less to suggest that those who've suffered don't deserve mourning, nor to imply that history wasn't *all that bad*. Instead, my hope is that examining Kamboureli's unique engagements with these still-powerful paradigms might prompt some metacritical considerations: Does it still make sense to employ the agency-denying "bodies" terminology? Is it accurate or sensible to imagine our relationships to the histories that we are interpreting through the image of Benjamin's angel—a grief-stricken but immobilized and ultimately disconnected observer? I'll examine Kamboureli's engagements with the "grief-and-bodies" discourses, if I may use that phrase, and I'll suggest that what remains useful about *Scandalous Bodies* is how it sits astride these two

critical paradigms, endorsing and expressing some degree of reservation about both in ways that clear a path for more politically engaged scholarship.

Let's first consider scholarly uses of Benjamin's well-known essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History," a text which gained prominence in anglophone criticism around the turn of the millennium for those seeking to contest progressivist historical narratives—I'm thinking of Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999), David Eng and David Kazanjian's volume *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (2002), and, no doubt most famously, Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), to offer only a very few examples. In a series of numbered paragraphs, Benjamin rejects any approach to history in which the past appears as a unified whole, wherein it is possible to know how things *really* were, and in which history is imagined as a progress narrative. In an especially well-known passage, he describes Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint *Angelus Novus*, interpreting the cartoonishly innocent angel in the picture as a trapped and stricken witness to the unfolding of history. From the angel's perspective, history is not structured as a linear narrative of improvement but as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (Benjamin 257). Wings pinned open by the wind, the angel cannot turn away from this devastating but undifferentiated vision; the angel is propelled into a future he cannot see, and is forced to survey the mess of the past. We, however, are not angels: Benjamin claims that the past cannot be grasped as a totality; instead, we only "seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (255). Speaking in the most general terms, what scholars have drawn from Benjamin's short piece is an invitation to rethink "subjectivity, time, and the writing of history in the context of a politics of social marginality," as well as a process for "restructuring tradition, discovering other moments, [and] finding new kinds of time in which other voices can be heard in official national historical narratives," to borrow a couple of representative phrases from Dinshaw (17, 18).

It hadn't previously occurred to me to put *Scandalous Bodies* in a category with other turn-of-the-millennium critical works that engage with Benjamin's writing or with other affective approaches to historical interpretation. Perhaps this was simply because the nation-based framing of most literary

criticism—even a work like *Scandalous Bodies*, which troubles national frameworks by attending to ethnicity and diaspora—artificially separates texts with similar critical frames. In addition, whereas many of the scholarly works that engage closely with Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" seem to adopt the angel's affective state and, at least implicitly, its perspective, Kamboureli expresses reservations about identifying too closely with Benjamin's angel, whose position is "too precarious for a mere human, and an academic at that, to mimic" (7). While the sad reality is that almost nothing is "too precarious" for an academic today, Kamboureli's circumspection about scholarly identification with the angel of history remains crucial: "We may empathize with his predicament . . . but we live in the midst of the debris that he only gazes upon from afar" (8). She therefore engages more substantively with the angels in Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (1987), angels who wander around, who engage, who love, learn, and interact. What I draw from Kamboureli's interlocution with Benjamin is a certain scholarly humility, as well as a reminder of our own embedded positions and the necessity of writing from "inside the cultural and political syntax of the communities in which [we] participat[e]" (21). From this position, the refusal of linear, progressive narratives and the embrace of the brief, particular flash not only makes good sense; it is all that is possible. In its structure and its examples, *Scandalous Bodies* continues to demonstrate the validity and the excitement of this approach.

Now let's consider a second theoretical corpus within which *Scandalous Bodies* might be situated. Art theorist Marina Vishmidt has recently analyzed the "'bodies'-centric discourse" of the past few decades, explaining that the ubiquitous emphasis on "bodies" seen in critical theory and its related discourses specifically flags "the vulnerability of growing numbers of the population" (34). In other words, the terminological emphasis on "bodies" underscores "the prioritization of vulnerability, or, more generally, life, materiality and affect which constitutes the parameters of basic political analysis today" (34). Evidently, *Scandalous Bodies* fits well within this discourse: indeed, the terms "body" and "bodies" are used hundreds of times throughout the book. With a little help from the CTRL+F function, it's easy to trace where these terms are most densely clustered: relatively infrequent in the introduction, nearly absent in the chapter on F. P. Grove, and appearing only a handful of times in the chapter "Sedative Politics:

Media, Law, Philosophy," the recurrence of these terms intensifies as the book goes on. With just over a dozen appearances in the third chapter on "ethnic" anthologies, they achieve their fullest saturation in the final chapter where, taken together, "body" and "bodies" appear well in excess of a hundred times. Why is this notable? The final chapter, as most readers will know, discusses Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan* (1981), reading its Japanese Canadian protagonist, Naomi, "as a character embodying history" (176). Perhaps this extreme emphasis on the body at the moment when the text most extensively considers a representation of a racialized woman substantiates Robin D. G. Kelley's recent critique of the "bodies" discourse: "In the argot of our day, 'bodies' . . . increasingly stand in for actual people with names, experiences, dreams, and desires." Put differently, the recourse to "bodies" terminology runs the risk of entrenching dehumanization by reducing those to whom it is applied to figures similar to Benjamin's angel; immobilized by forces beyond their control, "bodies" lose capacity for action (or even complexity) and become mere "cipher[s] of sorrow" (Vishmidt 40).

But Kamboureli attends to the *production* of bodies in a way that Vishmidt claims is rare. Vishmidt, following Kelley, suggests that the terminological emphasis on bodies tends to ontologize bodily vulnerability, unwittingly describing it as a pre-political condition. This, they both suggest, prevents inquiry into how suffering is produced. Kamboureli is instructive here. In fact, it's notable that the terms "produce," "reproduce," and "product" occur thirty-three times in her final chapter. They intersect with the "bodies" terminology, enabling Kamboureli to argue that "racialized sexuality is the product of master discourses; it shows hegemonic systems to operate as desiring machines in which desire signifies at once libidinal force and administrative intention" (203). Indeed, at various points in *Scandalous Bodies*, she explicitly discusses the production of "multicultural bodies" through "the mandate of the multiculturalism policy" and public understandings thereof (91). While my own reading of *Obasan* differs from Kamboureli's, what stands out most to me in rereading *Scandalous Bodies* is its insistence on problematizing the production of difference in law, media, and other discourses, and its focus on analyzing how this difference is attached and attributed to particular bodies.

An emerging generation of literary scholars is pushing this emphasis on the production of vulnerability—and, indeed, of difference—in new and

important directions. Moving beyond the familiar realm of textual analysis to connect literary studies and literary production with concrete instances and patterns of state violence, the scholars I'm thinking of might not be classified as working in *Canadian* literature due to the sophisticated ways that they discuss the state's involvement in producing vulnerability. Yet I hope that their growing corpus of work will be as influential to scholars of Canadian literature as Kamboureli's has been. As Kelley writes in reference to a group of graduate students at his own institution, so I wish to write in reference to the emerging scholar-activists connected to our field:

> [They] are demonstrating how we might remake the world. They are ruthless in their criticism and fearless in the face of the powers that be. They model what it means to think through crisis, to fight for the eradication of oppression in all its forms, whether it directly affects us or not. They are *in* the university but not *of* the university. They work to understand and advance the movements in the streets, seeking to eliminate racism and state violence, preserve black life, defend the rights of the marginalized (from undocumented immigrants to transfolk), and challenge the current order that has brought us so much misery. And they do this work not without criticism and self-criticism, not by pandering to popular trends or powerful people, a cult of celebrity or Twitter, and not by telling lies, claiming easy answers, or avoiding the ideas that challenge us all. (Kelley, emphasis original)

As Kamboureli says so clearly, we misunderstand our position and our role as critics if we pretend to abstract ourselves from the wreckage. If we take seriously her invitation to write from within the cultural and political syntax of our communities, then it is the work of these emerging colleagues that will refine and sharpen our sense of scandal.

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The Scandal of Bodies: *Scandalous Bodies* at Twenty

Kit Dobson

As I took out my pen and paper and began drafting (which is my distinctly embodied practice of writing of late), I was struck by just how scandalous bodies have become. At home in the midst of the global pandemic, the body has been banished from the body public or politic: we are confined to our individual spaces, our bodies separated, cordoned off, restrained. This is not to erase the very real and materially impactful differences between our bodies. The definition of "home" is multivalent, for one, and it is not one that I can assume we share. The importance of embodied differences is resurfacing in street movements like Black Lives Matter, in political discord, and in the vital analyses of how different bodies are impacted by this moment. Yet, perhaps it is the attempts at a broad, supposed flattening of these various differences that constitutes the scandalous nature of bodies in this moment. I am disturbed, shaken at these prospects.

The changes—or, really, intensifications—have happened for important reasons: the COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed upon humankind a virus that has as yet, at the time of my writing in the late summer of 2020, no remedy, only treatments for symptoms. Many bodies—surpassing one million as I write—have succumbed to this virus. The temporary state of exception that has separated us from one another is extending into a long emergency with little relief in sight.

What are we to do in these circumstances? I find myself returning to my mentor Smaro Kamboureli's 2000 monograph, *Scandalous Bodies*, for a reminder of the ways in which the body itself marks a site of scandal. For Kamboureli, the gendered, racialized body is an unruly vessel. The nation-state endeavours to contain it, yet it slips, leaks (to invoke Elizabeth Grosz), edges out past the genteel constructions and constrictions that are erected in order to hold it in place. Foucauldian biopolitics meet Achille Mbembe's analysis of the necropolitical in a macabre arena with very real, material consequences that are, for many, being witnessed and felt today in disembodied virtual spaces online.

What a time.

Even being able to write this piece entails bodily scandal, regulation, and a modified experience of challenges that Kamboureli identified twenty years ago. I am writing from home, from a home office recently transformed in order to accommodate the daily working rhythms of four humans and the companionship of one dog. My copies of *Scandalous Bodies*—both the original 2000 Oxford UP edition and, I thought, the 2009 republication from Wilfrid Laurier UP—were locked in my office. At present, faculty members at my home institution of Mount Royal University in Calgary are not allowed to work from campus. Our leaky bodies are possible vectors for a disease that can hardly be contained—indeed, a disease that so far manages to escape all containment.

In order to retrieve my books, I had to file for permission. At length, I was granted a narrow window of time to visit my office. This is a space in which I normally spend many hours in a given work day, coming and going between classes, meetings, and the library. Instead, the campus is now shut down, emptied out, and sterilized. I had to wear a mask in order to get there; I had to sanitize myself in order to enter the building. I had to get in, retrieve *Scandalous Bodies*, and then get out. My own body had become a scandal. All of this is by now banal, commonplace—yet it would have been unthinkable mere months ago.

I pause at that "yet." The particular scandal of my own body in this instance is, at most, a very small one. Elsewhere, between the fires and the floods, those whose bodies are marked by difference have experienced this moment in deeply, traumatically intensified ways. To say that the body is scandalous is to note both the necessary contingency of embodiment, but also the very real, variegated impacts of this moment on bodies across the globe.

Once I arrived in my office, I found that my 2009 edition of the book had wandered off, as books seem to do every now and again. So I found myself working between my 2000 edition in print—the copy that I purchased as a graduate student at the University of Toronto in the mid-2000s—and an online e-book of the 2009 edition that I accessed from my university's library. The book, too, had become disembodied.

How can the body itself be a site of scandal? Are we not all embodied? Would this not render each of us a scandal? Feminist thinking around embodiment and performance, as well as critical race theory, must

be starting points to unpack this problem. Here Kamboureli's work is instructive. In *Scandalous Bodies*, the organizing terms are ethnicity and diaspora, but the book's careful study of F. P. Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (and its critics), of media representations of multiculturalism in Canada, of multiculturalism as law and political philosophy, of ethnic anthologies, and of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* all entail careful elucidation of how the body is discursively enmeshed in a Canadian context, controlled, regulated, and—in Kamboureli's apt phrasing—sedated.

And, in my rereading, I set aside any sense of scandal as a means of unpacking my own experiences during this time. I think of all of the work done in literatures produced in the place currently called Canada since the year 2000—I think, in particular, of the tremendous work done in Indigenous literatures in this period—and I anticipate necessary shifts that are yet to come in the work of future criticism.

I move on to think etymologically. The word "scandal" has a long history, tracing through the Latin *scandalum*—the cause of an offence—to the Greek *skandalon* (σκάνδαλον). The Greek word means a snare or a stumbling block. The body is a site at which one stumbles. At the moment, we stumble in our separation; we are ensnared by invisible two-metre buffer zones, points of no contact. The *OED*'s definition of a scandal as an "offence to moral feeling or sense of decency" lands in full force at this juncture. Here is how Kamboureli discusses the title of the book:

> "Scandal" and "body" are equally polysemantic in this study. "Body" refers to corporeality, but also to the body politic; it is what I focus on, more often than not, in order to examine the politics of identity. The body's desires, its traumas, its abuse are all contingent on the body politic and its various manifestations. Similarly, "scandal" is a sign of excess and transgression, but also of violation and indignity. (ix)[1]

Bodies become scandalous, perhaps more than ever; they are sites of moral and legal governance, "violation and indignity": shifting prescribed and proscribed behaviours of the now counter-balance physical health and social and emotional well-being. The body, too, is a site of general public outrage over many moral offences: from yet another act of racialized police violence; to the dispossession of the most vulnerable as the "she-cession" unfolds in waves of job losses; to the ongoing crises of the displaced.

If there is a path to an equitable future to be found in this long crisis, it is to be found in the very nature of the scandalous body. What does it take to

prioritize bodies—the material body, the body politic, the body of the earth itself, the body through which we and our kindred species suffer, love, exult, and grieve—as sites of radical change? Each of these bodies is different; the differences between these bodies must be emphasized. And, so, how might the stories we tell affect the ways in which bodies become scandalous or sacred? Working in concert with the critics of identity whose works precede hers, Kamboureli considers these challenges. At key junctures throughout *Scandalous Bodies*, Kamboureli inserts moments of political critique and urges a path forward. She hopes "that the future will be less coercive than the history we have known until now" (x); she argues for "practising responsibility" through a pedagogy of understanding power and its (re)production (26); she situates her analysis against the seductions of "the disciplinary and homogenizing control of the dominant society" (80); she invokes the "goal" of mastering "discomfort, a mastery that would involve shuttling between centre and margin while displacing both" (130); and she observes that "we aren't going to get" anywhere progressive "by embracing a multicultural ethos modelled on a postmodernism" that is not truly radical (174). These statements are all hortatory: they urge readers to critically consider the body and the limits placed upon it by systems that remain in play today. Yet Kamboureli also writes that "it is because I think we still have a long way to go that I do not speak in emancipatory or messianic terms" (130). There are cautions, in other words, about embracing the idea of an emancipation that is about to come, rather than one that remains deferred.

All of these moments lead up to the book's concluding statement: in her analysis of Naomi in Kogawa's *Obasan*, Kamboureli argues that what is "brought to light . . . is the double imperative not only to expose the contents of history, but also to change history's shape" (221). The book ends, it has always seemed to me, quite suddenly. We have been reading, to this point, an attentive analysis of *Obasan*, one that probes the seeming dichotomy in the text between speech and silence in order to historicize, unpack, and problematize prevailing literary approaches to the text. Kamboureli's final imperative, however, is not merely a conclusion to her analysis of Kogawa's book. It is also an *envoi* from *Scandalous Bodies* itself: the imperative remains to expose the contents of history. This point remains as true now as ever, when misinformation, disinformation, and obfuscation confront us at every turn. It remains key to shift the shape of history itself, moving from

a recounting that comes from the enfranchised, the vocal, and the "winners" of history. The importance of sustained, granular analyses of texts, public policy, media reports, films, and anthologies for the push-and-pull between dominance and dispossession remains as urgent as ever.

At twenty years, *Scandalous Bodies* remains a vital work. In his 2009 foreword, Imre Szeman writes that Kamboureli's is "a must-read book for anyone involved in the ongoing scholarly and public discussions about ethnicity, diasporic communities, and multiculturalism," noting that it was written during a period of intense contestation (ix). The snares and stumbling blocks that were with us then continue. In a very recent piece—her introduction to the *Literary Solidarities / Critical Accountability: A Mikinaakominis / TransCanadas Special Issue* of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* (vol. 89, no. 1, 2020), co-edited with Tania Aguila-Way—Kamboureli returns to some of the concerns that animate *Scandalous Bodies*. She does so, in particular, by asking fraught questions about solidarity framed by the question, "Should I be here?", which she analyzes via the question's appearance in Wayde Compton's 2014 book *The Outer Harbour*. Building indirectly on the ways in which the introductory chapter of *Scandalous Bodies* analyzes, critiques, undoes, challenges, and discusses the importance of the practices of critical self-location, in her new article Kamboureli argues that "[w]hat is at stake in declaring and practising solidarity is the validation of alterity, not the production of a common identity" (5). Bodies continue to be in fraught, tense relationships that are not easily negotiated when we are able to commune in person, let alone in the fractured, fragmented ways that the present moment necessitates. The challenge remains, to think with Kamboureli, of how to emerge into a new frame, one of justice and an ethics to come.

NOTES

1 Although the 2009 republished edition begins with a new foreword by Imre Szeman, the pagination and contents of the main text are the same as the 2000 edition.

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2020 and All's Well: On Positionality, Transtemporality, and *Scandalous Bodies*

Libe García Zarranz

> 2019 and all's well
> —Larissa Lai, *Automaton Biographies*

> [W]e need to learn how to live with contradictions, and to do so without fetishizing difference.
> —Smaro Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies*

It is 2020 and all is *definitely* not well. The ironic words of Larissa Lai's racialized automaton, rachel, in the first epigraph could not be more timely to fathom this "age of turbulence" (Mbembe 185). A global pandemic hit the world on March 11, dramatically affecting the lives of millions of people and intensifying social, economic, and political inequities. In the words of Danielle Peers, Canada Research Chair in Disability and Movement Cultures,

> [i]f this pandemic has clarified anything, it is that eugenics is not in the past: ableist triaging of medical supports; coerced DNRs; herd immunity strategies; and the immense precarity of those we have institutionalised (e.g., long-term 'care', prisons, detention centers).

Given how systemic ableism is intimately intertwined with ongoing colonialism and increasing racism, as Peers aptly contends, the livability of racialized peoples is always at stake.[1]

It is therefore not surprising that Indigenous, Black, and diasporic writers of colour in Canada are making extensive use of print and digital platforms to publish their work, often positioning intersectional approaches to race and ethnicity at the centre of creative inquiry. The relentless work of

book publishers such as Arsenal Pulp Press, for example, is remarkable in this regard. In the current historical juncture, "the hegemony of the twitter feed . . . white backlash, [and] government by troll" (Lai, "Insurgent" 91) coexist with the unpredictable force of collective protests and racial justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Black Trans Lives Matter, and others. This continued paradoxical sense of despair and possibility, polarization and alliance, where contextual, institutional, critical, and creative impulses cannot be de-linked, remains at the heart of Smaro Kamboureli's influential *Scandalous Bodies* (2000).

Writing her book within the textures of the mid-1990s, Kamboureli defines this decade as one of "vociferous advocacies" and "global upheavals" (1). This is the time when some of the last residential schools were still operating, demonstrating the force of ongoing colonialisms and expressions of assimilation; the time of Writing Thru Race: A Conference for First Nation Writers and Writers of Colour (1994), which many found scandalous at the realization that "whiteness is not paradigmatic" (Kamboureli 91); a time before 9/11 but after the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) when the poetic and critical worldings of Lee Maracle, Dionne Brand, Hiromi Goto, and many others were transforming the contours of the literary traditions produced in Canada, counteracting the pernicious "sedative politics" (82) of official multiculturalism that Kamboureli persuasively articulates. These writers, whose work had appeared in the anthology *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996, rev. ed. 2007), were revolutionizing stifling conceptualizations of diaspora and multiculturalism beyond "symptom[s] of difference" and "sign[s] of cultural excess" (Kamboureli 132). Instead, as Kamboureli contends, anthologies in the 1990s began to problematize the representation of ethnicity as "relational knowledge" (161); a knowledge that is relational between hegemonic and minoritized positions and thus imbued with rupture and contradictions but also open to alliances and transformation. This relational epistemology challenges nostalgic impulses and essentialist origins while being firmly situated historically. In my view, Kamboureli's meticulous attentiveness to the "vagaries of temporality" (Freeman 9) becomes indeed a *transtemporal methodology*—that is, a critico-ethical course of action for the contemporary literary critic and teacher invested in examining how diasporic politics and poetics operate across multiple temporal frameworks simultaneously.

As someone who is currently based in a department of teacher education in Norway, who *also* teaches literatures in English with an accent, I found Kamboureli's grounding of her study on pedagogical questions crucial. Her extensive reflections on positionality, regarding not only background and identity but also epistemological and methodological frameworks, help situate *Scandalous Bodies* in a space where contradiction and unpredictability become critico-ethical navigational tools. Drawing on diverse traditions in oppositional and radical pedagogy, Kamboureli locates her study within a "negative pedagogy" (25) which is driven by the ethical imperative to practise responsibility and to assume that knowledge systematically creates gaps. As Kamboureli puts it, "negative pedagogy is relevant to a multicultural society because it may enable us to begin to address history and the historicity of our present moment *responsibly*—without, that is, maintaining the illusion of innocence or non-complicity" (25, emphasis original). Hence, pedagogical and ethical concerns must be understood as asynchronous, discontinuous (Freeman xii), transtemporal assemblages where questions of positionality need to be scrutinized.

In the prominent study *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2009), Nêhíyaw and Saulteaux educational scholar Margaret Kovach devotes a chapter to the question of self-location and purpose for Indigenous researchers. Kovach also touches on the commonality and importance of reflective self-location within feminist methodologies, where "researchers are encouraged to locate themselves, to share personal aspects of their own experience with research participants" (110). Kamboureli's insistence on the contradictions and tensions intrinsic to the situatedness of critical research marks an important contribution concerning self-location to literary studies in Canada. As Cree-Métis literary scholar Deanna Reder puts it, Kovach's emphasis "that scholars identify the purpose of their work is nearly unheard of in literary studies. At no point in any of our training are we ever asked to articulate why we are drawn—on a personal level—to do the work we do" (15). I would add that the ethical imperative to clearly disclose the purpose of our work as literary and critical scholars is also key in queer and transgender literary studies, particularly from those examining and learning with racialized authors. As I argue elsewhere (see García Zarranz), the contemporary work of trans writers and artists of colour, such as Kai Cheng Thom and Vivek

Shraya, and by Two-Spirit Indigiqueer authors, such as Joshua Whitehead, is revolutionizing diasporic lexicons by providing readers with novel paradigms that offer accountable and transtemporal ways of seeing, acting, and being in the world.

Discussing critical questions on temporality, Kamboureli contends that it is "imperative to address ethnicity . . . in the context of our present place and time" (140) while regarding historical legacies of racialization (84). This transtemporal logic is often erased from public discourse, as was the case both during the so-called multicultural wars in the 1990s and often in our current post-truth moment. Strategies of "verbal terrorism" (Kamboureli 85) continue to saturate the media and institutions such as the university, where freedom of speech is, once again, appropriated by dominant voices as a banner to justify the spread of hate. In this sense, it is remarkable how Kamboureli's discussion of Gina Mallet's 1997 article in *The Globe and Mail*, "Multiculturalism: Has Diversity Gone Too Far?", resonates with the current historical juncture. Mallet, for example, complains about how "[f]reedom of speech is called racism" (qtd. in Kamboureli 85). See, in turn, the letter published in *Harper's* on July 7, 2020, where such signatories as Margaret Atwood and J. K. Rowling mistake having the right to open debate with holding no sense of accountability for one's actions.[2] This scandalous conflation has dire consequences for minoritized writers who are subjected to racism, sexism, transphobia, and other violences on a regular basis.[3]

Let me close these notes on positionality, transtemporality, and Kamboureli's trailblazing book, *Scandalous Bodies*, by circling back to the beginning: 2020 and all is *not* well. This is why it is vital to envision what the unexpected may bring and to be attentive to the "emergent insurgencies" of the world (Lai, "Insurgent" 98), together with the critical and aesthetic labour of the literary imagination, to counter racist structures and forge more ethical futures. After all, to borrow the words of Nova Scotian filmmaker and multimedia artist Sylvia D. Hamilton, "we will always have music and poetry, they endure."

NOTES

1 The term "racialized" is a contested one as Tewelde (2020) aptly contends. The formulation "marginally racialized" would convey more accurately the argument I make in this essay.

2 For well-crafted responses to this letter see, for example, Hannah Giorgis in *The Atlantic* or Jessica Valenti in *Gen*.
3 See Lai and also McGregor, Rak, and Wunker for in-depth discussions of the numerous recent scandals in the Canadian literary and cultural scenes.

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A Narrative Inquiry in Search of My Home

Botao Wu

Introduction

Home separates "public and private" spaces, provides a "quiet" and "domestic" dwelling place, and denotes "the place of rest" (Richter 12, 16, 208). We spend most of our time at home; we have been exploring the meaning of home as the centre of literature and literary studies through broad concerns with nationalism and regionalism, diaspora, multiculturalism, refugees and migration, Indigenous and settler-colonial studies, and so on; yet home is still "under-theorized" (Duyvendak 26) in our academic circles. Is it because of our familiarity with our daily lives? Or is it because of our oblivion to the fact that we are significant as ordinary people?

"Addressing the issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness in research" (Webster and Mertova 3), narrative inquiry has been applied to almost every discipline of the social sciences and humanities (Spector-Mersel 204, 205, 207). It delves into "small stories" (Georgakopoulou 122-29) with the aim of knowing more about "the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator" (Butina 190). Narrative inquiry provides a window for seeing and understanding the social, cultural, and historical realities that a narrator has experienced. In this narrative inquiry, I write about my ordinary life to reconstitute my life, to express my regard for my ancestors, and to search for a home. My scholarly endeavour also serves as a model for those who have been baffled by similar experiences, and attempts to help them make peace with history and reality. Given the limitations of traditional research methods for tackling issues such as "complexity, multiplicity of perspectives and human centredness" (Webster and Mertova 32), I would like to contribute to the diversification of academic research paradigms and the deeper understanding of human existence.

Like Qian Zhongshu's allegory of a besieged city, people outside a city think life inside is better than theirs, and vice versa. Similarly, Westerners say people think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. We think that going far away from home is romantic, mystic, and attractive. But actually, our daily lives are valuable in themselves and are as charming as our vain dreams. Poetry and

the other side of the fence live forever in our hearts, as long as we appreciate our common lives poetically and take every day as a new journey. Enjoying and celebrating my ordinary life is the way that I try to find spiritual consolation.

My Actual Home

Hometown is a sweet word in Chinese culture, and more than half of the Chinese population visit the places where they were born during the Spring Festival—the time for visiting hometowns. But for me, the place where I was born is hard to return to. I'm a rootless vine that tries desperately to close the door to the memory of the past, and a snail that carries his home everywhere. Oh, no, I'm a tadpole.

In my mind flashes a story of a school of tadpoles trying to find their mother. They met a fish who was teaching its kids to find food, and the tadpoles mistook the fish as their mother because of the fish's tail. Several days later, when they grew four legs, they mistook a turtle as their mother. Finally, when they turned into frogs, the tadpoles found their mother. Chinese students of my generation were taught this short story in our elementary schools in China. In my mind's eye, I'm still the tadpole searching for my home.

According to oral history, hundreds of years ago, my ancestors were forced to move from another province to my current village. Before the journey, they were gathered together under a pagoda tree[1] by government officers. It was a large old tree planted beside an ancient temple (Zhang and Wang). Raising their heads to see birds nesting in the tree, the emigrants lamented over their uncertain destinies, which were more unpredictable than animals' lives (Zhang and Wang). When my ancestors settled down in their new village, they planted a pagoda tree as a monument of the event. Having weathered hundreds of years of rain and wind, the pagoda tree now is hollow in the middle, but it still shoots up new sprigs every spring. I dream of it from time to time. I also dream of the military knife that one of my ancestors left in the village. He passed the Wuju examination (武举military official test) and was awarded a military rank. When the imperial edict was delivered to his house, he was working in the hog lot with dirty clothes. He asked the deliverer, certainly a government official, to go to the other side of the village to find the correct person. When the deliverer came back to his house, he had already changed into a new suit of clothes and was sitting upright in the middle of the living room. He did that to save his face and that of the government.

Untitled

Clear sky, like water, over
Remote mountains, like splashes of ink
Both look at my city, quietly.

On a dark grey tree
Birds are celebrating
Early spring

Everything is delightful
While I don't dare think of
My distant
Hometown

Hazy,
Barren
Crowded
Far-off

But Hometown
Is still
A beautiful
Word.

My Rented Home

In my hometown, rainy days are rare and the rain falls only in the spring and summer. Maybe because of its rarity in my early life, rain became one of the most romantic forms of weather for me. I took raindrops for the sky's tears. On rainy days, I would ramble in the wild, clean my head, and make it a receiver for signals from the sky, pondering whatever naturally came to my mind. I felt purified by the rain and was inspired poetically by it. In Vancouver, rain is not a luxury anymore. It is almost a daily blessing.

Raincouver

Patter, clatter, spatter,
Rain incessantly falls.
In Raincouver.

Don't worry,
It seldom pelts down
But ushers in
His serenade.

After the excitement of arrival and some sightseeing in Vancouver, I try to settle down and to find a home. A poet's dwelling place is a practical problem. As a foreigner and a low-income scholar (less than $25,920/year according to the low-income cut-off in Canada), I finally found a home to rent.

I would prefer to share part of a house with some UBC students in East Vancouver for the sake of safety, comfort, convenience, and finances. It is quite difficult to find a place with almost everything you want at a good price. Struggle and humiliation are the nametags of finding a place to live in Vancouver.

Finding a living space is a constant struggle. You have to invest a lot of time, energy, and emotion into the process. You search websites to find places within forty minutes of UBC, and you search ads for a three- or four-bedroom apartment. After copying down all the possible housing information, you begin your search.

You contact the rental homeowners, one by one. First, you ask them to describe their house, and inquire about the rental price politely. If everything seems to check out, you finally ask rather casually whether they would allow you to share the apartment with schoolmates. Some will say definitely no, and others will pause to think, so you try to persuade them.

"I will rent your apartment for at least three years. I will keep it tidy and clean. I will provide you with post-dated cheques. I will do the gardening."

It is a skill to argue, defend your position, and make concessions during the negotiations. It is a verbal struggle with other people, and a mental struggle on your own part, since you have to persuade yourself before you can persuade others. This process can sometimes be humiliating. Some owners answer your questions in a contemptuous way.

"No, no, no, I don't want students. They are noisy, lazy, and selfish."

Others say bluntly that they dislike students, especially students who want to share their house.

"I don't want many students to squeeze into my apartment. I want it tidy and clean all the time."

You have to take it easy. You have to go through the process. As the deadline for moving out approaches, you have to invest more and more time, energy, and emotion in the search process. You see happy and unhappy faces. They pluck at the strings of your heart and you ruminate over them, only to forget them with the next rental search visit.

Renting a Home

Dial
Greet
Introduce
Offer
Make a counter-offer
Hang up.

Dial
Greet
Offer
Make a counter-offer
Hang up.
A process similar to finding a nest for my poems.

My Intellectual Home

Language is a way home. When I was growing up, I lived in other cities. My hometown is a county in North China, where my ancestors lived for hundreds of years. I feel at home when I remember the porridge that my mother made for me, and the fungus peeping from a piece of wood in a corner of my adobe house in the village. It was fun to observe ants, net cicadas, and dig out scorpions. Harvesting corn by hand was tiresome labour then, but a sweet memory now.

Late at night, I would turn on a video with sounds of birds chirping and creeks flowing and fall asleep peacefully. Physically, I could not visit my hometown frequently due to my busy life. But, I am a stranger in cities and fly back to my hometown in dreams. I feel at home in my poems.

H_2O ME

I cannot live
Without
Water.

For ME
H-HOME
Is holy water.

Hollow door is a metaphor for becoming a disciple of a certain religion. Here I mean that I have found my belief in the benevolence of poetry and language. To write beautiful English articles, I challenge myself and jump through hoops. The very word hoop reminds me of the golden hoop in the novel *The Journey to the West*.

The hero of the book, the Monkey King, wore the golden hoop and accompanied his master as he overcame eighty-one setbacks before arriving at the holy temples in the West. The golden hoop is an incarnation of holy wishes, and a tool to restrain the Monkey King from disobeying his master's orders. The installation of the hoop was necessary to ensure the powerful monkey would fulfill his task. After they arrived at their destination, the golden hoop disappeared by itself. The teachings are that difficulties, setbacks, and restrictions are not people's dead ends; subsequent happiness is the good wish that fate/god has arranged for us.

My Emotional Home

I was born in the Bethune International Peace Hospital, a military hospital built in memory of Norman Bethune, a Canadian-born physician who is very famous in China. When my mother was about to give birth to me, she had very bad labour dystocia, and almost died when I was born. She had one arm for intravenous fluids, and another injected with cardiotonic steroids. This early life experience explains my emotional attachment to the story of Norman Bethune, and why I developed a hobby of collecting relevant souvenirs. Flipping the commemorative silver coins issued in 1998 on the sixtieth anniversary of Norman Bethune's arrival in China (see Figure 1), I carried out the following narrative inquiry.

On the One Side of the Coin

When I was at home, I used to visit the biggest park in my hometown. The artificial lake in the park was a resort for me to practise fishing. My mother's call from home was the only order that I couldn't refuse, as I knew a sumptuous dinner was ready. When I was away in other cities, my mother would sit beside an elm in the park

and watch magpies nesting. The bird is a symbol of happy omens in Chinese culture. She said she hoped the magpies would bring her good news from me.

Autumn Wind

Magpies twitter
To a slip of the moon
In response
To a Chinese lute's whimper

A man far away from home
Recalls the dialect
Wafted from his hometown?

Why did I leave my hometown? It is hard to answer due to many speakable and unspeakable reasons. If you like the food, people, atmosphere, and weather of a place, and if you have lived in the place for an extended period of time, even though it is not your hometown, you would not like to part with it, would you?

Maybe, sometimes you feel tired of living in the same place, and impulsively travel to other cities, but finally you will remember the goodness of your old place. In my case, sorrowfully, the only connections that I have with my hometown are my immediate family members, my father's tomb that was already flattened, an old adobe house in my father's village, and two small pieces of farmland that were allocated to my family.

Umberto Eco criticized those who exaggeratedly depict animals as being "cuddly" and coldly ignore their suffering fellows (215). It is a curious paradox produced

Figure 1. The silver coins in memory of Norman Bethune jointly issued in 1998 by the Royal Canadian Mint and the China Gold Coin Incorporation. Image courtesy of the author.

in the human world. Once upon a time, you thought people around you were as simple as you, and you wanted to contribute to their wellness. After many life experiences, you have turned numb, inside and out. Leaving your hometown permanently seems to be the only redemption you can rely on.

You used to feel indignant, but now you do not. Walking through the "roller coaster circles" of "joys and sorrows" (Leggo 32), you ruminate over your past experiences, and decide to put aside the topsy-turvy world. You focus on improving your own personality and abilities. That is the way you make your life meaningful and hopeful.

On the Other Side of the Coin

Parting the sorrow, I am happy to witness many universities' recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to their ancestors' land. Sending out official emails, they make the point that their campuses dwell on Indigenous peoples' land. Opening an official meeting or ceremony, they solemnly declare that they thank the First Nations for allowing them to meet and learn together on the host nation's land. Scholars (Gone; Stewart) have also openly admitted that Indigenous people were slaughtered or removed from their land. In 2014, Mayor Gregor Robertson of Vancouver formally acknowledged that the city builds on unceded Indigenous land (Meiszner). It is a positive gesture toward reconciling old feuds.

Turning my eyes to Chinese history, I take a dynasty as a living organism with its birth, growth, decline, and death. At the birth of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE), Liu Bang's army besieged his major rival Xiang Yu in Gaixia (located in modern An Hui province), while Xiang Yu and his beloved lady killed themselves, trumpeting the establishment of the major Chinese dynasty that existed for generations (Sima; Liu).

Is Liu Bang happier than Xiang Yu? Yes, and no. In terms of military success, Liu Bang defeated Xiang Yu. In family life, I believe Liu Bang was a little more unfortunate. On the one hand, Xiang Yu and his wife loved each other, enjoyed their lives to the fullest, and finally departed from the world together in a sudden manner. On the other hand, as the founding father and the first emperor of the Han Dynasty, Liu Bang lamented his beloved concubine and son when he realized that he could not set them up as his queen and prince due to political considerations. As an experienced political figure, Liu Bang understood well that these two beloved family members would be eradicated after his death. It is a sad family story. Liu Bang led a life with hidden pain, knowing that his favourite woman and son would be killed. Besides, a bird's-eye view of the Han Dynasty reveals more pain for Liu Bang. His descendants were humiliated by relatives, military lords, and even eunuchs. Toward the end of the dynasty, his descendant Liu Xie was forced to abdicate the throne.

Liu Bang gained the land, and Xiang Yu lost the land. They both owned the land of China for a period of time. They paid duly for owning the land. Now, these historical figures are sedimented in the land they owned. I used to bitterly

contemplate how the vast land that belonged to my ancestors is now owned by other people. For a reason known to all of those who are familiar with Chinese history, my ancestors lost their land and my family consequently encountered many tragedies. I witnessed some of my family's tragedies, and read about similar tragedies. After being tortured by such painful explorations for years, I reconcile with myself and with reality by doing narrative inquiry. I thank the expiration of other historical figures' ownership of China. Because of this, their descendants would not jump on me and ask for the return of the farmland that currently belongs to me. Most importantly, I come to the realization that neither a house, nor an apartment, nor a piece of land bears the meaning of home.

My Spiritual Home

After several spiritual journeys, I adopted a notion that a human being is not only terrestrial but also cosmic and spiritual. We may think that we own our body and have complete control of it. But it is in fact the symbiosis formed by the interaction of our spirit, mind, physical body, and the viruses and bacteria in our body. A physical body is a temporary dwelling place that we share with innumerable invisible viruses. As a spiritual and cosmic being, I will finally reunite with some unknown and sublime existence. With this statement, I am not leaning towards any religion, and I have no bias towards or against any religion.

Resting on the above belief, I feel much consoled with the conviction that I have already found my home, my spiritual home. Such faith is not easy to develop. Initially, it is slimy and elusive, like a fish. During each reminiscence and meditation, I peruse my life events, and lead myself to the thinking that human beings dwell temporarily in the world, and that finally my spirit will rise and reunite with the spirit that caused the whole universe to exist. Like cultivating a plant or building a bonfire, I keep nurturing my thoughts with love and tenderness, and feel relaxed in the process. I reconstitute myself by doing narrative inquiry about my daily life (McMinn).

NOTE

1 I previously used locust tree for 槐树 when writing this story in my dissertation, as an English reader is more familiar with locust tree. 槐树 is native to China, and the translation pagoda tree or Chinese scholar tree is closer to what it really is.

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Articles, Forum, & Opinions and Notes

Paul **Barrett** is an Assistant Professor in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph, where he teaches Canadian literature and digital humanities. He is the author of *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism* and the editor of *'Membering Austin Clarke*. His current research project considers the history of humanism in Canadian literature from the 1850s to the present.

Andrea **Beverley** is an Associate Professor at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. She is cross-appointed to English and Canadian Studies and is the head of the Canadian Studies program. Her research focuses on Canadian women writers of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in relation to archives, feminism, and literary collectives.

Myra **Bloom** is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at York University's Glendon College, where she teaches Canadian and modern literature. Her current book project, *Evasive Maneuvers*, examines women's confessional writing practices in Canada.

Andrea A. **Davis** is Associate Professor in Black Cultures of the Americas in the Department of Humanities at York University. She holds cross-appointments in the graduate programs in English; Interdisciplinary Studies; and Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies. Her research focuses on the literary productions of Black women in the Americas. She is particularly interested in the intersections of the literatures of the Caribbean, the United States, and Canada, and her work encourages an intertextual cross-cultural dialogue about Black women's experiences in diaspora. She is the author of the forthcoming *Horizon, Sea, Sound: A Cultural Critique of the Nation*.

Kit **Dobson** is a Professor at Mount Royal University. He is most recently a co-editor of the books *Dissonant Methods: Undoing Discipline in the Humanities Classroom* and *All the Feels / Tous les sens: Affect and Writing in Canada / Affect et écriture au Canada* (both U of Alberta P, 2020).

Sarah **Dowling** is an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Comparative Literature and Victoria College at the University of Toronto. A literary critic as well as a poet, Sarah is the author of *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood under Settler Colonialism*, as well as *Entering Sappho*, *DOWN*, and *Security Posture*.

Libe **García Zarranz** is Associate Professor of Literature in English in the Department of Teacher Education at NTNU (Norway), working at the intersection of feminist and trans writing in Canada and affect studies. She is also Research Affiliate for the Canadian Literature Centre at the University of Alberta. She is the author of *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions: New Cross-Border Ethics* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2017). In 2018, she co-edited a special issue on affect and feminist literary production for *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice*. Her article "Feeling Sideways: Shani Mootoo and Kai Cheng Thom's Sustainable Affects" appeared in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* (2020).

Thomas **Hodd** is an Associate Professor of English at Université de Moncton. His recent publications include *Mary Melville, the Psychic: A Critical Edition* (2019) as well as an article on English-language women poets for *Parallel Universe: The Poetries of New Brunswick* (2018). He is also editor of *A Soldier's Place: The War Stories of Will R. Bird* (2018).

Smaro **Kamboureli** is the Avie Bennett Chair in Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto. The author of *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada,* winner of the Gabrielle Roy Prize for Canadian Literary Criticism, she has edited and co-edited many volumes. Her most recent publications include her article "Diaspora" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*; a bilingual English/Italian edition of her 1985 poetry book, *in the second person, in seconda persona*; and the co-edited special issue "Literary Solidarities / Critical Accountability: A Mikinaakominis / TransCanadas Special Issue" of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* to which she has contributed an introduction, "Literary Solidarities: 'Should I be here?'"

Malissa **Phung** is honoured and privileged to live and work as an uninvited guest on the territories of the Huron-Wendat, Mississauga, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe peoples. She is a second-generation settler descendant of Sino-Vietnamese refugees who have resettled on the territories of the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakoda, and Tongva peoples.

Margaret **Steffler** is Professor of English literature at Trent University. She is the editor of P. K. Page's *Mexican Journal* (2015) and selected children's literature by Page. She has published on the work of Miriam Toews, Carol Shields, Alice Munro, L. M. Montgomery, and Sylvia Fraser. Her current research projects focus on the work of Miriam Toews and on narratives of Canadian girlhoods.

Melanie Dennis **Unrau** is a white settler of mixed-European descent living on Treaty One territory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, a Research Affiliate at the University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities, and an instructor in the Department of English at the University of Winnipeg. Her current research on Canadian petropoetics expands on her dissertation on Canadian oil worker poetry. She is the author of *Happiness Threads: The Unborn Poems* (The Muses' Company, 2013), a co-editor of *Seriality and Texts for Young People: The Compulsion to Repeat* (Palgrave, 2014), and a former co-editor of *The Goose: A Journal of Arts, Environment, and Culture in Canada*.

Asha **Varadharajan** is Associate Professor of English at Queen's University in Canada. She is the author of *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak*. Her current research reconceptualizes the category of the refugee and the realm of "refugeedom." Her most recent publications comment on the crisis of the humanities, the subaltern in contemporaneity, violence against women and the discourse of human rights, decolonizing pedagogy, postcolonial temporalities, humanitarian intervention, and the legacy of the Frankfurt School. The most fun she has had writing was while composing her entry on Eric Idle for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. The most chuffed she has been lately was when she received the Queen's University 2021 Principal's Promoting Student Inquiry Teaching Award.

Vikki **Visvis** is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Toronto, where she teaches Canadian literature. She has published on Canadian and American fiction by Elizabeth Hay, Eden Robinson, Joseph Boyden, Kerri Sakamoto, Dionne Brand, David Bergen, Michael Ondaatje, and Toni Morrison in *Canadian Literature*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *Mosaic*, *ARIEL*, and *African American Review*.

At present, Botao **Wu** is a lecturer at Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics. He received a doctoral degree in Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He has published traditional academic articles and poems in North America and Asia. He is a poet and academic researcher, doing research both creatively and critically. Currently, he is searching for a home, in a non-religious and apolitical way.

Poems

Beatrice **Achampong** lives in Richmond, BC. Andrew **Faulkner** lives in Picton, Ontario. Clayton **Longstaff** lives in Victoria, BC. John **Reibetanz** lives in Toronto, Ontario. Jagjeet **Sharma** lives in Kemptville, Ontario. Neil **Surkan** lives in Calgary, Alberta.

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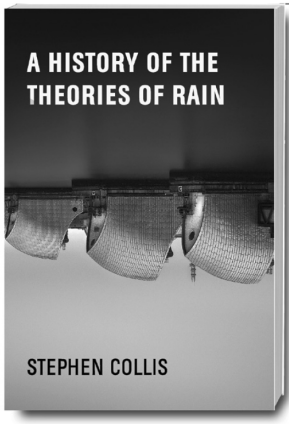
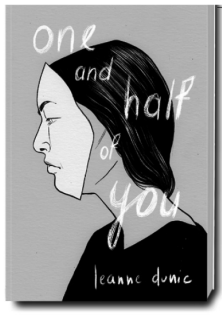
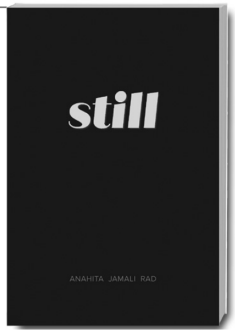


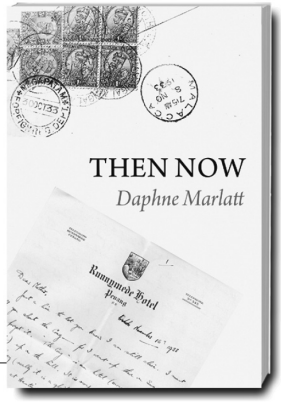
A History of the Theories of Rain



One and Half of You

still





Then Now

A History of the Theories of Rain
Stephen Collis

History of the Theories of Rain explores the strange effect our current sense of impending doom has on our relation to time, approaching the unfolding climate catastrophe conceptually through its dissolution of the categories of "man-made" and "natural" disasters.

One and Half of You
Leanne Dunic

A poetic-memoir exploring sibling and romantic love and the complexities of being a biracial person looking for completion in another. Includes links to recordings of three songs.

still
Anahita Jamali Rad

A powerful follow-up to Jamali Rad's *for love and autonomy*, *still* proposes an alternative to action, a way to jam the signal by refusing receptivity. *still* disclaims language, writes without writing, divests in itself, is non-living and unlife.

Then Now
Daphne Marlatt

Written in response to the discovery of letters by Marlatt's father, these poems explore a sense of place and home on Canada's West Coast now on the brink of global climate change.

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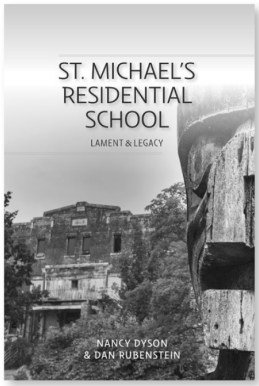

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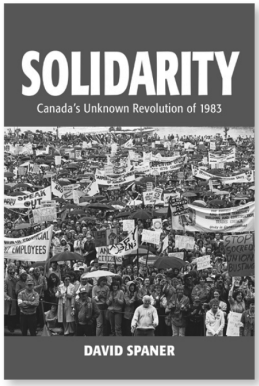

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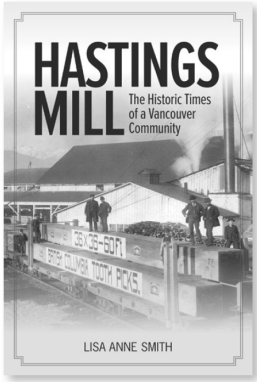

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