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

Editorial

111 Days

Laura Moss

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. As in other countries around the globe, life in Canada transformed rapidly. The nation's borders were closed to non-essential travel, and provinces and territories began declaring states of emergency. Public health directives moved in-person schools online, and mandated the closure of many non-essential businesses and public spaces like community centres, playgrounds, museums, and shopping malls. The federal government called citizens back to Canada from around the world and mandated self-quarantines upon arrival. Social distancing measures were implemented and Canadians were asked to conduct their work remotely from home whenever possible. Around the world, professional and collegiate sports leagues at first played with no fans and then quickly shut down completely. In the early days, provincial health authorities recommended or even mandated (depending on the province) "lockdown," where people were asked to stay home except for brief forays outdoors for exercise and grocery shopping. Over the course of a few days in mid-March, we entered what has repeatedly been called "unprecedented times."

The 111 days after March 11 happened to coincide with my final 111 days as editor of *Canadian Literature,* a position that I handed over to Christine Kim on July 1. I have taken the opportunity of this confluence in this, my last editorial, to draw from my own archive of experience to document one story about the early days of COVID-19. Since March 13, my personal and professional worlds have collided in space (my home), and in that spirit this editorial is part personal lockdown memoire and part reading journal during a time of crisis. As I write this in the summer of 2020, British Columbia,

where I live, has done well at "flattening the curve" of the virus spread in the community, although there is increasing concern about a second wave here as we witness the devastation of the virus as it rages in communities globally. So far, my family and friends have mainly remained healthy, in their own lockdown situations, with a few people I care for having contracted COVID-19 but having recovered. I am incredibly lucky to have a congenial home and a stable job that I can do remotely. And so my story is not one of loss and grief, or domestic concern, or financial fear, as are the stories of so many. It is a more simple chronicle, really, of coping with quick change and anxiety, and of turning to literature for both real and imagined communities. I know exactly where I was when I learned of the Montreal massacre, the 9/11 bombings, and the deaths of Elvis Presley, René Lévesque, Princess Diana, Jack Layton, and Kobe Bryant, but have never felt so personally a part of a global event. I know that I am living, today, at an important moment in history and so it seems imperative to share even the small stories for posterity. I think as scholars, mentors, teachers, and parents, much of the past three months has been about being open with our vulnerabilities and insecurities because there's been a kind of solidarity in that—with students, colleagues, friends, and family—letting down the facade of being a composed professional and just being real in our community support. I admit too that keeping reading notes for this editorial served as a kind of coping mechanism for me over the months. I did not plan for *forage*, "Unless the Eye Catch Fire," *The Collected Poems of Bronwen Wallace, The Black Prairie Archives,* or *Little Blue Encyclopedia (For Vivian)* to be the books that sustained me through a lockdown, but they did.

In the fictional post-flu-pandemic world of *Station Eleven*, Emily St. John Mandel writes about a virus that travels around the world via airline passengers. It spreads quickly and infects the entire global population over the course of a few weeks. Before this spring, I would have thought that the timing of the pandemic spread in the novel was hyperbolic. It was not. Looking back at the family conversation thread I had during March 2020, I am struck by how extraordinarily fast things turned. My son Simon was studying at the University of Geneva for a term away from UBC, while my son Owen was in Montreal finishing his first year at Concordia University, and my son Charlie, in grade 9, was in Vancouver with my partner Fred and me. In the first week in March, we were trading photos of daily life. The next week, we were frantically making plans to get everyone home as soon as possible.

March 10: *Hi Simon, since Italy is now on lockdown due to Covid-19, I think you should go grocery shopping and stock up on some canned and boxed food supplies (and buy a can opener). Is there any talk of the virus there?*

March 11: *Any news from Montreal or Geneva about cancelling classes and putting school online and sending students home? They just did it at MIT, Harvard, MSU . . . We are talking about it at UBC. If it happens, there might be a brief window to get you guys home.*

March 14: *Hi Owen, what are you thinking about coming back to YVR? Any news on how long the cafeteria will stay open? Are there restrictions on how many people can be there at once?*

March 14: *Should we go online and find you a flight? I think you should move out and then you can easily move back in if things get back to normal before the end of April.*

March 16: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Simon is home from Switzerland, after an epic journey. He just got home, ready for 2 weeks of self-isolation. Owen got home from Montreal last night. I am just so incredibly relieved. Stay safe everyone.

March 16: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Does anyone in Vancouver have an extra couple of masks? We have one building mask with sawdust still in it. Simon is in self-isolation and he can wear it. I understand that we are all supposed to wear masks at home but I went to 8 stores and could not find any and I just don't know what to do. Amazon has them for delivery mid-April. I did find bleach, paper towels, and hand sanitizer. I also could not find TP—at 8 stores too and we will be out soon. Amazon is charging $29 for 12 rolls with $45 shipping. We'd be really grateful if anyone could spare a few masks for my family.

March 16: **Laura Moss** replied: *RESOLVED* ☺

And then there was the speed with which anxiety and stress took over. I have a short attention span at the best of times but in the early days of the pandemic, it was minute. In the first month, all I read were news reports. I felt an imperative to keep up with information about the daily case count and the global spread of the virus, a real responsibility to know. For about

a month every single story in every news outlet was about the coronavirus: the whole of *The National* newscast on the CBC, the whole of *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*.

March 21: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Here's the thing. I am scared and anxious. I have spent time this week sitting staring into nothingness. I have read too many news stories (but am weaning myself back now) and reacted with very shallow breathing. My phone tells me that my screen time has increased by a lot. It has been a force of will to get myself to push myself forward to look after my family, teach my classes, plan for the journal, and think of other people. I am doing a mediocre job at all of those things and right now that is a success. My children tell me I am on edge. (They seriously need to load the f'ing dishwasher though). I am in a safe home surrounded by family and I feel this way.

Here's what I am doing to help myself and others. I am staying on Facebook because I need the community (3 weeks ago I signed off FB thinking I was done with it for good. I am glad to have it now). I have gone for a long walk every day and will continue to do so as long as I am allowed out. I have been talking to people on the phone while walking. I am going to bake something. Mainly, however, I have been emailing and texting people I know just to check in. I want them to check on me too. After my online class yesterday I stayed online to talk to students who wanted to stick around and socialize. A few did and they really needed to talk. I tried to make them laugh. I have emailed all my students and offered to talk on Skype, FaceTime, or the phone. I have checked in on all my grad students. I have friends living alone and friends living with others. They are all stressed. I think we should each create a list of 5-10 people we check on regularly who we might not normally check on. Everyone needs to be reached out to. I have seen the virus spreading charts where one person can infect dozens. I want to think of the same format as communication and care spreading charts. Networks of kindness and care. Take care everyone. How are you doing? Just checking in.

The move to take university classes online happened extraordinarily quickly as well. The following thread occurred over the course of a couple of hours.

March 12: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook (with responses from colleagues across Canada):
"U of Manitoba has now sent classes online. Is that the first Canadian university? The rest should follow soon, right?"

"First was Laurentian"
"LU has asked everyone to prepare for that possibility, though hasn't made the call yet"
"Same at UBC"
"U Waterloo too. And as of this afternoon, classes will continue, but all events of 50 or more people are cancelled."
"Western just cancelled classes and is moving online. At this point, I think Congress should probably be cancelled."
"I saw that. We'll see how the days unfold, huh?"
"Ontario has just closed all public schools for three weeks. We'll see if (and how) universities follow."
"We are dealing with this. We cannot demand courses go online unless public health authority or provincial ministry decrees. We are asking colleagues to prepare to go online."
"Fairleigh Dickinson University (Vancouver) declared on Tuesday that we will go strictly online on Monday."

UBC also suspended all in-person classes as of Monday, March 16. Fortunately, I was able to inform my students in our final "face-to-face" classes that we would likely be shifting to an "online learning environment" (phrases popularized in spring 2020). The pivot to remote teaching was technically challenging and emotionally draining but it also motivated me to focus on something valuable other than news and family at a time of peak anxiety. It was so good to check in with the students during that first terrifying and numbing month. One student said that our class was the only contact she had with anyone all week because she was unable to leave her apartment. Another woke up in the middle of the night in Shanghai to attend our class in the Pacific Time Zone and apologized for having to speak quietly because her family was asleep next door.

The texts we studied during this time also took on new meaning. I taught P. K. Page's short story "Unless the Eye Catch Fire" twice in the winter 2020 term: once in January in my Canadian Studies seminar on Environmental Art and Activism, and once in my English Majors class after we moved online. Eight weeks and a pandemic apart, the story resonated so differently in the two classes. In the Canadian Studies class in mid-January, we read Page's work as prophetic of our most pressing issues around global warming, the climate emergency and ecocide, and government action and inaction. We marvelled at reading a story from 1979 that so clearly imagined what we were

witnessing as wildfires then raged in Australia. It felt like we were joining *in medias res* with the story, ahead of where the narrator begins her own diary. In late March in my other class, we read the story as prophetic of the pandemic lockdown and the disintegration of time, of isolation and loneliness, and of pain and resilience. The story was still prescient of the apocalyptic possibilities of climate change but it was also a more personal story of loss and adaptation. In March, we moved deeper into the timeframe of the story, as the world shuts down around the narrator, than I could have ever thought possible.

March 30: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Hi friends: please suggest a poem of hope, love, or pure beauty that I can share with my students. It can be from anywhere at any time. Thanks in advance.

My classes next turned to Rita Wong's poetry collection *forage*. In the past, I have focused on the ways in which Wong asks questions about the ethical relationships between science, technology, the land and water, human and non-human inhabitants, and consumer culture in her poetry. I have never stopped long on the poem "susurrus" that sits near the end of the collection. This year, however, it resonated. Wong writes,

> the days passed by in fear & uncertainty
> the days passed by in caffeine & deadlines
> the days passed by in crunchy textures
>
> . . . . . .
>
> the days passed by, all lassitude & turpitude, serpentine &
> labyrinthine
> the days passed by in ritualistic meetings
> the days passed by like a swig of beer ends up in the toilet
> the days passed by in the hum of electronic appliances punctuated
> by the sproing of the computer being turned on
> the days passed by in email backlog
> the days passed by like a repurposed stock market
> the days
> the days
> the days (70-71)

Sitting in their own homes, each student read a line of this poem aloud to the class assembled via computer technology. The collective *ah-ha* recognition was audible. I then gave them a few minutes to write their own versions of "the days passed by." Their lines adapted to 2020 were stunning, but I left them in the April air, lost in the ephemera of online oral learning.

After classes ended, the *Collected Poems of Bronwen Wallace* was the first book to pull me away from the news. Wallace and I are both from Kingston, Ontario. She writes about places and people deeply familiar to me. Wallace's poetry operates the way my mind usually operates, but even more so in a global crisis—namely, it meanders. Think of "A Simple Poem for Virginia Woolf." It too has a short attention span.

> This started out as a simple poem
> for Virginia Woolf you know the kind
> we women writers write these days
> in our own rooms
> on our own time
> a salute a gesture of friendship
> a psychological debt
> paid off
> I wanted it simple
> and perfect round
> hard as an
> egg I thought
> only once I'd said egg
> I thought of the smell
> of bacon grease and dirty frying-pans
> and whether there were enough for breakfast (80)

In this new comprehensive collection, I saw several of Wallace's poems for the first time. What a gift. I appreciate the narrative completeness of her work. You can find whole lives in a few lines, like the internal conflict that pits desire against responsibility in "The Woman in This Poem." And then I came to "Distance from Harrowsmith to Tamworth" and read about Wallace's family history laid over the small towns of eastern Ontario, including the village of Bellrock where I grew up. During COVID lockdown in Vancouver, 4,426 km from my past, reading the poem was like driving down the Highway 38 of my own childhood. In her introduction to the collection, editor Carolyn Smart quotes Erín Moure on Wallace: "The assemblage, that made the poem whole, made her readers whole" (xix). Yes, exactly. Reading the assemblages of Wallace's poems helped ground me, whole.

April 30: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Me in COVID-times update: Tomorrow is May 1, the day I was supposed to start as Associate Dean. I was asked to come in early because of the COVID crisis so I actually began as AD on April 1. Between the COVID response teams and the

other committees I am now on, April was a busy month in this new role. I had 44 ZOOM meetings. I also finished up the 2 classes I had been teaching and finished editing an issue of CanLit. *Today we are sending issue 240 of the journal to the designer and I am totally amazed that we hit the end of the month deadline we were shooting for. Yay team! I am so grateful to my staff at the journal for figuring out how to do everything remotely. It has been really challenging. I can hardly believe that we made it through this crazy month in these pandemic times. April 2020 took somewhere between 20 minutes and 2 years. I hope May 2020 is slightly brighter.*

I had been awaiting the publication of *The Black Prairie Archives: An Anthology* for a while, having spoken with editor Karina Vernon about it over the years. It arrived on my doorstep in early May. I was surprised to see my name alongside many others in the book's acknowledgments and Karina's note about my "feminist mentorship from afar" (xiii). On the evening I sat down to dive into the book, alone in my home on the West Coast, it was a small but wonderful and especially meaningful moment of feeling connection and community across academic spaces. I admire this book. It takes scholarly resilience and deep editorial commitment to complete a project of this scope and scale. The anthology articulates the long presence of black men and women on the prairies (since at least 1779) and it explores their complicity in the colonial acts of settlement and displacement of Indigenous populations. The assembled black prairie archive "challenges traditional colonial conceptions of the prairies as a stable and boundaried territory by 'diasporizing' it," as Vernon says (8). This anthology is a marvel of experiences and voices of the past and the present, and a truly significant collection of literary art. Three weeks after I started reading *The Black Prairie Archives*, George Floyd was murdered by police officers in Minneapolis, and the crisis of a global pandemic was brought into relief against the historical and ongoing crises of racist violence, police brutality, and white supremacy in the US, Canada, and across the colonized world. As spring turned to summer in 2020, the resilience of anti-racist cultural work and the importance of artists and their voices in building this world differently were again palpable. This anthology amplifies generations of black Canadian voices that need to be heard.

May 15: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Exhausted. That's the whole update.

About two months after the pandemic was declared, the provincial health office recognized that the curve had been almost flattened in BC, and restrictions started to ease. While the virus had spread dangerously in long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, and meat-packing plants, the spread was considered enough under control that we could begin the "restart" plan. It seemed early. Elementary and high school students had the option of returning to in-person classes a few days a week, some "non-essential" businesses like hair salons slowly opened up with social distancing measures in effect, takeout restaurants and online shopping continued to thrive, and traffic started to return to the streets that had stood nearly empty for months. The noise came back. As things eased, I became hungry for immersive reading.

The final book I turned to during these 111 days was Hazel Jane Plante's *Little Blue Encyclopedia (for Vivian)*. The author had studied in our department many years ago and I like supporting former students so I ordered her book. It is brilliant. This elegy is structured as alphabetic encyclopedia entries for a wildly quirky fictional cult-classic television show, *Little Blue*, compiled by the narrator—a queer trans woman who may be named Zelda—as an act of grieving, remembrance, and love for her straight trans friend Vivian who has recently died. This heart-breaking and heart-warming story is accompanied by beautiful pen and ink alphabetical illustrations by Onjana Yawnghwe (another former student). In an interview with Emma Rhodes, Plante elegantly calls the form "realism via pointillism with pop art thrown in." Rhodes notes that the "form functions at once as a manual for how pop culture can help soothe and mend us and as an exploration of oft-overlooked sources of pleasure." During lockdown, I watched *many* hours of television and movies and I appreciate how seriously, and playfully, Plante uses pop culture as a way to navigate loss and grief in this book that also overflows with love, compassion, sexuality, humour, and the complexity of friendship and attraction. The narrator is raw and alone in ways I recognize from the past few months, despite our very different experiences.

As we settle into summer 2020 and I end my tenure as editor of *Canadian Literature*, it is impossible to know what the future holds in global health or in the health of the field. Both have struggled as of late. I know that I am leaving the journal in good hands. I hope it stays well and continues to thrive with Christine's leadership. The recurring words of BC's provincial health officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, seem pertinent here: "Be kind, be calm, be safe."

July 22: **Laura Moss** posted on Facebook:
Today I cleared out of my office at Canadian Literature*, my first time in that space since March. 17 years at the journal—11 as reviews editor and 6.5 as acting editor and then editor-in-chief. And now I am done. I have such mixed emotions: grateful to have had the opportunity to work on such a publication for so long, very proud of the work we accomplished, sad to be leaving the CL team, ready to move on, relieved not to have the weight on my shoulders, nostalgic already. All good things, etc. Bye CanLit.*

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Frank Klaassen

The business of the grass

I.

Waist-high words, the summer grass
grows thin and tumbles brown
and filament on filament, binds down
the fallen trash and curiosities
to stubborn rhizomes:
women's deep concerns,
the knowing nods of men, and talk
(when they can make it casual).

> *So—about those bullet wounds—who said*
> *that there were five? How could you tell?*
> *Can you believe those Hutterites?*
> *I think they made that up.*
>
> *Still scary though—so near to home.*
>
> *I heard that Jim's boy knew him*
> *in the city. Recognized his name,*
> *his picture in the paper.*
> *Said that it was over drugs.*

These put it all in place: out here
things don't stay random, don't
lie scattered, disconnected long.

II.

The Hutterites first saw him
from their tractors during seeding
in the yard of an abandoned
farm yard still in

winter coat and boots.
They called the cops and then
took cellphone pictures
of each other with the body
while they waited, then
were startled when a female officer
arrived. It made them feel
like they'd been doing something
inappropriate.

III.

When they pulled down the
spinning tape and carried him
away he'd still been new among
the refuse scattered in the yard:
the rusting swings, the plastic slide,
and sun-bleached toys.

You'd leave a scar of broken roots,
of moist earth scrambling with ants, had you
pulled the plastic truck and nerf gun up,
the random signs of years before:
the last-time children on this farm.

Repeated seasons' words
have made them always-there,
the story everybody knew.

Helena Van Praet

Writer's Writer Revisits Authorship

Iteration in Anne Carson's *Decreation*

The poet stalks her subjects from oblique angles . . .
—William Logan, *Our Savage Art*

1. Dialogism and Rewriting

As a writer's writer and "one of the great pasticheurs" (Merkin), literary virtuoso Anne Carson has been both praised and criticized for her extensive use of intertextual references.[1] Carson's practice of writing as rewriting by reassembling existing texts and voices, which Jennifer Thorp has termed "name-dropping" (15) in response to David Solway's critique of Carson, has accordingly been established as a hallmark of her work. In her experimental collection titled *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (2005),[2] Carson probes the works of numerous authors in four lyric essays, who then resurface as voices among other prominent names in the literary experiments that make up the rest of the collection. As a case in point, the collection's central essay on decreation is concerned with the heretical lives of the archaic Greek poet Sappho, the medieval mystic Marguerite Porete, and the French philosopher Simone Weil, whose life stories are then transformed into an accompanying opera libretto.

While much cogent criticism has been devoted to this spiritual dimension of the collection, including to sublime decreation (e.g., Disney; Skibsrud), and in particular to Carson's engagement with Weil (e.g., Fan; Coles), few scholars have effectively drawn on systematic research into the role of the reader as a text-constructing agent in Carson's work, with the exceptions of Liedeke Plate's multimodal approach to *Nox* (2010), and Solway's polemical attacks, wherein he argues that Carson is riding the zeitgeist of superficial erudition and that her readers see themselves reflected in

her gratuitous showmanship (49-50). Whereas Thorp regards the inter-authorial aspect of Carson's work as a poststructuralist technique to confuse notions of authenticity in contemporary poetry (15), I take Carson's alleged name-dropping as a starting point to argue that *Decreation* should be conceptualized as a project of re-engagement that is underpinned by synthetic disjunctions of competing viewpoints. In my reading of Carson's collection, the notion of decreation moves beyond a spiritual undoing of self to an undoing of entrenched patterns of thinking. To this end, Carson relies on the principle of intratextuality, which instills in the reader a blurring of the speaker's identity that complicates Carson's authorial presence in the collection, while her use of echoes ingrains the notion of decreation in the reader's mind. By pitting numerous literary voices and elements against one another, Carson coaxes the reader to assess *Decreation* from a syncretic viewpoint that can encompass these distinct perspectives. My essay therefore presents the following proposition: while conspicuously self-conscious and permeated by an authorial presence, Carson's *Decreation* instigates a critical re-evaluation of the notion of authorship by requiring the reader to pick up on its patterns of synthetic disjunction.

Focusing mainly on the reader in the context of literary semiology, my analysis sets out from the concept of intertextuality as theorized by Julia Kristeva in her 1966 essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel." Kristeva's central idea, derived from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37) has already been discussed at length in a great many other works.[3] I build on these studies by incorporating Kristeva's notion of dialogism into critical discussions of Carson's work within the context of her disjunctive collection *Decreation*. This approach is warranted by the collection's reliance on a stereoscopic third angle of vision as its organizing principle. In this respect, Carson has argued that

> we think by *projecting sameness upon difference,* by drawing things together in a relation or idea *while at the same time maintaining the distinctions between them*. . . . In any act of thinking, the mind must reach across this space between known and unknown, linking one to the other but also keeping visible their difference. It is an erotic space. To reach across it is tricky; a kind of stereoscopy seems to be required. (*Eros* 171, emphases mine)

Stereoscopy or depth perception, which stems from viewing a single object with both eyes through binocular vision, should be interpreted here as a visual process of reconciliation. This dialectic of reconciling two or more

apparently incongruous entities—in this case, either the numerous voices or the variations on the central trope of decreation—gives rise to what I will term a *synthetic disjunction*, in contrast to Gilles Deleuze's term *disjunctive synthesis* that implies an ultimate union, as a way of perceiving that recognizes both dissimilarity and discovered similarity. As a triadic structure that projects sameness across difference, it is akin to Barbara Maria Stafford's notion of analogy as "the vision of ordered relationships articulated as similarity-in-difference" (9). In the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, this disjunction can be described more precisely as one "that remains disjunctive, and that still affirms the disjoined terms, that affirms them throughout their entire distance, *without restricting one by the other or excluding the other from the one*" (76, emphasis original). Extending these critics' reasoning, I will argue that *Decreation* rests on a system of partial concordances or analogies, as Carson ushers the reader's perspective toward a relational angle.

Kristeva's interpretation of dialogism is instructive for this discussion since it helps me to conceptualize how Carson produces synthetic disjunctions of different perspectives throughout her collection. Key to my reasoning is Kristeva's emphasis on congruence, since it encapsulates the analogical quality of Carson's modus operandi:

> The notion of dialogism, which owed much to Hegel, must not be confused with Hegelian dialectics, based on a triad and thus on struggle and projection (a movement of transcendence). . . . Dialogism replaces these concepts by absorbing them within the concept of relation. *It does not strive towards transcendence but rather toward harmony*, all the while implying an idea of rupture (of opposition and analogy) as a modality of transformation. (Kristeva 58, emphasis mine)

Kristeva's interpretation of dialogism thus allows for a more precise definition of this dialectic of reconciliation as a *dialogism* of reconciliation. The dialogue that is established between the different texts, then, results in an amalgam of different voices and intertextual traces that indirectly convey the (perceived) intention of the author. At the same time, these relations of synthetic disjunction are not only established between the speaker and other literary figures (and texts), but also between Carson herself as an author and the reader—thus necessitating an analogical third angle of vision involving the reader. The novel speaker of the collection that emerges thus remains a profoundly individual construct on the part of the reader, since the analogical activity of linking always entails an emotional, personal dimension crucial to understanding selfhood (see Stafford 141).

2. From Intertextuality to Intratextuality: Meditations on I

My argument that Carson's fragmented speaker in *Decreation* originates as a synthetic disjunction of competing voices that are intratextually reprised requires a close examination of the notion of voice in the collection. In Ian Rae's article on narrative technique in Carson's "The Glass Essay" (1995), a rewriting of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), he puts forward a cogent argument concerning Carson's use of intertextual echoes:

> As the text progresses in this fashion, the intertextual allusions (between distinct authors and texts) transform into intratextual echoes (within Carson's poem), and Carson thereby achieves the effect of blurred identity between Brontë and her speaker. . . . [T]he author makes the reader feel this transformation taking place by showing how language draws the reader into a vortex of thought and emotion by establishing systems of association that become part of the speaker's subconscious response to phenomena. (174)

What I take from Rae's work in my reading of *Decreation* is the central idea that when intertextual references evolve into intratextual repetitions, a blurring of identity takes place as these mental associations become part of the speaker's subconscious. However, while "The Glass Essay" revolves around the figure of Brontë, *Decreation* features a plethora of authors and other names. Yet crucially, the collection opens with an unnamed speaker who addresses their mother. Since the mother figure plays a prominent role in many of Carson's works—from the mother as a modern Demeter in the autobiographically inspired *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001), to G's mother's death in *Red Doc>* (2013) and Carson's reflection on her own mother's death in *Men in the Off Hours* (2000)—this evocation of the mother-child relationship leads me to argue that *Decreation* is organized in such a way to make the reader wrongly believe that the speaker is Carson herself, or at least a persona that is close to her. Toward the end of the first series of poems, called "Stops," however, a name is introduced when the speaker proclaims that "going to visit my mother is like starting in on a piece by Beckett" (14). Beckett's work then takes centre stage in the following two poems as well as in "Quad," Carson's enigmatic discussion of his *Quadrat I* and *Quadrat II* in the form of a pseudo-interview. In this way, a first transformation from intertextual reference to intratextual echo takes place. Moreover, this introduction of Beckett is strongly reminiscent of a sentence in "The Glass Essay" that reads: "Whenever I visit my mother / I feel I am turning into Emily Brontë" (*Glass* 3). In *Decreation*, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is referenced as well, not incidentally in "Quad": "But Beckettpeople

[*sic*] pounce on such remarks as if they were Catherine pulling feathers out of a pillow in *Wuthering Heights*" (123). These allusions conspicuously cloud the speaker's assumed identity (as Carson herself) as the "I" in both works identifies with established literary names.

Such allusions are manifold in *Decreation*, but the poems in the collection's "Gnosticisms" series are especially metafictional, since they frequently offer a self-conscious reflection on intertextuality and notions of originality. The first of these poems, entitled "Gnosticism I," makes a tentative start by evoking Gerard Manley Hopkins' use of Duns Scotus' concept of *haecceitas* (or "thisness") through an allusion to "The Windhover" (see Birch 497):

> . . . Astonishment
>
> inside me like a separate person,
> sweat-soaked. How to grip.
> For some people a bird sings, feathers shine. I just get this *this*.
> (87, emphasis original)

In "Gnosticism III," however, Carson's reliance on intertextuality is far more explicit: the "first line has to make your brain race that's how Homer does it" (89). Subsequently, "Gnosticism V" gives up any pretence of originality in literature when the speaker asserts that "to inspire me is why / I put in a bit of Wordsworth but then the page is over, he weighs it to the / ground" (92). Thus, Carson seems to evoke Harold Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence as she alludes to the brittle balance between inspiration and appropriation in literature, which T. S. Eliot phrased earlier as "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal" (206). This preoccupation with literary names remains a constant throughout Carson's work. However, it is not always clear who is being addressed or to whom the poem refers. For example, the second half of "Ode to Sleep," Carson's unorthodox conclusion to her essay in *Decreation* on sleep, moves in rapid succession from a second-person "your" to a third-person "her" and "she," a first-person "me," and a third-person "they":

> later! Later,
> not much left but a pale green *upsilon* embalmed between *butter* and *fly*—
> but what's that stuff he's dabbing in your eye?
> It is the moment when the shiver stops.
> A shiver is a perfect servant.
> Her amen sootheth.
> "As a matter of fact," she confides in a footnote, "it was
> a misprint for *mammoth*."
> It hurts me to know this.
> Exit wound, as they say. (41, emphasis original)

Carson stages an almost dramatic dialogue of competing voices, but the different characters are not named or introduced—they rather belong to the speaker's subconscious. Carson thus deliberately obfuscates the distinction between enunciation (the utterances of the speaker), enounced (the statements made by the unnamed characters), and the announced or the agency of Carson as a writer, to borrow Rachel Blau DuPlessis' terminology (27), thereby spurring the reader to reconcile these various mental associations making up the speaker's subconscious.

A similar questioning of voice takes place in "Quad" when the speaker relates how most of Beckett's students to whom he lectured in Paris in 1931 "were doing their nails but one of them (Rosie) wrote down everything he said in a small notebook which she was courteous enough to show me" (121). This statement is troubling for a number of reasons. Firstly, the reader is confronted with the veracity of the account as Carson appears to blur fact and fiction. It seems probable enough that a reader would take the first part of the statement on Beckett's teaching position at face value, but the (fictional) character of Rosie might cast doubt on the whole account. Secondly, Carson again appears to blur the distinction between enunciation, enounced, and her agency as an author, since it is unclear to whom Rosie showed her notebook. However autobiographically inspired Carson's lyric essays may (appear to) be, the speaker in the collection is clearly *not* the author. Instead, Carson self-consciously complicates notions of authenticity and veracity in a genre that could be called autobiographical fiction by directing the reader's attention to the fact that her collection remains fictional. Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (1998), a rewriting of an ancient Greek myth concerning the red monster Geryon, can be placed within this same troubling paradigm. Yet this fictional aura is nevertheless convoluted by the numerous intertextual references that stem from a very human author who "wears her brain on her sleeve" (Merkin). In *Decreation*, Carson reflects on notions of authorship and presence in writing while stating, in her essay in the collection on the concept of decreation, that

> to be a writer is to construct a big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice and any claim to be intent on annihilating this self while still continuing to write . . . must involve the writer in some important acts of subterfuge or contradiction. (171)

Carson thus draws attention to the ontological relationship between writing and being, and thereby appears to reformulate Descartes' adage as "I write, therefore I am."

The issue of who is speaking becomes even more complex when considering that Carson does not seem to make a fundamental distinction between her academic and fictional writing. When asked about this distinction by Peter Streckfus in an interview about *Decreation*, Carson states:

> When I started to write the libretto, I had already worked on an academic lecture about Simone Weil, Marguerite Porete, and Sappho. The analytic level was there. The libretto was the fumes coming off that analytic effort, the sort of intoxicating fumes left in the room by mashing up all the grapes of the academic part. So, not that different but more pleasant. Not a different part of my mind. (Streckfus 216)

In this respect, it is telling that Carson's essay on decreation first appeared in the academic journal *Common Knowledge* in 2002, before *Decreation* was published as a collection, while two of the three opera instalments on decreation, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* and *Fight Cherries*,[4] were performed in 1999 and 2001, respectively (Streckfus 214; Carson, "Mirror"). Thus, according to Carson, there is no clear opposition between these two realms of her writing, which has enduring implications for the notion of voice in her collection: not only does it allow her to amalgamate fact and fiction, it also gives her the freedom to infuse her authority as a scholar into her fictional voices. As a literal case in point, "Lots of Guns: An Oratorio for Five Voices," included in *Decreation*, was originally recited by Carson herself, who was one of the performers during its debut in 2003 (115), but here again, the text of the oratorio does not indicate who these five voices represent or which parts of the text they each take on.

Beckett, a primary intratextual figure in Carson's collection, proclaimed earlier in his *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1958): "What matter who's speaking" (85). A second major literary name in *Decreation* is Homer, whose *Odyssey* and *Iliad* are discussed at length in the essay on sleep and in the oratorio, and who also makes an appearance in the essay on the sublime, in "Gnosticism III," in "Quad," and in the third part of the opera. Furthermore, Virginia Woolf plays a prominent role in the collection as well, since her story "A Haunted House," her essay entitled "The Sun and the Fish," and her novels *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, and *The Voyage Out* are discussed extensively in the essays on sleep and the solar eclipse. Philosophers, too, are rewarding objects of study in *Decreation*. Immanuel Kant, for one, is mentioned in the essay on sleep and in several of the collection's series of "Sublimes." Plato's *Krito* is referenced in the essay on sleep and he later reappears in the sublime titled "L' (Ode to Monica Vitti)" as well as in the third part of the opera. Moreover, the treatise *On the Sublime* by the

ancient literary critic Longinus provides a conceptual basis for Carson's essay on the sublime, and Longinus subsequently makes an appearance in the "Sublimes" and in the first part of the essay on decreation, where he is credited with the preservation of Sappho's Fragment 31. Finally, the director Michelangelo Antonioni plays an equally important role in the essay on the sublime, the accompanying rhapsody, and the "Sublimes" as a whole, of which the opening poem bears the telling title "Longinus' Dream of Antonioni." Other prominent literary figures that are mentioned in the collection include Byron, Artaud, Keats, Milton, Tolstoy, Hegel, Nabokov, Dickinson, and Dillard, to name but some. Carson too makes reference to Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and thereby indirectly offers an insight, so I argue, into the effect of these intratextual figures in her collection. According to Carson, "Stoppard uses the familiarity of Shakespeare's play to lock us into the badness of the bad dream" (35), and it is precisely this "sense of being governed by laws outside us" (35) that facilitates the coalescence of these intratextual figures that inhabit the speaker's subconscious.

Yet it is not always clear whether the information that is attributed to these historical figures is accurate or fictional, as Carson does not always provide a source, for example when she writes that "'Lovers all show such symptoms as these,' Longinus says" (160) without providing a reference. Furthermore, the sublime "Mia Moglie (Longinus' Red Desert)" starts off with a presumed quotation by Longinus that reads "'For instance, Sappho,' as Longinus says" (67) and then continues with a series of sentences between quotation marks of which both the source and the speaker are unclear, thereby evoking a lingering monologue that does not seem to be addressed to or spoken by anyone in particular. Yet crucially, the poem ends with another citation that is supposedly written by Longinus: "'[A]s I believe I said,' Longinus adds" (68). The poem thus blurs the distinction between quotations and chunks of conversation, and by extension, fact and fiction, as Carson uses quotation marks for both purposes. In this regard, the formal organization of the collection plays a pivotal role as well, given that *Decreation* opens with a series of poems entitled "Stops," followed immediately by the essays on sleep and on the sublime. In these essays, quotation marks do represent actual quotations, accompanied by endnotes, but this is not the case for the "Sublimes" that follow. What is more, Carson heightens the sense of (false) factual representation in "Mia Moglie" by printing the speech (and thought) representation of other unnamed characters in italics: "On the street she

pulls herself along, *to get there will be worse*," for example, and "*What is that antenna for?* she asks a man. *To listen to the noise / of stars—*" (68). In this way, Carson is able to riff on historical figures in intricate, fictional patterns that interweave around the collection's speaker.

Decreation is suffused not only with fictionalized accounts of historical figures, but also with narratives of actual fictional figures. By way of illustration, the "H & A Screenplay" revolves around the affair between the theologist Abelard and his student Heloise, one of the most famous couples of the Middle Ages (Bulman 2, 15), whereas the first part of the opera, "Love's Forgery," is based on an ancient Greek myth concerning the love triangle between Aphrodite, Hephaistos, and Ares. Furthermore, some passages in the collection hinge on mere speculation rather than textual documentation, such as the conversations between Simone Weil and her parents in the third part of the opera. In general, Carson often provides an additional, fictionalized account of the topics and figures she introduces in her essays—although their lyric quality already imbues these expositions with a fictional strain. In this regard, the "Sublimes," the "Gnosticisms," and the rhapsody titled "The Day Antonioni Came to the Asylum" all revisit the essay on the sublime, the opera in three parts complements the essay on decreation, and the "Ode to Sleep" supplements the essay on sleep by evoking a dream logic. Yet different media and genres call for different content, and such transfers of meaning operate by the principle of *transduction*. In more concrete terms, the material is transposed from one medium to another whereby the mediating role of the transfer results in a conceptual fitting together or negotiation (Collard 23). I therefore do not consider the process of transduction to be merely an act of translation, as Gunther Kress does (125). In the case of *Decreation*, this phenomenon can be illustrated by the fact that the opera on decreation, which revisits the preceding essay, does not comprise a fourth part, in contrast to the four parts of the supposedly three-part essay. More importantly, the first part of the opera is not simply centred on Sappho, the woman writer under scrutiny in the first part of the essay, but rather on her object of worship, namely the goddess Aphrodite. Thus, Carson's intratextual rewritings confirm adaptation's potential as a syncretic structuring process rooted in analogical thought (see Collard 23-24), as she produces a synthetic disjunction of analogical counterparts straddling fictional historiography, rewritten mythology, and lyrical criticism. I therefore contend that Carson is able to instill a blurring of the speaker's identity in the reader by means of intratextual echoes of names, whose lives

she rewrites in different genres that obfuscate the distinction between fact and fiction, and whose speech and thought representation she complicates through her deft use of quotation marks and italics. As a work of re-engagement whose speaker emerges as a synthetic disjunction of intratextual voices, *Decreation* is thus able to bypass discussions of authenticity in literature by highlighting the importance of productive intervention on the reader's part.

3. Echoes and Iteration

In his article on sublime disembodiment in *Decreation*, Dan Disney states that "the poems in 'Stops' speak less of integration by assembling parts of a life into an imaginative order, and more of a rhapsodic swerve towards disintegration" (35). Yet this sense of disintegration is countered by the numerous echoes, which can rightfully be described as the kernel of Carson's literary project (Thorp 23). To forestall ambiguity, I want to clarify that such echoes do not refer to literal repetitions, such as the figure of the wind or the swallow that do recur as motifs in the collection, but rather to the reassessment of central ideas. This specific understanding of an echo as a variation on a leitmotif yields a sense of repetition-with-difference while engendering continued creation in an analogical whirlwind of personal associations. I now turn to explore how Carson's use of echoes instills a sense of continuity that counterbalances the fragmented quality of the collection through an eternal, mythical time. After all, *Decreation* can be seen as a concerted work of literature, in the sense that "any idea must be perpetually rewritten, re-understood, re-transformed" (Thorp 23). Whereas Thorp suggests that rewriting—in the sense of exploring the notion of a bounded text—constitutes the crux of Carson's praxis (24), I will treat her narrative technique as a signification strategy that illustrates how a concept, in this case the notion of decreation, is established. As Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander expound in their work on analogy, every concept in our mind is continually enriched by a succession of analogies in a constant oscillation between the known and unknown (3).

In his incisive account of Carson's narrative technique in "The Glass Essay," Ian Rae reads the poem as a bilingual pun on the Canadian compound term *verglas*, which stands for a fine, glass-like layer of limpid ice caused by April thaws or freezing rain (164, 182). He furthermore claims that "'The Glass Essay' has come to define Carson's narrative technique" (163). The similarity between "The Glass Essay" and "Gnosticism II" in *Decreation*

may be simply fortuitous, but the latter too draws on the concepts of ice and glass through the image of windows at night. The following excerpt from "Gnosticism II" provides a stepping stone to my own investigation of narrative technique in *Decreation*:

> Forgot? how the mind goes at it, you open
> the window (late) there is a siffling sound,
> that cold smell before sleep, roofs,
> frozen staircase, frozen stair,
> a piece of it comes in.
>
> Comes in, stands in the room a bit of a column of it alive.
> At first no difference then palely, a dust,
> an indentation, stain
> of some guest
> centuries ago.
>
> Some guest *at this very hour* . . . (88, emphasis original)

On the face of it, the poem seems to be made up of repeated phrases such as "frozen stair," "comes in," and "guest." Yet it also offers a critical reflection on analogy's key role in cognition. The poem starts with a reference to memory and then proceeds by progressively ushering the reader into a vortex of associations that gradually give rise to the speaker's object of memory, namely the ghostly guest. The poem thus revolves around a tightly interwoven associative cluster consisting of a speaker, the half-forgotten memory, and the nightly cold.

This triadic configuration is characteristic of Carson's narrative technique in general. According to Rae, "Carson's triads grow through symmetrical accretions around innocuous details until they take on a unique shape" (168). In "The Glass Essay," this triangular structure is formed by the speaker, her mother, and Emily Brontë (Rae, 168), whereas in *Decreation*, the three women under scrutiny in the title essay each provide a distinct perspective on the notion of spiritual annihilation. Yet these triadic configurations do not account for the echoes that pervade *Decreation* and thereby evoke a sense of repetition-through-difference. Rae's observation about Carson's use of conceits proves helpful in this regard:

> Whereas Donne's conceits draw unlike entities into a convergent state of synonymy through brilliant but outrageous comparisons, Carson *clusters related entities together and explores their similarities without ever finally unifying or arresting them*. Instead, these affinities serve as means for the author to change narrative foci, defer conclusions, explore ideas from different angles, negate initial hypotheses, and develop new ones. (167-68, emphasis mine)

Rae thus argues that Carson draws on the affinities between *related* elements to advance her poem. However, building on and extending Rae's analysis, I am arguing that by juxtaposing seemingly *disparate* elements in *Decreation*, Carson's narrative technique encourages distinct entities to be viewed through the prism of analogy, which captures a synthetic disjunction. So whereas Rae states that the aim of this method is to "clarif[y] their subtle but important differences" (168), my reading shifts the focus by letting Carson's juxtapositional method take centre stage: the purpose is not to foreground similarity and to elucidate minor differences, but rather to inspire a new understanding of distinct elements that allows for similarity despite difference, i.e., a synthetic disjunction. In this way, the overarching conceit of decreation is evoked by juxtaposing dissimilar entities that together offer a variation on this key motif.

As a first example of Carson's juxtapositional technique, I would like to consider the following excerpt from "Gnosticism IV":

> at the moment in the interminable dinner when Coetzee basking
> icily across from you at the faculty table is all at once
> there like a fox in a glare, asking
> *And what are your interests?*
> his face a glass that has shattered but not yet fallen. (90)

In this excerpt, Carson connects—seemingly—unrelated elements, including the figure of author J. M. Coetzee, an unnamed "you," and shattered glass. However, considering that Coetzee is also an academic, I argue that Carson's juxtapositional method allows us to reflect on the dangers of the competitive streak in academic life. Crucially, here, too, ice and glass play a prominent role, and both contribute to the sense of insecurity (the breakability of glass) and confrontation (the slipperiness of ice) that characterizes academia. In particular, the phrase "his face a glass that has shattered but not yet fallen" may point to a potential burnout or the uneasy feeling that arises when you give in to the pressure of social networking, which can both be regarded as a particular instance of the overarching metaphor of decreation. This passage thus exemplifies how Carson crafts a synthetic disjunction of perspectives and how this "process of congealing wherein things are connected by a medium of *glace* yet do not abandon their distinct identities" (Rae, 171) is instrumental in evoking an atmosphere of pushing past one's boundaries.

Another example of Carson's method of juxtaposition that generates echoes of decreation throughout the collection can be found in "Our Fortune":

In a house at dusk a mother's final lesson
ruins the west and seals up all that trade.
Look in the windows at night you will see people standing.
That's us, we had an excuse to be inside.
Day came, we cut the fruit (we cut
the tree). Now we're out.
Here is a debt
paid. (6)

Again, the speaker's mother, the downfall of the west, people standing, and debt seem unrelated to one another, but Carson manages to tie these elements in with a sense of sublime transcendence. As the mother's "final lesson" on her deathbed amounts to a rejection of Western capitalism and materialism, the speaker and their mother are ultimately able to perceive reality in a fashion reminiscent of Plato's cave: they have escaped the cave ("Now we're out") and can see reality for what it really is in an act of sublime decreation. Rae thus rightly notes that "the clarity of Carson's work is enhanced, not obscured, by this circuitousness because each variation of the . . . motif is like a lens magnifying the significance of the preceding and succeeding variations" (165). Put differently, Carson's narrative technique in *Decreation* operates on the basis of analogy at two levels simultaneously: both within the juxtaposed entities that together evoke a sense of decreation on a micro level and between the resulting variations on decreation throughout the collection on a macro level.

As Carson's readers thus forge links within and between dissonant chains of elements, reverberating echoes are created and recuperated within a paradigm that rejects referential thinking. Within the context of such [an] intricate network of relations, Rae postulates that "The Glass Essay" fuses "the paratactic qualities of the modernist lyric (in which the poem leaps from one topic to another without transitional matter) with the hypotactic logic of the essay (in which the essay develops an argument using classical techniques of rhetorical persuasion)" (164). In relation to *Decreation*, I am thus arguing that, by favouring an analogical over a referential logic, Carson's collection "camouflage[s] hypotaxis as parataxis, such that her seemingly fragmented poetry retains an element of rhetorical coherence and force, while at the same time undermining the element of subordination in the hypotactic logic" (Rae, 183). In other words, by relying on relationships of similarity-in-difference between the juxtaposed elements, *Decreation* is able to offer an alternative to hypotaxis, without, however, compromising coherence.

Clearly, Carson's hallmark juxtapositional technique mirrors the thematic concerns of the collection. As content and medium thus reflect and reinforce each other, a recursive loop is generated at the heart of which lies a "revisiting effect" (Delville 223), not least since the variations on the central metaphor of decreation reverberate throughout the collection. This kind of repetition with a difference, also known as iteration (Callens 77), is characteristic of the loop as "a structuring device which, unlike mere repetition, intentionally 'returns upon itself' by 'revisiting' previous compositional units or segments of a given artwork" (Delville 222). By way of illustration, the poem "Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions" is suffused with variations on key themes, which include the colour green, love, the intolerability of existence, and by extension, death, through phrases such as "green room," "the greenness of love," "things unbearable," "to be unbearable," "this little size of dying," "still die," and "legs die" (*Decreation* 72-73). Key to my argument is the coupling of these apparently unrelated variations on major themes—already reverberations in themselves—which together echo the overarching conceit of decreation, as the poem reflects on the ambiguities of love:

> The oceans remind me
> of your green room.
> There are things unbearable.
> Scorn, princes, this little size
> of dying.
> . . . . . .
> I tempt you.
> I blush.
> There are things unbearable.
> Legs alas.
> Legs die. (72-73)

The associative cluster that Carson presents in this passage homes in on romantic heartbreak, which is in turn buttressed by visually foregrounding the notion of death.

4. The Mythic Past

The central theme of personal annihilation is thus formally echoed in Carson's paratactic narrative technique of juxtaposing seemingly disconnected elements, as visually reinforced in the visual-textual dynamics. Crucially, this recursive loop is closely related to the workings of myth. In this respect, Rae references Michael Ondaatje, who states that myth is produced through "a very careful use of echoes—of phrases and images.

There may be no logical connection when these are placed side by side, but the *variations* are always there setting up parallels" (qtd. in Rae, 174, emphasis mine). Furthermore, Rae draws attention to a particular understanding of myth Carson advances in *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001): "All myth is an enriched pattern, / a two-faced proposition, / allowing its operator to say one thing and mean another, to lead a double life" (qtd. in Rae, 176). It is clear that the deliberate use of variations on a key idea often results in the text's potential meaning being Janus-faced or even multifarious—which is exactly where the importance of analogical thinking manifests itself.

Yet such an "enriched pattern" has implications more far-reaching than mere polysemy. Rather, Carson's literary project of perennially re-engaging with her material plays a pivotal role in evoking a mythical time—a quality so very characteristic of Carson's writings. Paratactic shifts therefore not only result in what John D'Agata calls a "parallel present tense" of juxtaposed elements (qtd. in Rae, 183), but also in a wholesale reconceptualization of time—and, by extension, literature—as not merely layered, as Rae states (173), but as representing a continuity between past and present. Meanings become transitory as "each variation of the key motif in Carson's . . . [collection] cycles through moments of dominance, subordination, blurred identity, and complementarity before congealing in a surprising state of suspension" (Rae, 183). Yet crucially, these variations encourage analogical reasoning and imbue the collection with a sense of coherence and continuity. This cyclic rather than linear progression is therefore instrumental in instilling a mythical quality in the core of *Decreation*, which warrants a reassessment of Carson's praxis as aporetically probing the meanings of not only concepts, but entrenched patterns of thinking in general. Heloise rightly notes that "[still] the absence of time divides itself perpetually / into the one same moment / (repeat)—" (*Decreation* 131) as Carson revisits the past and thus revaluates the present in a recursive loop.

Carson's *Decreation* makes clear that any work of re-engagement, whether with central ideas or with the (literary) past, relies on a synthetic disjunction that re-evaluates apparently dissimilar entities in a process of reconciliation. While the reader of this dialogical collection is coaxed into toggling between fictional and fictionalized accounts of mythical and historical figures, these intertextual references in many instances develop into intratextual echoes, which together evoke a system of association that results in a blurring of identity between the polyphony of voices and the speaker, who has affinities

with Carson herself. Since this analogical reasoning is largely reliant on the reader's own idiosyncratic associations, the syncretic speaker of *Decreation* ultimately becomes the sum of the readers' partial recognitions of themselves in the plethora of voices. Equally, the continual rewriting of the central trope of decreation inspires a mythical sense of perpetuity that is capable of counterbalancing the paratactic quality of the collection. In this way, Carson's play with personae and distinct use of echoes trigger the reader to reconcile seemingly incongruous perspectives within an aesthetic of stereoscopy.

Rather than offering us brittle failures possessing "neither substance nor technique" (Solway 50), *Decreation* hinges on a network of relations connecting the author, her personae, and the overarching trope of decreation approached from multiple angles. Carson's revisioning of the authorial voice requires critical intervention on the reader's part and thus points toward the pitfalls and limitations of a belief in overt authorial control. Fully comprehending the critical nexus between authorship and scholarship therefore requires a recognition of the synthetic disjunction that allows for a sustained engagement with the principle of iteration as repetition-through-difference. As a metamodernist poet, Carson ceaselessly interrogates the leaking boundaries that define distinct voices and concepts. The significance of her work therefore lies precisely in its potential to give us a deeper appreciation for the fluctuating relationship between similarity and difference.

NOTES

1 By way of illustration, in the chapter with the loaded title "The Trouble with Annie," Canadian poet and literary critic David Solway excoriates Carson's work while claiming, *inter alia*, that "the scholarship for which she is celebrated merely exacerbates her overall performance" (41).
2 All further references are to the 2006 Jonathan Cape edition of *Decreation*.
3 See, e.g., Bloom (1997), Orr (2003), or Allen (2011).
4 In *Decreation*, the second part of the opera is called "*Her* Mirror of Simple Souls."

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Mark Cochrane

Precipitate of Abandoned Object-Cathexes

Ego does
absorb loss, loss does
absorb ego
without waste or remainder.
It is a perfect ecology,
it is a psychology
of recycling: thus "I." Thus
in every possible
parallel universe
"I" would have opted
to elope down the Oxted Line—
it would have chosen the grape scissors.

The night she victory-marched
past the Glass Slipper
(the whole block burned down)
I decided
it could either follow her
or begin dying. I followed her
for as long as it could stand
the Gillette of rejection that bisected
each moment
of puckered ripe attention. I believed
it treated people this way itself
but never before
had I knelt to receive
that corrupt apple. I called it love
& still does. Like a kind of self-
lashing Odysseus
I observed the carnage of her past—

the rock star
retired to his country seat;
the journalist
who thrashed in a chum of libel—
& vowed not to haemorrhage as they had haemorrhaged

when she said goodbye. Nay, I
would continue to secrete the boy silk,
it would harden to a pearl
around the grit shard she left it
& that pearl would bear her visage
like a cameo:

~~I haemorrhaged.~~
~~In every possible~~
~~parallel universe~~
~~it would have.~~

Sam Weselowski

Jeff Derksen's Citational Poetics

By what methodological shift might poets and critics rephrase that pesky question of revolutionary action, the one Marxism posed at the onset of the last century: "What is to be done [about neoliberalism]?"[1] How has this question since survived decades of ideology critique that duelled with neoliberalism's becoming-economic of everyday life in the first place? The problem, Adam Tooze notes, is that most critiques of neoliberalism chastise its "intellectual logic and history of ideologies and modes of government, rather than investigating processes of accumulation, production, and distribution" (135). Marxist literary and cultural critic Annie McClanahan sketches the urgent shift in method as a materialist one, proposing that "if we attend to material conditions . . . we might find that the change in consciousness or subjectivity described by theorists of neoliberalism is more imputed than real" ("Serious" 111). By giving attention to material conditions—the mechanisms of dispossession, the lived experiences of the economic regime—McClanahan contends that *actually-existing neoliberalism* becomes not purely an object of scrutiny but a site of struggle that takes its horizon of critique to be the historical end of capital. So how does poetry, that greeny flower, that marginalia of political economy, conjugate the material conditions of neoliberalism? How does this methodological shift bring into focus poetry's comportment toward capital?

To pursue these questions of real politics, I argue that Vancouver poet Jeff Derksen's *The Vestiges* (2013) adopts a range of citational practices and modes to critically examine the material conditions of *neoliberalization*. With citational poetics, I see Derksen's writing undertake a creative practice that cites multiple textual forms—statistics, unattributed quotations,

pop songs, Marxist theory—to recalibrate the poem's capacity for social observation alongside its ability to mobilize these textual forms against large-scale economic structures that far exceed the structure of the poem itself. In *The Vestiges*, citational poetics enables the poem to be grounded in specific encounters between material conditions and historical moments, textual feelings and lived experiences. By making the terminological shift toward neoliberalization, I move away from the classic reading of Derksen's poetics that sees it partake in the drama of exposure surrounding the ideology of neoliberalism, a reading which tends to overemphasize "ideology" and "neoliberalism" as philosophical monuments at the centre of contemporary social life. Writing on Derksen's *Transnational Muscle Cars*, Herb Wyile argues that the critical thrust of this work "prompts us to question the ubiquitous verities of neoliberal globalization and to make space for 'other rationalities'" (71). Peter Jaeger similarly states that "[t]he practice of conjoining economic relationships with ideology is key to Derksen's cultural poetics" ("'But Could I" 35). These appraisals of Derksen's poetics provide invaluable waypoints for understanding the political terrain of his writing, yet they nonetheless privilege the critique of neoliberal ideation over material conditions. I instead focus on how Derksen's citational poetics dilates the *processes* of neoliberalization—shining a harsh light on the linkages between subjectivity and financialization, gentrification, and labour relations—as they constitute the lived experiences of the economic regime.

The critique of neoliberalization documented by Derksen's citational poetics draws together the dual and often contradictory cohabitations of neoliberal practices and principles—its utopian visions of liberatory individualism laced with lethal programs of austerity, for example—thereby depicting how the poetic text rearticulates these cohabitations across spatial scales. As Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore argue: "[R]ecognizing neoliberalization as tendentially processual, always partial, and adaptively protean means confronting the complex and often contradictory intermixing of the practices and principles of market rule," and that in particular the *variegation* of these practices "refers not to some pretext for cartographic distractions but to what are always variable and contingent states of cohabitation" (255-56). Derksen's citational poetics similarly interprets the economic regime not so much as a monolithic force but as a complex network composed of small- and large-scale processes saturating the social world. Thus, the work of citation in Derksen's writing doesn't solely mount into a litany of systemic injustices pertaining to actually-existing neoliberalism so much as it stages the

dialectical unease between lived experience and economic structure at the heart of neoliberal realism. In this way, citation captures the scale-sensitivity inherent to Derksen's description of poetry writing against capital. For Derksen, poetry's ability to enjamb the spatial and social separations of late capitalism across its variegated terrain constitutes

> a political and aesthetic discourse, one capable of both turning inward and outward . . . and a discourse that does not fall into narrowed movements of inward *or* outward, but can tie the scales of subjectivity and agency to geopolitics and the production of a transnational public sphere that questions 'who' constitutes this sphere, and reverse the scales back down through the urban territory to new political claims made in globalized cities. (*Annihilated Time* 84, emphasis original)

Examining the paratactic orchestrations of writers like Louis Cabri, Carol Mirakove, and Kevin Davies, Derksen asserts that poetry can "tie" the political constructions of local, regional, national, and global space together in ways that reflect how individual and collective agencies are formed by *and against* the multi-scalar structure of global capital. Derksen suggests that poetry offers not so much another hermeneutic to cognitively map the social totality, but instead provides a fine-grained medium that toggles between detail and system, subject and structure. This poetics of scale similarly underwrites Derksen's own aesthetic project, where citationality, with its capacity to juxtapose multiple discourses at once, entails a very specific method with which to conceive questions of geopolitics and subjectivity across the topos and temporalities of neoliberalization.

Over the course of this article, I define Derksen's citational poetics as a practice that is not adequately represented by his practice of quotation alone but encompasses a whole critical project. Foremost, I argue that Derksen's citational poetics examines how the disparate materials of neoliberalization—depictions of gentrification, quotations of critical theory, recollections of chart-topping hits, references to overthrown governments—bear witness to the present conjuncture. At the same time, Derksen's sense of citationality makes legible the ways in which poetry, as a textual practice necessarily comprising many voices and social relations, aesthetically theorizes integrative modes of Marxist critique arrayed against the material conditions of actually-existing neoliberalism.

Rearticulating Citational Poetics

If intertextuality involves the relationship between texts (often literary texts), then citational poetics primarily underscores the pre-existing status of textual matter, and does so by assembling the literary and non-literary

alike. Citing means copying while retaining the frame of reference, thereby probing how textual matters cohabitate. By employing typographical cues that embolden the alterity of sources—quotation marks, italics, brackets—citational poetics places authorial commentary and pre-existing textual matter in dialectical unease.

"*[C]itationality*, with its dialectic of removal and graft, disjunction and conjunction, its interpenetration of origin and destruction," Marjorie Perloff writes, "is central to twenty-first-century poetics" (17, emphasis original). For Perloff, citational poetics designates the interplay of source and authorial commentary that reflects the deep pleasure of chance discovery found throughout modern and contemporary poetry. Here, citation implies a synchrony of texts that is otherwise thwarted by the large-scale passage of space and time, ultimately pursuing modes of aesthetic mediation able to shuttle across multiple scales of historical and cultural activity. But in Derksen's writing, attending to the cohesive relations of citational practice also demands attending to its tensions. Like Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia that represents "a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships" (263), Derksen's citational poetics traffics in an array of discursive registers to locate the social conflicts of language in the material conditions of neoliberalism. For Derksen, citing and commenting on numerous textual forms is to be understood as a method that critically explores cohesion and contradiction.

The Vestiges builds on a sustained critique of neoliberalism that Derksen's poetics has undertaken since the early 1990s—a critique that has been largely elaborated citationally. The (curiously unnamed) serial poem spanning his books *Dwell* (1993) and *Transnational Muscle Cars* (2003), that "Oil for Food" in *The Vestiges* (2013) completes, exemplifies the citational methods used in Derksen's attack. In the midst of "But Could I Make a Living From It" from *Transnational Muscle Cars* we encounter:

> Good morning little graduate schoolboy.
> If only we could elevate poetry to pop culture—smells like corporate spirit.
> To give this a context, I'm writing below sea level, but I don't know what time it is and I don't speak the language.
> 1982: 1.2341.
> Any mood-altering substance please. (*Transnational* 30)

Composed of grammatically complete sentences appearing to bear no syntagmatic relation to the next, these "modular units" (as Jaeger terms them) jump from ironic observations of late capitalist ennui, to the annual spot rate between US and Canadian dollars, to unattributed quotations

cribbed from critical theory and advertising as well as spoonerisms of pop lyrics. This produces a disjunctive canvas which twists far more than maps the relations (social, economic, spatial) between neoliberal subjectivity and globalization at hyper speed.

Likewise consisting of grammatically complete sentences organized into discrete modular units, and considering its equal parts whimsical and ironic tone, Bob Perelman's "China" is an important precursor for Derksen's citational arrangements:

> We live on the third world from the sun. Number three. Nobody tells us what to do.
> . . . . . .
> If it rains, you either have your umbrella or you don't.
> . . . . . .
> The landscape is motorized.
> . . . . . .
> *Hey guess what?* What? *I've learned how to talk.* Great. (60-61)

Fredric Jameson relates the backstory to Perelman's modular text: "[S]trolling through Chinatown, [Perelman] came across a book of photographs whose idiogrammatic captions remained a dead letter to him. . . . The sentences of the poem in question are then Perelman's own captions to those pictures, their referents another image, another absent text" (*Postmodernism* 30). Perelman's paratactic lines can be read as prototypical to Derksen's modular poems, where the former's captions correspond to a lost photographic object akin to the latter's financial citations that offer spatiotemporal indices in place of a representation of global-scale economic relations. The citations and captions of "China" toggle between writing that both is and is not Perelman's, in that they refer not simply to an unattributed source but to the disappearance of that source from the text as such. At the same time, "China" explores (however subtly) the spatial relations and global structure of capitalist postmodernity: "We live on the third world from the sun. . . . Nobody tells us what to do." Jameson states that "insofar as this is in some curious and secret way a political poem, it does seem to capture something of the excitement of the immense unfinished social experiment of the New China . . . the unexpected emergence, between the two superpowers, of 'number three'" (29). But even as Jameson notes that "China" registers a turbulent shift in the world-system's geopolitical makeup, he suggests that "such meaning floats over the text or behind it" ("Postmodernism" 122). The sentence-by-sentence disjunction of "China" ratifies, for Jameson, a benign acceptance regarding the disappearance of

history in late capitalism, that is, "the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present" (125). But as Jaeger counters, Jameson's criticism "omits the collaborative effort that Language writing assumes for its reader," such that particled words and indeterminacy of meaning in fact stages a momentary encounter between reader and the very cultural logic Jameson diagnoses (*ABC* 92, 93). "China" demands that readers reckon with late capitalism's dissolution of historical time by engaging with a series of syntagmatically ambiguous sentences that have for their background the modern world-system's historical transformation. At the same time, and scaling back down to the individual, the speaker appears torn between autonomy and resignation when confronted with this new geopolitical excitement as it is tempered by an emergent representational dilemma, shifting from the assertion that "Nobody tells us what to do" to observing that when it rains "you either have your umbrella or you don't."

Derksen's modular form is grammatically similar to Perelman's play of sentences, yet the content of his serial poem is overloaded with reference. Jaeger states that Derksen's practice of the modular unit "uses disjunction to dialogically foreground the links among subjectivity, economic relations, and social desire" ("'But Could I" 36), while Clint Burnham sees Derksen's text organized by what he terms "social collage": "The collage is social because of the putative political content here, *and* because the disjunction means the reader must construct meaning. The social is a collage because that formal structure is held to bear a relation . . . with the social world" (114, emphasis original). More specifically, the formal structure of Derksen's poem bears a relation with the social world by citing the processes that govern how social relations under capitalism are forged by forces and vectors that appear tenuous to the individual. Writing on the ways Derksen's poetics attempts resisting neoliberal ideology, Herb Wyile states that "one of the distinctive and insidious things about neoliberalism is the way in which its values [entrepreneurial freedom, faith in the market, etc.] have pervaded all walks of life and have come to enjoy the status of an unquestioned common sense," and that "a key part of the texture of *Transnational Muscle Cars* is an incisive grappling with the economic, political, cultural, and existential dimensions of the neoliberal order" (71). Wyile sees Derksen's poetics questioning the neoliberal order through his work's referential (or citational, I would argue) relationship to critical theory, as he argues this strategy "highlights his objective of denaturalizing and defamiliarizing neoliberal discourse,

especially with respect to relations between labour and capital" (77). But more than sighting (and citing) the shift from neoliberal values to general common sense, Derksen's citational poetics in "But Could I Make a Living From It" points toward the textual matter of neoliberalization. Serving as the coordinates of neoliberalism's economic *and* spatial relations, the annual spot rate figures intercalate the mock-cosmopolitan speaker that wanders flâneur-like across neoliberalism's globalized cities and surfaces.

Antagonistically, Derksen's use of economic figures first appears without context. "Oil for Food" in *The Vestiges* exhibits lines consisting of country names followed by percentages alongside other late capitalist slogans, word-play, and ironic commentary:

> "Unhappy workers."
> Canada 84.6%, Chile 11.9%, China 31.7%.
> I loved your novel, it's you I can't stand (and that's where the marketing campaign stops).
> Trickle-down architecture.
> "Is it really necessary to say something about the individual here?" (114)

Sianne Ngai describes a similar feature in Derksen's earlier writing, what she terms the "maimed statistic" ("West Germany 5.4%") that appears in his poem "Interface" from *Dwell*: "[T]he reader cannot fix it metaphorically, assign a concept to it, or send it on a metonymic voyage along a chain of other terms. . . . The reader can act on it only by not acting on it, by turning away—just as the maimed statistic itself turns away from its implicit referent" (181). What Ngai identifies is the kind of productive reading Derksen's poetics generates. That the text fails to offer a pre-booked metonymic voyage demands not so much that one turn away from these statistics but that they attempt to conceive of their situation in the poem's modular form. The text emerges as a site to produce rather than consume meaning, and this production is enacted by determining the relations between modular units across the wider (and dialogic) canvas of the poem. The contents of these modular units in turn locate the world-historical moment in which the text avowedly responds. As well, these percentages often come with a clue. Near the end of "Oil for Food" an unattributed quotation appears: "'It could just as credibly be said that 'the world owes this money to itself,' and so owes nothing'" (123). Reading this any time after the most recent of neoliberalism's financial crashes, where "money" and "owe" sound the alarm of financialization, these percentages isolate each nation's debt-to-GDP ratio, comparing the country's public debt to its gross domestic product.

Financialization, that decisive determination of social and economic life in the present, stands as one of neoliberalism's most reliable sources for extracting surplus value. Debt in particular expresses one of the clearest lived experiences of the global economy in ways that have been intensified by the cyclical financial crashes following 2008. Insofar as taking on consumer debt previously provided a means to "enhance 'discretionary' spending," McClanahan argues, the steady decline of worker wages and the devastation of the social safety net since at least the 1980s has transformed it into a primary form of economic subsistence, offering the sole means through which "many working- and middle-class families, as well as households experiencing persistent unemployment or underemployment, were able to continue to survive" (*Dead Pledges* 11). At a world-historical moment of rampant economic crisis where countries take on exorbitant amounts of debt eerily similar to the ways people are often forced to, Derksen's citational poetics articulates the bizarre homologies between citizens and nation-states both thrust into financialization's processes of capital accumulation, albeit at different socio-economic poles. At the same time, Derksen's citations of global financial relations and market jargon alongside ironic comments on the erosion of social welfarist programs as in "Oil for Food"—"A pension plan sinking like a ship's anchor offshored to Foxconn's supply chain" (110)—draw the individual into close contact with all manner of ideological abstraction as well as material conditions far beyond their immediate comprehension. Derksen's juxtapositions of individual pension, offshore finance, and supply chains elicit a kind of synesthesia for interpreting the material conditions of neoliberalism, where the socio-economic sensory organs have all been upended.

Reminiscent of Perelman, the maimed statistic of national debt in "Oil for Food" becomes a caption for the lost image of global economic relations, another absent text in the politics of everyday life. "Oil for Food" does not so much resolve the representational dilemmas of financialization as much as it reasserts the urgency of its problems in the present. In "Oil for Food," Derksen's citations enjamb rather than destroy the relations of space, finance, and lived experience, thus setting in motion both the open-endedness of the poem's modular form and the imperative to critique neoliberalization in relational, or dialectical, terms. "Oil for Food" resists the desire to perform a wholesale transformation of disjunction into conjunction, as though this transformation would offer some final clue to the inner workings of neoliberalism. Derksen's text instead confronts these problematics by

addressing the scalar that links individual pensioners to offshore finance, or that links the social to the economic in ways that are rarely visible when stretched across spatial scales. In short, Derksen's citational poetics suggests how these cohabitations can be rearticulated in ways that make their effects on multiple scales (scales that one might not readily sense) legible.

Cohering global flows of finance, Russian formalism, and anti-capitalist snark, Derksen's citational poetics in "But Could I Make A Living From It" and "Oil for Food" foremost puts the actual figures of neoliberalism's social, economic, and political projects into the text as important objects of study. Relatedly, other critics have commented not so much on Derksen's citational poetics as his use of quotation. Jason Wiens observes that "one of Derksen's recurring devices is the decontextualized quotation . . . as a sort of 'found poetry' whose assumptions are laid bare when placed under the sign of irony" (104). Writing on "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically" from *Transnational Muscle Cars*, Jennifer Blair notes that "[the poem is] chock-full of several quotations, as if borrowed from the ether of culture in which they circulate as freely available. Some read like bumper-sticker slogans . . . while some read like sound-bites from the news media" (87). Yet the pressure that citational poetics puts on the act of quotation ultimately conceives of a whole aesthetic practice, one that doesn't merely hoard the linguistic junk of neoliberalism but enjambs the signifiers of contemporary culture to the inscriptions of finance. That is, Derksen's citational poetics copies slogan and national debt percentage alike to address the abstractions of neoliberalism's world economy. If Derksen's quotations ironically lay bare the textual matter of neoliberalism, his citational poetics produces a geopolitical geometry in which the relations of structure and subject convulse. More specifically, Derksen's citations of debt stage how these figures interpenetrate everyday life—hence neoliberalism proceeds not as an ideological abstraction "elsewhere" but as a force which materially throttles the individual subject and their complex relationship to the political construction of local, national, and global space.

Citations as/in Vestiges

In comparison to the scattered citations of "Oil for Food" and the other poems from this modular series, *The Vestiges* is composed almost exclusively by citational means. The poem "'I welcome every opinion based on scientific criticism'" copies each instance that Marx uses the first-person pronoun in *Capital*, Volume 1; "But What of the City Itself?" reads like a cognitive map

of globalized cities the world over, though cities that are anthropomorphized to the extent that they are susceptible to capitalism's contradictions and overdeterminations—a line like "Before the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, New York was possibly the most egalitarian of any American city" is lifted from Susan Fainstein's *The Just City* (69)—and the text is appended by a works cited noting where each sentence is sourced. Meanwhile, "The Parenthetical" reproduces every single parenthetical remark from a specific chapter or essay from an individual author's work, all of whom are Marxist theorists of various stripes: Silvia Federici, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, and, eponymously, Karl Marx.

Yet the most vivid of these citations is in the design of the book itself. The front cover, with its stark contrasts of black and white dramatized by the hurtling of a water current (a detail from Alfredo Jaar's series *Searching for Gramsci*), would appear to dispute Jack Spicer's claim that "A drop / Or crash of water. It means / Nothing" (217). "*The Vestiges*," Derksen describes, "takes mid-sixties New Directions Paperback poetry books as its design model. . . . Accordingly, we chose Sabon, a typeface designed in 1966 by Jan Tschichold, to set the interior. The back cover copy is derived from an amalgam of New Directions Paperback Originals" (128). In his notes at the book's conclusion, Derksen discusses how the design choices of *The Vestiges*, serving as a kind of objective correlative to the poetics of works like George Oppen's *Of Being Numerous*, explore "what it would be like to do a *remake* of this type of poem" (125). Derksen's reproduction of mid-sixties, mainly Objectivist poetics is palpable in the materiality of *The Vestiges*; a citation that travels from cover design right down to the text's typeface. The front cover of *The Vestiges*, with its pairing of clarity and collision shot in black and white, bears a familial resemblance to the designs of Oppen's *The Materials* and *Of Being Numerous*, while the choice of Tschichold's late modernist typeface offers a further textual cue for the historical remake Derksen's work performs.

With its aleatory lyric units depicting Vancouver's Pacific Rim orientation set in and against the global flows of capital, the titular poem of *The Vestiges* performs multiple citations of Oppen's late modernist poetics:

> Linear tankers lie
> on the harbour's horizon.
>
> The speed of globalization.
>
> "Community-based
> crystal-meth focus groups."
> Jog by. (1)

That the poem opens epigraphically from Oppen's *Of Being Numerous* ("Not to reduce the thing to nothing—"), and makes more explicit reference to that text where it quotes his famous "'the shipwreck / of the singular'" (2), signals the Objectivist terrain upon which Derksen's poem moves. Indeed, Derksen's imperative to cite throughout "The Vestiges" draws on Oppen's poetics of quotation, a poetics which, as Peter Nicholls writes, "does not point outside the poem, but functions rather to disrupt any sense of unified poetic 'voice' even though sources are often obscured" (25). Similarly, "The Vestiges" features unattributed quotations of, among others, statements from news reports, as well as unattributed though fairly easy to parse quotations from Marx, "'The machine is a means / for producing surplus value'" (4). Included also are sections that quote critical theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu at length, serving as a clear nod to Oppen's citation of Walt Whitman in the last stanza of "Of Being Numerous" (51). Here, Derksen quoting Bourdieu becomes a citation of the very citationality underpinning Oppen's work. There are other poets present in "The Vestiges" too, such as Lyn Hejinian in one of the book's epigraphs, and the epistolary figure of Charles Olson, who receives a "Message mistakenly sent to Maximus and undisclosed recipients" (48). Like Oppen, Derksen's citationality disrupts a unifying poetic voice while probing how sourced texts both clarify and counteract social observation.

It is as though the spaces between the modular units of Derksen's multi-book serial poem have been ballasted in "The Vestiges" with Objectivist meditation, that pores over the fragments of real estate speculation, social struggles for property rights, and gentrification in globalized cities:

> Is mixed use
> sleeping in doorways
>
> the grey economy
> CDs cellphones tools cassettes batteries bikes lights shoes
> watches clothes
>
> spread on blankets
> on the sidewalks
>
> under the overhang
> of a pawnshop awning
>
> [consistently ranked number one
> in the world]. (19)

Here, the implied social function of multi-use buildings experiences a détournement by people who are experiencing homelessness or have precarious access to housing—people who actually use and live in and

around these spaces, often on the street, in spite of the real estate developers and municipal policy-makers trying to push them out. "The Vestiges" offers a realist depiction of a very specific moment in the grey market economy of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, observing how the sidewalk sale of *things*—electronics, clothing, tools—ironizes the meaning of "mixed use" as it relates to the activities of everyday life, the architecture of gentrification, and the collection of items the poem enumerates. "Mixed use" juxtaposes Vancouver's speculative and grey market economies and thus the determinations of wealth and subsistence they entail. Further, Derksen reconstructs the social contradiction between absolute poverty and the city's liveability ranking on the global stage by way of a broken citation—one that is not clearly attributed but is annually circulated. For "The Vestiges," Vancouver's contradictory economic cohabitations nevertheless designate (as the poem cites) one of the most liveable cities on the planet (a strange scalar indeed).

Unifying these poetic practices—citation and authorial commentary concentrating on the city and the spatial relations of speculative finance—is the concept of sincerity. As a compositional and political ethos held by the Objectivists, sincerity asserts the poem's capacity for social observation and ability to produce social meaning. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain write, the Objectivist's notion of sincerity suggests how the poem acts as "a mode of social observation, connecting a variety of basic, essential phenomena," and more explicitly how "Objectivists, with their decided sense of the line and their inventive serial organization, use the basic nature of poetry . . . to articulate social meaning" (3, 4). For the essential phenomena emphasized in "The Vestiges," sincerity registers how modes of economic subsistence (the grey economy spread onto a blanket) exist in spite of Vancouver's sloganized utopianism ("[consistently ranked number one / in the world]"). Objectivist social observation, and its rearticulation in "The Vestiges" (and throughout *The Vestiges*!), does not single out the contradictions of capital, because the contradictions are not a glitch but a feature of the lived experience of capital. Thus, a poetics of sincerity attempts, in Derksen's words, "To portray a thing or a place concretely and complexly through attention to the social relations both *in* and *around* the thing" ("Meaning It" 109). In Derksen's own poetics, sincerity demands giving attention to the social relations of actually-existing neoliberalism as they compose *and contest* its processes of dispossession.

Objectivist sincerity, as Charles Altieri stresses, "involves insistence on the surface of the poem as concerned primarily with direct acts of naming as signs of the poet's immediate engagement in the areas of experience made present

by conceiving the act of writing as a mode of attention" (33). Derksen's citational poetics similarly perform this act of naming, which is to say naming that does not solely describe the material conditions of capitalism but offers a space whereby it can be exposed and related more rigorously to the processes of gentrification, financialization, and property relations as they impinge on and impede everyday life. By positioning national debt, the grey economy, and the port city uncomfortably together, Derksen's citational poetics brings into focus the overlapping scales of the individual in the everyday and the economic system of capital. To tarry with this understanding of citationality in the expanded field, "The Vestiges" does not simply cite passages from other texts, or words that must appear in quotation marks, but cites what we might call actually-existing social processes: world-historical events, popular culture, and a whole host of economic and social facts that do not present themselves in easily reproducible terms. Derksen's citational poetics, while not able to capture the totality of these social processes in the camera flash of the citation, instead rearticulates them in ways that enunciate their relations, contradictions, and disjunctions at multiple scales. The sincerity of "The Vestiges" does not point out instances of the city's uneven development as local tragedies but contrasts them with the structure of capitalism and neoliberalism in the present, enjoining the choreographies of the city, the citizenry, and the spatial relations of finance.

Citational poetics untethered from quotation marks also offers ways of perceiving national, popular, and mass cultural production in the swirl of geopolitics that can then be scaled back down to the individual consuming that culture, even as they bear witness to global events: "[Marvin Gaye's 'Let's Get It On' / was top of the charts / the day the tanks were in Santiago's streets]" (23). Even without the injunction of the first-person pronoun, we sense that the speaker's individual experience of "Let's Get It On" maps onto a vast grid of culture and politics in world space amid a specific moment of social upheaval. Alternatively, "The Vestiges" registers spatial relations *through* the cultural, where a chart-topping hit connects American cultural production to Pinochet's regime. Here, "Let's Get It On" suddenly clips onto the Chilean coup d'état of 1973, while the title becomes a sardonic metonym for the devastation of the socialist option in the second half of the twentieth century. (One imagines they can hear the opening bars of "Let's Get It On" drift from an open window to the tanks below, where one libidinal economy steps into another.) That David Harvey pinpoints Pinochet's coup as "the first experiment with neoliberal state formation" (*A Brief History* 7) adds

another historical dimension to Derksen's citation of Gaye and this moment in the history of neoliberalism.

Proceeding from the Marvin Gaye citation, the poem rephrases Richard Nixon's order to destabilize Chile, where the speaker of Derksen's poem states that "The economy is still screaming," before closing with an unattributed quotation, "'We had a small victory / at city hall yesterday'" (24). Repressed so deeply within Nixon's command yet restored by Derksen is Marx. Surveying the 1851 French coup d'état, Marx argues that proletarian revolutions "criticise themselves constantly" while allowing the ruling class to "draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them . . . until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, *and the conditions themselves cry out*" (Marx 14, emphasis mine). These three types of citation—the pop culture reference, the rearticulation (and dialectical reversal) of Nixon, the unattributed quote—register the struggle for social and economic alternatives to capitalism across the long neoliberal moment, and specifically the persistence of that struggle where small claims and small victories apparently define the only viable tactic for Marxist praxis. Derksen's citational poetics doesn't aspire to simply depict the structural problems of capitalism and neoliberalism (poverty in one of the world's most liveable cities, the cultural encounter with a CIA-backed coup) such that, under their intolerable weight, class consciousness springs forth and revolutionary social change obtains. Rather, by articulating those processes of neoliberalization visible in the disjunctures and contradictions of capital in the present, Derksen's poem urges that these systemic injustices not appear as naturalized conditions but as a series of active relations which are always materially felt and exerted. "The Vestiges" interrogates the different proximities to these relations in the city, for different communities confront gentrification with varying speeds, stabilities, and solidarities. At the same time, Derksen's citational poetics scales up to the national and global, serving as the theatre where culture and geopolitics do not so much clash as trade symptoms with each other. Then, scaled back down to the individual, "The Vestiges" renders palpable the relations between popular culture and social upheaval, and how the practice of poetic citation indexes the history of crisis under neoliberalism alongside the history of struggle arrayed against it.

Parenthetical Citations

If capitalism and neoliberalism cannot be comprehended in their totality but instead only detected in their variegated cohabitations, "The Parenthetical"

groups together Marxist theorists differentially investigating particular though interlinked social conflicts. Transcribing the parenthetical remarks of theorists Federici, Marx, Althusser, and Marcuse, Derksen enunciates how theory addresses capital not from the battleground of abstraction but in relation to its material conditions. Derksen's copying of these authors in turn observes the ways in which they attempt working out the structural problems of the mode of production and its clutch on social life. The citational effect of "The Parenthetical," then, illustrates Marxist theory as a collective, processual effort that is shaped by specific contestations.

Beginning with Silvia Federici's classic Marxist-Feminist essay "Wages Against Housework," the first serial unit of "The Parenthetical" opens:

> (The magic words:
> "Yes, darling, you are a real woman")
>
> (which are relations of loneliness)
> (but to work in a factory is already a defeat)
>
> (Until recently airline stewardesses in the United States
> were periodically weighed
>
> and had to be constantly on a diet
> — a torture that all women know —
>
> for fear of being laid off) (62)

Cordoned off by lunulae, these parenthetical remarks appear modular-like, though these units are not the grammatically complete sentences found in "Oil for Food." Derksen's copying of Federici's parenthetical remarks offers not so much a précis of the original but a parallax view of it. The first parenthetical condescendingly interpellates the subject as "a real woman." The following line "(which are relations of loneliness)" suggests that this social act of interpellation is, paradoxically, an isolating one. However, because the parenthesis also serves as a kind of textual shield, "(which are relations of loneliness)" appears as its own autonomous, or referentless, statement, thereby torquing the poem's forward momentum such that the syntagmatic connections across the text become far more indeterminate. In this way, the performance of interpellation and factory work both become lonely relations among subjects. Yet loneliness itself is revealed to be the realism of capitalist social relations: "(capital has disciplined them through us / and us through them — / each other, against each other)" (62). Thus the gendered division of labour indexes but one powerful process in the broader program of social atomization fundamental to labour conditions, or how capital seeks to

decimate the organization of solidarities through the multiple kinds of social fragmentation and stratification it exerts inside and outside the workplace. By transcribing Federici's parenthetical remarks, Derksen proposes an alternative reading practice for critical theory, one that constructs the text as a dialogic site between modular units and key Marxist-Feminist arguments.

The serial form of "The Parenthetical" further interrogates the ways in which citational poetics rearticulates Marxism's different analytic modes and the sites of struggle in which they intervene. Foremost, Derksen uses multiple lyrical units to restage each individual theorist. The order of these poems suggests a recursive narrative, or a trajectory that travels back and forth temporally. The series begins with Federici in 1974, followed by Marx in 1867, then punctuated by the poem "But What of the City Itself?" succeeded by Althusser in 1971 and Marcuse in 1969, with Marcuse then leading into the final poem of *The Vestiges*, "Oil for Food." Besides Marx, all of Derksen's citations in "The Parenthetical" comprise a six-year period—they're all lodged between May 1968 and, *mutatis mutandis*, Pinochet's coup in 1973. The individual critiques of these theorists can also be read as responding to the broader citational structure of *The Vestiges*. The citation of Federici follows up Derksen copying every sentence in *Capital* where Marx uses the first-person pronoun in the poem "I welcome every opinion based on scientific criticism," a poem that tests, in Derksen's words, "if these first-person sentences could stand as a synopsis, or a personalized lecture, of the whole book" (*Vestiges* 126). Thus moving from a wholesale rearticulation of *Capital*, the first section of "The Parenthetical" hones in on a Marxist critique of feminized labour's denied access to the wage. Subsequently, Marx's incredulous parenthetical remarks from "The Working Day" are set beside the recitation of crisis-prone urban spaces in "But What of the City Itself?" whereas Althusser and Marcuse, who seem to stand at opposite ends of the Marxist spectrum, come to be placed side by side before the book turns to the closure of Derksen's long serial poem first begun in *Dwell*. The serial form of "The Parenthetical" thus explores how these parenthetical remarks can be read beside not just the other poems of the book, but more specifically the other kinds of citations Derksen deploys.

Mobilizing Citational Poetics

By interleaving its lyrical units with the various citational poems of *The Vestiges*, "The Parenthetical" mobilizes multiple kinds of aesthetic and political subject matter in Marxist theory, a mobilization that in turn

animates the politics of Derksen's poetics more broadly. With mobilization, I am referring to the ways in which citational poetics marshals texts, textualities, proposals, and processes, and particularly how citational poetics mobilizes these kinds of matter to be collectively arrayed against capitalism's and neoliberalism's material conditions. I borrow this sense of textual mobilization from Christopher Nealon, where he describes the ways in which "English-language poets since the 1980s have deployed figures of literacy and reading, not as 'postmodern' or self-referential tropes, but as indices to the history of poetry and to how its assembly of textual 'matter' competes with the massive organization of matter under capital" (45). For Nealon, the poetry emerging after and responding to Language writing (as Derksen's certainly is) riffs on "figures and concepts of the acquisition of literacy in order to investigate what kind of 'matter' poetry might be—and, often explicitly, set that matter against other 'matters' that seem to operate on a much larger scale" (46).

For Derksen, citationality offers one such figure of literacy used both to investigate the kinds of matter poetry is and to mobilize against the materiality of neoliberalism. Derksen's citational poetics, with its pairing of polysemy and social observation, locates the political stakes of Marxist critique in the exigencies of the present. That is, citational poetics in *The Vestiges* reasserts the poem as a fine-grained site of social observation that can rearticulate the complex linkages between individuals and the spatial relations of finance, and particularly how these linkages stretch across spatial scales. I'm arguing that Derksen's citational poetics aesthetically mobilizes Marxist critique as a political project in ways that resignify the poem's opposition to the large-scale structure of the neoliberal regime. This is not to say that Derksen's citational poetics marks the poem as anti-capitalist by sole virtue of the sources it draws from, nor does his poetics simply prop up the snide comment against the world-scale of capital. Rather, by assembling and mobilizing critical texts differentially engaged in the critique of capital, *The Vestiges* conceives an aesthetic practice of Marxist theory better situated to antagonize the structure of neoliberalism by collective means. In its citations of Federici, Marx, Althusser, and Marcuse, "The Parenthetical" serves as an emphatic collaboration between poetry and criticism, and Derksen's poetic citations of Objectivism more broadly affirm a critical lineage with which the historical continuity of poetry and politics is preserved. At the precipice of actually-existing neoliberalism's no-longer-certain future, *The Vestiges* proposes an urgent set of aesthetic tactics and coordinates with which poetry and its comrades can mobilize.

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NOTES

1 See Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), the title of which cites Nikolai Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel of the same name.

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Jade Wallace

Grip

After *Slip* by Sina Queyras

An owl made me think of
calling you, so I dialled each
number in his book until
I reached yours. The first
thing you say is *this may*
take a long time. I hope it does.
I'm desperate to share this with you.
Let's be peaks, pine trees, magpies.
We can wait for each other to change
slowly over centuries. We'll collect
every copper coin, every silver needle,
that the other leaves behind. We'll sew
pillows with the tamarind and jasmine that
arrive, tacit and silken, between snowfalls.

I know I've not yet loved you enough,
but how can we be in two beds
of feather and straw? We should be
lying in your bed eating moon jelly,
should be dying in one another's arms,
should be folding into each other like
nodding mushrooms, watching the
light turn apricot and morning glory
unfold its silk. One-night stands don't
linger for weeks. Pears for teeth,
they'll leave no lasting teeth marks
on our necks. Paramours fizz like
pop rocks and liquesce to nothing on
our tongues. Wait until we're face to face—

you'll see how our sweat, tears, longing,
are for each other. I could put winged
things in your shoes, fly you to the
palm of my hand. You, powdery and
trembling, a moth rustling from oak
leaves. I, too, shiver. We keep one eye
each on the back door, knowing it can
always be kicked in. Sometimes we
can't tell what is a door, a closet.
Those are no reasons to shun entrances.
There is a pause so lengthy on the line
I can hear a crow calling over the hollow.
Hours stretch themselves to days,
but I haven't the energy to hang up.

Your earlier words now pearling,
I fall in love with you once more.
I can see where I want us to
go and I dread the receiver's
click. How can we survive this
untransformed? Silence is a
door that swings open wide
the heart. If I were brave,
I would beg you to leap through.
It should be enough, though,
if each time you sit a little
closer to the threshold,
and let me fall asleep to
the possibilities of you.

Emilie Sarah Caravecchia

Se redéfinir dans la langue colonisatrice

Nouvelles voix autochtones francophones : *Chroniques de Kitchike* de Picard-Sioui et *Bréviaire du matricule 082* de Cousineau-Mollen

Pour un.e auteur.trice autochtone, le choix de la langue d'écriture n'est pas anodin. Ce choix est « toujours socialement marqué et politiquement tendu » (Bidwell 136), car — est-il nécessaire de se le rappeler — au Canada, la grande majorité des descendants des Premières Nations ne parlent pas leur langue ancestrale (Bidwell 169). Les politiques assimilationnistes, notamment la *Loi sur les Indiens* et la création des pensionnats qui en découle, sont largement responsables de la faible maitrise des langues autochtones et de la disparition complète de certaines autres. Ainsi, écrire dans la langue du colonisateur est toujours un choix conscient, pesé et mesuré. Maria Campbell (Métis) explique qu'il lui a fallu apprendre à trouver son rythme, son style; qu'il lui a fallu apprendre à manipuler l'anglais en le mettant à sa main (Bidwell 10). Ce processus lui fut nécessaire, afin de raconter son histoire — celle de son peuple — dans la langue anglaise du colon, cette langue qui n'était pas la sienne, le michif. Seulement là, elle s'est sentie libérée et capable d'utiliser — tel un outil de transmission, voire d'éducation — l'anglais. Dès lors, en se réappropriant les langues jusqu'alors oppressantes, les écrivain.e.s autochtones ont été en mesure de commencer à se réapproprier la narration de leurs histoires en jouant avec les codes des langues colonisatrices, et en renversant ainsi le schème de qui comprend ou ne comprend pas. De qui rit ou ne rit pas. De manière similaire, dans son recueil de nouvelles *Chroniques de Kitchike*, Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui (membre du clan du Loup de la nation athinye'nonnyahak du peuple Wendat) se réapproprie la langue colonisatrice française en en faisait un usage humoristique. C'est d'ailleurs à ce « survival

humour », pour reprendre l'expression de l'écrivaine Chippewa Louise Erdrich (citée dans Bidwell 3), propre aux auteur.trice.s autochtones, qui s'incarne notamment dans le jeu sur la sémantique française chez Picard-Sioui, que je consacrerai mon attention dans la première partie de cet article. Ce faisant, je tâcherai d'illustrer que Picard-Sioui peint — dans une langue humoristique étudiée comme le « code-switching » (Bidwell 134-169) dans la théorie critique anglophone — les travestissements identitaires des communautés autochtones au Québec en s'en réappropriant la narration. Picard-Sioui l'illustre, entre autres, en jouant sur les vocables désignant les habitants de Kitchike, en mettant en scène une redénomination des occupants blancs et, enfin, en soulignant le caractère fictif — factice — de la connaissance des langues pour les Autochtones mêmes, et ce, dans une communauté fictive du Sud du Québec.

Si la redéfinition identitaire de Picard-Sioui passe par le rire « jaune » et l'ironie, c'est un tout autre sentiment qui motive la réappropriation de la narration de l'identité dans la langue française chez Maya Cousineau Mollen. Dans son recueil *Bréviaire du matricule 082*, elle versifie sa colère de femme Innu[1] — autochtone — contre le colonialisme, le clergé, les préjugés qui nomment et dénomment. Mue par les injustices de la condition « indienne », celle de la femme « indienne » surtout, la colère de la poétesse se modèle en un bréviaire, livre utile « contenant un enseignement indispensable » (*Petit Robert* 301), de ce qu'il faudra apprendre et retenir de cette colère, nous lecteur.trice.s autochtones et allochtones. Ce bréviaire poétique se présente dès lors comme une réappropriation de ce dont elle — la poétesse, mais aussi, eux les Innu et plus largement encore, eux, les différents peuples des Premières Nations — a (ont) été dépossédé.e.s. Dans son court essai sur la colère, intitulé « Communautaire », Mélissa Mollen Dupuis (Innue) explique que la colère chez les Innu ne s'exprimerait pas dans sa forme intempestive et qu'à la place de l'effusion violente du sentiment, la colère est — devrait être — considérée comme « le carburant même de l'indignation, qui fait que l'on se lève et que l'on agit contre les injustices [. . .] [Que cette colère, il est possible de] choisir de la placer dans un moteur de transformation qui avance et bénéficie à l'ensemble du groupe » (55). C'est par ce filtre d'une colère émancipatrice poussée par un désir créateur que j'envisage l'analyse de l'emploi de la langue dans l'œuvre de Cousineau Mollen. Cela dit, même si elle est d'accord que son recueil apparait comme une modulation artistique de sa colère et qu'il est vrai qu'elle est d'origine Innu, il ne faudrait pas occulter le fait qu'elle ait été élevée dans une famille québécoise où elle avait

accès à l'expression forte de sa colère[2]. Ainsi, si la colère est transformée en objet littéraire, il n'en demeure pas moins que le sentiment colérique est fort et dénonciateur des oppressions et des violences ordinaires et systémiques, dont sont encore victimes les membres des Premières Nations sur les territoires aujourd'hui appelés Québec et Canada. C'est en ayant ces prémisses en tête que j'étudierai, dans la seconde partie de cet article, comment la poétesse se réapproprie dans le français colonial son identité et sa sexualité, dont elle et les sien.ne.s ont été exproprié.e.s[3]. Enfin, il sera possible d'observer que la réappropriation identitaire et narrative, pour Cousineau Mollen et Picard-Sioui, même si elle se fait avant tout dans l'irrévérence, l'humour, l'ironie et la colère, elle n'en reflète pas moins leurs expériences individuelles et personnelles de la colonisation.

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Que ce soit dans la toponymie du territoire appelé Québec ou dans les noms propres des individus appartenant aux Premières Nations, les diverses langues autochtones ont systématiquement été occultées. En effet, au début du vingtième siècle, le Gouvernement, notamment le fonctionnaire Eugène Rouillard, travailla à la francisation de la toponymie du territoire jusqu'alors désignée par des noms dans les langues propres des peuples l'habitant. Ces noms de la toponymie autochtone, Rouillard — dans son allocution du 10 décembre 1908, intitulée *L'invasion des noms sauvages* — suggère leur effacement (du moins une grande partie). Il propose, ainsi, un « travail d'épuration au moment même où se dressent [les] plans et cartes » (170). Le vocabulaire des Autochtones — ces infantilisés « enfants de la forêt » (162) — Rouillard le qualifie de « noms sauvages » (162, 167, 168), nécessitant une « digestion laborieuse » (163), « intangibles » (163) de mots étant « essentiellement rébarbatifs » (163), « [au] point d'écorcher le tympan » (163). Ces mots sont pour lui « [des noms] d'une bigarrure capable de déconcerter un chrétien d'une vertu ordinaire » (165), des noms peignant les cartes de « teintures primitives » (168), « [des] noms baroques ou tout simplement extravagants » (169). Ces mots, du « vocabulaire de ces enfants perdus de la forêt ou des terres polaires » (169), ne sont donc qu'une « myriade de noms indigènes » (170) d'une « lourdeur [qui] a de quoi effrayer les esprits » (170). Dans ce même esprit d'effacement et de francisation, pour une plus grande intelligibilité, le clergé le fait dans son processus d'évangélisation en baptisant de noms francophones ses nouveaux disciples.

Chez Picard-Sioui, les travestissements identitaires apparaissent dès l'ouverture des *Chroniques de Kitchike* dans le jeu sur les vocables désignant les personnages. Ainsi, le nom propre risible — image même du travestissement, du déguisement assimilationniste, rappelant la disparition de l'identité nominative des Autochtones par les baptêmes catholiques romains forcés — est mis de l'avant dans le titre éponyme de la première nouvelle : « Jean-Paul Paul Jean-Pierre » (17-28). On peut dès lors supposer que Picard-Sioui revisite ce processus chez son personnage dont les prénoms et noms — on ne peut plus catholiques de quatre des apôtres — démesurément longs surprennent et amusent. L'effet comique se confirme lorsque le ou plutôt lesdits noms réapparaissent dans leur très longue entièreté du, en fait, des récits. L'amusement décuple lorsque quelques nouvelles plus tard, les personnages de Lydia Yaskawich, Geneviève Saint-Ours et Sophie Tooktoo débattent à savoir s'il faut surnommer Jean-Paul Paul Jean-Pierre l'homme aux trois ou aux cinq prénoms (58). Le processus humoristique atteint son apogée au moment où la question du surnom — inutilement aussi long que le nom — rejoint le.a lecteur.trice dans le péritexte : « L'homme aux trois à cinq prénoms » (161) devient le sous-titre du XI^{e} chapitre de l'ultime nouvelle, « La grande débarque ». Aux apparences de prime abord risibles, ce personnage au nom démesuré semble plutôt illustrer le vide identitaire de celui qui est perdu loin de ses origines. Celui à qui le colon a retiré l'identité en lui imposant un prénom francophone aux origines religieuses. Jean-Paul Paul Jean-Pierre serait l'image — certes caricaturale — de celui qui a perdu l'accès à ses origines. Cette idée d'un certain renoncement à son « indianité » semble se préciser dans le couple qu'il forme avec Julie-Frédérique, une Algonquine, Anishnaabe qui vient — et on sent l'ironie dans l'exagération répétitive — de « la ville. La vraie ville, la grande ville, la Cité, pas la petite bourgade adjacente qui tient lieu de ville aux gens de Kitchike » (18). Opposée à la « vraie ville, la grande ville », la réserve, ce lieu faux, créé par le colon et sa *Loi sur les Indiens*, voit se développer une tout aussi fausse relation dans laquelle Julie-Frédérique entraine Jean-Paul à renier qui il est, d'où il vient, ce qu'il fait — faisait — comme travail, lui un artisan qui reproduisait « les gestes centenaires de ses ancêtres » (26). Les trous noirs — images de son vide, de son renoncement identitaire — qu'elle avait amenés avec elle, elle la fille de la ville, disparaissent miraculeusement après son départ, après que les doigts de Jean-Paul Paul Jean-Pierre aient retrouvé les éclisses de frêne, les moules à panier et l'odeur de la babiche.

Ainsi, en passant de la dépossession identitaire par le nom propre, le jeu de la redénomination avec les substantifs dont les colonisateur.trice.s ont affublé les Autochtones se poursuit avec le même personnage qui est défini de manière singulière. En effet, la narratrice — Lydia Yaskawich — le présente en évoquant les différentes manières dont les colons ont référé aux Autochtones depuis la colonisation, et ce, en passant des erreurs historiques, « Indiens », au vocabulaire anthropologique, « aborigène », « indigène », aux tentatives plus récentes de rectitudes, « autochtones », « membres des Premières Nations » :

> Jean-Paul Paul Jean-Pierre était un Indien. Un Indien on ne peut plus indien, hors de l'Inde. Mais il n'était pas ce genre de membre de la diaspora du sous-continent. Il n'était pas ce genre d'Indien. Jean-Paul Paul Jean-Pierre était un Indien d'Amérique. Un Autochtone aborigène autochtone indigène, membre des Premières Nations d'Amérique du Nord de la Grande Tortue. Un natif de Kitchike. (18)

L'accumulation des noms de ce passage n'est pas sans évoquer la complexité pour celles et ceux qui ont été dépouillé.e.s de leur identité à se définir alors qu'il y a même eu méprise quant à leur origine géographique. Partant de l'erreur d'appartenance territoriale (l'Inde et l'Indien), cette grande description identitaire culmine à l'identifiant le plus pointu : celui du lieu de naissance. Cette véritable identité territoriale, « un natif de Kitchike », sera précisée plus tard dans le texte quand on apprendra que les membres de la communauté de Kitchike sont des Wendat. Cependant, bien que la nation soit réelle, le nom de la réserve, tout comme les vocables erronés qui en désignent ses habitants, sont fictifs. C'est dans une ultime tentative de rapprochement des identités autochtones et colonisatrices, que le nom de l'Île de la Grande Tortue[4] est amalgamé à celui aujourd'hui donné au territoire appelé Amérique du Nord : « Amérique du Nord de la Grande Tortue ». À ces éléments de dénomination linguistique, il est possible d'adjoindre le caractère, certes, grotesque de l'accumulation volontairement exagérée des substantifs identifiants les Autochtones de ce passage, et repris intégralement quelques lignes plus loin lorsque Julie-Frédérique est, à son tour, présentée. Cette interminable définition aux appellations multiples n'est pas sans rappeler la célèbre réplique d'Elvis Gratton, personnage cinématographique du film éponyme marquant de la culture populaire québécoise :

> Moé, j't'un Canadien-québécois. Un Français-canadien-français. Un Amâricain du Nord-français. Un francophone québécois-canadien. Un Québécois d'expression canadienne-française-française. On est des Canadiens-amâricains francophones d'Amérique du Nord. Des Francos-québécois. [*Sa femme lui coupe la parole et conclue.*] On est des Francos-canadiens du Québec. Des Québécois-canadiens[5].

Ici, le renversement et la réappropriation apparaissent doubles. Non seulement Picard-Sioui s'est-il réapproprié le vocabulaire désignant l'identité autochtone en jouant sur le comique et l'absurdité de leur aliénation créée par l'accumulation des vocables désignatifs, il le fait — et c'est d'autant plus intéressant — en pastichant un classique de la culture populaire québécoise. Cette réplique de Gratton à la question sur son identité illustrait de manière sarcastique, pour Pierre Falardeau (le réalisateur), l'aliénation historique et dénominative des Québécois colonisés par les Anglais, qui naviguent entre les anciennes appellations d'une part liées à l'appartenance à la langue — « Français » — et, d'autre part, à l'appartenance géographique — « Canadien-français », « Québécois », « Américain ». Picard-Sioui reconnait cette filiation avec Falardeau (Conférence Picard-Sioui 2019), de même que la communauté dans les difficultés d'auto-identification des membres d'une nation ayant été colonisée.

Ce jeu de Picard-Sioui sur la dénomination des Autochtones correspond à ce que Kristina Bidwell (Fagan) explique dans sa thèse en parlant d'une certaine forme de « code-switching », notamment dans le rapport à certains termes anglais — ici en français — qui réfèrent à un emploi usuel de la langue par les Blancs : « certain forms of English can be identified as very "Native" and others as very "white." Native writers control and play with these various social codes to create particular messages and identifications in their work » (Bidwell 150). Ici, on peut identifier, comme évoqué précédemment, ces noms d'usage « très «blanc» » employés par les colonisateurs pour désigner les Autochtones : « Amérindien.ne », « aborigène », « autochtone », « indigène », « membre des Premières Nations ». Ces noms ne font d'ailleurs pas consensus dans les différentes communautés, et leur emploi conduit souvent à des désignations erronées. Picard-Sioui a d'ailleurs évoqué l'absurdité de l'emploi de l'expression « Première Nation » au singulier dans l'intention de désigner les membres d'une communauté autochtone précise (Conférence Picard-Sioui 2019).

De plus, Picard-Sioui pousse plus loin la redénomination en renversant le processus de déshumanisation inhérent au fait de se faire retirer son identité, ses identifiants, ses repères, en se réappropriant la capacité de renommer les êtres; dans son cas, les colonisateurs. Ce phénomène est particulièrement éloquent dans la nouvelle « Pendant ce temps, dans la ville avoisinante » (49-53), qui met en place des protagonistes « blancs », réduits à leur fonction. Ainsi, « Monsieur Dent », « Monsieur Viande », « Monsieur Yeux », « Monsieur de la Classe », « Monsieur Médocs » sont assimilés à

des personnages unidimensionnels, caricaturaux, voire cartoonesques, illustrant la bêtise qu'ils énoncent eux-mêmes au début de la nouvelle : Monsieur Dent s'avoue incapable d'identifier ses propres clients par leur nom, parce que de toute façon « personne n'arriv[e] vraiment à distinguer les Indiens entre eux [, et ce, m]algré la variété appréciable de leur teinte de peau et de leur coloration capillaire, ils [sont] plus ou moins tous du même acabit » (49). Dans cet habile renversement, Picard-Sioui leur retire sarcastiquement leur humanité, leur manière de se désigner à eux aussi. Ce jeu de la réappropriation par la redénomination cumule dans l'avant-dernière nouvelle du recueil, « L'homme qui fait danser les étoiles » (107-125). Jusqu'à ce moment dans le texte, il n'est pas question de la nation Wendat. Les personnages viennent pour la plupart de Kitchike, réserve fictive. Mais ici, dans un clin d'œil ou une mise en abyme à sa première œuvre[6], Picard-Sioui met en scène les personnages de Yawendara — personnage inspiré de la tradition orale Wendat — et de Teandishru' qui, ensemble, s'interrogeront sur le nom, selon toute vraisemblance, imaginaire de la réserve Kitchike. Devant l'impossibilité de Teandishru' d'expliquer la signification du mot « Kitchike », car il ne « parle pas [sa] langue » (119), le Wendat, Yawendara sous-entend le caractère factice et hybride du mot :

> Je parle au moins sept langues, et je peux t'assurer que le mot n'appartient à aucune que je maîtrise. On dirait un mot inventé. Artificiel. *Kitchi-* a une sonorité algonquienne. En atikamekw ou en cri, ça signifie «puissant». La finale en *-ke* est un suffixe locatif dans les langues iroquoïennes. Ça signifie «là où il y a telle chose». (*Kitchike* 120)

La mise en scène du jeu sur la traduction linguistique opère un renversement de la technique même du « code-switching » de la littérature autochtone, puisqu'il en souligne ici l'artificialité. À cela, Teandishru' répond en révélant la double mise en abyme du récit se déroulant sous nos yeux : « — Qu'est-ce que tu insinues? Que ma nation n'existe pas? Qu'on a été inventés de toutes pièces . . . comme toi?. . . ça devrait me réconforter de savoir que je suis au moins à moitié réel? » (120). Devant son désarroi, Yawendara soulève la nécessité de sa prise de conscience linguistique, réelle et artificielle : « — Teandishru', je ne cherche pas à t'insulter, à te troubler ou à te déplaire. Mais seule une profonde prise de conscience te permettra de trouver ta véritable voie » (120). Une prise de conscience qui se trouve peut-être dans la définition même du mot que donne Yawendara : « Kitchi- » voudrait dire « puissant » et « -ke », « là où il y a telle chose ». En d'autres mots, il apparait possible de comprendre que la réserve fictive est ce lieu de la puissance,

ce lieu où elle se trouve. Que la puissance de la résurgence des nations autochtones se trouveraient en somme dans les fictions qu'ils produisent.

C'est cette prise de conscience que Picard-Sioui semble illustrer tout au long de son recueil de nouvelles, ou plutôt son roman à la forme atypique et métissée : comprendre que les siècles de colonisation ont entaché, entravé l'identité, la manière de s'autodésigner, des différentes nations autochtones. Ici, il soulève humoristiquement — dans un humour plutôt noir, même — les travestissements linguistiques, nominatifs, identitaires et territoriaux vécus par les différentes nations au Sud du Québec. Cela dit, Picard-Sioui pousse aussi la critique jusqu'aux Autochtones qui se sont eux-mêmes pris — de gré ou de force — dans les jeux assimilationnistes des colons.

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Depuis près de cinquante ans, des femmes issues des différentes communautés autochtones au Canada ont amorcé la réappropriation de leur parole écrite, de leurs fictions, de leurs voix plurielles, au sein des littératures autochtones contemporaines (Younging 13). Pourtant héritières d'une littérature orale millénaire (Younging 13), en choisissant d'écrire, ces femmes ont mis à leur main les outils langagiers des colonisateurs.trices. Dans leurs mots, maintenant à elles aussi[7], elles ont exprimé leur colère et leur vécu : celui de femmes des Premières Nations — pensons à l'autrice Innu An Antane Kapesh[8] —, celui de femmes Métis — Emma LaRocque[9], ou Maria Campbell évoquée plus tôt[10] —, celui de femmes Inuit — Mini Aodla Freeman, par exemple. Ces femmes, et celles qui ont suivi, « translated the Aboriginal achievements, world views, and colonial challenges into meaningful and compelling art » (LaRocque 149). Elles ont donné forme à leur colère et à leurs aspirations en s'offrant « a cultural agency and accomplishments through literature » (LaRocque 149). Ainsi, la réappropriation de la langue dans l'aspiration d'une réappropriation culturelle est, il va sans dire, essentielle pour un peuple, une nation. Une langue est ce qui permet de nommer le monde, de le faire exister. La mise de l'avant de la langue Innu, comme l'ont fait les auteures Innu Joséphine Bacon et An Antane Kapesh, permet la survivance de la langue, permet de ne pas la laisser sombrer dans l'oubli. Ces Ainées, qui ont connu la langue vivante du territoire Innu, offrent, à travers leur legs littéraire, aux nouvelles générations de cette nation les outils nécessaires pour récupérer leur langue, ainsi que la culture qui y est associée et dont ils et elles ont été exproprié.e.s. Cette réappropriation est particulièrement visible chez des autrices de la nouvelle génération, comme Natasha Kanapé Fontaine et Naomi Fontaine.

Selon Lee Maracle, autre Ainée littéraire de la Nation Stó:lõ, « [d]ecolonization will require the repatriation and the rematriation of that knowledge by Native peoples themselves » (Maracle 92). Ainsi, expropriée de sa langue Innu maternelle, au sens de Maracle, Maya Cousineau Mollen affirme la nécessité — l'obligation — d'emprunter la voix du français : « Enfant colonisée, j'en suis bien consciente / La langue de Molière est mon île » (28). Le français devient alors pour elle cette langue insulaire, celle de son isolement identitaire, loin des sien.ne.s; elle, l'enfant adoptée. Mais aussi, elle devient la langue de la survie qui permet de partager les réalités de femmes Innu isolées dans la mer urbaine, « [a]u cœur de Tiohtià:ke[11] [. . .] Sous le bitume, visage de Muliats[12] » (17). Cette langue, en territoire Kanien'kehá:ka, apparait dès lors elle aussi isolée, loin de la langue Innu, telle que décrite par Joséphine Bacon : « Quand tu marchais dans un sentier de porteurs, chaque verbe parlait d'environnement et de ce que tu faisais, un verbe pouvait le raconter presque comme un récit » (Bacon 2). C'est donc dans la langue française — loin de celle du *nutshimit*[13], où un seul mot contient un monde de sens — que Cousineau Mollen rapatrie — voire ramatrie — son identité.

Lors d'une entrevue en réaction à l'affaire *Kanata*[14], Cousineau Mollen raconte l'expropriation identitaire dont ont été victimes les Autochtones au Québec, pendant la colonisation, l'évangélisation, et lors des envois dans les pensionnats : « Ils nous ont aussi renommés. Le curé nous donnait d'autres noms » (Entretien Cousineau Mollen 2019). Cela dit, la violence de l'expropriation identitaire, se faire retirer son nom, cet élément par excellence de l'identité humaine, atteint des sommets particuliers lorsque Cousineau Mollen rappelle que l'identité des Autochtones, de tous les « Indiens » du Canada, tient en un numéro de matricule, héritage toujours actuel de la *Loi sur les Indiens*; loi qu'elle qualifie ironiquement de « belle loi d'apartheid » (Entretien Cousineau Mollen 2019). C'est d'ailleurs ce numéro réducteur de son identité qu'elle dénonce en le posant en titre de son recueil, *Bréviaire du matricule 082*, et en en faisant la première strophe du premier poème de son recueil, pastiche de la genèse biblique : « Au premier jour de mon premier souffle / On me baptisa avec un numéro » (13). Notons d'ailleurs que de plus en plus de membres de la communauté Innu se réapproprient la violence de cette réduction identitaire directement dans leur chair, en se tatouant leur numéro de matricule « d'Indien ». Cousineau Mollen raconte, en entrevue, qu'une écrivaine[15] se l'est fait encrer sur l'avant-bras comme les Juifs dans les camps de concentration pendant l'Holocauste, alors que d'autres se le sont fait tatouer sur leur poignet avec la double courbe Innu —

le point d'artisan — , tout comme le personnage de sa nouvelle « Anish »[16] qui se l'est fait tatouer sur la nuque sous un code-barres, comme un produit. Ainsi, en plus de la réappropriation identitaire forte, la marque dans la peau de la série de chiffres impersonnels, de même que la blessure de l'aiguille, semblent mettre en lumière la blessure institutionnelle tout aussi indélébile de l'identité législative « indienne ». Cette marque numérique, Cousineau Mollen la file tout au long de la première partie de son recueil sous-titrée « Naitre autochtone : Ira de Terra[17] ». Elle la lie à sa solitude identitaire, réduite aux chiffres du matricule, mais aussi à ceux des articles de la *Loi sur les Indiens* qui définissent les deux manières possibles d'accéder à l'identité autochtone sur le territoire du Canada : « "Marie Maya Mollen matricule 082, est un Indien au sens de la *Loi sur les Indiens*, chapitre 27 des *Lois du Kanada*" » (13) ; « La 6.1 que je suis » (21) ; « Où je suis devenue une 6.1 » (21) ;

> Es-tu plus heureux en 6.1
> Ou plus triste en 6.2
> Enfant immatriculé d'appartenance
> Pour bien suivre tes contribuables dépenses
> Naître Autochtone est un acte politique
> En ce pays de mémoire juridique
> Je suis un code-barres
> Je suis matricule 082; (22)

« matricule » (23) ; « Ma solitude identitaire de 6.1 » (23). L'imposition de cette identité chiffrée est d'autant plus coloniale — comme si elle ne l'était pas déjà suffisamment — que les chiffres, dans la langue Innu, étaient limités. Ce faisant, les numéros de matricules et d'articles de loi apparaissent encore plus comme une infliction occidentale, comme le souligne Joséphine Bacon :

> Les chiffres, par exemple, c'était quelque chose qui n'était pas important pour nous . . . Pour autant qu'on savait compter au moins jusqu'à 100 . . . Puis ce n'était tellement pas important, parce qu'on n'avait pas besoin de rien accumuler. Pourquoi est-ce qu'on aurait appris ça, pourquoi les nombres auraient été si importants? (5-6)

Enfin, à l'amour-haine envers la langue coloniale, Cousineau Mollen répond par une résurgence de l'Innu-aïmun qui prend place dans sa poésie. Désormais chérie, et pour reprendre les mots de la poète Ilnu Marie-Andrée Gill, « au chaud, au creux de ses mains[18] », Maya Cousineau Mollen versifie les mots de l'Innu-aïmun, principalement dans la première et dans la troisième partie du recueil.

Si, tout d'abord, la colère de Maya Cousineau Mollen est dirigée vers l'expropriation identitaire dont ont été — sont — victimes les membres des

Premières Nations, elle prend parole, par la suite, contre l'expropriation de la possibilité de dire et de nommer l'érotisme chez les Premiers Peuples. Ce silence autour de la littérature érotique chez les auteur.trice.s autochtones de l'Amérique du Nord s'explique par le fait que « [f]or many tribes, this shame around sex started in the boarding schools, and sexual shame has been passed down for generations. Throughout the imposition of colonialism in the United States, one of the methods Native communities have used to survive is adapting silence around sexuality » (Finley 32). Ainsi, accepter de parler de sexualité pour les auteur.trice.s des Premières Nations est apparu à la chercheuse Anishinaabe Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm comme un véritable défi et comme un acte qui est toujours politique (Akiwenzie-Damm 161). Créer une littérature érotique est ainsi, selon elle, un acte de décolonisation contre l'asservissement religieux, contre l'envahissement des territoires par les colons, contre la disparition, contre le génocide, contre les stéréotypes de l'homme autochtone violent, et contre ceux de la femme autochtone princesse ou squaw. Se réapproprier sa sexualité, selon Akiwenzie-Damm, et l'écrire, est un travail de guérison : « To heal, I believe that our own stories, poems and songs that celebrate our erotic natures must be part of the antidote » (Akiwenzie-Damm 166). De la même façon, Cousineau Mollen affirme, « le clergé est arrivé et a imposé ses croyances faisant en sorte de jouer sur le rôle de la femme [autochtone en disant] . . . qu'elles étaient objets de tentation » (Entrevue Cousineau Mollen 2019). Ainsi, à ces difficultés s'ajoute celle de l'expression de la sexualité dans les langues autochtones même. L'auteure Crie-métisse Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau en fait d'ailleurs état dans la préface de son roman érotique :

> Il n'est pas aisé de communiquer le dit de l'amour chez l'Amérindienne. Notre mode de pensée est particulier. Nous n'avons pas le genre grammatical féminin/masculin dans notre langue. Comme Tomson Highway le disait lors d'une entrevue, nous devons spécifier si nous parlons d'une femme ou d'un homme. Difficile de partager ces différences dans la perception des rapports entre les cultures ; difficile de se mettre dans la peau de l'autre et de le comprendre véritablement. (9)

Serait-ce donc comprendre que pour certain.e.s les écrits érotiques sont, ironiquement, plus aisés à écrire dans les langues colonisatrices qui, elles, possèdent les spécifications de genre[19] ? Ce qui est sûr, dans le cas des poèmes érotiques de Cousineau Mollen, ce sont ceux dans lesquels il y a le moins de termes en Innu-aïmun dans les titres (« Uakatitishu » (40), « Laisses-moi mon atashakush » (41), « Mitish » (43), « Mishtamishk^{u} » (45)), de même que dans le corps du texte[20]. Peut-être, et c'est une hypothèse,

est-ce également lié au fait que les rapports décrits dans lesdits poèmes érotiques présentent des rapports entre la femme Innu et des hommes blancs (Entrevue Cousineau Mollen 2019). Ainsi, au fil de son recueil, Cousineau Mollen participe à la réappropriation du corps féminin autochtone en le libérant des carcans langagiers du colon. D'ailleurs, la colère envers le clergé catholique oppresseur du féminin surgit à la cinquième strophe du premier poème du recueil : « Étrangère en mes terres, au cinquième acte d'existence / Ma chevelure fut sacrifiée, offrande chrétienne » (13). Comme cela avait été le cas au sujet des matricules identitaires, Cousineau Mollen reprend, tel un leitmotiv, la critique des coiffures pudiques imposées aux femmes Innu afin que leurs cheveux ne soient pas indécents et surtout objets de tentation, péché mortel[21] : « L'homme cruciforme / A fait de nos femmes des secrets / De nos hommes, des ombres / Puissent les poétesses / Délivrer notre nature / Féminité échevelée » (25). Ainsi, Cousineau Mollen libère le corps féminin par la littérature, par la poésie. L'image de la chevelure libre de toutes entraves est reprise trois autres fois — en plus des deux déjà évoquées : l'image revient dans le poème dédié à Joséphine Bacon, poétesse Innu s'étant fait un devoir de transmettre les savoirs des Ainés, de celles et ceux ayant connu la vie dans le *Nutshimit*. Bacon apparait, dans le poème de Cousineau Mollen, comme l'une de celles ayant — métaphoriquement — libéré les chevelures des femmes Innu et permis leur décolonisation. En parlant de son identité de femme Innu, Cousineau Mollen dit : « Ma chevelure tant de fois entravée / Libre comme Atik[u] dans la toundra » (26). Si dans la première partie, les mots de son Ainée semblent avoir permis la réappropriation de l'identité et du corps féminin, dans la seconde partie, l'autrice explore la réappropriation de sa sexualité féminine dans le caractère désormais indomptable et désaliéné de ses cheveux :

> Fluidité d'une chevelure en ivresse
> S'accouplant au souffle des cieux
> Hanches voltigeantes en éveil
> La physique du corps trahit l'émoi de cette chair féminine. (37)

Désormais assumée, la poétesse déclare, dans une colère affirmée, à l'ancien oppresseur ecclésiastique que

> [j]amais tu ne verras à mes oreilles
> Les cadenas de ma féminité
> Que tu appelles coiffure
> Jamais tu n'entraveras ma beauté territoriale
> Afin de rester fidèle à tes prières

> Je suis faite pour aimer
> M'épanouir aux vents
> Faite pour caresser les lichens tristes
> À même la noirceur de mes mèches libres (44).

Cela dit, l'autrice n'est pas jovialiste. La sexualité de la femme autochtone n'est pas que bonheur même si elle s'assume. Trop longtemps, la femme autochtone et son corps ont été réduits aux clichés et aux insultes des colons : la « sauvagesse » (21), la « squaw » (20 et le terme « squaw » est répété trois fois à la page 49), la « Minashkuess[22] » (20). Les fossés culturels entre les Autochtones et les Allochtones sont énormes, de dire Cousineau Mollen (Entrevue Cousineau Mollen 2019), et les préjugés persistants. Les relations sont hantées par le passé — quoique toujours bien présents — et par le colonialiste, qui avait réduit la femme autochtone à une entité « sexually available for white men . . . Her body, and therefore her land, would now be owned and managed by the settler nation » (Finley 33-35). Dès lors, toute tentative d'affranchissement de ces conceptions coloniales semble se faire dans une relation nourrissant à la fois désir et violence. Ces images d'oppositions alliant suavité et brutalité physique — colonisatrice — prennent forme au fil des pages du recueil : « violence charnelle » (34), « Agonie d'une étreinte » (34), « luxure mordante » (35), « Serments à la brûlure vivace » (37), « Vos étreintes sont d'une violence / Libératrice, teintée de dominance » (41), « Nos attouchements de junkies » (42), « parfum de brutalité » (48). L'amant blanc se révèle comme ce *settler* ne pouvant pas — ou pouvant difficilement — se défaire de ses a priori coloniaux.

Dans « Dis-moi », Cousineau Mollen demande à cet homme : « Qui cherches-tu dans nos étreintes . . . Serais-tu ce coureur des bois / Amoureux de sa Minashkuess . . . Cherches-tu à devenir ce mâle alpha / Protecteur du territoire? . . . Tu me traites de squaw » (20). Dans « *Never enough*[23] », elle répond à ses interrogations par la fierté de son identité autochtone en se réappropriant l'insulte « squaw », et en rappelant à l'homme blanc que sans les sien.ne.s, son existence coloniale sur ce territoire ne serait pas : « Souviens-toi mon cher à la mémoire de sottise / Qu'il a fallu des squaws pour que ton peuple survive » (49). Sans Autochtones, pas de lieu initial où survivre.

*

En conclusion, tant chez Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui dans *Chroniques de Kitchike* que chez Maya Cousineau Mollen dans *Bréviaire du matricule 082*, la prise en charge de la création littéraire procède de la réappropriation

de la narration identitaire, de la réappropriation des fictions, de qui et de comment on écrit sur les membres des Premières Nations au Québec. Dans ces deux œuvres, la langue et sa capacité à donner et à retirer une identité est revue, dénoncée, ridiculisée, renversée et réappropriée, pour permettre de créer dans une langue jusqu'alors imposée, mais dans une langue qui n'aliène plus. Cette appropriation de l'écriture littéraire occidentale permet dès lors de renverser l'outil qui les avait jusque-là dépossédés de leur identité et de leur.s histoire.s. L'écriture permet la prise de conscience des préjugés et surgit comme le moyen de détruire l'oppression en rappelant — parce qu'il est malheureusement encore nécessaire de le faire — l'humanité des Autochtones. Ironiquement, manier la langue française permet également la résurgence des langues autochtones, notamment l'Innu, pour laquelle des grammaires et des dictionnaires bilingues existent déjà, et qui est désormais enseigné dans les communautés, mais aussi dans certaines universités. L'outil littéraire permet aussi la revitalisation de la langue Wendat, longtemps considérée comme « dormante », selon Picard-Sioui. Soulignons aussi le travail titanesque de traduction et de recherche qui est d'ailleurs en branle — le Chantier Yawenda[24] — pour ramener à la vie cette langue endormie. Cela dit, même si ces voix sont relativement nouvelles dans le paysage de la littérature autochtone francophone, elles s'inscrivent pourtant dans la continuité des traditions culturelles et littéraires de leurs Ainé.e.s. Si cette résurgence, tant par rapport aux langues qu'aux écrits, semble obtenir une plus grande écoute contemporaine, c'est que le travail a été amorcé il y a déjà plusieurs décennies et, surtout, il se poursuit.

NOTES

1 Par respect pour la poétesse, qui a choisi de ne pas « accorder les mots en Innu et de placer une majuscule au début de chacun » (8), je procéderai de la même manière tout au long de ce texte.
2 Entrevue Cousineau Mollen, 2019.
3 Ici, l'emploi du terme « expropriation » est inspiré de Maracle qui souligne que les Premières Nations n'ont pas été victimes de vols culturels, mais d'expropriations culturelles (92).
4 L'Île de la Grande Tortue est le nom que plusieurs nations autochtones donnent au territoire appelé Amérique du Nord.
5 Je transcris et reproduit l'accent québécois exagéré du personnage de Julien Poulin.
6 *Yawendara et la forêt des têtes coupées (Éditions Cornac, 2005)*.
7 Voir à cet effet Maria Campbell, « Strategies for Survival ». *Give Back First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice*, Gallerie Publ., 1992, pp. 5-14; Emma LaRocque, « Reflections on Cultural Continuity ». *Restoring the Balance: First Nation Women, Community and Culture*, U of Manitoba P, 2009, pp.149-173.

8 An Antane Kapesh. *Eukuan Nin Matshi-Manitu Innushkueu — Je suis une maudite sauvagesse* (Éditions Leméac, 1976).
9 Emma LaRocque. « Reflections on Cultural Continuity through Aboriginal Women's Writing ». *Restoring the Balance: First Nation Women, Community and Culture*, U of Manitoba P, 2009, pp.149-173.
10 Maria Campbell. *Halfbreed*. (McClelland & Stewart, 1973).
11 Montréal en Kanien'kéha.
12 Montréal en Innu-aïmun.
13 Territoire intérieur de la toundra.
14 En 2018, pour sa pièce *Kanata*, le metteur en scène et auteur dramatique québécois RobertLepage a été accusé d'appropriation culturelle par les membres de plusieurs nations autochtones.
15 L'écrivaine en question n'est pas nommée.
16 Nouvelle publiée dans *Amun*, recueil dirigé par Michel Jean (Stanké, 2016).
17 Signifie « Colère de la Terre ».
18 Pour Marie-Andrée Gill (Ilnu), les mots Ilnu tendent à disparaitre faute d'être dits et vécus. Marie-Andrée Gill, lors du spectacle *Kiciweok : lexique de 13 mots autochtones qui donnent du sens*.
19 Ce n'est pas le cas pour l'écrivain Cri Tomson Highway, cité par Pésémapéo Bordeleau, qui considère la langue crie comme étant la langue la plus sexy (« Why Cree is the Sexiest of all languages » dans *Me Sexy*, édité par Drew Hayden Taylor, Douglas & MacIntyre, 2008).
20 « Nukum » (44) et six fois « Mishtamishkᵘ » (45).
21 L'ouvrage de Gaston Carrière, *Le Roi de Betsiamites : Le Père Charles Arnaud*, a permis de soutenir longtemps l'idée selon laquelle le père Arnaud était l'inventeur du « bonnet montagnais ». Selon ses dires, « le père Arnaud jugeait la modestie chrétienne très importante. À cet effet, il devient couturier et directeur de salon de beauté. Les femmes montagnaises portaient les cheveux réunis en deux petits coussins carrés sur les oreilles. » (172) Depuis, cette théorie associant Arnaud à la paternité du bonnet est contestée. Francis Back soutient, en effet, « [qu'il] existe des descriptions du ''bonnet montagnais" qui sont antérieures à la naissance du père Arnaud, en 1823. » (32) Cela dit, bien que l'invention du bonnet puisse ne pas être la sienne, l'idée selon laquelle l'homme du clergé invitait les femmes Innu à porter des coiffures respectant une « modestie chrétienne » et qu'il ait confectionné des bonnets et tenu un salon de beauté, ne semble pas être contestées.
22 Signifie « Fille des bois ».
23 L'autrice souligne.
24 Voir à ce sujet Philippe Marois, « Onywawenda' yeienhwi's (j'apprends notre langue) ». *L'Actualité*, 4 déc. 2019.

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Tom Wayman

In a Bleak Time

Mid-December valley rain
hammers the sparse snow, weakens
to drizzle, then
thickens again: white fields, roofs,
roadsides absorb the falling water.

This afternoon, the dark foliage
of firs, cedars, pines
looms closer to houses, barnyards, highway
while the trees declare,
"Each spring, you utter noises of wonder
at the new leaves of the aspen. In summer
you praise the cottonwood's
rustling canopy. In autumn, the birch
becoming golden. You express dismay when
frost and wind erase
all but trunks and branches. Yet around you
spruce, hemlock, each of us evergreens
steadfastly function,
with no need to repeat that cycle of
prancing, preening, then whimpering
—adopting the pose of nature's pitiful victim
before sleeping, well-provisioned,
for a season. *Every* month
we conifers pump oxygen into air, lift moisture
from root to sky, maintain the green ridges

even under snow: an incessant labor.

"In the absence of your favored, count
how numerous we are, notice how few
the bare-limbed moaners, observe through the rain
that we constitute the forest. You regard
the majority as background, inconsequential,
though we cover every mountain slope, range
after range, keep the Earth alive.
In this pause at the edge of the ice
we step nearer to ask:
'What words do you have
for us?'"

Bronwyn Malloy

"Tuned every ear towards a tiny lengthening of light"

Listening for Weak Hope in John K. Samson's *Winter Wheat*

On his most recent solo album, *Winter Wheat* (2016), Winnipeg singer-songwriter John K. Samson lingers in the liminal space between despair and hope, locating a fragile fecundity in the dormant growing season evoked by the album's title. *Winter Wheat* voices a series of missed connections, unfinished stories, and interrupted conversations that cycle through many registers of despair before partially resolving into the tenuous hope that, as Samson writes in the title track (borrowing from Miriam Toews' novel *A Complicated Kindness*), "this world is good enough, because it has to be." Rather than advocating for complacency, Samson's songs perform a painful recounting of the past in order to imagine the troubled present as a time of tentative potential: though the world is not and has not been "good enough" as it is, still, to quote the title track, we must "salute the ways we tried, [and] find a way to rise" ("Winter Wheat"). I posit *weak hope*, which I characterize as a combination of resignation, optimism, and generative delusion, as a productive framework through which to listen to Samson's dense, richly allusive song lyrics. In turn, I suggest that listening closely to Samson's lyrics offers up a kind of weak, tenuous hope for the listener. In our increasingly fractured political times, learning to listen attentively, empathetically, and equitably—listening to *weaker* or marginalized voices, in particular—is an urgent imperative. Though we may not know exactly "what survival means" ("Confessions of a Futon Revolutionist," *Fallow*), to use the words of artist Jenny Holzer that Samson quotes in

Winter Wheat's album liner epigraph, listening to, for, and with *weak hope* in *Winter Wheat* might model some collaborative "way[s] to survive."

Many narrators on *Winter Wheat* struggle with a central *agon* that feels very contemporary: when action is likely futile, should we act anyway? In the face of late-stage capitalism, climate change, relentless technological advancements, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the global rise of far-right neo-fascist nationalisms, how do we locate hope? Is it *too late* to be hopeful? Samson's songs urge that we "recommit [ourselves] to the healing of the world" and "pursue a practice that will strengthen [our] heart[s]" ("Postdoc Blues," *Winter Wheat*). For the attentive listener, the very act of engaging with Samson's politics and poetics of weakness can form part of a practice that "strengthen[s our] heart[s]," by listening closely and imaginatively to the radical, unflinching empathy modelled in his precise, demanding song lyrics. Learning to listen for scraps of weak hope might just allow our splintered selves—"proud and strange and so hopelessly hopeful" ("Exiles Among You," *Left and Leaving*)—to begin to "tune" ("Winter Wheat") to one another.

Both weakness and hope are recurrent tropes in Samson's writing; the weakness of hope and the hopeful potential inherent in (mis)perceived weakness are equally audible in his lyrics. Over the course of the four albums he released with his former band The Weakerthans between 1997 and 2007, Samson theorized the latent political power of people, animals, and objects considered not only weak, but comparatively *weaker-than* others. According to Samson, the band's name emerged from "a few places" (see Todd). The first is a line from the 1992 film *The Lover* (based on Marguerite Duras' 1984 novel of the same name): when a character is challenged to a bar fight, he responds, "Go ahead, I'm weaker than you can imagine." The second, as quoted in the Weakerthans' song "Pamphleteer" (*Left and Leaving*), is a nod to what Samson calls Ralph Chaplin's "old union hymn," "Solidarity Forever": "What force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one?" In both quotations, the speaker invites the auditor to begin to internally articulate not only weakness, but the weaker-than: if the character in *The Lover* is "weaker than [we] can imagine," how do we imagine weakness? Is weakness merely the absence of strength? The name "The Weakerthans" evokes similar questions: what are the politics inscribed in the ways in which weakness is constituted? Who benefits from upholding conventional hierarchies that range from strong, to weak, to the *weaker-than*? What might happen if everyone deemed *weaker-than* were to band together? Rather than staging a countercultural celebration of true weakness, therefore, Samson's writing

critiques commonly held conceptions of strength—including masculinity, capitalism, anthropocentrism, and nationalism—and advocates for radical, collective, *weak hope*.

My articulation of weak hope is inflected both by contemporary theories of complex, even contradictory affects, and literary and musical evocations of troubled feelings. Miriam Toews' titular *A Complicated Kindness* and Montreal band Stars' invocation to "take the weakest thing in you / and then beat the bastards with it" ("Hold On When You Get Love and Let Go When You Give It," *The North*), for example, sound as loudly in my thinking as critical voices including Lauren Berlant's and Sianne Ngai's. *Weak hope* is particularly conversant with Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011) and Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2007). In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant asks why, when confronted with political or personal "situations" (5) that are clearly detrimental, we adapt rather than revolt. For Berlant in this regard, optimism is both inherently destructive, in that it contributes to the preservation of a status quo that functions as an "obstacle to flourishing" (1), and necessary to survival. Optimism, she argues, "makes life bearable [even] as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently" (14). In *Ugly Feelings,* Ngai probes the tension between staying hopeful enough about life to want to survive, but not so blithely optimistic that we ignore the political imperative to make a better world. Ngai also critiques Adorno's description of the perceived "powerlessness and superfluity" of art (and, of course, Adorno was even more scornful of popular music), suggesting that literature's own awareness of its *weakness* is "precisely what makes it capable of theorizing social powerlessness" (2). *Weak hope* seeks a middle ground between optimism and ambivalence, listening to how the *weaker-than* literary genre of song lyrics might tentatively rehabilitate people, places, and things considered powerless. In an interview with *Geist* magazine, Samson suggests

> There is a lot of potential in places that are removed from the centre of power. . . . I have this feeling that that's where a lot of interesting things are going to emerge—things that have the potential not to be sullied or defeated as soon as they're created. They can be ignored for a while. They can hover in between. (Tough)

In my close reading of and listening to Samson's work, I primarily take my language for *weak hope* from his writing itself, allowing lyrics to provide "new words for old desires" ("Left and Leaving"). In this paper, I re-listen to Samson's body of songs in concert with *Winter Wheat,* tracing the tropes of technology, survival, loss, faith, mental illness, nostalgia, cities, and ecology.

"A lonely line of buildings you can block out with your thumb": Touching the City

On Samson's first solo LP, *Provincial* (2012), he set out to give voice to the ghosts, living and dead, that haunt the roads of Manitoba. Constructed as a sonic roadmap, *Provincial* navigates both meanings of its title: the roads that branch through the province of Manitoba, and the parochial, non-metropolitan undertones of the adjective. *Provincial* holds steady as a cohesive piece of work with its driving compass returning "home" in the final track, matching the illustrated aerial maps of roads through wheat fields depicted in its album art. *Winter Wheat,* however, is more disjointed and expansive—Samson regularly refers to the fifteen-song album as "a bit of a sprawler" (qtd. in Lebar). This expansiveness is reflected in the album's cover art, which consists of an abstract wash of blues extracted from the foreboding prairie clouds in Winnipeg artist (and Samson's uncle) David Owen Lucas' 2009 painting *Grand Valley.* Instead of finding a road leading home, the dislocated protagonist in the title track begs the auditor to "allow the hope that we will meet again out in the winter wheat. Find me in the winter wheat." Whereas *Provincial* tracks the roads and highways of Manitoba, the characters voiced on *Winter Wheat* have been metaphorically driven off of their paths; while *Provincial*'s narrators drive to or away from their objectives, the narrators of *Winter Wheat* are unanimously lost.

Samson's lyrics return, again and again, to his hometown of Winnipeg. There are three major tropes in Samson's lyrics about Winnipeg: buildings, roads, and wheat. The cover of The Weakerthans' debut album, *Fallow,* is comprised of layered images of two of these tropes: a sepia-toned piece of wheat superimposed over a faded map of Winnipeg. *Fallow*'s album cover is especially anticipatory of the themes of both *Provincial* and *Winter Wheat*. In the nearly twenty years between *Fallow* and *Winter Wheat*, Samson has not strayed far from locating weak hope in images of unlikely growth, with the real and metaphorical crops on both *Fallow* and *Winter Wheat* tentatively promising future harvest. Further connecting the two albums' titles, winter wheat is often planted as a cover crop, which prevents soil erosion while neighbouring fields lay fallow (see Clark, *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*). Laying a field fallow and planting winter wheat are intended not only to preserve and protect what is already present in the field, but also to optimize the soil for future growth. Though fields that are fallow or planted with winter wheat may appear to be less valuable, or weaker than other crops, they are integral to the long-term survival of the farmland.

In the title track of *Winter Wheat*, the narrator takes a similarly long view of their city and the fields that surround it. Resetting a scene from the opening of Miriam Toews' novel *All My Puny Sorrows*, the song begins with the dislocated narrator staring back at Winnipeg over fields of winter wheat: "So make a visor with your hand and squint at where you're from, a lonely line of buildings you can block out with your thumb." In this image, Samson endows the smaller, *weaker* body of the narrator with the ability to physically "block out" the much larger entity of their hometown, playing with the power dynamics of perspective. From far away, uniquely vertical amongst vast fields of wheat, Winnipeg appears "lonely" and small, mirroring the speaker. Between the two living bodies, the speaker and the city, are acres of wheat that are touched only by the "wind throw[ing] patterns on [the] field[s]." With a small hand movement, Samson impossibly elongates the narrator's tactile relationship to their city. Like the wind "throw[ing] patterns" and the "sun selecting targets for the shadows to attack," the speaker flattens the entire city by blocking the vertical lines of buildings with their thumb.

The narrator's distant perspective on Winnipeg in "Winter Wheat" echoes the position of the speaker in "Highway 1 West," a song on *Provincial*, who envisions the city's "lonely line of buildings" as "some cheap EQ with the mids pushed up in the one long note of wheat." For the speaker in "Highway 1 West," who is stuck on a remote highway from where it is "too far to walk to anywhere," the skyline of Winnipeg resembles the audio frequency line of an equalizer (EQ) on a sound system with the "mids pushed up." The "mids" are the mid-range of the song, usually including the vocal tracks, so pushing up the mids increases the volume of the vocals. Mapped onto an otherwise flat prairie landscape, the city not only graphically resembles a line of audio frequency with its "mids pushed up," but also enacts the sounds evoked by this image: a city is a gathering of many voices, a chorus made louder, though no less lonely, in their multitude.

Pushing up the "mids" on an EQ and "mak[ing] a visor with your hand " are both tactile images, in which the speaker changes their perspective on the city by touching it, even at a remove. For Samson, the city and the body are always linked; in one of his most famous lines, for example, which is based on a line by Winnipeg poet Catherine Hunter, the narrator of "Left and Leaving" sings: "My city's still breathing (but barely, it's true) through buildings gone missing like teeth" (*Left and Leaving*). Connecting the human body and the body politic, Samson endows the city with anthropomorphized

agency, wherein it looks, listens, and breathes back at its inhabitants ("but barely, it's true"). The city, for all of its mass, is still a weak, "lonely" entity that feels the wounds its inhabitants inflict upon it. For Samson, the city is late and moribund, kept alive only by a weak, latent hope: if the city is alive, it too might learn to listen.

In the title tracks from both *Fallow* and *Winter Wheat*, hope is found on the margins of the city, in the wheat fields that surround it. In "Fallow," the speaker invites his companion to step an appropriately funereal distance of "six feet off the highway, our bare legs stung with wheat," in order to "dig a hole and bury all we could not defeat." Though burials are usually imbued with finality, rereading "Fallow" in the context of "Winter Wheat" might allow us to recast this interment as, instead, a planting: the weak, late offshoots of the narrator's despair sprouting nearly twenty years later in "Winter Wheat." Though "Fallow" ends with a desire that seems destined to be frustrated—to "stay for one more year" even though "the lease runs out next week"—the speaker in "Winter Wheat" is, somehow, still there, sleeping in a "parking lot, air-mattresses gone flat." Like several other songs on *Winter Wheat*, there is comfort, and even hope, to be found in the unlikely act of survival.

In the second verse of "Winter Wheat," the persona reveals their vision of tenuous, future-oriented hope, which they locate in the small stalks of wheat growing around them. Entreating the auditor to join them "out in the winter wheat," the narrator describes their surroundings: "This crop withstood the months of snow, the scavengers and blight, tuned every ear towards a tiny lengthening of light, and found a way to rise." Samson's use of the word "tuned" and pun on the "ear[s]" of wheat transposes the natural image of growing wheat stalks turning to follow the sun into an image of purposeful, musical movement. Tuning is a precise, deliberate motion, wherein one attempts to bring all of the separate notes or strings of an instrument into close harmony with one another. Like the focus of Samson's songs, tuning is both aural and tactile, using the "ear" to hear the desired note, and hands and fingers to adjust the strings' relative tension. Tuning is also fundamentally relational: not only must each string be in tune with the next, but each instrument in a band or orchestra must tune to each other. In this line, Samson endows the wheat fields with agency, rendering them, like the city they surround, ripe for comparison to the humans that live between and amongst them. If winter wheat crops can "find a way to rise" in tune with each other, perhaps listeners can attune their ears more purposefully towards

one another. Rather than speaking, which is often associated with strength and power, metaphorical harmony might be found instead through a *weaker* form of engagement: attentive, empathetic listening.

"This hashtag wants me dead": Technologies of Self

While Samson's writing retains a cautious hope that humans may find ways to retune ourselves with nature, non-organic sounds of technology are frequently configured as atonal barriers to the dream of harmony. In "Fallow," for example, "radiators hum out of tune"; in "Stop Error" (*Provincial*), the speaker is "trying to ignore the theme that keeps repeating from Call of Duty 4" while surrounded by the "wheezy breath of cooling fans and hard drives"; and in "The Prescience of Dawn" (*Reconstruction Site*), the narrator decides to "[t]une the FM in to static, and pretend that it's the sea." Samson, who no longer participates in any social media, even going so far as to conduct press interviews via postcard, worries that technologies are "advancing so swiftly [that] they . . . have in some ways overtaken us" (Chandler). Several tracks on *Winter Wheat* meditate on Samson's anxieties about technologies: "Carrie Ends the Call" reimagines Neil Young's "Motion Pictures for Carrie" in the context of a failing long-distance relationship conducted primarily over glitching video-sharing platforms; "Select All Delete" opens with the line, "That hashtag wants me dead"; and "Postdoc Blues" attempts to console a distraught postdoctoral fellow whose "presentation went terrible, all wrong dongles." In a pair of songs addressed to trees, "Oldest Oak at Brookside" and "Prayer for Ruby Elm," Samson imagines how human technological *progress* might appear to ancient trees. While these songs evoke the somewhat tired trope of a stationary object enduring massive changes around it, there is something reassuring about the steady survival of the object, despite adverse changes to its habitat, that might be read as hope for the continued survival of both humanity and the environment.

Samson's writing has often sought comfort in the tactile, as when the narrator in "Utilities" (*Reunion Tour*), for example, longs to be turned into an object: "I just wish I were a toothbrush or a solder gun. Make me something somebody can use." Randall Colburn writes in his review for the *A/V Club* that "*Winter Wheat* is about preservation and perseverance. . . . Samson's lyrics tend to linger on buildings, trees, and landmarks, things we can touch. Sometimes, we have to remember they're still there and that it's on us to ensure they'll continue to be there." Samson's songs addressed

to trees parallel the central growing metaphor embedded in the album's title: as plants manage to take root and survive in spite of adverse growing conditions, so too must humanity. On *Winter Wheat,* as Timothy Monger writes, "hope is hibernating just below the soil."

In "Oldest Oak at Brookside," which is sung to "the oldest oak tree in Winnipeg's Brookside Cemetery" (Chandler), the narrator traces backwards through history to the moment at which the oak was "set in sandy soil." With more than 200,000 graves, Brookside Cemetery, opened in 1876, is the largest civic cemetery in western Canada. The unnamed narrator speaks for settler Winnipeggers, alive and dead, using the pronoun "we" throughout the song in their address to the tree, whose growth has been fertilized by generations of their interred bones. Most lines in the song begin with the word "Before," and dig back through moments in Winnipeg's history both political and personal: "Before we built that smirking airport, before the phones told us where to go." Both opening images in this song give a troubled anthropomorphized autonomy to the non-human elements that they describe: the airport "smirking" and phones "tell[ing] us where to go." The airport that the narrator is describing is likely the new terminal that was added to the Winnipeg James Armstrong Richardson International Airport in 2011, which is semicircular. Seen from above, from the vantage point of an airplane, Samson's speaker imagines the terminal's curved shape as an unfriendly smirk rather than a welcoming smile. The terminal is Canada's first to be LEED-certified for its environmentally-friendly construction and operations, and the award-winning architect, César Pelli, "drew his inspiration from the vast prairies and sky" ("Winnipeg airport"). Samson's narrator reads a smug hypocrisy in the airport's environmental friendliness: while the building might be efficient, and its design evocative of the prairie fields it occupies, the effects of air travel are among the most environmentally disastrous. Much like Samson's previous critiques of the boastfulness of Winnipeg's welcome signs on the Trans-Canada Highway in the eponymous songs "One Great City!" (*Reconstruction Site*; see Malloy) and "Heart of the Continent" (*Provincial*), "Oldest Oak at Brookside" functions as a multi-layered indictment of a city that plasters a smile on its outward-facing elements, while glossing over the inequalities faced by its most vulnerable populations.

As "Oldest Oak at Brookside" progresses, the narrator wades deeper into Winnipeg's history, further stripping away the smirking mask erected by generations of the city's "Golden Business Boy[s]"[1] ("One Great City!").

In the second half of the song, Samson specifically criticizes Winnipeg's historical and present oppressions of Indigenous peoples: "Before the treaty, before we broke a promise to appear." Winnipeg is on Treaty 1 territory, the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. The second half of Samson's line, "before we broke a promise to appear," references the Manitoba Criminal Code, which gives police the discretion to release alleged offenders if they sign a "promise to appear" form (see Manitoba). Local and national governments have repeatedly made "a promise to appear" to address their numerous treaty violations, but have yet to make meaningful reparations. In a letter to journalist Erin Lebar, Samson explains that, "Especially since Idle No More," he has "been thinking of [himself] as a Treaty 1 writer. Thinking about the spirit and intent of the treaties has been a helpful way for [him] to reorient [his] citizenship . . . and try to find ways to express solidarity and support for Indigenous resistance." Writing against his frequent characterization as a poetic voice for all Winnipeg, in this song Samson weakens the authority of his singular, settler voice.

In the final lines of the song, the narrator of "Oldest Oak at Brookside" reaches back "[b]efore the treaty" to a time predating colonial invasion. Over swelling major chords and choral echoes, the narrator describes how the oak tree might have been planted, not by human hands, but by a series of natural processes: "You were lifted by a blue jay, beating wings above a sea, with a wave of grazing bison and tall grass prairie. You were set in sandy soil, and stand, a mighty oak." In these lines, the narrator engages in a fantasy of the natural, and seems to troublingly render the tree to be part of Terra Nullius. The problematic naivety of the narrator, however, which is buoyed by a musical arrangement that swells and resolves into major chords as they are describing an imagined past, is undercut by the lyrics that several voices sing in chorus. While the narrator waxes lyrical about the oak tree's genesis, their lyrics are interrupted by and layered with a choral refrain of partial phrases:

> Before we built that
> Before the fire
> Before the treaty
> Before we broke.

Like the narrator, the chorus uses the pronoun "we," but unlike the narrator, the chorus is actually plural, audibly comprised of several singing voices. The chorus peels back the rings of the ancient tree, not shying away from the atrocities the tree bore witness to but searching for the seeds of an

antecedent hope. While in "Winter Wheat" the narrator invites the listener to imagine the hope of a future harvest, in "Oldest Oak at Brookside," though the tree stands among thousands of graves, we see evidence of continued unlikely survival even amongst ruin.

Later on *Winter Wheat* in "Prayer for Ruby Elm," Samson borrows the repetitive structure of liturgical songs in order to offer a prayer for the implausible survival of an elm tree. Samson has frequently adopted and subverted the language and cadences of religious texts and music, ranging from the opening track of The Weakerthans' first album, "Illustrated Bible Stories for Children" (*Fallow*), to "Hymn of the Medical Oddity" on their final LP, *Reunion Tour*. "Prayer for Ruby Elm" is transcribed in Samson's album liner notes in enjambed lines rather than his customary prose paragraphs, which underscores the liturgical structure. Commissioned for Winnipeg filmmaker Erika MacPherson's 2013 film *May We Grow* and co-written with Christine Fellows, Samson's long-time life and creative partner, "Prayer for Ruby Elm" is both a prayer for a specific elm, and also a prayer for the continued survival of the environment, nature, and humanity.

Though the tree is facing a number of threats, first among them Dutch elm disease, "a very common problem in Winnipeg" (Samson to Chandler), the narrator has one central, humble request: "May it all seem plausible." Throughout the song, the narrator parallels the threats that the elm tree is facing with those that plague humanity. While some dangers, like "thunderstorm[s] . . . and climate change," are ominously realistic, at other moments, the tree is endowed with supernatural powers: In this song, the tree can not only produce oxygen, but the narrator prays that the leaves might "photosynthesize everything we're sorry for / into one long breath of air." The closing lines of the song also echo the weak, sapling hope for survival found in "Oldest Oak at Brookside" and "Winter Wheat": "Wherever we land," the narrator sings, encompassing seeds, birds, and humans all in one, "May we grow."

"Listing what's left": Remnants and Ledgers

Though much of *Winter Wheat* is focused on sowing the seeds for future growth, unlikely as it may be to come to fruition, nostalgia is also a constant presence. The nostalgia on this album is a troubled, late nostalgia, which juxtaposes a longing for "the good old days" with the firm, rooted knowledge that "the good old days were mostly bad," as the lyrics in the album's opening track suggest ("Select All Delete"). In keeping with the fundamentally

relational aesthetic of the "weaker-than," Samson's personae perform a nostalgia that both mourns the past and acknowledges that the present is not an inherently weaker era. "There is real danger in valourizing the past," Samson writes in an interview with *Noisey:* "There isn't anything to make great again (to unavoidably borrow from the bewildering moment we are living in) because it hasn't ever been that great and . . . there's something weirdly and abidingly hopeful there" (qtd. in Bayer). Samson borrows hope for the future from the past, not by idealizing days gone by, but by performing a painfully realistic recounting. For Samson, singing about the past fulfills twin desires; to mourn and elegize, and to celebrate and resituate nearly forgotten potential.

In order to make sense of their losses, many of Samson's nostalgic characters itemize their longing through the vehicle of lists of remnants or remains: personal effects from a lost time or love that string together complex narratives of absence. Samson's writing, which is highly paratactical, builds images of the speaker and absent auditor in reverse, blocking out the shape of loss like an X-ray, an accumulation of objects arranging around negative space. In the final lines of "History to the Defeated" (*Left and Leaving*), for example, the speaker takes stock of the effects left behind by a "Mechanic-school dropout" in order to build a shorthand understanding of the character, "listing what's left: a signed Slayer t-shirt, a car up on blocks in his mother's back yard." In "Everything Must Go!" (*Left and Leaving*), the narrator holds a yard sale in order to "pay [their] heart's outstanding bills," and lists items for sale ranging from "a cracked-up compass" to "a sense of wonder, only slightly used." In "Left and Leaving," the narrator explicitly identifies the items he is listing as mnemonic fragments, singing, "[m]emory will rust and erode into lists of all that you gave me: a blanket, some matches, this pain in my chest, the best parts of Lonely, duct tape and soldered wires, new words for old desires, and every birthday card I threw away." These lists act as both a final account—a tallying up of the remnants of a life or love that leaves material traces of itself behind—and an act of gathering, of taking stock not just of what was left behind, but of what is "left" to move forward with.

Though several songs on *Winter Wheat* centre on loss, elegizing individuals, the environment, and even a Public Access television station, each of their narrators finds a way to cling to hope. The narrator of "Fellow Traveller," for example, who is a fictionalized representation of British art critic and Soviet spy Anthony Blunt ("About John K. Samson's *Winter Wheat*"), mourns his loss of control over his disgraced public image ("Rain

for the last day that I will be known the way that I want them to know me"), and compares the loss to the defection of his erstwhile companion, the titular "Fellow Traveller." Though the narrator is now completely alone, abandoned by his government, co-conspirators, and even his dreams, and though memories of his partner are increasingly blurred (by "rain," "tears," and time), by the conclusion of the song the speaker "still believe[s] in you and me." "Fellow Traveller" resituates a historically *weak* narrative—a queer love story between two disgraced Communist-sympathizing double agents—as a sympathetic, deeply human tale of staunchly enduring loyalty and companionship. Though "Fellow Traveller" is unique within *Winter Wheat* for its physical and historical settings, its story of lonely, unlikely, left-leaning solidarity in the face of ongoing loss places it in clear thematic concert with the rest of Samson's work.

Returning to Manitoba, the song "Requests," commissioned for Erika MacPherson's 2018 film *Heimþrá, In Thrall to Home,* is comprised of accumulative requests from a woman to her deceased female ancestors for transhistorical, reciprocal forgiveness. The speaker is thus gendered female in this song. There is a tragic latency to these requests, an unfulfilled yearning that circles back upon itself in the bookended lyric of the opening and closing line: "I want you to know what I forgive you for, now that you're all ashes anyway." Like many of the requests in the song, the speaker's opening entreaty switches suddenly between the registers of grand narratives of human existence (death, forgiveness, and family) and the quotidian, embodied realities of life and death ("now that you're all ashes anyway"). The mixed tonalities of this song resemble the reality of experiencing the death of a loved one; it is both an earth-shaking, cosmic shift in reality, and the most ordinary event in the world. The speaker's final "anyway," offhandedly tagged on at the end of a line jam-packed with affect, undercuts the gravity of her request with its conversational tone. The speaker is both insistent upon being heard by the auditor and self-conscious about the whole interaction, beginning and ending with a trailed off "anyway" that suggests she may be resigned to many of her requests going unfulfilled.

Though the speaker's requests, which range from wanting the auditor to "hear the farm apologize for letting you believe you could return" to wanting "every highway sign to remember we were here," are largely untenable, Samson situates hope for salvation, or at least something approaching forgiveness, in the very utterance of a request. In its explicit voicing of frustrated entreaties, "Requests" resembles the opening line of "(manifest),"

the first song in the sonnet cycle that structures The Weakerthans' 2003 album *Reconstruction Site:* "I want to call requests through heating vents, / and hear them answered with a whisper, 'No.'" Like the whispered denial in "(manifest)," the speaker of "Requests" voices her requests to an absent or invisible auditor with not only the fear, but the intention of being denied. While the auditor can no longer hear or feel forgiveness, the speaker's performance of absolution locates forgiveness in the voicing of her song: though the intended auditor may either deny or not hear the request, we, the listeners, bear witness. Like the ashes the speaker scatters in the second line ("Every step into the river pushes you further away"), the speaker clutches at the remnants of the auditor even as she watches them disperse, singing, "I want you to take your time to disappear." In "Requests," the speaker performs one of the most enduring forms of elegy: singing her mother's memory into lyric so that the listener might share in her remembrance. Delivered over a splashy, gently tick-tocking beat and sparsely plucked guitar, this song sounds memory, delaying the auditor's disappearance "in 4/4 time" ("Left and Leaving").

"Let it rest and be done": Weak Listening

Long-time listeners of The Weakerthans will recognize another pair of songs on *Winter Wheat* as a kind of meta-elegy, completing a much-loved tetralogy of tracks about a "Cat Named Virtute." The first two songs in the series, "Plea From a Cat Named Virtute" (*Reconstruction Site*) and "Virtute the Cat Explains Her Departure" (*Reunion Tour*), offer a cat's perspective on her owner's spiralling mental illness and addiction. "Virtute," which Samson translates to "strength" from Latin, emerges from one of Winnipeg's first city mottos, "Unum Cum Virtute Multorum," or, "One with the Strength of Many." In her first song, Virtute tries to convince her owner that he is stronger than he thinks: "Listen, about those bitter songs you sing? They're not helping anything. They won't make you strong." Virtute insists that her owner find connection with other humans in order to gain "the strength of many." Like many of Samson's songs that dramatize failures of communication, however, Virtute's auditor is unable to understand her pleas or access her language of assurance.

In Virtute's second song, when she "Explains her Departure," she and her owner have lost all ability to communicate. Having strayed too far from home, Virtute first loses her memory of the way home, and, eventually, her memory of her own name: "For a while I heard you missing steps in

the street, and your anger, pleading in an uncertain key, singing the sound that you found for me . . . but I can't remember the sound that you found for me." In "Plea," Virtute begs her owner to "Listen." In "Departure," though Virtute can *hear* her owner "for a while," she slowly loses her ability to locate meaning in human sounds, the song dramatizing Virtute's dislocation through auditory imagery that weakly sounds "in an uncertain key." "Virtute the Cat Explains Her Departure" is less of an explanation, and more of a lament for the final fracture in communication between Virtute and her owner. Going beyond the obvious interspecies communication incompatibility, the Virtute tetralogy can be read as an extended meditation on the importance of learning to listen, even or especially when the voice is *weaker* than your own.

The first evocation of Virtute on *Winter Wheat* is oblique, coming midway through the track "17th Street Treatment Centre," in which the narrator cheerfully details the twenty-first day of his stay at an in-patient facility. It is unclear whether this is the narrator's last day in treatment or simply a day that feels like a turning point, but "on the twenty-first day," the narrator lists the ways in which he is reclaiming some fragile hope: "The sun didn't hate me, the food wasn't angry, the bed didn't sigh, the ceiling said it's possible I might get my looks back." Though the speaker is feeling stronger, his outlook is still coded in the languages of addiction, displacing blame for the side effects of his withdrawal (light sensitivity, queasiness, restlessness, insomnia, and doubt) onto anthropomorphized objects around him.

From his tentatively hopeful mindset three weeks into the program, the narrator is able to reframe his "court-ordered stay," finding positives and even humour where before he found none: "On the twenty-first day, I danced to the twelve-step, examined, admitted I'm powerless to . . ." Using the phraseology of the twelve-step program, the narrator sings his way to a tenuously hopeful, if incomplete admission: While he is powerless over any word placed at the end of his sentence, he locates a new resilience in its very vocalization. In the classic twelve-step program, admitting that you are powerless over your addictions is the first step to regaining power over one's own life. In step with Samson's politics and poetics of weakness, hope for the future in "17th Street Treatment Centre" can be found in the narrator's reclamation of his own powerlessness. The song concludes with a similarly "hopelessly hopeful" ("Exiles Among You," *Left and Leaving*) statement: "In for three weeks, or in for forever. . . . Most of us probably not getting better, but not getting better together." Finding community in even the bleakest of

locales, the song's narrator locates transformative hope in shaky, situational companionship. Directly following the narrator's admission that he is "powerless," he describes how he passes time in the treatment centre: "Sang the one about the spring the cat ran away." In this moment, the keen listener will identify the narrator as, for the first time in Samson's cat-song catalogue, Virtute's owner. Though the cat has long since died, the echo of Virtute's songs seems to form the soundtrack of his recovery.

In "Virtute at Rest," the final track on *Winter Wheat*, we hear from a spectral version of Virtute. The song opens by situating Virtute's voice within her owner's mind: "Now that the treatment and anti-depressants and seven months sober have built me a bed in the back of your brain." Though this song again dramatizes Virtute speaking entreatingly to her silent owner, for the first time there is an underlying assurance that her owner can *hear* her. Singing from directly within her owner's mind, Virtute echoes some of the larger issues of the album—forgiveness, mental health, rehabilitation, and attenuated companionship—and invites (rather than pleads with) her owner to "Let it rest—all you can't change. Let it rest and be done." Though, Virtute warns, "it will never be easy or simple . . . [and] I will dig in my claws when you stray"—the "when" rather than "if" and owner-cat-inversion of "stray" weakening any sense that the song is absolving the subject of responsibility—there is weak hope in Virtute's gentle insistence that her owner transform his indulgent inaction into generative *rest*. In *Winter Wheat*'s gentle, cozy closing track, Samson allows this sprawling, anxious album to come to rest, turning inwards once again. As Virtute and her owner finally find one another in the realm of the imagination, resting together "like we used to, in a line of late-afternoon sun," their voices cohere into one; singing the sounds that they found for each other in a melancholy, late, and weak chorus of hope. As the listener lays the *Winter Wheat* to rest, we are invited to join the chorus, by continuing to sing the sounds that we have found in its tracks, tuning ourselves carefully and attentively to one another.

"A way to survive": Beginnings

In the epigraph to *Winter Wheat*, Samson quotes visual artist Jenny Holzer's 1994 aluminum plaque, which reads, "In a dream you saw a way to survive and you were full of joy." Holzer's piece, which resembles a heavy memorial plaque but is formed out of a weak metal alloy, contrasts the sharpness of uncertain survival with a flimsy, untrustworthy dream of joy. Holzer's plaque evokes a simultaneous hope for the future—"a dream" and

"joy"—with the late, backward-facing grief of an epitaph. For Samson to use Holzer's tentatively hopeful epitaph as an epigraph to *Winter Wheat* suggests a similar tension between the memorialization of a troubled past and a theoretical, dream-like hope for the future. Like Ngai and Berlant, Samson wrestles with the complicated, occasionally *ugly* or *cruel* feelings that can attend hopefulness—is it possible, or even ethical, to cling to hope anymore? In uncoupling hope from sources of oppressive power, the *weak hope* I hear in Samson's lyrics imagines a collective chorus that tunes itself into metaphorical harmony primarily through radically equitable *listening*—becoming "One with the strength of many" not through forced cohesion or the erasure of difference, but by the loudest voices quieting themselves in order to listen to the *weakerthan*. *Winter Wheat* offers no blithe assurances, but instead begins to model the weak hope of attentive, empathetic *listening*, inviting listeners to tune our own ears towards the tiny lengthenings of light that just might be somewhere out in the winter wheat.

NOTES

1 The "Golden Boy" statue in Winnipeg becomes an image of corporate greed and hypocrisy in "One Great City!"

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Joanne Epp

Affirmation

Omand's Creek, May

The slopes are dull as pavement,
creek's edge dry with last year's cattails.
Coffee cups, bright red faded to brick,
lodge in bushes. Wind-blown fast-food logos,
disguised by dirt and sun-bleach,
entangle in the yellowed grass.

Step sideways—the picture changes:
new grass threading up through the old,
willow twigs bursting with leaves, rosehips
still orange after winter, the advertisement
of blackbird's scarlet shoulders.

Tomorrow, neighbours will come
with gloves and garbage bags, kick up dust
from blades of bluestem. They'll comb out
the cardboard and plastic that's drifted in.
Push back the boundaries yet again.

Kristina Getz

Alice Munro's "Providence," Second-Wave Feminism, and the (Im)possibilities of Reconciling Motherhood and Liberation

The difficulties inherent to the reconciliation of late-twentieth-century discourses of second-wave feminist liberation with the physical and psychosocial demands of motherhood have been well documented by countless theorists, philosophers, and academics, from Simone de Beauvoir's landmark 1949 treatise, *The Second Sex*, to Adrienne Rich's 1976 text, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, to the extensive maternal scholarship generated and curated by Andrea O'Reilly over the past fifteen years. Patrice DiQuinzio notes the deeply contentious nature of motherhood within feminist theory, observing that "some feminists have argued that mothering is the source of women's limitations or the cause of women's oppression, because it is the experience in which women most suffer under the tyranny of nature, biology, and/or male control" (ix). More productively, she also asserts that "mothering is both an important site at which the central concepts of feminist theory are elaborated, and a site at which these concepts are challenged and reworked" (xi). In the context of second-wave feminism, which reached its peak in the 1970s, the conflict between motherhood and female liberation was perhaps at its most acute. As Adrienne Rich writes in 1976, "The twentieth-century, educated young woman . . . trying to create an autonomous self in a society which insists that she is destined primarily for reproduction, has with good reason felt that the choice was an inescapable either/or: motherhood or individuation, motherhood or creativity, motherhood or freedom" (160).

This discursive and often material binary, between the needs of children to be mothered and the needs of mothers to function as autonomous, individuated people, persists into the twenty-first century. While the theoretical, discursive, and material conditions of working mothers have transformed significantly over recent decades, the conflict women continue to feel between the obligations of mothering and their autonomy and ambition is arguably as pernicious and powerful as ever. As Daphne de Marneffe explains, "Women continue to recognize the impediments to earning power and professional accomplishments that caring for children presents, but the problem remains that caring for their children *matters* deeply to them" (16, emphasis original).

Alice Munro's 1978 short story "Providence" is one of the earliest examples of Canadian prose that explicitly explores the conflicts inherent to maternal experiences of feminist liberation.[1] While the story was originally written in the socio-cultural context of second-wave feminism, the issues Munro highlights related to the struggles of mothers who seek to free themselves from the personal limitations of patriarchal marriage and explore their independence remain relevant to contemporary women. Furthermore, Munro's short story, even while it contemplates the material and psychological impossibilities of feminist liberation and motherhood, still functions to open up an important and emergent literary space within which a previously inarticulable maternal subjectivity can be expressed. The seventh story in Munro's 1978 short story cycle *Who Do You Think You Are?,* "Providence" features the enigmatic, footloose, and independent Rose as its protagonist, and explicitly explores the inherent and ultimately impossible reconciliation of her feminist independence and maternal responsibilities. Munro wrote the story in October 1976 (Thacker 311), a few years after the dissolution of her own marriage of two decades (244), and it first appeared in the August 1977 edition of *Redbook,* the publishing venue serving as an obvious testament to the story's underlying thematic preoccupation with women's lived experiences and the liberative upheavals of the feminist movement.[2] The other stories in the collection capture episodes and eras of Rose's life, from her downtrodden childhood in Hanratty, to her socially advantageous marriage, followed by the birth of her daughter, extramarital affairs, and newfound independence after her divorce. Her career as an actress, romantic entanglements, and return to Hanratty in the final, eponymous story round out the collection, forming what Gerald Lynch describes as Munro's "masterful" and "only fully formed short story cycle" (159).

Curiously, "Providence" has merited remarkably little scholarly attention in the forty-plus years since its publication. In fact, it is easily the least critically explored story in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Lynch devotes a chapter to *Who Do You Think You Are?* in his 2001 book on the Canadian short story cycle, but limits his attention to "Privilege" and "Who Do You Think You Are?" (159). Walter R. Martin likewise minimizes the importance of "Providence" in the collection, arguing that while it is "successful," it is more effective as "a section" of the short story cycle, rather than "an independent story" (116). He concludes that it is "less satisfactory than the other stories" due in part to an "uncertainty of purpose" (Martin 101). I would argue, however, that the uncertainty he detects, rather than evidence of a faltering in Munro's literary skill, is purposeful and meaningful. Rose herself, at this juncture in her life, is deeply uncertain and unsure, of both what she is doing as a single working mother and to what extent she is (or is not) sufficiently fulfilling her maternal role.

A number of critics, particularly those who openly employ a feminist or maternal framework, provide useful and applicable insights into Munro's recurring treatment of the mother figure in her stories, even though they may not directly reference "Providence." Magdalene Redekop explores the "surrogate mother" in Munro's work, noting the proliferation of "stepmothers, foster mothers, adoptive mothers, child mothers, nurses, old maids mothering their parents, lovers mothering each other . . . and numerous women and men behaving in ways that could be described as maternal" (4). Elizabeth Hay notes that texts of Munro's "middle period" (encompassing *Who Do You Think You Are?*) offer up "many variations on the mother figure, giving us unmarried mothers, substitute mothers, runaway mothers, invalid mothers, and motherless or poorly mothered or over-mothered children" (186). While Hay never explicitly mentions "Providence," it is easy to see how Rose clearly fits into these paradigms of unorthodox maternity, first as a separated single mother in the throes of a long-distance affair with a married man, and ultimately as a "runaway mother" who sends her child back to her ex-husband and his new wife before she moves East to pursue acting opportunities on her own. Chantel Lavoie notes more generally that Munro's fiction has "always explored" the "ambivalence" of motherhood, asserting "that staying and coping with motherhood is only [ever] an uneasy compromise, not a triumph" (70), and that more often than not, Munro is preoccupied by "the dark ambivalence of the monstrous mother" (69), with stories featuring "maternal

characters [who] ache with longing for men they love, and sex with those men takes them away from their children, the fruits of earlier relationships" (71).[3]

And while "Providence" does include a fledgling, long-distance romantic relationship that Rose is eagerly seeking to maintain, the story is much more deeply invested in the quotidian tasks of a mother raising her child, and the conflicts and difficulties of managing life as a newly-single working mother. It is also the only story in the collection that focuses on Rose's relationship with her daughter Anna and her experiences as a mother. The other story in which Anna is mentioned is "Mischief," wherein her birth is somewhat tangential to the narrative, which is focused primarily on Rose's affair with Clifford, the husband of a friend she meets in the maternity ward. "Providence," on the other hand, chronicles Rose's efforts to achieve a precarious balance between her maternal role and her newfound freedom from her marriage, which has paved the way for her to contemplate new professional ambitions and romantic desires. In fact, it is precisely her struggle with these competing demands and impulses which drives the narrative, as Rose longs for autonomy, freedom, and erotic love, while striving to adequately meet the obligations of mothering her young daughter. The difficulty of reconciling these equally powerful and often disparate drives is captured in the persistent ambiguity and ambivalence of Munro's text. As Ajay Heble observes, *Who Do You Think You Are?* as a collection marks "Munro's increasing involvement with a poetics of uncertainty and a rhetoric of mistrust" (96). Munro achieves this through a variety of textual, narrative, and thematic constructions, from the sublimated fears and desires of Rose's dreamlife, to Rose's oscillation between maternal satisfaction and self-doubt, and the ambiguity generated by Anna's unhappiness and final declaration of being "fine" by the end of the story. Ultimately, "Providence" suggests that reconciling motherhood with liberation and self-realization—particularly in the context of the dominant, liberative second-wave feminism of the 1970s—is, in fact, impossible. Rose eventually abandons her attempt at single motherhood and, instead, relinquishes custody of her daughter to her ex-husband and his new wife. And while Rose's decision to effectively give up her maternal role in exchange for the freedom of personal fulfillment may seem untenable or unacceptable in the context of dominant, idealized discourses of motherhood, the struggles she encounters and self-doubt she experiences as a single working mother continue to resonate into the twenty-first century.

Theoretical, Maternal, and Feminist Contexts

The ascendence of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s ushered in new personal, sexual, and professional possibilities for women's lives, the benefits of which women continue to reap into the present. The liberationist feminism of the second wave "implied a greater sense of personal empowerment and choice, adventure and sexual power free from prevailing ideas of what it meant to be a woman" (Hannam 147). However, women's lived, material realities, especially within the patriarchal family structure, often continued to remain constrained and fraught. Even within feminist theory and activism, "there was a general silence on mothering and motherhood in 1960s and early 1970s white second wave feminism" (Hallstein 4). This elision of and discomfort with motherhood was likely due to the perception that motherhood was deeply complicit with patriarchal structures of power. As Adrienne Rich observes in *Of Woman Born*, "[a]t the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit" (60), and within this family unit, "[t]he experience of maternity . . . [has] been channeled to serve male interests" (42). The mother, for Rich, is thus a potent figure co-opted into her own oppression. In recent decades, considerable scholarship has theorized the myriad ways women can and do enact feminist mothering beyond the bounds of patriarchy, most notably in the work of Andrea O'Reilly, who argues that feminist mothering becomes possible with the affirmation of "maternal agency, authority, autonomy, and authenticity" (26). However, in the 1970s context of Munro's short story, many feminists were left with "a void or silence" surrounding mothering as a feminist, and how one might go about reconciling feminist liberation with motherhood (Hallstein 42).

The feminist discomfort with motherhood is not simply limited to the theoretical and discursive context within which Munro's story was written and published, but is, in fact, woven into the fabric of "Providence" itself. If, as Beverly Rasporich suggests, *Who Do You Think You Are?* functions as one of Munro's many feminist quest narratives, "primarily undertaken by the dominant persona of an intelligent and mature narrator who questions society's expectations of her as female" (32), then "Providence" can be interpreted—in the context of the short story cycle in which the text is immortalized—as a story that chronicles Rose's escape from patriarchal restrictions towards personal autonomy, freedom, and independence, while confirming and enacting the impossibility of reconciling feminist emancipation with motherhood. Rose's daughter Anna thus embodies the final, complicated

obstacle that Rose must overcome in order to be set free from her patriarchal oppression, which includes both marriage *and* motherhood. It is this form of social oppression within the context of the family unit which Rich vehemently rejects, referring to it as the "patriarchal institution of motherhood," rife with its own history and ideology (33). She goes on to explain that

> [t]ypically, under patriarchy, the mother's life is exchanged for the child; her autonomy as a separate being seems fated to conflict with the infant she will bear. The self-denying, self-annihilative role of the Good Mother . . . will spell the "death" of the woman or girl who once had hopes, expectations, fantasies *for herself*—especially when those hopes and fantasies have never been acted-on. (Rich 166, emphasis original).

Munro's Rose is, in many ways, a woman who has—prior to this specific short story in the collection—followed a traditional trajectory for North American women of the mid-twentieth century, from her pursuit of a university education as a means to escape the poverty of her childhood, to her early marriage to an affluent suitor named Patrick she meets while at university, to bearing his child soon after. Of course, Rose soon discovers, in the midst of this sequence of events, that she longs for something more. As Magdalene Redekop notes of Munro's feminist subterfuge, "no writer is more devastatingly effective at dismantling the operations of our patriarchal structures" (xii). Furthermore, Munro's short stories are frequently preoccupied with the multi-faceted and divergent needs and desires of her female protagonists. As Joseph Gold remarks, Munro "explores the schizophrenia . . . which afflicts the educated woman who seriously seeks to be a genuine self, a creative person, a loving female, a mother, a writer, an actress, a teacher" (12). In this context, Rose's quest for feminist liberation and self-discovery necessitates cutting the ties of her patriarchal bondage, leaving behind her identity as a wife and, ultimately, also abandoning her role as an active, involved mother. It is clear that for Rose, no discursive or imaginative landscape exists for her to mother beyond the confines of patriarchy. Rose's feminist quest also mobilizes an interesting paradox, since, as I explore below, part of Rose's emancipation necessitates the return of her daughter to her ex-husband and his new wife, Elizabeth, who embodies a very traditional, feminine docility. And while the resolution to Rose's conundrum may cast her among the "monstrous" mothers described by Lavoie, the conflicts she feels with such acuteness, between her child and her sense of self, and between her professional ambitions and her maternal obligations, remain resonant into the present.

Rose's (Im)possible Feminist Motherhood

Rose's relationship with her daughter Anna is foregrounded throughout "Providence," tinged with ambivalence and guilt. The opening lines read: "Rose had a dream about Anna. This was after she had gone away and left Anna behind" (*Who* 142). In the dream, Rose meets Anna as she is walking home from school, but when Rose tries to speak to her, "Anna walked past not speaking" (142). Not only that, but the dream-Anna is "covered with clay that seemed to have leaves or branches in it, so that the effect was of dead garlands. Decoration; ruination" (142). The juxtaposition of these two impulses related to her daughter—both decorative celebration and death and ruin—function to symbolize Rose's complicated mix of emotions, her maternal love, guilt, and fear. The *Redbook* version of the story opens with the same scene, but with additional details of Rose's inner reflections that were subsequently excised:

> There was something terrible about that crude, heavy head, like the head of a featureless idol. Nothing has happened to justify that dream. Anna is not dead. She is happy, I think. I don't lurk about the streets waiting to speak to her as she comes home from school. I live too far away. When I first went away . . . I didn't take Anna with me. (Munro, "Providence" 98).

Of course, even though Rose insists that "[n]othing has happened to justify that dream," it is implied that it is her very abandonment of Anna that has given rise to her sense of culpability. A form of guilt is emblematized in the mud covering her daughter's head, rendered "crude" and "heavy," weighed down with the burden of her parents' divorce, and in Rose's acknowledgement that in her departure from her marriage and the West Coast, she had "left Anna behind." It is also noteworthy that she only "thinks" that Anna "is happy," and that, in fact, she now "live[s] too far away" to know for sure. This distance is rendered both physical and emotional, leaving in its wake uncertainty and guilt. Her admission that "[w]hen I first went away . . . I didn't take Anna with me" is resonant with culpability and confession. Anna is given primacy in the dream sequence that comprises the first paragraph of the story, and as I will explore below, Anna's written words—and her subjectivity—also form the concluding sentences of the story.

In the three published versions of "Providence," when Rose asks Anna if she wants to move with her to the Kootenays where she has a job or stay behind with her father, Anna's response, "lying on the four-poster bed where Patrick and Rose used to sleep," is simply, "I don't want you to go" (*Who* 142). When Rose presses her, Anna calls her father to the room: "When he came

she sat up and pulled them both down on the bed, one on each side of her. She held on to them, and began to sob and shake. . . . 'You don't have to,' she said" (143). The symbolism of the marital bed, where Anna—perhaps conceived in this bed also—weeps and implores her parents to stay together, "pull[ing] them both down on the bed" with her, highlights Anna's distress at the dissolution of her parents' relationship and her mother's imminent departure from the family home. However, Munro subtly undermines the reader's quick, reactive sympathy with Anna when she describes her as "a violently dramatic child, sometimes, a bare blade" (143), while simultaneously legitimating Rose's motives for leaving through a recounting of self-harm. The narrator reveals that Rose has "scars on her wrists and her body, which she had made (not quite in the most dangerous places) with a razor blade," and makes an allusion to at least one incident of domestic violence when "[o]nce in the kitchen of this house Patrick had tried to choke her. Once she had run outside and knelt in her nightgown, tearing up handfuls of grass" (143). Furthermore, as Rose is "packing her trunk" (142) in preparation for leaving the family home, she reveals that it has always been her sublimated intention to break free from the chains of her marriage: "[S]he had always been planning, at the back of her mind, to do what she was doing now. Even on her wedding day she had known this time would come, and that if it didn't she might as well be dead" (142-43). Before even entering into marriage, Rose was aware—in however sublimated a manner—of the enormous costs of matrimony, to both her autonomy and her freedom; remaining in her marriage is likened to a living death.

Notwithstanding the narrator's admission that "for Anna this bloody fabric her parents had made, of mistakes and mismatches . . . was still the true web of life, of father and mother, of beginning and shelter" (143), Munro ultimately concludes that "anybody could see [that it] ought to be torn up and thrown away" (143). The foundational, parental relationship that has created and nurtured Anna's life, within which Rose is inevitably ensnared too, is rendered inadequate and insufficient: "What fraud, thought Rose, what fraud for everybody" (143). And in one of Munro's classically ambivalent and paradoxical twists, Anna appears to rebound quickly from her distress the night before: "In the morning Anna was cheerful, she said it was all right. She said she wanted to stay. She wanted to stay in her school, with her friends. She turned halfway down the walk to wave and shriek at her parents. 'Have a happy divorce!'" (144). Her "cheerfulness" and her declaration that "it was all right" and even her waving and wishing

of a "happy divorce!" for her parents are undermined by the fact that she "shrieks" these words, signalling intense and unmanageable emotion.

Rose embarks on her new life in the Kootenays, working at a local radio station, decorating her new apartment, and corresponding with her married lover Tom in Calgary. After Rose decides to bring Anna to live with her after the Christmas break, "Providence" then offers a myriad of details of Rose's daily life and struggles as a single working mother, juggling her domestic and maternal tasks alongside her new job. The narrative emphasizes the physical difficulties of her new life with Anna, where Rose's "heart would pound . . . from hauling the laundry, the groceries. The laundromat, the supermarket, the liquor store, were all at the bottom of the hill. She was busy all the time. She always had urgent plans for the next hour" (148). The physical effort expended, emblematized in Rose's pounding heart and her "urgent" busyness, captures the difficulty of life as a single mother, without a partner to help with errands or housekeeping. Munro outlines some of the seemingly minor but time-consuming tasks Rose undertakes on a regular basis, noting that "[b]esides her job, which was hard enough, she was doing the same things she had always done, and doing them under harder circumstances" (148). But notwithstanding the difficulties Rose experiences, she also observes that "[t]here was a surprising amount of comfort in these chores" (148). In fact, Rose experiences an almost paradoxical contentment amidst the chaos of being a single mother to a young child. The narrative details the necessary "hound[ing]" of "Anna into her bath" at eight o'clock every evening, bringing her a "final glass of chocolate milk," "mopp[ing] up the bathroom," "pick[ing] up the papers, crayons, felt cutouts, scissors, dirty socks, Chinese checkers," and making "Anna's lunch for the next day" (150). Munro highlights the minutiae of the materiality of mothering, from specific toys to be tidied every day to preparing meals. These quotidian domestic details are often those aspects of women's lives that occupy inordinate amounts of time but are rarely afforded the acknowledgment of literary representation. The "surprising . . . comfort" (148) Rose experiences is something she particularly enjoys after Anna is asleep and Rose is able to "settle down with a drink or a cup of coffee laced with rum, and give herself over to satisfaction, appreciation" (150). It is during these moments, at the conclusion of the day, that Rose is able to sit down quietly with a drink, and experience a remarkable realization of what O'Reilly describes in *Mother Outlaws* as "empowered mothering" or "feminist mothering," beyond the bounds of patriarchy, wherein maternal "agency, authority, autonomy,

and authenticity" are affirmed, allowing mothers to feel both fulfilled and satisfied (26). As Munro writes of Rose's evenings after Anna is asleep,

> She would turn off the lights and sit by the high front window looking out over this mountain town she had hardly known existed a year ago, and she would think what a miracle it was that this had happened, that she had come all this way and was working, she had Anna, she was paying for Anna's life and her own. (*Who* 151).

Rose not only relishes her freedom in having come "all this way," but she acknowledges the importance of her financial independence as well. Rose, furthermore, "could feel the weight of Anna in the apartment then just as naturally as she had felt her weight in her body, and without having to go and look at her she could see with stunning, fearful pleasure the fair hair and fair skin and glistening eyebrows" (151). Anna's material presence in the apartment is rendered as a weight akin to the fullness of pregnancy, both natural and beautiful. Munro's narrator observes of Rose's self-understanding in this moment: "For the first time in her life she understood domesticity, knew the meaning of shelter, and labored to manage it" (151). The "labor" Rose undertakes to cultivate the domestic space wherein her mothering is enacted also gestures, like the "weight" of pregnancy, to the materiality of birth-giving. Munro emphasizes the self-understanding Rose acquires, and her newfound achievement of a particularly feminist iteration of "domesticity" and "shelter," in which both are maintained through the fruits of her own singular labour. And while single-motherhood is not without its struggles, Rose succeeds in making a home—however briefly—for her daughter that is independent of the interference of any male figure, effectively free from the limitations and expectations of patriarchal motherhood.

This newfound sense of empowerment and maternal independence, however, is undercut by Rose's fledgling and unsuccessful attempts to reunite with Tom and, more significantly, Anna's homesickness and psychological distress. Not long after Anna moves to the Kootenays to live with Rose, Rose meets her daughter on her way home from school and notices that Anna's face appears "dirty," and then realizes "that it was stained with tears" (148). This is also the obvious source material for the dream which opens the story, further underscoring the extent of Anna's unhappiness. When Rose asks Anna what has happened, Anna replies, "Today I heard somebody calling Jeremy . . . and I thought Jeremy was here" (148). The narrative then reveals that "Jeremy was a little boy she had often played with at home" (148). In

order to try and soothe Anna, Rose takes her to buy a pet fish and offers to stop for chocolate milk. However, Anna sullenly replies, "My stomach hurts" (148), and their physical surroundings begin to metaphorically reflect Anna's turmoil, with "the kind of winter sunshine that only makes your eyes hurt, and your clothes too heavy, and emphasizes all disorder and difficulty" (148). While drinking her ineffectual emotional remedy of chocolate milk, Anna accuses Rose: "'You don't love Daddy . . . I know you don't'" (149). When Rose protests that she does like him, but that they just can't be together anymore, Anna insists: "'You don't like him. You're just lying. . . . Aren't you?'" (149). She then concludes "with some satisfaction," as she "pushe[s] the chocolate milk away," that her "stomach still hurts" (149). Anna's unhappiness is manifested in both her physical ailments, which Rose is unable to soothe, and her direct accusations that Rose and her apparent lack of feeling for Patrick are at fault for their current living arrangements and Anna being away from her friends. Anna's discontent is in sharp contrast to Rose's newfound sense of well-being, and undermines Rose's confidence in her mothering. Her emotional response to Anna's resentment is one of irritation, as she finds herself "on the verge of saying no, she did not like [Patrick]. If that's what you want, you can have it, she felt like saying" (149). Alongside her acknowledgement that "Anna did want it" is the attendant question of her daughter's youth, as she wonders, "but could she stand it? How do you ever judge what children can stand?" (149). The origins of her maternal self-doubt can be found in Anna's undeniable unhappiness with her new life.

Further challenging Rose's occasional feelings of empowerment and independence is an undercurrent of anxiety and unease about Anna's environment. Anna spends much of her time in the evenings watching *Family Court*, with its parade of broken families and wayward teenagers, juxtaposed against *The Brady Bunch*, with its idealized, blended family (149-50). Rose lets Anna eat dinner in front of the TV because it allows her to continue to work. She begins "putting things in bowls, so that Anna could manage more easily. She stopped making suppers of meat and potatoes and vegetables, because she had to throw so much out" (150). Some nights, when Anna wants cereal for dinner, "Rose let her have it. But then she would think there was something disastrously wrong, when she saw Anna in front of the television set eating Captain Crunch, at the very hour when families everywhere were gathered at kitchen or dining-room tables, preparing to eat and quarrel and amuse and torment each other" (150). Alone, Rose feels

unable to recreate the family life that she believes Anna needs, and that she is sure other people are enjoying. Even though she herself sought to break free from the chains and routines of domesticity, she acknowledges something of value and stability for her daughter in the life she left behind. The freedom and independence for which Rose yearns and ultimately achieves in leaving her husband and carving out a career of her own is—as it turns out—not quite the life she wants for her daughter.

In addition to Anna's own unhappiness and Rose's doubts about Anna's home life, Patrick writes to Rose to ask that Anna come home to Vancouver for the summer, and to let her know that he has met someone new, Elizabeth, and therefore wants to expedite their divorce so he can remarry. He describes Elizabeth as "a fine and stable person" (160), in apparent contrast to Rose, and then ventures to request full custody of Anna:

> And did Rose not think, said Patrick, that it might be better for Anna to be settled in her old home next year, in the home she had always known, to be back at her old school with her old friends (Jeremy kept asking about her) rather than traipsing around with Rose in her new independent existence? (160)

Patrick's mention here of Jeremy reinforces the validity of Anna's own feelings of longing for her "old school" and her "old friends." Just as Anna is missing Jeremy, so too is "Jeremy . . . asking about her" (160). Patrick's letter also functions to corroborate Rose's own fears of her "disastrously wrong" (150) single-parenting arrangement, drawing attention to her "traipsing around" (160) (an obvious example of which is Rose's ill-fated, aborted midnight bus trip to see her lover with Anna in tow [156-59]). The narrative stays with Patrick's perspective, as he continues:

> Might it not be true—and here Rose thought she heard the voice of the stable girlfriend—that she was using Anna to give herself some stability, rather than face up to the consequences of the path she had chosen? (160-61)

According to this patriarchal logic of the family's structure, "the consequences" of Rose's path towards autonomy and independence necessitate the relinquishment of her daughter.[4] The indirect discourse through which Patrick's letter is narrated further complicates the meaning Rose interprets, as it merges his voice with Rose's subjectivity. Rather than quoting him directly, Patrick's suggestions to send Anna back to her "old home . . . the home she has always known" (160) is refracted through Rose's own insecurity and uncertainty. Rose has internalized and accepted the condemnation she feels she deserves because of her choice to leave her role

as wife and (traditional) mother within the context of a hetero-patriarchal family structure. As such, not only must she consequently pay the price, but Patrick has found another more suitable, "stable" woman and mother to take her place. Here, rather than asserting her maternal entitlement and new-found feminist empowerment, Rose capitulates to Patrick's request. She finds herself unable to raise a sufficient defence for herself or her single-mothering: "Rose wanted to reply that she was making a home for Anna here, but she could not do that, truthfully" (161). Instead, she admits failure, and decides that the home she has made for her and Anna is not only insufficient, but temporary. She confesses that "[s]he no longer wanted to stay [in the Kootenays]. The charm, the transparency, of this town was gone for her" (161). Furthermore, "The pay was poor. She would never be able to afford anything but this cheap apartment. She might never get a better job, or another lover" (161). Here, Rose admits to her desire for a romantic relationship and confirms the financial hardship she is experiencing, which is also alluded to earlier in the narrative by descriptions of the "stained and shabby" apartment she rents, with its wallpaper "ripping and curling away from the baseboard" (144). For the first time, she admits that she is "thinking of going east, to Toronto, trying to get a job there, with a radio or television station, perhaps even some acting jobs" (161). She reveals her professional ambitions to develop her career as an actress, something only possible in a larger city. However, she acknowledges also that "[s]he wanted to take Anna with her, set them up again in some temporary shelter. It was just as Patrick said. She wanted to come home to Anna, to fill her life with Anna" (161). Rose expresses her maternal desire to have her daughter close; however, she is also forced to admit to herself that "[s]he didn't think Anna would choose that life. Poor, picturesque, gypsying childhoods are not much favored by children, though they will claim to value them, for all sorts of reasons, later on" (161). Ultimately, Rose decides that the life she wants for herself as a single, independent, liberated woman is incompatible with her perceptions of Anna's needs and expectations. Rather than having confidence in her ability to sufficiently mother Anna (however unconventionally) or adapting her life's plans to accommodate the needs of her daughter, Rose chooses to relinquish Anna to the very patriarchal family structure she herself was so desperate to escape.

And so, Anna goes "to live with Patrick and Elizabeth," where she begins "to take drama and ballet lessons" because "Elizabeth thought she should have some accomplishments, and keep busy" (161). Anna is given

her parents' old "four-poster bed, with a new canopy" (161). Patrick and Elizabeth also give her a kitten—a pet that Rose was unable to get for her because of the rental prohibitions in her apartment, and which she attempted to replicate by buying a pet fish instead. Further, Munro emphasizes Elizabeth's domesticity by having her make Anna a nightgown and cap to match the bed. As if to rub in the image of domestic bliss, Anna's father and her new stepmother send Rose a picture of Anna "sitting there, with the kitten, looking demure and satisfied in the midst of all the flowered cloth" (161).[5] In light of the brief feminist empowerment Rose experienced in the Kootenays as a single mother, her relinquishing of her only daughter to patriarchy's comforting embrace with all the stereotypical trappings of girlhood—from ballet to flowery bedding and clothing—is deeply paradoxical and problematic. As Beverly Rasporich observes, "If the reader does not find Rose particularly likeable at this point in her life, it is because ambition, by its very nature, admits only selfness, and, as Rose is learning, the freedom to do, unencumbered, exacts a price" (65). Rose is unable to fulfill her desire for independence and autonomy while continuing to mother Anna, at least within the confines of available social discourses which inflect and limit her understanding of motherhood. While she is able to envision a feminist future for herself—moving east to Toronto, cultivating a career as an actress—she is unable to successfully sustain the practice of feminist mothering which she glimpsed on those snowy evenings while Anna slept and she relished her new-found independence.

Part of this difficulty lies within feminist discourse itself, which privileges "individualism in order to articulate its claims that women are equal human subjects of social and political agency and entitlement" (DiQuinzio xii). This ideal of individualism is decidedly at odds with the material obligations of maternity, particularly hegemonic conceptions of motherhood, which DiQuinzio refers to as "essential motherhood," as that which "requires women's exclusive and selfless attention to and care of children" and which is founded on women's supposedly innate "psychological and emotional capacities for empathy, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice" (xiii). As such, for DiQuinzio, "feminism has found it impossible to theorize mothering adequately in terms of an individualist theory of subjectivity" (xii). Rose and her choice to give custody of Anna to her ex-husband and his new "fine and stable" wife (*Who* 160) emblematizes the impossibility of reconciling this particular iteration of feminist, autonomous selfhood that Rose seeks to enact in her newly single

life with traditional conceptions of her maternal role. Rose is ultimately unable to escape what she perceives as a binary choice, relinquishing her motherhood in exchange for her freedom.

After Anna returns to her father, "Rose set to work cleaning out the apartment, finding marbles and drawings and some letters by Anna begun—mostly at Rose's instigation—and never finished, never mailed" (161). [6] They read: "Dear Daddy, I am fine. Are you? I was sick but I am fine now" (162); and, "Dear Jeremy, How tall are you now? I am fine" (162). In the final scene, we are given Anna's voice, and Anna's subjectivity, in epistolary form, disrupting Rose's narrative consciousness and reinforcing her maternal identity precisely at the moment that she has materially abandoned it. Furthermore, the conclusion of the story with the thrice repeated phrase from Anna, "I am fine," invites a multiplicity of paradoxical interpretations. On one hand, it provides a direct correlation between Anna and her new stepmother, Elizabeth, who Patrick also describes as "fine" (160), signalling an affinity between them. Furthermore, Anna's letter to her friend Jeremy, whose memory provoked tears and sadness, corroborates Rose's sense of Anna's loneliness and unhappiness with her, even while she declares herself "fine." On the other hand, though, her repetition of "I am fine" can perhaps be taken at face value, a reassuring balm for Rose's inarticulable maternal guilt and a revelation that perhaps Rose's abandoned attempt at feminist mothering had sown within it the potential for long-term happiness. Perhaps Anna *was* fine while she was living with Rose, and Rose had capitulated too easily to Patrick's custody request. Either way, the extent of Anna's "fineness," either while she lived with her mother or now with her father and stepmother, is never resolved. As Ildikó de Papp Carrington writes, "[Munro's] fiction is often intensely uncomfortable to read. The final emotional residue that many of her stories leave behind . . . is a lingering sense of unresolved ambiguity and dismayed unease" (5). The unsettling and unsettled conclusion to "Providence" functions to reflect Rose's own unspoken ambivalence about her decision to leave her daughter behind, as well as the almost universal, societal condemnation of mothers who abandon or choose not to care for their own children. With Rose's admitted plans to move "east, to Toronto" (*Who* 161), any possibility of joint custody is foreclosed. However, Munro's decision to centre Anna's voice in the final lines of the story suggests the inescapability of maternity. Though Rose can choose personal freedom and geographical mobility, giving over custody of her daughter in the process, she will always be Anna's mother.

Conclusion

"Providence" captures something of the tenuous and exquisite experience of mothering a small child, its difficulties and sacrifices, and the equally painful and (still) unspeakable choice to leave one's maternal role behind. Rose ultimately chooses feminist liberation over motherhood, unable to reconcile her desire for personal autonomy, professional ambition, and freedom from the patriarchal family with her perception of her daughter's need to be mothered. Her decision to relinquish Anna into the familiar care of her ex-husband Patrick and his new "fine and stable" wife is further motivated by her belief that she is doing what is best for Anna and affirmed by the concluding lines of the narrative, wherein Anna attests—in her own voice—to being "fine." In the end, Rose is unable, within the discursive context of second-wave feminism, to imagine and enact motherhood alongside her own journey toward feminist liberation. She is caught in the discursive binary that posits autonomy and maternity as antithetical, and ultimately chooses her own freedom.

NOTES

1 Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974) is another significant feminist quest narrative that predates "Providence" and features a protagonist who is a single mother to an only daughter.

2 A third version of the story appears in the US edition of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, which was retitled *The Beggar Maid* (1979) for the American market. The three versions of "Providence" share the same title and plot—in fact, most of the narrative remains largely unaltered—but some character names are modified, along with the narrative point of view (the original "Providence" from *Redbook* is written in the first person, whereas the final, collected versions are in the third person, which arguably permits a more ironic narrative distance). Helen Hoy provides an in-depth exploration of Munro's editorial process in her 1989 article on the compilation of the stories of *Who Do You Think You Are?* Unless otherwise indicated, I quote from the version of the story that is the most frequently cited and reproduced Canadian edition of *Who Do You Think You Are?*

3 Munro's 1997 short story "The Children Stay" also features a mother protagonist who abandons her children, although under decidedly more sordid and uncompromising circumstances. "The Children Stay" features Pauline as its protagonist, a married mother of two young daughters who is engaged in an adulterous affair and who impulsively leaves her very young children in order to run off with her lover. The story is distinct, however, in that Pauline is clearly motivated by a powerful sexual passion, whereas Rose is plagued more by a self-perceived inability to adequately nurture her daughter as a single mother alongside her nascent professional ambitions. Pauline also never attempts to continue mothering her children after leaving her marriage as Rose does—rather, she decides decisively to absent herself, likening her marriage and motherhood to "[a] sack over her

head" (*Love* 246). Pauline is making a clear choice between her children and her lover, whereas Rose is seeking a more open-ended personal freedom.

4 The scorned husband of "The Children Stay" issues a similar, albeit far more direct and devastating edict to his unfaithful wife upon her confession of her affair and her decision to leave him, telling her in a "shivering and vindictive voice" that "'[t]he children stay . . . Pauline. Did you hear me? . . . Remember. The children stay'" (*Love* 245). This final and definitive declaration also, of course, forms the title of the story itself.

5 The version of the story that appears in *The Beggar Maid* concludes with this exact sentence, of a "demure and satisfied" Anna "in the midst of all that flowered cloth" (*Beggar* 155). The *Redbook* version also captures a similar vision, of Anna living with her father and step-mother, where she "takes drama and ballet lessons, has a collection of splendid stuffed animals in her room" ("Providence" 163).

6 This ending is a significant departure from both the *Redbook* and *The Beggar Maid* versions. In the *Redbook* ending, Rose wonders about the current occupants of her old apartment: "I wonder if the wallpaper is the same, if the heat will be any better this winter. Who is living there now? Students, maybe; or a working mother and a child, making a stab at being a family" ("Providence" 163). It is decidedly more sombre and less ambiguous, a reminiscence of an attempt at creating a home that clearly did not succeed, while emphasizing its impoverishment by conjuring once again the peeling wallpaper and poor heat. The conclusion that appears in *The Beggar Maid* is—as I describe in the previous note—similarly definitive, as it ends simply with a contented Anna in a stereotypically girlish bedroom (*Beggar* 155). Here, there is no uncertainty about Anna's current happiness, further affirming and confirming Rose's decision to leave Anna with her father.

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Chelsea Coupal

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Some say don't feed the birds, but it's hard not to when they land
in the palm of your hand, plump as plums, even though it's February,

late winter. An evergreen curtain, bare-branch web, slow snowfall,
dishwater sky. Flakes melting on my face. I want even more birds

cupped in my hands. I want to reach out and grab them before they take off—
splash of wings. I want to feel their bones, the wheat-husk whisper of them;

pin-thin cages beneath black and white feathers: matchstick houses or
hyacinth heads. I want their heartbeats in my hands: that swell of belly,

warm-smooth as ripples on ponds in summer; against my cheek, and
pinecones, crackling-quiet, falling through branches, landing soft in the snow.

The birds flurry away, seed in beak, to eat where I can't see them.
My skin in the wind is dry; my eyes water, my lips split at the centre, bleed.

And the monks ring the bells. And the chickadees sing in the trees. And I pray
another bird, and then another, lands, steady as a psalm; gentle in my palm.

Dale Tracy

A Note—Doing the Work with Metonymy

Three Insights from Canadian Theatre

> Currently, we're collectively mourning the loss of a CanLit—and a Canada—that was always an idea instead of a lived reality. It's fine to mourn, of course. It's natural. But we can't just stand around and complain about the dumpster fire in front of us forever. Eventually we have to grab some fucking fire extinguishers and put that fire out. In other words, we have to sit down, assess the criticism, and do the work to fix the problems.
> —Alicia Elliott, "CanLit Is a Raging Dumpster Fire"

Building on Alicia Elliott's exhortation to "do the work" (97), I approach doing the work by pursuing the metonymic after the metaphoric. The dumpster fire metaphor has gained a lot of traction for good reason: it offers catharsis (through a kind of dark humour) and convenience (through the reduction to a pithy phrase of a complex set of issues). With this traction, the dumpster fire metaphor has helped to mobilize people around the work. So mobilized myself, I came to the following conclusion when I tried to follow the metaphor into the work: ideally suited to this mobilization, the "dumpster fire" is less suited to helping people conceptualize the practical steps of doing the work.

The metaphor "dumpster fire" takes the place of the field of relations that creates the conditions for controversies and crises. In contrast, metonymy is contiguous: its readability depends on showing conventional, assumed, or actual relationships. As Hugh Bredin points out, "[w]e must *already know* that the objects are related, if the metonymy is to be devised or understood" (57, emphasis original). Or in Sebastian Matzner's terms, "they are not *being* linked, they *are* linked" (81, emphasis original). They are already linked, Matzner explains, because metonymy operates within "[a] semantic field [which] is constituted by a set of words defined by semantic proximity and joint occurrence" (50). "Metonymy," he continues, "is thus predicated

not on an abstract logic, but on pragmatically determined association" (52). In contrast, metaphors *are* predicated on abstract logic. Matzner explains that "metaphorical meaning is contained within the metaphorical compound, within its logic of analogy and similarity" (74). They "can therefore usually be isolated from their wider context and still function" (74). But in metonymy "tenor and vehicle have no such internally negotiated and stabilized relationship" that would allow them to be "isolated from their context and still function" (74). While metonymy operates within a signifying field, a field of pre-existing relationships, metaphor generates meaning outside of such a field of relationships. While metonymy shows us relationships, metaphor suppresses difference and distance via abstract logic. "Dumpster fire" refers to any emphatically negative situation. This generalizability means difficulty for deciphering what "dumpster fire" means in this particular context—as opposed to the diverse other contexts people use it in. As Laura Moss and Brendan McCormack point out in their editorial introduction to the *Meanwhile, Home* issue of *Canadian Literature*,

> Metaphors are helpful and necessary to think through, but they are not neutral and they shift in meaning and application along with the tenor of the real world; like fire, they are sometimes generative, sometimes damaging, and always doing different work at different times for different people. (8)

It's unclear what kind of work the dumpster fire metaphor calls on us to do. As Moss and McCormack also note, "for many, the idea of CanLit burning isn't tragic. Indeed, it might be the goal" (8). Alternatively is Elliott's own message: "Eventually we have to grab some fucking fire extinguishers and put that fire out. In other words, we have to sit down, assess the criticism and do the work to fix the problems" (97). Whether one thinks one ought to let the fire burn or put the fire out, this metaphor positions those who could do the work outside the dumpster fire, able to decide what to do with the burning trash that we are not. But if CanLit is a dumpster fire, then we who are part of CanLit can't put it out with fire extinguishers or turn our backs to let it burn. If CanLit is a dumpster fire, we are in the dumpster fire. Though those working with this metaphor do not position themselves outside of the problem, that's where the metaphor's logic puts them. Arguments using the dumpster fire metaphor engage with the context necessary for doing the work, but the metaphor pulls away from that engagement. An abstract logic carries the potential to undercut the specific argument. As I said at the outset, I don't mean to suggest that I think people are wrong for using "dumpster fire" to discuss CanLit: it offers catharsis and convenience, two important tools,

especially for mobilizing people to work together. But because this metaphor is so dominant in this conversation (because it is so persuasive), it is doing a lot of work, sometimes working against the work it is involved in.

Metaphors aren't suited to every kind of work, and metonymy is better suited to working with associations within a signifying field. In "On Not Refusing CanLit," Moss engages the associations within the signifying field of CanLit. She "refuse[s] to read Joseph Boyden or Margaret Atwood as metonymic of CanLit" (146), thus moving away from a certain pattern of relationships those names activate. In the same essay, Moss notes that the term "CanLit" functions as a synecdoche (a particular kind of metonymy) for writing in Canada and the industry and academy engaged with that writing. Such attention to "CanLit" as a metonym is what I see as the fruitful counterbalance to the prominence of the "dumpster fire" metaphor.

Metonymy works as this counterbalance because it makes available the network of associations in a signifying field. However, Moss proposes that "CanLit" stands in for two distinct signifying fields: "I pause here to disentangle 'CanLit' as a noun synecdoche of all that is broken in the writing industry and the academy from 'CanLit' as a short-form term that refers to the history of writing in Canada" (146). While one can choose one's metonym (like not using Atwood or Boyden to refer to Canadian literature), one can't choose which sets of relationships a given metonym calls up. Even if one wants to call up only the history of writing (even just for the sake of clarity in an argument totally committed to the full context), the metonym "CanLit" necessarily calls up all that is broken in the writing industry. This is exactly what I think is so powerful about metonyms. Metonyms reject disentangling. Metonyms work by conventional or literal association within a signifying field: One can choose the metonym, but not the relationships it's embedded in. That "CanLit" can be used as a metonym for the larger field of the writing industry and the academy says something else about CanLit: its borders do not end at literature. In fact, "CanLit" has an even larger signifying field including Canada as a nation. In contrast, the dumpster fire metaphor, as Elliott notes, refers to Canadian literature: "Maybe, for those who still very much want to feel proud to be Canadian, it's simply easier to call CanLit a dumpster fire. That way, you don't have to call Canada itself a dumpster fire" (97).Unlike the dumpster fire metaphor, metonymy precludes this selectivity. If the associations exist, metonymy calls them up.

For these reasons, I'm thinking here about what metonymy can add to discourse about doing the work in CanLit. I'm thinking with three recent

Canadian plays that use metonymical strategies: Daniel MacIvor's *Who Killed Spalding Gray?* (2017), Jess Dobkin's *The Magic Hour* (2017), and Marcus Youssef and James Long's *Winners and Losers* (2015). My strategy is metonymical like "CanLit" is: I read each play for an insight it might offer as a metonym for the signifying field of CanLit, which includes Canadian literature, culture, and nation. Each play is about the work theatre does, and each play uses metonymical strategies to do this institutional work. These autobiographical, fourth-wall-breaking plays each engage the present audience and the real lives of their playwright actors. All three plays emphasize literal contiguity between actor and character and between actions in the play and actions in the world outside of the play. In short, they draw attention to the pre-existing relationships they work within.

In *Who Killed Spalding Gray?* Daniel MacIvor's character Daniel has a spiritual entity removed by a psychic surgeon, who calls this process "The Work" (21). This removal coincides with the suicide of Spalding Gray, an American performer known, like MacIvor, for telling autobiographical stories, and the play seeks to understand the connection between these two true events. As Daniel puts it, "I look for significance where I can find it" (22). In this play, "The Work" is mysterious. Daniel doesn't quite trust the psychic surgeon to whom he will pay a large fee to do The Work that is never explained to him and somehow occurs while the surgeon appears to sleep in front of him. Without really believing in The Work and its abstract logic, Daniel commits to its potential significance out of a sense of desperation. Grappling with the resulting coincidence of this work and Gray's death, Daniel thinks about Tim Burton's *Big Fish*, the movie Gray saw the day he died. Daniel impersonates one of the film's actors to explain its ending: "At the end of *Big Fish* we come to understand that a person may tell their stories over and over again and in doing so they will become their stories. And because those stories live on after the teller, the storyteller, in effect, becomes immortal" (48). In this film, the dying father magically becomes the big fish of his tall tales, thus establishing the significance of his lifetime of far-fetched stories. While this movie suggests that finding lasting significance entails telling stories that can take your place as metaphors for you, MacIvor questions this mysterious substitution, connecting the film to Gray's death and calling it, in contrast to reviewers, "heartbreaking" (27).

Daniel suggests that his attempt to find significance through The Work might have killed Gray via mysteriously linked energies, but the play also doubts The Work that must keep itself mysterious, especially if it obfuscates

the relationships between individuals. Instead of committing oneself to the mysterious Work, this play suggests committing to actions in specific contexts. For example, near the end of the play, Daniel emphatically absolves the audience of fault, repeating "[i]t's not your fault" "*until*," the stage directions read, "*everyone in the audience who needs to be freed of fault is freed of fault*" (53, emphasis original in all stage directions). Daniel's work has resonance precisely because it is not a mysterious sharing of energies. Instead, Daniel builds this audience work on a relationship he sets up at the play's start when he invites an audience member on stage for a substantial improvised conversation in which he asks, "*Where are you from? What do you do? Why did you come here?*" and any other questions that result from these initial ones (3). Daniel then "*talks about the women in his life, those he has lost. He asks the audience member if they would share with him the name of a woman that they may have lost, someone they loved*" (4). Later in the play, a character with this same name appears. MacIvor builds the work of forgiveness on this unscripted portion of the play in which Daniel engages with a member of the audience long enough to make a context for the loved woman. The significance is in all this work, the steps that don't necessarily make anything happen on their own but that shore up a context—not in a single mysterious act of freeing from fault. The loved woman, as a metonym for the audience members' relationships, makes available to the play a signifying field outside of which Daniel sharing his absolving energies could only be metaphorical (that is, outside of the pre-existing relationships making up audience members' lives).

In contrast to "The Work" that he finds so mysterious, MacIvor shows specific work as it operates in a signifying field. Outside of the CanLit context, Kenyan academic Keguro Macharia writes a "note" published at *The New Inquiry* about "the work." He cites Audre Lorde's self-description as "a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours?" and then asks his own questions:

> I have been confused by multiple claims about "doing **the** work." Those making those claims seem so sure about **the** work. So sure that I have tended to refrain from asking what **the** work is. I am asking. What is **the** work?
>
> What is the relation between **my** work and **your** work? What is the relation between **my** work and **the** work? What is the relation between **your** work and **the** work? What is the relation among **my** work, **your** work, and **the** work?
>
> I am asking. (emphasis original)

As is "The Work" for MacIvor, "**the** work" for Macharia is mysterious because it is generalized. In contrast, Lorde prioritizes the context of

her work as the contexts of her self. There is no "the work," only many contiguous works, built in specific contexts out of specific tasks.

Insight one: the work need not be mysterious, replacing actual work with its ostensible significance, like the story for the life or *the* work for actual work. MacIvor's play suggests the importance of showing the work behind the work so it comes in clear relationship to the rest of one's life and in specific context, including other work and other people.

As with *Who Killed Spalding Gray?*, Jess Dobkin's *The Magic Hour* engages ritual, this time to rework convention. Like MacIvor's, this play, according to its online description, is "asking us to consider who we are beyond the stories we tell about our lives" ("The Magic Hour"). *The Magic Hour* features the character Jess in a solo multidisciplinary performance that plays with conventions of the magic show, stand-up comedy, burlesque, academic lecture, and more, to explore, as Dobkin explains in an interview with Laura Levin, "*how* to perform experiences of trauma" and "why sexual violence is framed as a story" (199, emphasis original). She rejects sexual assault as a story "about who I *am* . . . I'm thinking about it in a feminist frame—how many things that become personalized are really social ills" (201-02, emphasis original). She doesn't want a story that stands in as her, making the context invisible. Denying the conventions of "testifying" to the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, Jess doesn't deliver on these or the conventions of any performance genre her play engages, instead disrupting or reworking the conventions of each (199). She performs performance to make conventions visible. For example, the stage directions indicate that "*The lobby is dressed in costume, performing the role of 'LOBBY'*" (177). Jess says as much to the audience: "this is the performance art presentation of a theatrical convention—where we break the artifice and spoil all the fun" (177). Her work is magical, but not mysterious: she shows all the work so that it is possible to rethink the conventions.

The performance takes place with the audience in a circle, and Jess pulls them into the performance in many ways, using physical cues to bind them together. Eventually, she tells the audience they will help her perform a re-enactment of her childhood, implicitly clear this will be a re-enactment of sexual abuse. Though she assigns roles to individual audience members via vintage toys from the 1970s era of Jess' childhood, the re-enactment instead involves a parachute the toys attach to, which the audience members open and then use in a game before it transforms into a series of other props that Jess uses until the play's conclusion. At this point, Jess delivers a monologue in which she asks a series of questions. For Dobkin, "Asking questions is also

part of ritual: something that is communal" ("Interview" 201). When the audience leaves for the lobby, it has transformed into a 1970s party where two nine-year-old girls "*tenderly slow dance together*" (198). Dobkin explains to Levin, "In my mind, it's the audience that conjures the final moment with the two girls dancing in the party room. It's through coming together in ceremony, and having us imagine an alternate world, that we're able to move toward it" ("Interview" 203). Jess invites audience members to stay for a drink and a dance. The final stage direction is "*[t]he audience can leave or stay to mix, mingle, and make something for themselves in the space*" (198).

Insight two: the work is a communal ritual; change occurs through shared repetition. By definition, conventions can't be changed individually, but rather only in context and with others. Metonymy points to the signifying field in which literal or conventional relationships exist and it mobilizes these relationships. Dobkin calls up fields of significance in which performance conventions and testifying conventions operate to make meaning; she denies the conventions through a communal ritual that generates a new field of significance out of the failures of other genres and the actions in the theatre space.

In *Winners and Losers*, Youssef and Long play characters Marcus and Jamie in a partially improvised game: name a person, place, or thing and debate whether it is a winner or a loser. Marcus and Jamie also win or lose, each ringing a bell when he believes he has successfully proven his stance. This winning and losing foreshadows the heightened stakes that develop when Marcus and Jamie make themselves the subjects of the debate, each assessing the other as a loser. In her introduction to the play, Jenn Stephenson notes that "their assessment of what constitutes a winner turns primarily on whether or not the person or issue presented is autonomous, self-directed, and capable of having significant impact" (xi). Explaining the discomfort of watching this "brisk capitalist reduction" (xi), she argues that "[i]n the short term, in the space of a snap judgment, there is no way to really know if all your work made any difference at all" (xv), a point A. H. Reaume has recently made about the effects of CanLit activist work (see "On Re-Fusing CanLit"). In the play, Marcus and Jamie judge each other's work harshly, with the reductive logic of winners and losers. Marcus reduces Jamie to a loser caught up in his own story of himself as a streetwise, self-made survivor, suggesting that Jamie neglects his family for his work. Jamie reduces Marcus to a loser whose privilege makes him a fraud, citing his inheritances from his immigrant Egyptian father—an expected monetary

inheritance that will make him wealthy and the ethnic inheritance that Jamie suggests Marcus superficially exploits for further profit in his work.

Marcus and Jamie call each other out as artists who seek social justice through art. Calling out is a tool to confront those who misuse their power, but Marcus and Jamie use calling out to win. Asam Ahmad argues that the call out is sometimes misused as "a public performance where people can demonstrate their wit or how pure their politics are" that serves to "immediately render anyone who has committed a perceived wrong as an outsider to the community," "to banish and dispose of individuals rather than to engage with them as people with complicated stories and histories." This is to use the substitutive logic of metaphor—winner and loser replace the people involved—rather than to engage with the complexity of larger contexts. Writing about the events in CanLit beginning in 2016, Kristen Darch, in her conversation with Fazeela Jiwa in *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, argues that "there were no winners; for the first time, CanLit wasn't about winners. . . . It was about complicity, accountability, self-reflection" (182-83). Calling out to win implies the absence of complicity.

Insight three: the work can't be judged in terms of winning and losing. Like the dumpster fire, the approach of winning and losing encourages an idea of a position outside of complex power relations.

I've derived three insights from these plays: one, show the work behind the work; two, create new conventions in communal action; three, place work within complicity. All three insights point to the same awareness: the work occurs in context. I've found thinking with metonymy useful because metonymy foregrounds context. While no one saying "CanLit is a dumpster fire" argues for decontextualized work, the metaphor's logic leads away from context and evokes the reductive logic of winners and losers. The dumpster fire metaphor is efficient and satisfying, especially for engaging the aftermath of a series of blow-up events, but I propose the benefit of the additional presence of metonymy in framing and promoting the kinds of work we've been discussing in the field and beyond.

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Michael Lithgow

Tumbling in spring

As the sun sinks below the false horizon
of bungalows behind my house, the sound
of light passing through dust on my windows
seems to change. The raft of my home
tumbles in spring, all that activity in the soil
and sap being sucked into crowns of trees.

No different I suppose from others on the block
arrayed like toys in rows. Containers. A sameness
that works against the singular feeling inside
this one, a sense that the silhouetted watersheds
of darkened branches fanning from trunks
are pushing through the glass. I'm called into this

animation, but I'm helpless. Instead, I speculate
about my neighbours' marriages. And mine.
And why I'm caught this time of year in a whirlwind
of sudden, invisible insurgencies. I'm holding
onto something, probably my daughter's shadow
as she sways from the monkey bars—

who can ever stop worrying? But when the light
really starts to disappear and darkness begins to sweat
from air like ink, and lights go on in rooms
of neighbours' homes, and we see into each other's lives
for a moment before the curtains close, the feeling
shifts. Darkness brings certainty.

Is it the way light behind shuttered windows
looks welcoming and calm in the dark?
Or is it the Bach piano playing on the radio?
We're touching I'm certain, the same way
leafless branches seem to bring sap into the crown
in my house. But no one will believe me

or let us know for sure. Besides, the rafts
look fortified. We'd have to tie them all together
and, god knows, without fences—

Twisting Mean

Caroline Adderson, ed.
Best Canadian Stories 2019. Biblioasis $22.95

Elise Levine
This Wicked Tongue. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Krzysztof Majer

That Caroline Adderson made delight the measure for her *Best Canadian Stories 2019* is, in itself, nothing short of delightful. Constructing this diverse volume—with snippets of Cree, Ktunaxa, Jamaican patois, and Yiddish here and there—doubtless involved exhaustive reading, yet the "strict criterion" of delight, intriguingly understood as "not a respite from our troubled world but a direct and more mysterious engagement with it," appears to have been essential. The editor's intuition, based on principles for fictional language once set down by Carol Shields, is admirable, and confirms what we may have known all along: that the short story in Canada is thrillingly alive and well.

Adderson's volume is part of a well-established series, spanning half a century, moved of late from Oberon to Biblioasis, and edited previously by such luminaries as John Metcalf and Douglas Glover. In the 2019 edition some themes are more prevalent than others: many stories centre on fractured family dynamics, with motherhood thrown into focus (e.g., Lisa Moore's "The Curse," Mireille Silcoff's "Upholstery," Cathy Stonehouse's "A Room at the Marlborough," and Elise Levine's "The Association"). However, according to Adderson—herself an accomplished author—often "the delight is in the telling." Indeed, quite a few pieces here challenge the reader, whether through a fragmented structure (e.g., Christy Ann Conlin's "Late and Soon"), a humorously jarring perspective (Zsuzsi Gartner's "The Second Coming of the Plants"), or a startling extended metaphor (Adam Dickinson's "Commensalism"). Perhaps the clearest highlight, however, is a story unsettling in both form and subject, as if it originated in another world: Camilla Grudova's dystopian "Alice & Charles," kin to her refreshing and bizarre *Doll's Alphabet*. In the year which saw the publication of a vastly underwhelming sequel to Canada's most celebrated dystopian narrative, it is bracing to see younger women writers put elements of that tired genre to such terrific use.

The eerie diction of "Alice & Charles" makes other stories gathered here seem, by contrast, more similar in terms of tone and range. Even Moore's voice, one of the most striking in Canadian short fiction, appears to occupy a more comfortably Munrovian territory than that staked out in her Burning Rock-era volumes. Nonetheless, "The Curse"—attentive to minute sensory detail as well as to the mechanics of recollection—is certainly one of the mainstays of this anthology.

As expected, the quality of writing in *Best Canadian Stories 2019* is almost uniformly

high. Other standouts include Kai Conradi's "Every True Artist," astounding especially for a first published story, not least in its metatextual problematizing of craft and circumstance; Shashi Bhat's "The Most Precious Substance on Earth," a pitch-perfect take on music, trauma, and exclusion; and Frankie Barnet's "Again, the Sad Woman's Soliloquy," which probes the underlying melancholies of our age. One might quibble about certain inclusions on formal grounds—for instance, whether Alex Pugsley's otherwise remarkable "Wheelers" is, in any meaningful way, a short story rather than a tantalizing excerpt from a novel.

Unsurprisingly, one of the brightest lights of *Best Canadian Stories 2019* is Levine, who debuted in 1995 with the collection *Driving Men Mad*, and has since also proved herself a skilled novelist (with *Blue Field* and *Requests & Dedications*). *This Wicked Tongue*, while uneven, is one of the most original volumes of short stories to be published in Canada this decade.

Metcalf was certainly right in arguing that Levine "plays her prose as a musical instrument" and that, not unlike a magician, she "makes language perform." At their best, the stories in *This Wicked Tongue* attain a neo-imagist intensity, a concreteness rarely found in narrative fiction. Metcalf's comparison of her writing to Mark Anthony Jarman's is instructive, since both Levine and the author of *19 Knives* are capable of that rare writerly feat: making every word count. One of her narrators may complain about how words "twist mean and not much to do with the truth," but it is precisely such twisting that propels the narratives. The hauntingly medievalist title story—stretched between "wicked tongues" and their striving for divine language—and the contemporary road-tale opener, "Money's Honey," are accomplishments of that sort. With their resonant sentences, just this side of enigmatic, conjuring odd yet palpable realities, they also manage to construct a strong sense of self. Upon rereading, they reveal ever newer layers, but still resist closure; they seem pared down to their pulsating essence, cut just so.

Yet what elevates such pieces is also what weighs down certain others, where the rhythms of dense, alliterative prose push on to frustrating effect, withholding enlightenment: "Princess Gates" or "All We Did" may just leave out too much for their own good. Possibly that is the price of a daring experiment; possibly what is reclaimed here is the original, long-lost meaning of that term, where failure is an option and, in fact, part and parcel of valuable procedure. Levine's "failures" are worth any number of low-risk, forgettable fictions that may have been written in their stead.

Remarkably, Levine shows herself just as capable within a more usual mode of storytelling, as evidenced in "Made Right Here," which casts a husband's disorientation in spatial terms, or even "Death and the Maidens," which puts a fresh spin on the Old World/New World origin tale. In that light, Adderson's decision to select for her anthology a more straightforward and relatable piece—"The Association," one of two interconnected stories about a certain Martin, perhaps the most complete self evoked in *This Wicked Tongue*—is noteworthy. Choosing a more exploratory piece would have placed Levine's work closer to Grudova's "Alice & Charles," or to Dickinson's disorienting "Commensalism," itself aligned less with customary fictive strategies than with the bio-optics of his poetry collections *Anatomic* and *The Polymers*. Instead, to include "The Association" in *Best Canadian Stories 2019* is to showcase the more accessible side of Levine's writing and afford the reader the surprise of the now-delightful, now-vexing

complexities of *This Wicked Tongue*. Both books are required reading for anyone who wishes to keep abreast of cutting-edge Canadian short fiction.

Mimetic Histories

Sharon Bala
The Boat People. McClelland & Stewart $24.95

Kathy Page
Dear Evelyn. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Shazia Hafiz Ramji

Inspired by the 2010 incident involving the MV *Sun Sea*, a Thai cargo ship carrying Sri Lankan asylum seekers, Sharon Bala's debut novel, *The Boat People*, traces the journey of a rusty cargo ship ferrying Sri Lankan refugees to Vancouver. Told from the perspectives of Mahindan, a refugee; Priya, a reluctant lawyer; and Grace, a third-generation Japanese Canadian adjudicator responsible for Mahindan's fate, *The Boat People* brims with nuance regarding the intergenerational difference and privilege embodied by the trio of characters who belong to the novel's Asian Canadian community. Chapters alternate between Mahindan's desperate need to avoid deportation and reunite with his family, Grace's privileged suburban family life and reluctant sympathy, and Priya's eventual investment in Mahindan's case as an "articling student" whose ingenue-like character guides the reader through the bureaucracy of refugee law. Chapters also alternate between the cold prison and shores of Vancouver, and Mahindan's Sri Lankan home, where he needs to escape the growing militancy of a terrorist organization known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Some of the refugees' stories are brutal and violent, refusing to shy away from the realities of civil war. Bala's narrator turns the question of moral responsibility onto the reader. When a woman speaks of her daughter's rape by members of the LTTE, "Grace could feel [the reporters'] excitement" and the sensationalism of their sound bite: "[*T*]*hose dogs, they had cut her hair*." The control offered by close or "deep" third-person narration guides us to sit with the difficulty of this reality—a timely and relevant perspective.

Like Bala's novel, Kathy Page's *Dear Evelyn* draws its beginnings from history. In Page's case, her father's wartime love letters shaped the journey of her protagonists, Harry and Evelyn, who marry before World War II begins. Harry's coming of age in London reveals his deep love for poetry, which keeps him buoyed up while he is at war in North Africa. When he returns, headstrong and charismatic, Evelyn's OCD-like behaviours only increase, causing tension between them and their three daughters.

Dear Evelyn is cinematic and taut; each choice is followed by a consequence, taking us seamlessly across the world and further into time. The ripple effects of war are felt in curtailed dreams and stunted love. We glimpse heartbreaking and banal joys through the intertexts of British poetry and novels, the voices and lives of which offer solace and relief. Although the novel is peppered with references to canonical works such as those by Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, they create the effect of memory as an event in the psyche. Consider a passage from Harry's experience in Tunisia, when he recalls being at school and reading T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

> He did not care about the sense, but submitted to the rhythm and the sequence of images. It was a peculiar kind of medicine, a sort of service, even, but he began to feel a little better: still empty, but not utterly desolate.

Eliot is not explained but experienced by Harry; the poetry is felt in his body and

connects him to the world outside his bunker, breaking the spell of despair. Page steeps us in the intimacy of her characters' lives as they are nurtured by literature and aspire to shape themselves and their dreams after what they read, in a mimetic fashion.

Dear Evelyn is at once a deeply human and writerly novel which offers a rare portrait of a relationship circumscribed by the life and afterlife of war, but whose complexity shines a different light, particularly when seen through the eyes of Evelyn, whose desire for solitude and independence makes us question the expectations of women and married life, even and especially today.

Don't Worry, Epidermis

Jonathan Ball
The National Gallery. Coach House $19.95

Vincent Pagé
This Is the Emergency Present.
Coach House $19.95

K. B. Thors
Vulgar Mechanics. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Laura Cameron

In Jonathan Ball's *The National Gallery*, melancholic, disenchanted poems strip away the institutional grandeur of the title in order to ask that perennial poet's question: What is the value of art in the contemporary world? Although the poems seem sometimes not even to believe in themselves—"Let's write a fucking poem!" the speaker declares at one point; "Maybe someone will read this poem!"—the volume is robust, insistent on laying bare the full breadth of its self-doubt. Some of the book's nine sections are named after areas one might find in an art gallery: "Group of Seven," for instance, in which the poems are titled after members or adjacent members of the famous painters' circle, or "Gift Shop," which contains playfully dark pieces about how we memorialize people, places, and events. Other sections—"Selfies" and "iPhone Elegies"—more explicitly concern the public "gallery" of a world structured by technology and social media. The volume's most compelling tension lies in its ambivalence toward both canonical artwork and modern self-presentation. "*I'm in an abusive relationship with poetry*," Ball quotes, and then observes: "my phone likes this / with a little heart. Half the world is sad little hearts now." And yet through all of its disillusionment, with surprising earnestness, *The National Gallery* poses one of the most urgent questions of our time: "What do I love when my phone is off?"

As a reader I fall unfailingly for earnestness, which is one reason that I so appreciated Vincent Pagé's *This Is the Emergency Present*. The spare, intimate lyrics in this volume are some of the most gently powerful expressions of longing I have encountered in a long time. "You and your absence / undermine my sleeping," the speaker observes in one piece; "You smell of rainwater / because I love you." The poems in the first section are entirely composed of remixed language from Pablo Neruda's *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*; by making Neruda part of his own poems' DNA, Pagé writes himself into a poetic tradition that offers literary companionship as an antidote to romantic loneliness. An interest in science structures the later sections, allowing Pagé to meditate in fresh ways on "space"—from the "space" inside an atom to the "space" between the stars. "You tweak my thoughts to you the way gravity / from the unseen planet in the solar system / throws all the other orbits off a bit," he writes. This tussle of absence and presence in the space and time following a breakup is the volume's major subject. The "emergency present" of the title, as Pagé defines it, is the feeling of

recogniz[ing]
everyone everywhere
and miss[ing] everything that's happened
all at once.

The loneliness in this image of missing everything all at once is all-consuming: an absence that is utterly, overwhelmingly present.

K. B. Thors' *Vulgar Mechanics* also begins with absence, but here the empty space—the space of mourning following a mother's death—reverberates with linguistic, erotic, and environmental energy. This dazzling, muscular collection begins with reflections on death, male violence, and intergenerational trauma, and then turns its attention to the rich potential of queer desire. Contemplating the legacy of her mother, the speaker resolves "[t]o stick to my guns and / kiss who she couldn't." Grief for her mother metamorphoses into queer grief in this turning-point poem, which concludes, "I don't believe in either-or // but in hindsight / she could have been." Thors eschews binaries throughout the book in order to explore all those "could have beens" that others weren't, or aren't yet. The speaker in *Vulgar Mechanics* inhabits a world where it's a "stupid thin[g]" to walk home at night with "no keys spiked between my fingers." But in response to this world, the poems offer a "variety of tongues" that declare her—and other women and queer folk—"worth a lick." There is no self-doubt or disillusionment here; indeed, belief radiates from the delicious language, choppy musicality, dexterous internal rhymes, cerebral allusions, and punchy imagery that animate this truly exciting volume. "I left my nipple clamps at the Chrysler factory / in Windsor," the speaker announces in the opening line of one poem: why *wouldn't* we read on? And somehow, amid all the feistiness and thunder, Thors conjures tenderness, too. "Don't worry, epidermis, I said, / over and softly again": these lines express, for me, the crux of the book. "Don't worry, epidermis," art says, "over and softly again."

Lessons in Style and Substance

Adèle Barclay
Renaissance Normcore. Nightwood $18.95

Bart Vautour
The Truth about Facts. Invisible $17.95

Reviewed by Dale Tracy

There's facts and how to tell them, knowledge and styles of living it.

Renaissance Normcore's interest in the sartorial is an interest in boundaries. These poems compose space within space like "a cell with a semi-permeable / membrane inside an organism / inside an ecosystem." When Adèle Barclay's speaker confides in "Our Beauty Was Lost to the Algorithm," "I don't know what to do / with all that lives inside of living," she discloses that more is withheld—or unheld: "The body hides in a shuttered poem" that investigates what bodies and poems "can and cannot hold." In "Peacock against the Cold Edit of Reality TV," the speaker notes her own "soft skin / that I'd invite you to touch / if it weren't for this screen." As screen, the paper takes on harder, less permeable qualities, but even the soft skin in these poems could function as a semi-permeable barrier to who is held within—much like the remarkable titles Barclay's poems wear. The imaginary screen invokes the collection's references to famous names tied to the style of contemporary times, but also to names of people the speaker knows but readers don't: the available public figure and the inaccessible personal life, the normcore accessibility and the voluminous Renaissance layers, the admirable balance of frankness and the

unrevealed, showing one space to show that there is another still inside it.

Facts and letters make sense within systems, and this abecedarium "let[s] a different system / take shape in our mouths": "There are so many ways / to find what you're looking for." Bart Vautour suggests that poetry is a system for understanding that brings factual coincidence into meaningfulness. *The Truth about Facts* subtly and satisfyingly illuminates already existing connections in the seemingly far-flung, like that Arthur Holmes' mother

> shared a name
> with a well-known
> plant collector
> from Massachusetts

who appears later in the collection, with quotation from her other art: "She had a *system of aesthetics / far superior to mine*." These poems cast poetry as a sort of code potentially written in anagram, semaphore, swear word, asteroids, or invisible ink: "The essential properties for a secret ink / are similar to those of a robust poetics." The facts are marked by the one who knows them, so that the poem "Facts[123456]" exists within "the current state of CanLit" and gives readers the hypothetical of "open[ing] to page 666 of my *Oxford Universal Dictionary*," the 1955 edition the poem uses to define "fact" because, the collection's marks of the personal suggest, that's the one that was there. Though one fact leads to another, Vautour's collection—contextualized, deliberate, espousing an ethics, engaging a "choreography of witness"—is not much like a dictionary or any other search engine.

Gaspereau in the Community

Madeline Bassnett
Under the Gamma Camera. Gaspereau $21.95

Karen Houle
The Grand River Watershed: A Folk Ecology. Gaspereau $19.95

Peter Sanger
Odysseus Asleep. Gaspereau $21.95

Reviewed by James Gifford

Every Gaspereau book, like some bowed or plucked string, relies on the tension between poetry and its presentation to make its unique music resonate. Madeline Bassnett, Karen Houle, and Peter Sanger show this strongly. Sanger's *Odysseus Asleep* collects previously published materials from the past twenty-three years and adds "Odysseus Awake" to conclude. Each of the book's six sections plays with form, repeating a singular structure in theme and variations. The "Stone Notes" section seems akin to fragments from antiquity, while "Kerf" repeats a two-stanza form throughout, for which the sixth poem hints at the formal concerns, opening with "the earth is a tree" and closing with the inversion back to "roots into branches" but with a repeated mid-line caesura and internal rhyme that show the "three songs" of the world as a form of reversion, circling back inward upon themselves with some Homeric departure and return encoding the structural loop. The opening poem of "Ironworks" likewise shows iron's circling life of extraction, fashioning, dancing, rusting, and return, but with "a space / between epochs" echoing in each line's varying syntax, dependent on the reader's interpretation of caesura. The closing and opening of the fourth and fifth poems make a similar monism, with "[t]he last voice of iron is rust" becoming "the touch of iron . . . /

where bright transmutation / sublimes the slag from an aeon." The final section, the new "Odysseus Awake," begins with something like the *Nostoi* between departure and return, as Odysseus "dreams himself / awake" in the opening stanza until he "awakens in Ithaca" in the closing, again circling before the final statement of "tercet" that again draws the reader back to form itself, giving the voice to the poem's music as much as to its journey away as the return home.

Houle's *The Grand River Watershed* is also a collection of journeys, in this case through Ontario, and as she remarks in the acknowledgements, "Fall Asters" previously appeared in *ArtsEverywhere* and *A/J: Alternatives Journal* accompanied by essays on her method. These discussions of method are extremely helpful for the reader, and both are conveniently accessible through the journals online. This foregrounds the ecopoetic and ecocritical paradigms at work, ranging from poetically retracing or echoing invasive species, or what appears in "Was thick with pine and hardwood forests" as a division of voices. In this poem, the impulse to inventory alienates the traveller from nature like the Enlightenment error of making the world an object upon which reason works, here with a source text providing materials reformulated in a dialectic aligned with each margin, as if between these gutters of the page (or banks of the stream) the white of the page flows like the river itself. This leads in "When North Flows South" to the conflicting registers of a scientific stochastic method that struggles to recognize the purposeful or the spontaneous organization of the natural world. By clearly marking out her source texts through citational annotations, Houle guides the reader toward conflicts and self-reflection, such as "*The genetic integrity of native species does not appear threatened / by the introduction of domestics*" anticipating the stanza "*For the most part*" (31), which points to an invasive fungus while textually pressing hard on settler colonialism. This trio of concerns—the lyrical subject observing yet generally absent from the scene, the natural world, and settler colonialism inextricably bound up with an invasive rationalism—recurs throughout the collection in varying form. And through all this, the river flows, in a sense like the anarchic current envisioned by Joyce as stream of consciousness: the *flow* itself is that subject, not the banks that shape it or the ever-changing waters. Here, rather than a stream of consciousness, an akin effacement of that rational subject opens space for the particular and the evanescent rather than the generalizable and the universal. This flow is most overt in "Stream Loggers" with its epigram from Wittgenstein, as if "the basic idea of *creek*" can be set aside to prefer the "expansion and contraction, / drainage and seepage, / discharge and infiltration" of the creek itself, which adheres to no universal "basic idea" or rationalist generalization that would abandon the localized, self-transforming, and protean experience.

Finally, Bassnett's *Under the Gamma Camera* gives a different interaction with the self, the particular, and the rationalist by narrating the quotidian experiences of illness, treatment, and recovery. The sense is of the self-become-object upon which rationality imposes the exercise of reason, and against which the particular of one life's experiences stands in contrast. Bassnett signals a capacious theme, offering intimacy in the experience of illness and remission that is startlingly paired with poetic exploration of allusion, as if the observing personality is still part of community: "the tubers still / nestled" only two pages before crabs with their "sideways scuttle" seem

tantalizingly like Eliot's *The Waste Land* and "Prufrock." Yet, this shifts remarkably in the sets of poems on Biblical sin, with the intimacy of embodied experience in "Gluttony" with "I am all stomach, / a cavern of need." The detachment then returns but is denied with the immortal cancer cells in "A Patch of Immortality." Here there are "jellyfish cells / reseeding the ocean floor to start again, / polyp to medusa to polyp" and while deadly also cast with a quasi-maternal birth, a tumor that is

> withered cells shedding
> casings like moths, fibrous cocoon
> split and discarded, new wet body
> launched into the world.

This drawing of beauty out from fear and illness unfolds remarkably in *Under the Gamma Camera*, linking malignancy with fecundity of mud and earth in the final set of poems "In Praise of Small Things," the title for which blurs the difference between malignancy and day-to-day pleasure.

Every Gaspereau book sings, and these collections echo cycles of tensions and repose, an antiphonal series of echoes, each intermingling the individual voice and the ensemble.

Traumatized Teens

Leanne Baugh
Last Words. Red Deer $14.95

Jean Mills
Larkin on the Shore. Red Deer $14.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

Both of these coming-of-age YA novels focus on teenagers whose "normal" lives have been disrupted by traumatic experiences—attempted rape, suicide, depression—yet the authors resist the temptation to sensationalize these experiences, instead focusing on the ways in which their first-person narrators navigate the aftermath of horrific events and develop effective coping skills.

Jean Mills' *Larkin on the Shore* takes us to a small seaside town in Nova Scotia where sixteen-year-old Larkin has been sent to spend the summer with her paternal grandmother as she recuperates from an attempted rape and subsequent head injury (she fell from a vehicle while fighting off the sexual assault of a "cool" boy from her school). Haltingly, Larkin begins to confront some of her trauma-induced social anxieties while navigating her role as "the new girl" in a small town. As a counterpart to her experiences, her father (with whom she exchanges regular text messages) is in Vancouver supporting her estranged mother who is—once again—in rehab for drug and alcohol abuse. Add in a budding romance with a local boy, a threatening letter from the erstwhile attempted rapist in Toronto, an interfering potential stepmother, and a jealous girl attempting to poison Larkin's new romance, and this novel could easily have deteriorated into self-indulgence, platitudes, and soap opera. But Mills' controlled presentation keeps the plot and characters plausible, effectively raising important social issues—depression,

drug abuse, bullying, sexual violence—without providing simplistic or overly didactic answers.

The author's decision to leave the details of the attempted rape vague contribute to this control. As readers we are close to Larkin's trauma and so do not doubt the veracity of her memories (albeit slightly muddied by alcohol). This vagueness nevertheless speaks to the very real struggle of victims to articulate their experiences, while also engaging readers in imaginatively piecing together Larkin's story.

Unlike Larkin, the first-person narrator of *Last Words*, Claire (also sixteen), is not a victim of abuse; her trauma results (at least initially) from her coincidental presence on Vancouver's Lions Gate Bridge when she becomes the last person to speak with a young man before he jumps over the railing. Unable to comprehend or accept what she has seen, Claire replays and revises the incident in her mind and dreams, becoming obsessed with reading the jumper's text messages and emails on the cellphone he handed to her immediately before dying by suicide, and finally reaching out to his friends and family. Claire's recuperation—facilitated by a new friendship with a vibrant young woman hanging on to life in the face of a terminal cancer diagnosis, informal counselling from a man who runs a local hospice, and a slow physical recovery from a concussion received in a bike accident—is realistically presented as nuanced, and at times tentative.

In this novel, Leanne Baugh seeks to enrich her teenage reader's understanding of depression and suicide, a goal made explicit in the closing section, "taking care of yourself . . . ," which includes statistics and information about suicide, as well as links to Canadian support services.

These two captivating and effectively paced works present believable adolescent characters in whose lives horrific and mundane experiences coexist, and whose parents are highly fallible, often caught up in their own dramas, and yes—as clichéd as it sounds—who frequently do not understand what their teenage children are going through. Both novels provide thoughtful advice without resorting to didactic dialogue, overly contrived plots, or simplistic solutions; given this, they have the potential to engage YA readers while expanding their awareness and increasing their sensitivity.

Gifts for the Journey

Henry Beissel
Footprints of Dark Energy. Guernica $20.00

Lorna Crozier; Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy, photography
The House the Spirit Builds.
Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

James Deahl
Travelling the Lost Highway. Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

These three volumes are evidence, if we indeed needed it, that some of Canada's best poetry is still being written by its senior poets. All three books embody a much-needed compassionate wisdom for those—all of us—travelling into our planet's uncertain future.

Henry Beissel's poems range widely across familiar topics—the ever-changing and renewing seasons, matters of love, growing old—but always with a sense of the deeper truths to be found beyond their aesthetic pleasures. Some, such as "Find the *Mot Juste*," are powerful calls for ethical responses to injustice. "Greenfield" is a compelling elegy for a once-thriving Ontario village, the collection's title and its larger cosmic themes deftly and vividly woven into the verse. Elsewhere, Beissel exhibits keen insight into the characteristics of larger-than-life figures. "A Wake for Fidel" acknowledges both the

greatest strengths and the most crippling weaknesses of the former Cuban leader. "Don Juan on his Deathbed" is a masterpiece of psychological insight. The dominant theme of this collection, however, concerns the poet's deep awareness and understanding of the alarming environmental problems that beset us in the Anthropocene, human-caused crises, vividly portrayed in poems like "Untimely Blizzard," "Changing our Planet," and "Contested Celebration." Beissel paints the terrifying reality of the fires now burning constantly across our planet—"[t]he world is on fire and we are / its arsonists"—as well as the prospect of death by water:

> [f]ragile as a canoe in a tsunami
> we must face the iceberg of our ignorance
> and leave nature to correct our blunders.

These are separate from yet intimately related to the book's final section, "Footprints of Dark Energy (The Seventh Elegy)," a continuation of the six-elegy cycle *Seasons of Blood* published eight years earlier. Reflecting the current physical theory that our universe is made up almost entirely of dark energy and matter, the elegy contends that the five per cent of the cosmos we can perceive is "as you and I are / footprints of dark energy." It ranges between past and present, the old world and the new, war and peace, cruelty and compassion, not sparing a bleak vision of our future, but offering at the end a possibility of redemption through the powers of "the yearning heart." Beissel understands the essence of both science and poetry, which he exhibits to great effect, reminding us that "this is no planet for the faint of courage," but also pointing the way to where that courage may be found and drawn upon to stem our looming collective crisis.

The thirty-six poems in Lorna Crozier's *The House the Spirit Builds* were inspired by and are juxtaposed with photographs taken by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy in and around Wintergreen Studios' retreat in eastern Ontario's Frontenac Arch biosphere. The photographs themselves are masterful, and both poems and pictures derive even greater value from each other. The tone is contemplative, meditative, each poem distilling from its corresponding picture a textual essence to move the mind and spirit. There are odes to amphibians, meditations on insects, and riffs on still life. "Three Oranges in a Red Bowl" evokes for the poet a summer of first love in southern Italy, destined for a sweet ending by the fall. "Nom de Plume" is a whimsical riff on the feather-like foliage of various plant species and the plumes of the tiny creatures that the poet imagines "flickering above," particularly the "splendid palpita snout," causing her to exclaim, "[t]hat's it. My old name's gone." While the photographs inspire the poems, the poems certainly inspire the reader to see these same photographs in new and satisfying ways. For example, a thin black line in a concrete mosaic elicits these opening lines, "[c]heck out the worm (is it a worm?— / . . .) that looks / like a rusted spike," which suddenly metamorphose to a supremely compressed *Bildungsroman* of a carpenter's apprentice grown to magician. The book ends with "Prayer," a litany for small animals of this biosphere and everywhere. Like the other two books in this review, the poems sing out to us that we are not the only species on this planet, softly proclaiming the importance of seeing both the beauty and the necessity of our fellow creatures. The reader should draw delight, inspiration, and wisdom from every page in this fine collection.

James Deahl's *Travelling the Lost Highway* purports to take readers down roads less travelled, but once on the journey they may recognize what has long been forgotten. Coming of age in the US but making

Canada his home for the past half century, Deahl has literally and metaphorically travelled many lost highways, within and between both countries. A spirit of retrospection lives in many of these poems, poems that honour, among many things, the virtues of nature, the tender aspects of human relationships, the joy of a new marriage, and the ghostly dignity of abandoned workers, factories, and towns. Some poems surprise: imagine the poet discussing Emily Dickinson with Harry Truman and Michael Wurster in a Pittsburgh café on the cusp of Big Steel's decline. Orchards, churches, sunsets, winter and summer storms, constellations, changes of season, classical music, and wild flora and fauna flourish and delight throughout the collection. Poignant elegies and tributes abound, for the likes of Raymond Souster, Denise Levertov, Kenneth Patchen, Phyllis Webb, Michael Bullock, and others. But perhaps the deepest sense of loss is expressed in Deahl's various laments for "the dead nation of [his] birth," a country to which, despite living in the border city of Sarnia for many years, he has apparently refused to travel since the last presidential election. Overall, this is a very rewarding collection, embodying a wide range of emotions, spiritual and physical longings, and, despite the troubling note of the concluding poems, an affirmation of goodness that can still be found on journeys down lost highways.

Whose Canadian Avant-Garde?

Gregory Betts and Christian Bök, eds.
Avant Canada: Poets, Prophets, Revolutionaries.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $39.99

Reviewed by Scott Inniss

Avant Canada: Poets, Prophets, Revolutionaries presents a range of writers, critics, and textual practices, some of which are far from fellow-travellers. Gregory Betts and Christian Bök deserve credit for their editorial ambition and scope. The anthology comprises nine divisions, the most sizable of which combine creative and critical texts illustrating major tendencies within contemporary avant-garde literature: concrete poetry, language writing, identity poetics, and conceptualism. Each of these sections offers material of interest. Highlights include Lisa Robertson's essay, and poetry from Dorothy Lusk, Donato Mancini, and the always amazing Annharte.

By far the most significant aspect of *Avant Canada*, however, is its constellating of avant-garde and Indigenous writing. The central dissatisfaction lies in the critical-editorial apparatus that frames this encounter. As the title indicates, *Avant Canada* gathers its material under the rubrics of the nation-state and the radical aesthetic-political cadre. The advisability of this organization is open to question. How productive is a literary-nationalist framework for oppositional textual economies that are often stubbornly site-specific, transregional, or local-global? As for representing Indigenous authors under the colonial sign of Canadian sovereignty, is this at odds or of a piece with the editors' rhetoric of inclusion, diversity, and reconciliation? What is at stake in viewing radical Indigenous writing as consubstantial with an avant-gardism still inextricably marked

by whiteness, anti-feminism, and phallic (Oedipal) aggression?

As avant-garde scholars and practitioners, the editors know that identity, aesthetic violence, and cultural imperialism are issues central to any project like theirs. The problem, then, is not that they ignore these issues, but that they consider them in a manner that too often rings hollow, reads as mostly proleptic, or comes off as obtuse or atonal. At times, they appear simply to extend the avant-garde franchise to Indigenous writers. Perhaps what the avant-garde stands to gain in return is some of the cultural-political authority that Indigenous writing currently enjoys. What gives the anthology its particular promise are the Indigenous writers who allow their work to appear in its avant-garde nationalist framework. For these authors, what is the relation between avant-garde transgression and decolonial poetics? To what extent are radical settler-cultural forms an influence on their work? From an Indigenous point of view, what are the uses of avant-garde conceptual vocabularies? What are their limits?

For the Anishinaabe poet Liz Howard, any identification with the avant-garde is conditional on its ability to perceive the immanent radicality of Indigenous survivance and resurgence. In an interview with the editors, Jordan Abel sidesteps leading questions about the avant-garde provenance of his erasure poetics, comparing them instead to Nisga'a carving techniques. Arguing that Indigenous "conceptual" writers like Abel "build contexts of anti-oppression into their erasures," non-Indigenous poet-scholar Sonnet L'Abbé strongly contests the (white, colonial) entitlements at work within dominant vanguardist conceptions. The positions from which these poets each write require them to confront the antagonisms inherent in any encounter between Indigenous and avant-garde. Unlike the editors, they foreground the truth that aesthetic revolution is not always equal to cultural-political revolution.

These Words Singing

Bertrand Bickersteth
The Response of Weeds: A Misplacement of Black Poetry on the Prairies. NeWest $18.95

Meredith Quartermain
Lullabies in the Real World. NeWest $18.95

Reviewed by Dani Spinosa

Full disclosure, reader: I am writing this review to take a break from marking undergraduate close-reading papers. Many undergraduate essays suffer the same problems: they identify literary devices, formal elements in the poems, and leave it at that. They only rarely tell me "so what?" I keep asking: "So? What is that repetition for? What is that alliteration doing?" And then today I sat down to read through Bertrand Bickersteth's *The Response of Weeds* and it is impossible to just note the form—the delicate and then resilient, the flowing and then stopping form—of these poems without seeing what those words are *doing*. They're singing.

I'll admit, too, that it's not often that I am fully drawn into a book of poems that I'm reviewing, but Bickersteth's grip on his reader, like his command of poetic language, is unyielding. I kept finding myself saying, "Forget the marking, let's just read one more." I had only intended to take notes for a review and now find myself writing it out in full.

The Response of Weeds takes off at a blazing pace with a prairie revision of Langston Hughes titled "The Negro Speaks of Alberta." This first poem is striking because of the—I am trying to find the eloquent way of saying this, but I can't, so I'll just say it—the balls it takes to start a collection by re-visioning

Langston Hughes. But, make no mistake, the poem is not kitschy homage or poetic flex. It's poignant and so beautifully written, setting the tone for a collection filled with musicality, where Bickersteth insists on a reinsertion of the Black voice that has so long been elided from the stories we tell (especially in poetry) about the Prairies. That first poem calls out, and a resounding echo persists throughout the collection. Bickersteth's musicality here is made clear in his striking use of enjambment, with the poem's (at turns tragic and joyful) cyclicism beating out "so on / and on and on" and still echoed in the "still you do not see me" of the poem's final line.

A similar echo, a kind of call-and-answer where these poems both call and answer, manifests this collection's musicality in the poems' various refrains: the mirrored "*watch your step!*" ("The Peace") and "[*w*]*atch my step!*" ("Notice"); the poems' various other refrains of "*we, too, wade in this water!*" ("The Battle versus the Red Deer") and the calling out to Black musicians, poets, writers shouting "Now *go*, Louis, and *tell* it!" ("Louis Armstrong on the Prairies," emphasis original). And still there are beautiful alliterative moments, particularly in "The Peace" and "Harry Mills, the Music is Passing." These poems almost demand to be read aloud, to be sung. One thing is sure to me after reading *The Response of Weeds*: Bickersteth is a poetic force to be reckoned with. He's out there singing these voices into the prairie winds, and we'd do well to listen.

If Bickersteth's work is beautifully bombastic, then Meredith Quartermain's *Lullabies in the Real World*, also from NeWest Press, is a quiet but still insistent call to witness. Quartermain's work here is also distinctly musical, but in a rather different way. The poetic voice is subtle but unflinching, demanding attention to the small things, advocating a kind of egalitarian redistribution. In "Pyramid Falls," for example, Quartermain writes of a desire to "bow to / Not Kings" and to "sing of Not Spinoza," wanting instead to "frisk in a world-class / Beethovenlessness." Like Bickersteth, Quartermain is ballsy in her rewritings here, too. The poem "Ithaka," for example, observes that "[s]o much depends / upon the lentil lens," somehow taking Williams' objects in focus and zooming in further.

The poems in *Lullabies in the Real World* are distinctly Canadian, beyond the fact that they are bilingual, with beautiful wordplay prancing from English to French with ease. Quartermain reinserts the Canadian into the literary landscape, insisting on an epic location for the quiet, understated poetic voice. She imagines "[m]ajestic dreamy Lotus Eaters" in the context of "Harris's grounded icebergs" and places "Nausikaa / wash[ing] her wagonload of linen" in "Cullen's scumbled snow-flurry sky." It's so distinctly Canadian, this desire to bring the epic here, to this landscape that demands epicness. There are a few surprises in *Lullabies*, too, like the use of a graffiti-style typeface in "Unreal to Real," which appealed to me as a visual poet, and told me early in the collection that I'd have to pay attention to these details.

All in all, these are both beautiful collections that return me to the centrality of the aural, of song, in poetry. And though these poets could never have anticipated the cultural climate in which I read these poems—we are all away in our homes, yet so many of us are out in the streets—these poems do tell us something of our contemporary need for song, our need for these words singing in their different ways. And, as the piles of essays that I need to mark keep getting higher and higher, I'm grateful for these poems, because I really needed to sing.

Gaspereau in the Wild

Lindsay Bird
Boom Time. Gaspereau $19.95

Monica Kidd
Chance Encounters with Wild Animals. Gaspereau $21.95

Bren Simmers
Pivot Point. Gaspereau $24.95

Reviewed by James Gifford

Every Gaspereau book delights with design, craft, and beauty. Lindsay Bird, Monica Kidd, and Bren Simmers do too. These collections embody the generosity and humanism for which Gaspereau is widely admired.

Pivot Point recounts a nine-day canoe trip through the Bowron Lake circuit, with short poems interspersed with prose and sketches. Simmers' lyricism reflects the introspective nature of every journey and the book's origin in drafts for a long poem, one largely reborn here in prose. The immediate comparison is to Amber McMillan's *The Woods: A Year on Protection Island*, but Simmers' lyricism concentrates in the scene providing her title: "I'm now attuned to just how far the canoe can tip before it rocks back to centre. / Each relationship has its own pivot point." The impersonal natural world we might expect to capture the poet's imagination, as if some invocation of the sublime with Kaza Mountain standing in for Mont Blanc, is not Simmers' pivot. Instead, the lyrical concern is with relationships, where they balance, where they roll over, and how marriages and friendships navigate quotidian life. She unfolds the self-conscious, ironical experiences of modern urban life shifting to roughing it in the bush, with "boil-in-bag curry, mac' n' cheese, and soba noodles stir-fry" or "[a]pproaching mid-life, we take calcium to maintain bone strength and fish oil for memory." Simmers also echoes the troubles of the rose-coloured glass of the Grand Tour of the Romantics and their landscape sublime—framed work of art for human enjoyment: "Using trees to scale the size, the eye moves left to right, takes in foreground, middle ground, before settling on the keyhole views between peaks." Simmers proves Lawrence Durrell's quip that "[t]ravel can be one of the most rewarding forms of introspection."

Bird's *Boom Time* opens with her arrival in Fort McMurray and the oil sands, which makes the book's black endpapers and cover all the more appropriate (they're shared across all three books but speak differently wrapping *Boom Time*). "Boom Time" captures working-class struggles for "*the good life*" with sardonic half-rhyme and the depressed race "between bust and bust." She overlays personal experiences living among workers, navigating labour, love, pleasure, and the liminal life in between jobs, places, and people in the interstices of a culture of extraction. As with Simmers, there's a natural comparison: Garth Martens' *Prologue for the Age of Consequence*, with which *Boom Time* shares manual labour conjoined with philosophical curiosity. Late in the collection, "Wood Buffalo" eulogizes nature's desolation amidst bitumen extraction and the silencing of the poet's voice as the pen falters, ink turned mud, difficult to wade through—the mud river ends poetic viscosity. Near the close, "Ariel," an allusively heavy title, fires readerly anticipation. Bird doesn't disappoint. Shakespeare and Plath settle to a Disney princess coyly wading through the black-gold boom, facing an end time, only to ask "[w]ill I shake my head" at such a past, a past made strange by a future hardly imaginable.

Kidd differs, centring the non-human in one set of poems among four clusters. The second, "Meeting the Eyes of the World,"

concerns travels to Antarctica and will likely garner the most attention. The shades of white for the ice and the non-human feature strongly, such as "[t]he stench" of penguins in "Natural Selections." In the same sense, "[t]his mantle of black debris / of whale bones and sailors" draws the reader toward the detritus that remains when presence becomes absences, in "Deception." The recurring impersonal focus is on place, the animal, and the non-living. Amidst these, however, we see men drawn to Antarctica in human relations in the two parts of "The Origin of Shame." This more lyrical mode permeates the other three sections, most strikingly "Chance Encounters with Wild Animals," which lends the collection its title, and which focuses on Kidd's European travels. The wild animals are not inhuman nature but the humane figures and spaces encountered, as in the stunning "On Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's *La Fortune*." This reviewer visited the same 2017 exhibition in Toulouse, and both the images of the poetry and the notes at the end of the book on the translations accompanying the exhibit convey the Renaissance humanism of l'Hôtel d'Assézat and the living blush of the stone of La Ville Rose. Kidd points to the quotidian life of the city with "[p]iss humming on the banks of La Garrone [*sic*]. / Everything clear in the quiet of the cloister, / magnolia rattling," which then seemingly juxtaposes the painting and the nearby Basilique Saint-Sernin.

Goodbye to Language

Brad Casey
The Handsome Man. Book*hug $20.00

C. J. Lavigne
In Veritas. NeWest $21.95

John O'Neill
Goth Girls of Banff. NeWest $19.95

Reviewed by Zachary Abram

The English actor Peter Ustinov once quipped that Toronto was what New York would be if the Swiss ran it. While Ustinov, who famously donned the meticulously manicured moustache of Hercule Poirot, presumably meant the remark as a compliment, many have bristled at Toronto's purported stuffiness and set out for skylines that promise to be a little less drab. This is the case for the protagonist of Brad Casey's debut collection of linked short stories, *The Handsome Man*. His defining characteristic is wanderlust. While his home base is Toronto, few of the collection's stories take place in Canada's biggest city. Instead, the man alights to an enviable number of hipster enclaves the world over: Montreal, Berlin, Rome, etc. The man's travels, sometimes by motorcycle, sometimes with movie stars, sometimes with a bevy of glamorous women, reveal not so much a protagonist on the run from a multitude of personal problems, but rather a budding Instagram influencer, each story mediated through just the right filter named for just the right cultural reference.

It becomes apparent, however, that readers are meant to interpret the man's peregrinations not as aspirational but as evidence of the depth of his emotional crises. He is not travelling, but escaping. It is never quite clear from what, exactly, he is escaping. Besides his nomadic streak, the man's other chief attribute is his seeming allergy to introspection. His deep alienation

from himself rivals the protagonists of Franz Kafka or Albert Camus: "Maybe his instincts were right, I think, not to trust me. Maybe he thought I was a bad man and maybe I was, maybe I am." Of course, Kafka and Camus were commenting on the fundamental alienation felt under oppressive systems of bureaucracy and colonialism, while the protagonist of *The Handsome Man* seems most offended at the sight of a group of people "wearing J. Crew covered in tattoos." The radical self-fashioning intrinsic to Casey's travelogue means that his protagonist is less a *flâneur* who loafs to wryly observe society at a distance, and more a throwback to *Vice* magazine's long-running feature "Dos and Don'ts."

The protagonist is unmoored, at home nowhere despite being welcomed everywhere. While pathos and moments of genuine connection are found in *The Handsome Man*, Casey's steadfast sincerity never quite coalesces into a coherent commentary. The stories hold little objectionable content, nor do they delve into politics or address issues of class, gender, or race. Writers are by no means required to address these issues, but their omission here means that Casey never interrogates how it is that his protagonist ended up astride a vintage motorcycle, how it is that he can drop everything and gallivant around Europe, how it is that beautiful women will not stop hitting on him, etc. Mercifully free of these questions, the protagonist and reader never have to grapple with the ramifications of this (perhaps gendered, perhaps race-based, perhaps class-based) asymmetrical allocation of resources.

Few would accuse the skyline of Banff National Park of being drab. While *The Handsome Man* globe-trots, John O'Neill's *Goth Girls of Banff* stays put in the harsh but heavily touristed climes of the Canadian Rockies. O'Neill depicts Banff, both the town and the park, as a place for searchers. The characters who populate this winning collection make the pilgrimage to Banff with expectations, usually of salvation. What they find is something distinctly less divine. Any hope of communion with nature is either thwarted by mundane human interference or the revelation of violence that lurks just below all that beauty. Feelings of isolation are only exacerbated by Banff's trails and vistas: "Loneliness is *always* more. It's never simple. It's like this place. Loneliness is a whole mountain range."

O'Neill's characters have come to Banff to confront their grief head-on. One widower disobeys his wife's last wishes that her ashes be spread in the Bow River and, instead, buries her in three places: "[n]o more arguing with the dead . . . 'The dead don't know anything.'" In another story, a lonely and overweight bachelor wants to bury a tooth he loses on one of Banff's precipitous trails as a last-ditch effort at regeneration: "Rudy considered dropping the tooth, sowing it in the wilderness, from which might grow, what? Another *him*?" In the titular story, two sisters run a business where, clad in Goth garb, they juxtapose Banff's natural beauty with the spooky and macabre:

> *WANNA ADD SOME EDGE TO your mountain experience? To sharpen the dull blade of things, and let darkness descend, like beautiful sleep but with your eyes wide open? Call the Goth Girls of Banff.*

When one of the sisters, Jessie, drops her facade to comfort a distraught man, her sister, Linda, becomes indignant that she has let slip the veil. Jessie becomes disenchanted with her Goth pose: "*Shouldn't the Gothic be a place where grief can live?* I hated our Gothness. We were a contradiction, a fraud." When it is revealed that the distraught man may have himself been performing, the crux of O'Neill's accomplished

collection is also revealed: given the extent of human idiosyncrasy and deception, not even being in nature comes naturally.

Ottawa's reputation as "the town that fun forgot" is crucial to C. J. Lavigne's skewed depiction of Canada's capital in her fantastical debut novel, *In Veritas*. While Ottawa's reputation as "Dullsville on the Rideau" precedes itself, it was not properly quantified until 2013, when, at the inaugural "Boring Awards," Ottawa beat out stiff competition from Abbotsford, Brampton, and Laval to be named Canada's most boring city. There is little doubt that if the members of the jury had been aware of Ottawa's preponderance of dragons, ghosts, and sorcerers, the results would have been different. These are exactly the types of creatures that populate Lavigne's magic-realist version of Bytown. Beyond the novel's fantasy elements, however, there is a nuanced meditation on language and its role in reflecting and determining truth.

The novel's title and the protagonist's name, Verity Richards, signal the novel's preoccupation with truth. Like all good fantasy heroes, Verity is special. She has synesthesia, smelling birdsong, hearing sunsets, and seeing voices. Lavigne depicts Verity's mode of perception as a mere quirk; even the dragons Verity sees along Ottawa's power lines aren't imbued with mythic potential. It is only when Verity sees a street magician transmogrify a dog into a snake that she embraces her own type of magic. Naturally, Verity has a crucial role to play in an impending interdimensional war that threatens to destroy the world. These time-worn tropes are imbued with new life by Lavigne's own legerdemain. More interesting, however, is the novel's linguistic critique. At one point, as Verity is being ushered into her new reality, a character asks, "How do you explain things there aren't words for?" Lavigne is skeptical of whether language is the most direct path to the truth, or even a particularly useful one.

Throughout the novel, the signified and the signifier consistently miss each other: "[*H*]*e would write a word and then cross it out . . . language was insufficient for clarity and he'd only used the best word he had under the circumstances*." The fellowship that Verity is initiated into communicates via posters for a mysterious band called "The Between," suggesting that Lavigne's truth is nestled comfortably in that liminal space between reference and referent. As in debt to Saussure's semiotics as it is to Tolkien's sword sorcery, *In Veritas* is a welcome novel because it finds the mythic in the mundane and escapism in realism.

Playful Experiments with Perspective

Tim Conley
Collapsible. New Star $18.00

Karen Hofmann
Echolocation. NeWest $19.95

Reviewed by Stephanie L. Lu

Collapsible and *Echolocation* are both collections of short stories with whimsical views of the world. As the titles suggest, both subvert normal ways of seeing and understanding and invite us to listen like a bat, following echoes of voices through dizzying spirals. Short, fun, and surprisingly incisive, Conley's and Hofmann's stories are ideal for reading on the go or relaxing at the end of the day. Think Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, or Franz Kafka, except in a contemporary Canadian setting and with—if you can believe it—even weirder narrative twists.

The first story in *Collapsible* opens on a delightfully matter-of-fact tone: "[t]he world's foremost authority on werewolves is buying a new suit." It soon turns out,

of course, that the character's expertise is not actually taken seriously by most other people. The third-person limited point of view initially follows him—"he can imagine himself . . . addressing the assembled experts"—but soon dips into another character's consciousness: "the tailor moving softly about him knows better than to remark on his customer's misunderstandings of his gentle questions." Within the span of eleven pages, the narration takes us on a kaleidoscopic tour through the minds of an entire neighbourhood of characters: the man who believes himself an expert on werewolves; the tailor trying to make ends meet; the tailor's adult daughter, Deja, who suffers from depression and can cook an amazing chili; the two look-alike women who run the bakery that Deja passes by; the quiet man with the crooked nose who silently admires the women in the bakery; the children who playfully imitate the manners of the quiet man; the naughtiest of these children, Esteban, who also does imitations of the doctor with the limp, a couple of cross-eyed priests, and the stepmother of one of his friends; and Esteban's grandmother, who has "survived as many marriages as wars." A later story takes the opposite of this whirlwind approach, focusing on one character's experience of a bad date, but its loyal reportage of every detail of her experience is equally hilarious: "[j]ust before the salads came she noticed that he had something up his nose. The left nostril (his left), something solid." While I found myself chuckling through most of these stories, I was also left with the impression that every person, no matter how sane or important they might seem to themselves, can still appear strange to others.

Echolocation opens with a seemingly conventional love story, following the perspective of a seemingly normal woman: "[s]he had never heard a man talk about his dreams before. It was like hearing him say *frightened* or *pussy*." The woman goes through all the stages of a relationship that one might expect: fascination—"she did not always understand what he was talking about"; forgetting of time—"she fell into his life activities, his energy, as into a vortex"; pride—"he is her husband"; and sullen reproach—"he had said, Don't ever do that. I'm the boss here, okay? . . . Okay, she had said. Her chin had trembled." Gradually, very gradually, the story takes a dive for the weird, so that by the end, when—SPOILER ALERT—both young people have turned into werewolves—END SPOILER—it sounds completely natural for the narrator to say that

> she knows what to do, now. Her brain tells her in a series of clear images . . . She sees in a kind of vision of herself . . . that she is made of sinew and thick red muscle and living, glistening bone.

Hofmann's adjustment of narrative perspective is so masterfully subtle that I had to go back to see when and how exactly this ordinary love story became a weird horror story.

Through playful experiments with perspective, Conley and Hofmann challenge us to see people from different angles. Whether giving us insight into a supposedly crazy person's mind, or making a supposedly normal person seem suddenly strange, *Collapsible* and *Echolocation* remind us of the limits of our knowledge and overturn our assumptions, again and again.

Attention Canadian Literature Professors

Amber Dawn and Justin Ducharme, eds.
Hustling Verse: An Anthology of Sex Workers' Poetry. Arsenal Pulp $19.95

Nyla Matuk, ed.
Resisting Canada: An Anthology of Poetry. Véhicule $22.95

Reviewed by Sarah-Jean Krahn

Resisting Canada insists on transformation of the CanLit topography: no more hiding behind the tepid or hollow. This anthology—no supplement, but foundation—reimagines the mountains of Canada's literary landscape. The tectonic plates are shifting, and finally through the haze the imposing shadows of tireless writers like Marie Annharte Baker and Lee Maracle emerge as the megaliths of Canada's—Kanata's—literary lineage. The anthology furthermore calls on *all* poets to use their platform to decolonize. When we have "nothing to say," we snub the simple message: "No More, No More, No More, No More" (Janet Rogers). Our duty will be done through substantive, politically savvy content that refuses the colonial state via glaring, variegated forms that challenge the literary status quo. From its excerpts from Jordan Abel's *Injun* to Rita Wong's "forage, fumage," the composition of poetic contours in this collection of twenty-eight poets includes reclaimed settler texts and handwritten glossaries. The majority of these poems stagger too much under the weight of layered strata to fit on a single page. There is too much to say through five-hundred-plus years of genocide for a few left-aligned stanzas on a white page. Janet Rogers explains: "being Indian . . . takes stories, lots and lots and lots of stories." Meanwhile, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson recounts publishers' refusals of her "polemic" tone. Armand Garnet Ruffo confronts Susanna Moodie and Duncan Campbell Scott with the context of their white lies, as El Jones slams in exclamatory style to keep resuscitated the memory of Viola Desmond and the victimization of Omar Khadr. As a unit, the poets reclaim the land and its languages as Indigenous terrains that sustain their original citizenry and cultivate a diaspora of allies who ardently decry colonial-hypercapitalism's crusade to exterminate this land.

Resistance is equally relevant to *Hustling Verse.* The poets who glitter its pages prove themselves to be "system-smashing-creative-fucking-geniuses," as dubbed by co-editor Amber Dawn. Here, too, the poets rarely deign to service convention. Play with space means this is *their* boudoir, their rules; with punctuation, their pace, their breath. They support and celebrate each other, as tzaz does in siren-singing the praises of the mermaid girls they croon with. They are sustained through stalwart humour, envisioning "A John's Funeral" (K. Sedgemore) or performing a "Tale of Two Sarahs" to challenge the white-sex worker nemeses who stonewall AK Saini's activism. But, while autonomy endures, several poems stick to your bones, quietly acknowledging calumny and assault, like jaye simpson's "*r e d*" does of a grovelling rapist. Even the banal can be brutal, like the mint *he* puts in his mouth "as though / my sucking your dick changed your breath / somehow" (Aimee Herman). Poet hustlers explode at the centre of a systemic inhumanity's intersections—colonization, homophobia, poverty, racism, sexism, transphobia, xenophobia—and smash to shame -isms of injustice which would never accept the body to be relished and rewarded in a safe, consensual environment for fear of engendering collective empowerment, like that in Strawberry's "3 strong pairs of

hands," wherein alchemist friends fulfill "violence so loving." You will find this anthology "handcuffed to [your] throat as [you] run / away" (kiran anthony foster).

Degrees of Separation

Phillip Ernest
The Far Himalaya. Linda Leith $21.95

Andrea Gunraj
The Lost Sister. Nimbus $24.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

These fascinating new works of fiction are rooted in personal and shared stories, and are set geographically in the city of Toronto; both unravel the unexpected threads that connect personal lives and public histories, disentangling the hidden dwellers of streets, malls, and neighbourhoods, and exploring interconnectivity and segregation based on ethnicity, language, physical appearance, education, gender, and economic status. The reader comes away with a rich, multi-dimensional kaleidoscope of the city. More remarkably, both books are almost spell-binding in their ability to explore individual lives and locations, yet also to reach temporally and spatially into the ancient past and into remote places often repressed in Canadian history.

Andrea Gunraj's *The Lost Sister* was, as the publisher's blurb states, "inspired by the true-life experiences of a close friend and former resident" of the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children. As Gunraj has emphasized, the book's proceeds will fund a bursary for descendants of the Home's survivors. While her first novel is set primarily on an unidentified island in the Caribbean, *The Lost Sister* explores the specific space of Toronto's "Jane & Finch"—and the cross-cultural and multi-generational landscape of that neighbourhood. At the same time, the first-person narration reflects the perspective of the *un*-lost "cowardly sister," Alisha. (The intratextual audience of the account remains unknown until the novel's Epilogue.) Alisha's story is interwoven with Paula's much older story of family, loss, and unresolved fractures.

Gunraj has noted her fascination with the ambivalent relationship between sisters, and explores a mix of protection, resentment, emulation, and competition through the linking of these two distinct stories. Alisha's recollection of her relationship with Diana is interwoven with Paula's more distanced memories of her relationship with her younger sister, Ave. The stories develop through two distinct chronological frameworks, alternating between multiple present and past lives skilfully. However, Alisha's story is the more haunting and evocative for the reader, while that of the Nova Scotia Home—resurrecting "Queen Nanny of the Blue Mountains" on "Big Turtle Island"—feels more detached, and at times somewhat overly convenient or pedantic. The resulting novel is still, though, a powerful truth-telling that contributes to a deeper understanding of Canada's uncelebrated past.

Similarly, the didactic component of Phillip Ernest's *The Far Himalaya* is at times distancing for the reader, yet it successfully integrates the ancient epic *Mahābhārata* with the no-less-troubling wars on the streets of Toronto and in the hallways of the University of Toronto. Moreover, that blend of intimacy and distance seems appropriate, since the primary character, Ben, and his mentor, "Moksha," explore their places as both insiders and outsiders in these locales. Ernest has noted in an interview with the publisher (accessible online at https://alllitup.ca/Blog/2019/On-Leaving-Home-and-Writing-Interview-with-Phillip-Ernest) that he is fascinated with art as an instrument for self-exploration, so that his

weaving of interior and "remote" worlds (like the *Mahābhārata*) holds "tragedy and comedy in one hand and the other at the same moment." The centre is more profoundly the university campus and its politics, reflecting violence, addiction, and misuse of power both within and outside the academy. That focus is prominent especially in the relationship of Ben and Aditi, a doctoral student in East Asian studies.

Ernest has also commented that his construction of this intimate relationship is one of the novel's weaknesses, as his portrayal of this relationship idealizes the bond but leaves Aditi's character largely enigmatic and underdeveloped. For instance, the rationale for Ben's shadow-writing role in Aditi's dissertation, with its emphasis on desire, can be somewhat unsettling. On the other side, the mapping of Toronto's streets, and (further) the ashram on Lake Simcoe creates an intriguing pilgrimage. While the couple does inevitably journey to the "Far Himalaya" in South Asia, the labyrinth in Toronto becomes a more profound and sacred space—the "*devabhūmi*" or "land of the gods."

Also evocative is the interplay of hallucinogenic substances and altered states of consciousness, an interplay that results in a Canadian "magic realism," even with a third-person narrator. In many episodes, the reader is caught in the web of imagined reality, and in moments of transformation from individual to character type, and to archetype. While this translation is sometimes rather heavy-handed, Ernest manages to create an approach that is both riveting and powerful. The limited-omniscient perspective invites the reader on an often terrifying, yet awe-inspiring, journey through the labyrinth of material conditions in Toronto.

Both these novels are richer when one reads the "back story" of their creation. In Ernest's novel, Ben's struggle to grasp solid ground—reality and joy—becomes the reader's struggle also. Similarly, in Gunraj's book, the *un*lost sister's fabrication after her sister's disappearance—and her burden of guilt and grief—become both compelling and intolerable as the narrative unfolds. We may know that the truth will resist concealment, but we are also invested in the dilemma of Alisha to reveal her role in the disappearance.

Broken and Unbroken Lines

Cornelia Hoogland and Ted Goodden
Cosmic Bowling. Guernica $20.00

Elana Wolff
Swoon. Guernica $20.00

Reviewed by Geordie Miller

Uncertainty can be clarifying, as both of these conceptually rich new collections affirm, especially when you pose purposeful questions and find the right companions. "Is it // the verb that does the big work? as some poets hold . . ." Elana Wolff asks mid-*Swoon*. The verb "swoon," for instance—what "work" is it doing for this particular poet? Wolff's four epigraphs offer the beginnings of an answer. They include Rebecca's first glimpse of Isaac in the Book of Genesis, which supplies the patriarchal connotation of "swoon"—as an expression of excess (feminized) emotion. But Rebecca does not fall, and the subsequent epigraphs associate swooning with empowerment, with reference to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Robert Walser's *The Walk*, and Franz Kafka's *Letters to Milena*. Walser, a favourite author of Kafka's, announces that he "would die of delight, or at least hit the floor in a swoon, if ever such a transformation occurred." The "transformation" that Walser feels

empowered to imagine is women wearing tighter pants. Wolff does not supply this context of heteropatriarchal male desire, but her multiple poetic mobilizations of swooning assail such presumptions.

In "Not Be Wrong" Wolff asks, "where are you now, / and are you safe?" She is addressing a crow "that got out of the murder." There is no answer, only the care in asking. Alongside question marks, ellipses and white space together do "big work" in *Swoon*, perhaps marking a poetic mind's unwillingness to settle for certainty's premature closures. As one poet, John Keats, famously held, uncertainty is a prerequisite for literary achievement. Though Wolff seems at least as interested in negative space—to borrow the title of one of her poems—as negative capability. The collection is full of jagged juxtapositions, of lines that begin in the middle of the page, as if awoken. White space demarcates all of Wolff's ellipses, suggesting the intentionality of excision rather than a trailing off.

Swoon contains two poignant poem cycles. In the first, "Messenger Suite," Wolff offers apostrophes to various birds, whose presence and songs ultimately retain the agency of mystery. Wolff listens; she does not impose projections. "These birds—they must be messengers. / They've come," the cycle concludes. The second cycle, "Stacked Cast," features one of six examples in the collection of poems inspired by a Women's Art Association of Canada artist. Janet F. Potter's *Life in Vancouver* sets the scene for the final poem in "Stacked Cast," entitled "Simple Cyan": "The bay-scape as imagined in a mythopoeic vision: / seagulls, those immortal horses, reeling to the heights." These concrete ekphrastic dialogues subtly complement Wolff's appropriately surrealist sketches of Kafka in poems like "Traffic" and "Surfacing Behaviour." Kafka's youngest sister, Ottla, also makes a memorable appearance. "—I've longed to find therein some clue or truth about my life," Wolff writes of Ottla's eyes, which are "opaque as the pool in the *Ring*, and shrine-like."

This quest for "some clue or truth" defines the conceit of Cornelia Hoogland and Ted Goodden's *Cosmic Bowling*. They are not bowling alone but communicating with each other through the *I Ching*. The collection reproduces an exhibition of Goodden's ceramic sculptures and Hoogland's poems that ran at four BC galleries in 2016 and 2017. In book form, a facsimile of each of Goodden's sixty-four sculptures, corresponding to a hexagram from the ancient Chinese divination manual, is displayed before Hoogland's six-line poems. The cosmic scale is apparent from the outset. Hoogland's first poem, "*Ch'ien*, the Creative," opens as follows: "Six unbroken lines forge a white-hot connection. / We're born for heat. Maybe lava, earth's / molten core; maybe the sun's energy." Several of the subsequent poems likewise look skyward, and Hoogland's celestial contemplations are grounded through recurring reflections on more immediate, mundane concerns like dog walks, rush hour, and "Martha Stewart's glossy mag on the table."

The kaleidoscopic movements of Hoogland's lines are formally enhanced by her artful caesuras, which make room for surprising shifts. Her crisp and more politically urgent tercets, meanwhile, speak to the contingencies and exigencies that consulting the *I Ching* can unearth. Climate catastrophe is a frequent topic, notably in the second stanza of "*Ta Kuo*, Preponderance of the Great": "The planet's idling on fumes, a kind of deadly / inertia. We go on being part of the problem. Like Atlas / bearing up the sky, a strained and daily quality. We suffer." We suffer, "but who would Sisyphus be without his rock," as a later poem concludes. Hoogland's Sisyphus

analogy is not to us, though, but "the tagged Monarch butterfly," whose mass migration Hoogland tags as a symbol of perseverance.

To the skeptical or uninitiated, the idea that meaningful self-knowledge might emerge from the *I Ching* in the struggle against the stacked deck of oppressive social realities is one of *Cosmic Bowling*'s major provocations. The moments where Hoogland steps back to assess the conceit only reinforce how the insights of the ancient text, like justice and emancipatory futures, are not so easily won. "Very Chinese, this hexagram. Hard for westerners / to understand," she observes in "*Kuei Mei*, the Marrying Maiden." For those also experiencing difficulties understanding, luckily the collection includes an informative closing essay by Goodden, "The *I Ching*: It Works If You Work It" (this review takes its title from the essay's definition of a hexagram). Goodden provides an illuminating history of the text and eloquently describes its value to him both personally and in his practice as a clinical psychologist. Goodden spiritedly situates the *I Ching* as an antidote to

> the news cycle, which daily releases a flood of despair and anxiety, not to mention fear and loathing, leaving in its wake a defeated feeling that it's too late in the game to be making the case for an ancient Chinese wisdom book. But this is exactly what I intend to do.

The multiple collaborations that compose *Cosmic Bowling* certainly succeed in making this case.

Of Care and the Self

Eva-Lynn Jagoe
Take Her, She's Yours. punctum US $20.00

Bahar Orang
Where Things Touch: A Meditation on Beauty. Book*hug $20.00

Reviewed by Julian Gunn

Consider two gauges of well-being: taking someone's pulse and offering psychoanalytic reflection. Psychoanalysis is a reader's art, elevating those favourite activities, interpretation, revelation, and surrender. Care resides in attention (and inattention); the analyst provides the reflective surface, and the analysand's own self-attention leads to new readings of old behaviours. Measuring someone's pulse by hand requires attention not only to the patient, but also to the taker's own internal state; the pulse is felt not so much on the fingers as within them, evoking the clinician's own interoception. Care is attentive and embodied.

Bahar Orang, the author of *Where Things Touch: A Meditation on Beauty*, is a physician-in-training planning to become a psychiatrist. She also holds an MA in comparative literature. Eva-Lynn Jagoe is a professor of literature who writes, in *Take Her, She's Yours*, about her experience undergoing analysis. The symmetry is not quite exact, yet *Take Her, She's Yours* and *Where Things Touch* enter the larger conversation of care from complementary angles: practitioner and patient.

Orang's book is presented to the reader as "part lyric essay, part prose poetry," Jagoe's as the fusion of "memoir with critical theory," aligned with Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (or *Bluets*, which, in one of several points of contact, is mentioned in Orang's book). The two books gather similar ingredients—memoir, literature, curiosity and doubt, critical theory. Orang's

essay draws on memoir to illuminate how beauty manifests in a queer life of care; Jagoe's memoir tracks the poetics of sexuality and intimacy through one consciousness. Somewhere upstream in both lineages flows Eve Sedgwick's queer theory (Orang cites it, and Jagoe studied under Sedgwick). Both books celebrate beings in excess of what they are expected to be, selves who overflow their containers.

Where Things Touch is part of Book*hug's Essais Series, which presents works that "challenge traditional forms and styles of cultural enquiry." Announcing her allegiance to fragments and the charged space between them, Orang arranges her meditations on beauty as a series of short segments divided by gaps in square brackets—[ ]—echoing one of the book's touchstones, Anne Carson's translation of Sappho. Sometimes a few fragments will form a more sustained exploration. Often, after touching an idea gently for two or three beats, like a caregiver measuring bodily rhythms, the book returns to its preoccupation with searching out a definition of beauty.

Orang's meditations are always beautiful, often resonant. Touch is the sense most evoked in the book, coupled with a tactile and proprioceptive sense of colour, as if everything were witnessed on the most vivid and glowing summer afternoon: "[A]s we lie / together on our mattress on the floor, we are buoyant / in our yellow kingdom." Powerful passages arise when Orang considers the most challenging material, whether that is philosophical or bodily—for example, the surreal undertaking of a Caesarean section: "[T]he lower / half of the woman's body is numb, but she feels / pressure as our intention gets deeper." As a doctor-in-training, Orang has unusual access to the language of internal sensations. She can evoke feelings difficult to name and describe, like the process of inflammation that leads to pain: "[T]issue becomes distorted, strange chemical mediators / arrive at the interlude, and then there is pain."

The insistent returning to the generalities of beauty, away from these rich specifics, might feel like a retreat, but this is the pattern of thinking that the book explores and echoes. Beauty shows not in one place but in many: in its relations to queerness, where blossoming plants become imagined embodiments; to language, in the tension between concision and excess; and to care:

> Maybe the search for beauty has just been my
> circular flight around one simple desire: to
> incorporate many more kinds of knowing into the
> work that I/we do as caregivers and caretakers of
> people, texts, other creatures.

Orang's book performs the compulsion to define and redefine as a kind of plenitude, an infinite accumulation of fragments that together surpass wholeness. In Jagoe's *Take Her, She's Yours*, the repetition compulsion is a trap to be escaped: "it is a form of resistance to remembering . . . the analysand acts out in an attempt to not remember, but to repeat." In entering therapy, Jagoe begins to choose to remember. *Take Her, She's Yours* covers five years of therapy, but the narrative takes place across psychological time, spanning a childhood complicated by two mother figures of unequal class status and caregiving intentions; a traumatic adolescent experience of sexuality and power; the joy of intellectual and philosophical investigation; and marriage as a mingling—potent, sometimes toxic—of these drives of power-seeking, intellect, and sexuality.

It is a vulnerable move for an author to present herself in the less authoritative position of analysand. To do so means to risk being read against yourself. Throughout

the memoir, Jagoe writes herself as divided between the wish to be made legible (to herself, to the analyst, to readers), and her urge to feel in control of the narrative, to predetermine our readerly acts of interpretation in her favour: "I don't want to see the act of writing as a gesture that discloses my most authentic self, because that would trigger my familiar hysterical demand for you to agree with me."

In another affinity, Jagoe and Orang each celebrate the text-in-excess, describing literature courses given over to the pleasure of long novels. As Jagoe points out, while *Take Her, She's Yours* champions excess and rejects totalizing ideas of the self, the book's arc is clear and concise: from struggle, to insight, to a new narrative of self-knowledge and balanced partnership. Formally, the memoir contains a single interruption, part of a proposal for a never-written book, "Too Much: The Time of Psychoanalysis." Jagoe mentions other plans, like a "Latin American sound project," conjuring fully imagined but unrealized textual analyses around her self-analysis. These points of contact between life and theory are erudite and pleasurable investigations, as when Jagoe points out that the Seven Dwarves of Disney's *Snow White* all "personify different affects." These proposals seem to serve as alternate universes, possible totalities glimpsed and abandoned. Ultimately, both *Take Her, She's Yours* and *Where Things Touch* favour the possibility in Sedgwick's "local theories and nonce taxonomies." Both books are less concerned with the way a particular theoretical model might support an argument about the self or about care, and more in the way a particular mind assembles fragments of experience and thinking into its own working model of relationship with the world.

Intimacy with a beloved becomes the model for other relations to the world. The way this intimacy echoes and informs other modes of care becomes a final point where these two books touch and diverge. In *Where Things Touch*, the queer beloved is collaborator and foil in the investigation of intimacy and its relationship to beauty and care. In *Take Her, She's Yours*, care is compromised by class and cultural difference; desire is compromised by the problem of *giving oneself away* in the heteronormative economy of sexual exchange. Jagoe describes encounters that are defined by acting out until she can examine and rewrite this urge in analysis.

As a trans and queer academic, my experience is closer to Orang's. The flavour of the love she represents—its surprise, its contingency—is more familiar to me. Yet Jagoe's tumult of heterosexual provocations, her case study of close attention to the self, and especially the distinction between acting out and knowing, also provided many opportunities for self-reflection—indeed, for interpretation, revelation, and surrender.

Faulty Families and Towering Slums: Two Stylists Get Crafty

Michelle Kaesar
The Towers of Babylon. Freehand $22.95

Ryan Turner
Half-Sisters and Other Stories. Gaspereau $28.95

Reviewed by David Huebert

"This civilization is collapsing around us! The whole world will be warring over water in a few decades!" These words—Joly's boyfriend Ben's response to her varyingly (un) wanted pregnancy—bespeak the central concern in Michelle Kaesar's slick and crafty debut novel, *The Towers of Babylon*.

The novel unfolds through four books of about sixty pages, each told from a closely limited third person perspective. Book One

details Joly's struggles with her pregnancy, art, and self-worth. The novel opens with Joly suffering through a job interview for a nauseatingly woke coffee shop—a scene that becomes increasingly compelling in retrospect as the novel spins you into its gravity of global cannibal capitalism. Book Two introduces readers to Joly's friend Louise, a depressed marketing exec turning to pot and extramarital sex to enliven—or divert from—a stale life, passionless marriage, and her "office drone" colleagues. Cleverly, it turns out that Louise's ennui is born in a primal scene of disaster capitalism—the collapse of a garment factory in Bangladesh—that keeps the theme of global capital alive and buzzing. In Book Three, Kaesar achieves the remarkable feat of rendering Ben—a Marxist-bagel-slinging-PhD-dropout-cum-preacher—coherent, likeable, and empathetic even as he rails bombastic against the "neoliberal labour model." Ben's section ends with a resounding sermon about climate crisis and the coming End Times that serves as the book's important, if not groundbreaking, intellectual climax. Book Four follows Joly's investment-banker brother, Yannick, through his struggles with alcoholism, his entrapment in the moneyed guillotine of Bay Street, his dream of "freedom forty" retirement in Bayfield, and recurring thoughts of suicide.

The novel's central image motif is mesmerizing. The titular towers of Babylon find many avatars in the text, including the condominiums of Toronto ("Hundreds of towers of Babel all across the city"), the CN tower, a bagel display, a mosque on the Iraqi 250 dinar note, and "*Torre David*," an abandoned skyscraper in Caracas inhabited by the poor and homeless. Kaesar demonstrates a knack for image-patterning, continually revising and refreshing her central metaphor.

The book has clear strengths, but there are problems. The novel's thirty-plus pages of sex scenes border on tasteless, adding little to the narrative. The fourth section is the book's weakest. After impressively humanizing Ben, Kaesar's exploration of Yannick, his banker-bro friends, his nagging mother-in-law, and his sexual pragmatist money-dazed wife, the writing often descends into cliché. The novel is not particularly novelistic, and readers hoping for an immersive beach-read may be disappointed. But the sections excel at the level of verve, energy, and momentum, with each chapter achieving a fresh and vivid voice.

Ryan Turner's second fiction collection, *Half-Sisters and Other Stories*, is a quietly dazzling feat of psychological athleticism. A controlled and understated stylist, Turner's is a deft craft. Often, nothing sensational happens in these stories; but their emotional power seethes in the shadows, chews the reading brain.

In "Poses," Grant becomes friends with an art teacher, Meg, and brings her to a wedding as his beard. Theo, the protagonist of "Moving," brings his grandmother home after his mother's death and helps her through an embarrassing scene of incontinence. Filled with credible and sophisticated detail ("never shake hands across a doorway"), "The Poet" details a Soviet civil servant's pseudo-exile to the sun-starved North, ending in an embarrassment caused by his attachment to one of the prisoners he stewards. Throughout the collection, striking images are often conjured in passing: a woman living alone dies and is said to be devoured by her many cats; the "oddly sweet smell" of a rural garbage dump where "bulldozers topple mountains of garbage bags off a cliff into a pit where several fires perpetually burned"; a woman stoops onto all fours in her yard during the Russian famine, eating grass.

The titular gesture to "half-sisters" offers an interpretive yoke; all Turner's families are somehow busted, splintered, or convoluted—fathers leave their children, mothers die, women adopt their brain-damaged in-laws, grandmothers move in with their grandsons, mothers parade their infidelity. Turner's persistent examination of the complex differences between family structures exposes the false fantasy of the nuclear family, but it is in the intimate minutiae of the self-assessing mind—the characters' subtle realizations, always potent, credible, and unique—that Turner nests his gift. In his characters' small revelations, Turner shows us the truths we've always felt but never quite articulated, "like waking angry from a dream."

Under Our Own Threat

Fiona Tinwei Lam
Odes & Laments. Caitlin $18.00

Alessandra Naccarato
Re-Origin of Species. Book*hug $18.00

Reviewed by Sunny Chan

Promotional blurbs about Fiona Tinwei Lam's *Odes & Laments* often describe it as an inquiry into what it means to live "in an environment under threat" or "a world under threat." But threat of what? Sometimes, the threat is the passage of time, and all the changes time brings: how health degenerates as buildings do, how parents grow old and die, how even objects like ceremonial plates once held in lofty regard are eventually transformed into ordinary junk in the back of a cupboard. Other times, the threat is global violence. There are references to the Cold War, to present-day nuclear threats, to children held as prisoners of war in "Holding Centre, Al-Najaf" (a reference to the 2004 World Press Photo of the Year taken by Jean-Marc Bouju). And sometimes the threat is climate change, which is in itself a kind of global violence. There are images of melting ice caps and rising sea levels in "Any Time from Now," and a horrifically detailed poem titled "Sea Star" describes how sea stars around the world are dying of a widespread disease exacerbated by rising ocean temperatures.

While she writes many odes to common objects in the tradition of Pablo Neruda, Lam also continually returns to another type of poetry. Visual poems, some of them concrete poems and some of them excerpted from video poems that she previously exhibited in collaboration with other artists, are her preferred mode when talking about plastic. The motif of plastic resurfaces throughout the book, standing for overabundance and overconsumption, for the lasting physical effect of humans on this planet. In "Ocean," the word "plastic" is scattered into pieces and letters of varying font shapes and sizes, to evoke the millions of tons of plastics that we now know are breaking up in the ocean. In "Consumery," the words are arranged into the shape of a jug and point out the irony of labels like "free range / wrapped in plastic" and "fair trade / organic / all natural [. . .] wrapped in plastic." The concreteness of these poems foregrounds how poetry makes words plastic, in the sense of malleable. The world is plastic, changeable. But the world is also plastic, cling-filmed over with what we have done to it.

Like *Odes & Laments*, Alessandra Naccarato's *Re-Origin of Species* mediates how we are part of nature and what we are doing to it. Recurring themes throughout the collection include cultures of motherhood and womanhood across generations, and how different they are from the kinds of relationships that the speaker has with fathers. Mothers' bodies come to be associated with the land, and vice versa: "[w]e

want to be forgiven, / by our mothers and the land; re-colonizer kids." Honeybees, a famously matriarchal species, come to stand in for all animals that have been forced to adapt to living in urban landscapes, as well as for the effects of the corporatization of big agriculture and genetically modified monocropping.

Despite lamenting how humans have imperiled the natural world through our actions, *Re-Origin of Species* does not romanticize nature as an idyllic thing. It is powerful and just as capable of causing pain and death, but it still feels like there is a qualitative difference. In "One Hundred Ways to Die in Yellowstone," an alphabetical listing of causes of death in Yellowstone National Park, Naccarato juxtaposes "Endangered species (attack by)" and "Endangered species (sale of, resulting in GSW, see: Firearms)," one immediately after the other. Wild animals can attack and kill, but they can also be endangered, likely by habitat loss and human activity. Whereas animals kill directly, often while defending themselves or their territory, human actions here exploit other species with lethal instruments. These differences are heightened in "It Could Be a Virus," which compiles the many ways someone could get ill—a mixture of natural causes, unfortunate accidents, and preventable human cruelty. This poem ends with, "[i]t could be pollution, or loneliness. / Or maybe bacteria. It could be all your fault." It asks us to contend with how our earth's environment can be hostile, but we are not exactly making it better for ourselves with our actions, either.

Performing Unsettlement

Vera Manuel; Michelle Coupal, Deanna Reder, Joanne Arnott, Emalene A. Manuel, eds.
Honouring the Strength of Indian Women: Plays, Stories, Poetry. U of Manitoba P $24.95

Helene Vosters
Unbecoming Nationalism: From Commemoration to Redress in Canada. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Reviewed by Sylvie Vranckx

Honouring the Strength of Indian Women and *Unbecoming Nationalism* examine how performance-based genres expose the myths of Canadian innocence and peaceful settlement. Committed to truth-telling, they strive to decolonize Eurocentric binaries between public and private, mind and body, theory and practice, and research and activism. They use such different perspectives as, respectively, an edition by Indigenous scholars of works by the late Ktunaxa-Secwepemc author, educator, and drama therapist Vera Manuel and a deconstructive study of Canadian cultural memory projects by settler "artist-activist-scholar" Helene Vosters.

More than a critical edition, *Honouring* is foremost a tribute to Vera Manuel (Kulilu Paɬki) by friends, associates, and her sister and collaborator Emalene Manuel. As part of the *First Voices, First Texts* series, it aims to make available her underrated plays, stories, and poems in a way that "Indigenize[s] the editing process" and emphasizes their groundbreaking work. The daughter of Indigenous leaders and activists, Manuel authored a range of artistic works, all unpublished or out of print, depicting intergenerational colonial traumas, lateral violence, silencing, and the resilience of reconnecting with one's own strength, culture, and relations. Her eponymous play *Strength of Indian Women* already testified in 1992 to the dynamics through which the cultural, emotional, physical, and sexual

abuse in the residential schools affects the next generations. Her honest, insightful works often show communities of women who reconcile with their loved ones by finally putting their pain and past actions into words, a process she calls "Story-Truth-Telling." The scholarly articles and the introduction by Emalene Manuel contextualize her plays and public readings as parts of her Ktunaxa pedagogy and community work, as her semi-fictional characters model healing processes for her audiences. This comprehensive collection also includes her unpublished essay about the residential schools and a few photographs. While I wish more pictures of performances were included, I understand that such inclusions would violate confidentiality and that *Honouring* invites its readers to do their own further work. Accordingly, the volume is part of a larger project continuing Manuel's life work, including a tribute website and perhaps a future edition of collaborative plays she co-wrote.

Unbecoming also exposes ongoing historical violence and its attempted suppression by several Canadian institutions. Anti-militaristic queer scholar Helene Vosters analyzes Canadian social memory projects like military commemorations, Canada 150 celebrations, and government-funded museums as performances, borrowing from performance studies; Canadian studies; critical race, anti-colonial, and Indigenous studies; critical memory studies; feminist historicism; and queer and gender studies. Her framework of "becoming" and "unbecoming" offers a pun, presenting a positive "becoming" image of Canada and "construct[ing] . . . the imagined Canadian nation," set against the "unbecoming" brutality of settler colonialism and military nationalism and affirming the urgency of unsettling their ideology. She denounces the instrumentalization of multiculturalism, reconciliation discourse, and the peacekeeping myth to normalize and obfuscate Canada's violence and systemic racism, to the extent that its increasing hawkishness goes largely unquestioned. For example, she analyzes the Highway of Heroes, commemorating the Canadian soldiers fallen in the Afghanistan War, as obscuring the thousands of dead Afghan civilians according to a "hierarchy of grievability." She further examines an array of subversive counter-memorial performances, and documents her own through pictures, logs, and (self-) critical reflections as she engages in an embodied "praxis of redress": the volume's cover represents *Flag of Tears*, a Canadian flag on which workshop participants embroidered 1,181 tears to memorialize the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirits. Richly documented through photographs, *Unbecoming* also rests on an impressive theoretical framework, which can make it extremely challenging for anyone unfamiliar with the thought of Gilles Deleuze or of Judith Butler. While Vosters clearly works with diverse communities through her performances, her findings deserve to be publicized more broadly to counteract what I believe she calls "manufactured ignorance."

Both books bespeak a profound ethical engagement as they foreground responsibility, collectiveness, and the need to grieve losses and honour survivors through creative acts of witnessing. Vosters and the editors of *Honouring* problematize the dilemma of publishing books while performance, decolonization, and healing are ongoing processes. Accordingly, Manuel's plays and *Unbecoming* deliberately end inconclusively to urge audiences to get involved. This message is more important than ever in a post-TRC context, when Canada continues its acts of aggression at home and abroad, notably (at present) against the Wet'suwet'en people and land.

Poem Emporium

Mark Laba
The Inflatable Life. Anvil $18.00

rob mclennan
A halt, which is empty. Mansfield $17.00

Reviewed by Carl Watts

Fixtures in a poetry community, even those who are notably prolific, can sometimes be accounted for without much trouble. But figures whose writings span multiple genres, which may come from the smallest of small presses or in otherwise ephemeral formats, can be harder to get a handle on. Any attempt to make sense of such writers, especially in a brief review, seems preposterous.

And yet, a reviewer taking on a new book by rob mclennan may note that his sprawling body of work has been shifting toward producing a somewhat less conventional form of lyric. *A halt, which is empty* bears out this development; its title comes from a passage by Claude Royet-Journoud that associates writing with the perception of movement. The opening poem's first section is caught up in this crudely physical act of stopping and noticing; it relies on short "sentences," frequently of two words ("Uninterrupted, swallow. Machines, recirculate. Relieve. We watch for symptoms, shallow"), distilling into particles everyday processes that clunk with their materiality.

But passages like "[a] mass of modern bus and antiquated streetcar. The power of an average. Slanting, ruin" are also typical mclennan in their alternately clattering and airy impressions of Ottawa. Much of the book strikes this balance between experimental conceit and familiar authorial voice. The epigraph to "Corporation of snow" disputes the colonial "Eskimo words for snow" myth; it asks whether any writing can be truly novel—"[p]articles, we designate. A show of hands. More sentiment / than sediment"—while again simplifying and physicalizing its conceit.

"Birthday poem for Gwendolyn Guth" combines the above techniques with apostrophe: "You turn, you turn, // remark, refrain." Such moments depict a group of creative people working in loose association with one another, creating a picture of mclennan as publisher of broadsides and of work by possible up-and-comers—a writer's writer's writer whose network defines his past and pervades his present as he brings others into the fold, his poetics embodied as they dilate within recognizable limits.

Mark Laba has left a similar paper trail, but he's been less focused, having worked (as his bio puts it) as a "jackass-of-all-trades." Laba has a long-term association with Stuart Ross (under whose A Feed Dog Book imprint *The Inflatable Life* appears), but it's harder to trace his output than it is mclennan's ongoing accretion of texts.

"Phil's Wall Unit Emporium" is a clutter of tchotchkes:

> Any endangered species, whooping
> cranes, marmosets,
> owls, pygmy goats, baby sturgeon
> swimming in pickle jars
> filled with pond scum?

The poem also concerns itself with life, death, and the cosmos—sort of. Its final stanza begins,

> The earth is just a big wall unit,
> an entertainment hub of love and horror,
> a barricade between you and those
> you have buried behind the wall
> and a big glowing stereo system,

while its closing image—"the deadened eye / of a trophy fish"—indicates just how far beyond piles of semi-surreal junk and into any form of sincerity Laba's poems are likely to get.

"Tolstoy's Leech Farm" expands Laba's menagerie to include almost primitivist

sketches; its text meanders through "a farm that grew / spineless toys into bulky vegetarians," giving the impression of an eccentric neighbour showing off his model trains or magnet collection. Parodies of precision and aphorism, like "How to Determine the Proper Geometrical Angle for Putting One's Nose to the Grindstone," in which

> a newly crowned king [. . .]
> warbles at the gates of doom like a wee
> songbird
> greets the day
> with a shit, regurgitation and a worm,

demolish notions of systematization as much as they do sincerity, their consonance construing the process as part of the flow of daily life.

Crackles of honesty eventually make the surrounding silliness seem more like darkness. "Toilet Duck" notes

> that my digestive tract
> stretches back
> to Russia in 1908
> and I've been passing gas and pogroms
> ever since.

"Moonlit Lung Serenade" begins as one might expect, only to erupt, "and then the guy next to me said, 'Jesus, you fucking retard, it's cinnamon girl, not cinnamon man,'" continuing in this vein for nearly two pages of prose. It's jarring—a disruption that, on second look, may not be so different from the too-muchness that comes before. Like mclennan's, Laba's voice proclaims itself in a perpetual present that, as the dark moments remind us, really isn't so perpetual. "Because, after all, this isn't poetry," the final poem ends; "it's a shooting gallery."

Addressing Endurance: Midgley, Bowling, Lockhart

Tim Bowling
The Dark Set: New Tenderman Poems.
Wolsak & Wynn $18.00

D. A. Lockhart
Devil in the Woods. Brick $20.00

Peter Midgley
let us not think of them as barbarians.
NeWest $18.95

Reviewed by Catherine Owen

These poets each consider maleness, vulnerability, ecology, and their heritage: a tendency all three of these books have in common.

Peter Midgeley's *let us not think of them as barbarians* features an afterword by Juliane Okot Bitek in which she claims that the weakness in this collection "may be the attempt to translate." She's right. The preface on the background to the genocide of Namibians by Germans in 1904-1908 and the copious endnotes distract from the essential thrum of the poems themselves. Regardless, through the haunting presence of "dragfoot," a creature "with his clanging bells and his necklace of bullets gathered from war," we become witness to the bloody decimations of a people but, more importantly, to Midgley, the way the land and dance enable them to transcend. The lower-case typography and Midgley's simple diction can make his potent repetitions feel a world apart. In these intellectualizing times, such poetry can cut to the somatic core of why we make art. With what can seem too naive an approach at times, Midgley's work still announces triumph over trauma. Vitality needs to be emphasized and accreted; in the enlargement of the musics of an alternate consciousness, the ecstatic can often be a risk when it's set

against a homogenized poetics. Midgley dares difference: "en jy en jy en jy" or "yii! the anguish! / eh! the heart-stopped breath!" This book offers a necessary paean to an often-forgotten tragedy.

For Tim Bowling, the term "Tenderman" is a touchstone, a being he first introduced in his 2011 collection and who returns here as the problematized, archaic, always-relevant, archetypal working man of the waterways, a self who straddles the worlds of resource culture and the troubled masculinities and economies of our society. The lyrics in this sequel are continually wrenching, steeped in homages to both literary predecessors and the working men of the Fraser River. Every piece contains an address to the Tenderman with whom Bowling associates himself and from whom he also detaches himself. This symbolic and tangible figure is excavated, questioned, and adored under the aegis of subject matter from Prince Rupert to his son's *Magic: The Gathering* playing card, from Michael Caine to Pliny to *The Incredible Hulk* to selfies. The book is rife with closures, including the last cannery in Steveston. Yet, there is value to working with your hands, in the elements. How does Bowling seek to reconcile these opposing tensions? "Open Mic on the Government Wharf," for instance, features the river itself giving voice to the realities of now, uttering the introduction: "[M]y name's the Fraser River. I was born in the mountains east / of here. Everyone is killing me." The titular piece may be the most potent though. With a tone and cadence reminiscent of Robinson Jeffers, Bowling enacts an elegy to the Tenderman and his era, crooning:

> I miss you, and it—
> the whole Ferris wheel of blood and brine and light,
> the way our sweat dried on our skin as the glossy film dried on the fish
> we caught and hucked onto the packer's deck [. . .]
> Even the river knows we've reached the end [. . .]
> Tenderman, cold friend, are you there? Were we ever there?

Tenderman is a fierce and wry interrogation of maleness, labour, the land.

Devil in the Woods by D. A. Lockhart doesn't have a dragfoot or a Tenderman anchoring his collection, but he does create a structural rhythm, alternating between Hugo-esque epistles and prayers both to harness and to release the wild humour of his pieces. Rampantly allusive but lacking endnotes, the book contains letters to every Canadian icon from k. d. lang to Pierre Berton, and prayers for the return of an annual James Bond marathon alongside an invocation of Tim Hortons' Roll Up the Rim contest. The work confronts encounter and rupture between colonial and Indigenous cultures, amidst First Nations history and the signifiers of "rez identity." The tone is jovial, colloquial but tinged with sorrow and the occasional poeticism, as in the epistle to Peter Gzowski that concludes: "I'm waiting on the loons and hoping you're finding your / arctic dreams." Although there's more lyricism in the prayers, the letters are rife with head-nodding moments as in the "Letter to Gerussi from Cobourg Beach, ON":

> we've already thrown more plastic and cigarette
> butts into the ocean than in nineteen seasons of the Beachcombers. Yet we yearn for the glamour
> that comes with being bigger than we believe we are.

The contrast between Timbits and ritual speaks to textures of endurance, uttering truths, chuckling, and surmounting, as all these poets do, tough transitions of time.

A Love Letter to Anne

L. M. Montgomery; Carolyn Strom Collins, ed.
Anne of Green Gables: The Original Manuscript.
Nimbus $29.95

Reviewed by Carla Harrison

"You remind me of Anne," my Grandma Margaret said, matter-of-factly, one day around 1989, when I was little more than a toddler. "I will call you my little Anne of Green Gables."

And thus, I was reborn, entrusted with a treasure the worth of which I did not then know. Anne's friendship has been a gift that I have been continuously unwrapping for the past thirty years and, like my Grandma, I will continue to explore the height and breadth of this beautiful gift until I behold "the seal of the Great Presence," as Anne would say.

Considering my love for Anne, you can guess that I was elated to discover that Carolyn Strom Collins, a fellow kindred spirit, had researched and assembled the original manuscript of *Anne of Green Gables*, complete with author notes and editorial details that have been previously unpublished.

This is clearly a work of love and devotion on Strom Collins' part. Readers will marvel at the care the editor displays in the way she designed, researched, and presented the book. The imagery that Strom Collins includes provides ample evidence of this attention to detail. The front cover features a beautiful portrait of the author, coupled with a selection of some of Anne's favourite flowers: violets, forget-me-nots, daisies, and verbena. In addition to the floral imagery, I also appreciated the flyleaf pages, which feature various *Anne of Green Gables* cover art from around the world throughout the decades. This was, I think, a powerful way to visually display Anne's impact on the world over the years.

Seeing Montgomery's thought process as she added detail, changed her mind (Diana was going to be called Gertude? What?!), and fixed mistakes allowed me, for the first time, to see this author as something other than the flawless literary genius-on-a-pedestal that I had built up in my mind. She was a person with doubts and fears about her ability to transcribe the visions in her head to two-dimensional ink on paper; a person who did, actually, on occasion, make mistakes; and a person who had to work through drafts and even delete things.

The way that Strom Collins has formatted the pages makes them easy to read and understand. All of the notes are clearly labelled and fully explained. As a diehard fan, I really appreciated the addition of the handwritten pages from Montgomery's first draft. At times, I felt like I was reading a letter from Maud herself. The introduction provides a colourful biographical snapshot of both Montgomery and her work. The author comes alive for the reader because of the excerpts from Montgomery's journal, illustrating her life when *Anne* was first published.

This book is a gift for all of Anne's bosom friends around the world, like me. Although we are separated from Anne by time, space, and fiction, Carolyn Strom Collins' work reminds us that "true friends are always together in spirit."

Collecting the Unknown Montgomery

L. M. Montgomery; Benjamin Lefebvre, ed.
A Name for Herself: Selected Writings, 1891-1917.
U of Toronto P $39.95

L. M. Montgomery; Benjamin Lefebvre, ed.
A World of Songs: Selected Poems, 1894-1921.
U of Toronto P $24.95

Reviewed by Ceilidh Hart

The first two volumes of the L. M. Montgomery Library, edited by Benjamin Lefebvre, *A Name for Herself: Selected Writings, 1891-1917* and *A World of Songs: Selected Poems, 1894-1921,* make two important and connected contributions to Montgomery studies: first, they make available more of her writing, showing her diversity and prolificacy; and, second, they balance the overwhelming critical attention (still) paid to her fiction:

> The attention given to [*Anne of Green Gables*] and to her book-length fiction more broadly obscures the more than one thousand items that Montgomery published in periodicals over a period of half a century, from 1890 to her death in 1942: these include five hundred short stories, five hundred poems, and a range of texts that the compilers of *Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Preliminary Bibliography* (1986) refer to as "Miscellaneous Pieces."

The point Lefebvre makes is clear: "[A] significant proportion of her literary output remains largely unknown." In seeking to redress this problem, these volumes collect much of that periodical work, largely not collected elsewhere, and in his framing material, Lefebvre addresses the multiple reasons for its relative obscurity, including complications of gender, genre, and the literary marketplace.

The first volume, *A Name for Herself: Selected Writings, 1891-1917*, presents a remarkable number of diverse pieces of writing that are, as Lefebvre explains, "[n]ot [s]hort [s]tories and [n]ot [p]oems." The volume is divided into three parts, and its organization, along with the supporting preface and afterword, trace Montgomery's development as a writer, exploring the choices she made with regard to what she wrote and how she presented herself, including how she reflected publicly on the trajectory of her career and her creative methods. The pieces here range from an early, award-winning school assignment, to a playlet she contributed to her college student newspaper, to items from her "Around the Table" column in the *Halifax Daily Echo*. The final section ends with a new edition of her memoir *The Alpine Path* which Lefebvre explains "returns to the original magazine text and restores the twenty photographs and first-person captions that Montgomery included in that text." Readers will find this volume a treasure trove.

The second volume, *A World of Songs: Selected Poems, 1894-1921*, contains fifty poems, most never previously collected. It is, Lefebvre suggests, "a first step in a major reconsideration" of her poetry, and significant given that Montgomery apparently found this genre the "most creatively satisfying." Because she published close to five hundred poems throughout her career, I would have appreciated more insight from Lefebvre in terms of his editorial choices here, especially considering that a *Collected Poems* is set to come out as part of the Library series. Nevertheless, the poems he includes show Montgomery's surprising range and speak nicely to the issues he raises. The focus in this book is more firmly on material concerns: the money she made from her poetry compared with her other work (Lefebvre shows her careful accounting of income), and how financial considerations likely shaped her choices. And in this volume, Lefebvre tackles the question of

literary value more explicitly than he does in the first. In his afterword, he seeks to complicate the picture of Montgomery the poet—who has widely been considered "minor" to this point—by re-centring the discussion on the particular demands of the literary marketplace at the time and on the complex trajectory of her poetry writing, including her keen (if not overt) attention to assessing her own work. Taken together, both volumes explore the fascinating tension between Montgomery's private and professional selves. Drawing on her journals in introducing and situating the texts he collects, and without detracting from the creative work the library is meant to showcase, Lefebvre provocatively opens up the discussion about literary celebrity and author branding.

Throughout, Lefebvre shows careful and meticulous research (I enjoyed reading about his archival adventures as he sought to connect Montgomery to the pseudonym J. C. Neville). And while his expertise is on display, he generously identifies the considerable work that remains to be done exploring the richness of Montgomery's oeuvre: he speaks not just of the first step he takes here in reconsidering her work, but also of the likelihood of new work being uncovered.

Lefebvre's work on these volumes, to say nothing of his other Montgomery-related projects, demonstrates an intellectual curiosity and a commitment to scholarship in early Canadian literature that will guide students and scholars of Montgomery's work for years to come.

Sinews and Sheaves

Tyler Pennock
Bones. Brick $20.00

Angeline Schellenberg
Fields of Light and Stone. U of Alberta P $19.99

Reviewed by Carl Watts

Canadian literature has for decades explored the alternate histories percolating beneath the construction called Canada. Increasingly, everything seems to be called into question: any conception of overarching unity is suspect, and few lived experiences seem too specific to be of note. And yet new books by Tyler Pennock and Angeline Schellenberg suggest that our poetic engagements with individual and collective pasts are defined less by intensifying fragmentation than by assiduous re-evaluation of the singularities and similarities among historical oppressions and the lives shaped by them.

Pennock's *Bones* is something of a long poem; in its pages the speaker, a Two Spirit Indigenous man, attempts to salvage a positive individual and familial identity from personal trauma as well as the systemic violence done to Indigenous peoples in Canada. The book resists locating such abuses in the past, instead rendering the persistence of trauma and ongoing settler violence in a temporally fluid meditation. The approach creates manifold linkages between discursive and organic imagery:

> I'll speak
>
> of blood
>
> and wounds and beauty
>
> in terrible things
>
> the way the wind pulls a thousand leaves down an empty street[.]

The widely spaced verse is occasionally broken up with other visual elements.

Alongside a section beginning "two paths cross / In darkness, straining // to illuminate the walkway," the word "EMERGENCY" is rendered vertically along the left margin. The juxtaposition indicates the vicissitudes of perception and complements repeated statements that "[t]he body is a collection / of continuously dying cells[.]"

The memories contained in this structure are described as passed down to newer cells, "each armed with knowing / and stronger than the last[.]" Such passages corporealize and reappropriate almost romantic-nationalist conceptions of a culture's transcending the generational death represented by "dying cells":

> [T]hen are we not the same—
> our deaths serving to make
> the whole stronger?
>
> Is our blood not a constant flow of memories
>
> shaped
>
> to make us survive what our parents
> could not?

Pennock also explores the reassertion of Indigenous value systems. The passage "and we aspired / to the same harmony / that animals had," in being followed by a swath of white space and an italicized characterization of a response—"*And you fools called it / animal worship / totemism*"—creates a one-sided conversation that critiques and caricatures settler dismissals of Indigenous ways of knowing. Subsequent passages are more literal (in a "boardroom," the speaker "saw the latest casualty // it was in the silence of the only Indigenous woman in the room / and the anxiety that I could recognize"). Political language emerges as another of the discourses that are themselves rendered as sinews of the living, breathing, verbalizing individual.

Language acquisition generates another conceptual arc. The recurring figure of the speaker's sister "used to teach me to read // words like *story*, *dog*, *Shasta*, and *lasagna* // *Sioux*, *Blackfoot*, *princess*[.]" The scene is echoed following Pennock's acknowledgements, where the author describes choosing to learn "Severin Ojibwe" [sic] because it was the available language closest to Cree—a reminder that First Nations affinities must sometimes be reclaimed from the settler taxonomy of language varieties that is reified in the classroom.

Fields of Light and Stone excavates the relationships between Schellenberg's Mennonite grandparents, drawing on source material including correspondence, family folklore, and two unpublished memoirs. "Love Letters, 1944-45" intersperses lyric poetry with parts that draw on letters sent between her maternal grandparents. The latter is rendered as dialogue, with one speaker on the left of the page and the other on the right. The free-verse conversation recreates the delays, disjunctions, and hidden meanings typical of such correspondence: "I anew / give you all my love. // *Mr. Wiens' sermons were very good*."

The book moves among various styles and source materials as through sheaves of distinct documents. It resembles not so much a stack of marginalia-covered archival records typical of the postmodernist Prairies as a more tightly stylized dossier. The third section introduces Schellenberg's paternal grandparents, Elsa Friesen Falk and Bernhard David Falk, drawing on the history of a group that settled in the Russian Empire as far back as the eighteenth century and was forced out in the early twentieth. The beginning of "Generations"—"1586: as far back / as the Mennonite database / can take me"—nods to the online resources that would have assisted Schellenberg's navigation of print materials.

Here, too, languages are gained and lost amid intergenerational hardship:

In Arkadak's crowded market,
vendors yelled what sounds like *yablooka*
(apples!)

and *duraki* (you fools!)—Russian words
Opa passed me
like forbidden fruit.

Russian vocabulary evokes the history of a Mennonite family driven to participate in Canada's settler-colonial project because of—ironically—the violence of a quasi-colonial regime. "Plans to Prosper" adds contours to the family's escape from Ukraine ("*they have ten overcoats: they / are rich*"), depicting a transcontinental mosaic of interlocking hypocrisies and oppressions with images of "[a] horse-drawn sleigh to another station—a rented room in a / former dacha of the wealthy—// Canada."

"~~Winnipeg Free Press~~ **Passages**" is a quasi-erasure poem in which the text of Bernhard Falk's obituary is alternately bolded or struck through. The technique makes disjunctive lyric ("**After / Health / our / evening March**") out of comparatively obscure details, one of which is a request that donations be made to "Gospel Outreach Ministry to Ukraine." The final proper noun speaks to the dysphoria faced by those whose cultural or familial stories have been defined by recurrent or consistent upheaval—there's arguably a contradiction in longing for an alien land to which one's ancestors fled only to be subsequently ejected in the space of a few branches of the family tree. But is this so different from the way Pennock's present-minded self-exploration ends by reaching toward a language many must learn even as some part of their intergenerational selves remains at home there? It makes little sense, so to speak, except for the affirmation—from the closing pages of *Bones*—that "[w]e tell stories / That is what we do[.]"

Presence of the Past

Nicole Perry and Marc-Oliver Schuster, eds.
Vergessene Stimmen, nationale Mythen: Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und Kanada/Forgotten Voices, National Myths: Literary Relations between Austria and Canada.
Innsbruck UP €28.90

William F. Pinar
Moving Images of Eternity: George Grant's Critique of Time, Teaching, and Technology.
U of Ottawa P $49.95

Reviewed by Angelika Maeser Lemieux

Vergessene Stimmen, nationale Mythen/ Forgotten Voices, National Myths is a bilingual collection of seven articles and a selection of lyric poetry predominantly drawn from an international conference—"Austria and Canada: Cultural Relations"—that took place at the University of Vienna in 2014, and that was planned and organized by Nicole Perry (Canada) and Marc-Oliver Schuster (Austria). While the conference was thematically dedicated to exploring diverse forms of Austrian-Canadian cultural relations in various domains, this volume contains contributions solely on literature and is divided into two sections: "Forgotten (and New) Literary Voices" and "National Myths and How They Are Dealt with in Literature."

Four of the authors examined in part one—Hans Eichner, Henry Kreisel, Carl Weiselberger, and Monique Bosco—share a common traumatic past as Viennese Jews who escaped the Shoah before being caught in the Nazi death machine and who, after roundabout journeys, settled in Canada and distinguished themselves in successful careers. Unlike them, translator/poet R. Von Paschen was born in Canada, works in North America and Europe, and teaches at the University of Vienna. All these writers thus have a deep connection

to Vienna and explore the imprint of Austria's past, shadowed by atrocity and the superficiality of romanticized images of the capital. Its darker underside lingers in their psyches and finds an outlet in fiction and in poetry.

The first two papers focus upon Eichner, the renowned scholar and editor of Friedrich Schlegel's works; they have the advantage of being written by his friends, Hermann Patsch and David G. John, who share their insights into his life as well as his novel (*Kahn and Engelmann*) and poetry (*Little Blue Book*). Patsch's article places Eichner's life and work in the context of "the North American experience of exile of persecuted Austrian Jews"; he provides points of contrast with two contemporaries (Egon Schwarz and Ruth Klueger) who settled in the US and maintained closer connections to their birthplace than did Eichner, who "distanced himself from his native country" and felt at home in Ontario, finding personal and professional fulfillment after a tumultuous early life. The past, though, did not entirely disappear, for in later life he published his "family saga," a fictionalized exploration of the impact of the Shoah that contains three poems from his youth spent in London with fellow Jewish refugees. It is to these and other poems that John turns in "Hans Eichner's Poetic Legacy." He discusses the poetry, written between 1937 and early 1950, collected in the *Little Blue Book*, as well as later lyric poetry reflecting an idyllic Ontario landscape, where Eichner found peace and solace. A mixture of dark and light tones also marks the poems of Von Paschen, selected from *VICE VERSA*, that appear here in both languages, revealing ironic perspectives on Vienna, its people, and its past.

Essays on the literary works of Kreisel, Weiselberger, and Bosco—by Eugen Banauch and Yvonne Voelkl—examine their generation's grappling with the traumas and moral issues of the Shoah, and also point out the unfortunate disregard of these authors in Austria. They are the forgotten voices, old and new, we must hear again.

Three essays on "National Myths" round out this fine collection: J. E. Magnet's examination of Canada's myth of two founding nations, F. P. Kirsch's exploration of the *Heimatsroman* and the *roman de la terre*, and Julia Kerscher's discussion of Thomas Bernhard's *Der Untergeher*. By examining the mythic underpinnings of the stories that cultures create, we better understand the process of national and personal identity formation.

A link between these essays and William Pinar's scholarly study of George Grant's "critique of time, teaching, and technology" might be the continuation of the past in the present. *Moving Images* is as much a thorough, endnote-studded exploration of his thought as it is a devoted testimonial from Pinar to his "icon." It is both a continual engagement with many authors, past and present, who impacted Grant, and an endorsement of his views on the dangers posed by an uncritical embrace of modernity, technological progress, and materialism. For those familiar with Grant's work, this will not be news, but Pinar's seven chapters present a compelling case for the validity of Grant's ideas today.

At the core of this book is the contention that Grant is a progressive Christian Platonist who rejected progressivism after a youthful affair with it during his years of teaching adult education; the goal of training citizens for democracy and freedom that Dewey's pragmatic philosophy championed was replaced by an embrace of Plato and Christ and a view of education as the pursuit of truth and morality. The modern emphasis upon reason as "instrumentality" directed toward the outcomes of mastery of

nature and self via STEM, social science, psychology, and psychiatry has led to "catastrophe"; the vaunted freedom that such education should lead to has become instead a dead end of narcissism and exploitation. The "Sputnik effect" upon education has been to accelerate the homogenization, conformity, and mediocrity of students and the merger of industry, capital, and business with universities: an unholy alliance. In place of scholarship, research has dominated the academy and bound the teacher to the production assembly line to meet the required quota of publications. In place of this "idolatrous" condition, wherein the researcher must labour for the gods of profit and prestige, the authentic scholar will make study once again a holy service dedicated to Truth, his desk an altar, the study hall or library a "sacred space" wherein he labours for no other reward than to obtain a glimpse of "revelation" and a hope that one day there might be a successful transition into eternity. Alas, Pinar informs us, neither Grant nor he has made that leap; they hover on the edge of the temporal moment, striving for "attunement," "presence," "humility," and "piety."

A curriculum specialist, Pinar maintains the primacy of the curriculum and its obligation to question what knowledge is worthy of being taught; judging from his study of Grant, it would be less of the STEM subjects and more of theology, philosophy, and art. Nowhere is there an argument to be found in favour of balance and an engagement with rapidly developing technologies for which youth must be prepared—and, yes, to earn a living as well as to contemplate in their cubicles and to wish that their days might be "[b]ound each to each by natural piety." We leave William sitting on the rock, renouncing the idols of the marketplace and academy.

The End of Popular Women's Writing

Wendy Roy
The Next Instalment: Serials, Sequels, and Adaptations of Nellie L. McClung, L. M. Montgomery, and Mazo de la Roche.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Hannah McGregor

In the essay "Pure Heroines," Jia Tolentino ponders how different the narrative possibilities are for girls than for women. Discussing the busy industriousness of the female heroines she loved—Anne Shirley, Hermione Granger, and Harriet the Spy—she wonders if "part of the reason these childhood characters are all so independent, so eager to make the most of whatever presents itself" is that "they—or, more to the point, their creators—understand that adulthood is always looming, which means marriage and children, which means, in effect, the end." This question of what the women writers of popular girl characters understand to be entailed in "the end"—for their characters, for their stories, for their own careers—is very much the concern of Wendy Roy's impressive archival study *The Next Instalment: Serials, Sequels, and Adaptations of Nellie L. McClung, L. M. Montgomery, and Mazo de la Roche.*

Like the best book-historical scholarship, this study offers detailed and materially grounded answers to big questions like why the female *Bildungsroman* unfolds in the way it does, packing childhood with myriad delightful entertainments and delaying the stultifying domestic narratives that seem to inevitably attend adulthood and marriage, at least within conventional popular fiction of the early twentieth century. As Roy explains, authors like McClung and Montgomery "both criticized and adhered to the female coming-of-age plot that could not imagine a conclusion other than that of

domestic romance." Of particular interest to Roy is how the emerging publishing conventions of the period contributed to the shaping of these authors' iconic series: the Pearlie Watson trilogy, the *Anne of Green Gables* books, and the *Jalna* novels, respectively. The portrait Roy paints is of three different creators navigating the complex terrain of popular writing and publishing in Canada in the first decades of the twentieth century, from international copyright laws to royalty agreements to disputed marketing and serialization approaches. In attending to how new conventions were being established in an industry just emerging into modernity, Roy demonstrates how industry norms are developed, from the rule that books in a series should have continuous naming conventions to the belief that magazine serialization in advance of volume publication would enhance rather than cut into book sales.

The strength of this book is the granularity of its detail: this will be a resource for scholars and students for years to come. But one of the pleasures of reviewing is getting to sit down and read a book straight through rather than skimming it for pertinent details, and this is a book that rewards that reading approach; Roy does an excellent job of transforming archival detail into historical narrative peppered with entertaining characters and interactions, whether it's McClung's agent continuously (and unsuccessfully) trying to convince her to marry off two minor characters, or the difficulty of tracing de la Roche's career because of her tendency to lie about her age. In addition to its breadth of archival research, this book is also part of the larger feminist project of restoring the legitimacy of sentimental and popular women's writing from its scathing repudiation by the midcentury male canon-forming critics, with their preferences for realism and modernism. As a feminist project, it is attentive both to the material conditions of women writers and to the aesthetic constraints on their work. The latter, however, sometimes oversimplifies. In "Horizons of the Publishable," Rachel Malik challenges the tendency in literary studies to treat writing as a process that *precedes* publishing:

> Publishing, far from being the mediating term between writing and reading, writer and reader, precedes and constitutes all formations of writing and reading. The publishable governs what is writeable and what is readable.

When Roy grapples with the question of whether Montgomery's tendency to write series rather than one-off books was a result of her natural inclination as a storyteller or a matter of her publisher's coercion, Malik's formulation helps us understand that it is both and neither.

As is often true of archivally driven and granular studies like this one, I often found myself longing for a shift towards theory that never quite arrived—which in fact points to the project's great strength. A wealth of detail like this, scrupulously researched and engagingly recounted, is a fundamentally generous project, one that opens up possibilities for future scholars to build in multiple directions. Frankly, I don't *want* to spend years in archives reading publishers' correspondence, but I'm extremely grateful that Wendy Roy has.

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Precarious Places

40 Island Writers and Gail Sjuberg; Nicola Wheston, illus.
Love of the Salish Sea Islands: New Essays, Memoirs and Poems by 40 Island Writers. Mother Tongue $23.95

Therese Greenwood
What You Take with You: Wildfire, Family and the Road Home. U of Alberta P $24.99

Catriona Sandilands, ed.
Rising Tides: Reflections for Climate Changing Times. Caitlin $24.95

Reviewed by Heidi Tiedemann Darroch

In her essay in *Rising Tides,* a recent collection that grew out of Catriona Sandilands' *Storying Climate Change* project, Briony Penn, a noted West Coast naturalist, describes taking a group of young students on a field trip to an unexpected site: the local dump. In the "deep, dark pit of crumbling shale" they search for ammonites. These young people are attuned to threats:

> They have already written a letter to the prime minister, planted trees, studied eelgrass, signed petitions against pipelines, marched to save the southern resident killer whales, gone plastic-free and present their ideas at town halls.

In Penn's students we can imagine all of the young people, from Greta Thunberg to the Indigenous youth and their supporters, acting as land protectors. These three books make clear that we have much to mourn—but also reason to hope. The two collections and the memoir also bear witness, in different ways, to how bewilderment, anxiety, and even terror may surge forward as we lose our touchstones—the familiar, built places and natural sites that constitute home.

Greenwood had been living in Fort McMurray with her husband for four years, as transplants from Ontario who had come to love Fort McMurray's bustling energy, its cultural diversity, and its sense of can-do enthusiasm. And then Fort McMurray experienced an unusually hot early summer. Residents were not immediately alarmed by the news that a fire had broken out on that June day, but over the course of a few hours, as evacuation orders were imposed and as the highway out of town swelled with traffic, Greenwood's anxieties multiplied. In her rush to leave, she gathered an assortment of objects, from deeply meaningful mementoes to items that initially appeared more random—and were certainly not the supplies the couple could have used during their agonizingly slow drive to safety. Each of the objects she has retained is carefully considered and contextualized over a number of chapters that fuse past and present, family memories and local histories. For instance, she grabbed a wooden rolling pin that belonged to her late father-in-law, the distinguished broadcaster Roy Bonisteel, instead, she notes ruefully, of many more obvious mementoes of his life and career: "But the truth was, when I thought of Roy, I pictured him rolling pie dough." Later, settled for a time with family in Ontario, the temporary guardian of an animal she calls Big Stinky Dog, Greenwood sifts through memories of her past and her family life. These are not easy reminiscences: her father's mental illness has had a significant impact on her young life; the family has weathered significant economic hardships. Her joyful marriage, commemorated in snapshots rather than formal photographs, endures, but all of the images and most of their cherished wedding presents have been destroyed along with their home. In this surprisingly gripping and deeply moving account, Greenwood considers how we re-establish normalcy in the wake of profound loss.

While Greenwood's work does not delve into the possible contributions of a changing climate, both of the essay collections are deeply attuned to the rapid

anthropogenic transformations of beloved places, chiefly of West Coast sites. The two anthologies share a concern with place, but their purposes vary. As its title suggests, *Love of the Salish Sea Islands* is made up of a series of warm tributes by long-time island residents. Nearly all are veteran writers, with decades of experience on islands ranging from the well-known tourist destination of Salt Spring Island to the underserviced Savary Island. The contributors—including novelists William Deverell and Jack Hodgins, poets Mona Fertig and Arleen Paré, and creative non-fiction authors Stephen Hume and Maria Coffey (along with more than thirty of their peers)—are relatively comfortably situated in places where increasing numbers of people struggle to secure year-round housing. While this sense of comfort creates a somewhat lopsided impression of current challenges and also contributes to the work's strong sense of nostalgia, these pieces are acutely insightful, deft, and interesting. In an outstanding contribution about her uneasy integration into Hornby Island's cultural norms, Amanda Hale considers her lifelong mourning for her father, writing that "[i]n this house, I have come to terms with my father's absence, and with my alienation from this extraordinary island community so full of love and light and darkness." Many of the works take a lighter tone, and, because they are arranged in alphabetical order by authors' names, the effect of moving from a humorous sketch to a lyrical poem or a searing personal reminiscence can sometimes be jarring. More troublingly, as contributor Chris Arnett notes, is the paucity of Indigenous authors in the collection and the absence of any authors from local First Nations.

Conversely, *Rising Tides*, while capacious enough to include poetry, short fiction, and lyrical personal essays, takes a more explicitly political slant and includes a range of perspectives from Indigenous writers, including Zoe Todd's gorgeous, lyrical reflection on watching the tides. While many of the writers work within academia, their writing here is accessible, open-hearted, and personal. The book opens with a dual-voiced territorial acknowledgement that sets the tone for the searching, analytical, and deeply ethically informed work of this project. Climate change researcher Sara Barron writes about cherry trees in Vancouver, noting that the annual "spring ritual of blossom 'snow' in April may not be a certainty for much longer." Ashlee Cunsolo's piercing work considers how she goes "to the land now when I need something . . . when I am angry. Sad. Hurt[,]" but does not "ask the land what she needs" or "where it hurts" because "I cannot bear the truth." In diverse ways, many of these contributors are probing this issue: how much hurt—how much climate change reality—are we capable of admitting into consciousness? Kyo Maclear's "Love and Lifeboating"—an outstanding essay about dying and grief by one of Canada's best writers—is, alone, worth the price of this collection. These are works to savour and treasure.

Living Caves

Karen Solie
The Caiplie Caves. Anansi $19.95

Reviewed by Katherine McLeod

Reading Karen Solie's *The Caiplie Caves* in March 2020 during the COVID-19 global pandemic is an experience of recognizing all too well the solitude at the heart of this collection. Solie's ability to craft poetry that is both familiar and devastating is nothing new after four award-winning collections: *Short Haul Engine* (2001), *Modern and Normal* (2005), *Pigeon* (2009), and *The*

Road In Is Not the Same Road Out (2015). In *The Caiplie Caves*, Solie crafts clever lines—such as "the solitude / there are no two ways about it / you can live here but don't expect it to entertain you"—that not only uncannily speak to our current time of self-isolation but also deliver a sharp critique of extractivism in that the earth is not here to serve humanity. Located on the coast of Fife, Scotland, the Caiplie Caves have been places for isolation and places for dwelling, as people continue to visit them freely, build a fire, or seek shelter. Moving from the seventh century to the twenty-first, Solie's poems circle around the choice facing Irish missionary Ethernan of whether to establish a priory on May Island (facing the caves) or to retreat from the world as a hermit.

As Solie writes in the preface, "Ethernan's story still wanders outside the archive, resists a final resting place in the ever-expanding facility of the past." The poems look out from the mouth of a cave across the water to May Island: "[I]t's turned its face turned toward me / it's about to speak." Caught in indecision, the poems are preoccupied with the possibility of error: that, in making the wrong decision, this fault would make it impossible to return. In fact, Solie reveals the precise moment when there is no turning back. Or, rather, that when you turn back you see that the past has hardened into form, which the book contrasts with a malleable present that is livable—one that has not been "crystallized by the system." The ocean is still at work eroding its edges.

One of the most poignant of these moments appears towards the end of the book when industries of Medicine Hat converge with those of Edinburgh during a description of a factory that must run constantly "lest molten glass harder in its veins." For this factory, "[h]esitation could mean the vital machinery / would be made worthless." All of the poems consider worth and worthlessness through "the mind's ear," revealing a troubling world in which "trees turn into ships, and sail away," and the self looks across at an island of indecision:

> the May is there
> idling at the curb in a cloud of exhaust
> radio on its doors all dented.

While carefully deconstructing and deliberating indecision, Solie writes the earth as abundantly clear in its roaring call for action.

"It Takes a Lifetime to Write a Poem"

David Staines, ed.
Robert Kroetsch: Essayist, Novelist, Poet.
U of Ottawa P $39.95

Reviewed by Robert Thacker

I met and came to know Kroetsch himself at the University of Manitoba during the late 1970s, just when he had come back from SUNY Binghamton and was joining the faculty; I was a new PhD student; I never had a class from him, but we often talked about my ongoing prairie-fiction project, on which he was a reader once it became a thesis. In that connection, the paper Kroetsch presented in April 1978 at the Crossing Frontiers conference in Banff, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space," was probably the most personally significant academic paper I have myself ever heard; it sparked outrage and a bit of awe. And from Crossing Frontiers too, a vivid memory from a session on prairie poetry, just after Kroetsch had published his *Seed Catalogue* (1977): he was asked why he had gone with a small Winnipeg press, Turnstone, for that book instead of a more commercial publisher—he replied that publishing a book of poems was basically "an

insane act" commercially, so the poet ought to have some fun while having some say in the shape of the book.

Sometime during those years, of a Saturday morning with few people around the English department offices, I ran into an MA student who was then doing a reading course with Kroetsch on all the great world literature everyone should know; he had just emerged from a session. The fellow was a bit wild-eyed. I asked how the course was going, and he immediately replied, emphatically, "You know sometimes I come out of that office convinced that Bob is the most brilliant man on earth; other times, I think he's the dumbest." "So much for that." Or better, "A likely story."

Robert Kroetsch: Essayist, Novelist, Poet is the latest in the University of Ottawa's excellent Reappraisals: Canadian Writers series, "the longest-running book series dedicated to the study of Canadian literary subjects," each volume (now numbering well over thirty and dating back to 1974) derived from an annual Canadian literature symposium sponsored by the English department. Over the years I've attended many of these gatherings, spoken at several, and certainly often saw Bob Kroetsch there. A unique and important institution in Canadian writing, one that needs ever to be noted and celebrated.

The Kroetsch Symposium was held in April 2017. Owing to Bob's death in a June 2011 car accident, when he was travelling home from a writers' gathering in Canmore after receiving the Writers' Guild of Alberta's highest award in Calgary, there is an appropriately elegiac tone through some of the writing here. But more than that, and overwhelming ruefulness, there is ongoing delight in and celebration of just who Kroetsch was as a man, as a relentlessly productive writer, and as a force for Canadian writing. His long-time close friend Rudy Wiebe—they met in 1967—begins his essay by writing of the "delights, the revelations of his brilliant, questing imagination" seen in the writing, but he prefers to concentrate on "the person I knew: Bob Kroetsch, that immensely complex, imaginative, warm and gentle man." Wiebe writes of their frequent travels all about Alberta together, the places they stopped, the land they contemplated. He highlights a 2007 session they did together in Winnipeg when they were asked about their shared "fifty years writing so many books" and Kroetsch "evaded the question entirely by shifting it to me—'What do you think?'" he asked. Wiebe also evaded some himself, but then "Bob finished the whole conversation with the perfect response: 'It takes a lifetime to write a poem.'"

David Eso begins the volume with a canny biographical analysis of Kroetsch's time at SUNY Binghamton, and especially his editorial work as co-founding editor of *boundary 2*, arguing that his "[e]xperience abroad helped clarify for Kroetsch the Canadian aversion to self-promotional bombast." While Kroetsch the essayist and novelist is evident in the critical analyses offered here—Robert David Stacey writes an especially good reading of *What the Crow Said*—most of the attention is on the poetry.

There, Albert Braz offers a niggling and ultimately unconvincing account of the fate of Kroetsch's "Poem of Albert Johnson" (1975), but the rest of the poetic analyses are of an exceptionally high order, some even brilliant: Phil Hall on "Poem for My Dead Sister" as masterpiece and Dennis Cooley on the travel poems are certainly that, while Jennifer Baker on *The Ledger* and Jason Wiens on Kroetsch's epistolary poetics are not far behind. Wiens' paper is deeply rooted in the Kroetsch archive, and complementing that necessary work is Cameron Anstee's detailed account of the complex

textual history of *Seed Catalogue*, most significantly the important role played by the Turnstone designer, Eva Fritsch. Looking at Kroetsch's reliance on fragments in his chapbook poetry, and arguing convincingly that (with Brian McHale) he thought autobiography "a fallacy, an optical illusion," Nicole Markotić makes an excellent case.

Two of the more personal essays, by Laurie Ricou and Aritha van Herk, need highlighting. Ricou, in "Sketches of a Layman," dissects Kroetsch's influence: not "*whom* he influenced, but how he influenced": "Bob the generous teacher, unaware, teaching by declining to teach." Citing his own students' responses to Kroetsch's presence and writing in some detail, Ricou in this deeply heartfelt, apt, and beautiful essay asserts that he was a "beloved, willing man." "Bob wrote his life all his life long in a way that invited his reader to come back with her own stories." For her part, van Herk offers vivid, often funny, accounts of driving about Alberta with Kroetsch riding shotgun, accounts connected to the texts he produced: the "urge, then, to drive, to travel, to journey, becomes a chronic itch in the textual presence of a fidgeting writer, his eternal restlessness belied by the silent poet role that he pretended to play." In Kroetsch, she writes finally,

> both space and place sculpt an imagination so completely unique that our grief and joy at its rereading can only retrace the journeys that he instigated in his readers, in his friends, and in his words themselves.

More than a likely story, a wonderful one.

Knowing Ourselves

Tony Tremblay
The Fiddlehead Moment: Pioneering an Alternative Canadian Modernism in New Brunswick. McGill-Queen's UP $34.95

Reviewed by Lisa Banks

For years now, I have anticipated new scholarship by Tony Tremblay with the excitement usually reserved for the first few days of spring. Tremblay always offers a comprehensive overview not only of a literary movement, but also of the environment from which it sprang. His latest, *The Fiddlehead Moment: Pioneering an Alternative Canadian Modernism in New Brunswick* (2019), is no exception. In addition to archive-supported literary, political, and social histories, there is also a vast postcolonial theoretical engagement woven throughout. Those familiar with Tremblay's work will recognize this move from previous articles and chapters; as in earlier work, here Tremblay demonstrates deep, unyielding commitment to telling a story that has not yet been accepted—the story of a powerful, productive, and culturally rich New Brunswick.

In *The Fiddlehead Moment*, that story—one informed by economic, social, and political realities—reshapes understandings of New Brunswick's cultural production. Contextualizing his argument in nineteenth- and twentieth-century New Brunswick, Tremblay writes against the prevailing narrative that Canadian modernism grew solely from urban centres in Ontario and Quebec; he instead aims to "provid[e] a missing piece to our understanding of Canadian literary modernism in the twentieth century." As he makes clear in his first chapter—the compellingly named "New Brunswick as Colony, Province, and Supplicant"—"this book examines a group of writers and cultural workers who," despite their shared

goals and aims, "have never enjoyed the status of a school or movement." In a nod to Desmond Pacey, Tremblay names these workers the Fiddlehead modernists.

The bulk of *The Fiddlehead Moment* is devoted to three major figures. In his second chapter, on A. G. Bailey, Tremblay draws a parallel between New Brunswick's cultural history and Bailey's own, sowing the seeds for Bailey's recognition of the need to understand one's regional history. Though Bailey was a tireless cultural worker, Tremblay's primary focus is the founding of *The Fiddlehead*, which began as a small, internally circulated pamphlet with writing from members of the University of New Brunswick's Bliss Carman Society. By his third chapter, Tremblay extends his focus outward as he charts Pacey's contributions to shaping an environment in which the regional and the universal are not at odds. This environment is then fostered by Fred Cogswell, who, as Tremblay argues in his fourth chapter, brought the literary magazine to the wider world, opening it to submissions outside the Fiddlehead school and creating something like *The Fiddlehead* we currently know. Tremblay links these three stories, each shaping and reshaping what has come before in order to imagine and create a New Brunswick aware of its history and potential—a sentiment that reverberates throughout his conclusion.

The Fiddlehead Moment will appeal to scholars of twentieth-century Canadian literature—even, or perhaps especially, those invested in narratives of a Laurentian modernism that privileges the Montreal-Toronto corridor. Those drawn to Tremblay's cultural work would be well served by checking out his other writing, as well as Kirk Niergarth's *"The Dignity of Every Human Being": New Brunswick Artists and Canadian Culture between the Great Depression and the Cold War* (2015).

Love on Looted Lands

Maureen Hynes
Sotto Voce. Brick $20.00

Douglas Walbourne-Gough
Crow Gulch. Goose Lane $19.95

Reviewed by Melanie Dennis Unrau

Douglas Walbourne-Gough's 2019 poetry collection *Crow Gulch* has endorsements on its back cover from John Steffler and Cecily Nicholson, and one way to appreciate this powerful book is in terms of its resonances with documentary-ecopoetic classics like *The Grey Islands* and *From the Poplars.* Grounded in the mixed/adopted Mi'kmaw poet's upbringing on the west coast of Newfoundland, the book was written while Walbourne-Gough was doing his MFA near the other West Coast, at UBC Okanagan—so *Crow Gulch* has a unique, hybrid West-Coast sensibility. Blending lyric, narrative, experimental, documentary, autobiographical, work, and eco- poetics, *Crow Gulch* is a book about a "slum" near Corner Brook, Newfoundland that persisted from the 1920s until its residents were relocated to the Dunfield Park social housing project in the 1970s. Walbourne-Gough, a descendant of former Crow Gulch residents, grew up in Dunfield Park. He uses poetry to fight the erasure of a harsh, mercurial, yet beloved place—and of a community for whom the future has both a "blank stare" and a "brilliant, polished edge." These poems convey the sensibilities of racialized, marginalized, working-class people whose rough lives are peppered with small pleasures like a warm feather bed and trout fishing with family, and with striking expressions of loyalty and affection. Following his ancestors, for whom a name could be "so wrought with work, so heavy, now, with love," the poet treats Crow Gulch as a place and a name that persist, "preceding and dragging / behind him like a loose bootlace."

Toronto poet Maureen Hynes' collection *Sotto Voce*, also published in 2019, is named after a quiet-yet-urgent mode of speech in opera and theatre. In contrast to the focus of *Crow Gulch*, this dense volume of recent work is a book about everything and anything—a book that pays attention to the beautiful, the political, and the intolerable in everyday life. Hynes' poems are mostly lyrics rich in metaphor, allusion, rhythm, and subtle rhyme. Born out of the idea that "Art lives beside fear," and the speaker's sense that she must "speak now," the poems address a familiar dystopian present when "mercy is failing // the GPS is failing"—when modernity, religion, and the settler-colonial nation are coming up empty and, worse, with "looted lands," unwelcomed migrants, climate change, toxicity and cancer, wildfires, and polluted and buried creeks and rivers. Yet, Hynes calls these poems not only "Song[s] of Disquiet" but also "breathing lessons." Like the pair of birdwatching women asked "*Are you ladies lost?*" because they seem to be staring blankly at a leafless tree—or like the double meaning produced through the line break where the speaker says she has "fallen / in love"—*Sotto Voce* matches failing with love. "[D]espite the dynamite / stick of injustice," Hynes posits love as "the bridge / to compassion intact"; it is in lesbian love, familial love, love of nature, solidarity, and care and kindness that she finds hope in disquieting times.

"waist-deep in the criss-cross river of shadows"

J. A. Weingarten
Sharing the Past: The Reinvention of History in Canadian Poetry since 1960.
U of Toronto P $75.00

Reviewed by Ryan J. Cox

Margaret Prang, addressing the Canadian Historical Association in 1977, implored her fellow historians to pay attention to what was happening in Canadian literature. She argued that "the sharpest and most convincing portrayals of [limited] identities . . . come not from historians but from our poets, novelists and short story writers" and, furthermore, "[b]oth the general reader and the social historian find their sensitivity to the impact of place and history heightened by [these writers]" (qtd. in Weingarten). Reflecting on Canadian literary history, this argument makes a great deal of sense. While Canadian poetry has long had an interest in the historical and a firmly established documentary tradition, there is a shift after 1960 in the way Canadian poets engage with both place and history. Attributable to both the structural changes in literary production brought on by the establishment of the Canada Council and the contentious debates about Canadian identity—or its absence—that occurred in the shadow of the national centennial, this shift, as J. A. Weingarten argues in *Sharing the Past: The Reinvention of History in Canadian Poetry since 1960*, is marked by a modernist scepticism in the mould of T. S. Eliot and the development of what Weingarten calls "lyric historiography."

Lyric historiography is "a creative study of the past that brings readers away from the distance inspired by an elite, academic history and closer to the historical and cultural experiences of people." *Sharing the Past*

suggests that the lyric mode is essential to the reinvention or revision of historical discourse because the lyric "I," being inherently limited, cannot make claims to objective authority. This, as Weingarten suggests, places it in opposition to more impersonal kinds of historical writing—including the work of professional historians—but also opens it up to engaging with historical narratives sceptically. Lyric historiography's particular kind of modernist scepticism is one that questions and interrogates in order to move back towards belief, which Weingarten positions in opposition to postmodern scepticisms that embrace uncertainty. Effectively, this serves to delineate the literary genealogy that *Sharing the Past* traces from Al Purdy through John Newlove to Barry McKinnon and Andrew Suknaski, and through Margaret Atwood to Joan Crate.

The work that *Sharing the Past* does to establish and explore this genealogy is one of the book's great strengths. The connections, both personal and poetic, are firmly established with thorough research and detailed close readings. This is a significant work of literary history that seeks to recover an underexplored aspect of Canadian literary history, to show the connections between this group of poets and shifts in the practice of Canadian historians, and to engage with what, excepting Purdy and Atwood, was very much a prairie poetic movement during a period when there was a rising consideration of the Prairies as place and people. These interventions are important, as revealed in particularly strong sections of the book dealing with the neglect of Barry McKinnon's *I Wanted to Say Something*, and situating Joan Crate's *Pale as Real Ladies* within the network of contentious representations of E. Pauline Johnson. They are also important as acts of recovery; this history and these texts speak to a crucial moment in the development of both Canadian literature and Canadian identities. Understanding them necessarily deepens the reader's understanding of the overall development of these structures.

There are some notable limitations to what *Sharing the Past* is able to accomplish. The way in which Weingarten constructs lyric historiography to specifically exclude the postmodern leads to some noticeable gaps in the texts and poets covered, given the interest in historical subject matter within Canadian poetry between 1960 and 1990. The book suffers little by excluding George Bowering or Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, but, given the degree to which *Sharing the Past* engages western Canada and familial history as a field of poetic composition, Robert Kroetsch's absence is noticeable. Indeed, some of the theoretical distinctions between modernism and postmodernism or the lyric and non-lyric are less distinct than they are presented here. And while they are arguably necessary both to link this particular group of poets and to connect their work to trends within Canadian historiography, these distinctions seem to prevent a full exploration of the construction of history in Canadian poetics in the centennial period. Despite these limitations, *Sharing the Past* is a well-researched contribution to the field, and an important examination of the relationship between Canadian poetics and historiography during a time of change.

A Multi-Generational Mixtape

Ian Williams

Reproduction. Vintage Canada $21.00

Reviewed by Paul Watkins

Reproduction—the debut novel from Ian Williams—is an inventive multi-generational saga that pushes the limits of narrative and language. The novel explores the ways families are bonded, whether by blood, story, or choice. Its size, encyclopedic knowledge, Biblical intertextuality, and peregrination through the complicated genealogy of family (from the cycle of birth, life, and death) recall Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, but in language and style it is closer to the work of Zadie Smith and the late David Foster Wallace. Fitting the cyclical nature of life and the seasons, the novel is told in four sections (with an interlude between them titled "The Sex Talk"), moving from Toronto in the late seventies to the mid-nineties, and finally to the present. Before the narrative proper, we encounter an upwards-moving genealogy that begins with "before" and then seven epigraphs. The genealogy—devoid of names, with representative sex chromosomes in their place—and the epigraphs, ranging from Margaret Atwood to Genesis, speak to Williams' awareness that both he, as author, and his characters are part of an inherited chain of stories.

The opening lines let us know we will have to decipher differing perspectives in the text. From XX: "Both of their mothers were dying in the background." From XY: "Both of their mothers were still alive in the background." XX focuses on Felicia Shaw—a nineteen-year-old from an unnamed island in the Caribbean—while XY centres on Edgar Gross, an older businessman from Germany. Their mothers share a room in palliative care at St. Xavier hospital in Toronto. While hardly an ideal match (Edgar is a self-aggrandizing womanizer and Felicia is a young faith-based woman), they strike up a romance of circumstance (with equal parts comedy and tragedy) that sets in motion the novel's power dynamics in relation to sex, race, and gender. Eventually they reproduce (despite Edgar's desire for an abortion), which sets up the storied lineage to follow. Part two focuses on their progeny—Armistice, who goes by Army and is a charismatic opportunist—and a summer in the mid-nineties in the shared split-level Brampton home when Felicia's cantankerous landlord's two children (Hendrix and Heather) visit from the US. The third section takes place in the present and introduces us to Chariot (Riot)—Heather's son—who creates a scandalous masturbation video that gets him expelled from university. The final section explores the relationship between Army and a dying Edgar who he meets in person for the first time.

Even though Edgar is mostly absent, Army receives his father's business acumen and desire for younger women. A major theme in the novel is sex and the entitlement men often feel to women's bodies. Observing Felicia early in the novel, Edgar notes that she has a "[g]ood body, useful body. Her body seemed useful to the point of being industrial," and his failed attempt to rape her is echoed in Heather's tragic narrative and pregnancy. The novel provides an empathetic look (*Einfühlung* is a theme) into the pain and invisible labour of women in relation to the pervasive misogyny of men. Hence, depending on the context, reproduction can be productive or destructive and Williams demonstrates this in both narrative and style.

Williams challenges the reader to entangle meaning, as they encounter crossed-out words, Bible verses, lists and epic cataloguing,

letters and text messages, play-like scripts, and a close reading of a song with chords and annotated text boxes. I was particularly drawn to the music in the text, as Williams incorporates popular lyrics from Nirvana, Barenaked Ladies, and Wu-Tang Clan, among many others, and describes a number of mixtapes that Edgar (and later Army) use to convey their emotions. The music provides a sonic textuality, such as when Williams includes both a lyric and three bars of actual music from the Negro spiritual "Ride the Chariot." However, by far the most experimental and obscure section of the novel is the fourth. Like Edgar, the text gets cancer, which causes textual blight as we get smaller text inserted within the larger narrative. However, the careful reader will see the reproductive meaning in this painful experience as they suture these words into sentences.

Sometimes the dialogue felt a little stilted, and I wanted more of Felicia, who seemed particularly held down by the weight of her circumstances. It would be nice to see her embrace her Blackness more directly (why is her island unnamed?), and the text could perhaps find ways to challenge its genetic metaphor in terms of race and gender (concerns to be taken up by others with more detail than I can provide here). A few quibbles aside, *Reproduction* treads new ground in CanLit, and Williams is a formidable talent deserving of his Giller Prize for this novel. With narrative warp and weft, the novel grapples with pressing social issues—from race and class to sexual assault—to provide a detailed portrait of the ways that one family is held together by (and within) story. *Reproduction* is a novelistic mixtape that shows the extraordinariness of ordinary people and their interconnected lives. In terms of creating new life and potential, which we get to enjoy, the novel lives up to its title.

History Lessons

Beryl Young
A Boy from Acadie: Roméo LeBlanc's Journey to Rideau Hall. Bouton d'or Acadie $19.95

Harriet Zaidman
City on Strike: A Novel. Red Deer $14.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

These two works set out to provide middle-school readers with accessible, engaging accounts of significant twentieth-century individuals and events. *City on Strike* focuses on the 1919 General Strike in Winnipeg, which involved more than thirty thousand workers, while *A Boy from Acadie* traces the background of Roméo LeBlanc, Canada's twenty-fifth Governor General.

City on Strike, a novel by Harriet Zaidman, presents the General Strike through the alternating perspectives of two narrators, thirteen-year-old Jack, and Nellie, his eleven-year-old sister, members of an impoverished family of Jewish immigrants. The more dynamic of the two, Jack is given agency in events preceding and during the Strike, through his work both as a newspaper delivery boy and as photographer's assistant on the climactic Bloody Saturday (June 21, 1919). In contrast, Nellie's chapters generally serve as interludes in Jack's more suspenseful narrative. Her vision is more limited, only occasionally transcending gendered concerns such as a desire for fancy dresses, or accounts of petty rivalries among her school friends. While Jack assists a photographer to capture images of police brutality on Bloody Saturday—pictures which provide crucial evidence to refute claims that the strikers instigated the violence—Nellie's involvement consists of a dramatic escape as she runs after her sister, evading armed Mounties charging a crowd of strike supporters.

However, while the novel's conventionally gendered perspective is disappointing, *City on Strike* merits praise for its nuanced

account of the Strike and the events preceding it. Avoiding a possible temptation to present a polarized perspective based on twenty-first-century outrage, or a simple valorization of the heroic behaviour of select individuals, Zaidman opts to challenge adolescent readers to engage with complexities and moral ambiguities. Like almost everyone in his community, Jack supports the Strike and recognizes the underlying social injustices motivating the strikers, yet secretly delivers, in order to earn money for his family, an Establishment newspaper replete with both anti-union propaganda and fabricated news stories (and, in an additional subtle twist, when he belatedly confesses his actions to his mother, Jack is informed that she was aware of the source of his income all along).

City on Strike carefully foregrounds the ethnically diverse nature of Winnipeg's working-class neighbourhoods through the protagonists' descriptions of community members, though Zaidman assumes a reader's familiarity with early-twentieth-century historical events such as World War I, the Spanish flu, and immigration to Canada, as well as the structure and role of unions, and the politics of employee strikes. Since neither the broader context nor the relevance of the General Strike are addressed in any detail in the novel, there is a danger that middle-school readers, some of whom may well struggle to locate the city on a map, will fail to engage with this work as more than an entertaining coming-of-age story set in an unfamiliar context.

Beryl Young's *A Boy from Acadie*, although a biography rather than a novel, has a pedagogical goal similar to Zaidman's work: presenting moments in Canadian history as vibrant, engaging, and relatable to young twenty-first-century readers. However, Young's tone is more overtly didactic, and it is difficult to imagine this text outside of an educational environment. Roméo LeBlanc is allowed a few minor vices, such as a reluctance to engage in farm work and a youthful habit of sneaking out to smoke cigarettes with his sister, though we are informed that he was "never afraid" of academic work and "later came to his senses and gave up the habit" of smoking. Nonetheless, *A Boy from Acadie* provides a very clear and informative account of LeBlanc's life. The book's layout is effective and the narrative is interspersed with a series of evocative photographs and somewhat eclectic asides (including an account of Joe DiMaggio's baseball career—LeBlanc was a serious baseball fan—and a recipe for one of his favourite dishes, *poutine à trou*).

Overall, both *City on Strike* and *A Boy from Acadie* succeed at providing accessible and quite engaging accounts of significant events in Canadian history.

Erratum:
Due to an editing error, the review "When Poems Are Quilts" in *Canadian Literature* 240 contained an inaccurate statement about a poem by John Pass. The review should have stated "There is a '[g]irl in the coffee-house making / earrings,' and what we know about her is that she has '[s]oft eyes, fresh skin.'" *Canadian Literature* regrets the error.

Stan Rogal

Ennui

the seven wonders of the world are tired
& a touch familiar
mourned by scholars who dream
        the ghosts of slim naked Greek boys
men who put a beer into a belly that is dead
one tree is like another, one hill the dead spit
of the next

I am bored & more than a little perplexed
it is the time of statistics, when all is
become billboards, sound bites & flash
the moment poetry slips into embellishment
clichés set my teeth on edge, make my skin
crawl, my blood boil, put a lump in my throat,
a pain in my ass
        why does that strange inland sea
        make no sound?

in the camera of my eye depicts row-houses
& row-lives
        (mother said to call her if the H-bomb exploded)
when the sniper aims to window the brain w/bullets
when politicians offer circuses instead of bread
when they come to hang Xmas from the plastic tree
we applaud mechanically
        not knowing what else to do

Contributors

Articles

Emilie Sarah **Caravecchia**, occupante de Tiohtià:ke (Montréal), est professeure de littérature française au Collège Montmorency et est coordonnatrice du programme de Littérature. Après quelque quinze années d'enseignement, elle est retournée à l'Université de Montréal, au Département de littératures et de langues du monde, où elle a amorcé ses recherches sur les littératures autochtones produites dans le contexte francophone du Québec. Elle a publié dans *Libérer la colère* (2018) et *Post-Scriptum* (2019). Elle a également remporté la Bourse d'excellence en Études Autochtones du Festival Métropolis Bleu pour son essai *Que veut dire une société juste?* (2020).

Kristina **Getz** is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at York University. Her dissertation, "Portraits of the Artist as Mother: Feminist Reconfigurations of the Maternal in Modern and Contemporary Canadian Literature," employs feminist and maternal theory in order to explore the intersection of motherhood and creativity.

Bronwyn **Malloy** is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. Her research centres on contemporary song lyrics and poetry.

Dale **Tracy**, a contract faculty member, has been an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Culture, and Communication and is currently Associate Chair of the Writing Centre at the Royal Military College. She is the author of *With the Witnesses: Poetry, Compassion, and Claimed Experience* (2017) and the chapbooks *Celebration Machine* (2018) and *The Mystery of Ornament* (2020). She is guest editor of the special issue *Metonymy, Poetics, Performance* (*Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 2018), and her articles are available in diverse journals, including *Canadian Literature*, *Modern Drama*, *World Literature*, and *Mosaic*.

Helena **Van Praet** is a teaching assistant at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Free University of Brussels) in the Department of Linguistics and Literary Studies. She studied English and Dutch Literature at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and University College London (UCL), and is the 2018 laureate of the BAAHE Thesis Award for her MA dissertation on Anne Carson. Her research focuses primarily on a network aesthetic in the work of Carson.

Sam **Weselowski** is a PhD candidate in English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick, working at the intersections of scale, poetics, and environmental humanities. His critical writing has appeared in *Litterae Mentis: A Journal of Literary Studies*. His poetry has appeared in *Hotel* and *Canadian Literature*. His chapbook *I LOVE MY JOB* was published by If a Leaf Falls Press in 2019.

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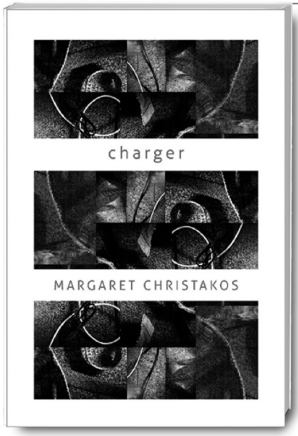
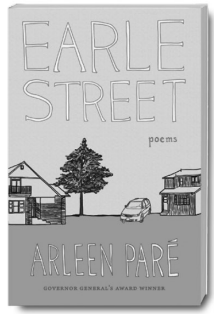
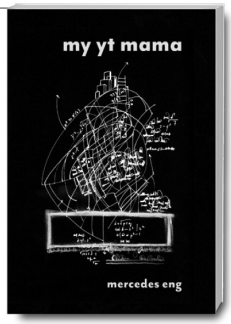


Earle Street



my yt mama



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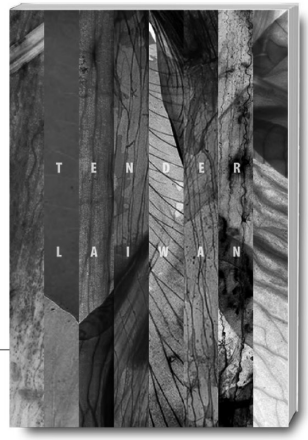

charger
Margaret Christakos

charger considers the plugged-in self fuelled by the technologies that deliver us to each other.

Earle Street
Arleen Paré

Earle Street, by Governor General's Award winner Arleen Paré, takes the concept of street and urban living, the houses on the street, the neighbours, the boulevard trees and wildlife, and the street's history as a poetic focal points.

myt yt mama
mercedes eng

Mercedes Eng continues her poetic investigation of racism and colonialism in Canada in the follow-up to her BC Book Prize-winning book of poetry, *Prison Industrial Complex Explodes*.

TENDER
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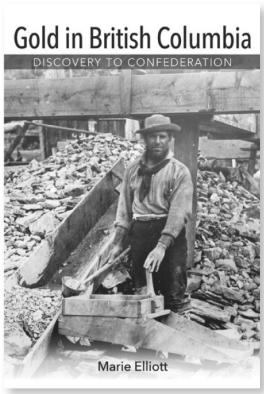

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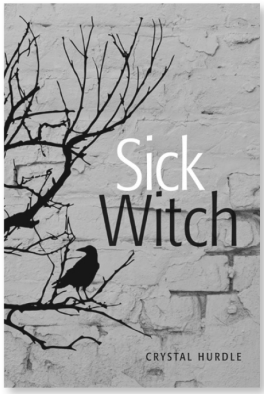

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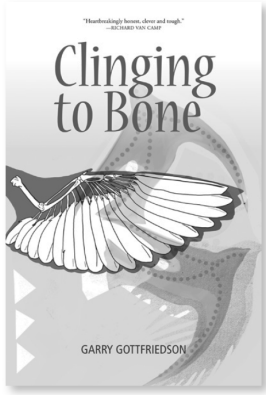

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