# *Canadian* Literature / Littérature *canadienne*

**A Quarterly of Criticism and Review**

Number 240, 2020, Decolonial (Re)Visions of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror
Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver
*Editor:* Laura Moss
*Associate Editors:* Nicholas Bradley (Reviews), Glenn Deer (Reviews), Kevin McNeilly (Reviews)
*Assistant Editors:* Phinder Dulai (Poetry), Sarah Henzi (Francophone Writing), Brendan McCormack

*Past Editors:* George Woodcock (1959-1977), W. H. New (1977-1995), Eva-Marie Kröller (1995-2003), Laurie Ricou (2003-2007), Margery Fee (2007-2015)




## Editorial


*Lou Cornum and Maureen Moynagh*
Introduction: Decolonial (Re)Visions of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror *8*


## Articles


*Larissa Lai*
Familiarizing Grist Village: Why I Write Speculative Fiction *20*

*Y-Dang Troeung and Phanuel Antwi*
"In this very uncertain space": A Conversation with Omar El Akkad *42*

## Articles, *continued*

*Moritz Ingwersen*
Reclaiming Fossil Ghosts: Indigenous Resistance to Resource Extraction in Works by Warren Cariou, Cherie Dimaline, and Nathan Adler *59*

*Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado*
Re-framing the Diasporic Subject: The Supernatural and the Black Female Body in Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* *79*

*George Elliott Clarke*
A Note—Imagining an Africa That Never Was: The Anti-Racist / Anti-Imperialist Fantasy of Charles R. Saunders' *Imaro* and its Basis in the Africentric Occult *97*

*Jody Mason*
Canadian Postwar Book Diplomacy and Settler Contradiction *107*

## Poems

*Lauren Nerfa* *19*
*Rebecca Păpucaru* *40*
*Lisa Arsenault* *57*
*Vivian Zenari* *77*
*Barry Dempster* *96*
*Dan MacIsaac* *106*

## Books in Review

Forthcoming book reviews are available at canlit.ca/reviews

### Authors Reviewed

*Angie Abdou* *128*
*Michael Barnholden* *167*
*John Barton* *129*
*Dominique Béchard* *130*
*Dominique Bernier-Cormier* *132*
*bill bissett* *134*
*Jim Blanchard* *135*
*E. D. Blodgett* *136*
*Columpa Bobb* *164*
*Sonja Boon* *137*
*Lindsay Keegitah Borrows* *139*
*George Bowering* *140*
*Marilyn Bowering* *142*
*Tania Carter* *164*
*Bruce Cinnamon* *143*
*Colin M. Coates* *145*
*Patrick Coleman* *146*
*Marlene Cookshaw* *147*
*Michael Crummey* *148*
*Marita Dachsel* *142*
*Joseph A. Dandurand* *149*
*Eva Darias-Beautell* *135*
*Dene Elders* *139*
*John Donlan* *136*
*Alana Fletcher* *139*
*Peter Frost* *151*
*Keith Garebian* *152*
*Kerry Gilbert* *130*

*Susan Glickman* 142
*Matthew K. Gold* 153
*Rawi Hage* 154
*Drew Hayden Taylor* 173
*Colin Hill* 163
*Philip Huynh* 156
*Sally Ito* 156
*Lauren F. Klein* 153
*Lydia Kwa* 157
*Ben Ladouceur* 158
*M. Travis Lane* 147
*Stéphane Larue* 160
*Maria Löschnigg* 161
*Martin Löschnigg* 161
*Katherine Luo* 157
*Monica MacDonald* 162
*Hugh MacLennan* 163
*Keith Maillard* 140
*Lee Maracle* 164
*Domenica Martinello* 158
*Derek Mascarenhas* 165
*Darrel J. McLeod* 149
*Andrea Katherine Medovarski* 166
*Roy Miki* 167
*Kagiso Lesego Molope* 169
*Blessing Musariri* 169
*Michael Nardone* 132
*Thorsten Nesch* 169
*Johnny Neyelle* 139
*Morris Neyelle* 139
*John Pass* 147
*Cecil Paul* 149
*Tshaukuesh Elizabeth Penashue* 170
*Briony Penn* 149
*Ryan Porter* 143
*Steven Price* 148
*David Adams Richards* 171
*Zoë S. Roy* 172
*Armand Garnet Ruffo* 173
*Bernard Saladin d'Anglure* 151
*Johanna Skibsrud* 129
*Emily Snyder* 175
*Michael Springate* 152
*Amy Spurway* 160
*Pablo Strauss* 160
*Bindu Suresh* 165
*Neil Surkan* 132
*Cheryl Suzack* 175
*Russell Thornton* 136
*Richard Van Camp* 173
*Wiebke von Carolsfeld* 160
*Matthew Walsh* 158
*Shannon Webb-Campbell* 164
*Graeme Wynn* 145
*Elizabeth Yeoman* 170

**Reviewers**

*Alex Assaly* 132
*Veronica Austen* 166
*Gregory Betts* 129
*Alison Calder* 143
*Alessandra Capperdoni* 167
*Karen Charleson* 160
*Sijia Cheng* 157
*David Creelman* 171
*Margery Fee* 149, 161, 175
*Ryan Fitzpatrick* 136
*Lydia Forssander-Song* 165
*Sherrill Grace* 162
*Lisa Grekul* 154
*Evangeline Holtz-Schramek* 137
*Weldon Hunter* 134
*Crystal Hurdle* 142
*Jessica Janssen* 164
*Valerie Legge* 170
*Brandon McFarlane* 140
*Michael Minor* 173
*Shane Neilson* 130
*Stephen Ney* 169
*Claire Omhovère* 148
*Michael A. Peterman* 163
*Ian Rae* 146
*Laurie Ricou* 145
*Ralph Sarkonak* 135
*Jasmine Spencer* 139
*Dani Spinosa* 153
*Marianne Stenbaek* 151
*Neil Surkan* 158
*Julie Sutherland* 152
*Eleanor Ty* 172
*Emily Wall* 147
*Brooke Xiang* 156

*Canadian Literature*, a peer-reviewed journal, welcomes original, unpublished submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles—6,500-7,000 words (including Notes and Works Cited), double-spaced, and in 12-point font size—should be submitted online through Open Journal Systems (OJS). Please go to canlit.ca/submit to register and submit. Submissions must be in Rich Text Format (.rtf) or Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). Submissions should include a brief biographical note (50-100 words) and an abstract (150 words). Articles should follow MLA guidelines for bibliographic format.

---

*Littérature canadienne* est une revue avec comité de lecture. Elle publie des articles, des entrevues et des commentaires originaux sur les écrivains et l'écriture au Canada, ainsi que de la poésie canadienne pour publication initiale. La revue ne publie pas de fiction.

Les articles—6500-7000 mots (notes et références bibliographiques comprises), à double interligne, taille de la police 12—peuvent être soumis en ligne sur canlit.ca/submit, où vous serez automatiquement redirigé vers notre plateforme OJS (Open Journal Systems). Les soumissions doivent être en format de texte enrichi (.rtf) ou Microsoft Word (.doc ou .docx) et doivent comprendre une brève note biographique (50-100 mots) et un résumé (150 mots). Les articles doivent respecter le style de citation MLA.

***Canadian Literature* online (canlit.ca):**

**Archives (canlit.ca/issues)**
Issues #1 to 215 are freely available online, as are all editorials and pre-print book reviews.

**CanLit Guides (canlitguides.ca)**
*CanLit Guides* is an open-access and flexible learning resource that helps students critically engage with Canadian literature while encouraging and promoting independent study.

**Open Journal Systems (canlit.ca/submit)**
Submit articles, poetry, and book reviews online.



GST R108161779

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

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

Publications Mail Agreement
NO. 40592543
Registration NO. 08647

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO
*Canadian Literature*
The University of British Columbia
ANSO Building, Room 8
6303 NW Marine Drive
Vancouver, BC
Canada V6T 1Z1

TELEPHONE: (604) 822-2780
EMAIL: Can.Lit@ubc.ca
canlit.ca
canlit.ca/submit

SUBSCRIPTION FOR ISSUES 240-243
CANADA (GST INCLUDED): INDIVIDUAL $63.00; INSTITUTION $245.00
OUTSIDE CANADA (SHIPPING INCLUDED): INDIVIDUAL $93.00 USD; INSTITUTION $278.00 USD

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
cl.manager@ubc.ca
Production Staff: Janin Balleza, Niamh Harold, Camille Lemire, Brendan McCormack, Beth Veitch
Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Paper: recycled and acid-free

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

# Message from *Canadian Literature*

Greetings from *Canadian Literature*. We are living in an unprecedented time of sadness and uncertainty, and also, at points, beautiful community togetherness. We hope that you and your loved ones are staying safe and healthy in this challenging time of COVID-19. Because of the need for physical distancing, our physical office closed on March 16, 2020 and will remain closed until it is deemed safe to return to campus by the public health authorities. During this time we have been adapting to working remotely. We are now continuing to edit articles, solicit reviews, process submissions, and do our best to keep the journal in operation. After some adjustments, we think this might just work. We continue to accept submissions and will continue to reach out to our valued community members to seek readers' reports. We do ask for your patience as everything will inevitably take longer than normal. We know that many of our academic colleagues who we rely on for articles, reviews, and reports have had a difficult transition to working remotely (whether doing classes online or having to relocate to safer spaces). We know that some have been ill and others have juggled many family and community commitments. We want to express our deep gratitude and support to all of you.

Stay safe, everyone.

All our best,
The *Canadian Literature* team

# New Editor of *Canadian Literature*, Christine Kim

We are pleased to announce that on July 1, 2020, Christine Kim will become the new editor of *Canadian Literature*. She will take up the position of Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literatures at UBC and will assume the editorship of *Canadian Literature* for the next five years. Currently, she is an Associate Professor of English at Simon Fraser University, and co-Director of SFU's Institute for Transpacific Cultural Research. Christine brings a wealth of editorial experience, a clear vision, and a dynamic range of expertise to *Canadian Literature*. She has inspiring ideas about extending the public reach of the journal and practical initiatives on how to deal with the challenges of Open Access. Her own research focuses on diasporic literatures and cultures in Canada, and considers how they are embedded in global structures of settler colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism. Dr. Kim is the author of *The Minor Intimacies of Race: Asian Publics in North America* (2016) and co-editor of special issues of *Canadian Literature*, *Inter-Asia Journal of Cultural Studies*, a section of *West Coast Line*, and *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora, and Indigeneity in Canada* (2012). We look forward to the new directions the journal will be taking under her guidance, and congratulate her once more on the appointment. Welcome to our new editor, Christine Kim!

Editorial

# Introduction: Decolonial (Re)Visions of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror

*Lou Cornum and Maureen Moynagh*

> The henceforward . . . is the future that is made possible in the present, it is the time and space in which we can tumble into something that will be arranged differently, coded differently, so that our locations and labors are more than just who we are to the settler. Henceforward is the start of the future now.
> —Eve Tuck, Allison Guess, and Hannah Sultan, "Not Nowhere: Collaborating on Selfsame Land."

## Speculating in Financial Times

As we write this introduction, the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs are engaged in consultations with their people concerning a tentative agreement with the British Columbian and Canadian governments over rights and title to unceded Wet'suwet'en territory. The Wet'suwet'en struggle against the Coastal GasLink construction of a fracked gas pipeline, a struggle to protect the land and its relations as well as to uphold sovereignty over that unceded territory, is a particularly vivid instance of the tension between financial futures and the role that the neoliberal state plays in securing those futures, on the one hand, and the alternative futures pursued by Indigenous peoples and their allies on the other. RCMP presence on Wet'suwet'en territory in recent months, their use of "lethal oversight," and their arrests of demonstrators and Gitxsan hereditary chiefs acting in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en, have made clear yet again the links between capitalism and state violence in settler-colonial formations like Canada. The 1997 *Delgamuukw* decision, the basis for the long overdue negotiations between the Wet'suwet'en and the federal and provincial governments, still gives the state the power to assert

sovereignty over Indigenous land for a "substantial legislative objective" such as "the general economic development of the interior of British Columbia," according to one interpretation of the Supreme Court Ruling (James Tully, qtd. in Coulthard, "Subjects" 451). We are conscious of the ground shifting beneath our feet as we write of the relationship between capitalist/imperialist speculations and decolonial (re)visions of speculative fiction (sf). We, too, are writing into the future, aware that when this issue appears, the future might well look very different from the one we anticipate now on the basis of dystopian projections of longstanding settler-colonial deterritorializations, even as those projections allow for glimpses of a "utopian horizon" (Moylan xii). In addressing decolonial (re)visions of settler-colonial futures, we look to the texts and thinkers on the margins of the literary who in their estranged testament represent variably what made this crisis world possible and speculate on how the dispossessed might build a world from and of other possibilities.

This link between the kinds of speculation that fiction makes possible and the economic speculation involved in the "futures industry" (Eshun 290) produced by "capital's imagination" (Haiven 93) dates back, in Catherine Gallagher's account, to the first half of the eighteenth century. Novels came to serve as a kind of training ground for the "cognitive provisionality" necessary for social and economic life under capitalism, a system requiring "competence in investing contingent and temporary credit" (347) in distant futures. Such futures, moreover, were distant in both time and space, for capitalist speculation was already heavily invested in imperial ventures, not the least of which was the slave trade that, Ian Baucom has shown, made possible a particular theory of value and a corresponding system of speculation (16-17). The particular kinds of speculation science fiction engages in can be traced both to these imperial imaginaries and to what John Rieder describes as "the disturbance of ethnocentrism" imperial adventures could occasion: "a perspective from which one's own culture is only one of a number of possible cultures" (2).

And what of our literary-historical moment? If the rise of "fictionality" coincides with capitalist modernity, as Gallagher has argued, it should not surprise us that in the twenty-first century, marked as it is by the global financial market, predicated on "alien currency from another time" (1), in Aimee Bahng's formulation, there should be a corresponding rise in speculative fiction. Nor is speculative fiction necessarily at odds with the futures industry, so much as it is part of the broader cultural imagination

necessary to its operations. But if fictionality is about practising speculation to contend with capitalism and imperialism, the speculative quality of sf at least potentially heads in another direction—speculation about how and what might lead beyond the social, cultural, political ills that attend the violent subjection of Indigenous and racialized bodies for whom the legacies of colonialism, together with the effects of the current conjuncture, have been especially destructive. Tavia Nyong'o articulates the value of speculative forms to African diasporic subjects in this way: "[W]e speculate because we were objects of speculation: bought and sold, killed and quartered, collateralized and securitized, used, impregnated, aborted, discarded" (101). A Black or Indigenous *novum*, then, is about reclaiming those embodied histories for an alternative reading of the current moment as well as for charting a more hopeful future.

The kind of comparative work across Indigenous and Black speculation that we undertake in this issue also strives to address the challenge of comparing across the differences between "stolen land and stolen labor" that Mark Rifkin identifies (*Fictions* 1)—differences that we frame, in speculative terms, as those between the experiences of alien invasion and alien abduction. These are differences of structural positioning within the settler states of Canada and the US that for Indigenous peoples are about land and national sovereignty, not (or not only) racialization (Rifkin, *Fictions* 5; Byrd xxiii-xxiv). The distinct, and no less structural, racializing of Blackness is linked to the history of slavery in the Americas, the reproductive logic governing labouring bodies working to preserve the racialized difference that allowed some bodies to be made into property, thus making "the loss of sovereignty . . . a byproduct rather than a precondition of enslavement" (Sexton 591). We look to the kinds of futures pursued in solidarity that Eve Tuck, Allison Guess, and Hannah Sultan articulate in our epigraph, and by the possibilities embedded in exchanges about Idle No More and Black Lives Matter in Canada (Simpson, Walcott, and Coulthard). We ask what the possibilities for bringing such struggles "into relation" might be, and for breaking down the "silos" between Black and Indigenous struggles (Simpson, Walcott, and Coulthard 88). We ask, also, how we might think about the possibilities for racialized immigrants and settler allies to work in relation with Indigenous and Black peoples and movements. The contributions assembled here, then, consider Black and Indigenous speculations, but also the positions of other racialized immigrant histories and current migrant and refugee struggles, while striving to avoid "lazy parallels" (Rifkin, *Fictions* 3)

or a typically Canadian "multicultural" paradigm that would obscure the structural violence of the settler states we inhabit. We strive to work in relation ourselves across Indigenous and settler divides and in solidarity with Black Canadians. Lou and Maureen would like to thank Suzette Mayr for her contributions to this special issue in its early stages. Her scholarship and her own speculative fiction have explored the relations of race, sexuality, and the myth and horror that simmer under our everyday.

## Decolonial Speculation

Under settler colonialism, the political violence that, in Judith Butler's terms, engages in the "derealization of the 'Other'" (33) is, in more ways than one, aboriginal, always tending to the "elimination of the native" (Wolfe 387). Through doctrines of *terra nullius* and the ideological fantasy of the "vanishing Indian," to say nothing of the gendered legal constructs of "Status" under the Indian Act in the Canadian context, colonial/nation-state violence tends always and perpetually toward the production of the "interminably spectral" (Butler 34), the Indigenous lives that must always be negated, denied in advance and yet which are strangely persistent and thus in need of killing again and again. What better manifestation of this "zombie imperialism" (Byrd 225) than those "paraliterary" (Delany, *Shorter* 188) forms like horror, fantasy, and science fiction, and what better means of reversing course, of imagining resistance, as Mi'kmaw filmmaker Jeff Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* (2019) makes evident? These genres that Amitav Ghosh has recently characterized as "generic out-houses" (24) likewise serve to refigure the lives and histories of those "conscripts of modernity" (Scott) forcibly yoked to the "imperial planetarity" that for Jodi Byrd marks the transformation of European conquest in the direction of Enlightenment "scientific rationalism" and "humanist articulations of freedom, sovereignty, and equality," projects whose coherence depends on the production of "savages" as the "abjected horror" against which the settler-colonial order exerts and defines itself (xx-xxi).

In accounting for the complex intimacies the settler-colonial, liberal-order project has forged in the lands that became Canada, Iyko Day attends to the "triangulated" (19) relationship between settler, immigrant, and Indigenous peoples in an effort to understand how settler colonialism enacts its racializing violence differentially. In her contribution to this issue, Larissa Lai addresses the complexity of her position as the daughter of Hong Kong Chinese who immigrated in the 1960s. Not only does she strive to

"understand what it might mean to be a good un/settler," she addresses her relationship to those whose historical experiences in the settler colony that became Canada are akin to alien invasion or alien abduction by proposing that the relation of Hong Kong Chinese to colonialism makes them "subjects of abandonment," and perhaps also "time travellers" and "spaceport denizens." Importantly, Lai also distinguishes her position, despite the strong connections she feels, from the history of *lo wah kiu* in Canada, thus further complicating the triangle.

Nor is there only one triangle to consider in the North American context. Tuck, Guess, and Sultan (among others) write about the historical antagonisms settler colonialism produced among—while also reproducing these discrete categories—settlers, Indigenes, and Blacks (see also Wilderson; Sexton), in view of settler colonialism's "remaking of land and bodies into property" (3). In fact, these triangulated relationships might better be conceived as a quadrilateral one: comprised of Indigene, settler, immigrant, and *arrivant*, to follow Byrd in her use of Kamau Brathwaite's term for those enslaved by and indentured to settler-colonial endeavours in the Americas. Refusing to be bound by these violent histories, Indigenous, Asian Canadian, and Black Canadian writers, filmmakers, and artists have found in science fiction, fantasy, and horror the tools for a "parallax view" (Byrd riffing on Žižek)—both cosmic distance ladder and political principle—with which to challenge the imperial planetarity that continues to sustain settler-colonial states like Canada and the US.

### The Work of (the) Genre(s)

The potential for reconceiving settler-colonial histories and the current neoliberal-imperial conjuncture that Indigenous and racialized citizen-subjects have found in these "generic out-houses" brings us back, for a moment, to Ghosh's banishment of science fiction, fantasy, and horror to "the humbler dwellings that surround the manor house" of "serious fiction" (24). If these forms have been cast out of serious literary study, they have only flourished in the realms of film, visual culture, and music, often reaching mass appeal as in the case of *Black Panther* (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018) and, on a smaller scale, A Tribe Called Red. The work of genre, though, is not only against the formalization of a literary canon according to exclusionary aesthetic rubrics. The taking up of the paraliterary genres also marks out a critique of temporality and furthers the challenge to Eurochronology posed by the Black and Indigenous intellectual and

creative traditions. As several of our contributors show, sf allows for temporalities, plural, rather than the singular temporality, the "abstract, homogeneous measure of universal movement along a singular axis" that Mark Rifkin characterizes as "settler time" (*Beyond Settler Time* 2). The Indigenous critiques of the Anthropocene that Moritz Ingwersen takes up in "Reclaiming Fossil Ghosts" in this issue can be seen as a fairly direct riposte to settler time, as Ingwersen suggests. The temporal imagination that Black, Indigenous, and other racialized writers bring to their decolonial (re)visions includes the *longue durée* of the Black radical tradition and the Indigenous teachings that ground contemporary resurgence and make the past an imaginative resource in and for the present. These strategies open up new and unanticipated possibilities for social life. As Kara Keeling observes of Black freedom dreams, "the long arc of Black existence contains within it imaginative formulations of 'futures past' that might be accessed now" (35). Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado pays attention, in her contribution, to the way Nalo Hopkinson's *Salt Roads* both reaches back as far as fourth-century Alexandria, and intercuts this time and place with two other historical moments more evidently linked to the Middle Passage in ways that avoid reproducing a linear progress narrative, or what Michelle Wright calls a "Middle Passage epistemology" (5), for understanding Blackness.

If sf is the genre of estrangement, in which technological innovations and futuristic settings defamiliarize the position of the present, then what Indigenous and Afrofuturism represent is an estranged estrangement of the future. If the utopic is the impulse that orients sf writers to the future, as a critique of the present, it follows that these narratives cast from the position of the typically alienated would have a modified impulse. Tom Moylan identified the critical utopia of 1970s feminist sf, but suggests we can also speak of critical dystopia. There is also space to consider how Black, Indigenous, decolonial, postcolonial, and anti-colonial sf think outside the utopic/dystopic. When asked her views on utopia in a 2001 interview, Nalo Hopkinson said, invoking Octavia Butler, "Utopia is dead; dynamic tension reigns" (47).

Dynamic tension is a useful analytic for thinking through the range of speculative fiction subgenres or modes of narrative and meaning making, in relation to each other, such as science fiction, fantasy, horror, and those that slip out and in between such classifications. Perhaps there is no greater tension amongst these as that between science fiction and fantasy. Fantasy is often understood in its non-modified (i.e., Western) iteration as a fundamentally nostalgic or at the very least backward-looking genre more aligned with the

"once upon a time" of fairytale. Science fiction, as Samuel Delany emphasizes in his essay "The Necessity of Tomorrows," is fundamentally about the future, not as a metaphor for the present but for the exploration of all that is foreclosed and immanent (13). Delany stresses that all literatures, mundane or queer, are also genres of reading. That is, each genre is not just a mode of representation but a mode of interpretation. The ways in which each genre references this or another world prompts not only different questions but different *kinds* of questions. There is a spatial sense to this questioning and this generic difference. Fantasy situates narratives in timeless or ancient geographies while science fiction looks to "new worlds" such as outer space or to futures transformed by so-called advanced technology, both tendencies can be articulated through colonial logics but in diverging temporal trajectories. Indigenous and Afrofuturist genre fiction, however, might indicate a smudging of these differences. For instance, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000) describes a "Caribbeanpunk" extraterrestrial twin planet system in which cyborgs understand the alternate "indigenous" dimension partly in terms of Taino oral stories. Interestingly, in her work on Nalo Hopkinson, Grace Dillon points to how the figure of the Indian has in itself been utilized to limn the generic boundaries between fantasy and sf (23). The distinction is framed by Fredric Jameson by reference to the "thinking of Indians" (61)—his spin on Lévi-Strauss' theorizing of *la pensée sauvage*—in a manner that is revealing and revealed here. If, in the Western idiom, science fiction can be distinguished from fantasy by the presence of technology in the former and magic in the latter, how might non-Western forms of science fiction and fantasy disrupt these normative dichotomies?

Other genres are not so much speculative as ruminative. Horror is a genre typically associated with monsters, hauntings, and murder—qualities making it, in Byrd's view, the defining genre of the new world which, when taken up by Indigenous authors, is written by those who are supposed to be ghosts. As Eve Tuck and C. Ree put it, "Settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation" (642). To put it slightly differently, settler colonialism is itself a type of horror, and is imagined in those terms in Indigenous fiction, film, and visual art—Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013), Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000), and Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler's *Wrist* (2016) (one of the works Ingwersen takes up) are key instances. "Haunting," Tuck and Ree continue, "is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by

settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation" (642). Despite the constitutively different racializing of Black bodies in the Americas (Wolfe 387), for African Americans and African Canadians, too, "horror is not a genre, but a structuring paradigm" (Poll 70). While often those structuring horrors are presented in realist narrative forms, Esi Edugyan's recourse to a kind of haunted house and gothic doubles in *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), a novel about the contested relationship to prairie land of both Black pioneers and recent Ghanaian immigrants, and David Chariandy's use of the figure of the soucouyant to link Afro-Caribbean history and anti-Black racism in Canada in his first novel, *Soucouyant* (2007), suggest that Black Canadian writers, too, are invested in using the genre to critique the structuring paradigms.

George Elliott Clarke contributes a different perspective to matters of the mysterious by tracking the occultist thinking that inspires Afrocentric revisionist histories, such as work by Charles R. Saunders and Frank Yerby whose speculative historical works "produce Africas (plural) that contest (via marginalization) Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman conceptions of black people." The occult, he reminds us, is not just an invocation of magic but also refers to hidden knowledge transmitted surreptitiously—and also obscured by malicious intent.

The temporal transformations and reorientations of the decolonial visions discussed here and throughout the issue are integral to orientation to space and place. These genres effectively make geographic revisions possible. What Afrofuturism, Indigenous futurism, and Asian futurism "all highlight," Aimee Bahng points out, are "modes of exchange that move beyond national cultural traditions" (8). In this sense, she argues, speculative fiction is to be regarded as "a transnational counterpoetics" (8). Several of the works our contributors take up may be read in this light.

## Planetary Futures

If, as Glen Coulthard has asserted, "[f]or Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die" ("For Our Nations"), what does this say about what it takes for the planet to live? As those familiar with *The Great Derangement*[1] will know, Ghosh's larger purpose is to call for a (re)new(ed) realism capable of imaginatively confronting the climate crisis—a crisis that, in his view, has not been accorded a sustained treatment in "serious" fiction because realism does not easily accommodate the improbable and the extraordinary, so focused as it has tended to be, since the late eighteenth century, on the

ordinary and the everyday. Yet, the extraordinary and improbable—the states of exception—*are* everyday realities for those perpetually thrust out or onto the margins of liberal-order settler states. The extraordinary facts of climate crisis and the exceptional lives of the colonized and the marginalized in settler states feature explicitly in the speculative fictions of the Indigenous writers Moritz Ingwersen takes up. Omar El Akkad's debut novel *American War* not only addresses the extraordinary violence the climate emergency is likely to unleash, it also extrapolates from our present moment the probable, if also exceptional, events that refugee crises precipitate. These questions are taken up as well in his conversation with Phanuel Antwi and Y-Dang Troeung in this issue. In the hands of Indigenous, Black Canadian, and racialized immigrant artists (identities not always so easily unentangled), the genres that better accommodate the extraordinary, then, become not a means of escaping the real so much as a new literary locus for the work of serious fiction. It is in this spirit that Jordan Peele, director of *Get Out* (2017), has characterized his film as "a documentary." Similarly, Jeff Barnaby attests that *Blood Quantum* (2019) is equally informed by *Night of the Living Dead* (dir. George Romero, 1968) and *Incident at Restigouche* (dir. Alanis Obomsawin, 1984).

Decolonial visions are capable of an oppositional production of the planetary. This involves, as we have traced in this introduction, transformations of space and time. The generic modes of science fiction, horror, and fantasy are modes of speculation paradoxically beholden to the profit-driven publishing market while straining to imagine worlds built outside capitalist accumulation and colonialism. This is sf's distinction from the work of financial speculation driven by opening and gaming more markets. Whether through the register of haunting, revised history, or futurism, decolonial genre fictions are narratives against the destruction of so-called progress, what Julie Livingston calls "self-devouring growth." Black radical traditions, past and present, and Indigenous struggles against the settler state and creative practices of resurgence offer instances of the kind of radical imagination that decolonial speculative fiction takes up alongside its engagement with the outsized realities of current crises. The "radical imagination," Kara Keeling argues, "works with and through what exists in order to call forth something presently absent: a new relationship between and within matter" (34). This "calling forth" of the "not-yet" is the futurism of the radical imagination, and decolonial science fiction, fantasy, and horror are some of the modes for doing this imaginative work.

NOTE

1 For Canadians, Ghosh's title has a resonance with colonial struggles that Ghosh seems unaware of, but which is felicitous for our purposes in this issue.

WORKS CITED


Bahng, Aimee. *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times.* Duke UP, 2018.

Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Duke UP, 2005.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2004.

Byrd, Jodi. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. U of Minnesota P, 2011.

Chariandy, David. *Soucouyant.* Arsenal Pulp, 2007.

Coulthard, Glen S. "For Our Nations to Live, Capitalism Must Die." *Unsettling America: Decolonization in Theory and Practice*, 5 Nov. 2013, unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/2013/11/05/for-our-nations-to-live-capitalism-must-die/. Accessed 9 Mar. 2020.

—. "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2007, pp. 437-60.

Day, Iyko. *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism*. Duke UP, 2016.

Delany, Samuel R. "The Necessity of Tomorrows." *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*, Wesleyan UP, 2012, pp. 1-14.

—. *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary*. Wesleyan UP, 1999.

Dillon, Grace. "Indigenous Scientific Literacies in Nalo Hopkinson's Ceremonial Worlds." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2007, pp. 23-41.

Edugyan, Esi. *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*. Knopf, 2004.

Eshun, Kodwo. "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism." *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, pp. 287-302.

Gallagher, Catherine. "The Rise of Fictionality." *The Novel, Volume I: History, Geography, and Culture*, edited by Franco Moretti, Princeton UP, 2006, pp. 336-63.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. U of Minnesota P, 2016.

Haiven, Max. "Finance as Capital's Imagination? Reimagining Value and Culture in an Age of Fictitious Capital and Crisis." *Social Text*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2011, pp. 93-124.

Hopkinson, Nalo. "A Dialogue on SF and Utopian Fiction, between Nalo Hopkinson and Elisabeth Vonarburg." Edited by Jennifer Burwell and Nancy Johnston, *Foundation*, no. 81, 2001, pp. 40-48.

—. *Midnight Robber*. Grand Central, 2000.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005.

Keeling, Kara. *Queer Times, Black Futures*. New York UP, 2019.

Livingston, Julie. *Self-Devouring Growth: A Planetary Parable as Told from Southern Africa*. Duke UP, 2019.

Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Westview, 2000.

Nyong'o, Tavia. *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life*. New York UP, 2019.

Poll, Ryan. "Can One *Get Out*? The Aesthetics of Afro-Pessimism." *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2018, pp. 69-102.
Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Wesleyan UP, 2008.
Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke UP, 2017.
—. *Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*. Duke UP, 2019.
Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Duke UP, 2004.
Sexton, Jared. "The *Vel* of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign." *Critical Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2016, pp. 583-97.
Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, Rinaldo Walcott, and Glen Coulthard. "Idle No More and Black Lives Matter: An Exchange (Panel Discussion)." *Studies in Social Justice*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 75-89.
Tuck, Eve, Allison Guess, and Hannah Sultan. "Not Nowhere: Collaborating on Selfsame Land." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 26 June 2014, pp. 1-11, decolonization.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/notnowhere-pdf.pdf. Accessed 28 Apr. 2020.
Tuck, Eve, and C. Ree. "A Glossary of Haunting." *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, Left Coast, 2013, pp. 639-58.
Wilderson III, Frank B. *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms*. Duke UP, 2010.
Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387-409.
Wright, Michelle. *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. U of Minnesota P, 2015.
Žižek, Slavoj. *The Parallax View*. MIT P, 2009.

Lauren Nerfa

# Gift

If I could nourish an orb of sun in my hands,
not only my words,
the rays that strike the golden curls of a cherub and gleam;
if I could capture the squeal of a child in bliss,
carefree nothingness
and forever,
eternally echoing in a conch shell;
if I could bottle the perfume of the first bloom of spring,
birth in a scent
sweetness, potent as a kiss;
if I could harness the quenching of water,
cleansing
visceral
sustenance,
life's vital source;
if these I could make material and gift to you,
wrapped in the gauze of my soul,
expecting no reciprocity
I would,
knowing only
that when I searched your eyes
you would know.

Larissa Lai

# Familiarizing Grist Village

## Why I Write Speculative Fiction[1]

Born in California and raised in Newfoundland, I am a second-generation Hong Kong Chinese person living on Treaty 7 Territory, having spent most of my adult life on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territories. It is an honour to be part of a special issue on decolonization and speculative fiction emerging from these spaces. As a person whose family left the British colony of Hong Kong in the early 1960s, and decided to emigrate permanently in the wake of the 1967 riots, fearing the ideological spread of forces driving the Cultural Revolution and the possibility of violence like that of the Vietnam War emerging in other parts of Asia, and partly in search of a better life, I am still trying to understand what it means to be a good un/settler and build better relations both through and beyond the Canadian state. I am particularly interested in Black, Indigenous, and Asian understandings of land beyond property and of time beyond the linear time of Western progress.[2] I am interested in histories of Asian movement—especially movements via indentureship and movements of Asian capital, and how those relate to histories of Black and Indigenous movement. I am also interested in the relationships among story, history, and sense of being in the world. My work since the early 1990s has been about re-centring my own experience, though it has taken quite a different trajectory from that of my elders and peers.

Figured in the popular imagination as a crossroad between East and West, Hong Kong is a place in which concepts of the political left and the political right don't hold, or at least don't work in the same way that they do in North America and Europe. It was invaded by the Japanese (as an Axis power)

during World War II because it was a British colony (and thus affiliated with Allied forces). The invasion was also part of the Japanese imperial agenda to unify Asia under the so-called Great East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere, an anti-colonial ideal that devolved into genocidal practice. Hong Kong was embargoed by the US (1950-1957)[3] during the Korean War for being too close to the People's Republic of China (or more specifically, to choke off the PRC economy). These embargoes caused widespread poverty, starvation, and hardship among people who were not the target of the embargo, but were British colonial subjects, and thus not of interest to the targeted PRC either. Canada also closed off relations with the PRC in 1951 because of its commitments to the United Nations during the Korean War.[4] While many of Hong Kong's subjects, including my parents, were educated in the British colonial system and democratic ideals, Hong Kong is not, and never has been, a democracy. Largely abandoned by Britain after the so-called "return" to China in 1997, the notion of "one country, two systems" is now under threat, most recently through the fallout from a proposed extradition law that would enable the PRC to extradite whomever they wish from Hong Kong on real or trumped-up charges to the PRC for arbitrary detainment and unjust trial.[5] Though there were people living in Hong Kong at the time of British occupation, including my great-grandmother, a Hakka woman[6] from Wong Nei Chung Village in Happy Valley, most Hong Kong people are descended from people who migrated there after the start of British occupation (1841) and its ninety-nine-year lease on the New Territories (which began in 1898), including many of my other predecessors. In the terms of this special issue, we are thus neither "alien-abductees" nor exactly subjects of "alien invasion."[7] Psycho-socially we are perhaps best described as subjects of abandonment. (I remember once my grandmother carrying a particularly heavy purse on a hot day in Hong Kong's Central District. I asked her if she'd like me to carry it for her. "No way," she said. I said, "Why not? It looks so heavy." She said, "I'm afraid you'll abandon me and leave me with nothing." When I read the story of Quy (about a young boy who is accidentally lost while boarding a crowded boat, as his family flees war-torn Vietnam) in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*, I am reminded of a similar story my mother told me, about a time as a child when her father took her to Central for an outing. He ran into an old friend and they started talking, and somehow he let go of her hand. She was swept up in the crowd and lost. He spent hours and hours looking for her. Finally, he found her and took her home, but those hours of being lost and abandoned are retained to

this day as a traumatic memory. Unlike Quy, she was lost for hours rather than years. But beneath these related stories lies a related fear. I wonder how many Hong Kong people have stories like this? Or Southeast Asian people more generally?)

Set up by a treaty demanded by the British after they won the Opium War for the express purpose of trade, punished by Japan and China for its Western affiliations, starved by the West for its communist affiliations, and generally abandoned by its father and master figures, is it any wonder that Hong Kong embraced capital as its source of power? It has played a major part in the neoliberal shift of the millennium's turn. Now, as a triumphal China[8] rises and populist movements around the globe turn also to vicious forms of nationalism, what will happen to Hong Kong, a city without a national origin, one whose legal status has shifted radically over the course of the past 150 years, but one that nonetheless understands itself as peopled and as inhabited?

Within contemporary configurations of what we used to call cultural race politics,[9] to be that kind of Asian called Hong Kong Chinese is fraught. There are two representational tasks that need to be accomplished. The first is to undo the racist stereotypes that have been made of us in colonial and imperial contexts. The second is to make better representations from our own subject locations. Here, I want to make a distinction between the kinds of self-troping that BIPOC writers do on their own behalves in order to self-represent, and the kinds of racist troping that mainstream speculative fiction does to mark us as other. In terms of racist troping, though the opium trade was something enforced by the colonial British, the associations of vice, infiltration, disease, and perverse sexuality have stuck to Hong Kong Chinese and Asians more broadly as a consequence of this history, and been played out in such figures as Fu Manchu or (tongue-in-cheek) The Mandarin in *Iron Man 3*, as noted by David Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta Niu in *Techno-Orientalism*. More broadly, Asians continue to be figured as all alike, as irredeemably collective, and as a horde, if one thinks, for instance, of the Borg in *Star Trek*. (Interestingly, the word "horde" is Turkic/Uighur in origin, appearing first in 1555 according to the *OED*, which specifies a horde as "[a] tribe or troop of Tartar or kindred Asiatic nomads, dwelling in tents or wagons, and migrating from place to place for pasturage, or for war or plunder." The notion thus rises long before the communist liberation, and may be associated with Mongol rule and expansion through Asia and Europe in the thirteenth century).

Through a range of developments in cyberpunk from the 1980s onward, Asians have been figured as machines, insects, robots, cyborgs—differently depending on nationality, but nonetheless generally nonhuman. I distinguish the racist figurations of Asians in speculative fiction from the work of re-subjectivation in which racialized people reclaim or remake racist stereotypes for the purposes of self-empowerment. The latter is a project that's been important to me since I started writing, along with a project of making my own "insurgent genealogy"[10] by reclaiming those aspects of Chinese culture that empower women, support good relationships with others, embrace earth and the forces of life, and hold up the imagination. My speculative fiction practice combines the work of re-subjectivation with the work of insurgent genealogy. As such, the work is not so much purely oppositional as it is a kind of hybrid genealogical/oppositional/imaginative outward petalling, full of possibilities for rupture or emergence.

In this regard, I'm interested in self-troping as a form of empowerment, albeit empowerment that is always fraught in historically-specific and embodied ways. For surely we want to do more than self-represent; we want to engage those self-representations to talk about relationships, complications, and contradictions in our lives. I'm also interested in that moment in my own speculative fictions when the speculative fiction metaphor I've set up breaks down, and the story has to address the problems attached to the representation rather than the represented.

With regards to productive self-tropings, I learned much, for instance, from Octavia Butler writing Lilith Iyapo in *Dawn* as an alien abductee as her way (in that book at least) of addressing the history of Black abductions into slavery. The three-part *Xenogenesis* series, of which *Dawn* is the first, is an exploration of this metaphor.[11] I think too of Ndedi Okorafor figuring the people of Lagos as subjects of alien invasion, where the aliens are a metaphor for European colonizers. This is a trope that Indigenous speculative fiction writers take up as well, to address the long, genocidal history of European colonization in the Americas. In this regard, I think of the title story in Drew Hayden Taylor's *Take Us to Your Chief. Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction*, edited by Isiah Lavender III, offers a set of critiques on "how racial identity inflects or challenges conventional narrative expectations" (6).

If brand new representations are never really possible linear history (because we are all subjects of it), then the project is always one of reclamation—of refiguring the tropes to serve other purposes: centring

one's people, silence-breaking, hero-making, or articulating the complexities and ambivalences of one's place in the world. But if we can break the hold of "History as a virus" then newness is moot, and we can keep coming back—for better or worse. Recognizing, obviously, that racial designations and refigurations, reclaimed or not, are complex, unstable, contradictory, imperfect, multiple, and ever-changing, I ask how might so-called Asians—Hong Kong Chinese in particular—be figured? As time travellers, perhaps, since we have never been the protagonists of capital "H" history? As astronauts jettisoned to the vacuum of space? Certainly, Hong Kong people have also been subjected to alien invasion. Insofar as Hong Kong has remained staunchly, or some might say rabidly, capitalist in the wake of being denied democracy, we might be figured as zombie or vampire, but if so, we were born bitten. As I said above, the city comes into being as a consequence of the Opium War, expressly for the purposes of trade. Could Hong Kong be figured a spaceport for denizens of the Mos Eisley Cantina (*Star Wars*) type?

To be clear, however, I did not think of the denizens of Saltwater City or Grist Village as Hong Kong Chinese when I began *The Tiger Flu*, since that identity is only one of many I carry, only one of many that interest me. (For readers who are interested, *The Tiger Flu* is a novel about a disease that affects men more acutely than women, a technology that cures the mind of the body, and two young women who have lost their families and are seeking ways to survive and rebuild the world in the aftermath of devastation. The world they rebuild, needless to say, is a radically different world from the one that was devastated.) Rather, I offer these thoughts on possible tropings of Hong Kong Chinese and Asians more generally as a way to connect my own preoccupations with the important work of this special issue. For indeed, my identities are multiple (as, I'm sure, are those of many contributors): I also identify as Asian, Chinese, Hakka, Canadian, American, Newfoundlander, British Columbian, Albertan, queer, lesbian, straight, woman, middle-class, intellectual, creative, human, animal, bacterial/cyborg assemblage, and many other things besides. But I came of age as a writer in the 1980s and 1990s and thus carry a poststructural inheritance that is generally suspicious of identity as essence. I understand identity, rather, as a sedimentation of historical practices and performances with real material consequences, but nevertheless as always in flux and thus open to difference within itself as well as to change through further practice and/or performance over time. Those real material consequences mean that I don't discard nationalist or sovereigntist movements out of hand—they remain

extremely important to me, though often in fraught ways. In this moment of intense political polarization, however, it is less fashionable to claim fluid or contradictory identities. Nevertheless, I must assert my own as always multiple and watery.[12] It is all the more important to do so, perhaps, *because* it is unfashionable.

Further, my relations with others are not caught up in a purely Asian/White binary. I've been committed from the start of my writing life to the making, building, and inhabiting of community across a broad and ever-evolving set of national, cultural, reclaimed-racial, gendered, classed, and sexuality divides. For certain, these have shifted with the time, in conversation with friends, colleagues, students, and other interlocutors, and in relation to turns in my own intellectual and creative work.

This is one set of reasons why the malleability of metaphor is interesting to me, and why novels are (for me) better than identity cards. It is also why speculative fiction novels are (for me) better, or at least more productive, than realist novels. One of the reasons I write speculative fiction is to slip the noose of a single identification or a single set of relationships, and through the work of allegory, metaphor, and analogy comment on and play through the intersections, interactions, constant alterations, and layerings of multiple ways of being with others in the world and out of it. However, as much as I embrace those moments when figure and identity coincide, I embrace more deeply those moments when the correspondence collapses and the figure takes on manifestations all its own, beyond the bounds of identity altogether. That, for me, is when speculative fiction really takes off. In such instances, it might show us routes out of the histories of oppression we inherit. Or it might offer not a linear pathway, but a rupture into another time and space where we can be if not free then at least different.

In this essay, I'll explain why I write speculative as opposed to realist fiction, what I think it does culturally and politically, and its relationship to the community-based work that I am also committed to. Along the way, I will discuss a few other things of interest to our contemporary moment: silence-breaking, metaphor, analogy, utopia, relationality, and literary experiments.

Let me start by saying that the impulse to write speculatively precedes my thinking on why it's productive or interesting. It might be because of all the science fiction I read as a nerdy Asian kid growing up in St. John's, Newfoundland. It might be because my mother, like her father before her, is a whimsical and playful person who gave me all manner of folk and fairy tales to read from a very young age. My parents were scholarship kids from

struggling families who left Hong Kong, before it got rich, to go to school in England and America, and decided in the thick of the Vietnam War, the Cultural Revolution in China, and the 1967 riots in Hong Kong, having already survived the Japanese Occupation and the American embargoes during the Korean war, to try to make a life abroad. I'm not, as many allies imagine me, a *lo wah kiu*[13] descendent, though I still understand myself as an inheritor of the histories of the Head Tax and the Exclusion Act, and of Chinese labour on the railways and in mining, as well as in laundries, corner stores, and restaurants. I feel a strong connection and responsibility to and for those histories.

But as a young child, I hadn't yet figured any of this out. I was drawn to what I was drawn to, from amongst the things I was given. The writers I loved as a kid were Andrew Lang, Oscar Wilde, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Madeleine L'Engle. While other kids at my high school were reading *Sweet Valley High* and *Flowers in the Attic*, I kept reading folk and fairy tales, until I discovered Frank Herbert (*Dune*), Ray Bradbury (*The Martian Chronicles*), and Ursula Le Guin (*The Left Hand of Darkness*). A little later I discovered Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber*, *Nights at the Circus*), Jeanette Winterson (*The Passion*), and Monique Wittig (*Les Guérillères*).

In my twenties, the cultural race politics of the late 1980s and 1990s sent me in other directions—towards some of the writers you might expect: Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Lee Maracle, Maxine Hong Kingston, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, of course, but also to weird forms of nineteenth-century anthropology and folklore to try to find my roots and routes. The two great discoveries of that moment for me were an obscure Dutch sinologist named Robert van Gulik who wrote sinological sexology—and thus wrote about women and "sexual minorities"—and Pu Songling, a seventeenth-century Chinese collector of tales. My grandmother, who spent most of her life in Hong Kong, was by then living in Victoria, BC. She wasn't interested in telling stories of the past. When I asked her she would say: "I was so unhappy then, I happy now—now that I have you. Why would I want to remember?" My desires to know were then, and probably still are, very second-generation desires, having not lived through the bloodiest horrors of the past. Because the older generation did not want to talk, I dug, and made my history from a very disparate archive and the work of a lot of imagination. My first novel, *When Fox Is a Thousand*, published by Press Gang in 1995, was the messy, but, I hope, interesting, result of this activity. It seemed, at the time, a natural place to start.

After its publication—more successful than I'd ever dreamt—I very much felt the pressure to produce a second book. I felt this acutely and painfully. I was subject to a lot of interest, both wanted and unwanted, which sometimes felt more like scrutiny. Advice from many mainstream publishing quarters, including agents and publishing houses, was that a memoir would be a great thing, but if not a memoir, at least realist fiction with a single protagonist and one continuous storyline. This was the requisite form for a young writer hoping for fame and fortune.

The desire for memoir on the part of the industry makes me antsy. I feel commodified and coerced by it, as though I'm being told that my body and the safe, and thus relatively dull, life that my immigrant parents struggled so hard to create for me are more interesting than my storytelling ability, my interests, my facility with language, my creativity, or my imagination—the things they fought for me to have. China and Chinese people have long been objects of Western curiosity. It's not a curiosity I'm interested in satisfying. Though I turn to the anthropologists for knowledge of my past, I retain a healthy suspicion of them. I dread the thought that audiences might not hear language as made, and instead might see memoir as some kind of proof of my being. Further, I didn't—and don't—wish for that kind of attention. I recall very clearly a day in the early 1990s, walking down Pender Street in Vancouver after one of my first literary readings at the Chinese Cultural Centre, being approached on the street by an audience member who couldn't tell me apart from another Chinese Canadian woman writer who had read from her work in the same group reading. This person came up, patted me on the back, and said, "Poor dear, that you should have had to endure such things." While the other Chinese Canadian woman writer had indeed endured some terrible things in her life, it troubled me first of all that she—a smart, creative person—should be the object of pity like that, and secondly, that I should be mistaken for her as though two Chinese women couldn't have led two very different lives. (My interest in clones stems from this problem in part—it is my uptake and working through of the racist notion that all Asians look alike.) There's a fine line, clearly, between respecting another Chinese Canadian woman writer for engaging a practice that she chooses, and not choosing it for myself. If David Mitchell can exist in the same world as Joan Didion, why can't I exist in the same world as Wayson Choy? To be clear, I do respect writers who wish to write the self in a realist vein, who need to break silence for important reasons—social, political, or creative. What I would like is to be valued as deeply by the culture at

large for choosing a different path. For the record, this is not the way the global publishing industry worked thirty years ago, and for the most part is still not the way it works, the hard-earned success of Liu Cixin and Ken Liu notwithstanding. This is something that, in the second half of my first century alive, I have accepted and agree to work with.

Because, of course, the flip side may be my own overweening sense of pride. I come from a culture in which the question of face matters a great deal. Even as a multiply displaced post post modern queer asian jook sing female writer, I carry that. I don't want to shame my family by telling intimate stories of their lives in ways that can be identified. Especially if they don't want their stories told. My family loves me, did their best to raise me well, and are essentially good, kind, hardworking people. Why would I want to put them in positions they don't wish to be placed in? Particularly as I come from a culture that—broadly and stereotypically speaking—values family at least as much as the individual. Further, I recognize that this valuing of the individual that drives so much of our progressive culture emerges from a European Enlightenment tradition that was and continues to be deployed in the colonies and neocolonies to claim European superiority. Which, again to be clear, does not make individualism bad, it just makes it historically and politically specific in ways we need to be cognizant of.

I know the late Wayson Choy grappled with this, recognizing his own work as "telling the secrets of Chinatown." Of course, the idea of Chinatown as a place of secrets is a racist construction in the first place, as I know he was aware. I know he had his tongue firmly planted in his cheek when he spoke of the secrets of Chinatown. One bears a certain responsibility to one's community: to break with that responsibility might be an act of bravery—or it might not. It might simply be a betrayal of those who have loved and nurtured you in the best ways they know how. Where the line lies in practice, and how to tell where it lies, is a matter of art, of risk, of communication, of balance, and perhaps ultimately of failure. The value of silence-breaking has become complicated. It depends on what kind of silence, when, and how. Sometimes silence must be broken and sometimes it must be kept. The important questions seem to be: Who is protected? Who is exposed? Who is shamed? Is the risk or inevitability of one's own shame worth the social gains that are possible? How can you know 'til you've done it? There are many acts of judgment that must be engaged, and it's in the complicated weighing of judgment that the "poethics" lies. We must embrace a certain "poethical wager," to quote the poet/critic Joan Retallack, and "do our utmost

to understand our contemporary position and then act on the chance that our work may be at least as effective . . . [as any intervention in] . . . the intertwining trajectories of pattern and chance" (46).

As we are discovering anew in the #MeToo moment: to break the silence about an act of violence against one's body by someone more powerful than you can be an act of bravery, but the cost can be tremendous. We hope that a collective breaking of silence will bring about justice and a safer world. That would be ideal. But in fact, this is not an outcome that is guaranteed. We are so steeped, even as a secular society, in a Judeo-Christian calculus that says the good should be rewarded and the bad should be punished. There's nothing wrong with thinking this, except that sometimes it prevents us from fully seeing the messy ways in which life flows and ideals and actions interact, producing unexpected results. Again, to be very clear, of course it makes sense to judge sexual abuse as bad. That's a no-brainer. But we see that perpetrators are not always punished. And even if punishment does come about, the question of what punishments are ideal remains a matter of much debate. We might even ask whether punishment is the thing to want in the first instance? And there are even messier questions: What exactly happened in any particular case? How can we find out? What is a good process? Whose story should we believe? What has transpired in the space between the thing that happened and the stories that were told? How should we understand the gender of the teller? How should we understand the power relations that are unfolding in the tellings? Who is listening? Who is receiving example and what example is being received?

Of course, if we choose to do so, we can tell our stories about it, as many people have been doing. I do think this is productive and necessary. I also worry about what will happen to already vulnerable people. I worry about ongoing injustice for those who disclose because I witness it daily. My own minor disclosures have largely resulted in shutdown, slander, and a deepening of already existing racial marking. All stories have consequences.

Here's where I think there is power and possibility in speculative fiction if only readers and industries can trust the storytelling abilities of marginalized people. Ursula Le Guin calls speculative fiction "thought experiment." She likes to set up whole worlds, often not so unlike our own, but always with a twist that comes from her imagination. She plays the twist out in the story to see what transpires. This is an incredibly useful tactic, I would argue, for those writing from marginalized positions. I too engage in speculative fiction world-alteration of the kind Le Guin describes. For me, there is also the

work of certain figures of speech, sometimes metaphor, sometimes conceit, sometimes analogy—the figures get a little loose or they overlap and dovetail one another. The thought experiment allows us to get at real-world problems and their interactions without having to live through the messy pain of them. The thought experiment can keep us if not *safe*, then at least *safer* from attack while still giving us the opportunity to work out and think or dream through what we need to think or dream through.

Another really hard thing to talk about in my world is lateral violence. I hope I've never actively perpetrated it. There are structural ways in which I can't avoid it, and must take responsibility for it. I know I've been the object of it. But to break that silence could do massive damage to communities I love and care about profoundly. When the personal gets conflated through racial mechanisms with the collective, no hand laundry has the labour power vast enough to clean off the dirt, especially when we are already carrying the vast burdens we carry. Here, the thought experiment is a productive way of bringing the discussion to the table without pointing fingers and without exposing the human flaws of the already vulnerable to the powers that be.

In the world of my most recent novel, *The Tiger Flu*, the Grist sisters are not exactly a community of feminists, lesbians, Asian women, or queers. They are not exactly Asian diaspora, or people of colour. They are a community of clones with capacities for self-reproduction, without the assistance of men. And yet there is something of all of those things in them. Sometimes they might appear as metaphorical for feminist community. Sometimes they might appear as analogical for Asian Canadians or queer women of colour. Something of the work of estrangement, or what the speculative fiction critic Darko Suvin calls "defamiliarization," is possible through them, in the sense that the philosopher Ernst Bloch describes: "[I]nsight into what is closest to the beholder grows out of his [*sic*] amazement at being confronted with what is farthest away" (124). I would suggest that this way of communicating is particularly productive for marginalized people carrying both double-consciousness and traumatic repression. If we have ways of knowing that carry the knowledge of the colonizer and its reverse, and if we carry secrets with or without express content, sometimes the only way to get at the story is through estrangement. Estrangement is a positive form that can draw out whatever it is that has been encrypted in the psyche—buried experience without articulation—though only ever in part. Unlike the Blochian kind of estrangement, my kind of estrangement doesn't always present itself as analogy or metaphor. Metaphor cannot directly

reference known historical truth if the truth is not known. My grandmother's not wanting to talk is my grandmother's not wanting to talk. There are no secrets in Chinatown. And yet, the work of estrangement can draw up buried truths we might not access any other way. Though it should not be overemphasized, there may be something of a culturally specific habit at work here as well—that is a habit of indirection.

There are so many stories in the historical record of Chinese generals or concubines tortured and executed for the smallest of slights, like wearing clothes of the wrong colour and getting read by the emperor as disloyal. Traditionally speaking, to be too direct—to make one's meaning too clear—can cause offence. If one speaks in such a way that multiple meanings are possible, one leaves one's interlocutor free to choose the interpretation that will least offend them. And if they, in turn, are gracious, they will choose the most inoffensive as opposed to the most offensive interpretation, or somewhere in between according to context and affective flow. Alternately, they might choose the most offensive interpretation as an assertion of power. Or they might choose the interpretation that truly fits their own sense of what they have done as a matter of honour. The conclusion is drawn relationally and collaboratively. So there is something of a cultural habit at work in my translation of the literary experiment to serve my own cultural and material needs.

The Grist sisters (in other words, the clone sisters of *The Tiger Flu*) are, after all that, partially metaphorical for progressive communities in the world as it is. Like many of us, they hold co-operation as an ideal but they struggle to practise it. They must co-operate in order to survive, but it is hard because they have egos and desires. (If I were really speculative, I might dream the ego away, but that's a project for later, when I'm really wise! Also, I feel it's important for Asian women to assert ego, in the first place to counter the stereotype of Asian women as passive and compliant, in the second to counter the stereotype of Asians generally as a horde, and in the third because many of us have exciting thoughts, ideas, and stories to share that come from our imaginations in their specificity.) One of my two protagonists, Kirilow Groundsel, is cranky and proud. Worse than that, she favours her lover Peristrophe Halliana over the other sisters in the Grist, especially over Auntie Radix Bupleuri, in spite of the fact that Auntie Radix holds the key to the sisterhood's survival—that is, the capacity to reproduce. The reason the Grist sisters do not provide a seamless analogy to any actually existing community is that the embodied forms my Grist

sisters take are very particular. Because their bodies are not exactly like ours, the needs and desires that proceed from them are different. Auntie Radix is a parthenogene, that is, capable of self-reproduction. It's no mistake that the word "parthenogenic" references the Greek goddess Athena, born in a fit of inspiration from the head of her father Zeus. She's the goddess of thought—or one might argue the "thought experiment" in precisely the way Le Guin means. As a self-reproducing woman, Auntie Radix does not have the same kinds of needs that ordinary heterosexual women in our world have. She has no need for men. And in the world of Grist Village, there are no men, so there is no point desiring them either. It would be possible to reintroduce them, though this would be a major disruption of the village as all Grist sisters are clones of the same woman. The analogies of Grist sisters to progressive communities, Asian women, or lesbian separatists go only so far. I suggest that these are at their most interesting precisely when they break down.

Though the analogies break down, they do still exist. Through the analogy to lesbian separatists, there's a nod to Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, a novel about four versions of the same woman inhabiting four different worlds. Through the figure of the clone, there's also a nod to Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and the Michael Bay film *The Island*. Further, the novel is a continuation of my own interest in the figure of the clone begun in my second novel, *Salt Fish Girl*.

The Grist sisters have things in common with other speculative societies too. Like the Amazons of Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, they are isolated and a little strange (an analogical nod to lesbian separatism, again). Like the Oankali of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* series, they have their own biology and so are in need of their own medicine. (Butler's work is extraordinary for its analogical thought on racial mixing. I don't presume to even touch her hem in this regard. I am, however, interested in Traditional Chinese Medicine, its ways of thinking about the body/mind, and how it differs from Western medical and philosophical thought on the body and mind.) There's a nod too to Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which proposes a society without the sexes except in times of reproduction. (If we are all women in Grist Village, do we have a sex at all? Or is sex, even at the biological level, always already relational?) Through these connections, *The Tiger Flu* enters a conversation with those who have gone before.

As in the work of these predecessors, identification is still the point. If readers didn't identify with the characters in the novel at some level, why

would they read it at all? Identification is still the power and challenge of the novel as a form—it partakes of the production of the self. Our historical moment seems to need this more than ever, which is another reason why I do it. However, rather than starting with familiar forms like Asian Canadian or feminist or queer as the industry seems to want, I start with unfamiliar ones in order to get out of the traps of overdetermination—in other words, to get out of the trap of all the cultural expectation and overloading that accompanies such terms. In not contending with them at the outset, I get to shunt aside at least for a moment the dialectical push and pull they carry with them—I don't have to break stereotypes in order to remake them according to some perception of the truth of Asian Canadian being; rather, I can start at depth, in the midst of a complexity with its own logic to work through. And if identification happens along the way, which it always does, then that's—well—fabulous.

I want to suggest that speculative fiction can also be relationally productive. I need to be very clear that it is not so by definition. Our Mother only knows the long history of exoticization as well as colonial and neocolonial objectification that has occurred under the speculative fiction umbrella.[14] And yet, imagined the right way, it allows the writer to play out relationships as literary experiment without making representations of "real world" others whom one might, poethically speaking, not wish which to speak for. I can think about my relationship across a divide without claiming a masterful knowledge of the other. If that other is not "real world" historically determined, then I'm not wading through stereotypes and misapprehensions in order to reach them. There are further problems here, though, insofar as one doesn't want to be so completely ahistorical as to lift oneself entirely from the world as it is. It is, in fact, important for me to retain connection to communities in the "real world." So the Grist sisters are descended from a fictional Asian woman rooted in real Asian histories. Within the world of the novel, this great-grandmother's DNA was appropriated by the clone company Jemini in approximately our historical present imagined as such. In the novel there is also a location called "the Coast Salish Timeplace," a site that acknowledges contemporary Indigenous sovereignty movements. There is also a place called "Cosmopolitan Earth," a slightly fraught location nominally run by Secwepemc leaders but impinged upon by a newly imperial China. This is, I hope, a respectful nod to political conditions of the present as they actually are, an acknowledgement that they exist and that they don't resolve easily.[15]

Here, I want to say something about utopianism, recognizing the word "utopia," coined by Sir Thomas More in 1516 and borrowing from two Greek roots, to mean both "good place" and "no place." Readers have probably recognized by now a certain utopian impulse in my work, but also a twisting of that impulse. Over the past few years, I have been developing a concept I call "Insurgent Utopia"[16] which builds upon the concept of critical utopia offered by the British SF critic Tom Moylan, in which he describes the intentionally flawed utopias of second-wave feminist writers like Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Doris Lessing that start, as *The Tiger Flu* does, with a utopian ideal (no sexism!) but quickly kick a hole in it (lateral violence instead!). Moylan speaks of preserving our ideals as dreams but not blueprints, in order to steer clear of that race-to-the-bottom phenomenon that Rey Chow has called "the fascist longings in our midst."

In an essay published in *Exploring the Fantastic* entitled "Insurgent Utopias: How to Recognize the Knock at the Door," I meditated on the impasses of the present moment and made a proposal for how to think of the present and so create the future differently. I argued for directed action according to our best understanding of what the moment calls for, followed by active and imaginative attention to what emerges from the combined directed action of other community-minded writers, artists, critics, and cultural organizers. What emerges is never what was planned; this is a good thing because twentieth-century experiments in planned societies and planned economies have already taught us the totalitarian dangers of over-planning. To surrender to the interactions of forces and the flows of history attentively is not easy and nor does it provide any guarantees. Through the concept of insurgent utopias I suggest placing worlds in interaction with one another to seek eruptions of the unexpected. For me this is where both hope and danger lie. Something of our present world is also reflected in this thinking.[17]

*The Tiger Flu* puts into play a utopian ideal: that of a society dominated by women instead of men. It is a response to our long, patriarchal moment, as all utopias are responses to the historical moment in which they are written. However, rather than playing out a traditional utopian form in the style of Thomas More, Edward Bellamy, or Ernest Callenbach (all of whom sought to illustrate the perfection of the utopian societies they dreamt of), *The Tiger Flu* focuses on eruptions of the unexpected from the initial utopian impulse. What emerges is a complex alternate society which unfolds its own wonders and horrors. These give way to yet more wonders and horrors. The novel's two protagonists, both flawed, must negotiate their way through a world of

rapid and continuous change. There is thus a certain Taoist impulse in my work—this is my way of bringing my Chinese history productively into a complex global present.

I embrace my own form of Taoism not just as a reclamation of roots/routes but also as a way of doing alliance work on Coast Salish and Treaty 7 Territories, I hope without appropriating the traditional cultures of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Blackfoot, Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, or the Métis Nation of Alberta (Region 3). I employ the elements of the Bagua—the Taoist trigrams: Earth, Fire, Wind, Thunder, Mountain, Water, Sky, Marsh—to elucidate clockwise Asian/Indigenous relations (which I understand as neocolonial and extractive) and counter-clockwise Asian/Indigenous relations (which I understand as matriarchal spirit-to-spirit relations).[18] My call, obviously, is for the latter, but I want to acknowledge and take my share of responsibility for the former. This work goes beyond thought and talk—I have been doing a fair bit of organizing in Calgary, as I also did in Vancouver when I lived there. It is important for me to do the work of community building beside the work of writing. These days, most of this takes place at my "un-centre" at the University of Calgary: The Insurgent Architects' House for Creative Writing.

So for me, then, speculative fiction holds profound possibilities for building community while making art. It does so because it is an open-ended practice that's available to me in my own cultural wheelhouse. It sings, it entertains, it dreams, it calls to its audiences to be themselves only a bit different. I hope it brings my voice to the table as one voice among many, making productive noise beside the productive noises of others so that collectively we might nudge our shared society into a better place—if not a utopia.

NOTES

1 This essay is a revised version of a keynote talk that I gave at the Alberta Writers' Guild Conference in Edmonton in the Winter of 2019, recast to address the concerns of this special issue.

2 See for instance Sofia Samatar's "Towards a Planetary History of Afrofuturism" in which, watching Jonathan Akomfrah's and Edward George's *The Last Angel of History,* she articulates the "History" (with a capital "H") of white capital and progress as a virus that shuts down the "lowercase histories" of Afrofuturism that are coded in the sounds and images of the past, and do not necessarily exist or reveal themselves in a linear/progressive order (176-77). In a related vein, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) makes a distinction between Western/industrial/colonial time, which is linear and related to production and profits, and ceremonial/"Indian" time, which is based on a ritual understanding of order

and harmony (153). Allen suggests that ritual or ceremonial time demands another kind of storytelling than industrial time does—a kind of storytelling that does not lend itself well to the marketable novel because it is relational in the first instance, rather than being oriented towards a single, heroic protagonist (152).

3 See "Embargoes and Sanctions."

4 See Hilliker and Barry (55).

5 See Pepper. There is also a good article by Kevin Chong on Chinese Canadian response to the uprisings (see "Divided Loyalties").

6 According to my aunt but not my mother.

7 The Call for Papers for this special issue asked, among other questions, "How do Black and Indigenous writers respond to the different positions colonialism historically imposed on those who were subjected to alien abduction versus alien invasion?"

8 See Chen.

9 See West.

10 Please see my essay "Insurgent Utopias: How to Recognize the Knock at the Door" in *Exploring the Fantastic* for more on the concept of insurgency.

11 Sofia Samatar articulates alien abduction as a metaphor for the Middle Passage and posits Octavia Butler's *Patternmaster* series as an example.

12 Rita Wong importantly reminds us that we are seventy per cent water (Wong and Mochizuki 5).

13 This is a Chinese term that has been translated as "old Overseas Chinese," "settler from China," "old-timers," or "pioneers." I use it to refer to the generation of Chinese sojourners who came with the railways, mines, laundries, corner stores, and restaurants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

14 H. G. Well's *War of the Worlds* and H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Chthulu" are much quoted examples. It is there in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, in the cyborg figure Rachael. For more, see for instance De Witt Douglas Kilgore's chapter "'The Best is Yet to Come': or Saving the Future: *Star Trek Deep Space Nine* as Reform Astrofuturism" (48-64) and Edward James' chapter "Yellow, Black, Metal and Tentacled: The Race question in American Science Fiction" (199-224) in Lavender.

15 My representations of Indigenous peoples and places are as material/historical/grounded as I could make them within the speculative fiction frame of the novel. It seemed somehow more respectful, given ongoing injustice and the responsibility I carry as a Canadian citizen of Chinese descent to take up the terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the necessary ongoing work of making things right. In writing the novel, I felt that while I could reinvent and overwrite Asian tropes and figures because they were, in a sense, "mine," it didn't seem fully respectful to do the same with Indigenous tropes and figures because of their attachment to real people and places to whom I owe a debt. I needed to make Indigenous peoples and places present because they are important beings in the world I actually inhabit, but it didn't feel right to take liberties with them, except where necessary to extrapolate from the world as it is to the world of the novel. My intention was to acknowledge Indigenous presences and to respectfully write Indigenous peoples into the future as I imagine it, but in a way that is not "polly-anna-ish." The Indigenous peoples in *The Tiger Flu* still have problems and struggles because all humans do. This is something I discussed a great deal with Warren Cariou, who worked with me on "sensitivity" issues, though of course any flaws, faults, or errors are my own. I hope I got the balance right, and I look forward to seeing how other non-Indigenous fiction writers handle this challenge. It seems to me to be a meaningful one to take up. I also feel that it cannot but evolve if we continue to do this work in a good way.

16 See Lai, "Insurgent Utopias: How to Recognize the Knock at the Door."

17 The concept of insurgency is, of course, attached to the work of revolution. I am however less and less convinced of the power and productivity of Marxist dialectics because they seem to make so much room for lateral violence and the silencing of outcry about it. The insurgency I call for necessarily involves the interactions of more than two forces. It values chance and mutation. This is why I sometimes call it "emergent insurgency." Emergent insurgency is possible both within the cultural realm and beyond it. For instance, it is possible for me as an Asian Canadian person to stand in solidarity with the protests at Standing Rock and the Unist'ot'en camp as neither a proponent of colonization or an Indigenous person. I don't escape my complicity with the colonial project, but that doesn't mean I have to like it or agree with it. I can work against it, at least some of the time. I am never entirely free from my engagement with it, however, as long as I am paid for my work using national currency, or as long as I buy commodities using that same currency. Or, for that matter, as long as I work at a university. Later in this essay, I talk about clockwise and counter-clockwise movement to help think this through. For further elaboration, please see my essay "How to Recognize the Knock at the Door" in *Exploring the Fantastic*.

18 See Lai, "Speculative Taoism, Bagua Insurgencies." The notion of matriarchal spirit-to-spirit relations comes from Lee Maracle in *Memory Serves*.

WORKS CITED


Akomfrah, John, and Edward George. *The Last Angel of History.* vimeo.com/ondemand/lastangelofhistory?autoplay=1. Accessed 24 Apr. 2020.

Allen, Paula Gunn. "The Ceremonial Motion of Indian Time: Long Ago, So Far." *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions.* 2nd ed., Beacon, 1992, pp. 147-54.

Andrews, V.C. *Flowers in the Attic.* Pocket, 1979.

Bloch, Ernst. "*'Entfremdung, Verfremdung'*: Alienation, Estrangement." *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1970, pp. 120-25.

Bradbury, Ray. *The Martian Chronicles.* 1950. Bantam, 1979.

Brand, Dionne. *What We All Long For.* Vintage, 2005.

Butler, Octavia. *Xenogenesis.* Doubleday, 1989.

Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber.* Penguin, 1979.

—. *Nights at the Circus.* Vintage, 1984.

Chen, Kuan-Hsing. *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization.* Duke UP, 2010.

Chong, Kevin. "Divided Loyalties: How the Hong Kong Protests Are Exposing Tensions among Canadians of Chinese Descent." *The Globe and Mail*, 12 July 2019, theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-divided-loyalties-how-the-hong-kong-protests-are-exposing-tensions/ Accessed 1 Mar. 2020.

Chow, Rey. "The Fascist Longings in Our Midst." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 1, no. 26, 1995, pp. 23-50.

Choy, Wayson. *The Jade Peony.* Douglas & McIntyre, 1995.

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Del Rey, 1996.

"Embargoes and Sanctions—Cold war sanctions." Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy, *American Foreign Relations*, americanforeignrelations.com/E-N/Embargoes-and-Sanctions-Cold-war-sanctions.html. Accessed 1 Aug. 2019.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune.* Berkeley Medallion, 1965.

Hilliker, John, and Donald Barry. *Canada's Department of External Affairs, Volume 2: Coming of Age, 1946-1968.* McGill-Queen's UP, 1995.
"horde, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, Mar. 2020, oed.com/view/Entry/88445. Accessed 5 Mar. 2020.
Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go.* Vintage, 2006.
Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.* 1976. Vintage, 1989.
Lai, Larissa. "Bagua Insurgencies." Critical Insurrections: Decolonizing Difficulties, Activist Imaginaries, and Collective Possibilities. Critical Ethnic Studies Association Conference, 21-24 June 2018, Social Justice Institute, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Plenary.
—. "Insurgent Utopias: How to Recognize the Knock at the Door." *Exploring the Fantastic: Genre, Ideology, and Popular Culture*, edited by Ina Batzke et al., Transcript, 2018, pp. 91-113.
—. *Salt Fish Girl.* Thomas Allen, 2002.
—. *The Tiger Flu.* Arsenal Pulp, 2018.
—. *When Fox Is a Thousand.* Press Gang, 1995. Arsenal Pulp, 2004.
Lang, Andrew. *The Fairy Books.* Longmans, Green & Company, 1889-1910.
Lavender, Isiah, III. *Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction.* UP of Mississippi, 2014.
Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Left Hand of Darkness.* Ace, 1969.
L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962.
Lessing, Doris. *Shikasta.* Vintage, 1981.
Lewis, C. S. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.* 1950. HarperTrophy, 1978.
Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* Crossing, 1984.
Lovecraft, H. P. *The Call of Cthulu and Other Weird Stories.* Penguin Classics, 1999.
Maracle, Lee. *Memory Serves: Oratories.* NeWest, 2015.
—. *Ravensong.* Press Gang, 1993.
More, Thomas. *Utopia and A Dialogue of Comfort.* J. M. Dent, 1930.
Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.* 1987. Vintage, 2004.
Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination.* Methuen, 1986.
—. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia.* Westview, 2000.
Pepper, Suzanne. "Another Hong Kong Uprising: Defying the Sovereign, or a Simple Demand for Local Standards of Justice?" *Hong Kong Free Press*, 6 July 2019, hongkongfp.com/2019/07/06/another-hong-kong-uprising-defying-sovereign-simple-demand-local-standards-justice/. Accessed 1 Mar. 2020.
Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time.* Ballantyne, 1976.
Pu, Songling. *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio.* Translated by Herbert A. Giles, Kelly and Walsh, 1968.
—. *Strange Tales of Liaozhai.* Translated by Lu Yunzhong et al., Commercial, 1988.
—. *Strange Tales from Make-Do Studio.* Translated by Denis C. Har and Victor H. Mair, Foreign Languages P, 1989.
"Q Who." *Star Trek: The Next Generation,* Paramount, 10 May 1989.
Retallack, Joan. *The Poethical Wager.* U of California P, 2003.
Roh, David S., Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu. *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media.* Rutgers UP, 2015.
Rohmer, Sax. *The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu.* Methuen, 1913.

Russ, Joanna. *The Female Man.* Bantam, 1975.
Samatar, Sofia. "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 48, no. 4, 2017, pp. 175-91.
*Stars Wars Episode IV: A New Hope.* Directed by George Lucas, performances by Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, and Harrison Ford, 20th Century Fox, 1977.
Suvin, Darko. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre." *College English*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1972, pp. 372-82.
Hayden Taylor, Drew. *Take Us to Your Chief and Other Stories.* Douglas & McIntyre, 2016.
*The Island.* Directed by Michael Bay, Warner Bros., 22 July 2005.
Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit.* 1937. Methuen, 1976.
van Gulik, Robert Hans. *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from Ca. 1500 B.C. Till 1644 A.D.* Brill, 1974.
Wells, H. G. *The War of the Worlds.* Dover, 1998.
West, Cornel. "The New Cultural Politics of Difference." *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, edited by Russell Ferguson et al., New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990, pp. 19-38.
Wilde, Oscar. *The Happy Prince and Other Tales.* D. Nutt, 1888.
William, Kate. *Sweet Valley High: Double Love.* Random House, 1983.
Winterson, Jeanette. *The Passion.* Penguin, 1988.
Wittig, Monique. *Les Guérillères.* 1969. Translated by David Le Vay, Beacon, 1985.
Wong, Rita, and Cindy Mochizuki. *perpetual.* Nightwood, 2015.

**Rebecca Păpucaru**

# Anti-depressant Pantoum

Yoked to my brain, ox-like,
the drug, long metabolized,
for much of my adult life
has ploughed my insides

The drug, long metabolized,
has played me out each night
ploughing my insides
to the vox populi of AM stations

Plays me out some nights
concerto for nerves and synapses
to the vox populi of AM stations
the conductor raises the baton

Concerto for nerves and synapses
the notes never change
the conductor raises the baton
to which I am chained

The notes never change
a hundred player pianos
to which I am chained
score my blown-up dreams

A hundred player pianos
play *flu-vox-amine*
scoring my blown-up dreams
for love of science

Play *flu-vox-a-mine*
chalky Valentine candy
for love of science
*I Luv U, Be Mine*

Chalky Valentine candy
in childproof vessel innocuous
*I Luv U, Be Mine*
in interlocking crystals

In childproof vessel innocuous!
For much of my adult life
interlocking crystals
yoked to my brain, ox-like

Y-Dang Troeung and Phanuel Antwi

# "In this very uncertain space"
## A Conversation with Omar El Akkad

Omar El Akkad is one of the most compelling new voices to emerge onto the Canadian and global literary scene. His critically acclaimed first novel, *American War*, has been translated into thirteen languages. The novel is ambitious in scope and scale: it is an unsentimental depiction of a family uprooted and displaced by war; a meditation on the banality and cruelty of life on hold in a refugee camp; a complex exploration of the psychological legacies of war that traverse time and space; and, finally, a literary work that combines various forms and genres (science fiction, climate fiction/"cli-fi," refugee narrative, war story, detention testimony, fictionalized archives, *Bildungsroman*, and more). As it extrapolates from the present into an imagined dystopian future, *American War* also offers a stunning refraction of the past. Beginning in the year 2075 when the state of Louisiana has become a new battleground between warring factions, the narrative follows a family from Louisiana as they flee their home to a refugee camp located in the "Free Southern State," a newly formed successionist country that is at constant war with the US. Here, the protagonist, Sarat Chestnut, is taken in by a recruiter who trains her to become a rebel insurrectionist. From here, Sarat learns to navigate and move through the borders of her new world—a world characterized by military checkpoints, quarantine zones, detention centres, drone warfare, and rapidly eroding coastlines. By the end of the novel, all that is left of Sarat's story—a dark-skinned girl from the South who became a martyr for the cause of the rebel South—are the archival fragments that her nephew, Benjamin Chestnut, must piece together from his home in the neutral territory of New Anchorage, Alaska, a generation later.

*American War* captures war's distortion of linear time and progress wherein the feared future for some is inevitably the unmourned past and the terrifying present for others. From the permanence of wartime and the carceral inhumanity of the camp, to the impunity of the border patrol and the rightlessness of detention, *American War* casts an unflinching gaze at the intersecting violences that mark our global simultaneities. The book disorients and inverts our coordinates of north and south, inviting us to consider the ruinous costs of continuously reinforcing colonial borders. *American War* gets us to think about how, despite the celebrations of globalization, travel, and new social networking devices, we remain in a world of compartmentalized sectors. Those of us in the spaces of privilege and settlement, even with our gazes cast outward, remain blind to the devastation that happens elsewhere, and dismissive of the ways in which we are involved in it.

The novel's concern with global geopolitical entanglements has been undoubtedly influenced by Omar El Akkad's own biography and multiple transnational crossings. Born in Cairo, Egypt, El Akkad grew up in Doha, Qatar, and moved to Canada when he was sixteen years old. He attended high school in Montreal and Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he earned a degree in computer science. As a journalist for *The Globe and Mail* for ten years, El Akkad reported on war and conflict from around the world, including the war in Afghanistan, the military trials at Guantanamo Bay, the Arab Spring revolution in Egypt, and the Black Lives Matter movement in Ferguson, Missouri. He is a recipient of Canada's National Newspaper Award for investigative reporting and the Goff Penny Memorial Prize for Young Canadian Journalists. In 2015, he turned his hand to fiction. In 2018, *American War* was shortlisted for a number of prominent literary prizes and garnered public attention as a finalist on the CBC Canada Reads competition.

Intrigued by his thought-provoking debut novel, we invited Omar El Akkad to UBC in March 2019. He travelled to Vancouver from Portland, Oregon, where he is currently based. His visit included a guest lecture in the course *Postcolonial Literature: Borders and Violence,* a private interview with us in the afternoon, and a public lecture at the university in the evening. The following is an abridged and edited text that combines our multiple conversations with the author throughout that day about his novel, journalism, literary influences, migrations, and political visions of the future. We found El Akkad's experience and insights on these topics to be capacious and wide-ranging. He moved seamlessly between disparate topics, spaces,

and texts, offering at once a deep dive into the specifics of his novel as well as a general commentary on some of the most unsettling issues facing the world today. We kept circling back to the relationship between violence and the production of uncertainty—the unpredictability of movement and refuge for the displaced; the ambiguity and risks of racial representation; the secrecy of detention and redaction; and the uncertainties of the future in times of change and crisis.

### A Crisis of Otherness, Walls, and Borders

Y-Dang Troeung: In *American War*, the reader is first introduced to the novel's protagonist Sarat and her family as they are displaced from their home in Louisiana as a result of a war fuelled by both environmental and political conflict. Can you say more about your thinking about the themes of war and displacement in your novel, and how your life experiences may have influenced this?

Omar El Akkad: Almost the entirety of my social circles growing up in Qatar were people from somewhere else. One of the earliest memories I have in relation to what we call being a refugee and being a migrant has to do with the violence of language. What we call these folks is really important. We have a spectrum of what we call these folks. Where I lived in Qatar, we had "expats," and expats were white Westerners. They were there, but they didn't need to be there. We were grateful for the expertise that they brought to running the various infrastructures. But then you work your way to "migrant," and the migrant is probably someone who is doing a lot more work, a lot more labour-intensive work, but doesn't have the privilege of being called an expat. And then you work your way all across "refugee" until you get to "illegal." That's the other end of the spectrum. I'm not sure that we have any kind of framework for dealing with people who have been forced away from the place they call home.

YT: The characters in *American War* are constantly being driven from their homes or from the refugee camps where they are being housed, but the borders they are crossing in the imaginative world you've built in the narrative have shifted from the present day. The story and use of cartography in your novel invite us to think about the arbitrary nature of national borders, and by extension, the relationship between the colonial construction of geopolitical borders and the production of refugees and precarious migrants.

OEA: There are certain things I do in my writing that I think alienate a lot of readers. One of them is that I have no respect for the nation-state as an

entity. You pick up this book [points to *American War*] and my short stories, and the borders have been moved around. Florida is underwater, and I've created an empire here and reversed the flow of migration there. I have very little respect for the entity of the nation-state as an unchanging thing, so there's a map at the beginning of *American War* and if you look at it, there's a huge chunk of the Southwest that's now called the Mexican Protectorate. I would get questions at book events in the US like: "Where did you come up with this map?" In response, I would say, "This is just an old map. This is what it used to look like. This was Mexico. I didn't invent any of this." But we're not primed to think that way. We're primed to think of these lines on the map as very sacrosanct. I come from a part of the world where a hundred years ago a bunch of British and French guys just drew arbitrary lines and we live with that now. Lebanon as an entity is a surreal entity from a cultural perspective. I believe there is still a law on the books where the president has to be Christian and the prime minister has to be Muslim to make everybody happy because it's an arbitrarily conceived thing that has become sacred. My frustration whenever I talk about the notion of being a refugee, or even being a migrant of any kind, is this: it always stems from this notion that we started from a contrived thing and we're making the lives of many people a living hell so that we can save the presumed sanctity of a contrived thing. There has got to be a better way than that. I'm not a geopolitical expert, and I'm not an academic and I don't know what that framework is, but I refuse to accept the ruin of so many people's lives to save this entity that I don't think is really under that much stress. I'm not of the opinion that it's a crisis, and if it is a crisis, then it's a crisis that can be solved by means other than destroying the lives of human beings.

Phanuel Antwi: I'm curious about what you just said—"I'm not of the opinion that it's a crisis." Can you meditate more on this word crisis for us?

OEA: It's not a crisis in absolute terms. It's not a crisis in relative terms. If it's a crisis in relative terms, then Lebanon has a migrant crisis. Lebanon is arguably taking on more refugees than the entirety of Europe with respect to people fleeing Syria. It's also not a crisis in terms of the resiliency of the systems in place. If a few people showing up in your country to escape what is the bloodiest ongoing war in the world are enough to bring your systems down, your systems were pretty terrible to begin with. It is actually a crisis of otherness. It's a crisis of people who don't look like others showing up at their shores. The result is a surreal, almost Kafkaesque, way of dealing with things. You have things like the Dublin agreement, where wherever you

land first in Europe is where you're going to be processed, and so people are desperately trying not to get fingerprinted in Greece, because you don't want to go through the Greek system, and so you try to get out of there. Hungary is building more walls, but no one wants to stay in Hungary; "nobody cares," they are saying, "just let us through." It is a fear-driven system and the thing that is the subject of the fear is otherness. I have very little sympathy for some of the richest places on earth that are trying to turn things around and repeat what was the treatment of others in the lead up to the World Wars. You know, this notion that the "boat is full" or this notion that "the walls are up for a reason," or "the barbarians are at the gates." The next thing you know, it's all gates, and you've gated yourself in. I have no respect for this notion that it's a crisis. That's obviously my personal position, and there are a lot of foreign ministers in Europe who vehemently disagree, and they have a lot more say than I do, but I don't for a second believe that this is a real stress against the institutions. It's a stress test of xenophobia.

PA: There are multiple modes of flight happening in your novel, and oftentimes these modes appear as competing flights. The characters seem to be faced with the perpetual dilemma of whether to stay in place and risk being killed, or to move across borders without a clear sense of where they will end up. It's an impossible calculation they have to make.

OEA: Honestly, I like that, because there was a preconception certainly in my mind, when I was writing this book, that movement is a very controlled thing: that you're going from Point A to Point B and you know where Point B is. You know how you're going to get there and why you're going to get there. But the very first real migration in the book—the very first instance of this kind of movement—is when Sarat's family is crossing this river. The bombs are falling down the road, and the last line of that particular chapter essentially tells the reader they never actually had to leave their home. It turns out the bombs never came closer. They could've stayed at home. That was really important to me—to resist the idea of movement as a controlled thing, because it's not a lot of the time. Certainly, I grew up around people who, in one form or another, were all migrants, refugees, whatever term you want to use, across that spectrum that ranges from "expat" to "illegal," depending on how you feel about these human beings. I've met people who continually were products of serendipity, products of this serendipitous movement. You know? I'm Palestinian by way of Jordan, and there's a funny story about that. I wanted to get at that. I wanted to get at that notion; that's why there's little in the way of clear-cut motion.

### Race, Proximity, and Intimacy

YT: In *American War*, you provide so much detail that allows readers to connect with the characters, but there's a particular strategy that we find fascinating and that is your leaving the racial backgrounds of the characters open and unspecified. Can you talk about this?

OEA: In America, this point about race has been a fundamental point of criticism of the book—the notion that you're going to write about a Second American Civil War and race is so rarely overtly mentioned in the book. How can you do that? That's a valid criticism of the book. One issue around the question of race is that I've been trying to find my place in this country [the US]. When I was writing this book, I wasn't able to find it. And I wrote this op-ed for *The Guardian* about what it means to be a brown person in Trump's America [see "I've always been"]. And one of the lines in the op-ed is [paraphrasing]: You know, I've been Arab all my life. I've been Muslim pretty well all my life. I wasn't brown with a capital "B" until I came to America. I'm trying to figure out what that is. I'm coming to the conclusion that before I can make anything of this country, I have to figure out what this country makes of me. And I was in that sort of very uncertain space when I was writing this book, so this book is in this very uncertain space.

With respect to the individual characteristics—and this is particularly true of the racial characteristics, but also sexuality, for example, and gender—what I tried to do was move along the axis of proximity to the character. I believe there's this thing that Toni Morrison said: How do you know the character in a novel is black? Well, you're told. How do you know a character is white? You're not told. Right? There's the element that you know what the default represents. And so instead of working along that axis of the default (and I'm not going to bother telling you), I try working along the axis of proximity. The more time we spend with this character, the more I'm going to tell you about their characteristics. Sarat is a character of intersectionality. You don't get that essentially for anyone else in this book, right? Because the threshold relates to proximity. I don't know if that's a proper strategy to employ. But it was really, really important to me.

YT: I think it's a strength of the book that you refuse that legibility or that kind of straightforward mimesis that we've come to expect when it comes to race.

OEA: I was sort of dealing with this notion of the negative space of who you are. I don't want to exist in a world where black writers only write about black issues and brown writers only write about brown issues and white writers write about love. I don't want that. I really don't want that to exist. It was

important to me that every character in the novel—or at least the characters we are spending time with—is afforded the positive space and the negative space. They're afforded the chance to talk about who they are in whatever portion they feel is necessary to them. That's a really hard tightrope to walk. I think I fell off it at times in the book, but it was something I was conscious of because I would consistently get things like: "Hey! We would really love an op-ed about the Muslim Ban. And we would really love an op-ed about this thing that you are—this thing we assume you are—this thing we assume you *only are*!" And that's fine and all important to talk about. But I also want that other stuff. And I do not want to cede claim to that other stuff that's important to me.

PA: It seems you are trying to recalibrate a grammar for race (perhaps maybe identity) in this novel through the language of intimacy, which you say sits on a plain of proximity. This approach both works and doesn't work. But even when it doesn't work, it still has the effect of jolting readers into contemplation.

OEA: I mean that's fascinating to me, right? First of all, I think intimacy is a better word for me than proximity, because you get close to people in this story. You're absolutely right about that notion of when it doesn't work, it still works. That's fascinating because one of the things I've struggled with is how to write from the place where I'm at right now, which is how to coexist in America (North America) as a conceptual entity. The nation-state on which I exist is founded on a bedrock of wrong, right? It's founded on these twin sins: this genocide and this enslavement. And one is directly responsible for the geographic growth for the entity called the nation-state. And one is directly responsible for the economic growth of the entity we now call this nation-state. And how do you proceed from a place of wrongness? And what does that mean about present-day interpellations? I don't know. I try to wrap my head around that. It's difficult for me to find my footing in that.

### Fabulation and Archives

YT: Can you talk about your experience as a journalist reporting on and moving through spaces that have been marked by violence such as military bases, Guantanamo Bay, and refugee camps in the Middle East? How did the accounts of these spaces make it into the novel?

OEA: I was a journalist for ten years and I very much wanted to be a foreign correspondent. I very much wanted to cover wars. I wanted to cover stories that, had I not covered them, most people would not hear about. For years

I did the exact opposite. For years, I was a tech journalist. I would write about the new iPhone. If you didn't hear about the new iPhone from me, you would have heard of it from eight hundred other journalists. It was the exact opposite of what I wanted to do with my life. There were times when I did do [what I wanted], in places like the suburbs of Kandahar. We went with a UN polio vaccination team one time just to see how work is done, and I was the only journalist there. And you know that sort of story has been done a million times before, but that was an instance of me being able to do the work that mattered to me because not a million other people were doing that. And it was a story that needed to get out. Because I was so interested in covering conflict, in all its forms, I got to see violence in all its forms. When I was around twenty-five, I first went to Afghanistan. I had read too much Hemingway, and I had this really juvenile male perspective of this swashbuckling war correspondent. It was horseshit. None of it was real.

What I did see were the various forms of violence that take place in wartime. There was the obvious physical violence of bombardment, destruction, and ruin, but then there was another layer of violence. That was the violence of language, of euphemism, of bureaucracy; of "collateral damage" when what you mean is "we killed innocent people"; of "enhanced interrogation" when what you mean to say is "torture"; of "unlawful enemy combatants" when what you mean to say is "we don't want the Geneva Conventions to apply to this person." And *that* layer was important to me, because I didn't think you could get away with the other top layer (of bombs dropping and guns firing) if you didn't have that other layer to sustain it.

And the place I saw this most overtly was Guantanamo Bay. Guantanamo Bay was one of the most sanitized places you could ever go to. We were going to Camp X-Ray at one point. If you ever see pictures of the first detainees in Guantanamo, they were in the orange jumpsuits and they were in these things that looked like oversized dog kennels. That's Camp X-Ray. And we were going to see the remains of it. And you have to stop at a stop sign where these little blonde girls skip across the street to the officer side. [The scene looked] something like the Stepford Wives kind of idealized. Those things exist in close proximity and nobody bats an eye. And the way that you know they exist is because there is immense linguistic bureaucratic euphemistic violence happening. It's where the detention camps are at.

PA: I want to go to some of the methods at work in your novel, particularly how you use fabulation. Saidiya Hartman talks about the idea of "critical fabulation" in her essay "Venus in Two Acts" as a literary gesture of "straining

against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (11). In your novel, you make things up, but the making up of things is not just pure speculation. It also informs and reforms default perceptions. Can you tell us a little bit about the ways you bring in archives? By methods, I'm thinking about the ways you tabulate your many different source materials, the official archives, alongside the fake source documents you fabricated.

OEA: I like that word "fabulation"—that's exactly what it is. At Guantanamo, I asked one of the commanders—one of the officers—a question. I said something like, how do the soldiers—how do the prisoners—as soon as I say the word "prisoners," one of the other soldiers stops me and says, "We don't have prisoners here sir. We have detainees." There's a really important reason for that. "Prisoner" implies a prison sentence, which is a finite thing or at least a defined thing. A detainee can be held forever. The source documents in the novel are very much about that kind of violence. The one example from the novel I go back to all the time is the censored letter from the Sugarloaf detainee—Sugarloaf being very obviously based on Guantanamo. And when, if you ever listen to the audiobook, when Dion Graham gets to that part, he just says "redacted, redacted." And it just has this numbing effect. I couldn't have done that in a straightforward narrative. I needed this kind of mechanism, and so the source documents were very much a means of exploring that kind of violence, which is much more a violence of negative space, of the violence of the things you don't say and the way you get around saying things and the passive voice and all of that. That was the sense of the use of the source documents.

PA: Your use of "redaction" brings to mind the work of two black feminist thinkers, Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* and Christina Sharpe's *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*. For them blackness undergoes redaction, it gets blacked out, cut off; redaction, black redaction in particular, enacts an ethical refusal to reinscribe the colonial and imperialist violence often inscribed in the archive; and, in so doing, ruptures the euphemisms, *the* archives that constitute our social imagination. In a way then, black redaction can offer a method of protecting oneself from that structuring violence of negative space.

OEA: I think in terms of the idea of redaction, the idea of taking away is a central part of this toolkit by which I think we all do a very human thing, which is to try to create a world that accepts us. I think everybody, at an individual

and institutional level, is trying to do that. But it's a very different thing in terms of whether you're in the privileged group or in the non-privileged group, or if you're within the institutions of power or without the institutions of power. This is a book called "American War" that backgrounds America. America is not centred in this book. It is in large part ignored and in large part subjected to fairly grotesque manipulations to fit whatever I wanted it to fit. I think it's a fundamental kind of element in the toolkit. When you come from an unprivileged place, or a place that doesn't have access to the power centres, what you're trying to do, to a certain extent, is to redact elements of these power centres that make a world you're now accepted in. When you're in those centres of power, what you're redacting is the truth. But the end goal in a kind of really terrifying way is somewhat similar, which is that I want to be accepted and I want for my actions to be accepted. Sometimes your actions are grotesque. This is what people have to do in Guantanamo to justify this entire infrastructure being created. When you're doing monstrous things, somebody has to be the monster. And if it's not the person having it done to them, then it's you and a lot of the infrastructure—the linguistic infrastructure—around that kind of redaction. We'll disappear what we have to disappear to make this work conceptually and to make us acceptable.

YT: One of the passages from your book that stood out to me was the fake source document in the form of a diary of a rebel recruiter, the "Found Cause Diary." This caught my attention because of my research on the Cold War in Cambodia and how the Khmer Rouge regime came to power. Achille Mbembe talks about this process in his work on necropolitics, about how places that collapse under the strain of violence give rise to new mechanisms of predation—"war machines" he calls them. In your novel, Sarat gets taken in and trained by rebel recruiters and they use her to further their cause. What influenced your ideas about war and radicalization?

OEA: When I was covering the "Toronto 18" case, when I was at *The Globe and Mail*, I was writing about one of the recruiters, the mentors. The case was mostly these young boys, eighteen or seventeen, who had all these plans to storm Parliament Hill. But then there were a bunch of these guys who were much older and who weren't planning to do any of this stuff themselves, but did sort of mould these kids and kind of direct them towards that path. And at one point we're writing about one of these guys, and I discover that what this guy did towards the very end, just before the arrests happened, was to go to one of these kids and say, "Get in the car, we're going for a ride." He takes them up three hours north of Toronto into these forests. Earlier in the day,

this guy had gone up and he had dug a grave; he dug a sort of plot in the middle of the forest. He takes this kid up there and they walk out; it's pitch black and they walk out into the forest, and he tells the kid to lie down in the grave. The kid lies down in the grave, and then this older man says, "This is what it's going to look like if you don't commit martyrdom on behalf of your cause, you don't get to go to heaven, you lie down in the grave for all of eternity."

You can imagine if I was trying to recruit you to do something and I led with that, you'd tell me to get lost immediately, right? But this came at the tail end of a year-long process of slow radicalization. It started at the very beginning with, "Hey brother, have you seen pictures of what they are doing to your brothers and sisters in Chechnya?" "Have you seen pictures of what they are doing to your Palestinian brothers and sisters?" That sort of thing. You very slowly work your way. I wanted to get at that notion of how you can take real damage and you can take real injustice and you can take a very real point of saying this is wrong and you can use that as a starting point for a very slow process of turning someone evil. A lot of the book is about that, about the process of how you shape somebody into the contours of very evil things. That's why I wanted to start with that image of honey, and I think honey shows up again later on in the book at certain points. I was thinking about how you can mold someone into the contours of their surroundings. And if their contours are unjust, maybe they are a powerful person and they can respond with love and hope, but I think for most people there comes a point when they become the injustice themselves.

### Speculations of the Future, or Reflections of the Past?

YT: I'm interested in some of the debates about the book. Is it a cautionary tale of the future? Is it an allegory of the past for some? Or is it a mirror of the present for others? Everyone seems to have different opinions about this.

OEA: My experiences, my very limited experiences, covering war have led me to believe that being on the receiving end, being on the losing end of a war, is very much akin to moving backwards in time. You look at pictures of places—I was based in Kandahar for quite a bit—if you look at pictures of Kandahar and Kabul from fifty-sixty years ago, those are places that look relatively futuristic compared to the [way they look in the] present day. The same is true not just of physical violence but also of economic and political violence. Cairo, where I grew up, Alexandria, where my family is from—same thing. In pictures from the 1950s and 1960s the place looks

like it's [advanced in comparison with the current] moment. So I wanted to get at this notion that being on the losing end of the war is akin to moving backwards in time, which is why it's not a very futuristic book.

YT: What I hear you saying is that time has not moved in a linear way in places that have been on the receiving end of violence.

OEA: *American War* is a book that is set in a future that not only is not futuristic, but that's actively opposed to the future as a concept of infinite possibility. I think this is a really refreshing way of looking at the future and I have no problems [with the idea] of the future as a space of infinite possibility. But there is a certain privilege involved in that, right? It's the privilege of the ever upward sloping line. And a lot of my work—this novel, the novel I am now editing, and my short stories—is not predicated on that kind of timeline. It's predicated on a hill-shaped timeline. And it's predicated on the possibility that we may be living at the top of the hill right now. And so my futuristic vision is not particularly, you know, the bombs are about to go off or the bombs have already gone off. It's in mid-explosion. The notion of the descent. And that's how the future is dreamed in this book—the moment of descent and what you do in that moment. I certainly never intended to predict anybody's future with this book. There are moments since the book came out that seem prophetic, but if you throw 350 pages worth of darts at a wall, you're going to hit a bull's eye just out of pure luck, you know? So that was never my intent. My intent was to transpose someone else's present, not predict somebody's future.

PA: There's a theme of the sentimentality of material objects in the book, of how people try to carry the past with them despite having lost everything. How were you thinking about materiality and objects as archives?

OEA: The issue of sentimentality and what the past represents was on my mind quite a bit when I was writing the book. I grew up in Qatar and Qatar is only ten percent Qatari. Only ten percent of the population is born and raised in Qatar. Ninety percent is from somewhere else. And they've shown up largely because there's a ton of oil money. I had a lot of Palestinian friends, which is to say that these are people who had never been to Palestine. Their parents and grandparents had a notion of what that is, and I would go to people's houses and their grandparents would be wearing necklaces with keys on them. I think that image shows up in *American War* a couple of times—people wearing keys. And the keys are to houses that no longer exist. They'd been razed. That notion of this item of sentimentality and this item of memorabilia standing in for something that no longer exists is a recurring

thing that I would see in places that were on the receiving end of violence. The past is yours in a way that the present can never be yours. When you don't have agency, when you live in a refugee camp, even if you live outside of your country because you've been forced to live outside of your country, you own the past in a way that you can never really own the present.

YT: The narrator of *American War*, Benjamin, is a historian of the Second American Civil War who is trying to piece together fragments of the past, against the official accounts that have been compiled. How does erasure and narrative reconstruction come into play in the novel?

OEA: At one point, in one of the earlier drafts of the novel, one of those fake source documents is a magazine article written by Benjamin the Second, the narrator, [about his return] many decades later to the site of his failed olive grove where the old border used to be, to write a story about how some people were saying that years ago there was this massacre here at this place called Patience. And he talks to some people who say, "Nope, there was never a Camp Patience, that never happened," and some people who say, "Yeah, twenty thousand people were killed, it was a massacre," and he can't figure out what happened because the past is malleable. That's what I was trying to get at: this notion of the past being something you can't change and that you have to live with.

### Ambiguity, Anger, and Restraint

PA: I want to loop us back again to the kind of restraint you've had to exercise in terms of wanting to get at the way things have happened in the past and at the very same time not wanting to be prophetic, to predict, not wanting to give us or represent the world in a mode that is certain and assured. I'm interested in the modes of restraint, not resistance, that you've had to exercise, that you've had to hold onto in adopting this process in writing *American War*.

OEA: It's a really interesting question, because it is one of the ways in which I try to measure myself as a writer. And I don't know. I hope as a writer I've come to exercise restraint, because there are certain writers I will read on any occasion. I'll read anything Toni Morrison has to say about anything. I'll go back and read James Agee's movie criticism. You know, I'm not one of those writers. I don't have that capacity. What I need to write about is what feels necessary. A lot of the time, for me, what feels necessary directly correlates with what makes me angry, and writing from anger is a really dangerous space. I remember reading an interview with James Baldwin where he talks

about channeling anger into his writing. I will never, never get to that place, or possess the kind of alchemy that someone like Baldwin had where you can take that anger and transform it into a kind of love, into a kind of state where you can call out the injustice from a place of feeling so viscerally, and yet be able to say something deeply profound. I don't have that. I work towards it and try for it, but . . .

YT: I'm thinking of Frantz Fanon too, of his description of colonialism—of the violence of colonialism that produces muscle twitches and nervous conditions that are important for the project of decolonization if channelled, but that also take a toll on the psyche of the individual who's doing the work. There's that dialectical tension of that anger and the channelling of it for a certain cause.

OEA: It used to be a point of pride for me that I sound like this; that I'm so well versed in English that I pass through TSA at the airport. I could talk about the Lakers' game the night before. I could talk about *Arrested Development*. And we'd be fine. It would be an element of safety. I have cousins who have my name and my skin colour, who have my background, who don't have my accent. And they're on secondary at airport security every time. I used to think of it as a method of protection, as a point of pride. Look at me. Look at me . . . I figured I'm in the Big Show. And recently I started thinking about the opportunity costs: my Arabic is terrible. My knowledge of Arabic history, my knowledge of Arabic literature is terrible. Solmaz Sharif, who is one of my favourite poets in America, has this poem out where she's talking about her Iranian father being assaulted by a Texan. And the moment where he feels the imposition of this violence that's happening to him, he screams out in his mother tongue. The notion of the opportunity cost of what that system has done for you is something I think is at the heart of the kind of expression I'm trying to do. Because for a long time I thought of this as success, as having made it, because you know growing up in a country that was colonized by the British, you learn English. You learn that language. You're there. You've done it.

YT: Thank you very much, Omar, for taking the time to speak to us to today so openly and generously. It has been a pleasure for both of us. We are greatly looking forward to what you will do next.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge James Pangilinan for his work on the transcription of this conversation, as well as Christopher Lee and the team at ACAM for making Omar El Akkad's visit to UBC possible.

WORKS CITED

Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke UP, 2015.
El Akkad, Omar. *American War*. McClelland & Stewart, 2017.
—. "I've always been an Arab. It was only when I moved to the US I realised I was 'brown.'" *The Guardian*, 17 Sept. 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2017/ sep/17/ive-always-been-an-arab-it-was-only-when-i-moved-to-the-us-i-realised-i-was-brown. Accessed 3 Mar. 2020.
Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove, 1963.
Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2008, pp. 1-14.
Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Duke UP, 2019.
Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke UP, 2016.

**Lisa Arsenault**

# Forgotten Jasmine[1]

Solace: the forgotten last shower fuck.
Not "*I got the package, thank you.*"
Six words, but not the six
I wanted to hear in *Ma'a As-Salamah* my dear.

The Kennedy airport flight tower, an easier control.
Go back to the desert's hot sand dunes and windstorms.
No wonder you can't talk, you drown in sand mouth.
And they kill each other now.

Darwin's theory of evolution—
not you, not the sulu bleeding heart,
not the Réunion night heron, not the canarian oystercatcher,
not Queen Arsinoë V.

The last two full summer solstice moons in June,
the 1967 summer of love then. The next seasonal
blue moon is nineteen years away. We will be in the Milky Way.
*Habibi Tahhan* is under five hundred count Egyptian cotton,

even if he's dead in Mount Pleasant cemetery.
Even if he says, "If you miss me, visit me there."
Even if the golden eagle can't peck the carrion out of my chest.
The pills will never cure. Anna Karenina does not need

the quinine when she sleeps with the count.
I understand this now. You slip down into *I need to be alone*.
So, my tits are cold.
And I feel the remnants of the remnants of forgotten

jasmine in the whitewashed *wust al dar*
I ached to see. Now, the Bardo is gone.
And the tourists are dead.
And I want to feel you take care of it all.

Arabic: *Ma'a As-Salamah (goodbye)*
*Habibi (dear)Tahhan (jerk)*
*wust al dar (courtyard)*

---

1 c16: from old French *jasmin,* from Arabic *yāsamīn*

Moritz Ingwersen

# Reclaiming Fossil Ghosts

## Indigenous Resistance to Resource Extraction in Works by Warren Cariou, Cherie Dimaline, and Nathan Adler

Settler colonialism relies on the fabrication and extraction of fossils. As an elaborate system of forces and pressures, the institutionalized mechanics of dispossession and forced assimilation that have come to be associated with settler colonialism push Indigenous populations underground while naturalizing this very process as an inevitable fact of cultural evolution and stratification. Within the Euro-Western narrative of modernity, the representation of Indigenous traditions, knowledges, and modes of existence as immobile and anachronistic traces of a surmounted past—as fossils to be disinterred, examined, displayed, and discarded—has in consequence become an essential element of foundational ideologies of colonial place-making in both Canada and the US. Correspondingly, what continues to drive settler-colonial economies is the systematic exploitation of Indigenous populations as commodifiable resources, more often than not stripped of meaningful political agency and relegated to the sidelines of neoliberal visions of progress. At the time of writing in the winter of 2020, the ongoing militarized RCMP raid on unceded Wet'suwet'en territory in BC to enforce the corporate construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline is only one of many blatant examples of the line that leads from the dehumanization of colonized peoples as fossils to the oppression of Indigenous cultures and lands by the regimes of fossil fuel. Building on Kathryn Yusoff's critical analysis of "colonial geo-logics" as a shorthand for the historical convergence of "the extractive grammars of geology" and "the violent dispossession of [I]ndigenous land" (*A Billion* 2),

this article examines the employment of fossil metaphors in three fictional works by contemporary Indigenous writers from Canada that critically engage with the complicity between settler colonialism and resource extraction: Métis writer Warren Cariou's short story "An Athabasca Story" (2012), Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), and Anishinaabe writer Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler's novel *Wrist* (2016). All three texts hinge on the dehumanization of Indigenous protagonists as resources and variously imagine resistance to settler-colonial fossil fuel economies by invoking a relationship between Indigenous subjectivity and geologic entities that refuse to stay underground. I suggest it is especially through their employment of gothic and horror tropes in the portrayal of Indigenous resurgence amidst a world marked by ecological precarity and resource exploitation that these works can be read as a response to recent articulations of the Anthropocene, a paradigmatic framework that rests on the declaration of the human as a geologic subject.

## Geologic Subjectivity

Bruno Latour takes the Anthropocene as an occasion to postulate the "return of object and subject back to the *ground*—the 'metamorphic zone'—they had both believed it possible to escape" (17). The Anthropocene in his diction is a matter not of history but of "geostory," whose agents cut across the modern divide between humans and nonhumans and, next to engineers, novelists, and politicians, include rivers, plate tectonics, and microbes (16). Similarly, Donna Haraway positions "Chthonic ones," "beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute" (2), as the figureheads of her Chthulucene, itself a speculative revision designed as an emancipatory counterpoint to the Anthropocene concept. In their rejection of anthropocentrism, such celebrations of geologic subjectivity are frequently compounded with approaches to ecology as the study of more-than-human kinship, nonhuman agency, and human-nature enmeshments—concepts predominantly formulated within a Euro-Western frame despite their rich history in Indigenous traditions.[1] Implicit in much of the early scholarship in this field is the tendency to de-historicize the condition of the Anthropocene, glossing over the links among resource extraction, the environmental crisis, and (settler) colonialism, thereby obscuring the mechanisms by which an analogous rhetoric of human-geologic hybrids has for centuries served to position Indigenous populations as less than fully human, exploitable, and inert—in effect closer to fossils than to human subjects. The conspicuous

proliferation of ghosts, monsters, and nonhuman revenants in much of recent Anthropocene scholarship and variations of ecohorror, moreover, stands in a generic tradition that, particularly in North America, is notorious for the interrelated construction of capital "N" Nature as a site of the uncanny and a settler-colonial gaze that views Indigenous people as monstrous. This article seeks to link up with a growing number of critiques by Indigenous and decolonial scholars who contend that in order to retain the Anthropocene as a critical concept, it has to be grounded in a thorough examination of the structural links among resource extractivism, settler colonialism, and the Euro-Western construction of modernity.

An Indigenous perspective on the Anthropocene helps illustrate that the *anthropos* that is posited as a universal geologic agent functions, not unlike the dominant narrative of North American modernity, as a tool of symbolic and representational erasure. Making a strong case for the inclusion of Indigenous voices in contemporary Anthropocene debates, Métis scholar Zoe Todd explains: "Not all humans are equally implicated in the forces that created the disasters driving contemporary human-environmental crises, and I argue that not all humans are equally invited into the conceptual spaces where these disasters are theorized" ("Indigenizing" 244). Following up on this argument in a widely-received essay from 2016 that builds on Indigenous critiques of posthumanist theory by Sarah Hunt, Vanessa Watts, and Juanita Sundberg, Todd calls out Latour in particular and European new materialist scholars more generally for peddling "insights into the 'more-than-human', sentience and agency" while failing to "credit Indigenous thinkers for their millennia of engagement with sentient environments, with cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships between themselves and all relations, and with climates and atmospheres as important points of organization and action" ("An Indigenous Feminist's" 6-7). Together with Heather Davis, Todd builds on this critique to propose ways to decolonize the Anthropocene by anchoring it in the structural conditions of settler colonialism. In their 2017 essay "Decolonizing the Anthropocene" they argue "that the Anthropocene is not a new event, but is rather the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have been at work for the last five hundred years" (761). In her recent study *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), Kathryn Yusoff proposes a similar revision of Anthropocene origin stories and provides an immediate linkage to theorizations of geologic subjectivity. Tracing the Anthropocene to the onset of colonization, she

shows how the nineteenth-century discourse of geology perpetuated an extractivist grammar that had also been central in the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples and slaves as resources: "The human and its subcategory, the inhuman, are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction," which is to say that "racialization belongs to a material categorization of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert" (2). In resonance with emerging fields such as "political geology" (Bobette and Donavan) and "geontology" (Povinelli), this analysis proceeds from her theorization of "'geologic life'—a mineralogical dimension of human composition that remains currently undertheorised in social thought and is directly relevant for the material, temporal, and corporeal conceptualization of fossil fuels" ("Geologic Life" 779). Let me follow Yusoff and propose that the narrative of the Anthropocene is not driven by a newly hybridized yet universal geomorphic *anthropos*, but by the resurgence of fossils, understood "as material and discursive knots in the narrative arc of human becoming (780). Fossils are ciphers for the mineralization of life and its far-future disinterment. Envisioned as "human-lithic enmeshments" (Cohen 6) they indicate that "[t]he lithic has for too long served as an allegory for nature stilled into resource" (11). In this vein, Yusoff explains how "[c]onsidering the geologic as defining strata of contemporary subjectivity within the designation of the Anthropocene opens up the question of what forms of geologic life subtend subjectivity; and how this geologic life holds the potential for a more expansive inhuman thought" ("Geologic Life" 780). Against the backdrop of this theoretical reorientation, I argue that by engaging the metaphorics of fossils to capture the settler-colonial violence upon Indigenous bodies and land and by raising the spectre of geologic life as a function of ecological resistance in resonance with Indigenous mythology and elements of gothic fiction, the texts by Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler discussed in this article effectively trouble the narratives and genealogies undergirding the very idea of the Anthropocene, reminding their readers that the current geological epoch is haunted not by monstrous natures but by its combined origins in colonization and resource extraction.

Implicit in Yusoff's understanding of fossils as indicative of "questions about human genealogy, inheritance, and modes of future and past survival" (788) is a complication not only of ontology but also of temporality that may be mobilized for what Mark Rifkin in *Beyond Settler Time* (2017) calls "temporal sovereignty" (2). In contrast to images of Indigenous subjects

as "ghostly remainders" of an inert past (5), invocations of geologic life in Indigenous fiction bear the potential of "indicating ways of being-in-time that are not reducible to participation in a singular, given time—a unitary flow—largely contoured by non-native patterns and priorities" (3). Not unlike *biskaabiiyang*, or "returning to ourselves," a frequently cited Nishnaabeg concept of resurgence and decolonization,[2] the folding of times and the living agency of fossils may "not literally mean returning to the past, but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishment of the past to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens" (Simpson, *Dancing* 51). Related to the concept of the ghost, the return of fossils in Indigenous fiction has less in common with settler imaginaries of haunted lands than with an Indigenous mode of being-in-time in which the boundaries between past, present, and future are not clear-cut but porous, in which ontological hybrids across time and space are signifiers of survivance and reconnection, rather than signs of a "neocolonial uncanny" (Cariou, "Haunted" 727).

Tellingly, the parallel construction of "nature" as resource and the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples informs the roots of both the Anthropocene and the North American gothic tradition. Scholars such as Cynthia Sugars, Renée Bergland, and Teresa Goddu have examined how foundational works in North American gothic fiction rely on the representation of Indigenous figures as inhuman avatars of a haunted, untamed wilderness. With respect to early Canadian literature, Sugars points to "two dichotomous features of Gothic expression . . . : one positing the Canadian wilderness as a Gothic landscape inhabited by savage creatures . . . ; the other conjuring the place as an equally terrifying *terra nullius* that was devoid of Gothic effects or ghosts" (410). Through the related semantics of wilderness and *terra nullius*, Indigenous subjectivity in this setup was first demonized and then denied, rendering appearances of the supposedly vanishing Indian a particularly salient trope of territorial anxieties in nineteenth-century North American literature. Against the backdrop of an ongoing history of displacement and longstanding struggles of North American Indigenous communities and activists to resist the commodification of land and cultural knowledge by fossil fuel industries and Western environmentalists alike, the works of Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler discussed below are evidence of Colleen Boyd and Coll-Peter Thrush's obvious, yet pertinent point that "Indigenous people are more than metaphors in the settler imagination, or silenced victims of removal. Rather, they are active participants in the shaping of uncanny narratives as a form of both resistance and persistence" (xi).

In line with critics from Sugars to Cariou and Michelle Burnham, who confirm the existence of modes reminiscent of the gothic in Indigenous literatures and stories, yet caution against the uncritical postulation of a full-fledged Indigenous or Aboriginal Gothic, I want to resist categorizing the texts examined in this article as unambiguously fitting into the genre of gothic fiction, not least because, as a quintessential Euro-Western literary form, the Gothic fundamentally relies on a structural haunting that proceeds from imagining marginalized or colonized others as monstrous (see Burnham). Sugars illustrates how the ambivalent Canadian attachment to the Gothic, characterized by the fear of territorial illegitimacy and inhuman beasts on the one side, and the "active attempt to 'gothicize' the Canadian landscape in order to render it 'home(l)y,' [on the other,] gave Aboriginal authors a means to 'write back' to the colonizing culture by reasserting their own understanding of the Canadian landscape as infused with [I]ndigenous spirits" (Sugars 410). It is in this sense that the following analysis aims at positioning Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler's fiction as not only overt ecopolitical commentaries but also successful examples of Indigenous authors writing back to a literary tradition shaped by wilderness survival and Indigenous hauntings.

## Reclaiming the Fossil

The opening scene of "An Athabasca Story" by Saskatchewan-born artist, critic, and writer of Métis/European heritage Warren Cariou recalls a classic trope of dark romanticist gothic tales: riven by hunger and cold, a lone figure stumbles through the remote winter forest in the hope of finding a place to warm himself, despondent from encountering "none of his relations" as he enters unfamiliar lands on his way west (99). Introduced as Elder Brother, a recurring spiritual figure in Cree and Nishnaabeg histories, Cariou's protagonist seems alienated and shrouded by an air of doom. As if to comment on the pervasive trope of the vanishing Indigenous presence, ghostly and on the brink of extinction, Elder Brother is presented like a time traveller from the world of nineteenth-century North American landscape painting—perhaps Thomas Cole's *Falls of Kaaterskill* (1826)—the aesthetics of which relied on what Bergland calls "Indian spectralization" (20). Cariou himself has written about how the Native ghosts prominently featured as a stock element of Canadian gothic fiction appear to be "haunting the very project of colonialism which has displaced Native people from their land" ("Haunted" 727). Imagined by non-Native writers, such "Aboriginal hauntings," he notes, are easily read as "the return of the repressed" (728). Yet, he cautions,

in the work of Native writers "these spirits are not necessarily figures of uncanny terror;" rather, Cariou maintains that "while many such spirits do seem to address the transgressions of the colonial past, they usually do so as part of a call for some kind of redress or change in the present" (731). Following this lead, we can read "An Athabasca Story" as an inversion of the settler-colonial gaze, focalized as the narrative is through an Indigenous ghost who beholds the evacuation of his relations from the landscape with confusion and an almost naive disbelief. Tracing the scent of "a kind of smoke he never encountered before," Elder Brother is stopped short by "a vast expanse of empty land. Empty of trees, of muskeg, of birds and animals. . . . The only things moving on that vacant landscape were enormous yellow contraptions that clawed and bored and bit the dark earth" (99). In an aesthetic resonance with the dark sublime, this "vast expanse" and the connotations of its vacancy—an unmistakeable reference to the Athabasca tar sands explored in much of Cariou's artistic work—hold up a mirror to the Canadian settler gothic. Settler confrontations between "civilization" and "wilderness" are inverted by invoking as unhomely not the lack of human (i.e., European) ancestry but "the newly naked earth itself" (99). Whereas the settler imaginary is haunted by "bestial Indians" who unmask Canadian and American delusions of territorial hegemony (see Yao), Elder Brother is faced with "great yellow beasts" that bore and claw and bite and haul amidst an ambient smell of "something dead" (99). Spotting a human at the helm of one of the contraptions, Elder Brother attempts to establish a connection: "Oh my brother, my dear relation, . . . I am very hungry and cold and I was hoping . . . to come and visit you in your house" (100). The response is swift and makes clear that Elder Brother has no place on this land: "You're saying you're not with the company? . . . Are you Greenpeace? . . . [Y]ou'll be a lot worse than cold . . . if you don't get the hell out of my way and off this goddamn property" (100). Less intimidated than disappointed, Elder Brother observes that "[t]his man talked as if he had no relations at all" (100). Against the backdrop of the "ecological Indian" stereotype perpetuated by twentieth-century Euro-American environmentalist movements, it is telling that Elder Brother is mistaken for a Greenpeace activist. To the operator of the machine, Indigenous subjectivity, it seems, is only legible through an environmentalist discourse that has historically reduced it to a powerless and passive surface for the projection of European environmental grief and guilt. As if to emphasize the vibrant reality of Indigenous ecological activism obscured by this trope, the story's 2018 graphic adaptation is contextualized

with images of the Standing Rock protests, the Idle No More movement, and the Fort McMurray fires, indicating that Indigenous environmentalism is urgent and thriving and has little need for paternalist Greenpeace appropriations (see Cariou and Burns 49-50).

What could be read as a commentary on early Canadian anxieties about the lack of ancestral ties to the land also serves to introduce an element shared by many Indigenous onto-epistemological frameworks—the importance of relationality and an understanding of ecological enmeshment as kinship with a broad range of relatives that include other-than-human entities like stone, plants, animals, and spirits. Compounding the vital importance of these frameworks is the trauma of disconnection, the severing of Indigenous peoples from land, language, and culturally inherent knowledge that has defined settler-colonial agendas of displacement and cultural genocide since their inception. Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice picks up on these histories to connect the mechanics of settler colonialism with the ongoing destruction of ecosystems, noting that "[t]he world increasingly becomes a commodity to be purchased, consumed, and flushed away" as a result of the interventions by which "a great resource-consuming part of humanity is busy ravaging . . . delicate threads of interdependence" (39). Highlighting the importance of relations, Justice explains that "[t]o be a good relative is to counter these exploitative [settler-colonial] forces and the stories that legitimize them, while at the same time affirming—or reaffirming—better, more generative, more generous ways to uphold our obligations and our commitments to our diverse and varied kin" (84). As the personification of a cosmological framework in which everything can be kin and alive, Cariou's protagonist finds himself in a barren landscape that signals death. After he learns that the machines are extracting "very special dirt" that promises eternal warmth, Elder Brother claims his own share but gets stuck (Cariou, "An Athabasca Story" 100). Spending days "[e]ncased there in the tar as if he was a fossil" (103), he is eventually hauled out by one of the excavating machines and dumped into the hopper of the smoking refinery. This is where Cariou's story ends on a note of ambivalent reassurance:

> Of course Elder Brother can't die, luckily for him. Or perhaps not so luckily. He's still alive even now, after everything he's been through. It's true that people don't see him much anymore, but sometimes when you're driving your car and you press hard on the accelerator, you might hear a knocking, rattling sound down deep in the bowels of the machine. That's Elder Brother, trying to get your attention, begging you to let him out. (103)

While Elder Brother literally merges with the earth to become first fossil and then fossil fuel, he is not dead, but transformed into a figuration of geologic life poised for resurgence. I want to resist reading "An Athabasca Story" as merely an allegory of the erasure and commodification of Indigenous people via the related extractive grammars of industrial capitalism and colonialism, but rather position it as an articulation and prediction of Indigenous survivance and futurity. Therefore, I suggest we read the story's ending as an apposite example of what it might mean to refract the often-belaboured notion of global ecological entanglements through the lens of an Indigenous onto-epistemological framework where webs of relationality between humans and nonhumans do not end at the refinery but extend into every aspect of modern consumer culture. What Cariou offers is not a simple infusion of the Canadian wilderness with Indigenous spirits, but an apt literalization of what it means to make the enmeshments of the Anthropocene visible, to become attuned to the recalcitrant noise of one's petrocarbon relations every time someone hits the accelerator. Folded back into the registers of gothic fiction, Elder Brother's metamorphosis and continuing existence and resistance in the "bowels" of modern automobiles resonates with what some scholars in the footsteps of Timothy Morton or Amitav Ghosh theorize as the environmental unconscious—a repressed physicality perpetually unsettling comforting beliefs in territorial hegemony, sustainability, linear temporality, and bounded individualism. Therein lies the shape-shifting and time-travelling power of the fossil, that "abandoned being that suddenly in the midst of the present reconfigures the possibilities of times" (Yusoff, "Life" 789), whose "geologic corporeality" resists extractivist semantics of inert inhuman matter and fossilized life (788).

Métis writer Cherie Dimaline's award-winning novel *The Marrow Thieves* serves as a second paradigmatic example of the negotiation of Canada's ongoing settler-colonial history as a function of industrialized resource extraction. Less gothic than ecological science fiction, it is set in the aftermath of a cataclysmic escalation of the contemporary environmental crisis that is captured in the crushing line: "The Earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long" (Dimaline 87). In what might be read as a comment on the dire need for speculative fiction in an age of uncertain climate futures, the entire non-Native population of Canada (if not the globe) has lost its ability to dream and looks to Indigenous peoples for a remedy. Dimaline's description of the insidious progression from the exoticization to the dispossession of Indigenous culture unmistakeably talks

back to the appropriation and commodification of so-called "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" by Western scientists and environmentalist movements from the 1970s onwards (see Simpson, *Traditional*): "At first, people turned to Indigenous people the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity, looking for ways we could help them guide. . . . And then they changed on us, like the New Agers, looking for ways they could take what we had and administer it themselves" (88). In a twist that recalls elements of 1980s body horror and that also mirrors the colonization of Black bodies in Jordan Peele's neo-horror film *Get Out*, released in the same year as *The Marrow Thieves*, the Indigenous body itself becomes a commodity and the site for a gruesome practice of resource extraction: "It began as a rumor, that they had found a way to siphon the dreams right out of our bones, a rumor whispered every time their doctors sent us to hospitals and treatment centers never to return" (89). The "culling" of Indigenous peoples by killing their dreams (89), reducing them to ossiferous raw material to be "harvested" and "used-up" in order to fuel the continuation of settler economies (143), is closer to the rationale for and ongoing effects of the Canadian residential schools system than to science-fictional literalization of metaphor.

Other than a description of glass tubes filled with "a thick, viscous liquid that was neither cool nor warm" labelled with age, gender, and tribal affiliation (144), little detail is given on how the extracted "dream stuff" (145) is used or what happens to Native dreams when transplanted into non-Native bodies and society. Instead, Dimaline's novel focuses on the vital role of dreams and stories for the survival of a multi-tribal and intergenerational group of fugitives on the run from the "Recruiters" of the Canadian government's "Department of Oneirology" (4). In weekly sessions, the group's leader Miigwans tells "Story"—consistently capitalized and in zero-marking as if to allude to the transcendent and performative quality of ceremonial storytelling—through which both younger members of the group and readers learn about the events that have shaped the diegetic present. To remember a collective history, "to set the memory in perpetuity" (25), reinforces the webs of relationships among the group and, as the protagonist Frenchie recognizes about the significance of Story for the younger RiRi, becomes a means for her "to form into a real human before she understood that some saw her as little more than crop" (26). Story thus constitutes a powerful tool of resistance against the dehumanizing and fragmenting forces of a state system that views Indigenous people primarily as resource.

The novel's plot alternates collective Story with each individual character's "coming-to story," the telling of which, in contrast to the appropriation of Indigenous dreams, becomes an enactment of sovereign agency: "Everyone's creation story is their own" (79). Insofar as they provide the infrastructure and frame for Indigenous flourishing, survival, and world-building, stories, like dreams, are literally invoked as cultural bone marrow.

The analogous decolonial power of stories and dreams heralded by Nishnaabeg poet, critic, and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson also holds true for Dimaline's world:

> Storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives. In a similar way, dreams and visions propel resurgence because they provide Nishnaabeg with both the knowledge from the spiritual world and processes for realizing those visions. Dreams and visions provide glimpses of decolonized spaces and transformed realities that we have collectively yet to imagine. (*Dancing* 34-35)

"[B]uried in our bones" by "our ancestors" (Dimaline 90), dreams in *The Marrow Thieves*, as in many Indigenous cultures, function as primordial archives and vehicles of cultural tradition, ancestral knowledges, and storied kinship relations that link the present to the future as much as to a past which, even if buried, is not dead. Considering their embodiment in and extraction from bone, Dimaline ambivalently invokes fossils as a metonymy of both Indigenous erasure and resurgence. Reminiscent of Yusoff's theorization of fossils as a manifestation of geologic life, Indigenous bones are envisioned as reservoirs of a material-semiotic life-force or energy that, if properly channelled, can also be wielded as a decolonial weapon. This potential is vividly depicted at the novel's climax. As the authorities attempt to extract the dreams of the group's Elder, Minerva, the dream energy stored in her marrow overwhelms the system and literally spills out, causing the machinery to collapse:

> She sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreaking wail that echoed through her relatives' bones, rattling them in the ground under the school itself. Wave after wave, changing her heartbeat to drum, morphing her singular voice to many, pulling every dream from her own marrow and into her song. And there were words: words in the language that the conductor couldn't process, words the Cardinals couldn't bear, words the wires couldn't transfer. (172)

The animation of ancestral bones and the summoning of the performative power of Indigenous language and knowing as a self-sacrificial act of defiance and collective empowerment in this scene simultaneously recalls the long-

suppressed atrocities of the Canadian residential school system and subverts the recurring settler-gothic trope of Indigenous burial grounds. Culminating in this revitalization of the past and the raising of bones into song to create viable and vibrant futures for Indigenous peoples against the backdrop of an ecological breakdown, *The Marrow Thieves* is exemplary of what it means to reclaim fossil narratives and unmask the complicities between settler colonialism and resource extractivism in the age of the Anthropocene.

## Reclaiming the Human

An examination of geologic life as a recurring trope in narratives of Indigenous resurgence requires attention to more flexible categories of humanity, kinship, and personhood that complicate Western demarcations of the monstrous and the inanimate. What unites many Indigenous oral traditions, according to Justice, is that "we learned to be human in large part from the land and our other-than-human relatives" (76). In this final section, I focus on the horror novel *Wrist* by Anishinaabe author Nathan Adler as a negotiation of what it means to reclaim Indigenous humanity in the face of resource extraction economies by embracing kinship relations to the land that are unapologetically coded as monstrous.

Adler's narrative is set on the fictional Ghost Lake Reserve in northern Ontario, the grounds of which harbour both dinosaur bones and oil: "By some geologic fate, the same physical processes by which dinosaur bones had been preserved, had also preserved marine life deposited in layers of sediment, which became oil and natural gas captured in the folds and draperies of the rock, the black sludge of the modern energy economy" (376). The novel hinges on a multiplication of fossil metaphors that relate dinosaur bones and oil to the resurrection of Indigenous kinship relations and ancestral heritage in response to a colonial rhetoric that posits Indigenous subjectivity as dead or inhuman. With reverberations in Justice's argument that "as long as our relationship to the land persists, there are possibilities for reawakening what has gone dormant" (51), *Wrist* propels a vision of resurgence based in "[Anishinaabe] stories about the ghosts of extinct species, awakened from their long sleep" (114). Reminiscent of both Elder Brother's metamorphic fate in "An Athabasca Story" and the summoning of spiritual energy from Minerva's bones in *The Marrow Thieves*, Adler develops an extended analogy between the extractive industries and the consumption of bodies that hinges on the proximity between fossils and fossil fuel. Transport trucks prompt a vision of "pistons pumping black

bile through mechanical veins," leading the protagonist to imagine "souls of extinct species filling the sky, clogging the air and breaking down the molecules of ozone with their viscous, primordial presence; the vengeance of disturbed ghosts terraforming the world to suit their lost one—a warmer world, a world with more lizard-brained violence" (376). Modern energy economies are here imagined as releasing an environmental unconscious that is not necessarily benign but follows its own agendas and operates beyond the bounds of human control—a predicament that in analogous registers also shapes the lives of Adler's Indigenous protagonists.

Set in the 1990s, the main story follows the coming-of-age of Church, the fourth-generation "quasi-human" descendant of a voracious Wiindigo spirit, struggling to keep his monstrous heritage in check (132). A parallel epistolary narrative set a century in the past introduces Harker Lockwood, a medical doctor who joins a paleontological excavation of dinosaur bones on the territory of Church's ancestors in 1872 to study "Wiindigo Culture Amongst the Northern Ojibwe" (36)—research he hopes, with unmistakeably extractivist undertones, will "yield rich discoveries" (29). The intertextual references to Jonathan Harker, the tormented protagonist of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Mr. Lockwood, the haunted narrator in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, are programmatic in that they deliberately invoke the European gothic as a foil. Via the baroque interweaving of dinosaurs, Wiindigo, and, ultimately, vampires, the novel generates a multiplication of hauntings that pivot on the metaphorics of extraction and consumption. Cast as a protector of the land and embodiment of fossil ghosts, the Wiindigo—an insatiable and emaciated giant who feeds on human flesh and, according to Ojibway scholar Basil Johnston, represents the most terrifying "of the evil beings who dwelt on the periphery of the world of the Anishinaubae peoples" (221)—seems ever lurking in the shadows of the Ghost Lake forest and in the back of Church's mind: "Some people say he's gone. Some people say he's just sleeping or hibernating like a bear. That one day he'll wake up, and you can be sure, that when he does, he'll be hungry" (130). As "animal ancestors" (130) and spirits, fossils and their incarnations as fuel are repeatedly coded in the registers of more-than-human kin and emphasize the centrality of relatives in Church's life, indicating that "Anishinaabe stories are filled with such intersections, across species, across-states of being, between animate objects" (23). As if in allusion to the historical dehumanization of North American Indigenous peoples as either yielding fossils or "savage beasts," the members of Church's family self-

identify as not entirely human, always on the verge of turning monstrous.

This intrinsic liminality is compounded by intersections of Church's family with a range of other hybrid positions on the socio-ontological periphery—from the "other-worldly nature" of Church's Two-Spirit/queer uncle Inri and his paraplegic grandmother, who sacrificed her legs in exchange for her humanity (92); to his father, a Holocaust survivor who was killed and resurrected more than a dozen times as a victim of Josef Mengele's horrific twin experiments in Auschwitz; to his great-grandmother's ghost twin sister, and his great-great-grandaunt, a descendant of tree spirits. To understand the dislocation of human-monster delineations in *Wrist*, exclusionary liberal humanist schemata may have to be discarded in favour of more expansive and generous conceptions. Justice heralds this task as one of the guiding principles of Indigenous literatures. Rather than "limiting the 'human' to specific classes of beings, with powers and privileges distributed accordingly" (36), Indigenous literatures may be approached as articulations of "how to learn to be human" via the recuperation of an "active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgment and enactment" (42). Framed in this rejoinder to Latour's iconic pronouncement "we have never been modern," Indigenous literatures can be understood as linking up with a critique of modernity that especially in the context of the Anthropocene has served to re-orient the human as always already hybridized and intimately enmeshed in more-than-human ecologies (which is not to say that all Indigenous literature is didactic in this sense). In its sprawling portrayal of Church's variegated family relations and their intersections with spirits and land, *Wrist* foregrounds the humanity of its Indigenous protagonists by ultimately rehabilitating their monstrously-coded heritage as a boon rather than a deficiency, pivotal in defeating the colonial intruders intent on squeezing their land for bones and oil across the span of over a century.

Not out of place in a narrative teeming with references to contemporary American pop culture and horror film, the villains in both timelines are invoked as veritable vampires. Offhandedly, Lockwood describes the "eyeteeth" of the Victorian-mannered paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope as "pointed and as sharp as fangs" (172), a peculiar observation that recurs almost verbatim a hundred years later as Church is lured into the car of three "details-men hired by a resource extraction company called Magnon Incorporated" who soon overpower him not only to suck his blood but also to extort the oil-soaked land belonging to his family (360). Contemporary fossil fuel industries are here cast as direct extensions of nineteenth-century

geological discourses and their personification as vampires renders the related extractivist violence perpetrated upon Indigenous bodies, culture, and land explicit. An observation tellingly made by Justice in a discussion of *The Marrow Thieves* that collates blood, marrow, and DNA is also pertinent for a reading of *Wrist*: "Indian blood . . . has long carried powerful symbolic resonance for settler societies: first pathologized as source of contamination, and later sought as a totemic presence by settler colonial people to claim belonging without relationship" (138). Through the parallelism of blood, bones, and oil,[3] Church and his family are doubly commodified as hosts of exploitable resources to be extracted and processed for the advancement of European industry and science. The only way to resist these forces, Church realizes, is by reaffirming rather than disavowing the connection to his monstrous ancestor, summoning the Wiindigo by nursing his hunger to the point of starvation—"how else could he learn to be human? It was a right [sic] of passage" (133). As readers learn at the very end of the novel, the Wiindigo appears as an avatar of ravaged land and has already slain two Magnon oil prospectors because he "didn't want them to discover the tar-like substance oozing from the rock-shelf like congealed blood" (414). In a climactic showdown that plays itself out on the "Burnt Grounds," a barren stretch of rock that recalls the bleak scenery of Cariou's tar sands and is described as a place where the "boundary between this world and the next is thin," "everything broken and destroyed is made whole, and everything burnt and wrecked is alive" (430), the vampires are eventually killed by an alliance among Church's Wiindigo forefather and the "ticked-off" spirits of his mother and uncle (432).

Adler's juxtaposition of Wiindigo and Vampire is clever, not least because both figures frequently serve as personifications of capitalist resource industries. In his book on Ojibway Manitous, Johnston describes "the modern Weendigoes" as "corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals" who've "renounced their cravings for raw human flesh in return for more refined viands" (235).[4] Through the confrontation and, at times, even alignment of Wiindigo and Vampire, Adler seems to reject the unilateral traffic from European gothic tropes into North American imaginaries, reminding his readers that Indigenous cultures have their own monsters and ghosts, some of whom may also be transformed into "figures of healing, ceremony, or political action" (Cariou, "Haunted" 730)—sources of empowerment, rather than victimization or demonization. As if to comment on the valence of gothic fiction as a vehicle of cultural colonialism,

Church's grandmother warns: "Immigrants brought their own monsters with them. Their own hungers, their own forms of wiindigo" (209). Adler's rehabilitation of the Wiindigo as a culturally-specific avenger and land defender, thus, offers a compelling response to the entangled histories of colonization and resource extraction. By staging decolonial resistance to European fossil industries as the resurgence of an Indigenous monster metonymically tied to oil and bones, he seems to talk back to the ways in which nineteenth-century geology in its legitimation of Indigenous genocide and slavery relied on a mechanism of "inhuman differentiation" through which the colonized other was "'transformed from the *human subject* of his own culture into the *inhuman object* of the European culture'" (Sylvia Wynter qtd. in Yusoff, *A Billion* 16, emphasis original). Estranged from its European context, the human/inhuman differentiation in *Wrist* is refracted through an Indigenous lens by which its protagonist becomes attuned to the manifold kinship relations that bind him not only to his monstrous ancestors but also to the land, the forest, the spiritual world, and the fossils in the ground. By eventually embracing his ostensibly inhuman heritage, Church enacts a return to his own culture that allows him to realize that the relationship between humans and monsters may be far more complex than his favourite (American) horror movies insinuate.

Reclaiming fossils implies a material-discursive dimension of decolonization that complements the physical repatriation of looted ancestral bones and Indigenous artifacts with the production of self-determined Indigenous narratives of geologic corporeality. It entails exposing the bio- and geopolitical delineations of being and nonbeing that underly the conjoined histories of settler-colonialism and resource extraction and anchoring stories of resistance in gradations of animacy and economies of value that accentuate variegated networks of relationality rather than rigid ontological divides. The texts discussed above talk back to a key paradigm of the Anthropocene while rejecting universalizing narratives of a catastrophe that is still to come. Rather, they link up with Anthropocene critiques such as Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte's, who recognizes that ecological collapse has been felt by Indigenous populations since colonization and understands "much of the conservation and environmental justice work that Indigenous peoples do as a type of science (fiction) that seeks to 'waken' protagonists and particular qualities of relationships" (232). With this restorative potential of Indigenous science (fiction) in mind, I am inclined to read Cariou, Dimaline, and Adler's visions of ongoing reconstruction and

survival as expressions of a narrative imagination that functions as type of theory in its own right and holds the potential for important dialogues with ecopolitical scholarship, art, and activism within and beyond the bounds of North American Indigenous literatures.

## NOTES

1 See Todd "An Indigenous Feminist's"; Watts; Sundberg.
2 See Dillon 10; Simpson, *As We Have* 17-21.
3 I am grateful to Sarah Henzi for pointing me to Elle Máijá Tailfeathers' (Blackfoot/Sámi) 2011 body horror short film *Bloodland*, which stages the parallel violences upon Indigenous land by fossil fuel industries and the bodies of Indigenous women via the enmeshed visual semantics of blood and oil.
4 A contemporary use of the vampire trope to describe the Canadian oil industry can be found in John K. Samson's 2016 song "Vampire Alberta Blues."

## WORKS CITED


Adler, Nathan Niigan Noodin. *Wrist*. Kegedonce, 2016.

Bergland, Renée. *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. Dartmouth College P, 2000.

Bobette, Adam, and Amy Donovan, eds. *Political Geology: Active Stratigraphies and the Making of Life*. Palgrave, 2019.

Boyd, Colleen E., and Coll-Peter Thrush. "Introduction: Bringing Ghosts to the Ground." *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History*, edited by Boyd and Thrush, U of Nebraska P, 2011, pp. vii-xl.

Burnham, Michelle. "Is There an Indigenous Gothic?" *A Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Charles Crow, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 225-37.

Cariou, Warren. "An Athabasca Story." *Read Listen Tell*, edited by Sophie McCall et al., Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2017, pp. 98-103.

—. "Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal 'Ghosts' and the Spectres of Settlement." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2006, pp. 727-34.

Cariou, Warren, and Nicholas Burns. "An Athabasca Story: A Graphic Narrative." *Sovereign Traces Vol 1: Not (Just) (An)Other*, edited by Gordon Henry Jr. and Elizabeth LaPensée, Michigan State UP, 2018, pp. 43-54.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*. U of Minnesota P, 2015.

Davis, Heather, and Zoe Todd. "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2017, pp. 761-80.

Dillon, Grace L. "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms." *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, edited by Dillon, U of Arizona P, 2012, pp. 1-12.

Dimaline, Cherie. *The Marrow Thieves*. Dancing Cat, 2017.

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke UP, 2016.

Johnston, Basil H. *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*. 1995. Minnesota Historical Society, 2001.

Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2018.

Latour, Bruno. "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene." *New Literary History*, vol. 45, 2014, pp. 1-18.
Povinelli, Elizabeth A. *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Duke UP, 2016.
Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke UP, 2017.
Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. U of Minnesota P, 2017.
—. *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring, 2011.
Simpson, Leanne. *The Construction of Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Issues, Implications and Insights*. 1999. University of Manitoba, PhD dissertation.
Sugars, Cynthia. "Canadian Gothic." *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 409-27.
Sundberg, Juanita. "Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies." *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2014, pp. 33-47.
Tailfeathers, Elle-Máijá. "Bloodland." 2011. *YouTube*, uploaded by maijatf, 23 Jan. 2013, youtube.com/watch?v=LSfBWMSl1rw&feature=youtu.be. Accessed 10 Mar. 2020.
Todd, Zoe. "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism." *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2016, pp. 4-22.
—. "Indigenizing the Anthropocene." *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, edited by Heather M. Davis and Etienne Turpin, Open Humanities, 2015, pp. 241-53.
Watts, Vanessa. "Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency Amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European World Tour!)." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, pp. 20-34.
Whyte, Kyle Powys. "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, vol. 1, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 224-42.
Yao, Christine. "Gothic Monstrosity: Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* and the Trope of the Bestial Indian." *American Gothic Culture: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam, Edinburgh UP, 2016, pp. 25-43.
Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. U of Minnesota P, 2018.
—. "Geologic Life: Prehistory, Climate, Futures in the Anthropocene." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2013, pp. 779-95.

Vivian Zenari

# Crowsnest Flow

Where lava sprayed glistening rock
a glacier plunged and ground the mountain rocks to melt into a lake and outflow river
out pours bluebunch and mountain rough fescue to roll and merge with the wind to the grassland east

The Pelican Lake peoples flowed in and out
the Besant peoples flowed in and out and the
Kootenai peoples flowed in and flowered and wilted
but set their roots down hard

An old priest trudged in a black gown and
railways ran their trains in and out
miners plunged and ground for black coal
farmers pushed their herds of cattle in and out
rum runners drove their McLaughlin Buicks in and out
skiers drive in and up to slide the slopes
dynamite exploded out to build the grey river of
highway number three when it wound west and south then west

All flow in and out almost nothing stops this stop gap
not even a gravel avalanche or mine explosion

It took a name it didn't used to have
flowing words about a perch on pine for the raven or
little brother of raven
or the band of Crow who met the Blackfoot there

Now a crow watches the traffic to the
cinnamon bun place from a power pole
until the day the flow stops
after what calamity,
when the cars on the highway disappear and
only flows the river,
and the deer, then only the wind, then only the
lava jettisoning its glistening rocks and
the mountains push themselves shut
without a witness

Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado

# Re-framing the Diasporic Subject

## The Supernatural and the Black Female Body in Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads*

As a genre, speculative fiction[1] engages with many of the premises that underlie colonialism and imperial projects. Often, "spec-fic" scenarios replicate the same principles and dynamics of invasion and extermination/domination that have historically marked colonial expansions. John Rieder explores how much of early science fiction is constructed upon "fantasies of appropriation," which include the location of the Indigenous or racialized *other* in marginalized contexts (often regarded as exotic and underdeveloped), the exploitation of resources, or the adoption of the *noble savage* figure (Rieder 34-60). Parallel to this pervasiveness of colonial discourses in spec-fic, there have been relatively few mainstream stories that engage significantly with non-European ethnicities. Elizabeth Leonard notes that "sf deals with racial tension by ignoring it. In many books the characters' race is either not mentioned and probably assumed to be white or, if mentioned, is irrelevant to the events of the story and functions only as an additional descriptor" (254). This is, of course, not only a problem of the content of spec-fic works, but of the publishing industry itself, as it is still largely dominated by white, male authors. This literary situation is nevertheless gradually changing as more black and Indigenous writers turn to the genre of speculative fiction. Nalo Hopkinson belongs to a tradition of black spec-fic writers who, though still a minority, have produced a strong and celebrated body of work. This tradition includes writers such as Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, and Charles Saunders, as well as more recently published writers of African descent, such as Nnedi Okorafor and Nisi

Shawl. Indeed, Hopkinson's and Uppender Mehan's collection of short stories by multi-ethnic writers, *So Long Been Dreaming* (2004), was the first to be self-defined as "postcolonial science fiction and fantasy," confirming, as Hopkinson has declared, that "a speculative literature from a culture that has been on the receiving end of the colonization glorified in some sf could be a compelling body of writing" (Rutledge 591).

Postcolonialism and speculative fiction thus overlap in significant ways and bringing them together constitutes a productive critical exercise. In this article, I focus on Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2003) to argue that, through narrative approaches such as the focus on the black female body and the use of the Afro-Caribbean supernatural, two main historical and cultural re-examinations can be discerned. First, the use of Afro-Caribbean epistemologies and cosmologies subverts elements from both canonical speculative fiction and Western philosophy and creates new frameworks of narrative and thought. The first section of this essay looks specifically at how Vodou metaphysics conceives time-space and mind-body relationships in non-Eurocentric terms. In Vodou, the self is defined outside the constraints of historical linearity, an ontological approach that also ties in with the work of many other Caribbean writers and scholars, most notably Kamau Brathwaite's idea of tidalectics. As I will explore below, this vision of self and history allows for a reading of Caribbean cultures and identities under a distinctively Caribbean lens. Thus, the novel is not only concerned with the purpose of *writing back*. It also engages in processes of self-definition that in turn add to a corpus of spec-fic which lacks compelling representation of racialized subjects and worldviews. As well, the particular narrativization of the black female body in this novel implies a rethinking of imperial projects and their historical aftermaths, and more importantly a reframing of diasporic subjectivities. The multi-relational framework provided by Vodou spirituality, echoed in epistemologies such as that of tidalectics, foregrounds the role of the body as historical context. The second section of the article focuses on this role and how it is fictionalized in terms that necessarily trouble certain established notions of diasporic experiences. Specifically, the novel implicitly questions Paul Gilroy's framing of the Black Atlantic, according to which the black diasporic experience begins with the Middle Passage. The historical (and geographical) parameters of the novel widen to incorporate previous imperial contexts (particularly, the Roman Empire) in which the black female body was exploited and racialized prior to the transatlantic slave trade. Thus, my argument in the second half of this essay

is that the novel points to an alternative framework to position the black diasporic subject: that of gendered practices of oppression and resistance.

*The Salt Roads* is a complex novel in that it follows the stories of three female characters along three different timelines. Crucially, these women are all visited or possessed by Lasirèn, a sea-goddess of the Haitian Vodou pantheon, who is attributed to Ezili, the *loa* (goddess) of love. The lives of the protagonists are thus tied together through the agency of the female deity. The narration opens with Mer, a slave woman born in Africa and working in a plantation in Saint Domingue. The second main character to be introduced is Lemer, the mixed-race mistress of French poet Charles Baudelaire. Finally, near the middle of the novel, the third main character is presented: she is Meritet/Thais, a Greek-Nubian prostitute living in Alexandria in the fourth century AD. Apart from their connection through Lasirèn, many other elements link the stories of these women: their names are related to the sea, they are all dark-skinned, they engage in queer relationships at different points, and their bodies are used for the pleasure and benefit of men.

Further, all three narrative lines in *The Salt Roads* are connected with real historical events and contain fictionalized versions of historical figures. In the Saint Domingue plantation, Mer engages with a runaway slave called Makandal, whose magical powers help advance the slave revolution by poisoning the water supplies of slave owners across the island. This character is clearly based on François Mackandal, a marooned slave who played a crucial role in the Haitian revolution, and who was allegedly a *houngan*, or Vodou priest. For her part, Lemer's character corresponds (although not completely, as some biographical events are changed) with Jeanne Duval, also known as Jeanne Lemer, who was the real-life mistress of Baudelaire and was of mixed French and African descent. Lastly, Meritet/Thais is associated in the novel with Mary of Egypt. According to Christian hagiographies, Mary of Egypt was a libertine woman living in Alexandria who, after travelling to Jerusalem, repented her sins by fasting in the desert and converting to the Christian religion. It is the element of the Afro-Caribbean supernatural, conveyed through the figure of Lasirèn, that separates the novel from historical fiction and distinguishes it as spec-fic instead.

I argue that the particular epistemologies that emerge from Afro-Caribbean traditions in Hopkinson's narrative challenge and subvert Eurocentric forms of meaning-making that pervade canonical fantastic genres. Postcolonial theory is in part useful for such an analysis of *The Salt Roads*, because this theory is "a method of deconstructing existing traditions

of Western thought and culture and of reading literary texts differently" (Gikandi 113). The novel, in reading history speculatively, offers a significant revision and rewriting of Eurocentric and male historical accounts. At the same time, however, a deconstructionist approach may not be sufficient to evaluate the full impact of the novel, especially in discussions about genre. While an important historical revision can be discerned in this text, the use of supernatural elements anchored in Afro-Caribbean traditions also implies the construction of new paradigms of spec-fic. To approach the novel as merely a response to or deconstruction of European models would retain the centrality of those very models. Rather, I emphasize in my reading the new models that emerge from the non-European discourses the novel engages. Walter Mignolo explains that "de-colonial options are being enacted by [I]ndigenous as well as by social movements emerging in the process not just of being anti-imperial, but of undoing the logic of coloniality and imagining de-colonial societies" ("Introduction" 18). Through decolonial thought, texts like *The Salt Roads* gain authority not only as a response to or questioning of Eurocentric models, but independently of them, as the "imagining" of a decolonial alternative to Western-based interpretations of history and epistemology. In alignment with decolonial theories, I focus on elements of intervention and critique of traditional discourses in the novel. Most importantly, I highlight projection and speculation in non-Eurocentric terms, that is, the construction of paradigms that are meaningful regardless of their relationship with Eurocentric epistemologies. By implementing Vodou cosmology as a regulating ontological principle, *The Salt Roads* points to both a postcolonial (revisionist) project and decolonial (speculative) subtext.

### The Disruption of Western Space-Time and Mind-Body Axes

In the Caribbean context, colonial history permeates processes of cultural production and self-definition (Tsaaior 124). Several academic and literary texts by relevant Caribbean writers such as Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Edouard Glissant, and George Lamming can be said to be "concerned with *writing back to the centre*, actively engaged in a process of questioning and travestying colonial discourses in their work" (McLeod 25, emphasis original; see also Tsaaior 125). Yet, it has been imperative to question whether this should be the pivotal *raison d'être* of postcolonial literature and criticism. The Afro-Caribbean supernatural is used in the novel to construct a narrative of historical revisioning, which emerges as an undeniable response to and contestation of dominant versions of history. At

the same time, however, it permits the articulation of a particular cultural identity that departs from those *centralized* European precepts. In Mignolo's words, it is the "constitution of a new epistemological subject that thinks *from and about* the borders" (*Local Histories* 110, emphasis original).

Two important elements from Vodou metaphysics escape the purported rationality of European epistemology. The first of these is the non-linearity of time. There are several aspects in Vodou that defy teleological assumptions about the linear progression of time. As Leslie Desmangles explains,

> Not only is the physical world inverted in the cosmic mirror of the sacred world, but so too is time. The oungan who is about to begin a ceremony often enters the peristil by emerging . . . backwards; this reverse motion symbolizes the retrogression through time to primordial times when the world was being created. The opening of the Vodou ceremony represents the sudden halt of profane time. (103)

Following this transcendental space-time scheme provided by the very basis of Vodou cosmology, Hopkinson often fictionalizes her supernatural characters within a similar, temporally-undefined framework. It is common to find in her works representations of a divine dimension that transcends the laws of time and space as conceived by Western thought. In *Sister Mine* (2013), for example, Afro-Caribbean gods are described as "simultaneously doing an infinity of things in an infinity of locations in the present, the past, and the future" (99). In *The Salt Roads*, the female *loa* Lasirèn, who is significantly associated with the seas and oceans, similarly breaks and fragments time in her encounters with the novel's protagonists: "Time does not flow for me. Not for me the progression in a straight line from earliest to latest. Time eddies. I am now then, now there, sometimes simultaneously" (42); "[i]n seconds I float through days and weeks, see the rains come and go, the crops flourish and be felled" (119-120). Following the parameters of Vodou cosmology, Lasirèn moves in a dimension that is not restricted by linear progressions of time.

The transcendence of a linear progression of time made possible by the supernatural in Vodou implies a significant self-defining narrative technique. For Lasirèn, the currents she ubiquitously navigates are associated with the lives of black people: "There are currents there. There is movement. Helpless, I tumble and splash from one to the next. Each eddy into which I fall immerses me into another story, another person's head. The streams are stories of people; I can/will/did see them, taste them, smell them, hear and touch them" (208). Thus, Hopkinson creates an imaginative space that links Afro-

Caribbean lived experience with a supernatural component, a connection that significantly takes on the form of stream flows. In the context of the cultural erasure and displacement of colonialism, the sea emerges as one of the defining locations of a dialogue between the histories of colonizers and colonized. Poet Kamau Brathwaite's concept of "tidalectics" approaches the sea as the location of a history that "can be characterized as fragmentary and dispersed" (Tsaaior 124). Based on an artistic interpretation of the currents that travel between islands in the Caribbean archipelago, tidalectics is a "methodological tool that foregrounds how a dynamic model of geography can elucidate island history and cultural production, providing the framework for exploring the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots" (DeLoughrey 2).[2] In *The Salt Roads*, the connection between streams/currents (and the movement they imply) and Caribbean history is crucial in that it follows a tradition of Afro-Caribbean cultural and identity discourses. Tidalectics, as Anna Reckin explains, "is concerned with a sense of relation that is expressed in terms of connecting lines, back and forth . . . and there are clear parallels here with [Édouard] Glissant's 'poetics of relation' and the shipping routes that Paul Gilroy discusses in his *Black Atlantic*" (2). With tidalectics, focusing on a non-linear, non-progressive model of history, a Caribbean ontology emerges that instead "draws attention to fluid cultural processes, sites of abstract and material relations of movement and rest, dependent upon changing conditions of articulation or connection" (Pugh 11). In *The Salt Roads*, these "changing conditions of articulation or connection" are effected by the linking of the protagonists' parallel lives through the powers of Lasirèn. In this way, the recourse to an imaginary that troubles received notions of time and space allows for a narrative articulation that can be clearly connected with a Caribbean tradition of historical and socio-cultural revisioning.

The second rationalist theory to be challenged by the incorporation of the Afro-Caribbean supernatural is that of the Cartesian conception of the self. Vodou metaphysics do not adhere to the division between mind and body proposed by Descartes, nor to the prevalence of the former over the latter implied in such dualism (Strongman 14). To understand this discordance, it is necessary to look into the concepts of the *gros-bon-ange* and the *ti-bon-ange,* two parts of the self as conceived by Vodou. The first, Maya Deren explains, "is born of the body, and may be imagined as the shadow of a man cast upon the invisible plane of a fourth dimension. . . . [It] is the metaphysical double of the physical being . . . the immortal twin

that survives the mortal man" (26). The *ti-bon-ange*, on the other hand, is "the universal commitment towards good, the notion of truth as desirable, all that conscience which, in our culture, is understood as a function of the soul" (26). Whereas the body is made of physical substance and is, therefore, perishable, this does not entail the hierarchy of the mind over the body that Cartesian philosophy maintains. Desmangles illustrates the intimate connection between the *gros-bon-ange* and the body thus:

> the gwo-bon-anj [sic] is conceived as motion: the sinuous motion in the succession of human generations, and the invisible driving force that generates action in a person's body. It is thought of as the root of being, consciousness, the source of physical motion, the inherent principle within the body that ensures life; it is identified with the flow of the blood through the body, and the movements of inhalation and exhalation of the thoracic cavity. (66-67)

This notion of the *gros-bon-ange* as movement and the force behind the succession of generations recalls the life-flows described in the novel from Lasirèn's perspective, as well as the emphasis on fluidity proposed by the aesthetics and epistemologies of tidalectics.

The centrality of the body is not only paramount in understanding the self. As a whole, Vodou is a highly performative religion where corporeality adopts multiple ritualistic and cosmological functions (Largey 69). The *loa* (or gods) often manifest different aspects of the same principle, and physical and anatomical elements are crucial in characterizing and distinguishing these aspects. Aspects and symbols in connection to physical appearance fluctuate in Vodou, an overlapping movement of meaning closely connected with tidal epistemologies. Deren describes how "[a]lmost every detail is specified for the aspects of the loa, and these serve both to identify him and to guide his ritual service. Postures, voice level, attitudes, epithets, expressions, etc., are formalized for each aspect" (95). For instance, Ezili, the Vodou *loa* of love, has three main manifestations: Ezili Freda is a beautiful, delicate, and feminine spirit; Ezili Danto (or Ezili-ge-rouge [red-eyed]), is in contrast dark skinned and usually represented as silent and enraged; and lastly, its manifestation in Lasirèn is connected to the sea. In the novel, this multiplicity and fractality is stressed in narrative terms by techniques of variation and repetition, especially in the symbolic recurrence of the number three. This plurality in the diverse aspects of Vodou spirits reinforces an ontology of multiplicity and fragmentation, rather than wholeness and completeness.

The complex relationship established between mind and body in Vodou metaphysics is particularly evident in the parts of the novel narrated in the

first person by Lasirèn. In her awakening to the physical world she tells how she starts having awareness of her self and her surroundings through the bodies she possesses. In her first intervention, when she is summoned to life by Mer and two other women singing in sorrow, Lasirèn wonders: "Do I have a voice? I open my mouth to try to sing the three-twist chant I can hear, and tears I didn't know before this were called tears roll in a runnelled crisscross down the thing that is my face and past my . . . lips? to drip salt onto my tongue" (46). It is worth recalling here Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido's words on Caribbean women's "voicelessness" in literature and history. "The Caribbean woman," they argue in their introduction to the collection *Out of Kumbla* (1990), "has been historically silenced in the various 'master discourses'" (1). Later in the novel, when Lasirèn possesses Lemer, the French woman, she says: "[T]he ginger-coloured woman floods me with words, with meaning, and with something more powerful. Now I know them as emotions" (56). Here, the body and the fluid corporeal experiences that materialize in Vodou acts of possession prevail over the mind in the process of acquiring consciousness and knowledge. This signifies a turn from Eurocentric conceptions where the self is determined by the mind, as contained in the Cartesian premise "I think, therefore I am." Lasirèn's voice, her existence and consciousness, emerge from the pain experienced by three women in the context of the slave plantation. She then learns to identify the world around her from the experiences of Lemer's body, as well as the bodies of other women. Lasirèn thus acts as connector between the three main characters within this non-Cartesian framework that allows for fluidity and the convergence of the different historical points that each woman inhabits. This narrative framework thus becomes the "locus for the reinscription of the woman's story in history" (Boyce Davies and Savory Fido 6).

Conceiving the self as plural and fluid is critical to expressions and representations of sexuality, both in Afro-Caribbean societies and in the novel. Roberto Strongman argues that "[a]llowing for a wider range of subjectivities than the more rigid Western model, the modular African Diasporic discourse of personhood becomes a vehicle for the articulation of non-compliant identities that are usually constrained by normative heteropatriarchy" (27). Indeed, the characters in Hopkinson's novel do not conform to normative notions of sexuality. In her reading of *The Salt Roads*, Kate Houlden points out that there is "a sensuous portrayal of the mutability of black female sexuality, as the novel brings to life a range of female

characters that have sex with both men and women" (465). An example of these characters' fluctuating sexualities is the relationship between Mer and her friend Tipingee:

> Sometimes Tipingee . . . could only remember Mer's strong hands, her eyes deep, the muscles of her thighs as she scissored her legs around Tipingee's waist. Mer always been there for her: shipmates; sisters before Tipingee's blood came; wives to each other after, even when they had had husbands. (12)

This passage, with a significant descriptive emphasis on the body and bodily fluids, draws attention to a feeling of companionship and support; it recalls the experience of crossing the Middle Passage the characters endured together, and their mutual help and protection during their lives on the plantation. That queer relationships are another factor that connects the distant lives of the protagonists can be seen in a chapter entitled "Throwing." Here, a section ends with Baudelaire and Lemer having sex, while she "lay back and thought on other, softer, more skillful mouths" (74), meaning her lover Lise. The following section opens with a scene in the plantation in Saint Domingue where Mer reminisces about Tipingee performing oral sex on her. These and other similar portrayals of sexuality and queer relationships[3] throughout the novel emerge from a fluid conception of identity that can be traced back to the diversified articulation of the self in Vodou metaphysics. In terms of contemporary literary genres, this means an important addition to the representative scope of spec-fic, where female queer identities usually receive much less attention than the traditional male, heterosexual hero. Furthermore, these moments of support and solidarity are essential in providing positive anchoring points in the articulation of the black diasporic subject.

### The Body as Historical Context: Redefining the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora

The supernatural in *The Salt Roads* acts as catalyst for an epistemological framework that places special emphasis on the black female body, which is constructed as fluid, rather than fixed, through its connection with Vodou spiritual and physical tenets. Moreover, as I have argued, the protagonists' agency in terms of sexual identity provides them a space of solidarity and comfort. Maintaining the black female body as a fundamental referent, this section seeks to explore how the novel addresses and troubles certain notions of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora and the diasporic self. María Alonso Alonso has argued that diasporic writers use the supernatural in their work as "a tool to come to terms with the past of their community in order to reconcile themselves with a history that in many cases haunts them" (65). Some of

Hopkinson's novels, such as *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), *Midnight Robber* (2000), or indeed, *The Salt Roads*, are examples of this process of narrative revisioning.

In its approach to a transatlantic history of colonization, *The Salt Roads* revisits some of the conceptual axes of the African diaspora, especially those presented in Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993), which to date constitutes one of the most important attempts to contextualize it. By including the story of Meritet in Egypt, Hopkinson's text introduces a historical and geographical expansion of black diasporic experiences. Thus, it defies some of the basic premises in the concept of the Black Atlantic that situate the diasporic subject exclusively in a post-slavery context. Gilroy's Black Atlantic emerges as "one single, complex unit of analysis" which aims to "transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity" (Gilroy 15, 19). Outside of a rationale that posits identity as invariably fixed, natural, and rooted to particular territories, the Black Atlantic relies on multidirectional crossings for the construction of identity. This paradigm, then, emphasizes routes, as opposed to roots, as the main epistemological device of diasporic identity formation. In its emphasis on hybridity, motion, and border crossings, this approach fits in with representations of the fluid identities of the characters in Hopkinson's novel. However, the novel diverges from Gilroy's theory of the Black Atlantic in some basic points. For Gilroy, the slave ship and the crossing of the Middle Passage act as political and symbolic starting points in the praxis of movement that accompanies the black diaspora thereafter. The Atlantic Ocean, the site of the slave trade and colonial exchanges of goods, thus becomes the geopolitical framework where the black diaspora is located.

In contrast, the historical and geographical scope of *The Salt Roads* is much broader, and this means an expansion of the diasporic context the characters inhabit. This expansion is achieved mainly through the story of Meritet, the Nubian prostitute living in Alexandria. Alexandria is presented as a truly cosmopolitan space, an urban enclave whose multiple cultural contacts are a product of the expansion of the Roman Empire. Colonization and imperial contact have historically acted as powerful agents of transculturation. Fernando Ortiz coined the term *transculturation* to "express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as the result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place" there (98); transculturation encompasses "the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another" (102). This approach

disavows the essentialist Western "notion of culture as static, fixed, objective, consensual and uniformly shared by all members of a group" (Unni Wikan, qtd. in Grillo 158). Mignolo points out that

> [t]ransculturation offers a different view of people interaction. It is, in other words, a principle to produce descriptions that changes the principle in which similar descriptions have been made up to the point of its introduction in cultures of scholarship's vocabulary. (*Local Histories* 16)

The transcultural processes that originate with the Roman Empire and which succeed each other like waves throughout the historical contexts of the novel work to provide new descriptions of the black diasporic subject. The tavern where Meritet works exemplifies an early form of cosmopolitanism and transculturation in what could be called a proto-globalized space. It houses people of different ethnicities: Meritet herself is of mixed Greek and Nubian descent; there is an Egyptian girl and a girl from Syria; and Judah, a male prostitute and a friend of Meritet who accompanies her in her journey to Jerusalem, is Jewish. Antoniou is a Roman merchant sailor who uses the services of both Meritet and Judah; he tells her about his journeys to faraway places in the Middle East, and it is on his ship that Meritet and Judah manage to flee Alexandria. Jerusalem is referred to in the novel as Aelia Capitolina, the name given to the city by Roman Emperor Hadrian in the second century. At a point in the novel, Lasirèn identifies herself with her own aspect as Ezili Danto, and realizes how this name can be traced back to ancient Egyptian religion: "In her name I perceive echoes: Danto, D'hanto, D'hantor, D'hathor. Some few of the Haytian slaves were North African, and a small memory of Hathor's love still clings to them" (304). Throughout the novel, other female deities and religious figures are evoked in connection to Lasirèn/Ezili, such as Isis, Venus, or the Virgin Mary. Images of the latter are in fact used in Haitian Vodou to represent Ezili in her different manifestations (Deren 138). This network and circulation of cultural symbols challenges ideas of cultures as fixed and hermetically sealed from each other, what Homi Bhabha has described as "the absurd notion of an uncontaminated culture" (53). Rather, it illustrates a dialogical and relational approach to the production of cultures that can be aligned with Édouard Glissant's idea (drawn from Deleuze and Guattari) of "rhizomatic thought," in which "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (11).

In this way, the emphasis on Roman colonization and the journeys across the Mediterranean Sea implies a change of the ontological foundations of the African diaspora proposed by Gilroy. He situates its origins and development

in the slave trade after the New World discovery and the subsequent cultural interchanges that take place in the Africa-America-Britain triangle, with the Atlantic Ocean as the chief stage for these transnational networks. By linking Meritet's story to that of Mer in the Caribbean plantation and that of Lemer in nineteenth-century France, Hopkinson extends these historical and geographical boundaries. What, then, are the foundations she proposes for the connections between the three protagonists of the novel? I argue that the overlapping experiences of gender and racial oppression underlying these characters' stories become the far-reaching diasporic framework that differs from the Black Atlantic. However, to reiterate, Hopkinson not only emphasizes pain and hardship, but underscores as well the importance of healing practices, sorority, and resistance as elements that unify these and other black women's identities. Once again, the female body is the central context where these experiences of suffering and resilience are located.

It is crucial at this point to turn to the question of the body as historical context. Drawing on Foucauldian theories, Angela King describes the body as "an over-determined site of power for feminists as well as for Foucault; a surface inscribed with culturally and historically specific practices and subject to political and economic forces" (30). However, as Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, this construction of the body as context was based for Foucault on a "corporeal 'universal'" which "functioned as a veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm" (188). In order to produce a nuanced reading of cultural and historical inscriptions on the body, then, it is necessary to pay attention to its particularities and material foundations in terms of gender, race, sexuality, and other identity markers. The novel revolves around the black female body; however, patriarchal systems of colonization impose the condition of a body abused and subject to violence, both physical and psychical. In this respect, Hortense Spillers has written that "the African female subject, under these historic conditions, is not only the target of rape . . . but also the topic of specifically *externalized* acts of torture and prostration" (207, emphasis original). *The Salt Roads* highlights the impact of Western cultural and political structures on the body by depicting detailed descriptions of its protagonists. Picking sugar cane, Mer talks about being whipped in the plantation: "My back was burning, burning. I stayed bent over the cane, didn't dare raise up. Seasoned twelve years ago to stay bent that way whole day if I must, crouched over cane" (60). Discussing sexual desire, she says that "most of we Ginen women don't have the spirit for

loving. Don't get pregnant plenty neither; don't have our courses regular. The food here doesn't nourish us enough for our bodies to grow babies" (97); and often, as happened to her, women give birth to stillborn babies for that very same reason. Meanwhile Lemer, in France, is the target of scorn and discrimination from Parisian society, due to her skin colour. Although now a dancer, she used to earn money by selling her body and sexuality, like her mother and grandmother before her. Moreover, she contracts syphilis from having intercourse with Baudelaire. The effects of the venereal disease are described with special attention to its impact on her body: "I looked old. I tried to draw myself up tall, to smile. The frozen side of my face wrenched the smile into a grimace. I could feel the tears start down, warm on my left cheek, cold on my insensible one. 'I am become a monster'" (226). The character Meritet, the Nubian prostitute, also partakes in these racialized, but more specifically, gendered projections. Li-Chun Hsiao has asserted that "[i]f there were to be a history of the body in the Caribbean, it would have to take the bodily labor of the slaves as its point of departure" (5). Once again, transposing the violence over the black female body to the pre-modern time of Meritet, Hopkinson offers a precedent to these acts of denigration; she delineates a genealogy of pain. Meritet's experience, like those of the other protagonists, is connected to her sexualized body, as she becomes accidentally pregnant and later suffers a miscarriage that threatens her life.

By focusing on the female body in pain as a node of connection between the three narratives, the novel outlines a history of racialized and gendered acts of dehumanization. Allusions to bodily fluids abound in the descriptions of the black female body in the novel. In her essays on abjection, Julia Kristeva talks about "*corporeal waste*, menstrual blood and excrement, or everything that is assimilated to them, from nail-parings to decay" as representing "the objective frailty of symbolic order" (70, emphasis original). This, as Elizabeth Grosz explains, is because "[b]ody fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside . . . , to the perilous divisions between the body's inside and its outside" (193). And also, according to Grosz, "in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid" (203). In connection with these processes of objectification, Hortense Spillers argues that, through the violence of slavery, the body bears "the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside" (207). The black female body in Hopkinson's novel thus becomes a site of codification where the inside is

made external. The socio-political and cultural subjugations of the black female body are, indeed, strategies of control and containment, symptomatic of the threat that this body poses to Western hierarchies of race and gender.

Thus, the emphasis on bodily fluids and sores in the novel illustrates the effects of patriarchal Western colonization on the female diasporic self. However, Hopkinson's narrative of solidarity and resistance provides a means to counteract these practices of oppression. Bodily fluids are also used in the novel to reflect an intimate connection and companionship with other women. Early in the novel, in a passage where Lemer and her lover Lise have just had sex, they decide to divine their future in a water bowl and, lacking one, they use the chamber pot, full of their urine and menstrual blood. Lemer describes this as a blissful moment: "Here in the warm dark with my Lise, no one to bother us, anything felt possible" (19). To cite Houlden again, in the novel, "Hopkinson shows the love and support black women offer each other being a source of sustenance, as well as conduit to sexual pleasure" (467). Thus, sexuality and mutual care, narratively embodied in the women's fluids, become the way to both physical and psychical healing. In terms of the supernatural, the role of Lasirèn/Ezili in binding black women's experiences together transcends the realm of pain and moves into the possibilities of resistance and triumph. Maya Deren argues that "the female principle" Ezili personifies "participates in all of the major cosmic forces . . . and Voudoun does not idealize woman, *per se*, as the principle of fecundity" (137). In a sense, Ezili is positioned outside Western, patriarchal readings of women. As Joan Dayan illustrates,

> this goddess who oscillates between the extremes of grace and brutality is . . . no mere perpetuation of Christian notions of Virgin or Temptress, nor of masculine projections of Venus or Hag, but more exactly a dramatization of how black women saw, reacted to, and survived the experience of slavery and the realities of colonialism. (16)

The role of Lasirèn as repository for struggle and resistance is even more clear towards the ending of the novel. Aware now of her fragmented self as Ezili Freda, Lasirèn, and Ezili Danto—separate but one—she says: "They, we, are the ones healing the Ginen story, fighting to destroy that cancerous trade in shiploads of African bodies that ever demands to be fed more sugar, more rum, more Nubian gold" (304). Hopkinson then proceeds to fictionalize historical events by including the supernatural influence of Lasirèn on black women who defied racial and gender oppression. She mentions women such as Queen Nzingha of Matamba, who confronted Portuguese colonizers in the seventeenth century; Rosa Parks and her refusal to sit at the back

of a bus; and even trans women who fought in the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York. Through the intervention of the spirit, these movements and the protagonists' lives become entangled, creating a border- and time-crossing whole that is nevertheless fluid and adaptable.

## Conclusion

*The Salt Roads* presents a fascinating account of history infused with supernatural elements. This combination allows for the construction of an Afro-Caribbean narrative, an interventionist reading of history that defies Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies imposed on colonized cultures. In this article, I have argued that non-teleological, non-Cartesian aspects of Vodou incorporated into the novel expand notions of the fixity of cultures and identities. The central role of the body in Vodou and its multiple selves rearticulates cultures as in permanent dialogue with each other, and identities as in constant motion. Sexuality, framed in the Vodou conception of the multiple, fluid self, emerges as a space of healing and resistance for the protagonists. This portrayal of queer relationships results, on one hand, in an expanded representational scope for the spec-fic canon. On the other hand, as the latter half of this article has examined, the novel constitutes a redefinition of the black female diasporic subject. Traditionally, diasporas are understood in their relation to geographical space. Even those "deterritorialized diasporas" such as the African diaspora (Cohen 123) negotiate their identities in relation to an *absent* space. In contrast, this novel broadens the horizon of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. It connects episodes from modern violence and abuse to those perpetrated in pre-modern times in a different empire. The black female body as subject of colonization, racialized and objectified, becomes the context of a historical experience that links these disparate scenarios. The diasporic subject, however, is crucially represented as resilient as well, which implies potential for endurance and eventual triumph. Genealogies of pain are also genealogies of resistance. As Leif Sorensen notes, "the historical narratives that make up *The Salt Roads* point to alternative futures" (267). Thus, the novel is not only a narrative of revision, but one of intervention and projection. These two axioms are essential in determining that this work of spec-fic does not only respond to a (post)colonial drive to question and challenge dominant discourses of culture. While this is certainly a major dynamic in the novel, that of dialogue and contestation, it simultaneously creates a decolonial imaginative space articulated in cultural and historical terms that are particular to the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.

Arguing from a decolonial position, this novel could be said to both reflect and impact the emergence of globalized spaces which can be linked historically to the imperial constructions it represents and contests. The novel, in pointing to the far-reaching effects of colonialism and imperialism, invites reflection on current forms of imperial domination and oppressor/oppressed dynamics. In the context of spec-fic, the novel equally attests to how the genre is affected by dynamics of domination that stem from colonialism, and to how power structures that reside in Western thought can and should be transformed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge that the research carried out for the writing of this paper has been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO) within the R&D project "Strangers and Cosmopolitans" (RTI2018-097186-B-I00).

NOTES

1 In a 1999 interview, Nalo Hopkinson noted that she favoured the term "speculative fiction" because her work "can include elements from science fiction, fantasy, dark fantasy, horror, and magic realism" (Rutledge 589). The term is similarly used throughout this article as an inclusive label, shortened as "spec-fic."
2 This is reiterated in Paul Gilroy's dialogues between roots and routes in the "webbed network" of his Black Atlantic (29).
3 For a detailed discussion on sexuality in the novel, see Houlden.

WORKS CITED

Alonso Alonso, María. "Marvellous Realism and Female Representation from the Caribbean Diaspora." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2012, pp. 59-71.

Bhabha, Homi. "Culture's In-Between." *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Sage, 1996, pp. 53-60.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

Davies, Carole Boyce, and Elaine Savory Fido. *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*. Africa World, 1990.

Dayan, Joan. "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1994, pp. 5-31.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. U of Hawai'i P, 2007.

Deren, Maya. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. 1953. McPherson, 2004.

Desmangles, Leslie. *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*. U of North Carolina P, 1992.

Gikandi, Simon. "Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Discourse." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, edited by Neil Lazarus, Cambridge UP, 2004, pp. 97-119.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.
Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, U of Michigan P, 1997.
Grillo, R. D. "Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety." *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, pp. 157-73.
Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism*. Allen & Unwin, 1994.
Hopkinson, Nalo. *The Salt Roads*. Warner, 2003.
—. *Sister Mine*. Grand Central, 2013.
Houlden, Kate. "Writing the Impossible: Racial, Sexual and Stylistic Expansivity in Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2003)." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2015, pp. 462-75.
Hsiao, Li-Chun. Introduction. *"This Shipwreck of Fragments": Historical Memory, Imaginary Identities, and Postcolonial Geography in Caribbean Culture and Literature*, edited by Hsiao, Cambridge Scholars, 2009, pp. 1-14.
King, Angela. "The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2004, pp. 29-39.
Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.
Largey, Michael. *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism*. U of Chicago P, 2006.
Leonard, Elizabeth. "Race and Ethnicity in Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 253-63.
McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester UP, 2000.
Mignolo, Walter D. "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-colonial Thinking." *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, Routledge, 2010, pp. 1-21.
—. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton UP, 2000.
Ortiz, Fernando. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. 1940. Translated by Harriet de Onís, Duke UP, 2005.
Pugh, Jonathan. "Island Movements: Thinking with the Archipelago." *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2013, pp. 9-24.
Reckin, Anna. "Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space." *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1-17.
Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Wesleyan UP, 2008.
Rutledge, Gregory. "Speaking in Tongues: An Interview with Science Fiction Writer Nalo Hopkinson." *African American Review*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1999, pp. 589-601.
Sorensen, Leif. "Dubwise into the Future: Versioning Modernity in Nalo Hopkinson." *African American Review*, vol. 47, no. 2-3, 2014, pp. 267-83.
Spillers, Hortense J. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. U of Chicago P, 2003.
Strongman, Roberto. "Transcorporeality in Vodou." *Journal of Haitian Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2008, pp. 4-29.
Tsaaior, James Tar. "History, (Re)Memory and Cultural Self-Presencing: The Politics of Postcolonial Becoming in the Caribbean Novel." *Journal of Caribbean Literature*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 123-37.

**Barry Dempster**

# Your Poisoned Life

You are beholden to petrochemicals:
your hiking sneakers that tramped through acid rain
deep down the East Coast Trail; the *product*
that keeps your hair from falling out, promising
volume and wig-like sheen; your kitchen gadgets
in various shades of plastic; pink cradles
of insulation, piled one on top of
the other in the attic; ball
of deodorant,
carcinogenic baby-powder scent.

The photograph of your 85-year-old
father riding the back of a jet ski's roar,
a Seabright's Bay spray of nitrogen, making
his bare feet appear lit from within.
You can't stop consuming, covering the walls
of your cave with lists of things you're sure to
start needing any minute now.

You shouldn't have kissed the gussied corpse
in your mother's coffin.
And your wife's creamed flesh, be careful not to
devour her moisturized skin.
At your last birthday, you guzzled
margaritas the colour of napalm.

At the very least, you are a can of *Raid*,
a serotonin uptake inhibitor,
a sugar substitute.

George Elliott Clarke

# A Note—Imagining an Africa That Never Was

## The Anti-Racist / Anti-Imperialist Fantasy of Charles R. Saunders' *Imaro* and its Basis in the Africentric Occult

That sage anti-racist and signal anti-colonial *philosophe*, Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952, 1968), warns would-be Afrocentrists[1] that knowledge of the glories of the African past, especially prior to the degradations and deprivations inflicted by European colonialism (particularly the slave trade), is of no avail in contemplating and confronting the oppressions of the early 1950s, the period of the Red Scares and Yellow Peril:

> I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe. (230)

Fanon discounts the political meaningfulness of recherché skulduggery in excavating long-lost empires or proving that African Emperor So-and-So was as great an imperialist as Alexander the Great. Bleakly, bluntly, Fanon wonders about the efficacy of such Afrocentric Trivial Pursuits (so to speak), when the liberation of black peoples and the creation of veritable equality and liberation are the urgent needs of the here-and-now:

> In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and my future. (226)

Yet, Fanon's ally in Black Liberation Theory, namely, Malcolm X, did see the cogency of articulating a Black riposte to White Supremacy and the Eurocentric perspectives that engender it and symbiotically support it:

> I would watch [other black inmates'] faces when I told them . . . that . . . because the white man had completely erased the slaves' past, a Negro in America can never know his true name, or even what tribe he was descended from: the Mandingos, the Wolof, the Serer, the Fula, the Fanti, the Ashanti, or others. (182)

Thus, as the US Civil Rights (i.e. Black Liberation) Movement moved from ballot box to classroom,[2] so too did the demand for courses in Africana—including Swahili—surge in popularity. As Jamaican reggae star Bob Marley sang of the Garveyite need to "Emancipate yourself from chains of mental slavery" ("Redemption Song," 1980), so too did popular African-American comedian Bill Cosby narrate that most startling documentary, *Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed* (1968). No matter Fanon's cautions about delighting in Black historical achievement as a politico-psychological answer to white racism, plenty of strugglers and strivers for Black Liberation saw Afrocentrism as an essential(ist) component of their programmes.

In his Foreword to *Theorizing Africentricity in Action: Who We Are Is What We See* (Bernard and Brigham, 2012), Molefi Kete Asante limns the determinative concerns of what he prefers to term "Afrocentricity":

> Two physical attacks on Africa, in the form of *enslavement* and *colonization*, led to the internalization of African marginalization, even by Africans themselves. So thoroughly [*sic*] was the acceptance of African peripheralization that Europe was successful in convincing the rest of the world that Africa, the mother continent, was a mere child in human civilization terms. . . . [These facts mandate that] Afrocentrists articulate a counter-hegemonic view that questions epistemological ideas that are simply rooted only in the cultural experiences of Europe and are applied to Africans and others as if they are universal principles. (8-9, emphasis original)

In his *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (2001), Bénézet Bujo also articulates the need for a counter-hegemonic, specifically African-based moral system, to oppose the "presupposition" that "what is good for Europe or North America must be equally good everywhere and for all cultures" (xii). Bujo is particularly and poignantly alarmed by the rise of a more or less Eurocentric "*monoculture*" (xi) that would eclipse, among other Third World cultural options, "the extremely *communitarian* manner" (xii, emphasis original) of African life. In reaction to the global influence of European/Christian/Capitalist ways of being and thinking and doing, Afrocentrists and/or Africentrists deem it essential to remind White Supremacy that Black Lives Matter.[3]

Arguably, Frank Yerby undertakes just such a rebuttal or refutation in his implicitly Afrocentric novel, *The Dahomean* (1971). In his "A Note

to the Reader," the African-American Yerby declares that his aim, apart from "entertaining the reader," is to "correct . . . the Anglo-Saxon reader's historical perspective," which has accepted too easily the denigration of "the high, and . . . admirable, culture of the African." Yet, Yerby also alerts his "Afro-American" (his preferred terminology) readers that his goal is veracity, and so, "neither the racist, the liberal, or the advocates of Black Power and/or Pride will find much support for their dearly held and perhaps, to them, emotionally and psychologically necessary myths herein." Importantly, Yerby subtitles his Afrocentric adventure "*An historical novel*," and stresses that "every detail in this book . . . is as accurate as it is humanly possible to make it"; thus, "the more strange, bizarre, and outlandish the detail may seem to the reader, the more he [*sic*] can be certain that the writer didn't invent it." Yerby's dedication to an Afrocentric narrative is also a devotion to "historical sociological aspects" derived from "a very fine anthropological study." He wants us to recognize that he is not writing Fantasy or Science Fiction, but a "historical novel." In a sense, Yerby hereby respects Fanon's fulminations against reproducing (i.e., romanticizing) a socio-politically irrelevant, African past, while also agreeing with Afrocentrists that a knowledge of the "real" Africa is essential to dispel racialist mythologies, whether black or white.

Appearing a decade after Yerby's novel, Charles R. Saunders' *Imaro: The Epic Novel of a Jungle Hero* (1981) presents an out-and-out fantasy Africa, dubbed "Nyumbani" (back cover), and a hero who may be read as a "counter-hegemonic" response to Tarzan, the white "jungle hero" invented in 1912 by US novelist Edgar Rice Burroughs, who'd gained a new lease on popular-cultural life thanks to a TV serial (*Tarzan*, 1966-1968). Unfortunately, Burroughs' novels about Tarzan present him as a White Supremacist,[4] and thus a character that Saunders must contest. Saunders is African-American, but came to author his Imaro series of novels after relocating to Ottawa, Ontario, Canada's capital, by 1971, as, not a Vietnam War draft-resister *per se*, but a refugee, so to speak, from the social/racial upheavals afflicting the US at the time. In this sense, too, by expatriating himself to Canada, Saunders followed Yerby, an expat in Spain. Saunders' "African" novel also traces Yerby in that it is a conscious work of pulp fiction, published by DAW Books, which billed itself, in 1981, as enjoying "Our tenth year leading the sf [Sci-Fi] field" (back cover). The "sf" or SF interest of the publisher is, however, not borne out by the novel itself, which runs closer to Fantasy of the Sword-and-Sorcery genre than it does

to Sci-Fi. (The 2014 Kindle edition of *Imaro* bills Saunders as "The Father of Sword and Soul.") Imaro helms no space ships and confronts no aliens; his technology is Stone Age iron and brawn that he pits against humanoid lizards and serpents, who nefarious wizards conjure up and grant demonic agency. Fundamentally, then, Imaro is more a response to US writer Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian hero (first launched in 1932), who is a chivalrous, swashbuckling "Cimmerian" (likely of Northern British stock), barrel-chested, six-packed, given to offer charity to ladies, but no mercy for male adversaries.[5] While Saunders sets his Imaro in an alternative, medieval (or just-beyond-the-Neanderthal-Age) Africa,[6] so does Howard present his hero in an alternative "Hyborian Age,"[7] which seems to require a hyperbolically misty and Gothic northern Europe—the setting of *Beowulf*—where men are proto-knights and women are virtual damsels. Like Howard's Conan, Saunders' Imaro exhibits thews, kills off monsters, rescues at least one maiden (Tanisha), and vanquishes malicious and malignant foes. While Conan is himself born a slave, Imaro must liberate slaves, for he himself becomes one:

> When the next day dawned, Imaro began to understand the meaning of the word "slave". . . . During the day, the slaves had been allowed a single meal of millet cake and water—just enough to sustain their efforts until sundown. Now they quietly awaited their portion of a tepid stew made of vegetables. . . . Time passed slowly in the [gold] mines of the Giant-Kings. The days crept by like a procession of slugs across a tree root, each one leaving behind its dull slime of memories: aching muscles, senseless beatings, and, above all, unmitigated drudgery. . . . Yet there was now a new element in the dreary, predictable pattern of the slaves. . . . Thoughts and emotions long-suppressed were beginning to resurface, for Imaro was among them. (99, 107, 111)

Clear is the resonant connection between Imaro's fictitious enslavement and that of the actual, historical enslavement of Africans—in Africa itself and in Europe and the Americas. Luckily, however, Imaro gets to play violent insurrectionist Nat Turner successfully—if somewhat supernaturally—and brings down the slave empire of the Giant-Kings as if he is Samson among the Philistines (see Judges 16). In the end, Imaro's feet get "stained crimson from the puddles of blood through which [he] had waded" (133). But this liberation is only antecedent to further peril. Soon, we learn that "pale people" (178)—*Mizungus*—from "Atlan, an island continent" (179), so suspiciously similar to Howard's Atlantis-descended Cimmerians, are invading "Nyumbani" (179) or Africa, and, with the help of "sorcery," are crushing kingdoms beneath their heels (179). As a result, "many were

the men and women that were sent across the Bahari Magharibi ["the Western Ocean"—the Atlantic, presumably] in slave ships" (179). Worse, the "Mizungus" believe that "the people of Nyumbani were subhuman, fit only for slavery or the sacrificial altars of the gods of Atlan" (179-80), and the latter should be understood to represent (and/or prefer) Caucasian Europeans. No matter: Imaro triumphs over the Mizungus (206) as he had triumphed over the Giant-Kings. His only fault is that he has permitted hatred to hinder love: "Yet his past was a two-edged sword. In the past there lingered the hate that wounded love" (203).

That last quotation might remind one of Fanon's latent humanitarianism wherein he, too, asks that we not let the past injustices of imperialism and slavery fill us with a paralyzing and debilitating hatred of the oppressor. But even if such is also the last-minute interest of Imaro (or Charles R. Saunders), the hero and his author are both committed to reminding Africans ("the Giant-Kings") of their complicity with the Transatlantic (African) Slave Trade and to reminding Europeans ("the Mizungus") of their dehumanization and exploitation of Africans. Thus, Saunders seems interested in articulating historical facts via a fantasy narrative that also has the positive result of reconfiguring the Transatlantic (African) Slave Trade as opportune for effective, heroic (superhuman), corrective intervention as well as the European imperialist undertaking of said trade as proving vulnerable, again, to the stout resistance of non-Christian, yet righteously muscular opponents. Nevertheless, Saunders' investment in Fantasy is no more Afrocentric than is Yerby's promulgation of a "historical novel." Indeed, the vaunted facticity of the latter and the wantonly imaginary Africa of the former align, for both delineate an Africentricity or Afrocentricity that is simply the black-marketing of the black-magic occult. Indeed, says Leon Surette, "the strong anti-establishment cast of aesthetic culture in Europe since the Romantics is mirrored in occult history, which is always a history of an oppressed and enlightened alternative culture perpetuating itself only surreptitiously and with great difficulty" (38).

Read in this light, both Yerby and Saunders become hieratic adepts, exposing the real and/or suppressed history of black people in the diaspora—as being either heirs of the noble people of Dahomey or as potential descendants of the unconquerable Imaro. Moreover, says Surette, the "fantasies of a Nordic or Aryan race articulated by Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Alfred Rosenberg bear a family relationship with the historiography of Mme Blavatsky and her theosophical followers" (38). For

Yerby and/or Saunders to answer back to the racialist histories pursued by the Caucasian-oriented occult means perpetrating their own blackening of such beliefs. Surette also proposes that "[t]he goal of occult scholarship [I'll include "Creative Writing"] is to bring into the light this noumenal [spiritually intuited] wisdom, a wisdom supposed either to have been deliberately suppressed by official scholarship or to have been hidden from the eyes of the profane by deliberate and clever disguise" (39). To further my argument, I relate it to Yerby and Saunders carrying out the mission instigated in part by the Cosby-narrated *Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed*, whose very title hints that black triumph and achievement has been disappeared by a committed, Caucasian cabal. The solution to this suppression is for learned adepts—like Yerby and Saunders—to restore to black readers especially a knowledge of Africa (real and/or imagined) that serves to buttress self-knowledge. It's no accident then that Dean Lee, an Africadian[8] high school teacher, affirms Asante's advice (as of 1991) that "our students are empowered when information is presented in such a way that they can walk out of the classroom feeling that they are a part of the information they absorbed" (63). Likewise, N. Akbar posits that "each generation has the responsibility of maintaining the level of consciousness attained by the previous generations, and of advancing the community to even higher levels by developing their own consciousness" (qtd. in Beals 118).[9] This proviso means that each generation needs to expand Afrocentric knowledge, an end that both Yerby and Saunders must laud. Another Africadian educator, Malik Adams, maintains, "In Eurocentric educational contexts, African people are rarely exalted for their accomplishments and achievements. The fact that we have survived the 'Maafa' or Great African Suffering is the ultimate testament to our greatness as a people, and this must be a starting point for Africentric education" (89). To achieve this end, Saunders' dreamt-up, African swashbuckler, who is anti-slavery and an embodiment of Black Macho, must serve just as well—archetypally—as would Yerby's research-backed excavation of Dahomey's classical pre-European-contact culture.

Yet, the politics and philosophy of this endeavour cannot escape imbrication in the occult thinking outlined above, a point given cogent poignancy by African-Canadian literary critic A. Lassissi Odjo, who suggests that the most subversive secret history that African-heritage scholars must overthrow is the obscuring of Africa as "the birthplace of spirituality, poetry, and metaphysics" (xiv). If we venture beyond the

vaunted "Hebraism/Judaism and Greece" origins of Western canons of thought to notice the pre-emptive centrality of Africa, then "the African and Afrodiasporic subject, now anchored in a recovered cultural memory that reaches almost into Deep Time," can undertake the liberating work of self-conscious, cultural assertion (xiv). For Odjo, it is especially important that Pan-Africanist scholars be able "to explore anew and organically avenues of being and of thought that the clamour of Judeo-Christian detractions of the 'Black' Other caused it to abandon or background in self-doubt or resignation" (xiv). That Saunders and Yerby produce Africas (plural) that contest (via marginalization) Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman conceptions of black people is both properly Afrocentric/Africentrist *and* an acceptance of occult thought, rendered thus progressive. This investment is legitimate, however, as a means of reinstituting a *culture* of undoubted African-heritage genius and ingenuity so as to overcome the *cult* of White Supremacy. The other consequence? That, well, for instance, Barack Obama is not the product of historical actors who include Jesus, Luther, Marx, Lincoln, Garvey, Fanon, X, and Martin Luther King Jr., but is, rather, the spiritual descendant of the ancient Egyptian god, Osiris. But one has to be an occultist (Afrocentrist) to see that truth . . .

NOTES

1 A major promoter of Black African influence upon world history and world cultures/civilizations, African-American anthropologist Molefe Kete Asanti has popularized the term Afrocentrism. Among those his work has influenced are African-Nova Scotians (or Africadians), who have changed Afrocentrism's "o" to "i," perhaps to emphasize the Africa within the term they choose to use, Africentrism. However, the "Scotian" variant on Afrocentrism does not deviate in conceptualization, so that Pan-Africanism and Black Pride and Power (Empowerment) remain central tenets of the philosophy and pedagogy of Africentrism. This paper employs both terms, but they are mirror synonyms.

2 To review this history, see Van Deburg, pp. 63-82.

3 The connection between scholarly promotion of Afrocentric epistemologies and socio-political activism possesses a genealogy that stretches back at least to Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) with his mutual emphases on Black Liberation from slavery and insistence on black pride; and then on to Malcolm X (1925-1965), who popularized the switch in self-identification from "Negro" to "African" (with or without a nationalizing hyphen) and also argued for armed self-defence versus (white) police forces; and also on to Angela Davis (1944-), whose writings explore the intersections of oppression (gender, race, and class), and who also has been a life-long political activist. International exemplars would include figures like Guyana's Walter Rodney (1942-1980), and Canada's Burnley "Rocky" Jones (1941-2013) and Joan Jones (1939-2019), etc.

4 Opines John Newsinger, Burroughs' hero is so irredeemably Negrophobic that he enjoys murdering African "savages," pp. 61.
5 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conan_the_Barbarian ("Conan the Barbarian.")
6 The back cover copy advises, "Imaro's saga will be compared with that of Conan and other heroes of history and legend and will rise above them for authenticity, for vivid conception, and for gripping reading." Prophetic?
7 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conan_the_Barbarian ("Conan the Barbarian.")
8 African-Canadian—especially from East Coast Canada. (See Clarke, 1991).
9 N. Akbar has also published *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery* (1996) whose title, like Marley's line in "Redemption Song," riffs on Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey's actual, 1937-spoken sentence, "We are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, for though others may free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind" (Garvey).

## WORKS CITED


Adams, Malik. "'Black Vibes' and Africentric Schools and Institutions: Successful Pedagogy for the African Nova Scotian Learner." Bernard and Brigham, pp. 73-98.

Akbar, Na'im. *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery*. Mind Productions, 1996.

Asante, Molefi Kete. Foreword. Bernard and Brigham, pp. 7-12.

Beals, Archy L. "African Spirituality: A Personal Reflection." Bernard and Brigham, pp. 107-124.

Bernard, Delvina E., and Susan M. Brigham, editors. *Theorizing Africentricity in Action: Who We Are Is What We See*. Fernwood, 2012.

*Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed*. Written by Ulf Kgell Gür, narrated by Bill Cosby, CBS News, 1968.

Bob Marley and the Wailers. "Redemption Song." *Uprising*, Island/Tuff Gong, 1980.

Bujo, Bénézet. *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*. Translated by Brian McNeil, Crossroad, 2001.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Tarzan of the Apes*. A. C. McClurg, 1912.

Clarke, George Elliott. "Introduction." *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*, *Volume 1: Early and Modern Writers, 1785-1935*. Edited by Clarke, Pottersfield, 1991, pp. 11-29.

"Conan the Barbarian." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 20 Feb. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conan_the_Barbarian. Accessed 21 July 2019.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, Grove, 1967.

Garvey, Marcus. "The Work That Has Been Done." 31 Oct. 1937, Menelik Hall, Sydney, Nova Scotia. Speech. "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery: The origin and meaning behind Bob Marley's Redemption song." Davis, Henrietta Vinton, *Henrietta Vinton Davis's Weblog*, 24 Mar. 2010, https://henriettavintondavis.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/redemption-song/. Accessed 24 Apr. 2020.

Lee, Dean. "Growing Up Black and White in Nova Scotia: A Narrative About Race, Racism and Racial Identity." Bernard and Brigham, pp. 49-71.

Newsinger, John. "Lord Greystoke and Darkest Africa: The Politics of the Tarzan Stories." *Race and Class*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 61-64.

Odjo, A. Lassissi. *Between the Lines: Africa in Western Spirituality, Philosophy, and Literary Theory*. Routledge, 2012.

Saunders, Charles R. *Imaro: The Epic Novel of a Jungle Hero*. DAW Books, 1981.
—. *Imaro*: *Book I*. Kindle ed., Lulu Press, 2014, https://www.fantasticfiction.com/s/charles-r-saunders/imaro.htm. Accessed 1 May 2020.
Surette, Leon. *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and the Occult*. McGill-Queen's UP, 1993.
*Tarzan*. Banner Productions, NBC. 1966-1968.
Van Deburg, William L. *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*. U of Chicago P, 1992.
X, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Transcribed and edited by Alex Haley, 1965. Ballantine Books, 1973, 1992.
Yerby, Frank. *The Dahomean: An historical novel*. Dial, 1971.
—. "A Note to the Reader." *The Dahomean: An historical novel*, by Yerby, Dial, 1971.

**Dan MacIsaac**

# Patrick Lane

*Death is in us, it's how*
*we're born*, he said.
The foundling's silken head
hardened to a bone helmet.

Even the glorious blue
of a Morpho butterfly
held death's bright glaze—
momento mori.

Old Yorick was young once,
his unearthed skull fused
from solar ovum
and infinite jest.

The antic flesh
will fracture;
each fragile birth
a wreckage.

Every *small salt sea*
turns septic, the unborn
cast out, pariah torn
free on a skeleton shore.

*Note – italicized portions are from*
*Lane's "The Last Day of My Mother."*

Jody Mason

# Canadian Postwar Book Diplomacy and Settler Contradiction

Rehearsed most recently in Nick Mount's *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*, the popular narrative in the cultural and literary history of English Canada is that literary culture "arrived" in the years between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s, propelled by the economic prosperity of this period; a desire for cultural autonomy from the US; and, as many have claimed, the forms of state support for culture that began to trickle from federal and provincial governments in the wake of the 1951 report of the Royal Commission on Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Report). What Mount calls the "CanLit boom" can to some extent be assessed using numbers: between 1963 and 1972, the number of Canadian-authored, English-language literary trade books published in Canada (including new titles and new editions of old titles) increased by 259%, from 355 to 1,275 titles (Broten 31-32). This increase was significantly greater than the worldwide increase in book production, which was 191% for the longer period 1950 to 1980 (Escarpit 3). While the increase in the number of Canadian-authored, English-language literary trade books in this period is irrefutable, the concept of "arrival" implies a developmental narrative that plots both an origin and an end point. Such a developmental narrative, drawing as it does on the narratives of organic cultural growth that were conjured by the new nation-states of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has long informed coming-of-age tales of Canadian nationhood.

This essay complicates the narrative of developmental momentum that frames the concept of CanLit's "arrival" in the period between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s. Moving slightly earlier, to the 1950s, it contends that

contradiction and disavowal are better analytical terms for understanding the emergence of the institutions that ultimately supported the flourishing of English-Canadian writing during the "CanLit boom." Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson theorize such contradiction in relation to the doubled character of the authority and authenticity that the "settler subject is (con)signed to disavow" (369). If the authority of the settler subject is derived from the "imperial enterprise" (in the case of English Canada, Britain), this authority is troubled by the distance that separates the settler from the Imperium. The settler asserts authority over the "indigene and the land," while "translating desire for the indigene and the land into a desire for native authenticity" (369). This authenticity can only ever be a form of mimicry, even while it helps to render the settler less "like the atavistic inhabitant of the cultural homeland whom he is also reduced to mimicking" (Johnston and Lawson 369). As the Imperium shifted across the Atlantic in the decade that followed the close of the Second World War, the settler nation struggled to locate itself anew in relation to these "origins of authority and authenticity" (Johnston and Lawson 370). The case examined here is the Canadian government's attempts to enter the cultural diplomacy field, and the international order more generally, in the wake of the Second World War, just as the Massey Commission was disseminating its findings. Postwar cultural—and especially book—diplomacy efforts participated in and adopted the rhetoric of the cultural diplomacy practices dominated in this period by the US. These efforts were thus obliged to emphasize the nation's ostensibly robust domestic book industries, a disingenuous narrative that depended upon a cultural nationalism (settler-imperium difference) that appropriated Indigenous "craft" to its origin story. The contradictions of the Canadian book diplomacy efforts of this period are particularly evident in a text that came to dominate the earliest book program of the Department of External Affairs, John D. Robins' *A Pocketful of Canada* (1946), a miscellany of Canadiana curated by the Canadian Council of Education for Citizenship that took as its purpose the creation of a "popular volume which reflects the spirit of Canada" (v).

Despite the common identification of the postwar decades with the "development" of English Canada's national literature, the publishing industry in English Canada was largely controlled from elsewhere well into the period Mount identifies as the "boom." As Paul Litt has shown, the 1951 Massey Report did not lead to any dramatic increases in funding for Canadian-owned publishers, a fact that Litt attributes to the elitist conceptions of "high" art (and the accompanying belief that such art does

not require direct state assistance) held by the report's authors. Though the Canada Council (a form of indirect state support for the book recommended by the Massey Report and established in 1957) provided grants to authors and for individual titles, direct state assistance for publishers did not materialize until 1972, when the Council introduced its block grants to publishers who were "actively producing and marketing Canadian books" (Litt, "The State and the Book" 39, 42). In this context, and until at least the early 1970s, book publishing in Canada was largely a non-Canadian affair.

The structure that dominated book publishing until the early 1970s was the agency system. George Parker emphasizes the domination of publishing in English Canada for most of the twentieth century by a "distinctive" agency system that was colonial in its structure. In Parker's account, this system emerged around 1900 as British and American publishing companies, now bound by an 1891 agreement to protect one another's copyrights, sought to carve up the expanding Canadian market. Some British publishers actually set up branches in Toronto (Oxford University Press, Macmillan), but others found Canadian publishers to act as agents for their books (as New York's George Doran did with McClelland & Stewart). Decisions regarding contracts, editing, design, production run, and royalties were thus often made elsewhere. Moreover, the whole purpose of agency publishing was to distribute American and British authors and not to develop Canadian publishing (Parker, "The Agency System" 163-64). This system prevailed until the early 1970s, when at least two factors coalesced to spell its end. First, a growing Canadian market for textbooks beguiled American companies such as McGraw-Hill to cancel their agencies and set up shop in Canada. Second, anti-American cultural nationalism helped to urge federal support for domestically owned publishers, including the Canada Council block grants and later the Canadian Book Publishing Development Program (1979) (Parker, "The Agency System" 166-67). The influence of the agency system meant that in the 1950s, only one-tenth of the books sold in Canada were published in Canada; the majority of book imports came from the US (Parker, "The Agency System" 166). Moreover, this situation did not immediately change with the advent of funding programs such as the Canada Council's block grants. In 1975, Paul Audley, executive director of what was then called the Independent Publishers' Association, estimated that foreign-owned subsidiaries constituted 84% of the book publishing industry in Canada (Parker, "The Agency System" 167).[1] Canadian-owned publishers (who have always published the majority of Canadian-authored titles) thus constituted only a small fraction of the total

market for domestic book sales during the period that stretched from 1950 to at least the mid-1970s.[2] The "boom" in Canadian-authored, English-language literary trade books published in Canada between 1963 and 1972 that I refer to above must be understood in this context.

Direct state support for domestically owned publishing was thus, to say the least, tepid during the 1950s and 1960s and into the early 1970s. Indirect sources of support were emerging in this period, however, and a considerable portion of these were directed outward, to the international arena.

## "The Free and Earnest Exchange of Ideas": Internationalism and the Postwar Rhetoric of the Book

In the 1950s, as Western governments, following the lead of the US, yoked the book to a wide range of overlapping political and economic goals—including the combatting of impressive Soviet book donation schemes and the development of economies friendly to American capital investment—they described their strategies using a rhetoric that emphasized what Dan Lacy, writing in the mid-1950s in the American periodical *Library Quarterly*, called the "free and earnest exchange of ideas" (191). During the World Wars, the US developed its government bureaucracies for cultural diplomacy alongside the private partnerships (with groups such as the Ford Foundation) that have always been important to that nation's soft-power initiatives (Barnhisel 12-13). As Greg Barnhisel points out, following the Second World War, the book and a "culturalist" theory of diplomacy—marked by a preference for the "soft" dissemination of messages through reading rooms, exchanges, touring performances, and the like—came to constitute one of the central information technologies of the Cold War of ideas, particularly because US officials were convinced that the book was the most effective medium for reaching European intellectuals hostile to American mass culture and the growing global power associated with it (97, 118, 13-20). Pursued in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and private industry, the post-1948 programs that performed the bulk of the Cold War work of using books as instruments of cultural diplomacy tended to select texts that complemented an ideology of liberal developmentalism that supported the flourishing of American capitalism—books that privileged freedom and individuality and the importance of co-operation between government and industry, for instance (Barnhisel 103-11, 99).[3]

Amanda Laugesen's focus on a particular Cold War book program, Franklin Publications (1952-1978), offers a good illustration of the ways

that government and private industry co-operated in American cultural diplomacy projects in this period. Established by the US government but eventually run by publishers and supported by a mix of public and private funding, Franklin Publications nurtured a vision of building book industries and book cultures in developing nations, a mission that flowed from the program's commitment to the following ideas: that (US-style) literacy and education were desirable; that US-style modernity should be embraced throughout the world; and that the US book industry offered the best model for developing nations to follow (3, 6). Laugesen's study provides an important frame for understanding what Sarah Brouillette calls the "developmentalist ethos" of the postwar activities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an organization that was deeply influenced in the immediate postwar years by American foreign policy goals. If this ethos privileged "literacy, agricultural development, and rational science" as the keys to bringing impoverished nations up to the standard of living enjoyed in Western, industrialized economies, these forms of development also offered ways of opening new industries and markets to American influence (Brouillette 31, 33, 42-43).

These international contexts were crucial to the increased enthusiasm in postwar Canada for the idea of state-sponsored culture. Drawing on Kevin Dowler's well-known assertion that culture in postwar Canada came to be understood as a form of national defence that could counter both the new hegemony of American cultural and economic power and the very different perceived threat of Soviet communism, Jody Berland argues that the state's increased commitment to the arts during the 1950s and 1960s also developed in a context in which "Canada sought to make a place for itself as a modern sovereign nation equal in status to other nations of the postwar world" (18). This pursuit of status within a new international order led by the US—bolstered by Canadian accomplishments during the Second World War, the new independence of its judiciary from the British Privy Council, and its autonomy in foreign policy decisions—was, as Litt observes, deemed appropriate in "internationalist circles," where there was "general agreement" that now that "Canada was rubbing shoulders on the world stage with older nations with venerable cultural traditions it should do something to match their refinement" (Litt, *The Muses* 17).[4] Though, as I note above, the Massey Report did not lead to significant direct state support for the book, it did contain two recommendations that redounded to the benefit of the literary field: support for the establishment of a National Library and for the idea

that diplomatic posts could build their libraries as a means of distributing Canadian books abroad (Litt, "The State and the Book" 39). The Massey commissioners' acknowledgement of the need to make Canada better known to its neighbours via the instrument of the book testifies to the currency in the postwar period of the idea that state support for national culture should be somehow *international* in scope and, indeed, to the idea that the book was an instrument that could be put to work to demonstrate the former settler colony's possession of "venerable cultural traditions"—that is, as signs of its transition from colony to nation.

Yet such apparently seamless development conceals contradiction: while the Massey commissioners invoked the language of contemporary US models of cultural diplomacy, they simultaneously rejected the hegemony of American cultural (and economic) power. For example, the fifth section of the first part of the Massey Report (entitled "Cultural Relations Abroad") offers numerous and often conflicting justifications for the value (drawing on a metaphor from film) of "the projection of Canada abroad." Among these justifications, one finds the nation's responsibility to make a "reasonable contribution to civilized life" and to benefit from such life in other Western democracies, while also increasing "Canadian prestige in other countries"; the need to combat Canada's "too frequent recourse" to American culture and institutions; and the obligation to counter the "false propaganda" of "dictatorships" with the "truth effectively and generously disseminated by every practicable means" (Canada, "Report of the Royal Commission" 253-67). What we see here is that concern regarding excessive American cultural influence is paired quite unselfconsciously with the American-defined cultural diplomacy language of the period.

In Canada, a postwar program to disseminate books internationally was actually developed in 1949, prior to the publication of the Massey Report in 1951. As Janice Cavell notes, the Information Division of the Department of External Affairs assumed the work of the Canadian Information Service (formerly the Wartime Information Board) in 1947. Reticent to have a peacetime government information service and anxious to avoid charges of propagandistic activity, officials increased the staff of the Information Division and granted it the task of distributing information abroad concerning Canada (Cavell 83). In 1949, a modest book presentation program—which came to be known as the Annual (Canadiana) Book Presentation Programme—was established within the Information Division. Under the auspices of the program, the Information Division was authorized

to purchase books "about Canada or by Canadians," as well as subscriptions to Canadian periodicals, to offer as donations to libraries outside the US. The aim of the program was to "increase the knowledge and understanding of Canada and of Canadian affairs abroad" and to promote "Canada's cultural ties with other countries" through print that represented "all aspects of Canadian life and affairs including history, geography, politics and government, economics, literature and the arts." The program was initially somewhat haphazard but was narrowed by 1954 to the goal of providing three selected libraries (one in Europe, one in Asia, and one elsewhere) each year with $500 worth of books (approximately 130-150 volumes).[5] In 1956, the Information Division added a Special Book Presentation Programme to its activities, which aimed to "combat the present flood of literature of Soviet origin in the Colombo Plan area" and to "build up intellectual resistance to communism and not, except indirectly, to project knowledge of Canada." Through the latter half of the 1950s, this second undertaking complemented and indeed threatened to supplant the Canadiana program; however, the two were merged in 1959 when it became clear that Canada's meagre efforts—approximately 1,800 books in 1957-1958—could do little to counter the influence of "cheaply produced popular books"—some thirty million of which were sent in 1958 alone—that the Soviet Union was sending to Asia and Africa.[6]

As in the US, the book initiatives undertaken by Canada's federal government were complemented in this decade by the work of a variety of semi- and non-governmental organizations, such as the Canadian Council for Reconstruction through UNESCO (CCRU). Created in 1947 at the urging of the Department of External Affairs, the CCRU gathered some thirty voluntary organizations that committed to tackling the UNESCO-mandated work of raising funds for "educational, scientific, and cultural reconstruction in war-devastated countries throughout the world" (Canada, "Canadian Council" i). During its first two years, the CCRU undertook two book-centric initiatives: the "school-box" project, which entailed the creation and dissemination of some twenty thousand boxes of basic school supplies and reading materials to classrooms in "war-devastated areas," and the establishment in Halifax of the Canadian Book Centre, which collected books to send to libraries in Europe that had lost collections during the war (Canada, "Canadian Council" 4-5, 7-8).

In contrast to the American and American-influenced book initiatives of the postwar years, the Canadian government's cultural diplomacy efforts were poorly funded and lacked coordination and integration with Canadian

foreign policy until well into the 1960s (Brooks 7-9). The initial budget for the Canadiana program was $2,000 per year and, during the 1950s, the budget for all book programs combined was never more than $10,000; in the same period, the United States Information Agency was spending about $6,000,000 to send books to Europe and to nations in what was termed the "developing" world. Australia, a better nation for comparison due to its size and comparable history, spent $50,000 in 1959 to distribute books about Australia to schools in Indonesia.[7] Nonetheless, in a period when any effort on the part of the federal government to fund and promote culture was a relative novelty, these dollars mattered.

Moreover, unlike American postwar book programs, Canadian programming did not involve the publishing industry in any significant way. Cavell suggests that in a period when there was little direct state support for book publishers, the book purchasing undertaken by the Department of External Affairs during the period 1949-1963 likely "made a significant contribution to the economic well-being of the Canadian publishing industry" (81). This is quite likely, given that the department supported many Canadian publishers, such as Éditions Beauchemin, McClelland & Stewart, and Ryerson Press; however, some civil servants involved in the work of ordering books for the Canadiana program prioritized price in cases where a book was available from both a domestically owned and a foreign-owned source.[8] Even though a strong domestic publishing industry was implied by Canada's participation in US-dominated postwar cultural diplomacy, support for Canadian-owned publishers was not a formal part of the Canadiana program's initial mission to disseminate books "about Canada or by Canadians," and it certainly did not inform the later Special Book Presentation Programme aimed at nations in the Colombo Plan area.[9]

### Settler Contradiction: Promoting Canada's Publishing Culture Abroad

Canada's Massey commissioners possessed what Litt calls a "blend of elitist, liberal, and romantic ideas" about culture ("The State and the Book" 36). Their thinking, and the thinking of many in the groups that formed a culture lobby around them, also bore a strong antimodernist streak: while they abhorred "purely commercial" (and largely American) mass culture, they saw value in the "folklore, customs, and pastimes that traditionally existed in close relation to a people's social culture." Such "grassroots" popular culture was "vibrant, participatory, and directly relevant to the community life of the individual"; as such, it could combat the effects of mass culture, which

"stultified and then manipulated a gullible public" (Litt, *The Muses* 85). A corollary of this elitist antimodernism can be found in UNESCO's first major book industry program, the Collection of Representative Works, which was created in 1948 to support the translation and cross-border dissemination of the world's "classic literature." Sarah Brouillette's account of this program reveals a great deal about the values and goals of the US-led development establishment during the 1950s. Concerned about the global transition from the "age of empire to the age of fragmentation," key UNESCO leaders wanted to cultivate and safeguard a "unified global vision" of "cosmopolitan liberalism," an ideal of "elite aesthetic expression" that could transcend politics while articulating the sovereignty and "local particularity" of each nation (11-12). A collection of global "classics" in translation (mostly into English and French), the Collection of Representative Works aimed to grant what were cast as "less developed cultures" access to the "great classics," while "making the preindustrial arts available to those whose decadence needed to be checked" (Brouillette 29).[10] Brouillette notes the obvious tension underlying this ostensible exchange, which, in its mission to cultivate progress through a harmonization of Western and non-Western cultures, threatened the very values of localism and tradition that it purported to value (29).

While the government of Louis St. Laurent was eager to cast Canada as a nation that was assuming a place among its equals on a world stage increasingly directed by US hegemony, Canada's settler-colonial status placed it in an ambivalent location between the "cosmopolitan liberalism" that UNESCO identified with the Western powers and the attractive "local particularity" of those nations that had yet to be modernized. The initial title selection for the Department of External Affairs' Canadiana program offers a telling demonstration of this point. At the first 1949 meeting of the Information Division committee tasked with overseeing the program, it was agreed that the program would include hardcover books in both English and French on history, economics, cultural subjects, geography, and government. At this meeting, committee member and civil servant Laura Beattie suggested John D. Robins' *A Pocketful of Canada* (1946) and Desmond Pacey's *A Book of Canadian Stories* (1947), both of which remained staples on the Canadiana list through the 1950s (Cavell 84). A project of the Canadian Council of Education for Citizenship, an association formed in 1940 with the encouragement of federal government officials that brought together volunteer groups and provincial departments of education concerned about education for newcomers (Joshee 110), *A Pocketful of Canada* was more or

less tailor-made for book diplomacy efforts of the postwar period. H. M. Tory, chair of the Canadian Council of Education for Citizenship (and university administrator), makes the domestic and international aims of the book clear in his introduction; it is meant to "bring to the Canadian at home, and to his friends elsewhere, such an interesting and informative view of the real growing and developing Canada as may be gathered from a study of the written record" (v). The book is a miscellany dominated by short fiction and poetry, some of which is presented in sections with regional themes ("West by North"), but it also includes non-fictional contributions by figures such as Marius Barbeau ("Indian Art and Myth") and Lawren Harris ("Reconstruction through the Arts"), in addition to political and historical essays and documents, such as Lorne Pierce's "The Underlying Principle of Confederation" and excerpts from the Treaty of Paris. The importance of *A Pocketful* to the Canadiana program is clear: in his 1952 purchase requisition, an employee in the Information Division observed that the book was in "considerable demand"; and, in a period when the Department had a budget of only $2,000 per year for the program (about six hundred books), they purchased more copies of *A Pocketful* than any other title—250 copies in 1952 and a further 60 copies in 1953.[11] By the early 1950s, *A Pocketful* was no stranger to international distribution: as Carole Gerson discusses, it was one of the books selected in 1948 by the CCRU for inclusion in the twenty thousand boxes of school supplies that were sent to classrooms in war-ravaged parts of Europe (Gerson 67; Canada, "Canadian Council" 4); its role in this earlier program may have influenced the Department of External Affairs committee tasked with selecting titles.[12]

The overrepresentation of *A Pocketful of Canada* in the government's Canadiana program is partly explained by the fact that, unlike most purchases the Department of External Affairs made for cultural diplomacy purposes, this title was primarily ordered as a paperback, which came at the attractive price of fifty cents a copy. The moderately priced hardcover books favoured by the Department typically cost three to four dollars. Published by William Collins Sons & Company Canada, a subsidiary of the Glasgow-based company that began operating in Toronto during the 1930s, *A Pocketful* was originally issued in cloth-bound hardcovers, but subsequent editions in 1948 and 1952 were paperbacks, the last of which appeared as a White Circle Pocket Edition, a series of cheap reprints of successful British, American, and Canadian titles [see Figure 1]. Launched in 1942 by Collins' Canadian office, the series was modelled after and competed with American firms, such as

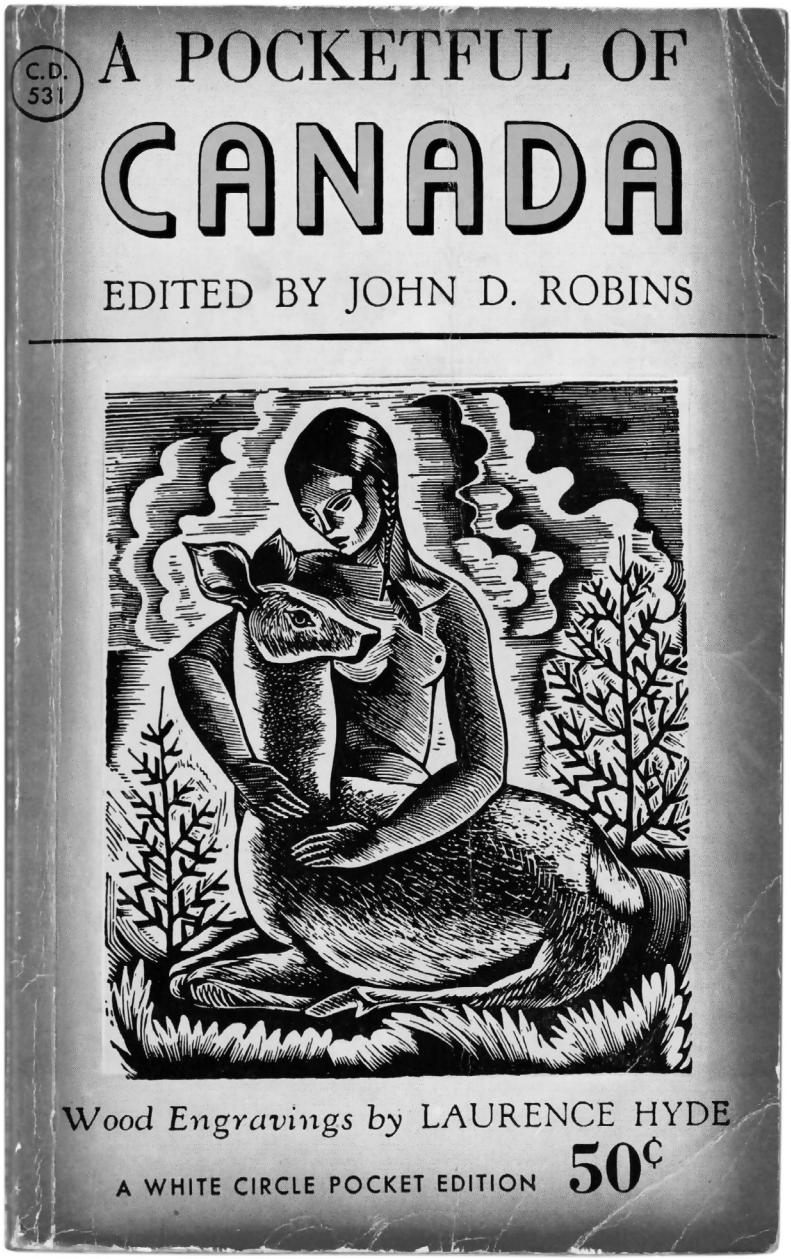


**Figure 1.** *A Pocketful of Canada* (White Circle Pocket Edition, Collins, 1952). Reproduction courtesy of the author's private collection.

Pocket Books and Doubleday, that led the paperback revolution of this period. White Circle Pocket Editions are an early example of mass-market book production—the Toronto branch produced the paperbacks at the rate of eight titles a month—as well as distribution in Canada (Rampure 186; "Margaret Paull"; Brouillette and Michon 405). The president of Collins' Canadian branch, Franklin Appleton, was a "committed nationalist" who used the wartime disruption of the trans-Atlantic book trade to enlarge Collins' Canadian operations, endeavouring through the 1940s to manufacture the majority of the branch's books in Canada (Campbell 58; Gerson 68-69). Indeed, the White Circle series was unique for its inclusion of Canadian-authored books—mostly mysteries and romances, though more literary titles, such as Hugh MacLennan's novel *Two Solitudes*, also occasionally found a place. Nonetheless, the White Circle series, which had to compete on drugstore shelves featuring the American and British selections of Pocket Books and Doubleday, was dominated by popular British writers of genre fiction, such as Peter Cheyney and Edwy Searles Brooks. Consequently, although the Canadian branch of Collins became more autonomous during the Second World War, and was committed to local manufacturing and to including some Canadian authors in its publishing program, as a subsidiary of a British company that made its money on British and American writers, it was representative of the publishing culture of mid-century English Canada, which was dominated by agency publishers and subsidiaries of foreign companies.[13]

*A Pocketful of Canada* is an interesting book to read in the context of its use as an instrument of postwar cultural diplomacy because it enacts, albeit ambivalently, the sort of "exchange" promoted by UNESCO's Collection of Representative Works during the late 1940s and 1950s. Quite literally enclosing the text's print selections is Laurence Hyde's cover illustration, a wood engraving that features a woman embracing a seated deer. Adorned with simple braids but no clothing and placed in proximity to nature (the deer, the forest background), this is a figure marked as Indigenous for non-Indigenous postwar audiences. As Gerson notes, there is a "visual dialogue" between *A Pocketful*'s woodcuts and its photographs (72). If Hyde's woodcuts, which pepper the book's endpapers (in the hardcover edition) and mark off each of the book's sections, represent the values of craftsmanship and simplicity of the era's fine-press work, these images contrast with the book's photographic essay by Donald W. Buchanan, which comprises stills from National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentaries that narrate the

nation's industrial "progress" (Gerson 73).[14] This dialogue demonstrates "the differing conceptions of Canada prevalent during the immediate post-war period" (Gerson 72), but it is also a wonderful material instance of the contradictions that constituted the settler nationalism of this moment. Aligned with an iconography of Indigeneity, the book's woodcuts function as a balm for both the American mass culture the Massey commissioners detested, on one hand, and on the other, the modernization and "progress" the book witnesses and, indeed, celebrates. The woodcuts embody what Lynda Jessup calls a "modernizing antimodernism"—one that "sought social and industrial advancement in a return to the imagined state of aesthetic consciousness that had been lost with overcivilization" (138), or, we might add, the saturation of daily life with American mass culture. At the same time, they draw on what Lorenzo Veracini describes as "settler indigenization"(46)—settler "appropriation of indigenous cultural attributes" as a means of claiming authenticity for the national project (46). The woodcuts thus function in highly ironic ways that situate Canada in ambivalent relation to the liberal cosmopolitan-local culture distinction. All at once, they critique American models of industrial mass production, while easing the transition to an age characterized in Buchanan's visual essay as the "conquest of space" (Robins 174); they appropriate a "local" culture that is not coterminous with settler culture and disavow the foundational violence of the nation; and they mark the destruction of the lifeways and knowledges they purport to value.[15]

Layered upon these contradictions is another, one that was produced by English Canada's positioning in relation to the concept of "civilization" that was attached to the postwar cultural diplomacy efforts led by the US. As I describe above, Canada's Massey commissioners repeated the language of American cultural diplomacy in their 1951 report; their appeal to the nation's responsibility to make a "reasonable contribution to civilized life," as well as its obligation to counter the "false propaganda" of "dictatorships," refers back to the argument, common in the American-led development establishment of the period, that liberal democracy was contingent on the "free and earnest exchange of ideas"—an exchange that rested on the basic assumption that the high literacy rates and modernized book industries of the Western democracies were crucial to their freedoms. Yet this language put English Canadians in an uncomfortable position because it implies that the nation had a robust publishing industry. *A Pocketful of Canada* offers an intriguing exemplification of this problem. Its contents suggest that Canada is a nation rich in the pre-industrial arts, including totem poles (Barbeau's "Indian

Art and Myth," a photograph of Emily Carr's painting *Blunden Harbour*), the wooden cradle of the *habitant* (Adjutor Rivard's "The Cradle"), and the canoe (one of Hyde's engravings, excerpts from Ralph Connor's *Postscript to Adventure* and John D. Robins' *The Incomplete Anglers*). Laurence Hyde's woodcuts and their implication of the high production standards of fine-press work are logically continuous with this theme of "indigenous" handicraft as the basis of nationhood. Yet print and publishing do not stand still, as other arts do; they are the handmaidens of the industrial progress the book takes as a sign of the nation's maturity, as H. M. Tory's introduction makes clear in its prizing of the "ever-increasing accumulation of the written word" as the site for the development of the "spirit of a nation" (v). The cultural nationalist argument here blithely absorbs the appeal to Indigenous authenticity, creating a legitimizing narrative that grants the settler nation two key advantages: it places Canada among the Western leaders of the postwar order, while insisting that its origin is more authentic than crass American mass culture. This nation-story of development, substituting as it does the settler-imperium difference for the settler-indigene difference, is connected to what Johnston and Lawson call the "strategic disavowal of the colonizing act" (365).

With this in mind, it is also important to pause on the contradiction produced by the book's narration of the nation's print progress and the actual history of publishing conditions in Canada. This is a book with small fonts, thin paper, and tiny margins, and as a White Circle paperback—the form in which it most commonly circulated through the Canadiana program—it speaks explicitly to the influence of American mass book production on publishing in Canada and implicitly to the domination of Canadian publishing in this period by British and American companies.[16] In other words, what the book avows in its iconography, its themes, and its arguments, it disavows in its material form.

Desmond Pacey's *A Book of Canadian Stories* (1947), the second book suggested by Laura Beattie at the initial 1949 meeting of the committee tasked with selecting books for the Canadiana program, offers a similar embodiment of the contradictions that Canadian book diplomacy produced in the postwar years. Pacey's short-story anthology was one of the earliest of its kind in Canada (Lecker 14, 190). It is thus not surprising that Pacey devotes space in his introduction to a narrative of the "origins" of English Canadian literature, which he locates not in the "Indian tales" that he includes and then passes over, but in Atlantic Canada, and more particularly

in the arrival of the printing press in Nova Scotia in the eighteenth century. Looking to the Loyalists who arrived in that region during the American Revolution, Pacey finds the "real beginnings of literary activity in what is now Canada" (xvi). Key to his narrative are figures such as John Howe (father of Joseph Howe), a Boston editor who arrived in Nova Scotia in 1776 with his printing press. Pacey considers the Howe family significant not merely for their printing and publishing contributions to British North America, but also for Joseph Howe's establishment of "the principle of a free press in Canada" (17). (*A Pocketful of Canada* similarly privileges this contribution, reprinting "On the Freedom of the Press," an excerpt from Howe's speech at his libel trial in 1835.)[17] Yet Pacey's account of "real beginnings" contains a significant error: clearly desiring to link Howe's early *printing* efforts to something closer in identity to *publishing*, Pacey suggests that John Howe was responsible for the establishment of the newspaper the *Novascotian,* and that he passed the newspaper along to his son in 1828, creating the conditions that made the younger Howe a "pioneer in the establishment of a distinctive Canadian culture" (xvi, 17). Contrary to this account, the paper was actually founded in 1824 by George R. Young, and Joseph Howe assumed control in 1827 (Kernaghan). This error demonstrates the fact that English Canadian literary history was, in 1947, building narratives out of a scarcity of scholarship; indeed, what scholarship existed did not tend to notice the economic relations that were important in determining the literary field of the former settler colony.[18] Thus the fact that Pacey's critical framing passes over key legal and economic structures—copyright agreements, the agency system—in his tracing of the "inhibiting factors" that have "held back the growth of Canadian short stories" (xxxvi) is not surprising. A text that attributes the growth of a national literature to the arrival of the printing press and then does not follow the fate of that press and others like it, favouring instead arguments that attend to aesthetic development, *A Book of Canadian Stories* offered to Canada's postwar cultural diplomacy efforts a narrative that celebrates—but does not examine too closely—a strongly rooted tradition of press freedom, printing, and publishing.

## Concluding Thoughts on Book Diplomacy as a Colonizing Practice

While Canada's book diplomacy in the 1950s played a role in the articulation of what Johnston and Lawson call the "settler-imperium" "vector of difference," and if this essay has attended to the ways that this settler cultural

nationalism was embedded in the perpetuation of the colonization of Indigenous nations in Canada, it is important to note in conclusion that postwar book diplomacy was imbricated more generally in colonizing—or neocolonial—practices beyond Canada's own borders. The contradictions that these practices produced offer another view of the complexity of settler-colonial nation-making during the two and a half decades that followed the close of the Second World War: while many English Canadian nationalists decried the "colonized" status of their nation's culture during these years, in publications such as A. B. Hodgetts' *What Culture? What Heritage?* (1968) or Robin Mathews and James Steele's *The Struggle for Canadian Universities* (1969), Canadian book diplomacy was working to undermine the nascent book publishing industries of former colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.

The colonial practice of "book dumping"—the process by which British and American books were "dumped" into the Canadian market in contravention of copyright agreements—was a significant inhibitor to the establishment of original Canadian publishing during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was widely condemned by Canadian publishers.[19] Nonetheless, this practice—renamed and cast in a very different ideological light—was central to Canada's non-governmental book programming between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s. The Overseas Book Centre (OBC) offers a case in point. Founded in 1959 by James Robbins Kidd, the postwar (1950-1960) director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and promoter of adult education in a wide array of the era's national and international cultural organizations, the OBC was committed to the idea that rich nations like Canada could "help education in the Third World through presentation of books" (Richards 26). Managed by Kidd, Harry Campbell (Director of the Toronto Public Library), and Kurt Swinton (President of Encyclopedia Britannica Canada), the OBC's flagship program, "Books for Developing Countries," had a second purpose: to provide a use for surplus books from Toronto libraries and Britannica that would otherwise be "burned or shredded" (Teager 122-23). By 1979, the OBC was shipping four hundred tons of donated books annually to 1,200 recipients in eighty countries (Richards 27). Yet as a 1979 review indicated, this program was plagued not simply by distribution challenges and the problem of the frequent (linguistic, cultural, educational, or other) irrelevance of the donated titles to their recipients, but also by its tendency to choke domestic publishing industries in receiving countries.[20] As I have shown,

book donation schemes—especially American and Soviet ones—formed an important part of the cultural diplomacy of the Cold War period. It was not until the early 1970s that UNESCO began to draw attention, through its 1972 Charter of the Book and publications such as Ronald Barker and Robert Escarpit's *The Book Hunger* (1973), to the ways that book donation programs undermined local publishing infrastructures.

Canadian postwar book diplomacy offers a rich site for the analysis of the paradoxes that constitute Canada's settler-colonial nationhood, particularly as its myths of origin congealed in the decades following the Second World War. Supported in important ways by Canada's participation in book diplomacy and donation schemes led and defined by the US (a nation that was attempting to counter the emergent efforts of the Soviet Union in this same domain), the dominant narrative of Canada in the 1950-1975 period is one of national becoming and of the achievement of cultural and political maturity. Subtending this smooth narrative is a set of bumpy contradictions: Canada's international positioning in these years was dependent on American hegemony but critical of its cultural inauthenticity, a condition countered in the Department of External Affairs' Canadiana program through appeals to Indigenous origins and traditions of preindustrial craft that were in turn subjected to modernizing narratives that both drew on their authenticating power and erased their ongoing presence in "modern" Canada. More generally, Canada's participation in the book diplomacy efforts of the postwar years belongs to a larger history of the book in the late twentieth century, a history that is deeply bound up in struggles that pitted American and Western European media corporations against the local interests of the world's decolonizing nations. The ambivalent positioning of former settler colonies such as Canada in this struggle is best illuminated not through metaphors of "arrival" but rather through the analysis of contradiction.

NOTES

1 Things had changed by the early 1990s. In 1992, Statistics Canada estimated that Canadian-controlled firms accounted for 53% of the market share of book sales in Canada (and 87% market share for trade books) (Lorimer, "Book Publishing" 14-15).

2 The report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing notes that, in 1970, foreign-owned firms produced only 27% of all Canadian literature (including fiction, poetry, and criticism) (Ontario 59-62). In a 1996 study, Rowland Lorimer states that Canadian-owned publishers produce nearly 90% of Canadian-authored books ("Book Publishing" 6). For more recent statistics on this question, see Lorimer, *Ultra Libris*, pp. 161-62.

3 American book programs of the 1950s aimed at audiences in Western and Central Europe featured major figures of early and nineteenth-century American literature (Washington, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Twain). Histories of American literature that interpreted these works in relation to the "evolving nation" were also included (Barnhisel 99).

4 Through the 1931 Statute of Westminster, Britain granted Canada full legislative independence, excepting the repeal, amendment, or alteration of the British North America Act. Canada did not immediately take up all of these new powers; it was not until 1949 that Britain's Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ceased to be the nation's highest court (Hillmer).

5 N. A. Robertson, 31 Aug. 1959, "Memorandum for the Minister," RG 25, Vol. 7797, file 12569-2-40, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC). Through the latter half of the 1950s, receiving nations/regions included Japan, India, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ghana, the West Indies, Spain, Poland, Belgium, Southern Rhodesia, and Iceland.

6 N. A. Robertson, 31 Aug. 1959, "Memorandum for the Minister," RG 25, Vol. 7797, file 12569-2-40, LAC. Book donation programs at the Department of External Affairs continued long after the period examined here; Cavell notes the department's "low-key" approach meant that it went largely unrecognized by influential Canadian commentators, such as Thomas Symons in his 1975 report *To Know Ourselves* (90-91).

7 N. A. Robertson, 31 Aug. 1959, "Memorandum for the Minister," RG 25, Vol. 7797, file 12569-2-40, LAC.

8 Laura Beattie's 1953 memorandum regarding Jean Bruchési's *Le Canada* expressed alarm at the high price ($6.75 for a paperback) of its English-language edition, published in 1952 by the domestically owned Ryerson Press; she suggested that her colleagues should investigate the cost of the book in France because "it is printed there." The department opted to purchase only two copies of the book (probably because the Quebec government ordered two thousand copies), but this order was for the French-language edition published by F. Nathan in Paris and was placed with Paillard, a French publishing house, an arrangement that produced a significant discount. Laura Beattie, "Memorandum for E. H. Norman," 17 Feb. 1953; Paul Malone, Information Division, to Supplies and Properties Division, Department of External Affairs Memorandum, 16 Sept. 1953, Vol. 4433, file 12569-40, RG 25, LAC.

9 In 1959, a decade after the Canadiana program was established, the Canada Council, following up on the Massey commissioners' suggestion that Canadian embassies could build libraries of Canadian books, established its "Projection of Canada Abroad" initiative. More clearly aimed at supporting Canadian publishers than the Canadiana program (though not necessarily successful in accomplishing this end), the Canada Council initiative enabled the block purchase of Canadian-authored books (mostly in French) for distribution by the Department of External Affairs at Canadian missions abroad (The Canada Council 35, 45).

10 For the full list of UNESCO's Collection of Representative Works, see UNESCO, "Literature and Translation." Chapter One of Brouillette's study of UNESCO analyzes the place of Yasunari Kawabata's novel *Snow Country* (translated from Japanese and published by UNESCO in 1956) in the collection.

11 P. C. Dobell, Information Division, "Memorandum for Supplies and Properties Division," 22 Nov. 1952; Bruce Keith, Information Division, "Requisition for Books and Publications," 25 Nov. 1952; Paul Malone, Information Division, to Supplies and Properties

Division, Department of External Affairs Memorandum, 3 June 1953; and Paul Malone, Information Division, to Supplies and Properties Division, Department of External Affairs Memorandum, 20 May 1953, Vol. 4433, file 12569-40, RG 25, LAC.

12 Gerson's essay on *A Pocketful* lays crucial groundwork for any history of the text; I add here a discussion of the book's role in the Canadiana program and in postwar cultural diplomacy more generally, one that teases out important paradoxes that Gerson's essay does not examine.

13 For a useful history of the White Circle series, including a partial bibliography that clearly demonstrates the dominance of British writers, see Sulipa. As Gerson notes, due to the fact that the papers of the Canadian Collins subsidiary were destroyed, the information regarding the print runs for any of the versions of *A Pocketful* is unavailable (67). Gerson's essay provides important details regarding differences among the three editions of *A Pocketful*, as well as a description of the physical book, which is indeed a "pocketful" (the hardback measures seven and a half by four and a half inches, not much bigger than the paperback and much smaller than a standard hardback) (Gerson 68-69).

14 It is important to note that the style of engraving that Hyde used for the images in *A Pocketful* is associated not merely with fine-press work but also with the visual style of Anglo-American leftist publications of the 1930s, including Canadian publications such as *New Frontier* (1936-1937), a magazine that featured Hyde's work. For examples of Hyde's engravings for *New Frontier* see Senechal Carney. Hyde's use of wood engravings for leftist critique is also exemplified in his 1951 "wordless novel," *Southern Cross: A Novel of the South Seas*, which visually narrates American postwar nuclear testing in the South Pacific.

15 On settler "disavowal," see Veracini (75-86). One of these strategies is to disallow the very existence of Indigenous presence and claims; many of the texts collected in *A Pocketful* might be read as exemplifications of this strategy, including the excerpt from L. C. Douthwaite's 1939 *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*.

16 Grant Campbell documents the unusually high production standards of Collins' Canadian branch during the Second World War. Under Frank Appleton, the firm advocated high-quality production (standards of layout and typography, wide margins, large type, etc.), despite wartime shortages of paper and other materials. Campbell contends that Appleton and other Canadian publishers resented poor British production standards and saw higher standards in Canada as a sign of growing national pride (56-58). Campbell does not discuss an obvious exception to this line of thinking—the White Circle paperbacks. Gerson notes that postwar shortages of paper likely account for the low quality of *A Pocketful* (69).

17 John Howe was in fact one of the earliest printers in the region and in British North America and, with his two eldest sons and his brother-in-law, went on to dominate Halifax printing (Fleming 61, 65). For further information regarding Joseph Howe's 1835 libel case, see Parker, "Joseph Howe."

18 Here I use "determined" in the sense described by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*, which advocates a concept of determination as "a complex and interrelated process of limits and pressures" located not in an abstracted mode of production but in "the whole social process itself" (87). A notable exception to my point is E. K. Brown's *On Canadian Poetry* (1943), which acknowledges that "economic" factors help to explain the "difficulties" faced by English Canadian writers (6).

19 George Parker notes that during the Depression, for example, American publishers routinely "dumped" remaindered books produced in the US for American readers on the

Canadian market. This contravened Canadian copyright arrangements ("The Agency System" 165; "Trade and Regional" 171).

20 In 1979, the organization shifted from a supply-based to a recipient-led philosophy, moving away from the provision of books and toward the development of both indigenous publishing and educational infrastructure in the nations where it focuses its efforts (Richards 27-28). Based in Ottawa, CODE continues its international development work today (see code.ngo/).

WORKS CITED

**Archival Sources**

Department of External Affairs fonds, RG 25, Library and Archives Canada.

**Published Sources**

Barker, Ronald, and Robert Escarpit, editors. *The Book Hunger*. UNESCO, 1973.

Barnhisel, Greg. *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*. Columbia UP, 2015.

Berland, Jody. "Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis." *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art*, edited by Berland and Shelly Hornstein, McGill-Queen's UP, 2000, pp. 14-38.

Brooks, Stephen. "Uncertain Embrace: The Rise and Fall of Canadian Studies Abroad as a Tool of Foreign Policy." *Promoting Canadian Studies Abroad: Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy,* edited by Brooks, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 1-36.

Broten, Delores. *The Lumberjack Report: English Canadian Literary Trade Book Publishers' Sales, 1963-1972*. CANLIT, 1975.

Brouillette, Sarah. *UNESCO and the Fate of the Literary*. Stanford UP, 2019.

Brouillette, Sarah, and Jacques Michon. "Control and Content in Mass-Market Distribution." Gerson and Michon, pp. 404-07.

Brown, E. K. *On Canadian Poetry*. Ryerson, 1943.

Campbell, Grant. "William Collins During World War II: Nationalism Meets a Wartime Economy in Canadian Publishing." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2001, pp. 45-65.

Canada. "Canadian Council for Reconstruction through UNESCO: Submission to Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951." *Library and Archives Canada*, 27 Jan. 2001, collectionscanada.ca/massey/h5-318-e.html. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.

—. "Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951." *Library and Archives Canada*, 27 Jan. 2001, collectionscanada.gc.ca/massey/h5-436-e.html. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.

The Canada Council. "Third Annual Report, to March 31, 1960." *Canada Council for the Arts*, https://canadacouncil.ca/about/governance/corporate-reports. Accessed 12 Mar. 2020.

Cavell, Janice. "Canadiana Abroad: The Department of External Affairs' Book Presentation Programmes, 1949-1963." *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, June 2009, pp. 81-93.

Dorland, Michael, editor. *The Cultural Industries in Canada: Problems, Policies and Prospects*. James Lorimer, 1996.

Dowler, Kevin. "The Cultural Industries Policy Apparatus." Dorland, pp. 328-46.

Escarpit, Robert. *Trends in Worldwide Book Development, 1970-1978*. UNESCO, 1982.
Fleming, Patricia Lockhart. "First Printers and the Spread of the Press." Fleming et al., pp. 61-69.
Fleming, Patricia Lockhart, Gilles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde, editors. *History of the Book in Canada: Beginnings to 1840*. Vol. 1, U of Toronto P, 2004.
Gerson, Carole. "Design and Ideology in *A Pocketful of Canada*." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2006, pp. 65-85.
Gerson, Carole, and Jacques Michon, editors. *History of the Book in Canada: 1918-1980*. Vol. 3, U of Toronto P, 2007.
Hillmer, Norman. "Statute of Westminster." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 4 Mar. 2015, thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/statute-of-westminster. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.
Hodgetts, A. B. *What Culture? What Heritage? A Study of Civic Education in Canada*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1968.
Jessup, Lynda. "Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: An Introduction." *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, edited by Jessup, U of Toronto P, 2001, pp. 3-9.
Johnston, Anna, and Alan Lawson. "Settler Colonies." *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, Blackwell, 2000, pp. 360-76.
Joshee, Reva. "The Federal Government and Citizenship Education for Newcomers." *Canadian and International Education*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1996, pp. 108-27.
Kernaghan, Lois. "Novascotian." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 4 Mar. 2015, thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/novascotian. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.
Lacy, Dan. "The Overseas Book Program of the United States Government." *Library Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1954, pp. 178-91.
Laugesen, Amanda. *Taking Books to the World: American Publishers and the Cultural Cold War*. U of Massachusetts P, 2017.
Lecker, Robert. *Keepers of the Code: English-Canadian Literary Anthologies and the Representation of Nation*. U of Toronto P, 2013.
Litt, Paul. *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission*. U of Toronto P, 1992.
—. "The State and the Book." Gerson and Michon, pp. 34-44.
Lorimer, Rowland. "Book Publishing." Dorland, pp. 3-33.
—. *Ultra Libris: Policy, Technology, and the Creative Economy of Book Publishing in Canada*. ECW, 2012.
"Margaret Paull: 42 Years with Collins." *Quill & Quire*, vol. 51, May 1985, p. 20.
Mathews, Robin, and James Steele, editors. *The Struggle for Canadian Universities*. New, 1969.
Mount, Nick. *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*. Anansi, 2017.
Ontario. Royal Commission on Book Publishing. *Canadian Publishers and Canadian Publishing*. Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1973.
Pacey, Desmond, editor. *A Book of Canadian Stories*. Ryerson, 1947.
Parker, George L. "The Agency System and Branch-Plant Publishing." Gerson and Michon, pp. 163-68.
—. "Joseph Howe and Freedom of the Press." Fleming et al., pp. 330-31.
—. "Trade and Regional Publishing in Central Canada." Gerson and Michon, pp. 168-78.
Rampure, Archana. "'Harlequin Has Built an Empire.'" Gerson and Michon, pp. 185-88.
Richards, Tony. "From Giving to Helping: The Evolution of a Development Agency." *Logos*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1 Jan. 1993, pp. 26-32.

Robins, John D., editor. *A Pocketful of Canada*. Collins, 1946.
Senechal Carney, Laura. "*New Frontier* (1936-1937) and the Antifascist Press in Canada." *Sketches from an Unquiet Country: Canadian Graphic Satire, 1840-1940*, edited by Dominic Hardy, Annie Gérin, and Laura Senechal Carney, McGill-Queen's UP, 2018, pp. 232-56.
Sulipa, Doug. "Collins White Circle, 1942-1952." *Doug Sulipa's Comic World*, dougcomicworld.com/inventory/INVENTORY-CollinsPaperbackSite.html. Accessed 10 Feb. 2020.
Teager, W. A. "Cultural and Humanitarian Activities Leading to an International Role and Focus." *J. R. Kidd: An International Legacy of Learning*, edited by Nancy J. Cochrane, Centre for Continuing Education, U of British Columbia, 1986, pp. 112-36.
UNESCO. "Literature and Translation." *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, http://www.unesco.org/culture/lit/rep/index.php. Accessed 12 Mar. 2020.
Veracini, Lorenzo. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford UP, 1977.

# Essential Contingencies, or the Verbs Behind All Nouns

**John Barton**
*We Are Not Avatars: Essays, Memoirs, Manifestos.* Palimpsest $19.95

**Johanna Skibsrud**
*The Nothing That Is: Essays on Art, Literature and Being.* Book*hug $20.00

Reviewed by Gregory Betts

I grow disenchanted when writers talk about poetry as if it were a singular phenomenon. The model of linguistic effects they call upon inevitably refers to a very limited band of what has been done, dismissive of the fringes of the form where the future is constantly being reinvented. Perhaps this is why John Barton's book of essays about his life, thoughts, and experiences as a gay male author in Canada feels less disenchanting. He is not defining poetry. He is writing about his experiences of poetry. All the nouns in his essays—the books, the forms, the author functions, the poetics—are understood as collections of verbs, ever shifting and moving and subject to myriad dynamic forces. Whether you like his poems or not, whether you agree with his insights into the art form or not, there is no denying that he is aware of the process by which he came to writing, and of the diverse influences—from his body to his mentors—that shaped his writing and his thinking.

The essays in *We Are Not Avatars* are grounded in public facts (like HIV/AIDS, Emily Carr's paintings, and the Canadian landscape) and personal experiences (like reciting poetry while swimming, what certain poems mean *to him*, and the struggle to write despite chronic pain). I like especially the moments when Barton conveys how his mentors, including Joseph Brodsky and Anne Szumigalski, models of "intuitive mentorship," showed him how to read and live like a poet. These are biographical facts, and this factual basis for his poetry is ultimately what makes him not an avatar. Poetry, it is implied, is a process emergent from a band of essential contingencies. When he says "writing was one way to recover or repatriate experience," his mentor Szumigalski suggests instead that "through writing I recovered *from* experience." It is a mark of honesty and lyric self-exposure that Barton documents and demonstrates the movement of his learning.

This tension is not yet reconciled in Johanna Skibsrud's *The Nothing That Is*. She writes about "the West" as if or in hopes it were an irreducible thing, a noun not a verb, and turns to especially American culture, poetry, film, art, and theatre to help illuminate that thing. As the title suggests, though, her interrogation of poetry by the likes of Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, and George Oppen, and other cultural artifacts from Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947) to James Marsh's *Man on Wire* (2008), demonstrates that such a thing is at best slippery, seen only in glimpses through the play of shadows. She turns to poetry as a special

kind of negation ("poetry or literary language doesn't actually produce anything") in order to establish a juxtaposition with material reality. Poetry, for her, undoes meaning and achieves its imperative function in this negative ontology: "Poetry must allow us, in other words, to pursue ourselves as strangers."

I appreciate the endeavour and the turn to poets (especially experimental poets) to think through the philosophical problem of presence, self-knowledge, and being in an age of mediated disaster. I especially appreciate the appearance of a few Canadians in the mix (such as Erín Moure and Anne Carson), though fewer white folks might have helped shift the project beyond the frame she seeks to decentre. Furthermore, I also appreciate how these essays work as an extension of Skibsrud's thinking through her father's experiences in America's war in Vietnam (documented in her novel *The Sentimentalist*), and how that conflict participated in or exacerbated a legacy of displacement from ideas of the truth. As I mentioned at the start of this review, however, attempts to specify what poetry is, even in the light of troubling ontological and imperialist dislocution, feel automatically limiting to me—and invariably send me searching for exceptions to whatever rule is being proposed. In this case, I have spent too much time with activists, for whom poetry helps to establish and maintain the space of dissidence; BIPOC and/or LGBTQ2S authors, for whom poetry helps to establish access to recognized subjectivity (and there I'm thinking more of the perlocutionary act of Fred Moten than Charles Taylor-style recognition liberalism); and avant-garde writers, for whom poetry helps to invent new spaces for new kinds of possibilities for reality and the imagination, to accept that poetry serves each in the same way. Poetry is a chant in a public square emboldening the crowd, a swerve of icons on a pirated billboard that invents a counterenvironment, a blunt script stripping rhetoric and changing laws—and also all the other ways that poetry actually does produce something.

## The Conformalists

**Dominique Béchard**
*One Dog Town.* Gaspereau $19.95

**Kerry Gilbert**
*Little Red.* Mother Tongue $19.95

Reviewed by Shane Neilson

Am I getting old, is that enough of an explanation? Straight white male shaking fist at sky? (Wait. Is anyone actually writing what they think in reviews anymore?) Or is the lyric poetry Canada produces currently coasting after the leaps and bounds of growth experienced in the aughts and early 2010s? After the doldrums of the nineties, in which the poets who had a pulse could be counted on two hands—most of them women (e.g., M. Travis Lane, Daphne Marlatt, Sylvia Legris, Dionne Brand, M. NourbeSe Philip)—Canadian poetry underwent first a sonic revolution, and then a reinvention of metaphor, both of these likely brought about by the Internet and easy accessibility to writing from elsewhere. In short order, Ken Babstock set the table for the sound of our talk; Jeramy Dodds pumped energy into how our people, places, and things might be reconceived; Jan Zwicky and some others offered the lyric as a place for spirit and philosophic reflection; Karen Solie seemed to synthesize all these elements. Then, in the latter half of the 2010s, lyric Canadian poetry widened to include far more contributions from diverse and marginalized communities. We cranked the sound; metaphor became emboldened; poetry seemed as if it might pray, albeit in a secular way; and poetry's demographic changed markedly. The latter change suggested, at least to me, that the aesthetic growth experienced in the field would continue apace.

But I don't think it has, and perhaps the stall was foreseeable. For we had so, so far to go in aesthetic terms to escape the undertow of our hegemonic styles. For example, what David Solway called "Standard Average Canadian," a Purdy-like rambling, anecdotal style, was embarrassingly common; so, too, was an Atwoodian high-irony-by-way-of-imagery style. That a few of our poets didn't succumb to these two mediocritizing trends is a credit to them, but a funny thing about such trends is they become trends *because* they seem new; only when they're tapped out and recognized as tired do many of the poets try, finally, to make it new. Canada has a sediment of trends, an anthropologically searchable record, and the most recent ones—jacked sound and zippy metaphor—will persist until our present writers understand their doomed periodization.

In 2019, I look at lyric poetry in my country and ask: *is this all there is?* Why do we (the privileged and the marginalized both) largely seem at rest, renovating the old trends with new content, but with no formal change? Though the expansion in content and awareness are welcome, when will it be time to acknowledge that poetry is much more than what is said—*it is how the thing is said?*

Thus I come to these books for review that, in isolation, are hard to fault. Dominique Béchard's debut from Gaspereau, *One Dog Town*, is emotionally powerful, striking me as a book entirely about despair with a lyric "I" oriented in a poetics of reflection, astute with sound and rendered into stanza structures that make the stuff seem as if cut from granite. Consider this snippet from "Dance Macabre with 'Sot's Inventory'":

> Meanwhile, I am inadvertently drunk,
>  mistook
> the cheer of a moment as foretelling—
>  I predict
>  an enforced solitude and time
> to prepare the next day's inventory:
>  tomorrow
> I will wake to fresh snow and canaries;
>  I will
>  chance upon unseasonable
> blueberries, and I won't forget to eat them
> this time.

Check, check, check—it's pretty good, right? Béchard's talented, and her book certainly marks her as someone who, I predict, could write an idiosyncratically beautiful one in the future.

But according to the familiarities I mention above, Béchard's work is also terribly familiar, indistinct from what everyone else is doing in our ongoing Canadian poetry project of formal conformity, just as every other nation's dominant trend is always conformity over time—with the rare exception that, because of the shock of its newness, sets the table for decades worth of meals in emulation.

Outside of style, though, there is the obvious matter of content to get to—the great frontier strip-mined in the latter half of the decade. Kerry Gilbert's *Little Red*, albeit not as dynamic or evocative as Béchard's book, is, from the macro view, little different. The poems are arrayed in stanzas that are predominantly unrhymed couplets and tercets. Sound is less modulated than in Béchard's poems, and comes a little more colloquially inclined; the emotional effects are displaced from a lyric "I" to that of a narrator's observation. Gilbert, though, does access a dominant trend in Canadian poetry by invoking identity politics. The conceit is a retelling of the Red Riding Hood myth from a feminist standpoint considering missing and murdered women and girls:

> then pretend the field is the forest and they
> work their way to grandma's house—
>  the old
> truck at the end of the yellow, full of seed
> they act out the whole bedroom scene
> wolf/grandma/red on the roof of the truck

> but somewhere in between the battle-dance
> they lose their footing and fall in
> seeds work their way into three sets of lungs
> and stop air, like trying to breathe in fur[.]

Atwood, of course, did this sort of thing already in *The Penelopiad*; and there've been many instances since of feminist revision of folklore and myth, including a redo of Atwood's own efforts in verse with Sue Goyette's *Penelope* (2017). But to zero in on Red Riding Hood: Atwood used the Red Riding Hood myth in *The Handmaid's Tale* (admittedly a prose book), and Anne Sexton rewrote the myth from a feminist perspective in a poem from the 1960s called "Red Riding Hood." To literally touch on Gilbert's text, I mention that Cornelia Hoogland, one of the blurbers on the back cover of *Little Red*, published *Woods Wolf Girl* in 2011.

My point is not that such reinventions shouldn't be done, because obviously the point of myth is for it to somehow inform contemporary life, as it has been doing for millennia! (And to dip into the vast scholarship available about the Red Riding Hood tale, as well as its countless adaptations over the years, is a testament to that fact.) No, I welcome such reinventions and acknowledge that they just might be the path to something new. My point is instead to simply ask two questions. First, is the current era of Canadian poetry not marked by the diversity of its representations, but rather by the linguistic sameness of its identity-based projects in search of material? (I write this being a vigorous participant in the same projects. Sorry, hand that feeds me!) Is what could be called "Canadian Poetry's Red Riding Hood Sequel 10457" the natural product of an era that encourages representation of marginalization and politicization of aesthetics so extremely that we might actually begin to not wonder if, according to the old adage, everything is political, but rather that everything must be?

In this way, there really is something cunning about just writing single, unlinked poems from a solitary consciousness à la Béchard. But then again, how is work that is of a piece with much contemporary Canadian poetry renovating aesthetics along the lines described at the beginning of this review? Where is the beautiful, surprising work that will condemn so many of our poets to emulate it as the new orthodoxy? Perhaps the latest orthodoxy is here to stay.

## Simply Observe

**Dominique Bernier-Cormier**
*Correspondent.* icehouse $19.95

**Michael Nardone**
*The Ritualites.* Book*hug $20.00

**Neil Surkan**
*On High.* McGill-Queen's UP $16.95

Reviewed by Alex Assaly

Since Charles Baudelaire's 1863 essay "The Painter of Modern Life," one of the most prominent characterizations of the modern artist has been of the detached and indifferent "observer." Three recent collections of poetry represent this idea of the artist-as-observer, doing so in ways that also extend and challenge it. Indeed, in debut collections from Neil Surkan, Michael Nardone, and Dominique Bernier-Cormier, the artist's "observing" is not just passive voyeurism: it is an act that is intrinsically moral, spiritual, and political. While Surkan, Nardone, and Bernier-Cormier do occasionally fall into vacant mimesis, at their best, their poignant and nuanced poems encourage readers to reconsider their own observations and reevaluate their relationship to their surroundings.

Surkan's *On High* is a patient study of the moral dimensions of "observation." The collection sets its tone in the opening poem, in which Surkan's speaker describes a path that meanders down to a beach. The winding path ultimately leads the speaker to declare,

"So think less / of your destination, more on where / you're bound to go." *On High* takes its readers on such an *ambulando*, passing through a variety of scenes and, while doing so, noticing what seem to be their most mundane details. Although he occasionally uses metaphors and rhetorical flourishes, Surkan's language is always grounded. "There are no parables here," states the speaker of "Low Tidings." The strength of *On High*, however, is not in its clear "observations" per se, but in its ability to represent the tensioned moment when an observation snaps open and asks the observer to think or act conscientiously. In *On High*'s most interesting poem, the speaker witnesses his uncle shooting a deer and imagines it stumbling into a schoolyard to die. The poem concludes with an account of the speaker's fluctuating sense of his uncle's actions, showing him moving between feelings of guilt, shame, and love. Importantly, Surkan never tries to resolve the speaker's feelings and, instead, allows the contradictions that exist within them to remain a "Gordian knot."

Nardone's *The Ritualites* is written with the ear more so than with the eye. Indeed, many of its compositions are based on sound recordings taken in locations across North America. A poem created from a recording made in Victoria, BC, starts: "We live on an island / I mean I don't know *all* the history / It's never really understood." Throughout *The Ritualites*, listening becomes an almost spiritual act. "All that Nature asks of you is to listen," Nardone writes in "Unfixed Territories"; "You must keep your focus on the *here* and *now*. / Only what you are doing in this moment, only this, is real." Despite the value that Nardone gives listening, however, *The Ritualites* is fatiguing, for its poems are often composed of series of terse clauses—observations cut short—which prevent readers from dwelling in the sonic topographies of its compositions. The sharp rhythms of Nardone's ear are only really effective when he uses them to build a coherent, rather than a fragmented or complex, image of his subject. The opening lines of "O, Or, Plains, Pennsylvania," for instance, are some of the brightest in the collection, instantly causing the reader to visualize the scene:

> Away from a relative plane of table conversation,
> The last forks and spoons resume a familiar
> Progression, clattering the sink's tin basin in time
> With Aunt Ange's O! no! oblivion. Laugh tracks
> Wrangle down the hall . . .

Of these three collections, Bernier-Cormier's *Correspondent* pushes "observation" to its most political end. The collection is divided into three, nineteen-part prose poems, with an additional prologue and epilogue. Each of the three primary poems of *Correspondent* is centred upon a political event that the poet was personally and emotionally connected to as a result of his father's employment as the Foreign Correspondent for CBC/Radio-Canada. The first poem, for instance, is a lucid description of the Kursk submarine disaster. Like Nardone, Bernier-Cormier constructs the poem by balancing a variety of different perspectives and voices. In "Kursk," he shifts from the disaster to his father's journalistic obligations in Moscow to his familial life in Canada to Vladimir Putin's general indifference to the event. In one of the most moving sections of the collection, Bernier-Cormier writes of the moment when Nadezhda Tylik—the mother of one of the men who died in the Kursk disaster—was forcibly sedated while she was berating a senior Russian official. When the needle sinks into her thigh, Nadia not only "unlearns her legs," but also "unlearns her language." *Correspondent* shuns the point at which voice, observation, reporting, and, ultimately, poetry end. Indeed, the collection revives and conserves

what has been forgotten or silenced, not with the intention of overriding the original moment, but so that its readers can relive, re-see, and remember them.

## The Breadth of "breth"

**bill bissett**

*breth /th treez of lunaria: selektid rare n nu pomes n drawings, 1957-2019*. Talonbooks $29.95

Reviewed by Weldon Hunter

The legendary Canadian poet bill bissett turned eighty in November 2019, and it has been sixty years since his mythical arrival in Vancouver as a hitchhiking teenage beatnik from Halifax. In addition to these significant temporal signposts, it's been—shockingly!—almost forty years since the last major anthology of bissett's work was published, 1980's *Beyond Even Faithful Legends*, which selected representative visual and poetic works by bissett from the 1960s and 1970s. All of this makes the new collection of his selected and new poems an exciting and essential publishing event. In recent years, bissett's critical reputation has been split between those who see the poet as a transformative shaman who continues to challenge linguistic convention, and the more pessimistic view of contemporary experimentalists who see his work as static and unchanging. We are so often wrapped up in a discussion of bissett's legend that we haven't really evaluated his importance to Canadian poetry, something that the breadth of *breth* compels us to do.

In the book's Foreword, Tim Atkins writes that "bissett was and is Canada's most important Beat-influenced, post-Beat writer." Biographies of bissett often namecheck Kerouac and the *Paris Review* interview where he declared the young bissett as one of the "great poets." Yet how often do we read his poems in light of his late 1950s genesis? Atkins makes the connection between bissett's visual work and Philip Whalen's calligraphy (perhaps best seen in Whalen's own, vast selected work, *On Bear's Head*). Throughout *breth*, bissett's poems from all periods are often punctuated by a loopy line drawing: a feature of his work since his earliest published poems in *blewointment* magazine.

Although bissett, in his endnotes, mentions the decision to select largely from print books "and not much from the first selektid," there are poems which recur across collections, taking on the status of "greatest hits." One of these is "Th Canadian," which was anthologized in the real first selected, *Nobody Owns Th Earth* (1971), as well as in *Beyond Even Faithful Legends*. Another is "Killer Whale," which points to a recurrent theme in bissett's poetry: the elevation and celebration of animal communities, in stark contrast to the disorganized and bureaucratic human society. There is an interplay between "lyric bissett"—Beat-like poems that have often amusing narratives, his sound experiments (two sterling examples are "i herd ya laffin in th water" and "anodetodalevy," poems which should be *heard* more than *read*), and the concrete and visual work he is perhaps most famous for. Amidst all these familiar modes, there is, as the book's subtitle suggests, much that is "nu." Poems such as "bob took gavin by th ass" reveal the growing emphasis on queerness that emerged in bissett's 1980s work and has become more pronounced in recent work such as *novel* (2011).

The poems are presented in large-type Helvetica Neue. This must be a conscious decision, given bissett's scrupulous attention to visual design, but I feel the large print looks somewhat amateurish and detracts from the presentation of the texts. It might be an attempt to make bissett's "voice" in the poems resound louder as we read, or it might be a concession to an aging readership. As a nearsighted reader, I won't complain too much.

This volume is a joyous occasion. It's a chance for new and old readers to survey bissett's vast oeuvre. The pleasure of a book like this is the opportunity to dive in at random, without regard to linear or chronological order, and to just enjoy the cornucopia of major and minor works on display.

## Shifting Cityscapes

**Jim Blanchard**
*A Diminished Roar: Winnipeg in the 1920s.*
U of Manitoba P $27.95

**Eva Darias-Beautell, ed.**
*The Urban Condition: Literary Trajectories through Canada's Postmetropolis.* Vernon US $60.00

Reviewed by Ralph Sarkonak

After the First World War, many cities had to contend with the influenza pandemic and the housing problems faced by returning veterans. Winnipeg also had to contend with the aftermath of the General Strike of 1919. Jim Blanchard's *A Diminished Roar: Winnipeg in the 1920s* is the third volume of what is to date a trilogy on the history of that city. He begins with the inauguration of the new Legislative Building in 1920 and ends with the opening of Memorial Boulevard ten years later. These were turbulent times that saw the end of immigration, a postwar depression (1920-1925), and the ongoing dispossession of First Nations. The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 led to a rise in the economic fortunes of rival Vancouver and to the reverse in Winnipeg. Inflation and the collapse of wheat prices sorely affected the prairie city: "[T]he city's old ambitions were beginning to slip away." Unemployment, unrest, and a concomitant rise in xenophobia also characterized a period that was to end with the initial downturn of the Great Depression. This book covers a lot of territory—from city politics to streetcars, power plants, conventions, tourism, Prohibition (1916-1923), entertainment, fashion, and the erstwhile Winter Carnival. The book is based on extensive research in the City of Winnipeg Archives and the Archives of Manitoba. I could have done without the chapter on the city's twenty-one millionaires of the period, but overall *A Diminished Roar* reads well. If First Nations and Métis history occupies almost no space, as Blanchard acknowledges, no doubt this is because of the shortcomings of the archival sources.

*The Urban Condition: Literary Trajectories through Canada's Postmetropolis* is a study in contrasts. Eight essays study English Canadian and Italian Canadian writers who portray city spaces and their inhabitants in literary works—for the most part, novels. This is an international endeavour with two Canadian contributors; the other five are based in Spain. The book is the outcome of a Spanish government-funded research project headed by Eva Darias-Beautell, who has contributed the opening and closing essays. The weight of post-structural theory is heavy in this slim volume. The names that one encounters most frequently are Jean Baudrillard, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Henri Lefebvre, Jean-François Lyotard, and Brian Massumi, although his due is given to the seminal thinker Walter Benjamin (via Baudelaire) on *flâneurs* and *flâneuses*. The premise of the book is the restructuring of the CanLit canon away from "wilderness tropes, the small-town imaginary, and the metaphor of nordicity" from the 1990s on. Canada is (also) an urban nation, so this turning to various cityscapes has a mimetic as well as a textual function.

The cities portrayed in the literary works studied include Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and St. John's. Among the works in which they figure are Jane Rule's *The Young in One Another's Arms*, Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for*, Timothy Taylor's *Story House*, Michael Helm's *Cities of Refuge*, Maria

Ardizzi's *Made in Italy*, Petro Corsi's *Winter in Montreal*, and Olindo Chiocca's *College Street*. Don Austin's *ned after snowslides*—half narrative, half poem—leads to an interesting study (by María Jesús Hernáez Lerena) of the theory and practice of a hypertext. I particularly appreciated the analysis of Holocaust allusions in this essay. The queer perspective of Ivan E. Coyote's *Loose End* offers the example of a transgressive, transformative, and transgender text that uses the singular meaning of the pronoun *they*—both in the book and the essay itself (by Isabel González Díaz). French Canada is largely absent; and Québécois literature goes unmentioned. Michel Tremblay and Régine Robin, to name but two francophone writers who have tackled urban subjects, could have been referred to at the very least. The best essays are those that wear their theory lightly, and overall the analysis is better than the at times heavy-handed treatment of theory. Surely, the latter can also be deconstructed, but here theory plays an almost religious role of doxa not to be doubted, questioned, or challenged.

Whereas Blanchard's book is archival in focus, *The Urban Condition* is theoretical to a fault. One wishes for an approach that might combine both such approaches. *Architextual*, it might be called, to coin a word, like the concept of *architexture* used in the essay on *Story House* (by Darias-Beautell). Reading Blanchard made me want to revisit Winnipeg; reading the essays written or edited by Darias-Beautell made me want to return to the literary works that portray and deconstruct Canada's shifting cityscapes.

## Something Attentive

**E.D. Blodgett**
*Apostrophes VIII: Nothing Is But You and I.*
U of Alberta $19.99

**John Donlan**
*Out All Day.* Ronsdale $15.95

**Russell Thornton**
*The Broken Face.* Harbour $18.95

Reviewed by Ryan Fitzpatrick

Russell Thornton's *The Broken Face* strains masculinity through a series of narrative reflections, linking intergenerational familial culture to a wider culture of not only carcerality and abuse, but also to the potentials embedded in the warmer moments emerging from memory. Thornton's long view keys into a white, working-class perspective grounded in the wake of the extractive resource-based economy of the Lower Mainland, specifically North Vancouver. In particular, Thornton's extended serial takes on parenthood balance on this working-class masculinity as he looks for moments of connection amidst the emotional distance. Reflecting on a thread of happiness around bicycles, Thornton's speaker slides between his father blowing air from a bike pump in his face to his great-grandfather's hand-built bicycle, posing that "my moment with my father is the forebear of my son's happiness" (39). This affect crosses generations as Thornton asks what carries forward and, in a reflection on the Salish names for some North Van creeks, what fails to carry forward. "[T]he more names I have learned leave me," he poses, "the more the number of names I would like to learn increases – and I learn *Chay-chil-whoak Creek*, *Kwa-hul-cha Creek*, and then these names too gather like mist, then move off and away like mist" (55).

John Donlan's *Out All Day* flips between ecological regions, turning an attentive eye to the intersections between human and nonhuman relations. His direct and

attentive language dwells on the mixed spaces he shares both in the bush and in the city. *Out All Day* plays through a tension around the connections and separations between nature and culture, posing no easy answers and instead dwelling in the complications of the ways we approach the nonhuman as something we treat as separate and extractable. At their best, Donlan's poems subtly shift between registers, image pools, and geographies, sliding between a hawk's claws and coal-fired factories in China or between Bloor Street westbound and the migrating George River caribou herd. Donlan's language is direct, but despite this I do wish that Donlan engaged more directly or deeply with the sour moments in his text that engage with race and Indigeneity, moments that approach but never take a position on the centrality of whiteness to his landscapes. One of several moments that invoke race, the book's final poem, "Chuck Berry," reflects on the Black performers of the 1950s ("the Hollywood Flames, Little Richard, the Coasters"), posing both that Donlan "didn't even know they were black" and that "they were brown-skinned handsome men / singing us into a new kind of freedom" (78). This poem leaves me wondering about Donlan's invocation of an "us" that he's not necessarily included in and how that question of freedom is connected to his considerations of ecology. What would happen if nature poetry critically addressed its own whiteness?

E. D. Blodgett's final book *Nothing Is But You and I* completes his life long poem *Apostrophes* with a rumination on life, fragility, and time. The book ends with a farewell to his addressee as the poem ends, dated seven and a half months before Blodgett's death from cancer. The book has an abstract, inward quality, presenting landscapes that are quietly unspecific and dwell on natural and spiritual imagery, but driven by bracing unpredictable sentencework. In a book that's constantly thinking about its (and the author's) end, Blodgett's sentences continually delay their completion, turning themselves and their content over and over and over. Blodgett's lines are elegant and a little airless, or, at least, it's difficult to breathe in them. And if they make it hard to breathe, it might be in the way they intimate a lot in their tracings of intimacy, but don't anchor us to much. And in this way, Blodgett's poems are very different than either Thornton's or Donlan's, reflecting on the experience of having one's experiences behind you without relying on the specifics of memory. Instead, the poems formally reflect on time and duration, death, and whatever comes next as our human matter unravels.

## Wayfinding in the Marginalia

**Sonja Boon**
*What the Oceans Remember: Searching for Belonging and Home.* Wilfrid Laurier UP $29.99

Reviewed by Evangeline Holtz-Schramek

Sonja Boon, a professor of Gender Studies at Memorial University, former professional flutist, and co-editor of the Life Writing series from Wilfrid Laurier University Press, has made us the beneficiaries of her extensive research into a seemingly innocuous but, in reality, supremely intimate question: "[w]here are you from?" In accounting for complex and painful interactions regarding origin that resonate with many of us with heterogeneous lineages—whether they stem from geography, racial and/or ethnic identity, or traumatic fractures as a result of internal or external pressures—Boon's *What the Oceans Remember* assuages its readers (and its author) that it is okay when presumably simple questions do not produce synonymous answers. As a work of life writing composed of personal memoir and archival research that centres

on the ravaging effects of colonialism upon family lines and human lives, especially when those lives are reinterpreted as chattel within the transatlantic slave trade, Boon's text echoes the haunting qualities of Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* and of M. NourbeSe Philip's critical companions to her masterpiece *Zong!*, as well as the thematic, affective, and geographic considerations of scholars including Saidiya Harman, D. Alissa Trotz, Katherine McKittrick, Sylvia Wynter, and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley.

Boon levies critiques of bureaucratic institutions that tout genealogical records, and of Enlightenment and existential philosophers who paved the way for our modern understandings of freedom. She points out that the quest for one's genealogy in an archive would rely on documents such as certificates of marriage and birth, but would fail to account for children born out of wedlock or conceived to enslaved mothers. Immersed in the archives of an eighteenth-century Dutch trading company, the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie, Boon is startled by the realization that her genealogy is told "in beer and wine, cutlery and weapons, fabrics and pots, in the price of a slave . . . [i]n the marginalia of a trading company journal." Ultimately she questions how to live with the weight of her freedom in the face of her ancestors' bondage and the subsequent acts of violence and dehumanization they suffered. While Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean-Paul Sartre offered, respectively, that "[m]an is born free . . . and everywhere is in chains" and we are "condemned to be free," Boon is unconvinced by such explications in that neither of these men wrote from the lived experience of enslavement. Coming to terms with her past thus requires Boon to attempt connecting with her ancestors' lives through the scraps of documentation available and to resist the temptation to turn to staid theories, as they prove incapable of addressing the singularities of her ancestors' experiences.

While the author admits to being fatigued by the never-ending barrage of questions about her heredity, she ultimately demonstrates painstaking self-reflexivity and compassion about the very human process of trying to find connection through shared cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Late in the book, Boon includes a photograph of her grandmother, Henriette, whom she describes as Catholic with a Chinese name and "Hindu indentured ancestors." Henriette married Boon's grandfather, described as "the child of a German man and his Creole concubine and the descendant of enslaved Africans." Such descriptions hint at the complexity of her roots in the former Dutch colony of Suriname, and also account for the incessant commentary she is privy to regarding her phenotype and physical features: "[e]xotic creature . . . What's your treaty number? . . . A dark woman." While this text is replete with emotional epiphanies and intimate offerings, one of the moments that has stayed with me is an anecdote about studying at the conservatory in The Hague, where Boon was constantly mistaken by women wearing headscarves who would stop and question her: "Turks?" With regret, Boon would shake her head. She explains: "The women were looking for a translator, someone who could help them navigate the various bumps . . . of daily living in the Netherlands." As such, "'Turks' was not just a question; it was an endearment, an intimacy. It was a way of seeking allegiances, a moment of recognition that acknowledged that we were both outsiders here." Boon thus deconstructs the impetus for the question "Where are you from?" While it can be, and often is, intended to affirm an "other's" status as an outsider, it can also stem from a place of desiring connection. Boon's musical training has given her an ear for subtlety in both human interaction and archival excavation for which her readers are indebted.

# Land and language through story

**Lindsay Keegitah Borrows**
*Otter's Journey through Indigenous Language and Law.* U of British Columbia P $32.95

**Johnny Neyelle and Dene Elders; Alana Fletcher and Morris Neyelle, eds.**
*The Man Who Lived with a Giant.*
U of Alberta P $24.99

Reviewed by Jasmine Spencer

Oral stories that have been written down offer a living depth and breadth of knowledge in their concepts, links between land and language, and ways of thinking—their epistemological dimensions. In this review, I share two important new contributions to the growing field of oral literature.

The first is *Otter's Journey through Indigenous Language and Law* by Lindsay Keegitah Borrows, a graduate of the University of Victoria's Indigenous Law Research Unit. Borrows is Anishinaabe and conducts research on law and language revitalization. For her, *Otter's Journey* is an expression of the legal dimensions of story. "Stories invite us to enter into different worlds," she writes, and thus you become an "agent with the storyteller as you create your own understanding of his story." Borrows shares her life and work in the mode of storyteller, recounting her learning experiences—in her home territory, Nunavut, Mauri territory, the Salish Sea, Minnesota, and her home again—as "fiction"—and she is Otter. As a literary scholar, I find the word "fiction" troubles me: fiction, for me, connotes "non-fact"—an implied duality which, as with most dualities, quickly becomes hierarchical in epistemological terms. But Borrows makes the bumpiness of ideological translation between world views more visible by using this word. And the evocative language that Borrows offers in her telling of the creation story in her introduction, in her enmeshing of the realities of language revitalization in Canada and New Zealand in Chapter Three, and especially, I find, in her experiences in the Salish Sea in Chapter Five, talking with Raven, serves to make real for me as a reader the power of the stories as conduits to ecologically, linguistically, and legally precise truths. And Borrows offers a glossary to enhance readers' understandings of her expressive multilingual writing. In Chapter Six, a teacher recites a ceremonially and spiritually grounded legal statement from Diné legislation. The Navajo Nation's law tells a story about the embodiment of wisdom in the land "[t]hrough songs and prayers." It is to this embodiment of wisdom evoked through language and land and invoked through story that I now turn in a northern-Dene context.

The second contribution to the field of oral literature which I review here is *The Man Who Lived with a Giant*, a collection of Sahtu Dene oral histories divided into traditional and personal stories. The Sahtu region is situated around Great Bear Lake, called more accurately Sahtu from *sah-*, "bear," and *-tu*, "water." The stories told in and around the area have been shared by Elders such as George Blondin and researchers such as Fibbie Tatti. In the story collection produced by Morris Neyelle and Alana Fletcher, another Elder shares his storytelling: Johnny Neyelle, Morris' father. The stories were told in *Sahtúot'įnę Yatį́* and recorded on tape, and then transcribed and translated collaboratively by Morris Neyelle and Fletcher. In the introduction there is a statement on the history and future of the stories by Johnny Neyelle, who says that his mother taught him that the

> stories that your *betá* is giving to you are like a good road he has made for you to follow. It's a long road with no end . . . To walk on this road does not mean everything will work out for you . . . but God willing, you will make it to the very end.

The stories are then shared as "Sacred and Traditional Stories" and "Oral

Histories from the Life of Johnny Neyelle." Interspersed through both sections are photos of the Neyelle family, and at the end are a family genealogy and a glossary. This glossary is beautiful, and as a student of Dene languages and stories, I would love to see a dual-language edition of this book. The afterword, on the editing process, is an important part of understanding the translation and redaction methods used in creating this collection.

The titular story recounts travel shared between a man of typical size and a giant. By spending time with the giant, the smaller man learns to see animals and the land at a different scale, and he acquires powerful foods and abilities even as he and the giant part ways. In the life stories section, one story which particularly stands out for me is titled "The Dream, 1940s." It passes on a philosophy of powerful visions, a spiritual practice held by many Dene people, stories of which are always extremely generous gifts to those with whom such visions are shared. In Johnny's dream, Johnny, who is ill, is lifted up and sees his cosmos, the lake, the rivers, the villages, and the spirit world. Johnny contemplates the effects of suffering and compassion on our experiences in this life and the afterlife, with reference to the Sahtu prophets in *Dél̨inę* and to his people, his family who came before him. When he wakes up, he is healed.

## No One and Twin Studies

**George Bowering**
*No One.* ECW $19.95

**Keith Maillard**
*Twin Studies.* Freehand $24.95

Reviewed by Brandon McFarlane

George Bowering's *No One* and Keith Maillard's *Twin Studies* recover past aesthetics to explore the fluidity of gender, sex, and love. They are fascinating works due to the tensions between their forms and contemporary themes: both apply styles associated with problematic masculinity to represent modes of being that defy categorization. The effects are certainly novel, but many readers will question if they are appropriate for contemporary Canadian literature. Indeed, *No One* is a work of postmodern metafiction that explicitly flags and takes delight in the opportunities opened up by the tension, whereas *Twin Studies* uses the conventions of Victorian realism to represent the characters' struggles to come to terms with their otherness. The contrast is striking: Bowering approaches the conflict with wit, playfulness, and tragedy; Maillard with, somewhat stodgy, seriousness.

*No One* is a "classic" work of postmodern metafiction that, if it were published in the early 1980s, could have served as a case study for Linda Hutcheon's *The Canadian Postmodern.* The narrator is an unreliable writer figure. It is ambiguous who the narrator is; at times it is George Bowering, at other times a parody of Bowering, and at others still a cast of different male figures drawn from Western culture—e.g., Odysseus, Kurt Russell. The plot parodies *The Odyssey*—the narrator travels "home" for many decades striving to reunite with his lover in contemporary Vancouver, and recalls phallic-centric stories that romanticize promiscuity and sexual conquest. The narrator is also an ex-centric, who defends the delights of swinging while nevertheless

acknowledging that such glamour is no longer considered "politically correct." The narrative structure and timeline may shock some readers because they feature a narrator/protagonist who glorifies a centennial-years, bohemian masculinity.

*No One* is hilarious. The narrator finds comedy in sex and all the characters—artists, professors, publishers, etc.—have a heightened knowledge of language; hence sexual innuendos and other witticisms abound as lovers deconstruct language. From the narrator's perspective, the relationships are equitable: women are just as raunchy, cosmopolitan, witty, and powerful as himself. Yet, the narrator unapologetically exploits celebrity and authority to seduce, and always notes that his partners initiat sex and experience many orgasms. The strategy parodies defences of sexual assault based upon consent, the notion that women are also sexually exploitative and that, really, sex is just a lot of fun and not a particularly big deal. However, the metafiction exposes how such stories are told by men—*No One* lampoons the politics of he-said/she-said by parodying the value unequally granted to male narratives. Indeed, each chapter features a sexual adventure told by the narrator. The sole exception is the final chapter, a letter written by the outraged Penelope figure. The intervention critiques charismatic storytelling, particularly the Western epic and postmodern aesthetics, and artistic prestige as tools of toxic masculinity.

*Twin Studies* features wealthy characters from West Vancouver who navigate identities that do not conform to existing ontologies. The protagonist is an Assistant Professor in Psychology who studies the bonds between twins at a fictionalized University of British Columbia. She is traumatized by the unexpected death of her identical twin sister and becomes involved with research subjects, teen twins who want to be identical but are not. Identical twins have split beings—each specializes and they combine to make a whole. So, for example, they'll think the same thing but one will speak for the tandem; one will adopt a feminine identity and the other a masculine identity to make a balanced whole. When identical twins are separated, by geography or death, they lose half their personality, skillset, and being. When her identical sister dies, Dr. Bauer is not only traumatized but also loses half of her self. This plot line is juxtaposed with that of the teens, a brother and sister dyad who obsess about becoming identical twins and cosplaying manga archetypes to navigate their fluid gender and sexual identities—they flow back and forth between male, female, trans, straight, gay, and bi beings. The teen twins are manic-depressive, due to bullying and the fear that their divorced parents will separate them. And they constantly threaten to kill themselves due to a mix of depression, manga mythology, and adult manipulation.

*Twin Studies* intrigues due to its use of dated aesthetics to explore contemporary issues. The novel is written with a mish-mash of Victorian and modernist realism. It explores how the conservative mores of posh Vancouver repress modes of being that defy traditional roles while promoting what conservatives often call "family values" and "natural" gender roles. It includes extended, detailed descriptions of mundane life, especially objects that are traditionally gendered. Such passages highlight the characters' privilege while also implicitly showcasing how fashion, design, hobbies, marketing, and everyday interactions maintain rigid binaries. The narrative focalizes protagonists, hence the excessive descriptive passages reveal characters' desires and anxieties, and evoke subtle intergenerational conflicts. The effect produces tedious prose but it nevertheless represents an experiment that inserts marginalized identities into literary forms that have historically been heteronormative. *Twin Studies* is a progressive comedy that

concludes with the formation of a massive family that includes a spectrum of sexual and gender identities; but the story has its obvious limits as the new family is formed by owning side-by-side mansions in West Vancouver and its tokenish inclusion of ethnic diversity.

## Never Enough Sad Poems?

**Marilyn Bowering**
*What Is Long Past Occurs in Full Light.*
Mother Tongue $21.00

**Marita Dachsel**
*There Are Not Enough Sad Songs.*
U of Alberta P $19.99

**Susan Glickman**
*What We Carry.* Signal Editions $17.95

Reviewed by Crystal Hurdle

These fine collections focus on loss—Dachsel's is even dedicated to "those I love / to those I've lost"—and offer daunting catalogues of the dead: parents, in-laws, grandparents, fellow writers, children of residential schools (Bowering), and marital happiness (Dachsel), as well as several animals. (Glickman notes that "nearly 500 species" have recently been cited as extinct.) These are not works by, about, or for millennials. Wisdom of both the aging and the ages shines through.

Wistfully, they explore growing older and what comes next—or doesn't. Dachsel observes her kids' "new departures" at a carnival and fears that she may have "run out of firsts—the ones that glow, / that bring joy." Bowering looks to the beloved "Cove" where she used to swim: "I will not say more about age / but why take everything // by force [?]" In her penultimate poem, "D Minor (Not Going to the Galapagos)," Glickman attempts a positive spin. She begins: "[w]ith more time behind you than ahead / the world grows larger, pregnant with wonder"—and, as she compares her girlhood self to the woman now, she concludes: "[u]nlike her, you are not immortal." The last poem, "What We Carry," notes the inevitability of movement from "a cradle, a cot, a single bed, a double bed, a single [institutional] bed again."

Despite the gloomy prognoses, however, the books offer guarded hope in the natural world. Glickman's striking sensory poems are tightly controlled, even choreographed, with music in sections one, three, and five—loose, exquisite "translat[ions]" of many Chopin preludes. Part two, five "Elegies for the 21st Century," balances the "Five Urban Salutations" of part four. Historical and mythological richness imbues the text with unexpected humour, as when Clytemnestra shows rage by "fl[i]ng[ing] plates / at Agamemnon." "May Day" (horrifying equivocation) concentrates on the unnecessary deaths of factory workers in Bangladesh. Imagery, as with the unexpected tenor becoming vehicle in "a scarlet peony sheds its petals / like a woman shrugging off her fur coat," intimates the importance of nature over humans.

Dachsel's more ribald images ("watering with urine" might be beyond "neighbourly") are jolting and rich. "[S]huswap [J]uly" is impolite and "sexy" with "terrible hair, and joy / that looks like pain." "[S]wing therapy" recounts early sexual desire without its attendant vocabulary: "[f]ace to the moon / open and soaring, tethered to you." In the humorously titled "a sonnet for middle-age mothers," Dachsel slyly describes new lovers as "explorer[s]"; the mother is tired of having been "colonized by others." She exposes the kids' so-called "quarrelling" for what it really is: "screaming, punching, kicking, // raging for blood." The bodily, piece-by-piece disappearance of a middle-aged woman is itemized in the blackly comic "check for spots." Wisdom can be learned from trees, which sometimes "break" rather than "bend"—in one striking poem, a "creep[y]" man has been transformed into a tree.

Many of Bowering's pieces offer spare and throat-catching conclusions. "Coffin Island" is one of several concentrated poems offering the plot, characterization, sensibilities, and time-sequencing of a novel. Arresting bird imagery and descriptions of nests both natural and girl-made offer haunting possibility. Why did the school friend drown? Also affecting (but perhaps better in a separate chapbook) is "Woof—at the Door—Woof," a too-long elegiac suite, illustrated by Ken Laidlaw, with an afterword about the death of her dog Tessa. Bowering explains: "inconsolable grief is what it is." In "Truth and Reconciliation," she repeats "I am grief." She uses a range of unusual voices, such as Emily Carr's in "Woods": "nothing could ever extinguish / the art of this green Earth, / as long as I did."

The excellent penultimate poem, "The Writers' Museum" (also the title of the final section), for Stephen Reid, juxtaposes sweetness, direct address, the personal, and the political. The heartbreaking imperative to "[i]magine" resonates "in the company of objects left behind" (as does Glickman's "What We Carry," with the obdurate thinginess of things). Bowering writes: "[i]magine a door in the writers' museum / through which everything lost / is recovered."

Imagination and hope, at least, are not extinct. In "down under," Dachsel, in a "mirrored life," notes that perception is all. Bowering in "The Consolation of Philosophy" reminds us that an answer to "What is Happiness?" is "'Look up! See those trees!'" Glickman offers a similar response in "F# Major (Firelight Spirea)"—a full garden has no room for weeds (like the persistent invasives of Bowering's "Wild"), so she concludes, beautifully: "just / let / everything / in."

## Where Was Here?

**Bruce Cinnamon**
*The Melting Queen.* NeWest $20.95

**Ryan Porter**
*You Can't Get There From Here: The Past as Present in Small-Town Ontario Fiction.*
U of Toronto P $60.00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

While *The Melting Queen*, a first novel about Edmonton as it never/always was, and *You Can't Get There From Here,* a scholarly study of representations of small Ontario towns in the works of four Canadian authors, are different in almost every way, they are both about memory: the ways in which the past is continually recreated in service of the present. Edmonton, in *The Melting Queen*, is a city defined by and dependent on its Melting Queen festival, in thrall to the legend of May Winter, the first woman to fill the role of "a daughter of the city, the mother of its people," who "shall embody the spirit of the city." This tradition, uninterrupted for 114 years, is challenged when the novel's protagonist, River Runson, is named to the role. River is also undergoing a spring breakup: their old identity, Adam Truman, no longer fits them, and River's new genderfluid identity confounds and splits the city into pro-River and anti-River camps. River's cautious negotiation of their new self contrasts with the actions of their sometimes friend Odessa Steps, who adds and discards personae for personal and artistic profit. As the conflict between progressive pro-River and conservative anti-River camps intensifies and reveals ugly schisms in the city's purported unity, River comes to understand that the troubling visions that they have been receiving are rooted in the horrifying truth of May Winter's real life. Only by confronting the terrible roots of the Melting Queen myth can the city begin to work towards a genuinely meaningful cohesion.

In *The Melting Queen*, satire works both to poke fun at the boosterism of civic officials and to expose ways in which punitive insistence on the rigidity of gendered, raced, and classed hierarchies is bolstered in the present by a view that sees the past as inherently innocent, as a time of wholesomeness and goodness at odds with the confusing complexity of the present. The Melting Queen festival becomes a chance for gendered roles to be reinforced in the guise of tradition. Though overwritten at times, the novel points to the painful roots of colonial Canada, and argues for the need to confront the difficult reality underlying celebrations of pioneer heritage and civic identity.

*You Can't Get There From Here* works with a culturally conservative canon of Canadian literature, finding its focus on ways in which the past is remembered and used. Chapters treat works by Stephen Leacock, Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, and Jane Urquhart, and concentrate on how each author represents the workings of memory in constructing an image of place. "The small town is a pliable cultural trope," writes Porter, and this pliability allows the trope to function variously as a safe retreat from modernity, as a stultifying cultural backwater, as a source of nostalgic longing, as a repository of authentic cultural values. Porter's starting point is that in their representations of small towns, each of these authors, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, "examine[s] the operations of memory that produce that past." The importance here is not only in what is remembered, but also in how each text shows memory functioning to construct, to challenge, or to accept versions of the past. While both Leacock and Davies employ outsider narrators able to maintain an ironic, nostalgic distance from events, Munro's narrators are immersed in place and, with little distance between past and present, come to question the possibilities of memory and the dangers of nostalgia. Meanwhile, Urquhart's characters long for vanished pasts and seek to commemorate this longing in the present.

These constructions of the local are not isolated, but are responses to larger social change, and are subject to the same forces as urban environments; these remembered small towns are not disconnected refuges, but are produced by the same forces that also work to reject them. Porter makes the point that these fictional small towns are located in southern Ontario, and therefore different from the more isolated, resource-based towns further north. If the focus is on how memory is shown to represent these towns, though, rather than on the towns themselves, it's not entirely clear what difference the local makes: are these towns shown to be remembered in different ways than those on the prairies, in British Columbia, or on the East Coast? Are small towns always to be located in the past, or is it equally possible for them to exist in the present? Is there more pastness in small towns than in other places? Such questions are provoked, I think, by the intensive focus on these four authors, to the exclusion of more contemporary and diverse writers.

## Hitched to Everything

**Colin M. Coates and Graeme Wynn, eds.**
*The Nature of Canada.*
U of British Columbia P $29.95

Reviewed by Laurie Ricou

John Muir observed that "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." This delightfully colloquial ecological aphorism acknowledges the human desire to possess, *to mark some limited object or detail as special and personal*. And then Muir emphasizes that an apparent uniqueness is pushed, and pulls—*is hitched*—to all of everything.

The seventeen short essays in *The Nature of Canada* shrewdly pick out resonant particulars, and then point to everything else. One essay focuses on cod and beaver; others, for example, discuss agriculture, mining, and gender. To pick out a few anythings from my own reading: I was startled by the extent of the "physical, emotional, and financial effects" of polio in the 1950s; distressed to realize that propylene glycol, used to de-ice airplanes, will "deplete dissolved oxygen" in wetlands near airports; amused that beavers may build twenty dams in just one kilometre of a slow-moving stream. But such particulars are hitched, both tightly and tentatively, to Apollo 8 astronauts, climate change, energy sources, and pathogens.

In its transcontinental and cosmic connecting, *The Nature of Canada* provides both summary and surprise. Adopting a relaxed yet energetic stance, the contributors consolidate the aspects of nature that have shaped Canada and relate them approachably across disciplines and among theoretical concepts. In total, the essays trace the nation's complicated environmental history. In its breadth and variety, *The Nature of Canada* makes a fine companion for the veteran Canadianist, and an ideal introduction for the novice.

While many of the book's authors recognize the importance of the "environmental imagination," readers of a journal focused on literature will not find much discussion of literary or artistic versions of nature in Canada. Mentions of, for example, Moodie, Atwood, Emily Carr, and Stan Rogers are brief and incidental rather than sustained reflections on what artists might reveal that others do not. But however limited its attention to fiction and poetry, this book is almost always, as the title of Julie Cruikshank's marvellous piece has it, "listening for different stories." Listening for, she explains, demands "attention, engagement, reflection, and curiosity." *The Nature of Canada* breathes engaged attention: it teaches us what we already know, and points to connections we have never pondered. It's a guidebook and a friend: you want to have this book handy, to mull again, when your class touches on farming or climate or women and disarmament, on activism, politics, or the myth of the North. All such informed hitching is hauntingly evoked in Heather E. McGregor's closing meditation on the paradoxes of nature in Canada. In her resonant teaching, McGregor reveres story: "[p]eople . . . will need to see and make sense of themselves in the *stories* of climate change, in the *stories* of humanity living within a crisis, and in the *stories* that guide our actions to mediate it."

# Frenemies and Possibilities

**Patrick Coleman**

*Equivocal City: French and English Novels of Postwar Montreal.* McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Ian Rae

Patrick Coleman's *Equivocal City* offers an intriguing analysis of francophone and anglophone authors "in counterpoint with each other, not as speaking within separate literary traditions but as offering mutually illuminating examples of the kinds of story that could be written about the city at successive moments in its life." Given that both francophone and anglophone Montrealers witnessed, and in some ways precipitated, radical transformations of their national narratives in the decades following the Second World War, Coleman's decision to read the postwar novels within a civic context, and not within the nationalist frameworks of Quebec's *Révolution tranquille* and Canada's pre-centennial push for bilingualism and biculturalism, is a bold move. Of course, national questions are never far from the surface of stories by the likes of Gabrielle Roy, Pierre Gélinas, and Mordecai Richler, but Coleman's aim is to explore what lies outside the national rubrics. He is interested in any form of "success in putting the recognition of Montreal's cultural complexity and linguistic diversity in novelistic perspective," whether that entails mapping the unique "mindscapes" of particular neighbourhoods or exploring the social imaginaries of shared class struggles or entertaining the contrafactual postulation of what Montreal *could* be.

Admittedly, "success" is a highly provisional term in this analysis, as novels such as Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* and Gérard Bessette's *La Bagarre* "diagnose[ ] a cultural problem that remains to be solved," including in the matter of matching stylistic innovations to social ones. In the literature of a city held together by "a consensus of non-agreement," "Failing Better" serves as the title for a chapter on "Francophone Novels on the Eve of the Quiet Revolution" and not, as one might expect, for the chapter on Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. Nevertheless, there is a strong cumulative effect to *Equivocal City* as common themes and rhetorical devices from earlier chapters—which might at first seem to participate in the same "abstraction and dubious symmetry of comparisons based on broad similarities in theme or mythic substructure" that Coleman criticizes—reappear in the concluding sections on *Beautiful Losers* and Jacques Ferron's *La Nuit*. The introduction to Coleman's penultimate chapter illuminates his method:

> An impressionable man of weakly defined identity, occupying a liminal position on the fringes of urban life, struggling with an admired and resented mentor figure, "master" of the city he surveys: this is the situation Ferron and Cohen dramatize in the novels that became turning-points in their career. We have already encountered other versions of this tension: for example, in the relationship between George and Jerome in [MacLennan's] *The Watch That Ends the Night*, and in the responses of Maurice and Claude to their mentors in [Gélinas'] *Les Vivants, les morts et les autres*. Never before, however, had the conflict culminated in violence. In those books, the authority figures were discredited or displaced; in *La Nuit* and *Beautiful Losers* they have to die.

# When Poems Are Quilts

**Marlene Cookshaw**
*Mowing.* Brick $20.00

**M. Travis Lane**
*A Tent, a Lantern, an Empty Bowl.*
Palimpsest $17.95

**John Pass**
*This Was the River.* Harbour $18.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall

We come to these books with a certain reverence: all three writers have lived long, and might offer us a view into their lives. Structurally, each book of poems is similar—they offer a fragmented approach to storytelling. We see scraps of story and images, sewn together, as if the writers were quilting language as a means of looking back, and perhaps searching for a pattern.

The cover art for John Pass' *This Was the River* is an appropriate introduction to the speaker and his vision of the world: *Creation of the Animals* by Tintoretto, 1551. Here we see a white male God, front and centre, with vaguely outlined animals all painted in darker, lesser hues. This sixteenth-century painting—like the poems it introduces—offers an anthropocentric and colonizing view of the world. In Pass' poems, man is in the centre, and the others who populate his poems are quilted in around the edges. There is a "girl" making the poet's coffee, and what we know about her is that she has "soft eyes, fresh skin." There is an entire section about animals, but Pass takes a wholly anthropocentric view: How can I use them? How do they entertain me? In the poem "I Know," a fawn is born, but in the twelve-line poem, only four lines are about the deer giving birth. Mostly the poem is about two men standing around saying "I know." The poem puts these men front and centre, gives them voices, and asks us to *wonder* at their experience of watching. While Pass offers us story scraps about those around him, they become simply background material in his pattern.

*Mowing* is about loss, and the attempt to make a pattern of our fear. Marlene Cookshaw explores the fragmented fabric of grief: the loss of a mother and her own aging. There are squares of delight and beauty—"the rose kimonos, high on the wall"—and those with such brokenness: "hard pads of flesh that ride my hips." The thread in all of these poems is a deep grief at the thousand losses in our lives. Cookshaw is at her best when she's offering us narrative snippets—the man who has to leave his home after an entire life there ("Moving House"), or her mother's behaviour at the end of her life ("The Hospital Bed, Again"). The most challenging aspect for readers is accepting that we're getting only snippets of stories—that there will be names, small actions, story moments that we only see fragments of—like a quilt, we're seeing just a pocket of what was once a—dress? A man's shirt? But if we take each as simply one square, which is part of a larger, more complete picture, then the pleasure of those snippets—both beautiful and desolate—becomes available to us.

Then we move on to "just faces, cut from a photograph, / as if they had been standing on parade / eyes forward, no expression, blank." "[N]o expression, blank" is perhaps how we might describe the squares in M. Travis Lane's *A Tent, a Lantern, an Empty Bowl*. Despite the promise of that title, the poems don't live up to the questions a reader asks: Who is in the tent? What was eaten? Who holds the lantern? The squares of Lane's quilt are expertly sewn, are technically perfect. We admire the work as if it were in a gallery—lists of images; clean, square stanzas; organized sections. But when we move up close, we don't feel invited into those squares. The writer keeps her readers at arm's length: there are no invitations into a story, no intimacies about her fears or desires. There is so little presence of the speaker—even the *tone* is

missing. How does this speaker *feel* about the "trodden rock" or the "salt encrusted scabious"? And when we do have the appearance of the "I," which we rush to in hope, that "I" is strangely distant: "I cannot shout, waving my banner— / I wasn't there— / but someone was." After a long, hopeful look, we find that the squares are, after all, empty bowls.

All three writers offer us expertly sewn poems, but only Cookshaw is brave enough to invite us into the tender centres. Hers is the only quilt we might want to spend more time with as we delve into her stories, and into our own fragmented memories.

## A Terrifying Insularity of Mind

**Michael Crummey**
*The Innocents.* Doubleday $32.95

**Steven Price**
*Lampedusa.* McClelland & Stewart $32.00

Reviewed by Claire Omhovère

> This violence of landscape, this cruelty of climate, this continual tension in everything, and even these monuments to the past, magnificent yet incomprehensible because not built by us. . . . All these things have formed our character, which is thus conditioned by events outside our control as well as by a terrifying insularity of mind.

So did Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa famously define the national character of his fellow Sicilians in *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), his one and only novel, posthumously published in 1958. The historical fresco, which also inspired Visconti's sumptuous film version of *The Leopard* in 1961, stands in the still centre of Steven Price's latest novel. *Lampedusa* unfolds at a slow, solemn pace, meandering through the last two years in Tomasi's life, which the writer spent wrestling against lung cancer while completing the novel that would ultimately become one of the masterpieces of the postwar era. The monster feeding on Tomasi's vitality is a shape-shifter whose growth comes to evoke the disease eating through the writer's wasted body, but also the creature of words taking up all the space inside his mind, as well as the decomposition of the old continent that once witnessed the rise of a most brilliant civilization.

Although *Lampedusa* cultivates the elegant melancholy of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, it stops short of the latter's despair. Price's dazzling evocation of the Mezzogiorno, and of the legacy of the many writers who, like Stendhal and Goethe, sought inspiration in its stark contrasts, could be read as a monument to a defunct humanist ideal. This is especially true today, when the name of the island of Lampedusa no longer calls to mind images of superb princely isolation, but instead images of Mediterranean shores strewn with the drowned bodies of illegal migrants in bright orange safety vests. The novel, however, does not venture to explore the tragedy of Europe's recent isolation, but stops in 2003, with the discovery of a letter in Tomasi's own hand that the prince entrusted to the endpapers of *The Voyages of Captain Cook*, in the private library of his Naples palazzo. The message went on a still journey that lasted almost half a century before it reached its destination—the prince's adoptive son, Gioacchino Tomasi, whose gift of youth illuminates the last months of Tomasi's life. The epilogue confirms that *Lampedusa* is most of all concerned with transmission and the tracing of the wayward circuits that give us an intelligence of the world. Most prominent among them are the exquisite detours through which literature enables human beings to connect across vast expanses of time and space, in defiance of the temptations of insularity.

Michael Crummey's *The Innocents* takes place in another sea-locked universe: a small cove on the northern coast of Newfoundland where two young children

survive through seasons of hardship after their parents and baby sister succumb to a sudden disease. "Violence of landscape" and "cruelty of climate" are only two of the shaping forces the orphans need to confront to remain alive in circumstances of extreme deprivation when the poorly salted cod has softened into a green mush, all other supplies are gone, and the winter drags on.

With *The Innocents*, Crummey enlarges the exploration of a sensorial connection to the land that has been the hallmark of his writing since *Sweetland*'s memorable tale of impassioned resilience. But although this is also one of the most captivating aspects of *The Innocents*, it would be reductive to view this novel as just another astounding story of survival. The narrative takes on a remarkable inward turn to observe the formation of the boy's and his sister's contrasting temperaments, their mental isolation, shy intimacies, and fumbling attempts at fighting off remoteness to earn admission into the society of their fellow creatures, whose rituals and customs they glimpse from afar on the ships and among the crews that periodically visit the cove. The siblings navigate the dangerous passages into adulthood without any maps and with little adult guidance. Their parents left behind scanty memories, among which is a troubling, throbbingly erotic jam-making scene, and only a handful of relics bind the two children to a lacunary, layered past that bemuses them—a silver button with an engraved fleur-de-lys, a "Red Indian" bone pendant, and the length of knotted string a midwife left behind as a charm against unwanted pregnancies. Crummey ties these strands firmly into a narrative that possesses the strength and pliability of the fishermen's ropes that serve as the novel's central trope, ultimately creating a rich, vivid tapestry, a moving homage to the tiny lives and stubborn wills that have left enduring traces on the shores of Newfoundland and in the imagination of its inhabitants.

## Transforming Stories

**Joseph A. Dandurand**
*Sh:lam (The Doctor).* Mawenzi House $19.85

**Darrel J. McLeod**
*Mamaskatch: A Cree Coming of Age.*
Douglas & McIntyre $29.95

**Cecil Paul, told to Briony Penn**
*Stories from the Magic Canoe of Wa'xaid.*
RMB: Rocky Mountain $30.00

Reviewed by Margery Fee

Cecil Paul was born in 1931 on the Kitlope River into the Killer Whale Clan of the Xenaksiala (now part of the Haisla). Wa'xaid is his chiefly name, meaning "the good river," and the book is a canoe into which we step to hear his stories of a stunningly beautiful territory. This story has many narrative threads, including how his birthplace healed him from the hate and alcoholism that came from his treatment at the Port Alberni residential school. As a return gift to the land, he began a trip in his magic canoe to save it from clear-cut logging in 1990. Many others joined him in the paddling, and now the Kitlope Conservancy / Huchsduwachsdu Nuyem Jees (1996- ) is a major part of the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest in the world, the Great Bear Rainforest. The name Huchsduwachsdu Nuyem Jees translates as "the land of milky blue waters and the sacred stories contained in this place," reminding us that, as Jeannette Armstrong puts it, the land speaks and we need to learn from it to survive. This book is a small beautiful inspiration, containing photographs and endpaper maps, and with detailed endnotes by Briony Penn that set the story into cultural and historical context. If you teach Eden Robinson's work, you should read this book.

Joseph Dandurand is a member of the Kwantlen First Nation. He has written and produced plays in Canada and the US: he is currently the Director of the Kwantlen

Cultural Centre and the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence at the Vancouver Public Library. *Sh:lam (The Doctor)*, his third book of poetry, is narrated by the "doctor," the latter an inadequate translation that still refuses other colonizing possibilities such as "witch doctor" or "shaman." In his preface, Dandurand calls this voice a Healer. Central is the sh:lam's ability to transform and to transcend time, space, and death. However, he cannot always heal himself: in some lives, he finds himself in the alleys of the downtown East Side of Vancouver, where desperate people "search for one more hit of paradise," sharing his needle with his lover as they leap "over the filth and the mayhem." The sh:lam travels back and forth through time, from the devastation of the smallpox epidemics to the origin of the world to residential school to the gold rush to recent stories of missing and murdered women. The sh:lam takes revenge on the predators: "by the touch of my hand / I have erased him"—the pedophile priest and the mass-murdering pig farmer become "dirt to be dug up in history / of the forgotten." The poem is full of flashing insight:

> In the cedar forest
> there are little people
> and they collect all that the
> world has lost.

and

> the fish
> come home once again
> repeating their brilliant life.

Hungry children in residential school are given "a bowl of cold nothing." Formally, the poems are free verse, but the last lines of each poem shorten, often to one word each: the rush of transformation, flight or the hustle for drugs followed by a slow recognition of peace, oblivion or understanding. One such ending reads

> the dogs bark and form
> the words
> this
> gun
> is
> for
> you.

Another

> and I become
> what I am
> and that
> is
> a
> forgotten
> man.

The healer has now been honoured and remembered by Dandurand.

Darrel McLeod grew up in Smith, Alberta. He tells the story of a loving family disintegrating under the pressures of racism, residential schools, and poverty. The stories, love, and vitality of his mother, Bertha, account for her son's dedication to understanding her and telling an honest story of his family. Devastated by racism, grief, and rage, she erupted into violence. He writes, "At the time, we all wanted to move past the terror of those moments as quickly as we could." Here he recounts and reflects on them, stark and painful though they were. McLeod struggled with abuse, his sexual identity, suicides of siblings, and his own constant self-questioning, while remaining alive to the world and people around him. Here he pays tribute not only to his mother, but to his sister and grandfather and others who cared for him in a hard, often chaotic world. *Mamaskatch* was the 2018 winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Non-fiction.

# Listening to Inuit Stories

**Bernard Saladin d'Anglure; Peter Frost, trans.**
*Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth: Gender, Shamanism, and the Third Sex.*
U of Manitoba P $31.95

Reviewed by Marianne Stenbaek

The new English edition of *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth: Gender, Shamanism, and the Third Sex*—translated from the French by Peter Frost—is a major accomplishment. This is one of the great classics of humanities and social science research in the Canadian Arctic.

Bernard Saladin d'Anglure is one of the giants in Canadian Arctic research. He went to the North, to what is now Nunavik and Nunavut, when few researchers did that. He took the time to get to know the Inuit and learned to speak their language. Maybe most importantly, he listened to what the Inuit said, he became friends with them and highly respected by them, so he was able to gather material that few other researchers had been able to gather.

The famous Greenlandic-Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen had visited the area around Igloolik in the 1920s, and it became the centre for Saladin d'Anglure's research. It was here that he found the three Inuit who became his main narrators and informants: (Michel) Kupaaq, (Rose) Iqallijuq, and (Juanasi) Ujarak. The last two had met Rasmussen. Because of their connection to Rasmussen and his own enchantment with these three Inuit—who were great storytellers and who were able to open up the whole community to him and his research—Saladin d'Anglure decided to focus on Igloolik. He returned there for over thirty years and developed a profound and intimate knowledge of the cosmology and mythology of the Inuit in Igloolik. This small settlement off Baffin Island became a rich environment for this study. Igloolik was a place that between the 1970s and 2000s embodied both the traditional Inuit life and modernity that was imposed from the outside. Igloolik had a deep spiritual, mythological, and traditional lifestyle which developed great and profound storytellers in different media. An excellent example of the Igloolik narrative and artistic power is Zacharias Kunuk's film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, which was filmed in Igloolik and based on local legends; it has now played around the world and garnered many prizes, including the *Caméra d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival.

Saladin d'Anglure pioneered a new way of doing research by living with the Inuit and listening intimately to them. He also chose a subject matter that few have handled as he has. He is an anthropologist, but in his work there are no delineations between social science and the humanities, between traditional anthropology and religion, mythologies, memories. In this book, Saladin d'Anglure focuses on, according to the publisher's description, "womb memories, narratives of birth and reincarnation, and the concept of the third sex—an intermediate identity between male and female." The book is essentially a collection of narratives and memories by these three Igloolik Inuit—Kupaaq, Iqallijuq, and Ujarak—and others. Saladin d'Anglure intersperses the narratives with his own analyses or the words of Rasmussen. *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth* is an exciting collection of narratives grounded solidly in Saladin d'Anglure's academic rigour. It can be read with equal interest and insight by a broader audience as well as specialized researchers. As Claude Lévi-Strauss writes in the preface, Saladin d'Anglure's "devotion lends distinction to an exceptional case in the history of anthropology. This lovely book bears witness to his work. It will become a classic."

# Getting to the Roots

**Keith Garebian, ed.**
*Colours to the Chameleon: Canadian Actors on Shakespeare.* Guernica $25.00

**Michael Springate**
*Revolt/Compassion: Six Scripts for Contemporary Performance.* Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Julie Sutherland

Two recent publications showcase some of Canada's finest theatre practitioners. Michael Springate's *Revolt/Compassion: Six Scripts for Contemporary Performance* presents a collection of his plays spanning a quarter-century of his career. Three have a conventional structure, being plot and dialogue driven (*Dog and Crow*; *Freeport, Texas*; and *Kareena)*. The other three (*Historical Bliss*; *Consolation of Philosophy*; and *Küt: Shock and Awe*) are experimental, drawing on conventions of cinema, Greek tragedy, and the Korean musical storytelling genre P'ansori.

What connects Springate's diverse scripts are their relentless reconsideration of language and an exploration of language's power—not always for the worse, but rarely for the better. Even his title—*Revolt/Compassion*—suggests such mutually exclusive words could be two sides of the same coin, a theme he explores in *Consolation of Philosophy*. Indeed, that same play examines a related theme that reverberates across his oeuvre: how we hear, understand, and interpret language will determine our worldview. Springate ably interrogates this subject, noting how humans across time and space have been slaves to language's destructive power and devastating control. In myriad theatrical forms, he demonstrates how reality can be manipulated and truth distorted through language, which is used to shattering effect in both personal and political arenas. Springate also interrogates how collective memory and religion can skew public perception of absolute truth—if such a thing even exists.

A final theme uniting Springate's plays is the individual quest for freedom. Shrewdly linking this to the dark underbelly of language, Springate promotes the thought-provoking idea that actual freedom is found in the absence of language: in silence. While all six plays are worth approaching on the page, bibliophiles should note that reading them should be a prologue to experiencing them where they will be strongest: on the stage.

In *Colours to the Chameleon: Canadian Actors on Shakespeare*, Keith Garebian considers what he calls the "national stamp" that leading Canadian actors apply to Shakespeare's characters in a series of absorbing interviews with some of Canada's "theatre royalty." In translating these interviews into fluid narrative prose (rather than presenting a straightforward Q&A format), Garebian's gorgeous turns of phrase draw the reader into the actors' lives and histories as much as into their thoughts about working on Shakespeare. And "working on" is key: Garebian is more interested in practice in this book than he is in theory.

His admiration for the actors he interviewed between 2017 and 2018, including Nancy Palk, Juan Chioran, Chick Reid, Graham Abbey, Moya O'Connell, Tom Rooney, Lucy Peacock, and Joseph Ziegler (among others), is everywhere apparent, but he begins on an unrestrained note about "rabid ultra-nationalists" who have "misconceived, misdirected choler." Readers should try not to be put off lest it drive them to miss the respectful heart of the work thereafter.

Garebian's interviews illuminate important issues in Shakespeare, including the ongoing lack of female directors of Shakespeare's plays and the extent to which it is important to uncover Shakespeare's intention for his characters. He also queries how actors can avoid being locked into a specific interpretation of Shakespeare's plays rather than being open to new ones. He

examines the power of Shakespearean subtext over text, and thought and feeling over word, and he considers the miracle of transmutation—where actor becomes character, and where passion is never manufactured, but organic. He reveals the challenge of escaping the common trap actors fall into of reciting Shakespeare's stunning poetry without any real sense of the text, subtext, or context; and their tendency toward histrionics and self-indulgence when reciting—not acting—Shakespeare.

Garebian also contemplates the significance of music as part of Shakespeare's storytelling and the musicality of Shakespeare's poetry. He interrogates how to tackle problematic plays (e.g., *Merchant of Venice*, *Taming of the Shrew*) and, similarly, how to apply feminist readings to shed new light on characters' actions (e.g., Lady M). He examines how to keep twenty-first-century audiences engaged in a language and time so far removed from their own. He also seeks opinions on contemporary trends towards gender-bending, cross-gender, and colour-blind casting. And, he marvels over the tendency, especially in academia but also in professional theatre, to over-intellectualize Shakespeare, musing about how doing so hinders rather than helps performance. Conversely, he showcases at least one actor (Graham Abbey) who finds academic research helpful.

I am not convinced that Garebian's interviews unearth the idiosyncrasies that might result in a specifically *Canadian* Shakespeare (though the topic is raised), but they nevertheless comprise a highly readable, enlightening celebration of some of this country's top actors.

## Designing and Resisting

**Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, eds.**
*Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019.*
U of Minnesota P $35.00 US

Reviewed by Dani Spinosa

In their introduction to the latest instalment in the *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (*DDH*) series, Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein write that the work of digital humanities practitioners and scholars is necessarily political. They position digital humanities (DH) work against a cultural and political backdrop of the US as a culture war where "free speech" fights against "equal protection," and where political resistance is haunted by a spectre ominously called "the 2016 election." The immediate politicization, from the start of this collection, is defensive positioning, working to combat claims throughout the decade about the uncritical or apolitical missions of many DH projects—as exemplified by Alan Liu's "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?" (included in the 2012 edition of *DDH*). Digital humanities has clearly responded to such criticism, and by 2019 Gold and Klein are "convinced that digital humanities can contribute significantly to a larger technically and historically informed resistance." What's more, the DH scholarship in this collection is not just contributing to resistance, but doing so "in concrete and meaningful ways" and "engag[ing] the world beyond the academy." These are nice ideas, and I, too, tend to be utopian about the potential of digital writing and scholarship. But, as a reader immersed in this field, I cannot help but think that this edition of *DDH* doth protest a little too much.

Some of the essays are fabulous. Safiya Umoja Noble's "Toward a Critical Black Digital Humanities" exemplifies both the inherent politics of Noble's DH work and the applicability of these ideas outside the academic feedback loop. But rather than

insisting on the politics of what's already happening in DH, Noble's work points forward: "[w]e should design against—or outright resist—the exploitative forms of labor and hazardous environmental practices in which information and communication technologies are implicated," she writes. But, lest this sound too theoretical, she affirms that "this has to include our everyday decisions that foment erasure and silence among practitioners." That mindfulness is key to a DH that, if it is to move forward as a contribution to the resistance, must be aware of the economic, racial, gendered, sexual, and ableist barriers to the study, use of, and—of course—access to DH tools.

What does this mean for those of us not yet quite convinced that DH at large makes good on the promise of real, significant contributions to resistance movements? For Élika Ortega, it means paying attention to DH work that is happening "all over the world . . . that is only beginning to be recognized." For Kathi Inman Berens, it means making sure that DH as a scholarly and pedagogical tool is "infrastructurally visible" so as to remove some of the barriers keeping precarious academic instructors out of DH practices. And for Noble, it means "consider[ing] the degree to which our very reliance on digital tools, of the master or otherwise, exacerbates existing patterns of exploitation and at times even creates new ones." To that end, it must mean reducing DH's reliance on the technological tools of terrifying corporate behemoths and encouraging a pedagogical and scholarly maker culture. It must mean less Google and Microsoft, and more critical code studies. It must mean more of the "collaborative and broadly interdisciplinary" work that Brian Greenspan promotes in his discussion of Carleton University's Hyberlab (94).

And it must also mean the forceful reinsertion of the human—which is to say social, community-based, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving—end of DH. My feelings about this edition of *DDH* and the direction that DH should be—is?—heading towards are perhaps best summed up by the trademark thoughtfulness and practicality of Johanna Drucker, who, in her exchange with Claire Bishop on digital art history, states clearly: "[y]ou don't ask a computer to do the things humans do better, but rather, you ask it to assist by doing things it does well." Humans do political resistance better than computers, but as computers continue to assist in the radical, political work of scholars like Noble, Ortega, Berens, Greenspan, and Drucker, that resistance can only get stronger. The future of DH looks bright, but the field needs to de-corporatize and to recognize how many DH tools continue to exploit, to silence, and to erase.

## Undertaking the Impossible

**Rawi Hage**
*Beirut Hellfire Society.* Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

Rawi Hage's newest novel—his fourth, following *De Niro's Game* (2006), *Cockroach* (2008), and *Carnival* (2012), all critically acclaimed and lauded by jurors of the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the Giller Prize, and the Governor General's Literary Awards—draws readers into the Lebanese Civil War, nine years of which the author himself experienced before immigrating to Canada in 1992. It demands that we consider whether it is possible to find order, or some kind of meaning, in the midst of chaos and despair.

Death, an obvious constant for those living through the war, is particularly inescapable for Pavlov, the novel's main character, not only because he bears witness to the relentlessness of falling bombs and daily funeral processions passing below

his home, but also because, the son of an undertaker, he becomes an undertaker himself after his father dies. In addition to inheriting the business, hearse included (which he calls the "deathmobile"), Pavlov assumes his father's role in a secret collective by performing cremations in an undisclosed, mountainous location outside Beirut, both for those with explicit wishes to have their earthly remains immolated and for those nameless, faceless bodies who otherwise would not receive the final liberation of fire. More than a caretaker for the dead, however, Pavlov tends to the living, too. True to his name's intimation that he has a fondness for dogs—"Pavlov," in fact, was a nickname affixed to him in childhood after he inadvertently trained a stray to expect food every time church bells rang for a funeral—he feeds Rex and Barbus. After a woman, having lost every member of her family in a bombing on Pavlov's street, takes up residence in the stairwell of his building, he bathes and feeds her—nurtures her through her extended (though not permanent) state of madness.

Madness, as rampant in the novel as death, manifests itself in the many characters whose stories are embedded in Pavlov's. Some characters he meets through his work with the Hellfire Society, most notably "El Marquis" (so named because of his similarities to the Marquis de Sade) and the "Bohemian" (obsessed with, among other things, photographing a falling bomb mid-air); others are members of his family, including two shady uncles (undertakers themselves, known for raiding graves for the valuables of the dead) and two unhinged cousins, Pierre (described repeatedly as "idiotic") and Salwa (recognizable for her hyena laugh, consistently unleashed in the most inappropriate of moments). Collectively, the stories within Pavlov's story present a world of corruption and violence in which sex and death are inextricably tethered. Salwa frequently, and loudly, takes her lover, "Son of Mechanic," in the local cemetery; El Marquis and the Bohemian engage in graphic, drug-fuelled orgies in attempts to at once escape and confront the inevitability of their "extinction."

In some ways, Pavlov is more observer than participant in the absurdity of his time and place, at least insofar as he does not engage in the excesses of the hedonists he encounters. As the Bohemian explains to Pavlov near the novel's end, "You are torn between the spectacle and participating in it." That said, Pavlov is far from immune to the disease of war. After Rex is decapitated, he has two-way conversations with the dog. He beats Son of Mechanic nearly to death, and murders Faddoul, the "scumbag" drug dealer who "still owed [his] father for the burial of Faddoul's parents." But in a place and time of unending tragedy, rather like the stories of the Greeks that Pavlov admires, distinctions between right and wrong, sanity and insanity, cease to exist. Then again, it may be the case that they remain for Pavlov. Son of Mechanic killed Rex, after all, and once shot at Pavlov, narrowly missing him. Faddoul is on fire—he inadvertently sets himself alight in the process of burning two chickens alive—when Pavlov puts three bullets into his body and then puts the chickens out of their misery. "Mercy," he says: "mercy to all creatures." Not long before he falls victim to Faddoul's avenging brothers and meets his own fiery end, Pavlov shouts from his balcony, "No one is important, none of you! There you all are, lying beneath the dirt, competing with one another, hoping to be remembered. Fools! . . . Dead fools!" Even as Rex's ghost repeats his words and the two dance, raising questions about Pavlov's grasp on reality, his words offer too much wisdom and clarity to be those of a madman.

To be sure, the death-dance of man and dog is macabre, in part because it foreshadows the fact that Pavlov, literally unable to escape death, will soon, along with

Barbus, be gone and forgotten. But in an unexpectedly optimistic turn, the novel's "Epilogue" (beginning with three words: "[t]he war ended") delivers news that he has been remembered. His great-niece, whose grandparents moved to Sweden during the war, returns to Pavlov's abandoned house, which she renovates. Ingrid smokes and drinks and dances "above the cemetery road" where funeral processions once passed. The home and this history of its inhabitants are literally and figuratively restored as she brings joy and innocence to a place where neither seemed possible. It is a satisfying, if swift, ending—or rather the sign of a new beginning—that points to what can emerge, phoenix-like, from the ashes of war.

## Diasporic (Be)longings

**Philip Huynh**
*The Forbidden Purple City.* Goose Lane $22.95

**Sally Ito**
*The Emperor's Orphans.* Turnstone $21.00

Reviewed by Brooke Xiang

Philip Huynh's *The Forbidden Purple City* is a collection of nine short stories that feature distinct, lovable, but often repressed characters whose lives and relationships are unravelled and simultaneously pieced together by their positionalities as Vietnamese immigrants and refugees. Echoing the text's preoccupation with postcolonial subjecthood, the collection's title recalls the Imperial Palace in Hue, Vietnam, much of which was destroyed during civil wars and the Vietnamese War. Huynh is a reflective and reticent writer whose characters are otherwise strangers bound together by familial obligations and happenstance; the craft of Huynh's writing appears in the ways it unpacks the aftermath of loss, of what wasn't there, and of what could have been.

Huynh's subtle, often tongue-in-cheek critique of class and racial privilege can be found in many of the stories. The aptly named "Gulliver's Wife" is the story of Josephine, a young mother who is neglected by her husband when he sets sail in the fruitless pursuit of a PhD in Economics. Josephine's complicated admiration for Camus' *L'Étranger*, an admiration developed while she taught French to children in Saigon, nearly leads her to an affair with Paul, her son's French teacher. Josephine's feelings of inadequacy about her Vietnamese-accented French are sharply contrasted with Paul's ease with the language by virtue of having grown up bilingual as a white man in Montreal. Moreover, Josephine's painstaking efforts to rid her son of his inherited accent echo the insecurities of many postcolonial subjects in contemporary literature, whose mastery of the language of the colonizer never seems to be enough to cleanse them of their otherness.

"Mayfly," a story from much later in the collection, in many ways presents a foil to "Gulliver's Wife." Here, Huynh writes from the point of view of a white Canadian man who grows up in an impoverished and racialized suburb of Vancouver. The protagonist becomes a member of a local Vietnamese gang because of his perceived infallibility in the eyes of law enforcement, then subsequently loses his place due to his inability to recognize his own arrogance and sexism. "Mayfly" is the only story in the collection told in the second person, and evocatively so; its form is simultaneously a reflection on the unattainability of whiteness for racialized subjects and a critique of the condescension and false sense of superiority that often comes with white privilege. Huynh's style is understated, measured, and steadfast, making the stories a pleasure to read.

If Huynh's stories lament the quest for what could have been, then Sally Ito's text is the story about what was never known, explored through retellings and reiterations of intergenerational trauma in a myriad of

narrative styles and forms. *The Emperor's Orphans* spans four generations, and details the transpacific lives and journeys of Ito's ancestors from both sides of her family tree. Ito's narrative is part confessional, part imagined family history, and part translations of her maternal grandfather's journal, the sum of which parts gesture towards the auto/biographical nature of the text. But it is difficult to categorize Ito's text by genre; in the preface, she requests it be read ambiguously as Ito's "personal myth with some parts imagined, some parts true . . . set before the reader who undertakes the journey of [her] tale."

Similar to the text's evasion of genre, its narrative voice is equally erratic and difficult to follow. Ito first throws the reader into the translated pages of her maternal grandfather's journal, then into the narrator's inner monologue, and subsequently into an imagined monologue in her paternal grandfather's voice, set beside the Yellowhead highway in 1942—all in distinct voices, and all within the space of two pages. These hurried transitions, or lack thereof, make Ito's text seem fragmented and unfocused—but that may very well be the point, if frustratingly so. As an account of how her family's history has been disrupted by World War II and by the subsequent Japanese internment and repatriation, the text's lack of cohesiveness gestures towards how, like intergenerational trauma, the retelling of these traumatic events is never linear, but by necessity often needs to be translated, reimagined, and retold through many different voices. In its refusal to be a cohesive and palatable whole, Ito's text demands the reader to reconsider what makes a narrative worth reading.

## (Re)Writing China

**Lydia Kwa**
*Oracle Bone.* Arsenal Pulp $19.95

**Katherine Luo**
*The Unceasing Storm: Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.* Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Reviewed by Sijia Cheng

Lydia Kwa's novel *Oracle Bone*, set in seventh-century China, and Katherine Luo's memoir *The Unceasing Storm: Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, set during the second half of the twentieth century, both pertain to the (re)writing of a China that is beyond dominant historical narratives though they differ in form and style. Kwa writes in a dreamy and vigorous manner, as she brings history, Chinese mythology, and magic together, and crafts an ancient China where a supernatural world of magical objects, demons, and animal spirits meets Chinese imperial history, with a remarkable focus on female characters. Drawing on the court ascendancy of Wu Zhao—the first and only female Emperor in Chinese history—the story is primarily about the growth, and a quest of revenge, of an orphan girl, Ling and a Daoist nun, Qilian, with subplots involving prophecy and destiny, adultery and conspiracy, a power struggle between Buddhism and Daoism, and a cosmos where time is a nonlinear construct.

The characters at the centre of Kwa's story are usually found at the margins of conventional historical narratives. Kwa's female characters are strong and determined, while her men, even those who have attained power, tend to be weak and insecure. As the "third kind of creatures," Qilian and Ling transgress various boundaries and invite us to reframe our understanding of the world. Questions of sexuality and identity-formation are also explored at moments such as Wu Zhao's epiphany that her destiny is inevitable as she satisfies her own desires, and when the Buddhist monk

Harelip reaches an understanding of his sexual impulses, which leads to his spiritual awakening. With the text's fairly open ending, a future that is yet to come remains unattained. Nevertheless, the implication that the history of a prosperous nation is potentially shaped by the empowerment of female characters and by a queer monk enables Kwa to reconstruct an ancient China that arguably unsettles and disrupts traditional tropes of Chinese historical epic. Her magical, ancient China opens up a speculative space that invites deeper understanding of our desires in and relations with the world.

If Lydia Kwa's reconstruction of an ancient China offers a futurity that lets readers imagine a history and world beyond a heteronormative framework, then Katherine Luo's depiction of contemporary China in *The Unceasing Storm* resolutely renders a past that cannot be wiped away by the dominant discourse, and openly questions the Chinese government's refusal to recognize the history of the Cultural Revolution. The book consists of thirty-seven non-chronological essays about lives during that era. Topics range from her own frustration as she navigates through that dark period with her family's "oversea capitalist" class background, to accounts of close relatives like her brother and her uncle who were treated wrongly, to discussions of ordinary people who encountered unbearable obstacles even though they had no extravagant desires. Varying in form and styles, these seemingly disjointed stories coalesce across time and space to retrieve personal lives that refuse to be erased by official memory. As trauma haunts the narrative, these intimate accounts of individual lives during turbulent times showcase how personal histories were sacrificed under an official, homogenizing narrative that privileged nation-building premised on revolutions and on subservience to the Party. This memoir articulates Luo's tenacious struggle to extricate herself, and all those who were involved, from historic violence and collective amnesia.

Luo's heartbreaking yet truthful record of a post-revolutionary China interrogates relations between individuals and the nation. Perhaps one weakness of the book is her oversimplified and idealized account of Canada as the beautiful "land of democracy and happiness" a characterization that fails to recognize the ongoing violence of settler-colonialism while reinforcing another potentially deceptive grand narrative of nationalism. As the book brings back to life erased memory, for its critical potential to challenge a history framed by dominant ideology, readers should push beyond Luo's depictions of Canada as a utopian site of peace and liberty in binary opposition to an unfree China controlled by the government, and instead consider how personal histories can present critiques of limited and problematic accounts of homogenous nation-building that keep a repressive social and political order in place. The critical function of Luo's writing remains productive, and offers political possibilities that resonate with the politics of today's China and Canada that are still largely framed by ideological and national paradigms.

## Toward More Feeling

**Ben Ladouceur**
*Mad Long Emotion.* Coach House $19.95

**Domenica Martinello**
*All Day I Dream about Sirens.* Coach House $19.95

**Matthew Walsh**
*These are not the potatoes of my youth.* icehouse $19.95

Reviewed by Neil Surkan

Three daring new poetry collections get behind Ange Mlinko's argument, in *Marvelous Things Overheard* (2014), that "we life-forms are evolving / only toward more feeling."

Wry, musical, and charismatic, Domenica Martinello's debut, *All Day I Dream about Sirens*, creates a chorus of voices—ventriloquized Greek goddesses, byssus seamstresses, pop characters, and more—that are as alluring as they are devastating. Reading *ADIDAS* feels like leaning in to smell a bouquet only to realize it's made of carnivorous plants. One would be hard pressed to find another collection that so brazenly interplays intimation and condemnation, melody and cacophony, and the effect is intoxicating. "What a blessing to be broken and showing," one voice whispers; "I don't know if you've heard but / I have a needle for a tongue," spits another. By the end of the collection, the world has cracked open, like the split between "Syllo" and "gism" in one of the many poems titled "Refrain on the Rocks." But from the split, from these poems' constant fluctuation between corroboration and contradiction, a "new" tenderness arises:

> new rules
> so newly familiar
> until tenderness
> is new
> yes new
> a new kind
> that no one
> can ever take
> away from us.

Or maybe not: in the very next poem, it is undercut by "faux tenderness / sniffed and followed like a sentence." Nothing definitively is as it seems in this collection, which, excitingly, demands more subtlety from us.

With poems that are as technically cunning as they are unabashedly intimate, Ben Ladouceur's sophomore collection, *Mad Long Emotion*, threads the seams between the digital and the carnal, the private and the public, as he prods the limits we set, and the ambiguities we endure, to reveal our desires and our bodies to one another from behind "embankment[s] of pixels." The book's first section comprises a series of hybrid sonnets in which every line is end-stopped, so that the poems become stacks of curt sentences that fluctuate between ecstasy and tentativeness: "I am on my second coffee and a bus and I love the whole world. / Even the quadrants that want me aflame," or "The vulnerable eon forgotten in an effort to move forward forever. / How do we tell a gill from a wound?" But right after that, Ladouceur pivots into a section of evocative, looser poems that gain momentum from evolving diction and bold conceits. Take, for instance, the visceral *ars poetica* "Colostomy," which blurs the line "where the insides end and the world / begins," as the speaker ruminates on his insatiable love of poetry that his "body has no need for / and would sooner evict." The book's third section, a long poem of equal parts blank space and language, continues to seek connection, as the speaker "struggles with silences" while telling his beloved "something about his body": namely, that it opens more than it resolves.

Compared to *Mad Long Emotion*, Matthew Walsh's debut, *These are not the potatoes of my youth*, favours a more predictable, consistent speaker, but one with a compelling, original voice. In poems that are equal parts heart-tingling and hilarious, Walsh harvests family history and tales of queer friendship to create a tangled root system of relations. Since theirs is a world that, on "Google Earth," looks "connected like veins," these poems are reminiscent of David McFadden's *Gypsy Guitar* (1987). However, Walsh's predilection for radical enjambments vaults the poems into a register all their own, as interruptions make room for multiple meanings and glaring contradictions: "I was not ready for the abuse // of intimacy"; "I had parts / of myself I did not know were part of myself"; "hands covered in Magic / Baking Powder." The personal stories that frame these memory poems are peculiar and moving,

often developing characters across numerous discrete lyrics that coax us toward more ambiguous, more ambivalent perspectives on what it means to love and, most poignantly, to forgive. See how, for example, in the remarkable coming-out poem "Individual Cats," Walsh's speaker slyly, sweetly recalls how their mother

> . . . loves
> to keep clementines in the closet to ripen
> up which is so good
>
> in the poem I am making over. We came
> out together
> from the Superstore and I turned and said
> *I am gay*
>
> which was scary comical 'cause she had
> so much fruit
> on her hands, now, literally, for real.

Precarious moments like this accrue and then snarl together, strange and fragile as potato eyes.

## Faces of Desperation

**Stéphane Larue; Pablo Strauss, trans.**
*The Dishwasher.* Biblioasis $22.95

**Amy Spurway**
*Crow.* Goose Lane $22.95

**Wiebke von Carolsfeld**
*Claremont.* Linda Leith $21.95

Reviewed by Karen Charleson

From a silent, traumatized nine-year-old boy, to an artist addicted to gambling, to a still-young career woman diagnosed with inoperable brain tumours, the main characters in these three Canadian novels are desperate. I am reminded of the opening line of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Each of these novels deals with some sort of sadness and grief. Centred in the individual, and radiating out into the family, it is this unhappiness that characters weave their ways through to attain measures of redemption and satisfactory living.

In the English translation of Stéphane Larue's award-winning novel, *The Dishwasher*, we meet a gambler who has spent his rent and an advance on an uncompleted graphic design project. He is forced to take a dish-washing job at a posh Montreal restaurant in an effort to avoid the inevitable. In Amy Spurway's *Crow*, we meet Stacey—or "Crow," as she is nicknamed—who returns home to Cape Breton to await her own death. In the process, Crow wants to settle old scores with family and friends. In Wiebke von Carolsfeld's *Claremont*, we meet a child who refuses to speak after witnessing his parent's murder-suicide. He is placed into his perfectionist aunt's home at first; then he is moved into his carefree, messy aunt's home on Toronto's Claremont Street.

*The Dishwasher* veers between hope and crushing defeat. "Don't do it," I cried more than once while urging the narrator away from the gambling machines which I had already learned he cannot resist. By the end of the novel, the narrator is under the strict guidance of a close relative, and has finally stopped gambling. Despite his personal growth, however, I remained not entirely convinced that he will be able to maintain his abstinence.

In *Crow*, Stacey Fortune abandons her career in Toronto upon being diagnosed with brain tumours, and returns home to her mother's small trailer in rural Cape Breton. She plans to write a memoir of family secrets and "dirt." Instead of recording, however, Stacey finds that she needs to learn to live anew with her mother, family members, old friends, and old partners. It is in these revitalized relationships, rather than in any kind of retribution, that Crow finds her peace.

In *Claremont*, a dysfunctional family struggles with grief and guilt. Not only has a sister died, but she has been killed under horrible circumstances that may have been preventable. The surviving siblings are left to care for their dead sister's traumatized

child. Von Carolsfeld creates a story of an imperfect family with believable problems coming to terms not only with a death, but also with the need to heal—for the sake of young Tom and for their own futures.

Of these three novels, *The Dishwasher* is by far the most substantial and intense. It is also the most autobiographical. Larue's knowledge of the nature of addiction, and the anguish that is the by-product of addiction, has a depth and reality that can probably only be achieved through personal experience. In comparison, *Crow* and *Claremont* are leaner and less complex stories. They are not, however, less important. The shorter novels provide less opportunity for critical thought, yet they still manage to provoke reflection while creating a lot of enjoyment.

There is dark desperation and there is the lightness of hope in each of these Canadian family settings. Hope resides within each uniquely unhappy family in each different location. In the loud, chaotic, often depressing urban nightlife of Montreal, in the harshly bleak winter of rural Cape Breton, and in the specific neighbourhoods of Toronto, I see, hear, taste, and feel. I share in the struggles and aspirations of wildly different Canadian families, and I am a satisfied reader.

## Twenty-First-Century Novels

**Maria Löschnigg and Martin Löschnigg, eds.**
*The Anglo-Canadian Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Interpretations.*
Universitätsverlag Winter €40.00

Reviewed by Margery Fee

Twenty-five chapters, each about an Anglo-Canadian novel or trilogy (Atwood and Frances Itani) published between 1999 and 2017, provide a useful—if necessarily selective—overview. The co-editors are co-chairs of the section on postcolonial literatures at the University of Graz, Austria, which also boasts a Centre of Canadian Studies. A footnote in their "Very Short Introduction" directs us to a multi-volume survey of the Québécois novel covering the same period, edited by Gilles Dupuis and Klaus-Dieter Ertler. The introduction's brevity is redeemed not only by that footnote but also by a 1922 quotation from Douglas Bush, whose trajectory from Toronto to Harvard is now all but forgotten: "[n]o-one reads a Canadian novel unless by mistake." Now no one even tries to read all the Canadian novels published in any given year in that same year, unless on a prize jury, and even then, there will be skimming. Most of us wait until bestseller lists, reviews, and prize nominations have done some filtering. This book will remind readers of titles they may have overlooked. Contributors come from universities in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, as well as Canada.

The essays cover authors from Alexis and Atwood to Vanderhaeghe and Richard B. Wright. Ten are women (with Itani meriting two essays) and twelve "writers of colour," if you include Joseph Boyden, who also merits two essays. I certainly have not read all these novels, although I had heard of all the authors except Emily St. John Mandel (embarrassing, now that I look at her accomplishments). Most chapters provide biographical information for even the authors best known in Canada, signalling the book's main intended audience: English-language readers outside Canada. Generally, the chapters avoid entering theoretical debates or making large comparative moves: these are well-contextualized, well-written interpretations providing a handy and thoughtful reference for Canadianists everywhere.

Clearly, a European literary ecosystem has grown up around English Canadian literature. Only three Canadian critics are included: David Creelman (on Clarke's *George and Rue*), Sherrill Grace (on Findley's *Pilgrim*) and David Staines (on

Thien's *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*). The International Council for Canadian Studies, European academic associations for both Canadian and postcolonial literatures, and university centres such as the one at Graz have created a web of relationships for Canadian authors, relationships that are rarely considered by critics at home. Indeed, the large numbers of readers for Canadian novels in translation or in English provided by the European market are in some cases possibly larger than the Canadian market itself. The reception of these novels, both popular (marked by sales, translations, and Internet posts) and critical (marked by reviews, critical studies, and university course adoptions) is well worth more study. These critics are clearly introducing a wide array of English Canadian writers to their students and colleagues.

To give each chapter equal due here would mean around twenty words apiece—since selection is impossible, I leave it to researchers, students, and general readers to consult this book for themselves as an informative and even inspiring guide to recent Canadian fiction.

## CBC's Canadian History

**Monica MacDonald**

*Recasting History: How CBC Television Has Shaped Canada's Past.* McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

If you've been a CBC fan for years, as I have, you may have wondered about the ways in which Canadian history is packaged and produced by our national television broadcaster. If you've been puzzled or irritated, as well as informed and entertained, then you should read this book. MacDonald has done a fine job of describing and contextualizing five major CBC history programs, beginning with *Explorations* in 1956 and ending with *Canada: A People's History* in 2000-2001.

The trajectory MacDonald charts follows the evolving mandate of the CBC over almost fifty years and illustrates changing approaches to historiography and the rise of professional journalists who gradually took over the telling of our history from academic historians. Leading historians of Canada, like Michael Creighton and Ramsay Cook, played key roles in the creation of the CBC's programs until the 1970s when this shift began. For many reasons, which MacDonald explains (competition, commercials, American influence, audience ratings), professional journalists supplanted the perceived stuffy professors, and Canadian history, which remained an important element in CBC's programming, continued to be produced to entertain, as much as educate, viewers. MacDonald is careful to note that over the years the CBC has often underplayed or neglected contributions to our national history from the West and the Maritimes, and she identifies perspectives that were often ignored, such as women's and First Nations' voices. The result has been a national story dominated by white male exploits and nation-building, which is only today, almost twenty years after the end date of her study, being addressed.

Of the five case studies she examines, I found *The National Dream* (1974) and *The Valour and the Horror* (1992) the most compelling. *The National Dream*, based on books by Pierre Berton, signalled a start in that shift away from academic to popular history sources. Berton, already a recognized journalist and writer, insisted that history must be privileged over the dramatic presentation of a story, and he controlled as much of the production as he could. *The Valour and the Horror*, written and narrated by CBC journalists Terence and Brian McKenna, created considerable controversy with veterans' groups, military historians, and some members of the public because it was considered too fictional and,

hence, not accurate history. MacDonald's analysis of the distinctions between documentary and docudrama film methods and goals clarifies why the series met with such opposition. The tension between these modes of filmmaking remains with us, but within the history of Canadian television's programming, the McKenna's series marked a watershed moment for the CBC and forced it to review its policies and practices.

There is much to learn from *Recasting History* about how television series are made, by whom, and with what consequences. MacDonald's claim that the CBC has shaped our history is a convincing one; it is also one we should all take seriously and examine critically.

## Rejoicing in MacLennan

**Hugh MacLennan; Colin Hill, ed.**
*Man Should Rejoice: A Critical Edition.*
U of Ottawa P $29.95

Reviewed by Michael A. Peterman

Hugh MacLennan's early novel *Man Should Rejoice* (c. 1937) has finally found a publisher in the Canadian Literature Collection, a series edited by Dean Irvine for the University of Ottawa Press. It is eighty years late in appearing, but it makes an important addition to MacLennan's oeuvre, offering insightful new perspectives on the beginnings of his writing career. Carefully edited by Colin Hill, it will force interested readers to rethink past assessments of a writer seen by many as the quintessential, somewhat predictable, Canadian realist. It also tells, as Hill notes, "an enduring story that ought to haunt us today."

*Man Should Rejoice* is an ambitious novel dramatizing a generation that, MacLennan writes, "lived hard and tried to change the world by thinking about it." It is set in the early 1930s in the US and Europe, when economic conditions were very difficult for most people and numerous political options were available. For MacLennan's American protagonist, David Culver, the still point in this troubled world is Nova Scotia, described deftly as "half outside the world"; it is a remote place where the natural rhythms of life are curative for Culver.

Culver is a sensitive and observant painter who is cast as the son of parents representing conflicting worlds—his father, Bernard Culver, is a powerful American industrialist while his mother, Arina, is a Russian bourgeois of a literary bent. David grows up with his mother while his father develops his massive business interests in Pittsburgh. Overall, David has little feeling for either parent. After his mother's death, he works for his father even as he grows more sympathetic to the communistic inclinations of New York friends. That empathy leads to a strike at his father's New Jersey plant during which he sides with the strikers. The result is a year in jail for David, facilitated by his father's outrage at his complicity.

Nearly a broken man after that incarceration, he and his wife, Anne, return to her native Austria, where she was raised in a model socialist community called Lorbeerstein. There in 1936, while they are living in idyllic conditions, a sudden, country-wide rebellion leads to Anne's violent death and David's narrow escape. The novel's preface locates him among the glacial rocks of oceanside Nova Scotia, where he is recovering alone and painting again.

The plot is heavily loaded with politics and political jargon to the point of seeming intellectually overwrought, despite its relevance to contemporary issues. Neither are the characters and their relationships particularly compelling. Centrally, David's self-preoccupation as narrator often seems narcissistic, lacking the vision and energy of, say, James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, who may have been one of MacLennan's models. First written while MacLennan was at Princeton, *Man Should Rejoice* seeks to

embrace the complexities of the modern world while investigating ways of dealing with its problems. Its "early modernist affinities" (in Colin Hill's phrase) counter MacLennan's reputation as "a traditional realist." Important as well is Dorothy Duncan's role in the rewriting of the novel. (MacLennan and Duncan were married in 1936.) Hill gives the reader much to think about in this welcome edition.

## Voices of Trauma and Hope

**Lee Maracle, Columpa Bobb, and Tania Carter**
*Hope Matters.* Book*hug $18.00

**Shannon Webb-Campbell**
*I Am a Body of Land.* Book*hug $18.00

Reviewed by Jessica Janssen

The two books under review are written by and about Indigenous women, and both are representative of past and present artistic and socio-political calls for bringing awareness to their lives—"unfinished" lives, Shannon Webb-Campbell writes—in the context of ongoing colonialism and genocide in Canada, as defined in the recently published Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

With *Hope Matters*, Sto:lo author Lee Maracle and her daughters Columpa Bobb and Tania Carter have published a book that—through individual poems that dialogue and finally merge into one strong, collective female voice—honours, addresses, and simultaneously enacts relationships. The victimization of Indigenous women is one of the major themes in this collaborative work—without, however, further victimizing them. On the contrary, Maracle, Bobb, and Carter write invisibilized, "crazed" women into life; they give them a space to exist and a voice with which to speak back to colonial injustices. In other words, they refuse victimization. As Maracle declares, "I am not tragic." The writing confronts the reader with the ugly, violent truth and traumatic wounds of colonization, racism, and sexism as inescapably as generations of women have had to face and endure them in their everyday lives. Yet the poetry is a colourful celebration of women's strength, resilience, and power of love that testifies to their determined efforts to make their families, communities, and nations survive and thrive.

Maracle also plays a crucial role as teacher of Mi'kmaq poet Shannon Webb-Campbell and editor of her most recent book, *I Am a Body of Land*, a completely revised version of *Who Took My Sister?* (2018), which sparked controversy across Canada and was eventually removed from the shelves. The earlier book's graphic descriptions of the murder of Indigenous women—without their families' knowledge or permission—initiated discussions about Indigenous protocol in the arts, the author's responsibilities to Indigenous individuals and communities, and, most importantly, the harmful and re-traumatizing effect of dealing with individual cases of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls when settler violence and the victimization of women are perpetuated. In response, Webb-Campbell exploits poetry as a site of critical engagement with her self and community, with questions of belonging and trauma, and with the poet's ethical responsibilities. Each poem is a space where she performs self-reflexivity, exercises accountability, and practises the principle of "do no more harm." According to Webb-Campbell, *I Am a Body of Land* "isn't a typical book," and I agree because it blends poetics, politics, criticism, and ethics without diminishing the affective beauty of poetry and its ability to speak to the reader's soul. Webb-Campbell's poetic response to previous criticism is a seminal contribution to the field of Indigenous literary studies and represents an unconventional way of dealing

with complex questions of authorship, the function of art, poetics, and ethics, as well as the internalized culture of colonialism.

Both poetry collections are timely and much-needed works that directly and critically address the individually and collectively lived female experiences of trauma without perpetuating the stereotype of the victimized Indigenous woman. The authors craft poems full of resistance and resilience, loss and hope, pain and love. Just as water makes its way despite all obstacles and as embers continue to glow, these women's poetic voices resonate with their unswerving belief in decolonization and Indigenous resurgence that will recreate a space where, in Bobb's words, "Indigenous women are human beings worthy of being alive."

## The Numbers Tell a Story

**Derek Mascarenhas**
*Coconut Dreams.* Book*hug $20.00

**Bindu Suresh**
*26 Knots.* Invisible $19.95

Reviewed by Lydia Forssander-Song

Although numbers appear to be at the forefront of Derek Mascarenhas' *Coconut Dreams* and Bindu Suresh's *26 Knots*, the authors skilfully use these numbers to organize their narratives. Memory connects the characters' pasts to the present and projects their hopes for the future. As the character Araceli realizes in *26 Knots*,

> the past and the future were equally heavy burdens that limited the present to a sliver, a small crack in the doorway. She was the path between two destinations, a body to lie and stretch across like the wild terrain between cities, between homes.

In *Coconut Dreams*, the table of contents lists years from 1946 to 2006. This collection of linked short stories is mostly set between 1994 and 2000. Its main characters Aiden and Ally, whose parents emigrated from Goa, grow up in Burlington during their school years. Only two stories deviate from this predominant setting: "When the Good Shines a Little Brighter" includes an aunt/babysitter recalling her African safari honeymoon, and in "Two Islands" Aiden and Ally's mother, Clara, meets a British tourist, Thomas, who visits Goa and the Andaman Islands. The penultimate story, "Hold It like a Butterfly," is Ally's story; it spans a ten-year period starting in 1996 in Burlington and ending in 2006 in Toronto. This suburban coming-of-age collection—told in both third- and first-person points of view—begins and ends, however, with stories set in Goa. The first story, although beginning in 1946, contains events set mostly in 1958. We learn about the birth of Felix—Aiden and Ally's father—in Goa. We also meet Felix and Clara as childhood friends before their move to Canada as a married couple. The final story describes Aiden's "return" to Goa as an adult and university dropout. The story and collection end with the image of Aiden's old uncle running alongside the train as it pulls out of the station, and bidding farewell to his nephew while Aiden muses: "[w]hatever I'd come here to find. What I thought I'd been missing. Running alongside me." His heritage and history, together with his childhood experiences and adolescence, come together in this adult moment of nostalgia, identity formation, and hope. Mascarenhas' writing is direct, descriptive, accessible, and alluring, and he allows his readers to easily walk alongside his characters on their journeys towards self-discovery.

In contrast, *26 Knots*, Suresh's debut book—set mostly in Montreal and minimally in Cuba and other parts of North America—deliberately shuns prosaic narrative storytelling for a more poetic, episodic style that leaves literal and narrative gaps in the story expressed through spaces on the pages between chapters and even within chapters. The numeric title corresponds to the twenty-six chapters that follow the love

stories of Araceli, Adrien, Pénélope, and Gabriel, which are told from a third-person point of view. The knots in these main characters' relationships with each other become obstacles as well as remembrances—like knots in a handkerchief. Adrien "discover[s] . . . that love, when skipped over, rests as a pebble lodged in one's memory." The book opens with a comment on Araceli and Adrien's relationship: "[y]ears later, he would reach for her hand as she walked. . . . By then she will have drawn the nectar from every memory, dried the fallen petals with constant thought." Memory in this story is all-consuming and tragically loaded. The story ends with Pénélope and Gabriel's relationship: "Pénélope felt a note of triumph: One day, Gabriel, you will look up from your work and suddenly remember me." Suresh's focus on her characters' realistic fixations, loaded choices, impulsive actions, and inner turmoil relentlessly draws the reader into the stories in spite of the gaps in their narratives and the spaces on the pages, which also act as poignant pauses. In the midst of despairing relationships, she also presents hope in the form of Araceli and Adrien's restored relationship and Adrien's care for a child, Chloe, who is not his own biologically.

Although set in disparate locations, *Coconut Dreams* and *26 Knots* showcase their Canadian content through a strong sense of home (Burlington and Montreal, respectively) and humanity (diverse in culture, language, and gender). Both works put their Canadian characters and landscapes at the forefront in spite of their reliance on numbers for narrative order.

## Spaces of Possibility

**Andrea Katherine Medovarski**
*Settling Down and Settling Up: The Second Generation in Black Canadian and Black British Women's Writing.* U of Toronto P $50.00

Reviewed by Veronica Austen

Andrea Katherine Medovarski's *Settling Down and Settling Up: The Second Generation in Black Canadian and Black British Women's Writing* looks to literary representations to contemplate the vital question, "what happens to individuals and families *after* migration." Through a study of five novels from the late 1990s and early 2000s, Medovarski explores the inadequacies of diaspora studies, noting that this framework does not fully account for the experiences of children of immigrants. To Medovarski, the second generation challenges discourses that construct the diaspora, particularly in terms of migration and rootlessness. In Medovarski's readings of Dionne Brand's *What We All Long for*, Tessa McWatt's *Out of My Skin*, Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, Esi Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, those in the second generation do not necessarily see themselves as migratory subjects, but instead seek to "lay[] claim to a nation that casts them as outsiders." As Medovarski observes, in so asserting their rightful place in the countries of their birth, these characters provide a new model for "being-in and being-of the nation," one that acknowledges their navigation of competing pressures to assimilate and yet to preserve connections to a foreign "back home" that is not their own. In their attempt "to create inhabitable spaces for themselves" amidst conditions that exclude, this second generation becomes, according to Medovarski, uniquely able to question the nation's "ongoing marginalizations of its legal citizens." Using Barnor Hesse's concept of

"settling down and settling up," Medovarski thus positions the second generation as able to "bear[] witness to the ways in which conditions of settling are uneven for, and sometimes hostile to, non-white presences."

Particularly valuable in Medovarski's work is her conceptualization of the second generation in terms of its expansion of the "conditions of possibility" (a concept borrowed from Michel de Certeau). In other words, Medovarski conceives of the second generation not just as a resistant force, but instead as a transformative one that can work to "*remake* citizenship on other, more ethical or more inclusive terms" and thereby create nations that are "'more' than they currently are." Medovarski takes her cue from a wonderful selection of texts, intervening nicely into already-established discourses surrounding some of the more well-known texts, while also helping to forge discussion of novels, like Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* or Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, that have been somewhat eclipsed by their authors' later works. In positioning novels as a key mode of discourse for unsettling hegemonic views of nation, Medovarski finds in her selection of texts a model for asserting the value of "everyday practices" like friendship, trans-ethnic/-racial affiliations, and "outer-biological" kinship as the means for imagining new, more habitable national spaces. There are some gaps left in this text's argumentation. For example, although a focus on gender and specifically on women's experiences does appear sporadically through the text and culminates nicely in the chapter on Smith's *White Teeth*, the choice of specifically Black *women's* writing as the book's scope, and the significance of this scope, remain unexplored. Further, although the chapter on McWatt's *Out of My Skin* does some interesting work in contemplating the problematics of a second generation rooting itself to stolen Indigenous land, the focus on the protagonist's navigation of Indigenous spaces is lost by the chapter's end, which renders an interpretation or two not fully developed. Overall, however, *Settling Down and Settling Up* offers a timely and important contemplation of Canada and Britain as exclusionary nations, but also as spaces with the potential for change.

## "The lemon is not a lemon": Flowing Letters for Our Time

**Roy Miki; Michael Barnholden, ed.**
*Flow: Poems Collected and New.*
Talonbooks $49.95

Reviewed by Alessandra Capperdoni

The title of the collected poetry of Roy Miki, *Flow*, does not come as a surprise. Miki's lifelong work as a poet, cultural activist, and academic has consistently strained the stabilization of discursive systems by putting received assumptions about language and representation under erasure. *Flow* is an apt title for a body of poetic work that privileges the slippages and unruly fluidities of language associated with the immediacy of individual and social lives. In short, it is a critically informed working practice that interrogates the shifts and contradictions of the historical conditions of the present—and the effects that such contradictions create for "identity formation" and the structuring of subjectivity—but which also explores the creative possibilities opened up in the subject's relation to power.

This hefty volume, brought together by the careful editorship of Michael Barnholden and accompanied by the brilliant preface of Louis Cabri ("Floward"), is part of the Talonbooks Collected series of poetry of (so far) West Coast writers Phyllis Webb, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and (forthcoming) George Bowering—all Miki's fellow-poet travellers, despite the differences

in poetic generation or poetic style. This volume gives readers the opportunity to examine more closely the discursive horizon that such poetic relations (and communities of poetries) have produced in his work.

The collection includes published and new work. It spans the writer's lifelong preoccupation with the relation of aesthetics to politics—in particular the politics of form. Such preoccupation is shared with many writers but it acquires a particular significance at the height of "identity politics" in Canada from the 1970s to the 1990s, when the constitution of racialized subjectivities in relation to the power of the nation-state came under scrutiny in conjunction with the establishment of state multiculturalism and the Redress movement's struggles. That the mediation of experience in consciousness is not the ownership of a property-laden "I" but, instead, is always caught in the contingency of the different discourses available to the subject at the time of its constitution, also raises questions about memory and the re-processing of experiences in the present. What are the limitations of articulations in language if language itself sets the stage for such articulations? Can the subject of experience ever be recuperated in a later present? What is the place of the body at the intersection of body memory and the contained body of official discourses? *Flow* is not an autobiography in the traditional understanding of the term. But in moving through the sequence of Miki's poetic works one is struck by the way in which the collection produces its own poetic social story. In Miki and Barnholden's "Inter View" at the end of the volume, Miki expresses it best: "The poetry is the truer biography." I would add that it is also a poetic biography that writes a significant time in Canada's (ongoing) history, not attempting to "correct" national narratives but, instead, unleashing the potential of language (as Cabri also suggests in his "Floward"). Echoing texts such as Roy Kiyooka's *transcanada letters* (1975), the poetry is also a cultural document.

Previously published poetry in the volume include *saving face: poems selected, 1976-1988* (1991), *random access file* (1995), *Surrender* (2001), *There* (2006), and *Mannequin Rising* (2011). To the reader's great pleasure, a completely new section, *Cloudy and Clear* (2018), is also included. The later work (*There*, *Mannequin Rising*, and *Cloudy and Clear*) also shows a renewed engagement (for the literary poet-scholar) with the medium of photography and photo-collage in addressing the problem of "framing" as well as the power of visual culture in constructing neoliberal subjectivity under the hegemony of globalization.

We cannot speak of continuities in the conventional sense of linearity in Miki's work but, rather, of continuous and playful engagement with language as well as the exceeding of the limits of language—limits that can be rendered calcified by discursive power but which also produce resistances, unsignifiable residues, and creative possibilities. In engaging with Miki's poetry, we recognize the influence of past voices—from Charles Olson and W. C. Williams (with echoes of Gertrude Stein) to the rich encounter with Roy Kiyooka and bpNichol's "lettering" practice and the many language-based poetics of the postmodern scene (Robert Kroetsch, Fred Wah, George Bowering, and Rita Wong to name only a few), but Miki's style always combines the singular and the collective, the personal and the communal in a poetics of flow that opens up spaces of language.

# The Divided Self in the African South

**Kagiso Lesego Molope**
*Such a Lonely, Lovely Road.* Mawenzi $20.95

**Blessing Musariri and Thorsten Nesch**
*My Totem Came Calling.* Mawenzi $18.95

Reviewed by Stephen Ney

These novels about contemporary southern Africa aren't much concerned with politics, but they do a lot of thinking about post/colonial binaries. At the centre of both novels is an individual wrestling with the tensions between rural, communal African traditions and urban, individualistic, Western/globalized modernity. The novels prefer to examine not the political but the psychological side of these divisions, finding the most crucial dividing line not between village and city, or Africa and the West, but between distinct parts of one troubled individual—the first-person narrator. In both novels a reconciliation is found that restores hope and integrity. As Kabelo, the protagonist in *Such a Lonely, Lovely Road*, acknowledges at the novel's resolution, "all parts of a person's life need to come together and make sense for one to feel grounded."

*Such a Lonely, Lovely Road* traces a hopeful narrative of the first thirty years of Kabelo's life because it shows a slow and steady progress towards that coming together. As he reviews his childhood in a Setswana-speaking township through adult eyes, he sees that it was dominated by the desire to satisfy his parents, which mostly meant repressing his gay sexuality and steering towards a medical career. The novel is great at capturing how the forces of family and communal expectations converge agonizingly in the heart of an outwardly successful and unimpeachable youth.

Whereas heading off to Cape Town for medical school seemed to promise Kabelo freedom, and whereas it did indeed give him plenty of opportunity for sexual experimentation, his secluded, studious self, his racially and sexually uninhibited partying self, and his pleasing-the-home-community self didn't begin to converge. (The novel shows with great clarity how being gay, even in notionally post-Apartheid South Africa, was in many ways more difficult for Black than for white South Africans.) Exhausted by inner divergences, he transfers to Durban. The new start doesn't look promising until he runs into a childhood friend, Sediba, who has always been the object of his longing and therefore the trigger for his inner torment. Kagiso Lesego Molope's novel hopefully, but perhaps also unrealistically, suggests that love, though it might require taking great risks, can bring convergence to an individual and for that very reason is the best thing for the society in which the individual is located.

*My Totem Came Calling*, by Blessing Musariri and Thorsten Nesch, is a lighthearted young-adult novel that adolescent Canadian readers would probably have an easy time relating to. Through the mental-health journey of its teenaged protagonist, Chanda, the novel deconstructs common assumptions about urban modernity's superior understanding of health and superior opportunities for living a full life. Repeated hallucinations of a zebra send the desperate Chanda, with three male friends, on a bumpy road trip towards her father's ancestral village, which is almost as foreign to Chanda as it would be to an average Canadian reader. She reflects: "[t]wenty-four hours ago, I was back home lying on my bed, watching Netflix on a plasma screen in the middle of Harare." Now, feet rubbed raw by the elasticated pumps that she should never have worn, stomach turned inside out by the mopane worm her cousins served her, she gives her verdict: "this whole scene is just not working for me." Though she and her tradition-contemptuous parents could never have

known it, Chanda's zebra visions are completely explicable. They aren't symptoms of psychiatric illness but a merciful reminder of who she is: an inescapably Shona woman whose totem, affirmed at birth, is the zebra. The visions called her towards inner integration. The alluring, globalized city actually impeded that integration whereas the village—where Chanda's apparently "traditional" relatives are in fact proficient with mobile technology and with high-tech sustainable irrigation technologies—catalyzes it.

## Walking Woman and Her Legacy

**Tshaukuesh Elizabeth Penashue; Elizabeth Yeoman, ed.**
*Nitinikiau Innusi: I Keep the Land Alive.*
U of Manitoba P $29.95

Reviewed by Valerie Legge

Innu elder and activist Tshaukuesh Elizabeth Penashue has been the subject of a film (*Meshkanu: The Long Walk*) and her story has been published in *In the Words of the Elders* (1999) and *It's Like the Legend* (2000). Her story affirms the experiences of other Indigenous women in Canada. During the 1970s and 1980s, the publication of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree*, Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman*, and Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* signalled that something significant was happening across the country. Silenced for centuries, the voices of the grandmothers were being "channelled through the pen of one recently decolonized woman" (*I Am Woman*). As D. A. Maracle observed in the introduction for *I am Woman*, Indigenous women were finally telling their own stories, "weaving the lessons, values and oratory of [their] grannies, utilizing the natural prose inherent in oral history and the tradition of teaching through the use of story, combined with [their] own poetic visions."

The genesis of *I Keep the Land Alive*—the published form of Penashue's diary, kept from 1987 through 2016—coincided with that important wave of women's writing from the West. In *It's Like the Legend*, Penashue described the destruction of Innu homelands by government, industry, and military. She was born in *nutshimit* ("on the land") with only her family present, her father delivering her into her mother's arms. This was before "settlement became a way of life in the 1960s," a time when "the Labrador Innu lived a nomadic life for nine months of the year." In *The People of Sheshatshit* (1997), José Mailhot recalled how "sedentarization . . . was the first stage of a government policy intended to assimilate [the Innu] into mainstream Canadian society."

In *I Keep the Land Alive*, Penashue describes traditional Innu life as "like a circle." Back then, *nutshimit* was "a school where the children learn[ed] from their elders." By the 1980s, Innu territory was "being used by the military to practise war," the sounds of fighter jets disrupting the nomadic way of life. According to Penashue, NATO viewed *nutshimit* simply as "an empty space" on a map, failing to understand the intricate Innu relationship with the land. Her concerns about the negative impact of the military and industry extended to all of Penashue's relations: her children and grandchildren, her community, the animals, the rivers, and the trees. Noting that "the Innu have been hunting in nutshimit for thousands of years," she identified how disruptive and traumatic these intrusions were. No one had ever "experienced anything like this. Neither [had] the animals. It must terrify them too—they must try to get away from it but they can't. They need to be calm to eat and drink but they're always poised for flight."

In *The Land of Little Rain*, Mary Austin wrote that "to understand the fashion of any life, one must know the land it is lived in." Editor Elizabeth Yeoman identifies the

valuable cultural and historical knowledge contained in Penashue's diaries: details about everyday life, her acts of political resistance, her extensive travels as an Innu spokesperson, and her "reflections on her ancestors and how they lived." Not speaking Innu-aimun and knowing "next to nothing about Innu culture and history," Yeoman describes the obstacles to transcribing, translating, and preparing Penashue's diaries for publication. The project took eight years but the rewards were immense: "I have learned more from Tshaukuesh than I ever dreamed I could, and my life has been enriched in ways I never imagined."

*I Keep the Land Alive* is an important story about the impact of colonization on Innu culture. A strong and devoted leader, Penashue knows that the survival of her culture rests on an awareness that it is a living culture and that the land and the people are inseparable. "The land is [her] children's inheritance," and her work is a "legacy for [her] children, [her] grandchildren, [her] great grandchildren, all her descendants." The photographs of Penashue and her relations provide a rich visual record for readers unfamiliar with the Innu or Labrador. This is an important book that contributes significantly to an established and respected body of literature by Indigenous women in Canada.

## To the Heart of the Matter

**David Adams Richards**
*Murder and Other Essays.* Doubleday $32.95

Reviewed by David Creelman

David Adams Richards' opening sentences in his new collection, *Murder and Other Essays*, seem to welcome the reader into his company:

> It was a July night and I was travelling Highway 11, along the Miramichi River in Northern New Brunswick. Along the way I picked up a hiker, coming from town. It was dark and warm, and the stars seemed endless . . . .

For people who know Richards' work the feeling here is familiar: the well-crafted direct sentence, the setting along the Miramichi River, the author in control of his vehicle, and the reader being invited into an intimate conversation. Even a glance at the titles of these thirty essays and twenty-five poems tells you that some of Richards' familiar concerns—the rural Maritimes, the plight of the bullied, and the centrality of love and courage—are going to be discussed. But this collection offers more. The volume offers an intimate, touching, and compelling look into one of Canada's most important novelists.

When Richards published his first book of essays, *The Lad From Brantford*, in 1994, his essays were brief and his tone terse. In this collection he is more expansive and expressive. There are familiar references to the writers who have most influenced his imagination; Joyce, Tolstoy, Dickens, and Dostoyevsky are often mentioned in Richards' interviews. But in *Murder* he also reflects in much greater detail on Alden Nowlan, Joseph Conrad, Malcolm Lowry, and F. Scott Fitzgerald: writers who battled to retain their artistic integrity when surrounded by tormenters and demons, internal and external, that threatened to bring them down. Richards writes at greater length than ever before about his family members: his fierce grandmother

who defended her family while endangering them, and his bullied father who was haunted by loneliness and strove to be kind. And Richards returns, in more detail than is common for this private writer, to express his tender admiration and deep gratitude toward his wife and children.

Richards' poems, nestled in the middle of the collection, are lyrics: some elegiac, some free verse, and some shaped by subtle rhyming patterns. The first Richards novel I read was *Road to the Stilt House*; it is a masterpiece of sparse poetic prose. Similar poetic gifts are evident in this volume. In his poems, Richards reminds me of Alden Nowlan as he finds precise concrete images and fuses them with a subtle subjective voice. He is intimate without being sentimental, and thus able to embrace the uncertain and the incomplete. Richards can hold a lovely line of tension until his final phrase and leave the reader moved.

Ultimately, Richards writes out of his own ethical vision. He has always been suspicious of power, critical of institutions, and angry at the ways the privileged belittle the vulnerable. In "Playing the Inside Out," he cautions against the "idea of the inner circle [that] is with us always—men and women striving to belong to the most significant group and often . . . giving up their own ideals and even humanity along the way." Richards hates bullying and scapegoating. Prophet-like, he warns that the "posture of freedom is not free if it accuses what it does not take the time to understand." His ethical core rests on a defense of courage and love, for "without compassion there [is] neither understanding nor truth." Richards is not the least bit moralizing. He longs for a link to the divine, free from theology, and he is anchored in the relational, returning again and again to the importance of the individual act of generosity. His creative vision, expressed in his fiction and non-fiction alike, is rooted in the search for and experience of self-sacrificial love.

*Murder and Other Essays* is insightful and reflective, challenging and endearing. Occasionally Richards may sound irritable or defensive, but ultimately he defends his community and his vision with a fullness of heart. David Adams Richards, the prolific author of seventeen novels and seven works of non-fiction, is an enduring writer and an important artist. These essays help us understand, a little better, the fierce empathy at the heart of his world.

## Jiaozi and Pirozhki

**Zoë S. Roy**
*Spinster Kang.* Inanna $22.95

Reviewed by Eleanor Ty

*Spinster Kang* is both a typical and untypical novel about an immigrant. Zoë S. Roy weaves a traditional story of a new immigrant to Toronto from China with the story of a Russian Jewish woman writing a memoir about incidents that happened to her some forty years before. The link between these two women is the intriguing kernel that the reader discovers by the end of the novel.

Both women are struggling to expand their intellectual horizons, and, in the course of their studies, manage to also stumble upon love. Both are sexually innocent, and their fear of romantic entanglement—an interesting story in itself—is linked to the constraints imposed by their families, to traumatic experiences in the past, and to the strict cultural codes of the communities in which they live.

The first part of the novel provides details of the thirty-something-year-old unmarried Kang settling down in Toronto, making new friends, getting used to Canadian food, walking around the city, and working in a coffee shop. At one point, cleaning tables in a Tim Hortons, Kang picks up a *Toronto Star* and reads the headline, "Outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome."

The article talks about "Sui-Chu Kwan, a Chinese Canadian woman in her seventies, who had travelled to Hong Kong in February and died of SARS in Toronto." Then Kang's reflection: "now she understood why the woman on the subway train had moved away from her. It also explained why the customer line-ups in front of her had been shorter." Not all incidents are so pointed; many simply record Kang's day-to-day experiences as she works towards her teaching certificate.

The pace picks up in the second part of the novel as Roy inserts a story within a story. In the process of narrating the Russian Jewish woman's memoirs, Roy reveals the similarities between the repressive regimes in China and the Soviet Union. We learn about the Cultural Revolution under Mao as well as what it was like to be a Jewish intellectual in Moscow in the 1950s. In both cases, romance and dreams become secondary to duty to one's country.

This is an ambitious book, raising a number of issues that are important, though they are not all resolved. These questions include the effects of secondary trauma, the recognition of Hmong peoples in China and the diaspora, the acceptance of gay and lesbian people in immigrant communities, and ways to deal with mental illness. With all these matters, the novel is surprisingly light and encouraging. The protagonist Kang cheerfully plods on in spite of her fears and self-doubts. I particularly like the fact that whenever she is faced with an unfamiliar task, she goes to the library to read about how to do it. Kang is a well-read woman, often alluding to Chinese (*Five Golden Flowers*), Russian (*War and Peace, Eugene Onegin, Fathers and Sons*), and English (*Wuthering Heights, The Matrix, A Christmas Carol*) literature and film. Roy reaffirms our beliefs in the resourcefulness and resilience of immigrant women, and the positive effects of kind friends and welcoming communities.

## Placing Through Poems, Play, and Stories

**Armand Garnet Ruffo**
*Treaty #*. Wolsak & Wynn $18.00

**Drew Hayden Taylor**
*Cottagers and Indians.* Talonbooks $16.95

**Richard Van Camp**
*Moccasin Square Gardens.*
Douglas & McIntyre $19.95

Reviewed by Michael Minor

Despite the range in genre spanned by these books, they remain remarkably coherent as they examine familiar endings and fresh beginnings for Indigenous worlds. Van Camp's fifth collection of stories returns readers to the world of the Denendeh. Readers are immediately plunged into an unlikely nexus of humour and horror when they read the dedication to the "Fort Smith 'smoking tree'" and an epigraph giving top-notch fist-fighting tips from the author's mother. These are indeed stories that pull no punches or, for that matter, illegal wrestling moves.

Van Camp unapologetically shifts between sci-fi, romance, rez politics, nostalgia, medicine power, and horror. Yet, the stories remain grounded in a deep love for the people of Fort Smith. Whether facing the threat of aliens, wheetago, corrupt politicians, or "track pant- and hoodie-wearing Bong Generation scruffians," Van Camp shows that the world his characters inhabit can and must be saved. The hilarity along the way serves to temper the all-too-real consequences of ignoring ecological catastrophes like the tar sands. Once again, Van Camp has enlisted the terrifying presence of the flesh-eating wheetago to warn us that the earth can only take so much destruction before an uncontrollable embodiment of greedy consumption is released.

At first blush, *Cottagers and Indians* may appear to be somewhat parochial. Its depiction of the ongoing struggles over planting

*manoomin* (wild rice) in the cottage country of Kawartha Lakes may seem barely related to the quite obviously Indigenous places that Van Camp writes about. But, the play and the stories share a humorous tone as the authors both outline end-of-the-world scenarios. In the play, Maureen, a cottager from the GTA, squares off against Indigenous *manoomin* keeper Arthur over the wild rice that cottagers claim is lowering property values. Throughout the two-character play, Arthur demonstrates that *manoomin* is at the very centre of his Anishinaabe world. What's more, the disappearance of the *manoomin* has marked an ending for this world. Arthur has been replanting *manoomin* so that his family can once again draw sustenance from a lake that cottagers have claimed and settled with "muskoka chairs, hot tubs, fondues, golf courses." While these familiar symbols of cottage country certainly exist in a different register than Van Camp's *Terminator*-esque "Wheetago Wars," they reveal an equally sharp distinction between Indigenous and settler worldviews. Reinforced by including Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's article "Land & Reconciliation: Having the Right Conversations" as an Afterword, Hayden Taylor's play provides a powerful argument that relations between Canada and Indigenous people can become a life-giving force. However, the terms of this relationship must be based on Indigenous sovereignty over land. It is only through a sober reckoning that the damage done by colonization can be repaired.

Armond Garnet Ruffo's timely fifth book of poetry, *Treaty #*, offers an unflinching focus on the disingenuous motivations that the Crown brought to creating treaties. Meanwhile, he dedicates his book in part to "those ancestors who signed treaty in good faith." He highlights these dramatically different motivations in the poems that title each of the book's three sections. These are excerpted directly from Treaties Nine, One, and Five, with the majority of the text written in reverse. One small, but particularly telling, example of the results of this method is the word "wonk" in "Treaty No. 9," which was once the word "know" in the original treaty text. The primary exception to the reversal of the treaty text is the names. Helpfully, readers of these poems will have no trouble understanding who to hold responsible for these backwards treaties, even if Ruffo has made reading the rest of the text even more inhospitable by reversing the words.

*Treaty #* is not only about the end of the world that the treaties represent for Indigenous peoples. It also leaves the powerful impression that a return to Indigenous teachings of "Minobimaadizwin, The Good Life" is humanity's last best chance to avoid "the inevitable reckoning." Through distinct and powerful rhetoric, each of these books reveals and reckons with the crises that this place, our home, is in. They place responsibility on government and corporate greed. Moreover, they offer hope for returning to relational, reciprocal connectedness with the land. Who better than Indigenous peoples, who have already lived through the end of the world, to guide us through the many crises the world now faces?

# Indigenous Women and Law

**Cheryl Suzack**
*Indigenous Women's Writing and the Cultural Study of Law.* U of Toronto P $25.95

**Emily Snyder**
*Gender, Power, and Representations of Cree Law.* U of British Columbia P $34.95

Reviewed by Margery Fee

Both of these authors use an Indigenous feminist perspective to think about Indigenous law. However, the material and methods they use to illuminate their thinking are somewhat different. Suzack pairs four novels by Indigenous women—Lesley Marmon Silko, Beatrice Mosionier, Louise Erdrich, and Winona LaDuke—with four court cases. Although Suzack's transnational focus puts the spotlight on the ways colonial law has impacted women (and their families), Snyder's focus is on Cree law, as represented by a range of media including books, videos, online material, computer games, and graphic novels. These books set the stage for future, detailed work on the complex gendering of law, legal decisions, and legal frameworks, both mainstream and Indigenous. Anyone interested in Indigenous issues or in getting an Indigenous perspective on law more generally should read them both.

Snyder's book is based on a 2014 PhD thesis in Sociology at the University of Alberta and on work done while a postdoctoral fellow in the Faculty of Law at the University of Victoria, where she co-published with Val Napoleon and John Borrows. Central to Cree law is miyo-wîcêhtowin (good relations), but Snyder's focus is on how that principle is represented and expanded. She realizes that to conclude, as she does, that most of the materials she studies represent women and girls in limiting ways may lead to the discounting of her views, particularly since she is a settler scholar. Her response is that "all educators need to foster a spirit of critical engagement whether they are Indigenous or not." She combines Sara Ahmed's notion of the "feminist killjoy" with Val Napoleon's Indigenous feminist trickster to argue that Cree law, as much as mainstream law, must be seen as a living resource that is adapted over time to new challenges. For Snyder, to assume a simple male/female binary in allotting societal roles is already to exclude gender non-conformity and to risk imposing compulsory heterosexuality and the burden of reproduction and childrearing on one group of people. Arguments that Indigenous pre-contact societies were free of sexism, said to result from colonialism, may facilitate the imposition of "traditional Indigenous law" as a set of sacred rules imposed by the Creator, to be obeyed without question. This representation of law materials excludes the notion of deliberative law—that is, a vision of law not as a set of rules but as a practice of managing conflict through thoughtful debate and through the fair hearing of multiple viewpoints. Given the ways in which the dominant traditions of law in North America have discriminated against Indigenous people—women and children in particular—it is understandably easy to romanticize pre-contact social formations, including law, but this is a danger we must guard against.

Suzack notes that elucidating particular legal orders is an important task, but this work was not part of her project. Here she shows how Indigenous women writers can render the damage legal cases do to women understandable at an affective, personal, and family level. Although literature has often been regarded as a "frill" from both mainstream and Indigenous perspectives, Suzack demonstrates how literature works as a form of social justice activism. The chapters deal with four major injustices against Indigenous women, consolidated by mainstream legal decisions and sometimes

by their own communities: the patriarchal removal of Indian status or tribal membership from Indigenous women who "marry out" with non-status outsiders, an exclusion that includes their children; the treatment of rape and sexual violence; the removal of children from their mothers either through residential schooling or various "scoop-ups" to foster care or adoption; and the alienation of lands that often follows from these other violent acts. What is central to both books is the demonstration that gender is a vital analytic category for understanding the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples. They both state their own perspectives clearly, but also attend to the opinions of those Indigenous women scholars who see feminist thinking as a form of implicitly colonial, white, middle-class theory. Both make the case that feminist theoretical approaches—including Indigenous feminist ones—are neglected at the peril of complicity with the colonial and heteropatriarchal insistence on essentialism over more fluid identifications and on individualism over community.

# Contributors

## Articles

Phanuel **Antwi** is Assistant Professor of English Language and Literatures at the University of British Columbia. He writes, researches, and teaches critical black studies; settler colonial studies; black Atlantic and diaspora studies; Canadian literature and culture since 1830; critical race, gender, and sexuality studies; and material cultures. He has published articles in *Small Axe, Cultural Dynamics, Interventions, Affinities,* and *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and he is completing a book-length project titled *Currencies of Blackness: Faithfulness, Cheerfulness and Politeness in Settler Writing*.

The inaugural E. J. Pratt Poet/Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto, George Elliott **Clarke** hails from Black Nova Scotia (Africadia). He has served as Poet Laureate of Toronto (2012-2015) and Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016-2017).

Lou **Cornum** is a Diné writer born in Arizona and living now in Brooklyn, New York. They received their Masters Degree in English literature from the University of British Columbia and are currently an English literature PhD candidate at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Their dissertation is titled "Skin Worlds: Science Fiction Theorizing in Black and Indigenous Science Fiction since the 1970s."

Miasol **Eguíbar-Holgado** holds a degree in English Philology from the University of Oviedo, Spain. In 2011, she followed with a Master's Degree on American Literatures at Trinity College, Dublin, and was awarded her PhD in 2015 from the University of Oviedo. She currently works as Assistant Lecturer in English at the same university. Her research focuses on Afro-Canadian literature and postcolonial speculative fiction.

Moritz **Ingwersen** is Assistant Professor of North American Literature and Culture at the University of Konstanz, Germany. He holds a joint PhD in Cultural Studies and English from Trent University, Ontario, and the University of Cologne. Building on a dissertation on intersections of science fiction and science studies, his research and teaching focus on speculative fiction, the posthumanities, and ecological criticism. His publications include articles on J. G. Ballard, China Miéville, N. K. Jemisin, and Neal Stephenson.

Larissa **Lai** is the author of six books, including the novels *Salt Fish Girl* and *The Tiger Flu*, and the monograph *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s*. Recipient of the Lambda Literary Award, the Astraea Award, and the Tiptree Honor Book Award and finalist for the ACQL Gabrielle Roy Prize for Literary Criticism and seven more, she lives on Treaty Seven Territory in southern Alberta, where she holds a Canada Research Chair in the Department of English at the University of Calgary and directs The Insurgent Architects' House for Creative Writing.

Jody **Mason** is Associate Professor in the Department of English at Carleton University. She has published two books, *Writing Unemployment: Worklessness, Mobility, Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Canadian Literatures* (2013) and *Home Feelings: Liberal Citizenship and the Canadian Reading Camp Movement* (2019), and is currently working on a SSHRC-funded project that examines how Canadian practices of book diplomacy have been shaped in the past sixty years by the antinomies of settler colonialism and the shifting meanings of the book within late capitalism.

Maureen **Moynagh** is Professor in the Department of English at St. Francis Xavier University, in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. She teaches postcolonial literature and theory, and she has published in the areas of African and African Diaspora literatures, transnational feminist collaborations, anti-imperialist travel writing, and child-soldier narratives. She received the Joe Weixlmann prize of 2019 for a recent essay about Nalo Hopkinson's speculative fiction, published in the *African American Review*.

Y-Dang **Troeung** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literatures at the University of British Columbia. She specializes in transnational Asian literatures, Asian Canadian literature, critical refugee studies, and global south studies. Her work focuses on genealogies of colonialism, war, and militarism in the transpacific. She is currently completing a book manuscript on the afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia. Her publications can be found in journals such as *Modern Fiction Studies, Amerasia, ARIEL, MELUS, TOPIA,* and *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*.

## Poems

Lisa **Arsenault** lives in Toronto. Barry **Dempster** lives in Holland Landing, Ontario. Dan **MacIsaac** lives in Victoria, BC. Lauren **Nerfa** lives in Vancouver, BC. Rebecca **Păpucaru** lives in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Vivian **Zenari** lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

## Reviews

Alex M. **Assaly** lives in Cambridge. Veronica **Austen** teaches at St. Jerome's University. Gregory **Betts** teaches at Brock University. Alison **Calder** and Michael **Minor** teach at the University of Manitoba. Alessandra **Capperdoni** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Karen **Charleson** teaches at Hooksum Outdoor School. Sijia **Cheng**, Sherrill **Grace**, Weldon **Hunter**, Laurie **Ricou**, and Brooke **Xiang** live in

Vancouver. David **Creelman** teaches at the University of New Brunswick. Margery **Fee** and Ralph **Sarkonak** teach at the University of British Columbia. Ryan **Fitzpatrick** teaches at the University of Toronto Scarborough. Lydia **Forssander-Song** and Crystal **Hurdle** live in North Vancouver. Lisa **Grekul** lives in Kelowna. Evangeline **Holtz-Schramek** and Dani **Spinosa** live in Toronto. Jessica **Janssen** lives in Sherbrooke. Valerie **Legge** teaches at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Brandon **McFarlane** teaches at Sheridan College. Shane **Neilson** lives in Oakville. Stephen **Ney** lives in New Westminster. Claire **Omhovère** lives in Montpellier, France. Michael A. **Peterman** lives in Peterborough. Ian **Rae** teaches at King's University College at Western University. Jasmine **Spencer** teaches at the University of Victoria. Marianne A. **Stenbaek** teaches at McGill University. Neil **Surkan** lives in Calgary. Julie **Sutherland** lives in Kingston. Eleanor **Ty** teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University. Emily **Wall** lives in Douglas, AK.

# THE *CANADIAN LITERATURE* HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVE

In March 2020, *Canadian Literature* sent complimentary packages of two back issues of our journal to over 300 secondary school libraries across Canada. A teacher at a local Vancouver school had reached out to ask us if we had any spare issues of the journal that she could show to her grade 12 AP students. She wanted them to connect with a physical copy of the academic journal and to hold literary scholarship in their hands. Recognizing that it was better to have back issues of the journal in her students' hands than on our storage shelves, we were totally happy to share. Her request stayed with us. It made us realize that exploring the contents of the journal and its print culture material might be of interest to other students and educators as well. We are always looking for ways to share ideas about the study of Canadian writing. So, we started a project—The *Canadian Literature* High School Initiative—of circulating copies of our journal to a range of libraries at secondary schools in all provinces and territories, compliments of *Canadian Literature*. We hope this initiative helps build connections between high school readers and university scholarship.

To support the initiative, **we are offering secondary schools a special institutional Subscription Rate for four print copies this year**: Issues 240-243 for $130* instead of the regular institutional rate of $245. This offer is available until September 30, 2020.

Order at canlit.ca/subscriptions.