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Canada and Beyond

A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies

Recognition and Recovery of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

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Editorial

Coinciding with its 10th anniversary, *Canada and Beyond: A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies* has joined the University of Salamanca publishing program. This issue marks not only the journal's move to a new location, but also the beginning of a new phase. As co-editors of Canada and Beyond, we assume the challenge of steering the journal at a time of profound and overlapping global crises such as those derived from climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, as well as ongoing frictions that continue to deepen social and economic inequities in Canada and elsewhere. We understand this journal as a space for critical reflection and imaginative approaches to the literary and cultural production coming from Canada/Turtle Island and reaching out to the world in these complex times.

This Special Issue on Caribbean Canadian writing signals the journal's interest in engaging with the literary representations of the connections and entanglements between the region most widely known as Canada and the world. It also marks the smooth transition from the groundbreaking work of the journal's founders and co-editors Pilar Cuder-Domínguez and Belén Martín-Lucas, who for ten years have offered the international community of scholars, writers, and artists a free-access forum to think about, through, and beyond the literatures and cultures of Canada. We would like to thank the former editors for inviting us to take over this relevant task as they step down. We hope to follow in their footsteps in our pursuit of a new fruitful period of cutting-edge scholarship. Special thanks go to Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, who invited Michael Bucknor to guest-edit this volume on Recognition and Recovery of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production, and helped immensely with the first stages of this special issue and the journal's migration from the University of Huelva to the University of Salamanca. Working alongside guest editors Michael Bucknor and Cornel Bogle has been an amazing learning experience and a pleasure. We would also like to thank the generous scholars who have helped in the selection and blind review of the articles and other materials that make up this volume. We trust readers will enjoy reading this special issue and find

inspiration in the new directions pointed out by the guest editors' mappings of Caribbean Canadian cultural production.

Ana María Fraile-Marcos
and Eva Darias-Beautell
General Editors

RECOGNITION AND RECOVERY OF CARIBBEAN CANADIAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Special Issue

Articles

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Imagining the [Unbounded] Grounds of [Caribbean Canadian] Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

The "Introduction" to this Special Issue on "Recognition and Recovery of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production" surveys the multiple creative directions and critical orientations of Caribbean Canadian cultural production and raises key questions about the grounds on which Caribbean Canadian cultural production is recognized, especially in Canada. The guest editors also explore the productive, but sometimes problematic, relationship between Caribbean Canadian archives and the nation, Blackness, Indigeneity, queerness, publishing, popular culture, and settler colonialism. Even so, the writers see the possibilities of communities of relations as well as political alliances between different constituencies in both Canada and the Caribbean in confronting racial capitalism and the many afterlives of colonialism. Re-conceptualizing Caribbean Canadian cultural production as an archive, rather than a field of study, allows the guest editors to recognize the importance of certain commitments and values: an investment in an ethically conscious methodology, a refusal of reductive and essentializing conceptualizations of race, gender, sexuality, as well as the modern human, and a desire to build collectivities of political alliances. The unbounded and sometimes ungrounded nature of the Caribbean Canadian inspires an openness to new ways of thinking about the politics of cultural production in Canada and beyond.

Keywords
Caribbean Canadian; Archive; Black Canadian; Black and Indigenous Relations; Caribbean Canadian Self-Publishing; Queer Caribbean; Diaspora; Recognition; Recovery.

Does Caribbean Canadian[1] Exist?

The invitation to do a Special Issue on Caribbean Canadian literary and cultural production for the Spain-based journal *Canada and Beyond* provides a unique opportunity to audit the values and commitments of this archive. In the minds of the guest editors, we thought it prescient that we frame the issue through the concepts of recognition and recovery. Given the ways in which imperialist, colonialist and racial capitalist dogmas have informed what is privileged, empowered, or legible in Canada, how recognizable is Caribbean Canadian cultural production or its workers? We note in our Call for Papers that, in recent years, Caribbean Canadian writers and artists have received increased recognition in the form of major awards and prizes,[2] national and international honours, more reviews and critical writing on their work, and incorporation into secondary and post-secondary curricula in both Canada and the Caribbean. This increased attention to Caribbean Canadian artists and writers has led to an improvement in the sales of their work and in some cases the achievement of celebrity status. Though the increased income might represent their improved ability to

1. A Caribbean Canadian writer/cultural worker is traditionally understood as someone born in or with heritage from the Caribbean AND who lives, studies, or publishes in Canada OR someone born in or with heritage from Canada/who lives, studies, or publishes in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Canadian may live elsewhere at various times in their lives, but they would have experienced at firsthand, or through parents and grandparents secondhand, both societies. These traditional frames of inclusion might not be exhaustive.
2. In the past five years, Caribbean Canadian writers have been recipients of major literary awards. The Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize was awarded to David Chariandy for *Brother* in 2017, and to André Alexis in 2019 for *Days by Moonlight*. Alexis was also a recipient of one of the prestigious Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes for his body of work in 2017; Lorna Goodison (2018), David Chariandy (2019), Canisia Lubrin (2021), and Dionne Brand (2021) were also recipients of the Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes. In 2019, Ian Williams became the third Caribbean Canadian writer to receive the Scotiabank Giller Prize for his novel *Reproduction*. Kaie Kellough (2020) and Canisia Lubrin (2021) were also awarded the Griffin Poetry Prize. The recipients of prizes noted here are but a small sample of the recent recognition Caribbean Canadian writers have received within North America in the past five years.

continue their work and have their worth remunerated, their more recognizable status, we imagine, might create bigger platforms for their creative work.

Nevertheless, we wonder if the designation Caribbean Canadian, even in this moment of magnified recognition, is overshadowed, often hidden in plain sight. Much like a "visible minority" subject or writer in a predominantly white dominated society, the Canadian Caribbean might "vanish in the harsh light of overlooking" (Senior quoted in Collett 81).[3] Even as works by Caribbean Canadian artists and writers are recognized, their status as Caribbean Canadian is often subsumed under other means of identification, as part of a multiculturalist regime of recognition, namely Black Canadian, South Asian Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Queer Canadian, or either Canadian or Caribbean, but rarely both. What, then, are the political stakes of recognizing this body of work as Caribbean Canadian? What does this recognition obscure or reveal? The question of recognition raises the issue of the terms through which Caribbean Canadian becomes visible, legible, or legitimate in Canada, the Caribbean, and in its trans-national diasporas. What does this doubly-pronged labelling signal about our understanding of Canada and beyond?

Some fields/areas of literary study in Canada have been experiencing what Smaro Kamboureli calls a "belatedness"[4] in their recognition and perhaps in their recovery efforts as well (9). One of the most recent examples is Karina Vernon's black[5] prairie archive project, recovering archives that go back

3. See, for example, Anne Collett's reference to Olive Senior's account of the paradox of hypervisibility as part of a racial/ethnic minority in Canada: "to come here [to Canada] is to suddenly become a member of a visible minority and all it entails. Visibility here implies over-exposure; you are too readily seen, but you can fade and vanish in the harsh glare of overlooking" (quoted in Collett 81).

4. Kamboureli uses the term "belatedness," following on Imre Szeman, to refer to the "formation of Canadian literature and Canadian studies in Canada," and to denote not so much "Canadians' obliviousness to their literature, …but more Canlit's own ambivalence about itself" (9-10). The belatedness of the recovery and recognition is less about knowing of the work of Caribbean Canadians, but an ambivalence about its significance in literary studies.

5. We maintain the lowercase 'b' when speaking about the black prairie archives in accordance with Vernon's publication to honour the critical impetus behind Vernon's choice to not think of blackness as a singular phenomenon but rather as one that is trans-historical and thus has resonances that may differ from contemporary urgings to capitalize. We too recognize the validity of this maneuver. However, elsewhere in this introduction we capitalize the B in Black to signal our investment in Blackness as an espoused political and cultural identity as opposed to an imposed racial, ethnic, or phenotypical category.

as far as the 1800s, even as she has given visibility and recognition to more contemporary archives that would still be overlooked in the present (1). In our Caribbean Canadian publication, what are we recovering, belatedly, or giving a spotlight in this contemporary moment? Certainly, the recovery is not just about material archives or cultural workers, but also the political, critical, and philosophical efficacy of an area of study that might be better understood as a body of archive. Does recovery imply hiddenness, obfuscations, loss, absence, political ambivalence, institutional neglect? How does recovery connect to recognition? Yet, even as this moment will most likely belatedly uncover a more prominent stature of the Caribbean Canadian, is recovering not an ongoing activity? Each moment in history carries its own pressures of production and recovery, its distinctive frames of reference and political urgencies. Indeed, the archaeology of literary and cultural recovery and recognition exposes the ongoing politics of institutional preferences and practices informed, no doubt, by the dominating ideologies of colonialist exclusions, disavowals, suppressions and disciplinary violences. Acts of recovery must be deliberate to shatter the preserved glass cases and ceilings of multicultural provisions and pretenses and the ways that systemic national-exclusions operate. The very issue of framing these questions through the construct of the nation itself invites interrogation and requires expansion.

Between elasticity and limit?

In a Canadian scholarly context in which Black Studies has been given greater institutional currency, how might a special issue dedicated to the recognition and recovery of Caribbean Canadian literary and cultural studies fare in this academic environment?[6] What might be the generative relationships between Caribbean Canadian cultural production and Black Canadas, as well as the more expansive diasporic spaces of Canada and the Caribbean? Indeed, in the last account of Caribbean Canadian writing, entitled "Rooting and Routing Caribbean-Canadian Writing," and edited by Bucknor and Coleman, George Elliott Clarke,[7] one of the prominent proponents of Black Canadian studies, raised the issue of the "existence of Afro-Caribbean Canadian" in and of itself and,

6. This is evinced, for example, through cluster hires of Black faculty at the University of Alberta, Brock University, McMaster University, Queens University, OCAD University, Simon Fraser University, University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University.
7. We will use G.E. Clarke in the shortened form to distinguish from Clarke which would be a reference to Barbadian Canadian writer, Austin Clarke.

secondarily, "in the Caribbean" (260). That 2005 publication by G.E. Clarke suggested that "African-Canadian literature," not to mention Afro-Caribbean Canadian writing, held a "fragile," even "brittle" existence that was both "elastic" and "limited;" the relationship between Canada and the Caribbean and, more pointedly, the place of blackness in Caribbean and Canadian spaces become heated touchstones in our cultural debates (260). Since the publication of the *JWIL* Special Issue, important critical works by Canadian thinkers have reignited and sustained interest in the political "currencies of blackness," to borrow a phrase from Phanuel Antwi. A sample of such texts includes Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), Phanuel Antwi's Ph.D thesis, "Hidden Signs, Haunting Shadows: Literary Currencies of Blackness in Upper Canada" (2011), Paul Barrett's *Blackening Canada*: *Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism"* (2015), Winfried Siemerling's *Black Atlantic Reconsidered* (2015), and Andrea Davis's *Horizon, Sea and Sound: Caribbean and African Cultural Critiques of Nation* (2022). Three of these texts explicitly mobilize Caribbean Canadian authors to think through and interrogate race and/in the Canadian nation, despite Rinaldo Walcott's caution about the hypervisibility of Caribbean Canadian in Black Canadian studies (*Black Like Who* 39).

Given G.E. Clarke's idea of label-fragility, why is this Special Issue invested in this named constituency, Caribbean Canadian, at this time in the critical histories of the Caribbean, Canada and beyond? In that 2005 article, Clarke argues that an identity quandary forces the "Caribbean immigrant writer [in] Canada" to "imagine the grounds of 'Can-Carib' or 'Caribbeanadian' consciousness" (261). For G.E. Clarke, Afro-Caribbean Canadian writing has a "spectral" presence in the Caribbean, though it is ironically "landed" in Canada, but "grounded" in the Caribbean, and finds "shelter," if not shade, under Canada's multicultural umbrella. By landed, he could be invoking the idea of living on Canadian lands, being landed immigrants, a country where they "settle," where one's creative work lands a publication contract, while "grounded" implies that their creative energies, foci, stylistics, concerns remain rooted in the Caribbean. Yet, long celebrated Caribbean Canadian writers such as Dionne Brand, Myriam J. A. Chancy, Austin Clarke, Dany Laferrière, and Makeda Silvera ground their content in both places.[8] The contrast between "landed" and "grounded" suggests a temporary touch down versus a permanent planting. Caribbean peoples of

8. G.E. Clarke qualifies his position thus: "Few of Caribbean origin respond explicitly to Canada; most celebrate ties with an external homeland or lament their loss of those bonds. That is not to say Canada is ignored or that the attitude toward former homelands is uncritical or nostalgic… Yet—and rightly—Canada is often an alien space where they mainly happen to be, putting up with the blizzards and the racist epithets" (260-261).

a certain generation believe that their burial ground should be where they are most culturally and/or emotionally rooted, usually where their parents buried their "navel strings" (umbilical cords). While G.E. Clarke exploits the seeming irony of Afro-Caribbeanadian writers grounding their work in the Caribbean, even as such work does not seem to be resonating in the academy there, he does not offer any in-depth critical reflections on the ungroundedness of Caribbean Canadian writing in Canada. Perhaps, we see being ungrounded in Canada as a political value—recognizing Canada as a land of "touch down" and not one of groundedness is in one sense an ethical acknowledgement of Indigenous rights to their ancestral lands, and an ethical stance to refuse being complicit with settler colonial violence, as Andrea Davis argues (5). What does it mean for the creative imagination of Caribbean Canadian consciousness to be grounded or ungrounded in Canada? Jamaican Canadian Olive Senior's work, for example, has been critically flagged in this way, as Anne Collett has shown in her article, "Why Don't you Write About Canada?". For Collett, "Senior writes almost exclusively 'about' the Caribbean," while at the same time, even when "the poems do not reference Canada specifically," "the poems speak to and of Canada—Canada in the world" (79-80). Is there a particular value in seeing Caribbean Canadian cultural production as an ungrounded and unbounded archive?

In terms of recognition, is Canadian content or "grounding" in Canada required for Caribbean Canadian inclusion in the Canadian canon or necessary to attract Canadian critical attention? Frank Birbalsingh, almost like an apology, explains that there is "a pattern common in South Asian [Canadian][9] writers who deal with their countries of origin in their earliest work before moving on to Canadian subjects and settings" (95). The question of Caribbean Canadian "ungroundedness" is important for exposing the terms on which some critics are granting recognition. These critics demand either inclusion of Canadian content or "settlement," if not on Canadian lands, then immersion in Canadian culture. The misleading nature of G.E. Clarke's provocation undergirds other critical accounts that see Caribbean Canadian writers becoming more Canadian or claiming Canada as a space of belonging the longer they remain in Canada. In "From Landscape to Territory in Caribbean Canadian Literature," for example, Rodolphe Solbiac, while not arguing that the Caribbean Canadian has a stronger connection to the Caribbean (grounded) than with Canada (merely landed), as G.E. Clarke implies, he still offers a progressive narrative of greater settlement in Canada, as time moves on, than their previous sense of placelessness in an earlier period. He uses 2000 as the turning point evidenced in three

9. Birbalsingh's category of South Asian Canadian writers includes Caribbean Canadians.

books published by David Chariandy, Ramabai Espinet, and Austin Clarke in that year. The temporal milestone is troublesome because these writers are of different generations and the choice of *More* (Clarke 2008) is unfortunate because its creative production was far in advance of its eventual publication in 2000, thus problematizing the significance of 2000 as a critical turning point. We think that this progressive narrative aligns with settler colonial imperatives that require assimilationist strategies and explicit Canadian content for acceptability into the Canadian canon. If groundedness is determined through these terms of Canadian content and settlement, then "ungroundedness" is worth imagining and conceptualizing for the Caribbean Canadian archive.

Even without explicit or central focus on Canadian situations, Canadian colonialist influences in the Caribbean mark the works of Caribbean Canadian writers. For example, Birbalsingh argues that in *Yesterdays* (1974), Harold Sonny Ladoo features "the imperialism of Canadian Presbyterian missionaries, who, in the process of converting Indo-Trinidadians to Christianity, instilled in them western European cultural values that tended to replace their ancestral, cultural habits inherited from India" (95). Also, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) is read by Mariam Pirbhai as "a novel which indicts the Canadian Presbyterian Mission's deracinatory policy of making education accessible to the indentured labourer's children on the condition of religious conversion" (138). This imperialist practice in the works of Caribbean Canadian writers set in the Caribbean is very relevant to the ongoing critical engagement with Indigenous and decolonial scholars' work in Canada about church schools and colonial violence. Anne Collett, in her defence of the Canadian relevance of Olive Senior, confronts the question of what Caribbean content has to do with Canada.

If Canada is a "confluence of diasporas" (Bucknor "Postcolonial Crosses" 20), then Caribbean "elsewhere[s]" (Siemerling 158)[10] are central to Canadian considerations. Using the poems "Gastropoda" and "At the Slave Museum," from Senior's *Shell*, Collett argues that although the poems do not appear "to have anything to do with Canada" because of a lack of explicit reference, "the poems speak to and of Canada—Canada in the world" (80). Beyond Bucknor's idea of Canada's diasporic make-up, Collett proposes the idea of "entangled histories" and "the worlding of the Caribbean and of Canada" as ways of reading the

10. To refer here to Siemerling's idea of "elsewhere(s)," which he uses primarily to recognize a Black Atlantic connection to Black Canadas, is not to suggest that diasporic elsewheres is limited to Blackness. We would argue that all settler Canadians are connected to elsewheres. Secondly, in using Siermerling's term, we, like Lizette Gerber, are as equally guided by McKittrick not intending the term to be "reducing black specificities to an all-encompassing elsewhere" (simply not Canadian) (99).

extra-Canadian content as Canadian. Invoking notions of a larger geo-politics of racial capitalism where first world development relies on the thwarted development of the "so-called third world," Collett correctly argues that "Senior's poetry acts to insert the Caribbean within the world and to remind Canadians of their relationship to the Caribbean and that world" (82). Implied in the first part of Collett's statement is the idea that Senior has a right to use first world publishing platforms to foreground the Caribbean; she feels no reservation in inscribing the Caribbean in the world, including nations like Canada. Further, the entangled history of Canada and the Caribbean is illustrated by Trinidadian Canadian Dionne Brand who shows that Canada carries over the diasporic colonial legacy from Britain through "Lloyd's Bank… who got their bullish start insuring slave cargo" (qtd. in Collett 82). Other writers such as Jamaican Canadian Lillian Allen go beyond this diasporic colonial paradigm to Canada's direct engagement in extractive (neo)colonialism in the Caribbean through companies such as Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) and ALCAN (Allen "I Fight Back"): "ITT, ALCAN, KAISER, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce/ these are privilege [sic] names in my country/ but I am illegal here" (*Women* 139).[11] The entangled histories of racial capitalism and colonialist violence make the Caribbean subject a Canadian concern in Caribbean Canadian writing, an issue we return to later in this introduction. The return to these histories of violence produces a poetics of discomfort that perhaps is not agreeable to the civil palate of Canadian literary and cultural criticism. The Canadian nation may be better engaged as the Canadian international, a place where the world comes and a place that engages other worlds, like the Caribbean, deemed available for exploitation.

Caribbean Canadian as Black Canadian?

Although Curdella Forbes in her 2005 publication *From Nation to Diaspora* suggests that we are making the nation less a conceptual crux of Caribbean studies, is Canadian studies still obsessed with the nation as a centralizing construct? Earlier, in Bucknor's 1998 Ph.D. thesis, he envisioned the Caribbean Canadian literary archive as establishing Canada as a "confluence of diasporas" (20), thereby already marking the "multicultural" Canadian nation as already widening to what Siemerling refers to as Canadian "elsewhere[s]" (158). Yet as

11. See also G.E. Clarke's account in which he produces evidence of both Canada's imperial ambitions for the Caribbean—various plans to annex islands such as Jamaica and the Bahamas—and capitalist incursion into the Caribbean: "although Canada never established a political empire within the Caribbean, its capitalists have been perennially present" (282).

recently as 2015, Canadian critic Paul Barrett in *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism* maintains the importance of the nation in his interrogation of "diaspora, race, multiculturalism" (1). Three creative writers, who are Caribbean Canadian, form the bedrock of his study that aims to interrogate Canada's racist, multicultural nationalism. As Barrett correctly argues, the "cold mechanisms of racism operate subtly, invisibly, and persistently in Canada" (8). Due to racism's persistence and, perhaps, the urgent need for interrogations of the kind of racism that overshadows immigrant exclusions, Caribbean Canadian writing has been put in service of Black Canadian cultural politics. Consequently, Barrett contends that the narratives of the Canadian nation—multiculturalism, hyphenated designations, colonialism, anti-black racism—need interrogation and he sees Black Canadian writing doing this work. While the Black Lives Matter Movement in Canada (and throughout the world) continues to engage in this disruption of racial capitalism, it also makes important demands for systemic change. Even so, Ronald Cummings and Nalini Mohabir see the containment of Caribbean Canadian writing within the nation as a limit. They reference Barrett's "chapter on the Caribbean-Canadian writer Clarke" as paradigmatic of Barrett's "demand for Clarke's [and, by extension, Caribbean Canadian writers'] inclusion in Canadian national canons" (4). For Cummings and Mohabir, "rather than simply seeking to confirm a place within nationalist discourses and canons for Black writers and writing in Canada," their articulation of a "community of relation exceeds the nation as the space of dialogue (even as it intervenes from the geographic space of Canada)" (4). This idea of a "community of relation" is reminiscent of Maynard and Simpson's community coalitions: "we are both committed to thinking through what it means to engage in community-building across communities and toward building Black and Indigenous futures without relying on appeals to whiteness or to the state" (quoted in Davis 32). Beyond Barrett's use of Austin Clarke to show the racial limits of the nation, Bucknor has argued that Clarke exposes Canada's expansion into Black Atlantic intimate and political networks, thereby recognizing Canada's place in the world of Black transnationalism and acknowledging "the community of relation" Clarke achieved through affective artistic alliances ("Canada in Black Transnational Studies" 53).[12]

For other interlocutors of race in Canada, such as Karina Vernon, the nation is not the orienting axis; regional literary production is her starting point. While at some level the regional representation of race reflects what happens generally at the level of the nation, it displaces the centrality of the multicultural state and its limits from this raced recovery. In bringing this archive to public

12. See also Kris Singh's Ph.D. dissertation (34-63).

attention and into public circulation, Vernon is not just revising literary history, but also re-orienting critical approaches, as well as re-reading literary archives. This recovered archive (including Caribbean Canadian arts workers) shifts the predominant reading of the prairies as a naturalized geographical construct, to one that Vernon views as an "ideational space" (3). Using geographer Nicolas Entrikin's definition of "ideational space" as "a field 'in which individual and collective identities are worked out,'" Vernon views the prairie relationally (3). Consequently, rather than viewing the "sanitizing" of black cultural production from the literary and critical construction of the prairies as primarily evidence of the erasure of black lives, she has shown how race was central to the making of the region. As she argues, "writing between 1872 and 2019, black authors reveal the key role race has played in shaping the prairies as a region, politically, culturally, and ideologically" (2-3). The very act of "rejecting [black] presence and producing it as the outside boundary that defined the legitimate spaces of the region" was an acknowledgement of the presence of blackness. Rather than just a belated "blackening" of the prairies,[13] Vernon's project recognizes black presences in Early Canada, much like the Ph.D work of Phanuel Antwi in which he demonstrated "what cultural work 'undefined and indefinable' blackness did in early Canada and in contemporary imaginings of it" (iii). Also, like Anne Collett who sees Caribbean Canadian writing as showing Canada connected to the world, Vernon's approach resists the focalization on the nation, but shows how regional literatures, through the black prairie archive (25% of which are Caribbean Canadian writers), connect to the wider world. For her, "Black writers produce the prairies differently … as a place that is connected to and transformed by its relation to the black world, including the transatlantic slave trade and resulting cultures and networks of the black Atlantic" (3). The use of Caribbean Canadian archives under black prairie cultural production offers us some productive concepts to think through the value of this archive to Canada, the Caribbean, and the world. For Vernon, the black prairie archive establishes relationality as a central concept that connects Canada internationally, mobilizes an ethics of archival relations engaging in reciprocal sociality, and redefines historical entanglements to emphasize empowerment and not extraction.

13. While there is no doubt that Barrett has the laudable intention to critically assess the shortfalls of the masked and contradictory racial profiling of multiculturalism, the term "blackening" might suggest that blackness was absent from Canada all along. Though we understand that Barrett uses 'blackening" as a restorative gesture, it also carries the other connotation of the reductive, imperative interpellation of people of colour into performing/inhabiting blackness as a subject position because of a strict racial logic. To read Tessa McWatt, for example, as a Black subject, is to restrict the elasticity of her Caribbean Canadian racial and ethnic variability.

Moving from an emphasis on nation and multiculturalism by Barrett, and region and the archive by Vernon, we turn to Andrea Davis who gives priority to gender and intersectionality as a means of engaging Caribbean Canadian artistic production. Although taken from a different vantage point, she, like Vernon, also offers us the concepts of relationality and ethics, plus a suspicion about the potential for equity and justice in postcolonial nationalisms, for either Canada or Jamaica. So, like Barrett, the nation appears in Davis' account. However, the optimistic investment that Barrett seems to have in the multicultural nation's capacity to incorporate Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of colour within its regime is robustly challenged by Davis. She dubs the postcolonial settler nation as the "hegemonic nation" and the Jamaican Canadian critic positions herself as an Afro Caribbean woman seeking to "ground her sense of self," even as she faces gender, class, and race precarity in both Canada and Jamaica (1). The idea of the grounding of the Caribbean Canadian, is not so much an "identity quandary" as G.E. Clarke sees it, but a matter of negotiating the restrictive patriarchal, heteronormative, and racial capitalist regimes the Afro Caribbean Canadian woman confronts. While G.E. Clarke's question of "ungrounding" finds resonance in this gendered, intersectional account, which is both personally and communally related, grounding is not a matter of simply belonging, but more about how to live ethically and how to "*be* in the world" (xiii). As she notes, "I use the term 'be/longing' … (differentiated with a slash) … not to mark a desire for national belonging, but to signal Black women's right to be; as in, to exist in time and place across our differences without fear" (xiii). Senior's "ungrounded" creative activities in Canada reroute our critical endeavours to Canada's "entangled history" of racial capitalism in the Caribbean that raises ethical questions about transnational dispossessions.

In her work, Davis insists on an ethical basis for resisting inclusion in Canada. In parting company from Barrett's optimism in Canada and canons, she questions the terms on which she might be included, when she asks, "is it possible for a Black woman—or anyone, for that matter—to live in Canada and participate *ethically* in the project of the capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal nation state" (xiii; emphasis ours). This ethical concern is not about establishing some self-righteous posture around the gospel of racial reckoning, but perhaps more to signal the value in the politics of discomfort that might be generative in Caribbean Canadian consciousness. To "imagine the grounds of Caribbean Canadian consciousness" requires a decolonial, transnational approach. G.E. Clarke's seeming regret that Caribbean Canadians are landed, but not grounded in Canada (116), Barrett's lament about the raced erasure and disavowal of Caribbean Canadians in Canada, and Olive Senior's uneasy relationship with Canada may all be fruitful to our ethical response as Davis argues to refuse "complicity with racial capitalism" and to "make the nation accountable for the violence of Black subjugation

and Indigenous conquest" (5). Finding common cause with indigeneity and other subaltern subjects is to recognize a history of hegemonic entanglements that requires interruption and challenge. Notions of groundedness are also central to some of the contributions in this volume. For example, Lizette Gerber's extended analysis of Nalo Hopkinson's speculative fiction in her article, "'There is no solid ground beneath us': The Shoals and Detours of Nalo Hopkinson's 'The Glass Bottle Trick,' 'Precious,' and 'Greedy Choke Puppy'" revolves around the concept of "ungroundedness" and the power of women's creativity in imagining other futures for Caribbean Canadian subjectivities. Gerber connects "ideas of self-creation and subjectivity … with the imagery of shoals and detours to emphasize … the interconnectedness of physical geographies and metaphorical understandings within the diasporic self of Caribbean Canadian identity" (54). For Vernon and Davis, to "imagine the grounds of Caribbean Canadian consciousness" (G.E. Clarke 261) not only requires epistemological shifts but must also include commitments to ethics and relationality.

Caribbean Canadian Writing, Black Canadian Studies, and Indigenous Studies

It is not surprising then that several contemporary scholars explore Black, Caribbean, and Indigenous relations in the Americas—a space characterized by the interaction of settler colonialism, empire, and slavery—as a consideration of the positionality of so-called "arrivants" to the region. Within the context of Canada, Sto:Loh poet and critic Lee Maracle has suggested that immigration policies represent a settler colonial legitimizing of "chronic and continuous invasion" (qtd. in Vernon, *The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing* 152), a further rendering of Indigenous bodies as absent, precarious, and lacking sovereignty.[14] Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence argue that Black people who cannot trace a heritage to Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island "exist in a profoundly contradictory relationship to Indigenous peoples," as, despite sharing a history of brutality and marginalization under colonial regimes, they

14. Even as Maracle offers this insightful critique of Canadian immigration policies, her solidarities with Black peoples transnationally is unquestionable. In *I Am Woman,* she asserts her politics clearly: "To Black mother do I offer a piece of CanAmerica, unconditionally, for she had to sacrifice so many of her finest daughters. With her alone do I strike a partnership, an equal right to rebuild a nation more lovely than settlers can imagine. Everyone else will have to fall in line or be left behind, outside the warm circles of our fires" (120-21).

"have little option but to struggle for power as settlers in Canada" (Amadahy and Lawrence 126). We are sympathetic to this line of argument, especially considering certain histories, such as those of Black Loyalists in the eighteenth century who were offered land grants, settled in Mi'kmaq territory (also known as Nova Scotia), and consequently co-opted in the regime of settler colonialism. However, we contend that such assertions of settler status bypass the complex systems of subjection that positioned Black Loyalists in relation to American sovereignty. This is not to deny the agency these subjects may have had, but rather to suggest that relations within settler colonialism are complex and often contradictory. For example, in the American context, Barbara Krauthamer's *Black Slaves, Indian Masters* details the participation of Indigenous peoples in the enslavement of Africans. However, the acknowledgement of those histories is by no means meant to demonize Indigenous nations, but to suggest that the binaries in which Native and Black relations on Turtle Island have been framed by recent academic discourse—particularly that of the status of the Black peoples as Settler—do little to account for the complex ethical relations that settler colonialism produces.

The status of the slave, native, and settler represents a field of relations that signals different positionalities and practices. Though Tuck and Yang assert that the "settler-native-slave triad structures settler colonialism, this does not mean that settler, native, and slave are analogs that can be used to describe corresponding identities, structural locations, worldviews, and behaviors" (7). From some perspectives within Black Canadian and Indigenous studies, to name the status of the African-diasporic person as Settler ignores the reality that Black peoples have yet to achieve the freedom in which to claim such a privilege; this view is based entirely on the presumption that emancipation has already arrived for Black subjects and that the ontological status of slave has already been surpassed. Jared Sexton argues that current formulations of Black and Native alliances require a reconfiguration of the ontological positions that have been presupposed by scholars in Settler Colonial Studies. He proposes the main ontological difference has to do primarily with the status of the African in the 'New World' and their relationship to indigeneity. Amadahy and Lawrence suggest that from Indigenous perspectives the most horrific aspect of slavery was that it "created generations of 'de-culturalized' Africans, denied knowledge of language, clan, family, and land base, denied even knowledge of who their nations are" (127).[15] This point is taken up by Sexton as the primary

15. Despite these gestures to linguistic and cultural deracination, Caribbean scholars (Brathwaite; Warner-Lewis; Tomlinson) have acknowledged and researched the cultural retentions of Caribbean peoples.

wedge between Black Studies and Native Studies, as while the loss of indigeneity by most Native peoples can be "named and its recovery pursued"—to the extent that it becomes the main focus of their political mobilizations around resurgence and land claims—for Black peoples the loss of indigeneity can only be acknowledged in an abstract sense and "its recovery is lost to history, and so something else must (and can) become central to political mobilization" (Sexton 7). Sexton denies the possibility of the total reclamation of language, lineage, kinship, and tradition for descendants of the enslaved, opting instead to insist on the impossibility of a return of any kind in a praxis of abolition. For him, the forming of alliances based on a shared cultural history of indigeneity can never be enough, as the ties that contemporary Black people have to their indigeneity cannot justify a politics of resurgence. Whilst in the past, in the early period of chattel slavery in the Americas, alliances based on cultural similarities such as "a spiritual worldview, land-informed practices, and … kinship structures" (Amadahy and Lawrence 127) could bring about meaningful collaboration, contemporary Blacks require something wholly different in order to negotiate how "'stolen people on stolen land'" can be situated "in relation to today's existing Native peoples who are still struggling to reclaim stolen lands" (Amadahy and Lawrence 125).

Despite the differential positionality of both subjects, Sexton's conclusion proposes a re-evaluation not of Indigenous demands or Black positionality, but rather to think of alternate modes that a praxis of abolition might create. His affirmation, in a direct rebuttal of the binaries established by Amadahy and Lawrence, is that "Blacks need not be indigenous and/or enslaved Africans in order to be allies to native peoples in the Americas," but rather what is needed is *creative thinking* that asks, "What if there are, and will have always been, ways to pursue settler decolonization otherwise than as indigenous peoples and their immigrant allies, a movement from within that slavery whose abolition is yet to come?" (Sexton 7). Our goal in this survey of critical approaches so far has not been to accentuate divisions or differential thinking towards decolonization as sites of conflict, as this would only be for the advantage of the settler colonial state which wishes to see our communities in perpetual crisis. Instead, by making these distinctions and identifying difference, we are seeking to contribute to a conversation which so far has been limitedly taken up by scholars about what impedes the "analytic and political dream of a 'Savage'/Slave encounter?" (Wilderson 182). Identification of difference here is also not meant to signal a preference for the conclusions that are arrived at by Sexton (which is that the current ideological positions must be abandoned for solidarity) or Amadahy and Lawrence's failure to fully account for the ontological status of Blackness. Rather, in bringing to the fore these concerns, we are more interested in what Caribbean Canadian cultural production might offer to these conversations.

We contend that Caribbean Canadian writing complicates the binaries that inform the current conversations in Black and Indigenous studies. Caribbean Canadian studies detours from Black Canadian studies by not centring Black ontologies (and differential claims to sovereignty) alone but affirming the need to account for creolized Caribbean subjectivities, which phenotypically may be Black, mixed race, Indigenous, Indian, and/or Chinese Caribbean, yet marked by concomitant histories of slavery, genocide, and indentureship. It is from the epistemological background of the Caribbean, that new languages for thinking about Caribbean presence in Canada against impositions of Settler identity can be articulated. Edward Kamau Brathwaite conceives of "arrivant" as a category or concept rooted in Afro-Caribbean unsettled and unsettling relations to place which manifest in diasporas. Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) subsequently borrows the term arrivant "to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe" (xix). Through this, Byrd expands the arrivant from solely Afro-Caribbean and transmutes it to be able to signify the multiplicities of forced labour, migrations, and dispossessions that inform the Americas. This expansion of the conceptualization of the term arrivant fundamentally enables us to consider the relation between the settler-colonial nation state and, for example, both non-Black and non-European peoples with significant histories in the Americas, such as Indian and Chinese Caribbean peoples. As Angie Wong observes, "while both Indigenous people and arrivants are made subordinate to settler colonial nation-making projects, their experiences under settler colonialism differ vastly on the basis of being racialized differently. Settlers will allow agreeable or desirable arrivants to assimilate into the norms of the settler state, such as by way of extending apologies to a historically wronged group, but this is entirely for the benefit of the settler colony" (93). Wong's caveat that these inclusions are in the service of the settler colony underscore the importance of articulating differing relations to the state in ways that do not obscure Indigenous presence, or ongoing settler colonial violences.

Grounds for Landing in Caribbean Canadian Writing

What the discourses above highlight are how Caribbean people have already begun to negotiate their presence on the Indigenous lands that constitute Canada. The consideration of what it means to inhabit the lands of dispossessed and disappeared Indigenous peoples is not new to Caribbean Canadian writers. Despite histories of cultural and material genocide, Indigenous people continue to inhabit and affect the—psychic and material—realities of Caribbean life. The work of Olive Senior exemplifies an attentiveness to these complex

histories. As a Caribbean Canadian writer her work is marked by an ethics that understands contemporary inhabitants of the Caribbean as *making life*[16] on Indigenous lands in the afterlife of slavery, indentureship, and genocide. Senior's writing challenges renderings of Indigenous people in the Caribbean as dead and belonging to the past by pointing to Indigenous cosmogonies and their impact on the cultural inheritances of contemporary Caribbean people, as well as the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in the region.[17]

Though a writer living in Canada for several decades, Olive Senior's work is almost exclusively set in the Caribbean. Anne Collett argues that Senior's "focus on the Caribbean acts not only to assert the value of Caribbean community but to lay claim to, and indeed to remind readers of, the value of that community to Canada" (81). The "value" of the Caribbean community to Canada, we would argue, is dissimilar to the narrative of multiculturalist diversity that is often touted by Canadian government officials. Rather, the "value" that allows for Senior's writing *about* the Caribbean to be resonant *to* Canadian audiences is rooted in Caribbean people's ethical and onto-epistemological orientation to histories of colonialism and their ongoing presence on lands they are not indigenous to. Across Senior's oeuvre, is a call to presence Indigenous cosmogonies in negotiating the conditions of contemporary Caribbean life. Senior's landmark collection of poetry, *Gardening in the Tropics*, focalizes Taíno history, knowledges, and practices alongside African, Indian, and Chinese negotiations of place in the Caribbean. In doing so, Senior's writing models an ethics for Caribbean Canadian people, in her attentiveness to the "shared catastrophe" (Gahndi 45) of Indigenous genocide, and transatlantic slavery and indentureship; Senior's writing suggests what it means to be in relation to Indigenous knowledges, without foregoing recognition of Black precarity and without casting Indigenous peoples in the past. The poetry of Lillian Allen is also rife with moments that suggest an awareness of the shared precarity of Caribbean and Indigenous North American life. In her poem "I Saw a Perfect Tree Today," Allen juxtaposes industrialization in Canada with Indigenous dispossession. An Indigenous figure in the poem remarks, "Where I come from they cut them all down, / long, long, long before I was born" which prompts Allen's persona to lament

16. In Lorna Goodison's poetry and fiction, references to "making life" emerge as a Caribbean diasporic rhetorical mode of place-making. In Edward Baugh's review of Goodison's *Controlling the Silver,* he writes that, "this Jamaican expression, 'making life,' constitutes and affirms a variation on a standard global phenomenon. By acting out the transformation of 'exile' into 'making life,' [Goodison] represents the creative capacity of a people, their capacity for 'making' something of circumstance, necessity, and lack, as in another Jamaican saying, 'turn you hand make fashion'" ("Making Life").
17. See for example, her poem, "Meditation on Yellow" in *Gardening in the Tropics*.

that "This land, this land / Where cities have sprouted, / Blooming glistening skyscrapers at night / T'was all covered with trees once / One big forest we were once /All perfect trees" (np). Both Senior and Allen's engagement with indigeneity signal their investment in building community around shared environmental issues.

As a Caribbean Canadian, Senior offers the space of Canada a model of what it means to meaningfully engage in good relations with Indigenous peoples and histories. Additionally, Senior offers an affirmation of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's assertion that a collective life built on solidarity in search of a better world "does not belong to black people alone but to all who must be against this worlding of racial capitalism, to all who have suffered a displacement of–in the murderous imposition of–body, of land, of home, to all who would live in earth, as flesh, in and as the theory and practice of indigeneity under duress" (np). The concept of "indigeneity under duress" as characteristic of the life of many who endured the violence of modernity, is a compelling frame especially when considering that racialized peoples in the Caribbean "were indigenous, displaced in the most brutal way by European sociopathic greed" but who "were constrained to feel it as the settled coloniality of their own atmospheric condition" (np). The work of Caribbean Canadian writers like Senior urges people in the Caribbean as well as Canada to foreground the matrices of history that render different relations to the land. This gesture offers scholars in Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies to consider alternate modes of engagement with cross-racial solidarities that depart from the contemporary models emphasizing competing identity politics at the expense of collectivity.

Beyond the work of Olive Senior, Caribbean Canadian cultural production also models what it means to engage with Indigenous communities as a Caribbean person within Canada itself. The Jamaican Canadian poet Lorna Goodison's engagement with Indigenous life in Canada is also worthy of further study particularly as her very identity as a Caribbean Canadian writer is often obscured. In poems such as "Spirit Catcher," "Rites," and "Medicine Bundle of a Blackfoot Woman," Goodison situates her own African Caribbean epistemologies alongside those of Indigenous North American peoples. For Goodison, affective affiliation between herself and Indigenous peoples is borne through a shared commitment to spiritual worldviews that resist the extractive practices of coloniality. This concern with the spiritual is signaled through not only the content of these poems which invoke Indigenous figures such as the "Blackfoot medicine woman," (80) and the "Big Indian hawking / spirit catchers," (75) but also through the title of the poems themselves. These moments of indigeneity in the North American context which appear across Goodison's oeuvre are worthy of scholarly inquiry to further elucidate attempts at building collectivity and solidarity among racialized and diasporic peoples in Canada.

Similarly worthy of further study is how the work of Tessa McWatt negotiates Caribbean, particularly mixed race Caribbean, experiences alongside Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. In McWatt's novel *Out of My Skin*, the protagonist Daphne—a thirty-year-old adoptee to Anglo-white Canadian parents—attempts to understand "her birth family's Guyanese background and the circumstances of her biological mother's immigration to Canada" (Medovarski 59). Throughout *Out of My Skin*, —which is largely set in Montréal during the Oka crisis, a 1990 land dispute between Mohawk people and the town of Oka, Quebec, which lasted 77 days—the question, "what are you?" which haunts Daphne, is paralleled with the Mohawk people's desire to assert their sovereignty and right to self-determination. The coupling of this individual Caribbean Canadian subjectivity alongside Indigenous peoples' struggles produces a narrative that intimates the *grounds* on which Caribbean people attempt to make life on Indigenous *land*.

Exposing the violence of the question, "what are you?" defines McWatt's literary endeavors, and is most explicitly interrogated in her memoir, *Shame on Me: An Anatomy of Race and Belonging*. 'What are you?'— asked of an eight-year-old McWatt in her "suburban Toronto elementary school" (13)—serves as the point of departure for her exploration of the pathologizing narratives of the racialized body, and the challenges of liberal citizenship in a settler colonial nation. Rather than seeking to answer the violent and racist question posed to her throughout her life, McWatt opts instead to offer a critique on the bio-essentialism that undergirds contemporary understandings of identity politics. For McWatt, "[t]he single most powerful tool we have is our language and its ability to reinvent realities," and so, she "desire[s] a new language of belonging. A who-are-you space to gather in with others, rather than the biological 'what' am I" (205). By situating the politics of belonging and identification within the "space [we] gather in with others," McWatt asserts the value of relational encounters, more so than ethnoracial-based identity politics, as the basis for anti-racist activism. McWatt encourages shifts in how we language the questions of subjectivity and belonging and turns towards alliances built upon shared values and shared desires for a renewed politics of recognition that is disaggregated from the essentialist logics that inform Canada's regime of liberal multiculturalism and settler colonialism. In doing so, McWatt affirms what Caribbean Canadian may offer the nation of Canada. McWatt's rejection of a liberal identity politics allows for a more expansive understanding of Caribbean Canadian, not as a category interested in individual identity, but as a way of thinking two epistemologies alongside each other. Put differently, Caribbean Canadian can be understood as a way of thinking, what might the Caribbean—a site of cultural and racial hybridity, the world's most modern civilization, and a space where multiple identities have been forced to make relations to land in different ways—offer

Canadian and Indigenous studies, and other avenues of thinking. In highlighting the work of Caribbean Canadian artists here, we hope to underscore how the foregrounding of Blackness in relation to Indigeneity disappears Caribbean Canadian associated epistemologies that would otherwise be valuable to these discourses. Indeed, what concerns us, and instigated this special issue, are the ways in which the work of Caribbean Canadian cultural workers disappears under institutional priorities that often fetishize and hierarchize precarity.

Caribbean Canadian Ecologies

In a *Harvard Magazine* interview Fred Moten argues that "the work of black culture was never to civilize America—it's about the ongoing production of the alternative. At this point it's about the preservation of the earth" (McCarthy). Moten's invocation of the 'preservation of the earth' to the casual observer appears figurative, even lyrical, and thus without material consequence. However, what would it mean to take the figurative as consequential, what would it mean to think of Black and Caribbean life as central to the ecology and the threats faced by the environment? The emergence of theories of the Anthropocene are evidently exclusionary in their totalizing narrative that foregrounds certain manifestations of life and demands accountability of the human in relation to their belatedly occurring actions towards the environment. But the case cannot be read as this undemanding. As Elizabeth Povinelli and others have highlighted, the relational experiences of other inhabitants of the earth differ from those within the Western conceptualization of the human. Some lives exist despite the human, they persist relationally to the earth as opposed to dominating it.

Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* employs figuration as an intellectual praxis to probe the conditions in which Black life is made to suffer in the ongoing afterlife of slavery. The notion of 'afterlife of slavery' is key here and continues to circulate as a compelling turn of phrase in contemporary Black, Caribbean, and Diaspora Studies. The afterlife is sustained in a state of recursion through the weather which provokes modes of *being* in the afterlife that has the primary goal of survivance. Sharpe figurates and repurposes the weather and climate to meet the demands of the Black diaspora. Weather becomes "the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack" (104) and slavery is always the undercurrent fuelling this ecology. Sharpe's figuration of Blackness emerges alongside Sowande Mustakeem *Slavery at Sea*, which takes up figuration within the weather as a mode of thinking about Black diasporic life. The publication of Sharpe and Mustakeem's texts in late 2016 and their focus on the environment [and breathing] as linked to the slave trade

can be read as signalling the response of Black scholars to the Anthropocene entering public discourse and its ongoing elision of Black life.

In *Slavery at Sea* Mustakeem argues that "The inability to breathe worsened slaves' conditions as they crossed the Atlantic" and that "respiratory problems frequently emerged through immersion in and the ingestion of *toxic air* from bodily fluids and excrement" (60; emphasis added). "Toxic air" stands out as immobilizing as it pollutes; it is a belatedness of death, and failure to maintain the environment, long before the emergence of fossil fuel and industrialization. If "a stigma of filth became associated with a ship's sail and Atlantic arrival within different ports," (62) that stink continues today as a product of slavery, a pollutant of Black and Caribbean life. Each time a Black person's blood spills onto grass/ into water/on the pavement, each time a black body is made to stop breathing, we are reminded of the nexus between Black life, racial capitalism, and ecological crises. The figuration of climate and weather in the wake of the Anthropocene asks of us to *believe* in Black life, *before* the life beyond the human (the locus of post-humanist desires), to think laterally about the belated and recursive present of Blackness. Considering new materialist theories emerging in the form of epochs such as the Anthropocene, which, in its elision of Blackness, "solidify and make continuous the colonial project of violence … What kinds of ethical viewing and reading practices must we employ, now, in the face of these onslaughts? What might practices of [figuration] offer?" (Sharpe 116-17). As Sharpe articulates, "the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies. When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of antiblackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?" (106). The work of improvisation, re-imagining, and indeed poetry is central to the creation of Black ecologies.

In this Special Issue, Titilola Aiyegbusi reads Brand's *Ossuaries* as ecopoetry, particularly in its attentiveness to the varied entanglements between the human and nonhuman worlds. Aiyegbusi's argument in "Situating the Ecological in Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*" centralizes the relationship between anthropogenic environmental catastrophes and marginalized bodies, and also reads *Ossuaries* as invested in prompting ethical considerations of "the histories of the spaces we inhabit, of lost dialects, cultures, identities, lives, and worlds" (79). Through close readings of the poem, Aiyegbusi asserts that "woven into the fabric of [anthropogenic] destruction of nature, are the bones of Black bodies, disarticulated, branded, scattered, and held in ossuaries" (80). Similarly, in the poetic contributions of Canisia Lubrin to this Special Issue, climate catastrophe accentuates and accompanies the laments, erotics, and demands of the Black subjects. "In the Middle of the Burning" evinces a concern with social and environmental crises, Black intimacies, and histories that structure modernity, through lines such as

"the dogged tide we make / the world shoring its dark scars between seasons," "the granite sky," "the velocity / of the burning world," "snow in May," "the frosted rich," and "a fearsome autumn ending spring" (207-208). Moreover, Lubrin's "This that We Have" depicts a post-apocalyptic world, which is simultaneously the present, the past, and an indeterminate future. The temporal ambiguity signaled through the repetition of "call the year anything" followed by a temporal example, "3020-something," and "1492," suggests the long durée of environmental catastrophe stemming from colonial contact in the Americas to a distant future (209). Surrealist images and diction referencing degradation further this coupling of ecological crises with coloniality, as evidenced in lines such as, "the diaphragm of oceans, soils we find bearable," "flesh-chambered engines we widen widen like the sea," "every sunset, an emergency," "our preventable catastrophes," and "the plantations at the sea's beginning bend" (209-210). Lastly, Myriam J.A. Chancy's excerpt from her novel *What Storm, What Thunder* details the life of Anne, a Haitian working for a non-profit organization in Kigali, Rwanda months following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Anne reflects on the capitalist orientations of environmental disaster relief organizations, calling them "disaster vultures" (178). She continues, "in our line of work, it would be the emergency shelter crowd we would see first… Shelters had become a business opportunity" (178). This excerpt prompts consideration of the capitalist and neo-colonialist undercurrents of contemporary environmental and social crises, particularly as it relates to the lives of Caribbean peoples.

Formal Experiments in Caribbean Canadian Writing

Linzey Corridon's interview with H. Nigel Thomas offers engaging inquiries into the metanarrative of Thomas' oeuvre; Montréal as a significant site for Caribbean Canadian cultural production; as well as the ethical, psychological, and intergenerational terrains of Caribbean diasporic experiences. Corridon's mobilization of the interview lends to our thinking about the methodologies available to scholars of Caribbean Canadian culture. As he notes, this interview "is only one of many ongoing conversations unfolding across Canada between Caribbean and non-Caribbean peoples" (157). In recent years, the interview has been prioritized as a form suited to the recovery and recognition of Caribbean Canadian archives, figures, and movements as it foregrounds relationality as a praxical site of knowledge production. The interview can rebuff traditional scholarship's tendencies to reinforce masculinist and colonial modes of self-defensiveness, as it "reach[es] for different ways of inhabiting our scholarly domains—and more primordially, of inhabiting ourselves" (Singh 8). Ronald Cummings and Nalini Mohabir's interviews with Faizal Deen, Frank Birbalsingh,

and ahdri zhina mandiela are among the recent output that signal the utility of the form. Additionally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has produced new archives of conversations with Caribbean Canadian figures resulting from digital recordings of book launches, panels, and lectures. This turn to the digital in the midst of unfolding global crises "encapsulates [how Caribbean people] sit together from time to time, reasoning about life" (Corridon 157), increases the accessibility of Caribbean Canadian voices to interested publics, and extends the durationality of the knowledges produced through relational encounters. In addition to its appearance in this Special Issue as a critical practice, the interview emerges as a creative form in a creative contribution from Shane Book, an imaginative interview that serves as the prologue to his new work of poetry.

Among the highlights of the interview between Corridon and Thomas are their exploration of how Caribbean Canadian writers circulate in the Caribbean, as well as the relationship between multiculturalism and Caribbean Canadian identity. This interview raises important concerns that we have pondered ourselves, namely, to what extent are Caribbean writers in Canada read within the Caribbean region? And what are the networks of circulation and institutional recognition available to Caribbean diasporic writers within the Caribbean itself? In recent years, answers to these questions have become somewhat discernable as literary culture has found more institutionalized grounds in the region through festivals such as Calabash (Jamaica), the Nature Island Literary Festival (Dominica), WordALIVE (St. Lucia), NGC Bocas Lit Fest (Trinidad and Tobago), and the Bim Literary Festival and Book Fair (Barbados); the emergence of new literary magazines such as *Moko* and *Pree: Caribbean Writing*; as well as podcasts and digital communities like *Rebel Woman Lit* (Jamaica) and *Bios and Bookmarks* (Trinidad and Tobago).[18] Yet, for Thomas, there is still much to be done as he explains, "I don't think I've ever sold more than fifty copies of any of my books in the entire Caribbean" (160). While this is indeed lamentable, Corridon's response that "those are 50 copies that end up in different households. Each reader then internalizes your writing, becoming both a reader and an orator of the narratives you create" (160) is illuminating in its foregrounding of the informal and incalculable networks of circulation in the Caribbean which are elided by the metrics of the publishing industry. Additionally, the

18. In particular, the NGC Bocas Lit Fest has featured several Caribbean Canadian writers since its inception in 2011, namely, André Alexis, Cyril Dabydeen, David Chariandy, Myriam Chancy, Dionne Brand, Gail Morong, H. Nigel Thomas, Honor Ford-Smith, Olive Senior, Kaie Kellough, Madeline Coopsammy, Nalo Hopkinson, Neil Bissoondath, Canisia Lubrin, Pamela Mordecai, Shane Book, Shani Mootoo, Sheena Kamal, Yolanda T. Marshall, and Zalika Reid-Benta.

interview with Thomas offers interesting grounds for considering the lingering currency of multiculturalism for some Caribbean Canadian writers. For Thomas, who affirms multiculturalism as a category through which to understand himself and his work, "multicultural need not exclude Caribbean Canadian … what I am overflows—or has expanded—the perimeter of Caribbean Canadian" (166). Thomas's understanding of "Caribbean Canadian" as a confining identity emerges as an important prompt for future scholarship to explore how identity politics have been mobilized in the popular imaginary, and thus, incorporates Caribbean Canadian under a capitalist liberal regime.[19] Despite his disavowal, Thomas nonetheless asserts that "there's much to be said about the contribution to Caribbean literature by the Caribbean diaspora writers living in Canada" (167), a comment that this special issue affirms.

Queer Caribbean Canadian *Returns*

H. Nigel Thomas' presence in this Special Issue signals the significant history of queer writing and cultural production by Caribbean writers in Canada. In his tracing of queer Caribbean writing, Silvio Torres-Saillant observes that there appears to be a new "generation bringing … energies to Caribbean writing, [including] Jamaican Kei Miller and Trinidadian Anton Nimblett, who join an earlier generation of mainly Canadian-based LGBT writers such as Dionne Brand, [Makeda] Silvera, and [H.] Nigel Thomas" (155). This comment is important as it reorients a genealogy of queer cultural production that is often obscured in criticism of Caribbean Canadian writers by scholars in Canadian, Caribbean, diasporic, and queer studies. In addition to the writers above, the archive of queer Caribbean Canadian cultural production includes figures such as Nalo Hopkinson, Faizal Deen, Whitney French, Linzey Corridon, Cornel Bogle, Trey Anthony, Shani Mootoo, Richard Fung, Suzette Mayr, and d'bi.young anitafrika among others. Our insistence on Caribbean Canadian is not meant to fetishize, nor essentialize, this category, but to insist that considering the field of relations inherent in Caribbean Canadian continues to raise pertinent questions that enrich our analyses. In their introduction to the 2005 special issue of the *Journal of West Indian Literature* on Caribbean Canadian writing, Bucknor and Coleman characterize Caribbean publishing and criticism as still "grappl[ing] with issues of [gender and sexuality]" even as Caribbean Canadian cultural production

19. See Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò's *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)* for an examination of liberalism's co-option of identity politics, which Táíwò argues has stripped it of its political substance and liberatory potential.

offered useful texts "for exploring these crucial issues" (xix-xxx). Since 2005, queer visibility and institutional recognition in the Caribbean has increased significantly. Recent historic rulings and legislations in the Cayman Islands, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, and Trinidad and Tobago have allowed for a reduction in the legal challenges faced by queer Caribbean people. Additionally, queer visibility in the region has been marked by highly publicized Pride events. While these actions are noteworthy, it is important not to overstate their impact on everyday attitudes towards queer people in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, they signal compelling shifts in the context of the Caribbean from the time of Bucknor and Coleman's previous assessment. Moreover, Caribbean scholarship has expanded its investigations into queer life, with notable publications emerging, as well as conferences, and university courses.[20] Consequently, considering these developments in the region, it is worth asking, what does queer Caribbean Canadian writing still have to offer to the Caribbean region?

To us, the value of Caribbean Canadian cultural production to queer Caribbean life today is to foreground the importance of recognition and recovery of queer archives. Enacting a version of Rinaldo Walcott's "queer returns," Caribbean Canadian writing today prompts readers to acknowledge the progresses made in the contemporary, whilst simultaneously urging investigations into queer histories, moments, and fictions that have been obscured by hegemonic constructions of sexuality. We are attentive to recent publications by—and about—Caribbean people in Canada, like the excerpt from Suzette Mayr's novel, *The Sleeping Car Porter,* which narrativizes the journey of a Black Bahamian sleeping car porter on a train travelling from Montréal to Vancouver. In an interview regarding this novel, Mayr explains, "part of my writing about him is trying to dig into the archives and find people like me there. Who are my ancestors, who are my family in terms of people who are Black and queer in Canada" (Goddard). Faizal Deen's *The Greatest Films*, and Antonio Michael Downing's *Saga Boy: My Life of Blackness and Becoming* also interrogate personal and public histories through the perspective of queer recovery to animate questions concerning Caribbean and diasporic constructions of gender and sexualities. Additionally, the Guyanese Canadian scholar Frank Birbalsingh's personal remembrance of his close relationship to the Jamaican-born literary critic

20. See for example manuscripts by Rosamond S. King (2014); Alison Donell (2021); Lyndon K. Gill (2018); Nadia Ellis (2015); Maria Christina Fumagalli, Bénédicte Ledent, and Roberto del Valle Alcalá (2013); Kate Houlden (2016); Rinaldo Waclott (2016); and Thomas Glave (2008); as well as conferences such as Beyond Homophobia at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, and conference presentations at the annual West Indian Literature, and Caribbean Studies Association conferences.

Cliff Lashley in a recent issue of *Caribbean Quarterly* not only seeks to position Lashley as an early queer figure in the region's literatures, but to also orient readers to Lashley's work in Canada as a librarian at the University of Western Ontario in the late 1960s, and thus incorporate him within the archive of Caribbean Canadian.

Several queer returns comprise this Special Issue and raises the value of Caribbean Canadian writing to both Caribbean and Canadian discourses on race, citizenship, sexualities, and gender. H. Nigel Thomas's short story "Cockadoodle Nonsense?" opens with a queer Vincentian Canadian couple on a flight to the Caribbean. Thomas details the conflicts in their relationship, stemming from financial, immigration, gender, and sexual insecurities. He refuses to offer an idyllic narrative of queer Caribbean life in North America, opting instead to demonstrate the competing demands of class, mental illness, and religious identity that inform the subjectivities of his characters. In the literal return to St. Vincent, "to inform [Millington's] mother of [their] marriage," Thomas intimates the complexities that attend to the confluence of a Caribbean Canadian consciousness with material space of the Caribbean (173). And yet, in foregrounding their return in this short story—and their desire to share their life with family in the region—Thomas signals the shifting demands made of heterosexual Caribbean publics *by* queer people from the region. These demands include not only recognition of themselves as queer men, but also of their multiple positionalities resulting from their experience as Caribbean Canadian.

While Thomas' story interrogates the anxieties attendant to returns to the Caribbean, Lidia María Cuadrado-Payeras' "Alterities in Conflict: The Queer and the Animal in Makeda Silvera's 'Caribbean Chameleon'" focuses on a story by Silvera which dramatizes the return of a woman from Jamaica—her home country—to Canada, the country in which she now resides. Cuadrado-Payeras situates the story as generically multiple, straddling the lines of both fiction and drama through its mobilization of "scriptwriting conventions" (117). Reading the airport setting of "Caribbean Chameleon" as an exemplar of "non-space" which "represent[s] a break in the individual's experience of place where, against the latter's subjective inscription" Cuadrado-Payeras argues that inhabitants of the airport not only "*interpret* … the spatial text" but are required to "*perform* it adequately" (118). Invoking theories of animality, queerness, alterity, and migrant experiences Cuadrado-Payeras furthers our understanding of Silvera's fiction as invested in showing the racist and dehumanizing underpinnings of borders and Canadian civility. Moreover, this article gestures to the limiting conceptions of the human that renders those outside of the conscripts of respectability as non-human, or animal, and thus unincorporated into the national imagination.

Heather Smyth's "'Usable Paradoxical Space': Negotiating Captivity and the Gaze in Michelle Mohabeer's film *Blu in You*" examines the Guyanese Canadian

Mohabeer's work for its critical and creative exploration of "complexities of diasporic, queer, mixed-race, experiences" (138). Smyth argues that Mohabeer's *Blu in You* challenges the hegemonic racial and sexual violences crucial to modernity through its foregrounding of queer Caribbean Canadian women—exemplified in the film through a conversation between Nalo Hopkinson and Andrea Fatona, "archival stills and video images of Black women, especially in entertainment/performance contexts; and in the film's imagery and filmic techniques and its incorporation of queer erotica" (136)— as Sarah Baartman's resistant diasporic inheritors. Smyth's critical intervention, along with the community and performance work discussed earlier, signals the ongoing need to think critically about Caribbean Canadian cultural production beyond the literary.[21]

Translating Memory for Futures Untold

We envision this Special Issue as a gesture to the wide-ranging archive of Caribbean Canadian cultural production. While we have so far foregrounded institutionalized literary figures and publications in our introduction, we by no means wish to signal that as our only interest. However, before detailing our more comprehensive vision of what constitutes the archive of Caribbean Canadian cultural production, we also want to acknowledge other modes of recognition—such as memorials, translations, and collaborations—in honour of

21. Though our attention throughout this introduction has mostly focused on the literary arts, we are also attentive to the ways in which the work of filmmakers expands the archive of Caribbean Canadian cultural production. Many Caribbean Canadian writers have also pursued creative projects in film, demonstrating the intermedia affinities of this archive and their creative practices. For example, Dionne Brand has served as director and narrator for several documentary films. Additionally, Shani Mootoo has produced and directed short films. A number of Caribbean Canadian literary texts have also been adapted for film and television, such as Trey Anthony's *da Kink In My Hair*; and more recently Clement Virgo's adaptation of David Chariandy's *Brother*. Virgo, a Jamaican Canadian filmmaker, maintains an influential presence in Canadian film. Richard Fung and Michelle Mohabeer as well continue to have a prominent presence within Canadian art institutions as video artists. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of Caribbean Canadian filmmakers, we nonetheless want to gesture to how film remains an important media for artists in this archive. This is perhaps most evident in the success of the CaribbeanTales International Film Festival, founded by Trinidadian Canadian filmmaker Frances-Anne Solomon and staged in Toronto. The festival has been an important medium through which Caribbean Canadian films have made their way to audiences, both in Canada and globally, through the festival's online video-on-demand platform.

Caribbean Canadian writers. Following the death of Austin Clarke in 2016, for example, several recognitions of his life have emerged, including Paul Barrett's edited collection, *'Membering Austin Clarke*, a special issue of *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* focusing on Clarke and his writing co-edited by Andrea A. Davis and Leslie Sanders, a celebratory conference on Austin Clarke's legacy held at York University in 2017, and the Royal Ontario Museum's recently commissioned portrait of Clarke by the Jamaican Canadian artist Neville Clarke. We continue to remember Clarke in this Special Issue, through an essay by the Guyanese Canadian writer Cyril Dabydeen. In "'Man, I know 'bout you': A Reminiscence of Austin Clarke," Dabydeen recounts his first encounter with Clarke in Guyana in 1970; his subsequent meeting with Clarke a decade later at the Black Writer in the Canadian Milieu conference at McGill University; his correspondences with Clarke; and his last memorable contact with him at the Miami Book Fair. Dabydeen's recollection affirms the significance of Clarke as the first major Caribbean Canadian writer to be published in Canada.

This Special Issue also features a translation to the introduction of the French pocket-book reprint *Soucougnant,* of David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant*, originally published in French by Éditions Zoé in 2012. The introduction, written by the Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau, and translated to English by Lyse Hébert, is a remarkable moment of recognition of a Caribbean Canadian writer, by one of the most significant Caribbean writers of our time. Chamoiseau celebrates Chariandy as a "writer of relation" ( ) in his attentiveness to metasporic realities, cultural and personal memory, and the figure of the soucouyant in Caribbean folklore. Translation allows for an expansion of the perceived nationalist and linguistic boundaries of Caribbean Canadian writing. The translation to French of *Soucouyant* allows for new readers across the Francophone world to become acquainted with Chariandy's writing. Additionally, this translation of Chamoiseau's introduction, exclusively published in this Special Issue, adds to David Chariandy's archive of literary production and reception in English. A consideration of the linguistic terrain of Caribbean Canadian cultural production also informs Michał Obszyński's contribution to this Special Issue. Obszyński's "From Paris and Rome to Quebec: Reading Fanon in Radical Montreal Intellectual Circles of the 1960s" adds to the critical archive of recent publications—e.g., Austin's *Fear;* Mill; Cummings and Mohabir—concerned with recovering Black and Caribbean Canadian radicalisms in Montréal. The article traces the reception of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* among left-wing intellectuals, artists, and activists in Montréal between 1950 and 1970. Through this, Obszyński further elaborates the role of not only Montréal, but of Caribbean Canadians, in the development of a Black global consciousness, expanding beyond the literary to include community relations and engagements. Moreover, this article furthers our understanding of the reception of publications by Fanon in Canada.

Caribbean Canadian Publishing, Self-Publishing, and Children's Literature

Caribbean Canadian cultural workers have had access to several historical and contemporary publishing opportunities. Simultaneously, these opportunities allowed for a shifting of the scope of the audience for Caribbean Canadian writing, however, in some cases it resulted in the limited availability of some forms of cultural production to wider audiences. While early, predominantly male, writers such as Austin Clarke developed, albeit tenuous, relationships to established Canadian publishers such as McClelland & Stewart, opportunities for publication for other marginalized Caribbean Canadian writers were scant. Consequently, the founding of Sister Vision Press (1985-2001) by Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin was significant. It allowed for more opportunities for Caribbean Canadian writers and was the first press in Canada whose mission was to publish writing by and for women of colour, particularly those living in Canada, but originally from the Caribbean. The significance of Sister Vision Press was not only due to its focus on its recognition of the importance of race and gender, but also sexuality and language. Early publications such as *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* were ground-breaking in their scope and timing; additionally, the linguistic commitment of the press is evidenced in many of its publications being written in creole languages, namely, ahdri zhina mandiela's *Speshal rikwes [Poems in Dialect]*, the Sistren Theatre Collective and Honor Ford-Smith's *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women*, among others. Sister Vision Press also engaged in collaborations with organizations in the Caribbean which resulted in several publications, as well as community development through its offering of workshops and mentorship to emerging writers.

Beyond Sister Vision Press, an often-overlooked publisher of Caribbean Canadian writing is Pamela and Martin Mordecai's Sandberry Press (1988-2005). Initially, based in Jamaica, the press continued its work as both founders moved to Canada in 1993. Sandberry Press has published several Caribbean Canadian writers, such as Edward Baugh,[22] Gloria Escoffery, and Pamela Mordecai, as well as the anthology *Calling Cards: New Poetry from Caribbean/ Canadian Women*. That Pamela Mordecai self-published through Sandberry Press is noteworthy, as it speaks to the resources that marginalized writers draw on to circulate their creative endeavours into the public. Dallas J. Baker contends that "the stigma attached to self-publishing is, surprisingly, a relatively recent phenomena (historically speaking), arising around the same time that

22. Edward Baugh can be considered Caribbean Canadian as his poetry is published with a Canadian publisher and he lived and studied at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada.

publishing houses were transforming into corporations" (np). He argues for tracing the history of the stigmatization of self-publishing alongside histories of gender inequality, especially considering research by Alison Baverstock and Jackie Steinitz in the UK which shows "that 65% of self-publishers are women" as "traditional publishing houses heavily favour male authors," consequently, "self-publishing offers women writers the opportunity to share their work and gain readers" (np). Critics and scholars have largely ignored the work of self-published writers. The reasons for this critical neglect are multiple, ranging from institutionalized snobbery, a generalized and assumptive perception of self-published works as lacking editorial rigour, to more innocuous gaps in awareness of the breadth of self-publishing. What Mordecai's publishing of her own writing by Sandberry Press makes clear is the need for scholars to attend to the cultural and economic significance of self-publishing. What might an attentiveness to Caribbean Canadian self-published literatures—as opposed to the existing, yet unfinished, archive of traditionally published writing—tell us about the otherwise unknown ethical, creative, and political investments of Caribbean Canadian cultural production?

Recent self-published works by Caribbean Canadian writers signal the importance of recognizing and recovering the creative pursuits of Caribbean Canadian people, regardless of their institutional origins and relationships. Self-published Caribbean Canadian writers face different pressures than writers who are published through more traditional means. Oftentimes, self-published writers are tasked with the marketing, production management, and distribution of their works. However, these writers have also been resourceful in their seeking of networks and communities for the development of their writing. In an interview with *Quill and Quire,* Stacey Marie Robinson, a self-published Caribbean Canadian urban fiction writer and founder of the Toronto Urban Book Expo, remarks that the Expo provides an opportunity for writers of different backgrounds to share their work. She notes, "a lot of self-published writers were given the chance to present … I wanted to create a safe, culturally familiar space for like-minded writers to come together to share with an audience that would be supportive of their efforts, despite where they were in a publishing sense" (np). The networks of support for self-published writers extend beyond the more traditional Expos and book fairs, but also to digital platforms. Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian blogs serve an important function for the promotion of both traditionally published and self-published writers. Zetta Elliot's blog, for example, is an archive of both Elliot's own journey with self-publishing as a Caribbean Canadian woman, but also features interviews, reviews, and discussions with other Caribbean Canadian self-published writers. Social media platforms such as Twitter have also fostered community amongst self-published writers of similar backgrounds.

Recent self-publications expand the existing archive of what we understand to be Caribbean Canadian. Zetta Elliot—who has both self-published as well as published with traditional publishers—and whose background is Nevisian, gives visibility to Caribbean Canadian writers from smaller 'home countries.' These writers are usually overshadowed by writers from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, who enjoy a more prominent publishing profile. Moreover, Stacey Marie Robinson's urban fiction challenges American generic characteristics, as she observes, "I'm coming from a Caribbean-Canadian background … Urban fiction in the U.S. is more underground, gritty, and seedy. I hope in Canada it can be less so, and be more diverse and represent more experiences in the city" (np). Robinson's writing expands the conventions of the genre associated with U.S. urban fiction by acknowledging the particularities of Canada, and refusing the generic hegemonies produced by urban fiction in the United States. Self-publishing has also created more spaces for queer and trans Caribbean Canadian writers to engage in literary endeavours. Noticing an absence in safe and supportive writing spaces for non-mainstream writers, the Toronto-based writer Dianah Smith created a reading series ('A' is for Orange) and courses and workshops specifically for emerging queer and trans writers of Caribbean descent. A former participant in the now-inactive 'A' is for Orange reading series, Barbadian Canadian Akhaji Zakiya self-published *Inside Her*, a collection of linked short fiction and poetry, which focuses on four women of colour living in Toronto. The collection explores queer life in all its joys and complexities in the contemporary world and adds to the archive of queer Caribbean Canadian writing. The expanding archive of queer writing overall by Caribbean writers challenges stigmas and narrow narratives of what it means to be a Caribbean subject.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also given way to new writing by self-published Caribbean Canadians. Canute Lawrence's *Pathology of a Pandemic*, a collection of poetry, has received noteworthy reviews and discussion on various platforms including Amazon, as well as traditional media outlets. Lawrence describes the collection as "a creative chronicle and documentation of the individual and collective experiences we have faced during the 2020 pandemic" (back cover). Similarly, Olive Senior has also ventured into self-publishing, with her collection *Pandemic Poems*. Though Senior has historically published with traditional presses, her self-published collection might signal the appeal of self-publishing to writers who see their work as timely. In her introduction, Senior explains that the poems appear "in the order in which they were written and posted on my Twitter and Facebook pages between May and September—the COVID-19 summer of 2020" (vii). The initial publication on social media, and their subsequent collection in a book format, demonstrates the utility of self-publishing as a vehicle for real-time social commentary. While the work of documenting self-published Caribbean Canadian writing is still to be done, it

is worth noting here that children's literature is the genre of self-publishing that is most prominent among Caribbean Canadians.

Children's and Young Adult literature, whether self-published or traditionally published, is an often-neglected site of inquiry, and thus limits our ability to fully recognize the range of Caribbean Canadian writing. For example, the writer C. Everard Palmer, is often considered as only a Jamaican writer, even though he emigrated to Canada in 1974 and lived there until his death in 2003. That at least five of his published children's books were written while he resided in Canada is significant, and it most certainly incorporates him into an archive of Caribbean Canadian. This raises the question of how might the inclusion of Palmer into the archive of Caribbean Canadian shift how we understand his oeuvre? Likewise, many Caribbean Canadian children's writing disappears from wider recognition, regardless of their publishing status. Gail Morong, a Trinidadian Canadian children's writer who emigrated to Canada in 1993 and currently resides in Kamloops, British Columbia, observes that "at the time of taking up residence in Canada, I was not sure that the book would sell well to a foreign market, so I didn't actively pursue [writing]" (np). It was not until two decades later that Morong decided to take writing seriously again and published *Lost at Carnival* in 2015. Morong describes the challenges and joys of self-publishing as a children's writer in an essay in *Ananseem*. She explains, "I recently found out through Twitter and Facebook that my book has made it to Egypt and London, so I know there is potential for it to be sold more widely to a Caribbean and international audience … It has taken me twenty-eight years to get to this point" (np). Other Caribbean Canadian children's and young adult writers, both self-published and traditionally published, such as Sharon Dorival, Shauntay Grant, Nadia L. Hohn, Yolanda T. Marshall, Carol Ottley-Mitchell, Kristina Morgan, and Kelbian Noel, have also described their struggles for recognition, not only as writers, but as writers of a particular background that they view as integral to the stories they tell.[23] Recognition and recovery of Caribbean Canadian children's and young adult writers is important if we are to understand the fullness of this archive and its investments.

23. Not only are all the writers mentioned here women, but they are women whose presence in Canada further nuances our conception of the breadth of Caribbean Canadian writing. Put differently, their countries or provinces of origin are places that are not always incorporated into the archive of Caribbean Canadian. For example, Sharon Dorival is a Dominican living in Alberta; Shauntay Grant lives in Nova Scotia and is a descendant of Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons and Black Refugees who migrated to Canada some two hundred years ago; and Kelbian Noel was born in Moncton, New Brunswick to Guyanese immigrants.

In addition to providing spaces for community making for Caribbean Canadian self-published writers and writers of young and adult and children's literature, digital platforms have also been important for archiving Caribbean Canadian cultural production. As mentioned above, Olive Senior's recent poetry collection began as posts on social media, however, Senior's online presence goes back even further. A digital platform featuring a biography of Senior, bibliographies, and samples of her writing, hosted by Toronto Metropolitan University, and curated by Hyacinth Simpson has served as an online resource to researchers and students interested in Senior's writing. Winfried Siemerling's companion website[24] to his 2015 monograph *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*, is a resource accessible to publics interested in Black Canadian writing and culture. As much of the resources referenced in Siemerling's monograph are in the public domain, this website curates the primary texts alongside historical documents, information about authors, scholarly and newspaper articles, and other digital platforms. Lastly, Stephanie McKenzie, of Memorial University in Newfoundland, has curated several online collections of Caribbean poets reading their work and has made these recordings accessible to the public. Among the writers who have dedicated digital platforms on Memorial University's website are Pamela Mordecai, Tanya Shirley, and the St. Lucian poet Vladimir Lucien. The inclusion of Shirley and Lucien challenges us to consider how does a writer become incorporated into the archive of Caribbean Canadian? In the case of Shirley, her presence in Canada dates to her time as a secondary school student in the country, however, her status as Caribbean Canadian, like Lucien, is further concretized as they are made institutionally legible within Canada through McKenzie's efforts.

Expanding the Archive of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production

It is not surprising that as literary critics, both G.E. Clarke and Barrett primarily privilege traditional literary archives. However, by this specialized focus, they delimit the registers of recognition to academic machineries and scholarly protocols, and the relationship of Black Caribbean Canadian cultural production to the nation. G.E. Clarke, for example, uses such rubrics of recognition as critical accounts, bibliographies, library holdings, thesis-production, interviews with academics and writers, and syllabi in schools. Barrett turns to institutional mechanisms, and popular discourses/narratives of the nation in order to show the exclusions of Black subjects and the ways

24. Visit the website at: http://blackatlantic.ca

in which Caribbean Canadian writers help in the "blackening of the nation" (22). We have already discussed the broadening of the significance of the Caribbean Canadian beyond the Canadian nation and content, but what value might accrue to our critical practice by recognizing an expanded archive beyond literary canons and academic concentrations? Black Canadian archival recovery has always had to go beyond the establishment sites (G.E. Clarke's use of non-literary sources; Lorris Elliot's examination of memoirs and self-publishing; Makeda Silvera and Dionne Brand's oral histories of Black women in Canada) and this is no different in the work of both Vernon and Davis who turn, for example, to popular culture as sources of Black Canadian/Caribbean Canadian cultural production. Even as Vernon notes that "oral cultural forms" ("folk spirituals, plantation songs, shouts, prayers, dances, folk tales, and stories") might have been lost because of inadequate records, she turns to alternative archives to excavate black lives in the prairies (15).[25] Via the alternative archive, she has included "oral literature, slam poetry and rap" (16), but also drama and film.

Our Special Issue features the spoken word artist Brandon Wint, Ontario born, with Jamaican and Barbadian heritage, who in 2020 published his debut poetry book *Divine Animal*. We hasten to say, he has other printed appearances in national anthologies, but most importantly, he has published via other audio-visual and digital formats (digital albums–*Infinite Mercies* (2018) and *Freedom Journal; Antidotes to Violence* (2018/2019) and many on-line videos of performances). As a two-time national slam poetry champion, his *Freedom Journal*, much like the digital publication of (Senior and Lawrence's) pandemic poems, provides a contemporaneous account of "the racial violence—and the varied response to it—in 2018 and 2019" (*Freedom* np). Wint uses his digital album—a popular cultural mode of production—to widely circulate his artistic response to racial violence and to expose "the experience of being black in North America, with its attendant histories, joys and its tough reconciliations" (*Freedom* np). The poem, "Backbone," that he offers in this issue mines the Black body as a source of debilitation and damage, but also reaches towards ancestral memory ("the pain above my hips/ now leads to my grandmother's doorway") and to landscape ("my toes sunned or shadowed in tall grass") for healing, even as it articulates the role of light in the imaginative/creative impulse and customs for shifting the black subjects vision about their reality: "Every day, light ribboning my mattress,/ morning announcing itself in the flame/ that turns the blinds to shadow puppets" ( ). Essentially, the poem advocates Black joy as an antidote to historical damage to the bodies and psyches of Black subjects

25. As she argues, members of the first period, "belonged to a more oral than textual culture, and their oral forms were rarely registered in the colonial archive" (15).

through Barbadian communal food ("macaroni pie and coucou"), leisure activity ("old men slamming dominoes"), music ("the trumpet of an old song") and dancing ("I last saw them dance/ my grandfather's fingers soft as rain on her shoulders"). Wint does not only expand our archives into the popular domain and wider circulation, he does not only provide us with other sites of validation and recognition, but he also suggests ways of building communities of relations especially through his connecting damage to bodies of people of colour as a kind ecological disaster that benefits from the epistemologies of Indigenous thinking. Even as he self-consciously connects with the work of Christina Sharpe, Dionne Brand, Robin DG Kelly, Cedric Robinson, and others, Wint develops a Caribbean Canadian aesthetic practice that moves beyond these works.

While Wint uses various medias of popular culture for the circulation of his work, Shane Book's poems "Caribbean Flex" and "Nice for What," which appear in this Special Issue, mobilize allusions to popular culture, creole languages, and surrealist images to interrogate Caribbean diasporic masculinities, capitalist greed, and ongoing climate crises. The speaker in "Caribbean Flex" performs masculinities through dancehall cultural rhetoric ("Bless-up! Big-up!") and Black American vernacular and allusions to rap culture, "Skrrt-skrrt-skrrt," a reference to the 21 Savage song of the same name. Accentuating the profile of masculinities in the poem are moments of disclosing covert desire and sexual longing—in lines such as "Started at the bottom / and kissed on it. / Loved that bottom so much / I wanted to piss on it / (I never told you that)" and "Lemme watch so much online porn I hurt / the fleshy-ribbed crook of my hand,"– that suggest the relationship between Black and Caribbean popular culture and the erotic. Indeed, the shifting of "starting from the bottom," from its initial resonance and referent to the Drake song "Started From the Bottom" which explores the singer's early life, career, and upward social mobility, to a provocative sexual image, signals the speaker's temporality as within the age of "online porn" and "Black people on Netflix," as well as intimating the masculinities of the speaker as belonging to a particular temporality, that of the 2010s era when figures such as Drake achieved widespread popularity. Like "Caribbean Flex," "Nice for What" interrogates masculinities and popular culture through references to Drake. The title of the poem alludes to Drake's 2018 song of the same name. The presence of Drake in these poems is significant for several reasons, namely because, as a mixed race Canadian, he is the most successful rapper in the country's history. His music frequently features Caribbean artists (for example, Popcaan and Rihanna), incorporates Caribbean musical forms (namely, dancehall and reggae), as well as Caribbean languages. His masculinities reject the stereotypical hypermasculine and overtly violent performances associated with American rap. More often, he opts instead for masculinities that foreground the vulnerability of men

without compromising popular images of a "real man." These performances of masculinities by Drake have been influential on many young men in urban spaces. "Nice for What" attempts to capture the temporality of Drake's rising prominence ("Wall Street / and the billionaire class,") his influential masculinities, his mixed race identity ("I learned Courvoisier and frenemies / is a Chex Mix type of a mixture,") while questioning—through spectacularizing—the politics of aesthetics ("Gucci, Ozwald Boateng and Kiton," "Prosecco popper," "fashion-less asses," and "Fake diamond earrings"). Through their embeddedness in popular culture via allusions and linguistic experimentation, these poems speak to the influence of Caribbean people in Canada (the modes through which Caribbean aesthetics become urban Canadian aesthetics) as well as to the appealing unwieldiness and hypervisibility of Caribbean, Black, and Caribbean Canadian culture.

The Commitments and Values of Caribbean Canadian Cultural Production

While earlier considerations of Caribbean Canadian understood it as a field of study, our reflections in this Special Issue provoke a shift in perspective that urges us to consider it more so as an archive. The ungrounded and unbounded nature of Caribbean Canadian cultural production, as well as its multiple resonances across several fields of study (Gender and Sexuality, Critical Race, Migration and Diaspora, Critical Ethnic, Caribbean, Canadian, Black Canadian, Environmental, and Postcolonial) encourages an engagement with David Scott's conceptualization of an archive as a "*generative* system" (82). Deborah Thomas's elaboration of Scott's notion of the archive animates our desire to conceive of the "process of developing archives as one that creates new possibilities, possibilities for seeing connections previously unexamined" (27). Some of the possibilities of the Caribbean Canadian archive brought to the fore, in both this introduction and the Special Issue itself, include the connections between ecological damage and Black life; the relationship between Indigeneity and Blackness, and how these categories become further complicated by Caribbean diasporic life; the creative movements between "high" and "low" culture; artistic collaborations among friends, as well as allusions to other artists; diasporic life as a queer improvisational practice; and the circulation of critical and creative thought across languages, and the influence of this work on artists, community activists, and critical thinkers, both inside and outside the academy and other institutionalized spaces. We think of these possibilities as embodied in figures such as Lillian Allen, who engages in community as well as institutionalized intellectual work, and engages with popular culture, improvisation,

and performance to develop knowledge around issues of gender, sexuality, diasporic place-making, and ecologies.

We see the possibilities that emerge from the Caribbean Canadian archive as examples of some of the commitments and values that ground a Caribbean Canadian consciousness. This consciousness, which is also a method of analysis, is one that understands the archive (considering Karina Vernon's *Black Prairie Archives*) as demanding an ethical relationship, built on trust, respect, and reciprocity. Moreover, we see the Caribbean Canadian consciousness as one that refuses reductive and essentializing conceptualizing of race, gender, sexuality, and the conscripts of the modern human. We are also inspired by Andrea A. Davis's ethical orientation, rooted in her intersectional analysis, that allows her to understand the unequal relationships to power and build solidarities with others through collectivities of relationalities. Our interest in this archive is borne out of our eagerness to celebrate the creative endeavours of Caribbean Canadian cultural workers, who inspiringly offer new ways of understanding the contemporary moment through an ungrounded and unbounded archive opening to new possibilities. In our curation of recoveries and recognitions of Caribbean Canadian cultural production, we attend to the ways that this archive is often obscured or subjected to institutionalized limits that disappear cultural workers who should otherwise be accounted for. Even as this curation is an act of discovery, of bringing attention to people, places, and concepts not previously explored, we are excited for the work that is yet to be done, the connections yet to be made, and the additional grounds through which this archive will be expanded. Essentially, as CLR James writes, "all we can do [is] give some idea of what Ground is and why it is necessary … It is the analysis of Ground which tells us exactly what [our] movement is … If you want more Ground, there it is" (98).

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"There is no solid ground beneath us": The Shoals and Detours of Nalo Hopkinson's "The Glass Bottle Trick," "Precious," and "Greedy Choke Puppy"

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ABSTRACT
This article presents a reading of Nalo Hopkinson's short stories "The Glass Bottle Trick," "Precious," and "Greedy Choke Puppy" that considers Caribbean Canadian subjectivity through lenses of (inter)textuality and the material/metaphorical spaces and movements of interruption. It draws from Tiffany Lethabo King's thinking on shoals to theorize the gathering and accumulation of tales that occurs in Hopkinson's re/imaginings of "Bluebeard," "The Kind and the Unkind Girls," and soucouyant folklore. The article suggests that these shoals interrupt the paths of dominant narratives in ways that force detours to emerge, adapting Rinaldo Walcott's use of the term to explore the transformative possibilities that occur through the creation of new improvised paths, of otherwise ways of conceptualizing Caribbean Canadian being. Ultimately, it proposes that Hopkinson's stories acknowledge and yet interrupt colonial narratives of geography, identity, and femininity, providing a framework through which to consider the unstable grounds and the searching detours of Caribbean Canadian subjectivities.

Keywords
Caribbean Canadian; Nalo Hopkinson; intertextuality; fairy tales; folklore; soucouyant; self-creation; diaspora.

In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand writes that "[t]o live in the Black Diaspora is…to live as a fiction—a creation of empires, and also self-creation" (18). Her metaphor of Black[1] diasporic subjectivity as a fiction, as a creative text, provides a generative way of thinking through the multiple fictions of Black diasporic speculative fiction, particularly in relation to the intertextualities of Caribbean Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson's short stories. In what follows, I take up the idea of Black diasporic subjectivity as (inter)textual in combination with the spatial dimensions held by both the concept of diaspora as well as the Caribbean Canadian label in an exploration of three folklore re/imaginings from Hopkinson's *Skin Folk* collection—namely, "The Glass Bottle Trick," "Precious," and "Greedy Choke Puppy." More specifically, I use the language of space and movement to read the intertextuality of Hopkinson's narratives as a way through which to consider both the broader plurality of Caribbean Canadian subjectivity as well as the individual multifaceted fictions of the stories' female protagonists. I thus read Hopkinson's work together with an adaptation of Tiffany Lethabo King's theorizations of shoals and Rinaldo Walcott's thinking on detours to suggest that the stories' respective re/imaginings of "Bluebeard," "The Kind and the Unkind Girls," and soucouyant folktales reflect a self-creation that "work[s] alongside and across traditional geographies" (McKittrick xiv). In other words, I suggest that Caribbean Canadian subjectivity acknowledges and yet interrupts colonial narratives of geography and identity, interruptions that are formed by the accumulation of multiple stories and that force the creation of otherwise paths.

While the creation of empires cannot be ignored, it does not encompass the totality of Caribbean Canadian fiction. The white supremacist narratives of empire come through on the level of the term itself as a colonial (mis)naming of the spaces to which it refers. As Carole Boyce-Davies argues, "[t]he terms that we use to name ourselves…carry their strings of echoes and inscriptions. Each represents an original misnaming and the simultaneous constant striving of the dispossessed for full representation" (4). A term such as Caribbean Canadian, then, simultaneously carries both the colonial erasure of the names and relations to the land held by the Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean and Canada as well as the complex multiplicity of identities held by the dispossessed—such as Black diasporic peoples—with attachments to both places. This linguistic entanglement is further complicated by the ways in which the

1. In my own writing, I follow P. Gabrielle Foreman's convention of capitalizing the word "Black" in recognition of Black being as a proper noun ("A Note on Language" xv; see also the community-sourced document "Writing About Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help"). When citing others, I respect their terminology and capitalization decisions.

Canadian nation-state inscribes Blackness as "Caribbean or U.S.," thus "unhing[ing] black people from Canada, while also reducing black specificities to an all-encompassing elsewhere (simply non-Canadian)" (McKittrick 99; see also Walcott 117, 135). Yet Hopkinson refuses to be reduced to an oversimplified narrative of elsewhereness, instead mapping the specific diversity of her "geographic story" (McKittrick ix): "When I say I'm 'predominantly' black, does it convey any of the callaloo that is the Caribbean, that gives me a clan tartan, one Jewish great grandmother, and one Maroon, as well as Aboriginal, West African, and South Asian ancestry?" (qtd. in Rutledge 599–600). By imagining the Caribbean as a "callaloo" that entangles her Blackness with multiple other identities, Hopkinson undermines the Canadian flattening of difference that reads the Caribbean as only Black. At the same time, Hopkinson claims Canada as part of her geographic story (qtd. in Rutledge 591), rejecting the displacement imposed on her by the narratives of Canadian empire. Her self-creation thus pushes up against the creation of empires, a frictional intertextuality that tries to write a new fiction from the various parts in motion.

Hopkinson's navigation of Caribbean Canadian subjectivity illustrates the otherwise possibilities of self-creation. For Brand, self-creation involves imagery of searching, of "scouring maps of all kinds, the way that some fictions do, discursively, elliptically, trying to locate their own transferred selves" (19). There is a sense here of what Nadia Ellis describes as the "unconsummated" desire of "diasporic consciousness" (2), "a persistent sense of the insufficiency of existing modes of belonging" that is "matched by an awareness that new forms remain inspiringly elusive" (3). The search is endless, a trying that is exhaustive but left unsatisfied. Yet this elusiveness of a definitive self—this unmappability—is what generates the radical possibilities of liberation. As Charlene A. Carruthers argues in relation to Black activism, there is an important "distinction between freedom and liberation": "We can gain or hold various freedoms—for example, the freedom to vote, the freedom to marry, the freedom to choose abortion. But liberation is a collective effort [that] must entail resistance to the dominant oppressive systems that permeate our societies" (25). In other words, liberation is not just about demanding "individual freedom[s]," but rather about insisting on a "collective access to…full humanity" (25). If applied to Brand's thinking on self-creation, this idea of liberation can emerge through the continuous search for new ways of being that resist the "compulsory sameness" inscribed through colonial maps and misnamings (Ellis 4). The genre of speculative fiction is particularly generative here, as it allows for the imagining of possibilities that are uncontained by the boundaries of known reality. In this sense, Hopkinson's use of the speculative form emphasizes the potential of self-creation to transform existing linguistic and spatial structures by thinking with the realms of fiction, metaphor, and the fantastical. The work of liberation is in this transformation,

in the ways in which Caribbean Canadian subjectivities can be thought of as speculative texts entangled with other texts in a creative process rather than as singular narratives decided only by dominant white supremacist systems.

I combine these ideas of self-creation and subjectivity as fiction with the imagery of shoals and detours to emphasize "the imbrication of material and metaphorical space" (Smith and Katz 79), or more specifically the interconnectedness of physical geographies and metaphorical understandings within the diasporic self of Caribbean Canadian identity. Shoals in particular function here as a spatial representation of the accumulation[2] and entanglement of the multiple fictions within a Caribbean Canadian subjectivity. To that end, I am adapting Tiffany Lethabo King's imagery of shoals through Hopkinson's imagery of diasporic being as an experience of "no solid ground beneath us," of "shift[ing] constantly to stay in one place" (Rutledge 599). As King explains, "[t]he word 'shoal' has a number of meanings," but the primary focus of her thinking is on the shoal "[a]s a location and geological formation [that] is often described as a sandbar or a coral reef. It is an accumulation of granular materials (sand, rock, and other) that through sedimentation create a bar or barrier that is difficult to pass" (2), a space where "movement as usual cannot proceed" (3). She adds that "[b]ecause these sedimentations of sand, rock, or coral were often imperceptible until they sank a vessel, the mysterious and shoal-filled ocean floor posed a problem for navigating the sea," noting that shoals "can erode over time, drift, and eventually accumulate in another location," embodying an "unpredictability [that] exceeds full knowability/mappability" (3). For King, shoals provide "a space of liminality, indeterminacy, and location of suture" between the fields of Black diasporic studies and Indigenous studies, a space that is "simultaneously land and sea" and as such offers a way to "fracture" what she understands as the "overdetermin[ation]" of water in Black diaspora studies and of land in Indigenous studies (4).[3] There is something to be said here about the theoretical potential of

2. My use of the term "accumulation" in this paper follows King's imagery of shoals and is thus meant to connote a gathering together of multiple parts. I do not intend to allude to Saidiya Hartman's conception of accumulation and fungibility as ontological definitions imposed on Blackness through slavery and its afterlives (Hartman, *Scenes*).

3. For the extensive presence of water and ocean metaphors in Black diaspora studies, King cites Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic," Kamau Brathwaite's "tidalectics," and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," and the *liquid blackness* research project, among others (4, 216n30); Michelle M. Wright's discussion of the centrality of the "Middle Passage epistemology" in Black studies also points to the ways in which the Atlantic Ocean has been pivotal to theorizations of Black life (7). For the perceived overrepresentation of land in Indigenous studies, King notes that dispossession in relation

shoals for the specific context of the entanglements between Black diasporic and Caribbean Canadian subjectivities when placed in relation to Indigenous peoples and the lands colonially called Canada—especially considering King's assertion that "the shoal gains its force from the traditions of Caribbean poetics and studies" (4)—but for the purposes of this paper my initial thinking is focused on the shoal as an interruptive yet unstable, unmappable space, as unsolid ground that constantly shifts. My application of shoals then conceptualizes them as an accumulation of narratives and fictions within Caribbean Canadian subjectivity that forms a point of interruption. The shape and location of this interruptive accumulation is subject to the endless searching of self-creation, meaning it can impede dominant white supremacist colonial narratives—or "movement as usual"—while also being elusive and unmappable. In other words, shoals operate here as a material/metaphorical expression of the intertextual fictions of Caribbean Canadian subjectivity.

If shoals are the point of interruption created by the accumulation of multiple texts, then detours are the new ways of thinking and being that are made to emerge as a result of the interruption. Rinaldo Walcott conceives of detours as "the (un)acknowledged routes and roots of black expressive cultures," as the "improvisatory and…in-between space[s] which black diasporic cultures occupy" (31). Although Walcott's description mentions roots as well as routes, his prioritization of movement through the imagery of the detour destabilizes the solidness implied by being rooted, moving roots away from "stillness" and towards "forms of stasis that are neither stagnant nor motionless" (Campt 158). In this way, detours, like self-creation, are not "an outright rejection" of "the nation and its narratives (whether Canadian or Caribbean)," but rather "an alternate passage" (Bucknor and Coleman vi–vii), a search in motion for new modes of subjectivity. Hopkinson's diverse roots and routes are part of the Black diasporic cultures that Walcott's ideas are centered in, yet they also fracture the flattening of the Caribbean into Blackness that occurs through Canadian narratives of nationality and belonging, asserting a Caribbean Canadian subjectivity that is entangled with and yet exceeds the Black diaspora. My theoretical framework reads this intertextual multiplicity as a shoal, as an accumulation of fictions that creates a material/metaphorical interruptive space and thus forces a change in course. In other words, detours function here as the transformative possibilities that emerge through encounters with shoals, through explorations of the unsolid ground of the Caribbean Canadian label.

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to land is significant to Indigenous scholarship and activism against white supremacist colonial powers (4).

The stories I have chosen to analyze here are not only intertwined through their Caribbean Canadian intertextualities, but they are also apt examples of the ways in which the formations of shoals and the liberatory potentials of detours operate through speculative fiction in a theorization of Caribbean Canadian subjectivities. All three are collected in Hopkinson's *Skin Folk* alongside other similarly intertextual re/imaginings of fairy tales and folklore. "The Glass Bottle Trick" follows the relationship of a woman named Beatrice and her husband Samuel Powell. Beatrice's anxiety over telling Samuel that she is pregnant threads through her memories of their courtship and marriage, memories that reveal Samuel to be controlling and often on the edge of becoming physically abusive. His murderous nature is then exposed towards the end of the story when Beatrice discovers the mutilated bodies of his previous two wives in a forbidden room in their house, their enraged spirits standing over their dead physical forms. Realizing Samuel killed the women because they were pregnant, Beatrice frees the spirits from the room, hoping that she and her unborn child will be spared from their vengeance. This theme of gendered violence is also central to "Precious," in which the female protagonist Isobel is both verbally and physically abused by her husband Jude. Like Beatrice, Isobel makes the decision to resist her husband's cruelty, but her ending is much less open-ended; while Beatrice's fate is left unwritten, Isobel knocks Jude out and calls the police, concluding her story—and the collection as a whole—with a joyful moment of freedom.[4] While "Greedy Choke Puppy" does not contain an abusive marriage, it does consider ideas of freedom and liberation that accentuate the collection's investment in thinking beyond surfaces: "*always, whatever the burden their skins bear…once they* get *under their own skins—they can fly*" (Hopkinson, "Riding" 10; emphasis in the original). In all three stories, the female protagonists bear the burden of being women in misogynistic realities, finding liberatory possibilities in going under this skin and embracing otherwise paths, embracing self-creation. The shoals and detours of the stories allow me to extend this concept to the Caribbean Canadian label, suggesting that the burden held by the misnamings of the term's surface, its skin, is not the totality of Caribbean Canadian subjectivities—that underneath lies the potential for flight.

4. I use "freedom" rather than "liberation" for the specific context of her calling the police; although legal and carceral institutions seem to provide justice for Isobel and punishment to Jude for his misogynistic acts of violence, they are also white supremacist patriarchal systems that disproportionately target and police people of colour and that overwhelmingly dismiss women in cases of rape and sexual assault.

Hopkinson's "The Glass Bottle Trick" and "Precious" are both in conversation with fairy tales: the former with "Bluebeard" tales, and the latter with "The Kind and the Unkind Girls" tales. Although these story types have variants from all over the world (Yearsley; Roberts), Eurocentric focuses within folklore studies have often positioned the versions by Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers at the forefront.[5] A Brothers Grimm "Bluebeard" narrative titled "Fitcher's Bird" specifically involves a sorcerer kidnapping three sisters in a basket one after the other and testing each one by giving them keys and an egg to hold on to, forbidding them from entering one of the rooms in the house and warning them against losing the egg. The first two sisters both enter the forbidden room and, upon seeing the many mutilated corpses within it, drop the egg, marking it with a bloodstain that cannot be removed. When the sorcerer returns from his journey, he sees the stained egg and kills them. The third sister, however, does not drop the egg when she enters "the bloody chamber"; instead, she "gather[s]" the separated body parts of her two sisters and arranges them "in their proper places," resulting in them magically coming back to life (149). The third sister then tricks the sorcerer so that the three women can escape, locking the sorcerer in his house and burning it with him inside. "The Kind and the Unkind Girls," on the other hand, is much more amorphous, generally following the basic trope in which a kind girl is rewarded and her unkind sister is punished; in Perrault's version, titled "The Fairies," the kind girl is gifted with "flower[s]" and "precious stone[s]" falling from her mouth when she speaks (127), while her sister is penalized with "toad[s]" and "viper[s]" falling from her mouth when she speaks (128).[6] While I summarize only one version of each tale type here for the sake of practicality—and because these specific versions have relevance to Hopkinson's re/imaginings—it is necessary to "be careful with fairy tales," as "[t]here are always many stories behind the one story" (Hairston 156), and many variants that exist alongside and after the narratives that Perrault and the Grimm Brothers penned. This multiplicity of stories entangled within one story exemplifies the intertextuality of the Caribbean Canadian fiction.

The intertextual accumulations of "The Glass Bottle Trick" create a shoal around the imagery of eggs and wombs. In one of Beatrice's memories of her life together with Samuel, she describes the "two bottles…jammed onto

5. As Casie Hermansson notes, "the prevailing classification systems (Aarne's types classification, Thomson's motif index, and Propp's morphology)" for folklore and fairy tales are limited by their Eurocentrism (xv).

6. Interestingly, Warren E. Roberts points out that some versions of "The Kind and the Unkind Girls," which he categorizes together as "The Gold from the Forbidden Room Group," have some resemblances to "Bluebeard" stories (93–4).

branches of the guava tree" in their front yard, which Samuel—knowing that the bottles contain the trapped spirits of the women he murdered—explains away as a superstition: "You never heard the old people say that if someone dies, you must put a bottle in a tree to hold their spirit, otherwise it will come back as a duppy and haunt you? A blue bottle. To keep the duppy cool, so it won't come at you in hot anger for being dead" (Hopkinson, "Glass" 95). Beatrice finds this superstitiousness somewhat out of character for her otherwise "controlled and logical" husband (95), but is otherwise unconcerned, more focused on trying to reassure herself about telling Samuel that she is pregnant. In the present time of the story, she accidentally breaks the bottles, after which their cold air-conditioned house becomes uncharacteristically warm. In her search for the air-conditioning unit Beatrice opens a forbidden door and discovers the gutted bodies of Samuel's previous wives, their spirits standing above the bodies and holding bellies "slightly swollen with the pregnancies for which Samuel had killed them" (109). She realizes that by breaking the bottles she has freed the "duppy wives" (109), their hot anger now uncontained and filling the house, "thick and close as a womb" (107). This imagery of broken bottles and the thick heat of wombs then accumulates with the egg imagery of multiple "Bluebeard" tales. At the moment that Beatrice comes across the murdered wives, she is holding a raw egg which she drops in shock, and the "fast congealing yolk" reveals "a pin-feathered embryo" (108). Unlike the egg dropped by the sisters in "Fitcher's Bird," this one breaks open, another womb ruptured by Samuel's murderous violence. At the same time, however, the shattered bottles free life rather than destroy it, alluding to the cracking of hatching eggs: "*Eggs are seeds, perfectly white on the outside. Who knows what complexions their insides might reveal when they crack open to germinate and bear fruit?*" (92; emphasis in the original). The story's question calls in Canadian author Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg," in which the protagonist asserts that "[t]his is something the story ["Fitcher's Bird"] left out…: the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come out of it?" (178). These questions are never definitively answered, forming and dispersing in the intertextual gathering together of Caribbean, European, and Canadian fictions.

The interruption created by this accumulation centers on the issue of colourism. Samuel's hatred of his "molasses-dark skin"—a hatred that extends to all his possible offspring and the women who bear them—leads him to reference "Beauty and the Beast" tales when he compares himself to Beatrice and her lighter skin tone: "Beauty. Pale Beauty, to my Beast" (103). Beatrice's joking reply of "Black Beauty," another intertextual reference, upsets him, and he insists that he is "not a handsome man… Black and ugly as my mother made me" (104). Samuel's internalization of colourist evaluations of his dark skin rewrites the "traditional Bluebeard abhorrence of pregnancy and reproduction" in ways

that draw attention to the misogynistic and anti-Black narratives of empire (Bacchilega 189), narratives that accumulate with the geographic multiplicity of Caribbean Canadian being. Through the gathering of European, Caribbean, and Canadian texts alongside "texts" of gendered and racialized violence, "The Glass Bottle Trick" acknowledges the burdens of the Caribbean Canadian "skin" while also interrupting the movement as usual that would see Samuel kill Beatrice and her unborn child. Beatrice's discovery of and interaction with the duppy wives, and the connected gathering of eggs and wombs, then joins the shoal as the self-creation that does not deny the diverse influences within the Caribbean Canadian fiction; the violence of mutilated wombs and the dropped egg are not ignored, but rather accumulate with the freedom and life of hatched eggs and the broken bottles, insisting on the question of what else can germinate, what else will emerge.

The detours of "The Glass Bottle Trick" move through the unconsummated desire created by the unanswered question and the boundless searching of self-creation. The intertextual moments of the story are punctuated by Beatrice's memory of her father "chanting words from an old-time story": "*Yung-Kyung-Pyung, what a pretty basket! / Margaret Powell Alone, what a pretty basket! / Eggie-law, what a pretty basket!*" (98; emphasis in the original). These words are from a Jamaican Anansi story,[7] in which Anansi uses a basket to uncover the secret of three princesses' names so that he may marry one of them ("Yung-Kyum-Pyung" 11). Anansi, as Natalie Robinson explains, is a "spider-man"[8] who is featured in "countless tales from throughout the African diaspora" (259)—an unmappable figure. The final line of the chant returns as the final line of the story, a (non)answer to the narrative's last question:

> When they had fed, would they come and save her, or would they take revenge on her, their usurper, as well as on Samuel?
> *Eggie-Law, what a pretty basket*. (110; emphasis in the original)

The materiality of Beatrice's fate is left uncertain, and yet this uncertainty highlights a self-creation that holds a liberatory potential for the conceptualization

7. I follow Hopkinson's spelling from the epigraph to another short story in the *Skin Folk* collection, "Tan-Tan and the Dry Bone" (160). Other spellings include Anancy (e.g. Robinson 259) and Annancy (e.g. "Yung-Kyum-Pyung").
8. Although Hopkinson also refers to Anansi as a "spider man" ("Tan-Tan" 160), in another of her stories the protagonist encounters a feminine version of Anansi, and he illustrates the figure as a "[w]atcher at the boundaries, at the crossroads. Sometimes man, sometimes woman. Always trickster" ("Something" 52).

of Caribbean Canadian subjectivities. This final line not only recalls the shoal of egg imagery through the name "Eggie-Law," but also creates an otherwise path around the shoal's interruption through Caribbean folklore. The unmappability of Anansi moves with the unknowability of Beatrice's ending, creating an endless search that cannot prescribe a single answer. Beatrice and her unborn child thus exceed the boundaries of narrative in multiple senses, highlighting the in-between spaces of a detour that, in simultaneously holding the possibilities of life and the violences of death, imagines liberation from the "seemingly predetermined stabilities" that would reduce Caribbean Canadian being to the misnamings and inscriptions of colonial legacies (McKittrick xi).

Like "The Glass Bottle Trick," Hopkinson's "Precious" is intertwined with fairy tales and folklore. The story, as Cristina Bacchilega notes, functions as a continuation of "The Kind and the Unkind Girls" (189), imagining life from the perspective of the kind girl after receiving the gift of riches falling from her mouth. For the majority of the narrative, the only names she has are the pet names (Precious, Princess, Jewel) given to her by her (ex) husband Jude. She remembers him being "playful," "kind," and loving early in their relationship before his greed leads him to abuse her, extracting wealth from her sounds of pain to compensate for his poor financial decisions (Hopkinson, "Precious" 264–5). She manages to escape and hide from Jude for a time, but he tracks her down and threatens her. She lets her frustration and rage burst forth in a torrent of words, burying Jude in a pile of treasure finished with "a ruby as big as a human heart" formed from the declaration that ends her speech: "stop calling me Precious; my name is Isobel!" (269). With this assertion of her name, Isobel ends the story—and the *Skin Folk* collection as a whole—laughing with joy, as her mouth creates "[j]ust sounds, only sounds" (270). The significance of naming here gestures towards the entanglements of colonial misnamings and self-creation; Isobel rejects Jude's misnaming of her and affirms her true name, yet the story's title echoes the gendered linguistic violence of the imposed name "Precious." The reader must get under this "skin" to see the otherwise paths of flight the story holds.

The formation of this story's shoal begins with its epigraph, in which Hopkinson gathers pieces of the plurality of tales that weave through "Precious": "*The ending of the folktale goes that…the prince decides to marry the girl because she's so sweet and beautiful. Of course, the fact that she had just become a walking treasury can't have hurt her prospects either. I keep mixing that tale up with the one about the goose that laid the golden eggs and that ended up as dinner. That wasn't a happy ending either*" (262; emphasis in the original). The abusive marriage that plays out in "Precious" threads through Hopkinson's keen observation that the prince was most certainly drawn to the kind girl's ability to endlessly produce wealth as much as, if not more than, her personality and appearance; indeed, in Perrault's version, the prince asks to hear her story

as a result of "seeing five or six pearls and as many diamonds coming from her mouth" (129). The many tales within "The Kind and the Unkind Girls" story type then accumulate with another narrative form involving birds, gold, and greed, known as "Of the Goose and Its Master" in John E. Keller and L. Clark Keating's translation of *Aesop's Fables*. This story, attributed to Avianus, concerns a goose who lays golden eggs and a man who kills the goose in hopes of extracting the wealth from inside her body; her death provides no treasure, however, and the man loses his guaranteed daily riches because of his greed.[9] This tale type is also found in India, appearing in *The Mahābhārata* as a story of "wild birds" who "spit gold" and a man who "strangle[s] them out of greed" (132). This variant not only further intertwines the two story types in its depiction of gold coming from the birds' mouths—echoing the valuable stones that pour from Isobel's mouth—but it also adds to the multiplicity of geographies gathered in Hopkinson's story, an intertextual reminder of the diversity of Caribbean Canadian subjectivities.

The plurality of stories brought together by the epigraph accumulate together with the in-between spaces of Isobel's life. Before describing her relationship with Jude, Isobel outlines the limitations she has had to place on herself: "I stopped singing in the shower. I kept having to call the plumber to remove flakes of gold and rotted lilies from the clogged drain. … I used to have the habit of talking to myself when I was alone, until the day I slipped on an opal that had tumbled from my lips, and fractured my elbow in the fall" (262). Even when she is away from Jude's violence, the private joys of her voice are silenced, preventing her from singing and thinking out loud. At the same time, the wealth that her voice produces allows her to have financial freedom, as she has "no need to work," and thus "[her] time is [her] own" (266). This freedom, however, is not her liberation. To reiterate Charlene A. Carruthers's assertion of the distinction between freedom and liberation, Isobel's financial freedom is an "individual freedom" rather than part of a "collective access to…full humanity" (25); in other words, her ability to feel financially secure does not liberate her from the reality of extraction that she is forced to navigate, a reality in which, to adapt Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's words, "[her] body is a resource" (75). This narrative reduces Isobel's self to the "jeweled phrases" and "silver sentences" she can produce, alluding to the histories of forced labour and extraction in the creation of empires in both the Caribbean and Canada (Hopkinson, "Precious" 264). These in-between spaces of silence and speech are spaces of survival, of preventing injury and navigating racial capitalist and abusive relationships that impose "the extraction-assimilation system" on to her

9. Some versions of the fable feature a hen rather than a goose (e.g. Aesop 119).

life and being (Simpson 75). Together with the multiplicity of tales that weave through Hopkinson's narrative, Isobel's strategies of survival—the texts of her life—question the greed that underlines her need for these strategies, gathering into a shoal that interrupts movement as usual through her refusal to accept "her gift, her curse" (Hopkinson, "Precious" 266).

The ending of "Precious" creates a detour of liberation through which Isobel can imagine new paths. Isobel recalls her father telling her that "a soft answer would turn away wrath," a focus on "agreeableness" that places her in the position of her abusive stepmother's obedient servant (263). Her labour, like her "gift" for producing gems, is exploited by those around her, and her father's advice guides her against resisting, instead teaching her to be quiet and pleasant, "smil[ing] until [her] teeth ached" (263). Isobel thus represses her feelings throughout the story, but by the time Jude finds her towards the end of the narrative, she can no longer hold back the "years of resentment," "eject[ing]" stones "with the force of thrown rocks" as she finally voices her anger at her father, her stepmother, and Jude, culminating in a series of powerful assertions punctuated by her name: "I am not your treasure trove, and I will not run anymore, and I shall be nice if and when it pleases me, and stop calling me Precious; my name is Isobel!" (269). With these words, Isobel rejects the exploitation she has been subjected to and the passive niceness she has been told to maintain, claiming the full complexity of herself in the declaration of her name. This moment creates a detour that forms an alternate path around the shoal of fictions of greed and survival, and that moves through the endless paths of self-creation, as Isobel insists her self into being and yet is undefined by national or racialized narratives. Like the multiplicity of her author's Caribbean Canadian experience, Isobel is simultaneously unmappable and rooted—not motionless but rather in an "effortful *equilibrium*" that affirms her self-creation while also refusing containment (Campt 158–9; emphasis in the original).

Unlike "The Glass Bottle Trick" and Precious," the intertextual accumulations of "Greedy Choke Puppy" are not formed around traditional fairy tales variants, but instead around specifically Caribbean folktales. The story follows Jacky, a humanities PhD student at the University of the West Indies who worries over growing older and not yet finding a husband with whom to have children, and her Granny, who lives with her. Jacky's dissertation on Caribbean folklore draws on her family's oral storytelling traditions, other Caribbean ways of knowing, and Western academic readings, generating tensions that are revealed in her conversations with Granny:

> "How you mean, 'Yes Granny'? You even know what a Lagahoo is?"
> "Don't you been frightening me with jumby story from since I small? I putting a section on it in my thesis paper. Is a donkey with gold teeth,

> wearing a waistcoat with a pocket watch and two pair of tennis shoes on the hooves."
> "Washekong, you mean. I never teach you to say 'tennis shoes.'" (Hopkinson, "Greedy" 180)

While both Jacky and Granny speak in a creole cadence, Jacky's use of "tennis shoes" over the creole word "washekong" destabilizes the ground of the conversation, creating a shoal of Caribbean and Western fictions. That the figure being discussed is the Lagahoo, a shapeshifting creature from Caribbean folklore, further emphasizes the multiplicity of identity here. The story does not hierarchize the two characters in this moment; its inclusion of both phrases allows readers to draw upon the one they recognize to access a meaning for the one that is unfamiliar. While the intertextuality of this shoal is less pronounced than in "The Glass Bottle Trick" or Precious," it emerges in the interruption of a Western/Caribbean binary, in the shifting motions of a figure who inhabits the diverse creole spaces of washekong and tennis shoes and who can embody multiple forms.

This shoal further accumulates with the Caribbean folklore of the soucouyant. A soucouyant, as the story itself explains, is a "Caribbean equivalent of the vampire myth," a woman who "removes her skin at night, hides it, and then changes into a ball of fire" that can "fl[y] through the air" (187). During these nighttime flights, the soucouyant seeks out babies and "sucks the life from [their] bod[ies]" (187), taking youth for herself from "*somebody who still have plenty*" (184; emphasis in the original). Jacky is the main soucouyant of the narrative, but by the end of the story her Granny reveals that "[t]he soucouyant blood" runs through "all the women in [their] family," including herself and Jacky's mother (194). Jacky's fear of aging combines with her soucouyant being to drive her to consume the life of her friend Carmen's newborn baby, an act that leads Granny to decide to kill her at the end of the story for the safety of their community. For Giselle Liza Anatol, this ending serves to "demonize women's agency," inscribing a binary that "reveal[s]" Granny as "the only 'good' woman" (140–1). Yet I would suggest that the accumulations of the soucouyant and its vampiric allusions gather alongside the fictions of language and the Lagahoo to interrupt the movement as usual that would position Jacky and Granny in opposition. As Kinitra D. Brooks points out, Jacky's downfall is not a triumphant vanquishing of good over evil (82), instead leaving Granny heartbroken and hoping that her next sighting of the Lagahoo will signal her own death (Hopkinson, "Greedy" 196). In this moment, Jacky's death becomes the site of questioning, of searching for an otherwise path that might bring liberation.

The detour that emerges from this interruption echoes the tensions between creations of empire and self-creation through what Denolyn Carroll describes as the tension between "being bound and being free," between "the ultimate freedom that comes from shedding their skin and flying off into the night, and

their driving need for the life-breath of babies to sustain their own existence" (56). Jacky manifests this in-betweenness in her relationship with her skin. On the one hand, she feels "*confin[ed]*" by it, "*feel[ing] it getting old*" and "*binding [her] up inside it*" (Hopkinson, "Greedy" 191; emphasis in the original), and when Granny confronts her and threatens to harm her skin, Jacky, in her fireball form, "follow[s] close, drawn by the precious skin in the old woman's hands" (194). She is bound not only by her skin, but also by her need to inhabit that skin as an object of desire full of youth, beauty, and reproductive capacity. On the other hand, her fire form allows her a reprieve from the restrictive narratives that impact her identity: "*Sometimes I does just feel to take it off and never put it back on again, oui? … Oh, God, I does be so free like this!*" (191; emphasis in the original). Granny is also bound by her skin in some ways, as her refusal to feed on babies' blood prevents her from escaping the natural process of aging. Yet Granny, like Jacky, also experiences the freedom of flying; when she tells Jacky to "be careful when you go out so late at night," Jacky replies, "You self too, Granny. Always off to prayer meeting, sometimes 'fore day morning before you come home" (182). This subtle hint of Granny's soucouyant flights allows a detour to emerge, one that does not eschew the ways in which soucouyant being is shaped by violence, but rather searches for the liberatory potentials of being unbound by skin. There is no solid ground here, only the desire for otherwise paths, for new possibilities that, in the broader context of Hopkinson's speculative fiction, can untether Caribbean Canadian subjectivities from the oppressive narratives that read only skin and overlook the constantly shifting fire within.

The intertextualities of Hopkinson's short stories generate conversations about Caribbean Canadian subjectivities that I explore through the material/metaphorical framework of shoals and detours to highlight the otherwise potentials of thinking with fiction. The accumulations of fairy tales, folklore, and shifting imagery interrupt the singular narratives of oppressive systems, and the resulting detours search for new ways of being that can liberate the Caribbean Canadian label from the colonial violences inscribed on its surface. My thoughts here are not comprehensive; there is much more to be considered in relation to the entanglements of Black diasporic and Caribbean Canadian identities, the interconnectedness of imperial racial capitalist and gendered violence, and the political potentials of theorizing subjectivity through speculative fictions and spatial imagery. For now, however, I will end with the image of the "red ruby" that Isobel's name generates, a ruby "as big as a human heart" and "gleam[ing] as though a coal lit its core" (Hopkinson, "Precious" 269). Here, in the last story in *Skin Folk*, life blood and heat combine in the physical form of Isobel's liberating words, calling in Beatrice's unknowable future and soucouyant flights of fire to the possibilities of intertextual self-creation, of getting under the skin and searching for the elusive geographic story that captures the multiplicity of being.

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Situating the Ecological in Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*

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ABSTRACT
What does it mean to read a poem about anti-Blackness as ecopoetics? How do we account for the ecological in such a work? How does this kind of reading unsettle the notion that ecological literatures are tethered to the environment? These are the questions I tackle in this paper as I undertake a reading of Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries* as ecopoetry—a poem that explores the entanglements between the human and non-human worlds. I argue that through this poem, Brand pushes against such simple definitions of ecocritical works as focused on the impact of human activities on the environment. Her work suggests that woven into the fabric of the narratives that govern such activities are evidence of the destruction of marginalized bodies. As such, I approach *Ossuaries* from the angle of the key elements identified by scholars like Lawrence Buell, Laura-Gray Street, and Ann Fisher-Wirth as evident in ecological literatures. I examine how Brand deploys these features in her poem, using them to nudge us towards exploring Black histories in the context of what Kathryn Yusoff calls "geologic narratives." I contend that these features situate *Ossuaries* within the context of ecopoetics, and therefore allow us to critique the impact of Anthropocenic origin narratives on both the environment, human body, and human history specifically, Black histories.

Keywords
Ecopoetry; Anthropocene; Black Histories; Black bodies; Geologic narratives; Self-conscious Anthropocene.

> What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living.
> Christina Sharpe. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016)

> Geologists may say, what has this got to do with geology, to which may be replied, everything!
> Kathryn Yusoff. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018)

Reading Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries* as ecopoetry requires unpacking the features that constitute ecopoetics. It entails a repositioning of the ecocritical framework to extend into discourses beyond the environmental, pushing them into the domains of the cultural. Such realignment is affirmed by Lynn Keller who, in her book *Recomposing Ecopoetics*, notes that debates about the Anthropocene have evolved to embrace global literatures in ways that link "ecocritical with postcolonial as well as queer and race studies" (15). Therefore, to situate *Ossuaries* within ecocritical discourse necessitates a reading that both acknowledges slavery and its afterlife, and implicates colonial histories in the development of the Anthropocene.

This paper unfolds in three main parts: the first section highlights Brand's contributions through *Ossuaries*, engages with notable critiques of Brand's work, and situates my discussion within the context of extant scholarship. The second part focuses on the ecological themes that emanate from the text by drawing on the key features proposed by Lawrence Buell, Laura-Gray Street, and Ann Fisher-Wirth. The third examines the form and language in *Ossuaries* by examining the function of experimentation as deployed by Brand. I assert that this poem, in many ways, engages with ecological concerns and what Keller refers to as "the Self-Conscious Anthropocene" (2018). I thus call for a reimagination of how we interpret Brand's poetics by putting forward the argument that to approach Ossuaries exclusively from the context of anti-Black existence is itself an oversight of anti-Blackness' intricate connection with the Anthropocene.

Among the striking features of Dionne Brand's writing is the provocative positioning of her characters within political and temporal spaces in ways that

make ethical demands of us as readers. Her work requires that we question histories, norms, and politics and situate our understanding of the narratives they tell within the context of Black experience, specifically within the framework of the violence that pervades Black existence. Scholars have mostly approached Brand's work from this angle, reading it through the lenses of contemporary racism and the afterlife of slavery. Katherine McKittrick's "Plantation Futures," for example, examines Brand's *Inventory* as "a creative work that intervenes in the commonsense teleology of racial violence" (12), one that carries out the decolonial work of repositioning as well as providing context through which "black futures are reimagined" (12). Although it is a reading of *Inventory* that conceives of Plantations as sites that hold geographies of slavery and its aftermath, Black dispossession and exclusion, and Black death and survival, McKittrick's discussion also reads like a direct response to Brand's other poem, *Ossuaries*. Opening with the story of the African Burial Ground discovered in New York City in 1991, McKittrick explicates Black bodies' status as testament of Black death and anti-Black violence. For readers of *Ossuaries*, the African Burial Ground enacts an imagery of the "stone pit" that Brand describes—a pit filled with the bones of Black bodies, proof of the traumas of slavery and forced relocation. McKittrick thus asks for a rethinking of Plantation geographies as a prerequisite to the contextualization of contemporary racial violence, asserting that "it is impossible to delink the built environment, the urban, and blackness" (2). Therefore, to think of Brand primarily in the context of her stance against antiblackness, is to perform the "delinkage" that Mckittrick denounces.

Likewise, Anne Quema presents an insightful interpretation of *Ossuaries* as a response to the annihilation of Black bodies and the memorialization of such violence.[1] Referring to the poem as "songs of necropolitics"—one that sings about living in a "death-world" in which Black people continue to experience both social and political death—she argues that it confronts the reader with the "everyday practices of aggression and destruction and stages the exercise of violence with [Black] death as a normalized experience" (55). Quema concludes that while the poem offers no sense of closure for historical traumas, it grants momentary reprieve through the poetic persona's yet continuous escape to different cities, new spaces that gesture hope, no matter how minute, at regeneration (66).

Although my approach to *Ossuaries* aligns to a large extent with that of McKittrick and Quema, and other scholars like Diana Brydon, Libe García Zarranz, Andrea Medovarski, Franca Bernabei, and Tanis MacDonald who

1. See Anne Quema's "Dionne Brand's Ossuaries Songs of Necropolitics" (2014).

have rendered brilliant interpretations of Brand's works, I depart from their assessments on the basis that they tend to read the afterlife of slavery and contemporary racism in these works as isolated from her writing about environment. As such, I further their interpretations by looking at *Ossuaries* through an ecocritical lens, to observe how, as a poem, it is concerned with the politics of environmental justice, to explore how it teases out the relationship between the histories of human existence and the environment, how it investigates the connectedness of living and nonliving things coexisting in an ecosystem, and lastly, how it examines spaces and landscapes and human positioning within such spaces. Ultimately, this essay seeks to expand the unicentric and restrictive conceptualization of ecopoetry beyond its current predominant focus on non-human actors.

Laid out in fifteen ossuary sections, each reading like a chapter in a novel, the poem follows the life of Yasmine, a Black woman, as she travels across Africa and North America in pursuit of purpose and acceptance. Through this character, Brand writes a narrative that explores the impact of the Middle Passage on Black experience. She weaves a plot that does not shy from difficult topics such as domestic abuse, loss of cultures and languages, institutional racism, Black scientific experimentation, and Black activism. By positioning these topics within the context of Black diasporic existence, Brand suggests that conversations about the Anthropocene should include not just the destruction of the environment but also the *destruction* of Black bodies.

Approaching *Ossuaries* however from an ecocritical perspective unsettles the traditional descriptions of ecopoetry as poetry that "persistently stresses human cooperation with nature" (Scigaj 5). Rather than engage with the environment as a geographical space, *Ossuaries* takes on the task of unmasking veiled anti-Black activities by first articulating their forms of representation, and subsequently, connecting them to their colonial underpinnings. She appears occupied with the weaving together of political, historical, and ecological issues in ways that prompt the reexamination of human existence, relations, and spatial occupation.

Several questions emanate from reading this poem through an ecocritical lens: What is the benefit of reading *Brand* as ecopoetry? How does this exercise unsettle the notion that all of humanity is *equally* responsible for the ecological crisis, a notion that ignores 1) the role of developed nations as the major contributors of the Anthropocene; and 2), the varying impact on different communities, especially former colonies? Also, what kind of awareness is Brand trying to instigate? And lastly, what areas of ecological concern does Brand unveil through the language and form with which she has written this long poem? To tackle these questions, I focus on Brand's thematic and formal preoccupation with enacting what Kathryn Yusoff refers to as scenes of "refusal." I examine how

these features force us as readers to explore Black geologic histories[2] in the context of contemporary Black experience arguing that this contextualization therefore allows us to critique the impact of Anthropocenic origin narratives on both the environment and the human body.

Locating the Ecological in *Ossuaries*

Ecopoets explore a variety of themes; depending on the subject matter, poems may address several dimensions or just one aspect. Mostly, ecopoems have a strong sense of environmental inclination, be they yoked to nature or a political stance. They tend to represent the natural world and the complex interactions within it in ways that prompt us to question our knowledge of the world along two lines: firstly, how much do we know of our natural space and what role do we play in its existence? Secondly, how well do we understand the role of cause and effect in the universe? Are we able to see how events and actions have aligned in ways that harm the ecosystem, including the living and nonliving entities within it? It is this reasoning that makes the call to activism and demand for social justice integral to these poems.

In the preface to *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, Street and Fisher-Wirth account for ecopoetry under three categories: 1) Nature poetry—poems that are inspired by and respond to nature; 2) Environmental poetry—poems that are driven by and engage with discourse about environmental activities; such are often as concerned with human injustice as they are about the destruction of the non-human world; 3) Ecological poetry—poems that are experimental in form, often enacting on the pages the ecology they represent (xxviii-xxix). As they note, isolating a universal and encompassing definition of ecopoetry can be a daunting task because of some of its elusive features. Although this categorization serves to guide how we recognize ecopoetics, it is not exhaustive as a means of definition. At best, as a whole "they are some of the many planes that meet at various angles to create the larger whole that is ecopoetry" (xxix). To think of ecopoetry then in this sense is to lean on the *intentions* of the poet rather than on the categorization of the poem. To ask if as ecopoetics it achieves the aim of the poet, which often, as Geordie Miller asks in "To the Bones: The Instrumental Activism of Brand's *Ossuaries*," calls out, and to, the public and

2. I examine these histories in the context of what Kathryn She calls geologic origin narratives in her book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Yusoff argues that these narratives are necessary because they account for how coloniality and anti-Blackness are inscribed into the Anthropocene (19).

serves as a form of political activism (160). On this basis, I subscribe to the idea that in *Ossuaries*, Brand's objectives to place Black lives in the context of historical traumas while probing complicity and complacency performs this function.

For a more robust understanding of the subject matters that drive ecopoetry, it is useful to turn to Laurence Buell, who in his book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, traces the literary history of environmental writing in the United State. He provides a comprehensive account of how literature can potentially influence our perceptions about the environmental. Using Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* as a focal point, he traces the place of literary scholarship in the sensitization towards an ecocentric existence. In the "Introduction," Buell identifies four key elements that can be said to be present in ecopoetics: it examines the interconnectedness between non-human environment and human history; it considers and shows concern for the interest of the non-human world; it holds humans accountable for the Anthropocene; and it emphasizes a changing environment (7-8). Examining these key elements in *Ossuaries* does not only establish the ecocritical in Brand's work but also provides a rethinking of how we locate and analyze ecopoetics, especially when the work under consideration defies standard orientations. In the following pages, I undertake a reading of *Ossuaries* in line with these points.

Buell's first point expresses that the non-human environment exists "not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (7). This point gestures at an intricate relationship between history, nature, and human existence/experience. The inclusion of human existence/experience in the acknowledgement of the relationship between the past and the environment allows us to view history, then, not just as an account of events or occurrences but as a momentous past that continues to dictate present and future terms of engagement. From the perspective through which *Ossuaries* engages with the readers, the history of slavery and the modern-day violence against Black people explicates this interconnectedness. Yasmine, the main character, embodies these complicated relations; she symbolizes the multifaceted distressing Black experience rooted in slavery. And through her, Brand illuminates the proximity of Black bodies to harm and death: "this regime takes us to the stone pit every day / we live like this, /each dawn we wake up, our limbs paralyzed, / shake our bones out, deliver ourselves/ to the sharp instruments for butchering" (123). Therefore, to think about how human history is implicated in the history of the environment is to think about the ways in which coloniality was grounded on the categorization of "Blackness" and other marginalized people as commodity, a categorization that permitted the harmful treatment of these bodies.

This adverse proximity is central to Yusoff's analysis of the Anthropocene as a contested concept. She dives into contemporary ecological discourse,

challenging existing perceptions about the origins of the Anthropocene[3] while proposing novel perspectives on humans' historical relationship to and with geology. Contrary to common views about the origins of the Anthropocene, Yusoff's work considers *White Geology*[4] as a critical agent in signaling the beginning of man's global catastrophic influence on the planet. She suggests that social practices—racism and its concomitant categorization of the other as *nonhuman*—that became enabled by the white man's exclusive assumption of earth's material and processes should also be considered as drivers of ecological change. Therefore, she brings critical race discourse into conversation with ecological crisis debates by exemplifying how the language with which geology is inscribed has enabled the *commodification* of other races, theft and pollution of Indigenous lands, unauthorized scientific experimentation on bodies, and the deliberate erasures of colonial histories. In sum, Yusoff's central argument hinges on this statement: "coloniality [history] and anti-Blackness [human existence/experience] are materially inscribed into the Anthropocene [the degradation of nature]" (119). My reading of *Ossuaries* in many ways aligns with Yusoff's viewpoint mainly because I focus on how Brand magnifies the issues summed up in the term "Black Anthropocene" in Yasmin's lived experiences and psychological struggles.

Teasing out the ecological in Brand's poem in the way Buell's point demands, requires that we situate it, as Rinaldo Walcott suggests, within "a series of social, political and cultural movements of the 1960s" and the continuing effect of the Trans-Atlantic slave traffic on Black diasporic experience (88). As such, it becomes necessary to read Brand's writing as a form of what Yusoff describes as "Black Poethics".[5] Borrowed from Denise Ferreira da Silva, the term indicates a Black feminist praxis that proposes a different way of presenting and understanding the socio-economic and geologic drivers that have historically shaped, and continue to shape, Black peoples' experience. Yusoff describes this term as an attempt "to redefine both black subjectivity and 'inert' materiality" (84). For the Black Feminist writer who inhabits such a "poethical" space,

3. Yusoff identifies three possible explanations provided by the science community for the Anthropocene: "the Columbian 'exchange' and 'Orbis hypothesis' event (Lewis and Maslin 2015) (1610); the Industrial Revolution and James Watt's steam engine (1800); and the 'Great Acceleration' and nuclear isotopes from missile testing" (p. 24, Kindle Edition). For more information about Anthropogenesis, also consider Paul Crutzen's "The 'Antropocene'" (2006).

4. I use the term "White Geology" in the context of White man's dominance over the earth's material, structures, and processes as discussed in Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.

5. See Denise Ferreira da Silva's "Towards a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World" (2014).

writing becomes a means to reclaim Black narratives, stolen or erased, and an opportunity to reconstruct notions of Blackness. She explains further that Black poethical works enact scenes of "refusal" in which notions of Blackness are reworked to project an alternative and transformative perspective of Black bodies. This reworking is often exercised using "new poetic grammars to create an insurgent geology of belonging, one that refuses capture by geologic forces and redirects their nonstratified forces as a sense of possibility" (88).

Ossuaries as an example of such poethics presents a vivid representation of Black diasporic experience in contemporary society in a way that indicts the Middle Passage (history). To capture this experience effectively, the plot of the long poem centers the unequal grounds upon which Black resistance and anti-Black violence stand. Brand reiterates the inscription of violence on Black bodies through historical narratives, and how such biased descriptions served as justification for the atrocities of slavery. While she does not mention the Trans-Atlantic slave trade specifically in this poem, by referring repeatedly to the disarticulated bones of Black people accumulated over generations, she reenacts an image of the unmarked graves of Black slaves who were victims of colonial cruelty:

> I drowned in vats of sulphurous defences/
> the crate of bones I've become, good/
> I was waiting to throw my limbs on the pile,/
> the mounds of disarticulated femurs and radii/
>
> but perhaps we were always lying there,/
> dead on our feet and recyclable,/
> toxic and imperishable, the ways to see us. (49-50)

Also, later in the poem, she writes:

> here we lie in folds, collected stones
> in the museum of spectacles,
> our limbs displayed, fract and soluble. (126)

In these lines, Brand uses the imagery of remains trapped in scattered ossuaries to explain contemporary society's perpetuation of agential cruelties that habituate Black people continually to harm. In fulfilling the Black poethic mandate, Brand refuses the inscription of violence as organic to Black racial identity; rather, she reframes its construct as a crafting of the trauma of slavery, a trauma that reverberates in contemporary society's perspective of the Black race. Violence in the poem is thus depicted as a response to the unfavorable living conditions that have become mundane to Black individuals, such as

police brutality, scientific experiments on Black bodies, and labor exploitation, to mention a few.

Libe García Zarranz's insightful essay, "Toxic Bodies that Matter: Trans-corporeal Materialities in Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*," also examines this interconnectedness. In this paper, García Zarranz analyzes Brand's portrayal of the female body as a site of "trans-corporeal toxicity" one that bears the inscriptions of "the violence of multiple histories and discourses across different temporal and spatial frameworks" (28). Leaning on Stacey Alaimo's work on trans-corporeality, she pushes the argument that Brand portrays the female Black body as permeable, holding and carrying forward traumatic histories while simultaneously bearing witness to present uneven global structure (58). She notes that the poem is primarily concerned with depicting the environment as a toxic space in which the Black body is entrapped, one that requires looking back at the past in order to make sense of the present, one that says loudly and clearly that "Human beings seem to have lived a genealogy of toxicity and despair through time and history and thus bodies bear the trace of such ruptures" (59). Such a depiction, García Zarranz seems to suggest, nudges us to consciousness, not just of our existence in a temporal space, but the histories and narratives that inform inclusions and exclusions in present day.

Moving on to the second key element that Buell identifies in his book, he indicates that environmental literature highlights the existence and the importance of protecting the nonhuman (7). He supports this claim by referring to the bird in Walt Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" as a good example of the coexistence of multiple worlds within a single space. This bird, Buell notes, embodies a story, a world, and a history of its own, one that is independent of human interaction, but is often impacted by it. The contemplation of death at the end of the poem nudges one to consider not only an ultimate finale to the state of living, but also the cause of the bird's presumably dead mate.

Ossuaries complicates this stance. It insists that to examine the interest of the nonhuman is to think in two folds: to consider the marginalized "other" who is perceived as less human, and to consider "the other than human" entities coexisting in the ecosystem. These two positions must be held simultaneously in anthropocentric discourse. In other words, if ecopoetics is concerned with the interest of the nonhuman world, such interests should consider how the actions that put the nonhuman at risk also tend to harm marginalized bodies.

It is useful once again to turn to Yusoff, who explains how the extraction of natural resources, justified by the concept of White Geology, precipitated Black violence and death. She writes that "It is an inhuman proximity organized by historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism. It is predicated on the presumed absorbent qualities of black and brown bodies to take up the body

burdens of exposure to toxicities and to buffer the violence of the earth (xii). Arguing along this line prompts a consideration of the connection between anthropocenic activities and marginalized bodies; it calls into memory historical events such as the 1954 "Castle Bravo," the largest nuclear detonation carried out by the United States that devastatingly impacted the lives of the residents of Mashall Islands;[6] it also recalls the toxic pollution of Ogoni lands in Nigeria by Shell, which caught the world's attention after the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa.[7] As Yusoff notes, the history of geology is entwined with that of the Anthropocene, and it tells a story of theft and destruction, not just of natural resources but of bodies too (71). This theft necessitated the creation of a "New geologic identity" (the classification of human beings as fungible commodities), and this new identity ushered in a legacy of colonial "Experiments" (45-48).

The experimentation on marginalized bodies is an experience that Yasmine knows too well:

> let us begin from there, restraining metals
> covered my heart, rivulets
> of some unknown substance transfused my veins
>
> . . . .
>
> Plunged repeatedly to our deaths only to be revived
> By zoos, parades, experiments, exhibits, television sets. (11-12)

Here, Brand conjures an imagery of the past in a way that draws a connection between these lines and the violent circumstances that Black people have endured, such as human zoos and "freak shows" (the story of Ota Banga and Sarah Baartman come to mind), scientific experiments like the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, and the distorted representation of Black people on television. Through the poem, she shows that in all these instances, there is a lingering sense of entrapment, and while such acts presumably end, they have enduring real-life consequences because even after the perpetrators leave, and the shows end, the victim is unable to exit the scene of torture:

6. See Rens van Munster's "The Nuclear Origins of the Anthropocene" and Barbara Rose Johnston's "Environmental Justice."
7. See Eghosa E. Osaghae. "The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State" and Victoria Brittain's "Ken Saro-Wiwa: A Hero for Our Times" for conversations about Saro-wiwa, his poems, activism, and execution."

> oh we wanted to leave, we wanted to leave
> the aspirated syllables and villages, the skeletal
>
> dance floors, the vacant, vacant moons that tortured us,
> when the jailers went home and the spectators drifted
> away and the scientists finished their work
>
> like a bad dog chained to an empty gas station,
> for blue blue nights,
> I got worse and worse, so troubling. (12-13)

Thinking along the second line, while Buell considers the interest of the nonhuman in the sense of other living things in the ecosystem,[8] Brand, on the other hand, focuses on natural landscapes as the nonhuman in *Ossuaries*. She reflects nature in the context of space, specifically diasporic space. Rather than affix her narrative to a specific setting, Brand becomes what Scott Bryson refers to as a "place-maker."[9] She creates a space akin to nature in her imagery of ossuaries and uses these imagined worlds to demonstrate how Black people have continuously been "on the wrong side" of historical narratives (53). Importantly, in "Ossuary IX," she calls us to consider the degradation in the environment: the gutted sea beds, "the Clouds' soft aggressions," "the moons / which have left the skies," "the satellite whales, GPS necklaces of dolphins and turtles," and in that mix to imagine the human skin (most likely gesturing at the enslaved who embraced the "suicidal blue waters" (35)), made translucent by diesel from the ships (67-68).

In essence, Brand's poems recognize that natural spaces, whether metaphorical or literal, embody ethical stances that should prompt us to question our knowledge of the histories of the spaces we inhabit, of lost dialects, cultures, identities, lives, and worlds. Therefore, to think of the nonhuman interest, is to consider how environmental degradation affects not just the stratosphere

8. This assertion is premised upon the way he uses the bird in Walt Whitman's "Out of a Cradle Endless Rocking" to depict how ecopoets draw attention to the existence of other entities on earth.

9. Scott Bryson borrows this term from the linguistic anthropologist, Keith Basso. Basso, speaking of the Apache storytellers, describes place-makers as narrators who create imaginative "place-worlds" that are representative of "what the world could be" (9). Bryson likens these storytellers' conception of imaginary spaces made into "place-worlds" to ecopoets' creation of conceptual spaces where audiences are moved "out of an existence in an abstract postmodernized space … into a recognition of our present surroundings as place and thus as home" (11).

and other nonhuman beings, but to consider the implication of this destruction on bodies that have been destroyed as a result of White Geology. As Yasmine seems to suggest in the poem, woven into the fabric of this man-made destruction of nature, are the bones of Black bodies, disarticulated, branded, scattered, and held in ossuaries.

As a third feature, Buell asserts that human accountability is central to ecopoetry's ethical orientation (7). By similar standards, social injustice underlines *Ossuaries*. The gaze of the poem rests on slavery, and thus on the countries that have benefited from colonialism. As Yasmine continues in her search for a place to call home, carrying with her the challenges of being on the run, she seems to contend with these questions: How does one ask for accountability without access to power? What would be a justifiable reparation? Can there be respite for the traumatized soul? These questions encourage us to think from the perspective of the histories and contemporary realities that Yasmine symbolizes, and to perhaps attempt to understand the factors that motivate her thoughts and actions. For instance, while watching the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centers on television, "she looked, pitiless, at the rubble" (26). The image of a pitiless Yasmine gestures at a latter violent act in the text. The bitterness she embodies, which carries with it a tinge of righteousness, seems to emerge out of a desire for retribution as she says, "it's done, someone had done it, someone, / had made up for all the failures" (26). From Yasmine's perspective, her life and history have been ended, punctuated, erased repeatedly by institutions that have assumed the status of "metaphoric gods" (123), who justify their wrong doings under the canopy of "greater good." To this assertion Yasmine says: "do not say, oh find the good in it, do not say, / there was virtue; there was no virtue, not even in me" (11). For the Black people living in the afterlife of slavery, the question of reparation is moot. Its credence lies in the acknowledgement that they are owed a moral debt. But as Christina Sharpe asks in *The Wake*, how would such a debt be repaid? Or "Is it that Black people can only be the objects of transaction and not the beneficiaries of one, historical or not?" (60). *Ossuaries* does not provide any kind of grand mapping for recompence, nor does it recognize any form of action to assuage the hurt of marginalized people and/or repair the environment; rather, it serves as an acknowledgement first of the interrelationship between race and the Anthropocene, and second, of the violence that perpetuates more violence.

For Yasmine, who continues to live in the wake of historical and contemporary injustices that permeate Black diasporic experience, recompence is out of reach. But to remain in the hopelessness of this existence is to reinforce the inhuman hewed into Black bodies. Thus, as a push back, Brand enacts scenes of "refusal" through the poem. She projects an alternative transformative perspective

on Black bodies and narratives. In this sense, *Ossuaries* refuses the inhumanity embodied in the bones; it refuses also these atrocities committed against Black bodies as the only point of description; rather, it refocuses our attention on the social injustices that have held Black people captive for so long.

A fourth criterion by which we identify and understand ecopoetry, according to Buell, is that a "*sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text*" (8). In fulfilling this mandate, Brand's poem subtly warns about how human activities have altered existence on the planet in ways that are beyond the popular geological and biochemical lines. This warning aligns with Gary Snyder's notion of the importance of ecopoetics. He notes that writing ecopoetry requires that we "see whatever current crisis we are in as part of an older larger pattern" ("Ecology" 28). It is this imperative duty that Brand performs in *Ossuaries*. She accounts for her characters' personal inadequacies within the context of a larger geopolitical and socio-cultural framework that has historically impacted Black diasporic experience. Finding another world, some new elevation, is not an option for this group who will always have in pursuit an "eternal cops behind them, glacial and planetary" (102). Yasmine's existence is thus fraught with despair; her affective response to the undesirable life she is forced to live is like a call to arms in the context of what Lynn Keller calls "self-conscious Anthropocenes." As Keller explains, the self-conscious Anthropocene is an awareness of how past developments have damaging implications for the present and the future. Thus, in "Ossuary XIII," Yasmine says:

> if only I had something to tell you, from here,
> some good thing that would weather
> the atmospheres of the last thirty years
>
> I would put it in an envelope,
> send it to my past life,
> where someone would open it and warn the world. (103-104)

A few lines later she continues:

> I've been wasted, look, the chest like a torn bodice ripped the guts right out of me, go,
> go, my toes are eaten away by frost and rubber,
>
> some chemical has boiled my eyes the rest of me's been stolen,
> I should say wrecked, well let's say,
> I never knew it, like wire. (105-106)

Yasmine's desire to inform her past self, if possible, of the looming disaster prods us to think of our future, to be conscious of activities and their effect on humans, nonhumans, and the Earth. In its hopelessness, *Ossuaries* asks us to contemplate human histories and the implications they have for our societies today, within the crucial context of ecological ruin and ruining.

To limit the ecological in this poem to the extrapolation of Buell's points ignores other equally important features of environmental literature that Brand employs, for example, the way she manipulates language and form to create a continuous pattern of tercets that are sparsely punctuated and rarely come to a full stop. These blocks of stanzas can be read both as a literal form of confinement as well as metaphor for an actual "ossuary," a box of remains. Brand references this notion in her acceptance speech at the Griffin Poetry Prize award ceremony saying, "I made these ossuaries—these bone cabinets or bone boxes if you will where I wanted to put all the toxicity of our society" ("Dionne" 2011). The form of the poem indicates this notion; however, the subject matter pushes against this contained structure. While the constant boxing-off of the stanzas presents an imagery of bones contained in unmarked graves, the repeated use of enjambment works to emphasize the speaker's struggle to escape this restriction. Yasmine's desperate, yet unsuccessful attempt "to undo, to undo and undo and undo this infinitive" (21) reiterates this struggle. In a way, this box of bones also represents cultures and languages lost as a result of humans' geologic interference with nature. I use the term interference with nature in the context of Yusoff's discussion of geology as the main driver of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. With the removal of African people from their homelands, many cultures, languages, and identities were displaced and lost. It is this loss that Brand references throughout the poem: "the body skids where the light pools/ each bone has its lost dialect now, /untranslatable though I had so many languages" (50). Bringing the poem to a close still in this form portrays a sense of permanent loss in a way that seems to leave one wondering: could there ever be room for recovery and redemption?

Brand also utilizes several literary techniques in this text. Flipping through the pages of this book, the reader is pulled towards the run-on layout of the poem. There are only two full stops in the entire 128 pages of poetry, and these are used in both direct and indirect reported speech: "finally finds a tongue "We got work to do.'" (42) and "safe place, she is in stitches, the Syracuse teenager/giggles." (94). As such, these full stops have no direct implication on the message of the poem, and by allowing her poem to flow continuously till the end, Brand implies the endlessness of Black struggles, not to suggest infinity but to prompt a consciousness to the need to put an end to these cycles of violence and trauma. Similarly, there are many inquiry lines in the poem that are not marked with a question mark: "will my bones glitter beyond these ages,

/ will they burn beyond the photographs'/crude economy" (51); likewise, the whole of "Ossuary IV," which is made up of rhetorical questions made into stanzas. These unpunctuated rhetorical questions subtly call for self-reflection, encouraging the reader to pay attention to the speaker's plight. It is interesting to note too that the unmarked questions she poses are open-ended, thus giving the reader the freedom to answer, if they so choose, based on their knowledge, understanding, and affective response.

Brand's use of comparative literary devices run through the poem. Metaphor and simile are deployed to draw attention to the similarity between the violence of slavery and the recent anti-Black violence. The entire poem, including the title, is symbolic of many things: the historic trauma of the Middle passage, the effect of the Anthropocene on Black bodies, the violence imposed on Black people today, and the anti-Blackness of public spaces and institutional agencies. At times, she describes Black experiences that can be read as representative of both the reality of the Black slave and the Black person today: "we grinned our aluminum teeth, / we exhaled our venomous breaths, / we tried to be calm in the invisible architecture / we incubated, like cluster bombs" (12). There is also sustained use of repetition in *Ossuaries*. For instance, she uses epistrophe, a literary device Brand mentions in the poem itself, to place emphasis on the urgency for action: "I've got no time, no time, *this epistrophe*, no time, / wind's coming, no time, / one sunrise to the next is too long, no time" (61, emphasis mine). Also, at several instances, the narrator repeats the idiom "as I said" (11, 31, and 33) to carry on her narrative and reinforce the theme of exasperation, implying her frustration with having to repeat what should have been already heard. Perhaps even more obvious are those words she repeats in succession: caught,/ caught,/ every comrade caught" (24); "she would love, love to talk" (26); "oh I longed, longed" (35); "run, run" (42); "they drive, drive, drive, drive, drive" (78), and "I gave here, I gave there"(48). The intentionality of her emphatic style serves to reinforce the main character's opinions and abstract truth.

But not all ecocritics will agree that Brand's work fits within the purview of ecopoetics. John Shoptaw in his essay "Why Ecopoetry" argues that an ecopoem needs to be both environmental and environmentalist. By environmental, he suggests that an ecopoem is a kind of nature poem, and in this sense, it is about the nonhuman natural world. He also states that it must be ecocentric rather than anthropocentric because "Human interests cannot be the be-all and end-all of an ecopoem" (396). The other feature of an ecopoem, according to Shoptaw, is in its ability to sensitize us towards its theme. For Shoptaw, ecopoetry should aim to unsettle and create awareness, but not in a didactic way. The purpose should not be in teaching us a new way to act, but in sensitizing us to the need for action (401). In essence, his argument about what ecopoetry is and what it should be doing is summarized thus: "However

self-aware and self-reflexive it may be, an ecopoem must be tethered to the natural world" (396). With this summation, Shoptaw seems to assume that ecocentricity and anthropocentricity are mutually exclusive, with only one form of centeredness possible in a given work. I argue for multicentricity. Such works, as Brand's *Ossuaries*, examine how human activities impact, or have impacted, the natural world, which includes *natural* human bodies. They thereby create a consciousness—environmental, socio-cultural, or political—about relationships and interconnectedness between human and nonhuman entities in the world, and by extension, the relevance of certain events to this relationship.

An overview of how ecocriticism and ecopoetics have evolved is beyond Shoptaw's restrictive characterization. In his introduction to *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction to Ecopoetry*, Scott Bryson identifies three overarching characteristics that are evident in ecopoetry: "ecocentrism, a humble appreciation of wildness, and a skepticism toward hyperrationality and its resultant overreliance on technology" (7). Going by these characteristics, one can say that ecopoetry fundamentally, as Shoptaw too would agree, draws connections between human activity and the environment; it explores the interrelatedness between the human and nonhuman world and often emphasizes how a lack of awareness of this connection accounts for the global degradation prevalent in the environment. But ecopoetry goes beyond a sensitivity to ecological subject matter; it investigates, through its themes and forms, as Forrest Gander puts it, "the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception" (2). Keller also writes about this relationship in her Introduction "Beyond Nature Poetry" in which she examines ecopoems that respond "to environments that have undergone radical anthropogenic transformation" (3). In this study, she provides a critical review of ecopoetry and its complicated relationship with nature poetry suggesting that poems that portray ecological concerns, especially the ones she focusses on in her book, depart from traditional norms of nature writing in the sense that their primary focus lies in the impact of humankind's actions on the planet. But not all ecopoems, she adds, deal with how humankind adversely modifies the planet; scholars in environmental humanities have been pushing beyond the narrow definition of ecopoetics as exclusively ecological by acknowledging that culture is intertwined within this discourse. As a result, ecopoetics now encompasses issues of environmental justice in ways that link ecocriticism to critical race, feminist, and queer studies.[10] Laura-Gray Street and Ann Fisher-Wirth echo this shift. Drawing on Bryson's categorization of ecopoetry, they write that ecopoetry "is also greatly influenced by social and

10. Keller discusses these points in her introduction to *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene* pp. 9-13.

environmental justice movements; it is committed to questions of human injustice as well as to issues of damage and degradation to the other-than-human world" (n.p). As such, a poem can be ecological without being explicitly about nature. Street and Fisher-Wirth extend this view by arguing that poems with an "experimental" outlook and that tend to invoke self-reflection in "ways about how poems can be ecological or can somehow enact ecology" fall within the ecopoetry spectrum. Thinking about environmental poetry in this light allows the works of feminist writers like Dionne Brand and Canisia Lubrin to be included under the canopy of ecopoetry. I include Lubrin here because of her recent work, *The Dyzgraphxst*, in which, like Brand, she engages with the ecological. She tackles disruptions, especially of self, of knowledge, and of language, that pervade Black postcolonial experience, and accounts for these within the context of global exploitations.

But why is it important to consider these writers and their works as ecological? It is because they inhabit a unique and important space in ecological discourse, a space that examines ecological crises as part of a complex human history. More importantly, they challenge the assumption that humanity is a homogenous force by illuminating how marginalized groups, perceived as less than human, have been assumed to be non-human, received abuse similar to the environment, and have consequently been more severely impacted by the Anthropocene.

Unlike mainstream ecopoets who continue to largely focus on human impact on the planet and other species in the ecosystem, poets like Brand present an anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist framework through which they indict capitalism, colonialism, and slavery as the drivers of the Anthropocene on Black and Brown bodies and on native lands. By taking on the task of engaging with race, gender, and the history of colonialism in their works, they oppose the hegemonic structures that have enabled the erasure of histories, the commodification of racialized bodies, and the exploitation of lands by centering geopolitical violence and the perpetuating socio-cultural implications of colonialism on marginalized people. Adopting this approach paves the way for conversations about decolonization, not in terms of monetary compensations but in the dematerialization of racialized bodies, in the restoration, preservation, and protection of native lands, and in holding *White Geology* accountable for the Anthropocene.

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From Paris and Rome to Quebec - Reading Fanon in Radical Montreal Intellectual Circles of the 1960s[1]

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ABSTRACT
The aim of this article is to trace the socio-political context in which Frantz Fanon's thought reached left-wing French and English-speaking intellectuals in Montreal between 1950 and 1970, and to analyze the reception of the theses of the author of *The Wretched of the Earth* in the discourse of these circles on culture and art, especially literature. The reading of Fanon's main concepts becomes here the object of a certain cultural-political interpretation, in which strategies of adaptation or even appropriation make it possible to inscribe Fanon's work in the Franco-Quebecois independence struggle in the era of the Quiet Revolution or to link the identity aspirations of the Quebec Black minority with the demands of the Black Power movement as well as the worldwide anti-imperialist movement. In these different contexts, literature has its own distinct tasks, inextricably linked to the aspirations of the societies within which it is produced. From defending the language of the dominated to creating a new vision of the world and of man, through

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direct involvement in political affairs: the writer, according to Fanon interpreted in Quebec, becomes one of the central figures of the revolutionary struggle.

Keywords
Frantz Fanon; Sixties Montreal; Parti pris; Black Power; Canadian left-wing intellectuals; Canadian revolutionary writers.

Known as one of the foremost theorists in the struggle against racism and colonialism, Frantz Fanon became one of the primary authorities for revolutionary and anti-imperialist circles around the world in the 1960s (Cherki 14-15). Fanon's analysis of the psychological effects of colonization, based on his observations of compatriots in Martinique as well as patients in the Algerian psychiatric hospital in Blida, became within a few decades a canonical interpretation of phenomena such as the institutionalization of racial divisions or the cultural alienation of members of colonized societies. It is also impossible to forget his theories on the independence struggle in colonial conditions as well as the place and role of culture in such activities. All these aspects of the author's thoughts in the essays *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) or *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) became so well known among the supporters of decolonization that they also spread throughout North America, including Canada. In the latter country, Fanon's texts were read and commented on in both English- and French-speaking society as early as the 1960s, shortly after the publication of the aforementioned texts. This paper aims to trace which of Fanon's themes in his reflections on culture found the strongest resonance among Canadian intellectuals of the era, and how the latter shaped their conception of the writer and artist based on Fanon's theses and postulates. The idea will be to examine the influence of this Caribbean theorist of anti-colonialism on liberation movements in Canada, specifically in the Quebec of the 1960s, through a reading of speeches by some of the participants in the 1968 Congress of Black Writers in Montreal as well as selected articles that appeared in the journal *Parti pris*. This analysis will be based on a cross-reading of Fanon's own speeches at the Congresses of Black Writers in Paris (1956) and Rome (1959), as well as on references to two of the author's foundational texts mentioned above.

Culture and the writer according to Frantz Fanon

Organized at the Sorbonne from September 19 to 22, 1956, on the initiative of Alioune Diop, founder of the journal *Présence africaine*, the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists was to become one of the most important events in the intellectual and cultural life of Blacks after World War II. Bringing

together leading representatives of the Black intelligentsia from Africa, the Caribbean and the United States, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Jacques Rabemanajara, Aimé Césaire, George Lamming, Jacques Stephen Alexis and Richard Right, among others, the congress proceedings became a space for reflection and discussion on Black culture, their condition in the then colonized world, and possible directions for the development of an international and transcontinental Black community. Planned as a kind of counterpart to the Bandung conference (1955), but focused on cultural issues, the Paris congress became one of the main reference points for subsequent reflection on negritude, Pan-Africanism, and a source of inspiration for anti-colonial theories of culture and art. (Bonner 1-18; Dieng 118-124; John 21-43)

Fanon participates in the Congress as the author of the essay *Black Skin, White Masks*, published four years earlier by the Seuil publishing house, but also as a practicing psychiatrist involved from 1953 to 1956 in the psychiatric hospital in Blida, Algeria. In his paper, entitled "Racisme et culture," Fanon conducts an analytical deconstruction of racism and its pseudo-scientific attitudes, attempting to show it as an ideological construct created and maintained by colonial states as a tool to reinforce the power exercised in conquered territories. In this perspective, placed in the specific context of colonization, "racism … is only one element of a larger ensemble: that of the systematized oppression of a people" (Fanon, "Racisme et culture" 123; our translation). According to Fanon, unsupportable by any scientific findings that would confirm actual differences between races, racist attitudes are ultimately a product of colonial discourse, sustaining the dominance of colonial powers. For Fanon, then, racism is a phenomenon rooted in politics, the nature of which changes over time, evolving from theories that proclaim the biological superiority of one race over another to concepts and practices that entrench the presumed inferior status of one culture (the dominated culture) over another (the colonizer's culture). It is this aspect that becomes Fanon's main point of reflection given the impact of this type of thinking on the situation of colonized countries at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. Following the reasoning presented by Fanon at the Paris congress, the primary task of colonized societies is to try to fight not racism itself, which is only a consequence of the socio-political situation of a given country, but the multidimensional struggle for liberation from the political, economic, and cultural oppression resulting from colonization. According to Fanon, racism, understood as the humiliation of one social group and its culture by another, can disappear only when the former undertakes a liberation struggle, perceived by Fanon as the only possible path to de-alienation both at the level of the psyche of individual members of a given society and at the level of the collective awakening of national consciousness and identity. Breaking out into independence, achieving political freedom and the

possibility of constructing one's own statehood becomes, for Fanon, the basis for the creation of national culture and the development of the arts. Fanon thus opposes the postulates proclaiming the primacy of culture over socio-political activities, according to which the protection and enrichment of the cultural heritage of conquered societies should be a stage prior to the struggle for independence (Young 94). In his discussion of potential solutions to the problem of colonial alienation, Fanon thus prioritizes the need for action in the area of socio-political construction of new nations as a necessary and prior stage to the cultivation of a living culture of a given society. This conception, already present in the Paris paper, would be concretized in another speech Fanon would give three years later in Rome as part of the Second Congress of Black Writers and Intellectuals (1959). Entitled "Reciprocal Bases of National Culture and the Fight for Freedom," this paper would serve as a direct extension of the reflections presented in Paris and, at the same time, as a leaven for further thoughts in this area that would appear in *The Wretched of the Earth*.[2]

The Second Congress of Black Writers and Intellectuals takes place in Rome from 26 March to 1 April, 1959 as a continuation of the events in Paris.[3] While the latter was held around the central theme of "The Crisis of Culture," and aimed to determine the state of knowledge of Africa's diverse cultural traditions and to provide a general framework for the revival of Black culture, the Rome congress sought to establish more precise directions for the cultural practices of Black societies in the context of Pan-African unity (Appeal 9). During the congress, speeches by such intellectuals as Alioune Diop, Cheikh Anta Diop, James W. Ivy, and William T. Fontaine sit side by side with speeches by writers directly involved in politics, such as Jean-Price Mars (Haiti's ambassador to Paris), Aimé Césaire (longtime mayor of Fort-de-France), Léopold Sédar Senghor (who the next year would become the first president of independent Senegal), and politicians such as Eric Williams (premier from 1956 to 1962 and, subsequently, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago from 1962 to 1981) or Sékou Touré (President of independent Guinea since 1958).[4] The co-presence of these two types of participants, as well as the topics taken up in their

2. The Rome speech is included in Fanon's book as an integral part of Chapter 4, entitled "On the National Culture."
3. The idea of organizing another congress was formulated in Paris as one of the final demands of all the participants. The organizers of the congress in Rome were the Société de culture africaine (an institution founded by the projects initiated at the Paris congress) and the Institut italien pour l'Afrique.
4. It should be noted that most of the individuals mentioned (with the exception of Sékou Touré) attended the Paris congress as some of the main figures in the debates held at the Sorbonne.

speeches (revolving mainly around the leading issues, i.e. African unity and the responsibility of culture towards the nation), testifies to the ever stronger politicalization of the debates held in Rome and confirms the desire to create concrete solutions in line with the thesis put forward by the authors of the issue of *Présence africaine*, in which the papers from the congress were published: "This renaissance of the peoples of color is the work of political leaders. It is also the work of men of culture" ("The Policy of our Culture" 6).[5] It is in this context that Frantz Fanon speaks, deepening his reflection on the links between culture and the political situation of colonized countries.

In his statement, Fanon starts from the basic observation that colonialism means for the colonized society the complete disappearance of its own statehood and, at a deeper level, national consciousness. Even if a socio-political or cultural life can be observed in the colonized countries, according to Fanon, it is always an artificial reality, operating on the principle of forced, inauthentic, and therefore alienated reactions of the colonized to the conditions of external domination. Attachment to tradition, cultivated and glorified as an artifact of the past (such an attitude Fanon attributes mainly to the négritude movement), becomes here only another form of reaction to the colonial deprivation of the right to one's own identity and culture, different from the basic one related to assimilation (imitation of the canon of the dominant culture and more or less conscious denial of one's own culture). According to Fanon, the lack of the possibility of self-determination causes in colonized subjects, locked in a vicious circle of permanent relation to the colonizer, a complete incapacity for community self-awareness as well as for the creative development of culture: "The colonial situation calls a halt to national culture in almost every field. Within the framework of colonial domination there is not and there will never be such phenomena as new cultural departures or changes in the national culture" (Fanon, "Reciprocal Bases" 237). Colonization thus leads to the suffocation and atrophy of both the national identity and creativity of the colonized society. Consequently, the primary goal of the efforts of every member of colonized societies should become, in the first instance, the liberation struggle. The latter is the sine qua non condition for the revival of culture: "The condition for its (of the culture; my precision) existence is therefore national liberation and the renaissance of the state" (Fanon, "Reciprocal Bases" 242). Fanon goes a step further in his reasoning by elevating the liberation struggle to the level

5. The more political nature of the congress in Rome is also confirmed by the institutional setting of the proceedings: an audience with the President of Italy, Giovani Gronchi on the eve of the opening of the congress, an audience with Pope John XXIII after the proceedings, and an address by Senator C. Mazza during the congress itself.

of a symbolic manifestation of the power of the nation: "We believe that the conscious and organized undertaking by a colonized people to re-establish the sovereignty of that nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists" (Fanon, "Reciprocal Bases" 243). According to Fanon's thesis, it is only a truly free society, which, importantly, regains its independence by its own will and its own struggle, that becomes capable of producing a culture that is truly and profoundly valuable, that is, one characterized by strong dynamism, changeability, a creative approach to its own legacy, and, just as importantly, the ability to engage in dialogue with other cultures. This last statement is important because for a long time Fanon's postulates were identified with the notion of radical nationalism (and violence at that), which, allegedly, Fanon praised or even promoted. As Alice Cherki points out in her preface to the 2002 edition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, this reading of Fanon turns out to be invalid (Cherki 10-11). Contrary to some of Fanon's critics, Fanon's conception of the struggle for the emancipation of the colonized world does not imply the promotion of nationalist attitudes understood as the closing of new national societies to others. On the contrary, it assumes the necessity of openness to international and intercultural relations after the formation of new national communities:

> The consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication…National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension …The birth of national consciousness in Africa has a strictly contemporaneous connection with the African consciousness. The responsibility of the African as regards national culture is also a responsibility with regard to African Negro culture … [T]he most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation. If this building up is true …then the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately only the source of all culture. (Fanon, "Reciprocal Bases" 247-248)

Violence, on the other hand, understood as the inner reflex of the colonized rebellion, becomes legitimate only on condition of being "organized in a liberation struggle that allows the overcoming" (Cherki 10; our translation). By subordinating everything to the idea of emancipation, Fanon thus seems to defend the right of colonized societies to the historical stage of the birth and constitution of a new nationhood and a new statehood: "National claims, it is here and there stated, are a phase that humanity has left behind. It is the day

of great concerted actions, and retarded nationalists ought in consequence to set their mistakes aright. We however consider that the mistake, which may have very serious consequences, lies in wishing to skip the national period" (Fanon 245). At the same time, his thought does not oppose the general ideas of Pan-Africanism, the unity of Negro-African societies, or other forms of contact between cultures. The ideal promoted by Fanon, then, is a free, internally strong, and autonomous society, capable of creating its own state institutions and its own culture, while remaining open to dialogue with other nations.

Fanon in Canada

The question of the reception of Fanonian thought in Canada presents itself in two ways. As Sean Mills states, among francophone intellectuals in Quebec he was read mainly as a theorist of colonial alienation and a promoter of violence as a legitimate means of struggle for independence, which was supported by Jean-Paul Sartre's interpretation of Fanon's theses (*The Empire Within* 50). In the circles of the radical Anglophone left, Fanon appears as one of the main authorities in the struggle for Black equality, in which racial issues (understood dynamically and evolutionarily) become a key issue. It seems therefore legitimate to say that Fanon's thought, in both cases, has been interpreted partly differently through interpretations in accordance with the interests of particular social groups. It is therefore a question of a certain appropriation of the Martinican's theses according to the needs of a given intellectual and political movement. An important role in the formation of these two readings of Fanon seems to have been played by the conditions in which his texts reached Canada.

The events of the Congresses mentioned above, both in Paris and Rome, had their resonance in the social consciousness of the time. It was certainly not a very strong resonance, if only because of the wider socio-political context of the time (the bread strike in France in 1956 and the war in Algeria since 1958), but the proceedings at the Sorbonne and the Institut italien pour l'Afrique were mentioned in the French and English-language press. As for the congress in Paris, James Baldwin regularly informed the Anglo-American as well as the French public through his dispatches sent as an accredited envoy-correspondent of the *Encounter* and French *Preuves* newspapers (Winks 605-614). James W. Ivy included a detailed account of the Paris deliberations in the December issue of *The Crisis* magazine (Ivy 593-600). Another event also contributed to the popularization of the ideas of the Paris Congress, namely, the First Congress of Black Writers, held February 28-March 1, 1959, in New York City. Organized according to the Paris model by the American Society of African Culture, the American branch of the French Société de culture africaine (Washington

156), the New York conference was an opportunity to promote the reflections and concepts presented in Paris. Regarding both the Paris and the Rome congresses, it is worth noting that the papers presented during the proceedings were published in bilingual (French and English) issues of *Présence africaine*.[6] In the case of the Paris Congress, these are issues 8-9-10 of 1956 and 14-15 of 1957 while, in the case of the Rome Congress these are issues 24/25 and 27/28 of 1959. The availability of an English version of the speeches facilitated the circulation of the ideas preached in Paris and Rome, including Fanon's papers, throughout North America, especially through the American Society of African Culture mentioned above.

With regard to Fanon's reception, however, access to his most famous essay of the time, *The Wretched of the Earth*, plays a major role. It is worth noting that among Francophone readers in Quebec this book was popularized by the journalist and essayist Raoul Roy, one of the leading left-wing activists of the 1950-60s, who strongly influenced the crystallization of the attitudes of future members of the FLQ and the journal *Parti pris* (Mills, *The Empire Within* 59). In addition to Roy's role, mention should also be made of the influence of Haitian intellectuals and writers who arrived in Montreal in the early 1960s as a result of François Duvalier's oppressive and dictatorial rule. Figures such as Anthony Phelps, Serge Legagneur, and Roland Morisseau, associated with the Haïti littéraire literary group, come into contact quite quickly with Franco-Haitian writers such as Gaston Miron and Paul Chamberland, introducing them to the work of Antilleans, including Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon himself (Voltaire and Péan 351-395; Mills, "Popular Internationalism" 257). Meetings between Haitian and Quebec writers at the Haitian restaurant Le Perchoir d'Haïti become, then, one of the factors in the spread of Fanon's thought in Francophone leftist intellectual and literary circles. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that Fanon is also read in circles traditionally understood as conservative and which, at the same time, are evolving towards increasingly leftist attitudes. As Sean Mills states, organizations such as Development and Peace or the Jeunesse étudiante catholique undergo a profound shift in sensibility in the 1960s, and some of the events they organize become opportunities for debates around global capitalism or under-development in light of Fanon's analyses and concepts (Mills, *A Place in the Sun* 69).

However, the very milieu associated with the *Parti pris* (1963-1968) seems to have been the strongest vector for the dissemination of Fanon's thought, due to the numerous references to the Martinique psychiatrist-thinker appearing in

6. The journal published an English language edition from 1955 to 1961, with Richard Wright as its editor.

the articles of this periodical as well as to the fact that *The Wretched of the Earth* was available in the permanent offer of Éditions Parti pris (a subsidiary of the magazine founded in 1964).[7] Fanon's texts thus reached francophone Quebec through leftist circles strongly associated with ideas of identity renewal and the struggle for independence of this Canadian province. It should be emphasized that this is happening at a time when the debate on these issues is already strongly present in Quebec. Suffice it to mention the disputes that preceded or accompanied the publication of Robert Charbonneau's *La France et nous* in 1947. Charbonneau's efforts to strengthen the position of French-Canadian publishers, his criticism of postwar French literature (considered by Charbonneau to be in decline and increasingly hermetic), and his call for French-Canadian writers to realize their American distinctiveness from their European source all fueled internal discussions about what would soon be called not French-Canadian but Quebec culture. By the time Fanon's texts reach Quebec, movements of identity affirmation are already well felt there, and while first concerned with attitudes toward France, they would soon turn even more strongly toward questions of dependence on anglophone Canada. It is in this context of the Quiet Revolution that Fanon's work would resonate most widely among French-speaking intellectuals.

To Quebec English-speaking intellectuals, *The Wretched of the Earth* reached mainly through emancipation groups and the struggle for Black equality in the United States.[8] The first English translation by Constance Farrington, entitled *The Damned*, was published by *Présence africaine* as early as 1963.[9] That same year, Grove Press published the same translation in New York, but under the revised title, still known today, *The Wretched of the Earth*.[10] Sub-

7. It is worth highlighting on this occasion the mutual relationship between Fanon's French publisher Éditions Maspero and Éditions Parti pris. Cf. Gérard Fabre. "Parti pris et Maspero" *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 19(2), 87-96, 2011.
8. It should be noted here that Fanon, as one of the leading theorists of the struggle against racism and colonialism, was known in Black radical student circles of English-speaking Montreal. C. R. L. James mentions him at least in his lectures organized between 1966 and 1967 in Montreal, especially in his talk "The making of the Caribbean people" delivered at the Second Montreal Conference on West Indian Affairs held in 1966 (James 190). As we will see later, in the context of the Congress of Black Writers, Fanon's image is also prominently displayed in the meetings of that period, which may indicate that he was well recognized in that community.
9. On the history of the first English translation of Fanon's essay, see Kathryn Batchelor, Sue-Ann Harding (eds.). *Translating Frantz Fanon Across Continents and Languages*, London: Routledge. 2017.
10. According to Robert J. C. Young, this title does not appear until the London edition.

sequent editions (1965, London, Mac Gibbon & Kee; 1966, New York, Grove Press—a reissue; and, that same year, Grove Press, under the Black Cat imprint, in a low-budget version aimed at the general public) reproduced Farrington's translation, until 2005, when Grove Press published Fanon's essay, translated by Richard Philcox, with a foreword by Homi K. Bhabha. Interpreted in various ways, as evidenced by the very subtitles added to the various American editions (Young 91), and to which Farrington's translation distortions may also have contributed (Macey 45-47), Fanon's essay quickly became one of the primary readings of members and supporters of the Black Power movement, especially activists associated with The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (Arnold 118-135). It was representatives of these movements, who were invited to guest meetings in Canada, especially in Montreal (Austin 17), that helped to spread Fanon's theses among Black members of the English-speaking part of Canadian society. In all likelihood, it can be argued that central to this dynamic of increasing affirmation of communal Blacks in Canada, especially in Quebec of the 1960s, and in which Fanon's reflections and theses acted as one of the catalysts, was the Congress of Black Writers held in Montreal from October 11 to 14, 1968 at McGill University.

Organized in part by former members of the Caribbean Conference Committee such as Rosie Douglas, the Montreal congress featured the likes of C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, James Forman, and Stokely Carmichael. As Sean Mills and David Austin state, along with the events surrounding the occupation of the computer center at Sir George Williams University, this congress was one of the landmark events that brought to the attention of Quebec public opinion racial issues that had often been downplayed until then by both the public and the authorities in that province, but especially influenced the crystallization of the identity and socio-political demands of Blacks in Quebec (Mills, *The Empire Within* 112; Austin 152). Importantly, two speeches from the congress program, delivered by James Forman and Stokely Carmichael, relate directly to the person of Frantz Fanon and his political and social thought. Following them allows us to understand what interpretation of Fanon's thought reaches Montreal's Black revolutionary circles, and in this, what concept of culture and literature emerges from these readings of the Martinique author.

Cf. Robert J. C. Young. "Fanon and the Enigma of Cultural Translation." *Translation: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 1, 2012, p. 91. The copies of the first American edition available even today contradict this thesis. Importantly, the New York edition also covered the Canadian market.

Fanon and Parti pris

For leftist Franco-Québec intellectuals associated with the journal *Parti pris* (Gérard Godin, Paul Chamberland, Jan Depocas, André Brochu, among others), Fanon's thought was part of a concept, being developed since the 1950s, of cultural and political solidarity with the countries of the so-called Third World. Support for the independence aspirations of the French colonies, combined with a community of political and economic views rooted in Marxism, goes here additionally hand in hand with an emerging awareness of Quebec's cultural separateness from France, English-speaking Canada, and the United States, as well as an increasingly strong resistance to discrimination against Franco-Canadians in the social and economic life of the Canadian Federation.

Literary-intellectual references associated with Black cultural revival movements play an important role in the process of identity de-alienation of Franco-Canadians. Indeed, Franco-Canadian writers and political activists of the period are quite familiar with the main theses of the négritude movement and with the poetry of one of its main exponents, Aimé Césaire, which reaches Quebec through Gaston Miron (Fabre 93) and also, indirectly, through André Breton, who recognized the author of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* as one of the greatest French-speaking contemporary poets (Breton 97). Fanon's main theses, concerning the colonial alienation of conquered societies, the struggle for independence, the conditions for the creation of nation states, as well as the role of culture in the processes of independence, are part of a broader context of reflection on the colonial condition of Franco-Canadian society and the search for models to describe and precisely diagnose Quebec's situation. The assimilation or appropriation of Césaire's, Memmi's, and Fanon's thought by French-speaking intellectuals in Quebec takes place on the basis of a political and cultural metaphor where the problem of racial discrimination, so important for Fanon's reflections, becomes a much broader concept, referring to the whole processes of domination and subjugation in colonial and capitalist societies. As Sean Mills notes:

> For a vision of a future postcolonial society, many radicals turned to the works of Frantz Fanon, finding in *The Wretched of the Earth* the means of reconciling their feelings of national alienation with their socialist convictions. Engagement with the book helped them articulate the necessity of resisting neo-nationalist narratives of modernization. (*The Empire Within* 30)

The best example of this peculiar cultural transfer would, of course, be Pierre Vallières' essay *Les nègres blancs d'Amérique* (1968), where the figure of the nègre becomes symbolic of Franco-Canadians culturally and economically

dominated by English-speaking society. In this context, it can be argued that Fanon's own theses were often reduced for the benefit of radical sovereigntist attitudes, as part of the legitimation of the use of force and violence in the liberation struggle (Mills, *The Empire Within* 32), leading to serious distortions of the Martinican's entire theory and conception. It should be noted here that this appropriation was often done consciously, as most French-speaking Quebec intellectuals stressed the need to adapt Fanon's theses, developed on the basis of observations of the real and practical situation of colonized societies in Martinique and Algeria, to the Quebec reality, in which the very concept of colonization is largely figurative (Mills, *The Empire Within* 34).[11] Additionally, as Ato Sekyi-Out demonstrates, misinterpretations of Fanon's analysis of violence in the anti-colonial struggle stem, beyond the very issue of a certain opportunistic reading of his works, from a misunderstanding of the style Fanon uses. According to Sekyi-Out, Fanon's comments on violence have often been understood as calls for violent action, whereas their true meaning is revealed when they are read as a "dramatic dialectical narrative" in which what is described is not the result of the author's own will, but rather is what must happen under conditions of colonial oppression (Sekyi-Out 4).

Fanon's interpretation of Quebec reality as the effect of colonial forces underlies the diagnoses made by *Parti pris* intellectuals about the state of Quebec literature during the Quiet Revolution. A key article in this regard, "Notre littérature de colonie," by Laurent Girouard, seems to be a direct transposition of Fanon's vision of culture presented at the Congress of Rome, which later became part of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Indeed, Girouard begins his text with the provocative assertion of the non-existence of any Franco-Canadian literature because at the same time there is no Franco-Canadian nation as an independent socio-political entity. In stating this, Girouard remains close to Fanon's assertion that the vitality of culture is closely linked to the existence of a self-determining nation capable of building basic state institutions. For Girouard, Quebec literature and, more broadly, Quebec culture, appears as an empty, artificial creation of identity alienation, a prosthesis to a true and independent culture that can only exist under conditions of complete freedom: "We have reached the last 'alienation' if we continue to believe that cultural life is possible for a minority people during the process of their linguistic assimilation. Culture is only viable for a free people" (31; our translation). Maintaining

11. It should be noted here that the aforementioned figurative nature of the term of colonization refers to the French-speaking population of Quebec, descended from the former inhabitants of New France, and not to the Indigenous People of the same areas, for whom the same term has a most material meaning.

his text on the borderline between an iconoclastic pamphlet and a historical analysis of literary development, Girouard accuses Quebec writers of completely conforming to models taken from the French classics and to the conservative requirements of the ideology dominating Quebec society until then, closely linked to the Catholic tradition but also to the political affiliation to the Canadian federation: "Every young quebecer (sic) knows at fifteen years old that he is guilty of wanting to assert himself, that authority comes from God, that Quebec is part of the great Canadian family" (32; our translation). Quebec's French-language literature to date thus appears to be the product of ideological indoctrination, the effect of which is detachment from true reality, defined, following Fanon, by closeness to the people:

> However, the more we read about French stylists, the more we lost touch with our social milieu. My father was embarrassed by my sentences… my mother laughed. Our friends from the factories listened to us, dazed, we were now poor dumbs. Our articles for the newspapers became hermetic. Everything was broken. We no longer spoke the same language as the people. (Girouard 33; our translation)

Certainly, the difference between Fanon's understanding of the relationship between the cultural elite and the people differs here from Girouard's perception. The former understood the people as the inhabitants of the countryside or, even more, as the lumpenproletariat, excluded by capitalism from the socio-economic circulation of development, while for the latter it means the working class using joual. Nevertheless, the main principle of the value of literature (or any product of intellectual labor) is for both of them based on its accessibility and usefulness to the lower, excluded parts of society. The role of the writer, in this sense, becomes to regain freedom, if only by force, and to reveal the truth about his own people:

> Stripped down, vociferous, anarchistic, we came up against the absurdity of a Quebecer's life in "Great Canada." Everything had to be done. To conquer by force and assume our individual freedom, to forget the bad dream of our petty bourgeois culture, to invent an understandable and valid language. There remained only one solution, to write, write, write the whole truth about us and our country. (Girouard 33; our translation)

However, the function of literature thus formulated does not guarantee, according to Girouard, the emergence of great works that could become part of the universal, international cultural heritage of humanity. For the author of the text in question, as for Fanon, a truly valuable culture remains inseparable from the freedom of the whole nation:

> For Quebec writers, the chances of survival are problematic. They feel, they know, that their books are only an individual accident. Our colonialism condemns them to ramble on about intestinal problems. Cultural life here will only be possible when a literature emerges from a free community. (37; our translation)

By inextricably linking cultural issues with national concerns, Girouard's analysis seems to follow the line of thought set out by Fanon, even if the latter does not appear verbatim in the text. A similar line of thought, developing the diagnosis of Quebec's French-speaking society as colonized, appears in yet another text, this time by Pierre Lefebvre entitled "Psychisme et valeurs nationales," in which the reference to Fanon is already direct. In his article, Lefebvre focuses on the psychic (individual and social) consequences of colonization. This fact alone brings to mind Fanon's analysis of Martinique society, rooted in Fanon's psychiatric practice and presented in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Thus, like Fanon, Lefebvre focuses in his text on the linguistic oppression to which colonized societies are subjected and, importantly, the mental and cultural atrophy to which the latter are subjected. Certainly, with an eye to the situation of Franco-Canadians viewed as second-class citizens in Quebec of that era, the inferior status of the French language dominated by English, and the sclerotic Franco-Canadian culture mentioned by Girouard, Lefebvre emphasizes the paralysis suffered by any society dominated by a colonizer:

> A national community which undergoes during several generations the effects of colonialism sees developing in its members psychological conflicts and tendencies which reduce the collective aptitude to progress … Collectively, this may be expressed, as in the individual psyche, by various defense mechanisms. First of all, there is a marked inhibition of initiative and creativity, a kind of fatalistic apathy. The aggressive tension is internalized; it paralyzes the effort of thought. (16; our translation)

According to Lefebvre, one of the strongest forms of passive reaction of conquered societies is a paseistic attitude towards the surrounding reality, the image of which becomes dominated by references to the past and its glorification:

> But in general, the colonized human community gives the impression of being stopped in time, preserved in formaldehyde, the image of an obsolete and inefficient society. All that remains of the past, all that has not been swept away by colonization, is invested with a kind of respect that is sometimes incongruous; the residual social structures, unsuited to the demands of an evolving way of life, persist despite everything. The dominated nation lives emotionally in the past. It is another way of refusing reality; it is a psychic defense promoted to the rank of trait of the national character. (Lefebvre 16; our translation)

Such a vision of the psycho-social effects of colonization is close to the conclusions Fanon presents in *The Wretched of the Earth* where, as we mentioned at the beginning of this text, Fanon indicates self-closure and attachment to tradition as typical defense mechanisms (Lefebvre even uses the same notion) while the independence of the state is shown as the main source of a new, lively and energetic culture, capable of creative artistic creation. Mentioning the sudden interest in these questions on the part of Western psychologists and sociologists, linked to the wave of decolonization of African countries in the early 1960s, Lefebvre, moreover, clearly emphasizes the main sources of inspiration for his own observations: "Frantz Fanon's vehement and deeply revealing book, and Jacques Berque's more articulate one, provided a comprehensive explanation of the psychic effects of colonialism and the values of decolonization" (15). By referring to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and to Berque's *Dépossession du monde*, published in 1964 (both essays appear in the article's bibliography), Lefebvre fits perfectly into the overall issue of the journal whose title is "Portrait du colonisé québécois" as well as into the narrative of *Parti pris* intellectuals who treat Fanon primarily as a representative of anti-colonial thought and a theorist of decolonization, abstracting from his origin or racial affiliation. It is thus a form of reductionist appropriation of Fanon's thought for the interests of a particular audience. At the same time, it may also be a form of symbolic transgression of racial issues, given that the search for analogies between French-speaking Quebec and other colonized societies takes place here on the level of broadly understood humanity, without racial divisions, where the common destiny of the colonized becomes a link between different countries, sometimes with completely different cultures, such as Ireland, Israel, Finland and other Scandinavian, Balkan, Asian or African states.[12] What

12. In another article, "De la damnation à la liberté," published in the same issue, Paul Chamberland states categorically: "Lorsque nous nous sentons, nous nous vivons comme colonisés, nous ne voulons pas signifier que notre situation est identique à celle de l'Algérie ou du Congo, mais que cette situation participe de traits communs avec ceux des pays colonisés; et ceci nous pouvons le vérifier sur des plans comme l'économique, le politique et le culturel" (84). The obvious reference to Fanon in the title of this article, as well as the direct references to *The Wretched of the Earth* present in Chamberland's text, go hand in hand with the much more political than cultural nature of the considerations contained therein. It is worth mentioning that the main theses of the diagnosis posed by Chamberland are completely analogous to those of Girouard and Lefebvre. In Chamberland's text, however, the question of the socialist revolution that Quebec should undergo in order to fully liberate itself and strike out for independence plays a much greater role. In Chamberland's, therefore, one can clearly see the combination of the decolonization question with the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle.

unites all these socio-political areas, affected to a greater or lesser extent by various forms of colonization or external occupation, is the quest for self-determination as separate, independent states. Like Fanon, Lefebvre sees nationalist aspirations as a necessary stage in the development of independent nations, which should then, in his opinion, open themselves to international cooperation, thus avoiding antagonism or conflict. According to Lefebvre, a key role in the creation, strengthening and consolidation of the national consciousness of a given society is played by its language, its defense and development, which depend to a great extent on literature:

> It is singularly significant that the rejection of a colonial domination almost always begins with an effort to revalorize the language of the group. This can go as far as a somewhat artificial reinvention of a disappeared language. Examples: Ireland and Israel. But always, it is the poets, the linguists who will try to reconstitute the linguistic heritage. All the nations of Europe before reaching independence since the liberating shock of the French Revolution have followed this evolution. Nations that had disappeared in the sleep of history suddenly surfaced, based on a literary movement that must have seemed quite insignificant at the beginning. This was the case with Finland, Norway, Iceland and the Balkan nations. The same process can be found among the ancient peoples of Asia. Prisoner of its linguistic abundance, Africa also seeks to identify itself by modernizing residual idioms. (17; our translation)

Probably in reference to the debate known as "La Querelle du joual" over the use of the Montreal working class sociolect in literature, and more broadly to the discussion of the status and function of the Quebec variety of French within the Canadian federation (Laur), Lefebvre here defines the role of the writer in the emerging Quebec of the 1960s. As the above quote implies, this is to consist in the rediscovery, revalorization, and legitimization of the local language that constitutes the main glue of the cultural community of individual peoples striving for freedom and self-determination. All this on the way to the creation of a global but multinational human community that would be able to avoid the threat of cultural homogenization that Lefebvre sees in the increasingly rapid development of communication technologies in that era.

In the approach of the authors associated with the *Parti pris*, Fanon's thought is harnessed to a revolutionary narrative aimed at creating an intellectual, cultural, and political framework for a new Quebec society that would be able to break away from the Franco-Canadian identity that was considered outdated and, above all, untrue. Psychological, socio-cultural, and economic diagnoses borrowed from Fanon and other decolonization theorists are used here in an elaborate argument that seeks to establish the foundations for the new

community that Quebec society would become after a revolution, both mental and economic and class-based, leading to a new independent nation and state. It is in the construction of the latter two that literature and the writer himself, as a member of society, is supposed to help. At the same time, the intellectuals associated with the *Parti pris* do not promote the concept of a directly engaged literature whose only matter would be the struggle for national liberation. Rather, in Girouard's and Lefebvre's texts, literature is part of a broader project in which the separate fields (politics, economics, and culture) have their own tasks and areas of action, contributing to the common goal of a free, independent, and anti-capitalist Quebec.

Fanon and Black Montreal of the 1960s

The issues of new community and identity affirmation, so important for *Parti pris* intellectuals, played a large role in the discussions among the Black minority living in Quebec and especially Montreal in the 1960s. Relatively sparse, mostly English-speaking, and composed mainly of descendants of former slaves and immigrants from Africa and, to a large extent, the Caribbean, this minority faced the same problems as African-Americans in the United States at that time, i.e., intolerance and racial prejudice translated into informal racial segregation, lower social status, and fewer opportunities for social advancement (Austin 14 and 56). Influenced by the activities of liberation movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power as well as the international situation, mainly decolonization in Africa, members of the Black community living in Montreal would also attempt to redefine their place in Quebec social life, touching on identity, political, and cultural issues. The thickening atmosphere of revolt against racial oppression would mobilize some members of Montreal's Black intelligentsia into action, which would translate, among other things, into the organization of meetings with leading theorists in the struggle for Black equality, the aforementioned 1968 Congress of Black Writers, and the occupation of part of the former Sir George Williams University (now Concordia). As David Austin states, in the 1960s, "[t]he city became a 'Mecca' for Black and Caribbean students and a center for revolutionary thought" (14), while both events appear as symbols of this social turmoil. It is within the framework of the Congress of Black Writers that Fanon's thought appears prominently on the intellectual map of English-speaking Montreal, in keeping with the spirit of the era and the socio-cultural transformations taking place among members of the Black minority living in the city. Two participants and speakers at the Congress, James Forman and Stokely Carmichael, devote their entire speech and a large part of it, respectively, to the person of Fanon. In doing so, they make Fanon

one of the main focal points of the debates that accompany their speeches and one of the central, though absent, figures of Congress.

It is worth mentioning that at the very beginning of his speech, entitled "Frantz Fanon and the Third World," Forman pays tribute to the Martinique author, whose portrait adorns the meeting room's wall, putting him on a par with other great revolutionary and activist figures of those years, such as Che Guevara, Malcolm X or Martin Luther King. Forman even asks the assembled audience to observe a minute of silence in memory of these late heroes. After this symbolic gesture, Forman moves to the heart of his paper, which is based entirely on Fanon's theses and aims at a profound critique of such forms of struggle for independence that bypass the issue of socialist revolution. The latter Forman presents, like Chamberland, as the only possible path to the true emancipation of colonized societies. Any social and economic changes in countries affected by colonization or any other form of domination must, according to the speaker, be based on the overthrow of the existing class system, in which the bourgeoisie is the group holding power and deriving all economic benefits. Criticizing the situation that prevailed at that time in the young, recently independent African states where the colonizers were replaced by new local elites, Forman inscribes the decolonization processes into a broadly defined anti-imperialist struggle, the only one that could bring about real change for the oppressed people. In doing so, he sets Fanon as an example of suitably deep political commitment and consciousness: "Frantz Fanon fought and died for revolutionary socialism throughout the Third World, especially in Africa … He preached against narrowness and pitfalls of a purely nationalist revolution that won a flag, a new style of dress, and underneath the dregs of humanity remained the same" (Forman 204).

Unlike the authors associated with the *Parti pris*, Forman places a great deal of emphasis on the racial question, which he lumps together with other forms of oppression against which the revolutionary struggle is to be waged: "Racism, capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism dominate the lives of the people of the Third World—the people of Africa, Asia, Latin America —black people in the United States, and other colonized minorities that also live in the United States" (204). By making a direct reference to Fanon's speech at the 1956 Paris Congress (on the relationship between racism and colonization), Forman performs a de facto rhetorical device that allows him to go beyond the spectrum of references to *The Wretched of the Earth*, where racial issues are practically absent (replaced by issues of imperialist exploitation), and to return to the first stage of the development of Fanon's thought focused on the psychological consequences of racial discrimination. Forman distributes the accents in such a way as to extract from Fanon's theses those that best fit the interests of the group he represents, right to the very end of the speech citing

the aforementioned quartet of concepts (racism, colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism) as inseparable.

In his vision of an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist revolution, Forman makes a certain amalgam where African countries and the African-American diaspora are one. In the spirit of Pan-Africanism, Forman extends Fanon's diagnosis of independent African states to the entire Black community of the world, pointing out as its greatest threat the lack of a clear ideology that would allow all nations and the entire Black community of the world to fight for their own interests and at the same time build a transnational unity:

> We see the black world divided on the question of ideology. Throughout Africa, the lack of ideology does divide people against people and ensures opportunism by certain leaders. Inside the United States, this is a paramount problem where the most technologically advanced group of black people are struggling in various ways for liberation. This advance is being checked through the lack of ideology among other things. (207)

Faced with disillusionment with the new order following the decolonization of Africa, where the new bourgeois power elites are practicing a new form of colonialism through the further exploitation of their countries, Forman advocates a form of revolution that would aim to privilege the lowest classes (workers, farmers, and the poor). He thus remains a radical Marxist, while proposing a very specific task for intellectuals, artists, people of culture, and writers, namely, direct involvement in struggle and revolution: "Fanon was a man of action, an activist, a militant. His life was engaged in the struggle against injustice. It is not just sufficient for the revolutionary artist to preach against injustice. He must become activated in an organization, in a group, in a political party, in revolutionary movements that are seeking to change injustices, seeking to bring about social change" (207). Unlike *Parti pris*, then, Forman proclaims the necessity for people of culture to become involved in political activity in spite of themselves, setting the example of Fanon, who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* after he had already learned that he was suffering from leukemia. For Forman, such an attitude, committed to a cause, exemplifies a writer, but also a literature that is written with the community and its problems in mind: "He felt that his greatest contribution, knowing that he had leukemia, knowing that he would die, would be to wage an ideological struggle that would serve to live on and that was the essence of *The Wretched of the Earth*. This ideological struggle that he waged is of particular importance to us as black artists and writers" (207).

The creation of ideological foundations for new societies, for a new humanity that would be born out of revolution, thus becomes, following Fanon's example, the main and highest goal of intellectual and artistic work. Yet apart from

the references to revolutionary Marxist slogans (rebellion against the power of the bourgeoisie), Forman does not specify what the ideological struggle he emphasizes would consist in. Carmichael's speech, entitled "Black Power in the USA," in which references to Fanon are equally numerous, appears as a deepening and elaboration of Forman's claims.

Like his predecessor (Carmichael speaks just after Forman), the then Honorary Prime Minister of the Black Panther Party advocates the struggle against racism, colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism: "[…] we have to state clearly what our fight is. Our fight is against racism and capitalism, and certainly imperialism, which is the highest stage of capitalism" (217). At the same time, as in Forman's, racial issues become central to Carmichael's argument in which a distinction is made between two distinct concepts: exploitation, which affects different groups of people regardless of skin color, and colonialism, of which racism becomes one of the main elements:

> [T]here are two types of oppression in the world: there is exploitation and there is colonization. … I want to go into it more deeply because I think when one talks about exploitation, the question of race is not present. One just talks about a group of people who are economically taking advantage of another group. But when one talks about colonization, the question of race comes into play because in colonization it is one race that seeks to dominate an entire other race. … Brother Fanon wrote a book called *The Wretched of the Earth* and he said, in essence, that the Third World was the wretched of the earth. But of the Third World, the most damned happens to be the black man. … Wherever the black man is found he is on the bottom of the ladder. (213-214)

Carmichael thus situates Blacks at the heart of the revolutionary struggle by recognizing that they are the primary victims of oppression. He thus focuses no longer on the global struggle against imperialism itself, but on the struggle against Black imperialism as a distinct group or community. Referring to Forman's take on the lack of ideology as the main affliction of Black people, he moves away from the question of class domination and moves on to symbolic issues. Carmichael understands the lack of ideology not only as the weakness of Black commitment to the ideas of socialist revolution, but as a general cultural weakness of Blacks, deprived of their heritage by the colonial system, which distinguishes them from white victims of economic exploitation:

> There are in fact poor white people in the United States. They are exploited, that is to say they are economically deprived of some wealth in the United States. But those white people have their culture, their history, their language, and their value system. These things have not been stripped from them. But that is not

> true for black people living in the United States. We have been stripped of our culture, our language, our history, our value system, our way of life. We are in fact what Fanon called dehumanized. We are dehumanized … And that is the effect of the process of colonization. (214)

Under the conditions of Black deculturation thus defined, the primary task for Black intellectuals, according to Carmichael, would be to become fully engaged in action through their own liberation from cultural alienation (that is, liberation from the influence of White culture), the revalorization of their own social group, and a better understanding of the cultural wounds inflicted on Blacks, with a view to creating a great community on that basis:

> it is necessary for Africans (and I make no distinctions between Africans living on the continent or Africans living abroad), there is a necessity for Africans to begin to understand the culture that has been plundered, purposely and maliciously, by white Western society, and it is a necessity for us to pick up that culture and begin to use it as a unifying tool because a culture is a cohesive force for a people. (215)

In fact, in this passage, Carmichael is closer to Pan-African discourse or at least to the demands of the "négritude" movement than to Fanon. Indeed, it was intellectuals such as Jean Price-Mars, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire who fostered visions of some imagined unity uniting all Black societies of the world around a spiritual belonging to an abstractly understood Africa (Murphy 32). Fanon, who was alien to such concepts from the very beginning, found them too vague and unsuited to the realities of colonized societies at the time. What connects Carmichael's vision with some of Fanon's reflections is his desire to create his own universe of Black culture, independent from the White world, with its own references, myths, heroes, concepts, and vision of reality. Here, in turn, Carmichael assigns a central role to Black writers:

> the black writer must begin to redefine for the African whom our heroes are. We no longer need white cowboys. We need Kwame Nkrumahs, Sekou Toures, Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, LeRoi Jones, Rap Brown. … It is the job, then, of the black writer to do this. And the black writer must begin to redefine it and not in a concept of Western society but in an African concept that means it is not wholly intellectual but rather quite emotional. (225)[13]

13. Cf. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 98-99. The last sentence of the quote simultaneously brings Carmichael closer to Senghor and his controversial distinction

What is at stake here, then, is a great project of cultural renewal, which would be one of the bases for the liberation struggle and which would give the oppressed a new language, and thus a new vision of the world and of man. Carmichael does not shy away from more radical statements, according to which the role of the writer is to prepare the ground for a ruthless revolutionary struggle by bringing to light and sharpening the lines of demarcation between the allies and enemies of the revolution:

> That is the job of writers. They must instill in our people a will to fight to the death. It is a question of either we win or we die. … The paradoxes must be clear and the contradictions must be heightened, because in heightening contradictions you prepare the ground for revolutionary warfare … It is the job, then, of the black writer to work to heighten the contradictions … Let's polarize the forces. Let's polarize them … so that there is a choice: either you fight with us or you fight with them. (225)

Carmichael's vision of the writer and intellectual is based on the issues of de-alienation, liberation from the yoke of culture imposed by the Whites, the creation of one's own system of values, and the preparation of society for the socialist revolution. Issues of nationality, so important to Fanon, recede into the background, giving way to issues of community and identity. By focusing on what, quite abstractly, would constitute the general cultural framework of a worldwide Black community, Carmichael moves away from the point of view Fanon takes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, apart from the very subject of violence in political struggle, to which he devotes the second part of his speech. As for the cultural issue, his fundamentally Pan-Africanist discourse seems to draw revolutionary energy and fervor from the cited essay and to appropriate the very prestige of the Martinican in order to legitimize his own arguments and demands, which are de facto a kind of amalgam of concepts drawn from different strands and sources of Black cultural renewal discourse.

In Forman's and Carmichael's terms, Fanon becomes a certain symbolic figure of both the political activist and the intellectual-writer, committed to the creation of a new order of things in which the Black man would have his rightful place. While for *Parti pris* he is a symbol of the worldwide struggle against all manifestations of colonialism and domination, as well as a penetrating analyst of the psyche of the colonized and a champion of the cause of national independence, for Forman and Carmichael he remains intimately connected to racial issues as a warrior-model for Black writers. The linking element between

between Western culture, based on reason, and Black culture, supposedly rooted in the irrational, impulsive, and emotional (Bachir 124).

these two readings of Fanon is certainly the question of basing the revolutionary struggle on the people/lowest strata of society, and at the same time the idea of the closeness of intellectuals or writers to these very sections of society. The Enlightenment or positivist vision of the writer as one who works at the grassroots trying to understand and support society in its quest for self-awareness, self-determination, and freedom remains common to both *Parti pris*, to Forman and Carmichael, and to Fanon himself. Another element common to all of the aforementioned is also the issue of language, or more broadly, the entire conceptual universe that breakout societies should use after the process of disalienation and decolonization, which foreshadows later considerations of the nature of postcolonial cultures (Spivak 271-313).

Reflecting on the impact of Fanon's reception in Canada, several issues must be mentioned, divided into the francophone sphere, the anglophone sphere, and the question of indigenous peoples.

On the francophone side, in addition to the already discussed issue of theorizing the condition of Quebec as a colonized society, it is worth highlighting here the role that Fanon's work, but also Césaire's, played in bringing Haitian and Quebec intellectuals together. The aforementioned meetings at Le Perchoir d'Haïti and the intellectual debates around the revolutionary theses of the two Martiniqueans work federally, thus paving the way for an even greater presence of the Haitian community in the intellectual life of Quebec. In the wave of changes associated with the Quiet Revolution, the Quebec administration would open the doors of newly established francophone universities to well-educated and fluent French-speaking Haitian intellectuals, hiring them for research and teaching positions. Georges Anglade, geographer, or Émile Ollivier, sociologist and writer are just examples of this presence which, as Franz Voltaire, the founder of the Centre international de documentation et d'information Haïtienne, Caribéenne et Afro-canadienne (CIDIHCA) in Montreal states, "brought a different sensibility during a great moment of identity affirmation in Quebec" (qtd. in Gelper; our translation). Without forgetting the impact of the political conjuncture of the time, which had a decisive influence on the adaptation of the Haitians and their acclimatization in the Quebec society of that era, Fanon's symbolic role as an intercultural link and common point of reference seems to have been extremely important for the formation of intellectual affinities between the new arrivals from the Caribbean and their new social environment, which, from the 1980s onwards, would become more open to ethnic and cultural diversity, including a greater awareness of the Caribbean minority's presence in Quebec, ultimately marked most visibly, though not without controversial elements, by the success of Dany Laferrière's writing.

On the anglophone side, events related to the Congress and the Sir George Williams affair would translate into a greater consolidation of the

Black community present in Quebec. This would become apparent through the creation of new organizations such as the Black Coalition of Quebec or new newspapers such as *Uhuru* and *The Black Voice* (Austin 242). The protests in the streets of Montreal would also reverberate throughout the Caribbean, especially Trinidad. The spirit of the Fanonian theses, aroused during the congressional debates, thus led to concrete actions and changes that were part of a broader trend that one could venture to call the "Montreal renaissance" and which was strongly associated, among other things, with left-wing radical socio-political activism, with vigilant observation on the part of the Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière (the Quebec offshoot of the League for Socialist Action). One of the main actors in these events, Roosevelt "Rosie" Douglas, would be accused of leading the protests, sentenced to 18 months in prison, and eventually expelled from Canada to his native Dominica, where he would become an important political player, one of the island's main proponents of full independence, and the country's prime minister in the early 21st century. Another important figure to highlight in the context of the strengthening of Black Power movements in Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s would be Ato Sekyi-Out, already mentioned above as a reader of Fanon's work. Upon arriving in Canada, Sekyi-Out would earn a doctorate at the University of Toronto, subsequently becoming one of the leading interpreters of Fanon's thought in Canada, and thus, one of the main theorists of the struggle of Canadian Black activists for equality.

Interestingly, the evaluation of the actions of radical Black activists, including the analysis of their reading of Fanon, would become the subject of in-depth debates in political and academic circles from the 1970s onwards, triggered by the publication of Robin Winks's *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1971). The polemics between liberal historians like Winks, critical of the overly emotional and opportunistic reading of Fanon by radical circles, and a new generation of intellectuals, represented for example by George Elliot Clarke, allow Daniel McNeil to coin the term "children of Frantz Fanon" to describe some Canadian scholars, thinkers, and artists, whom he characterizes as "'honest intellectuals' born circa 1952 (the first publication of Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*) and 1961 (the original publication of Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre*), who challenged profiteers and schemers when they raced for positions and pensions in the early days of neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s" (24). McNeil's work thus demonstrates how important questions of the interpretation of Fanon's thought in Canada are to understanding the dynamics of Black leftist trends and actions in this country.

Finally, it is impossible to ignore another area in which Fanon's work founded new audiences, namely what is known as the Red Power movement, and within it the socio-political commitment of Indigenous activists to the recognition

of the rights of their communities around the world, including in Canada.[14] As Glen Coulthard shows in his book *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), the conceptual apparatus developed by Fanon became the source of a new language of political contestation used by Indigenous internationalists in critically analyzing their own colonial situations (2014).

The question of Fanon's affiliation with the Caribbean is certainly marginal in the reflections of the intellectuals mentioned in this article. They treat Martinique, the French West Indies, or the Caribbean as a whole primarily as examples of broader and global dynamics of colonization and decolonization movements. However, Fanon's influence on the independence movement in French-speaking Quebec circles brings the Caribbean closer to a Franco-Quebecois society that is so different and yet so close to them. In addition, the tribute paid to the author of *The Wretched of the Earth* by some of the leading figures of the Black Power movement during the 1968 Congress of Black Writers would influence greater consolidation of the Caribbean portion of the Black minority living in Montreal. Fanon's symbolic presence in the consciousness of both Franco-Quebecois and Black anglophones in Montreal seems to prepare the ground for further reflections on the identity belonging of Caribbean immigrants in Canada. The cultural, linguistic, historical, and political diversity of individual Caribbean countries would play an important role in these discussions, perhaps inhibiting to some extent the entrenchment of such generalizing concepts as Caribbean-Canadian identity in the Canadian consciousness. Such an attitude, however, remains consistent with Fanon's central theses, for whom belonging to Martinique and concern for the future of his country were ultimately the deepest motives for action and socio-political engagement on behalf of Algeria and, more broadly, all colonized societies.

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14. The scope of this article does not allow for a broader discussion of the issue mentioned here. For further information on contacts between Black Power and Indigenous, Canadian activists, see: Scott Rutherford, *Canada's Other Red Scale: Indigenous Protests and Colonial Encounters during the Global Sixties*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020.

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Alterity, Recognition and Performance: The Queer and the Animal in Makeda Silvera's "Caribbean Chameleon"[1,2]

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ABSTRACT
This article explores notions of performativity in the story "Caribbean Chameleon," published in Makeda Silvera's collection *Her Head a Village* (1994). The story emphasises problems of performing with regards to the categories of race and gender as they pertain to the lived experience of Anglo-Caribbean migrants in Canada, a country which, in spite of its ostensible positive engagement with difference, is nevertheless still systemically hostile to migrants. Being able to adequately "perform" race or gender in a non-threatening way for the system becomes imperative for migrants, which the story

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2. I would like to acknowledge and thank my reviewers and editors for their thoughtful comments and suggestions on this piece.

highlights framing its critique of racial profiling within the conventions of the stage. This opens the door to examining the types of performativity with which "Caribbean Chameleon" engages. In this article, I discuss how notions of performance, performing and performativity interact with representations of queerness and animality, which provide and constitute modes of alterity that intersect with questions of race, gender, and (un) belonging that are raised in the story.

Keywords
Performance; Makeda Silvera; Queer; Animality; Race; Gender; Alterity.

Makeda Silvera's "Caribbean Chameleon," included in the short story collection *Her Head a Village* (1994), follows one woman's return to Canada, where she lives and works, from Jamaica, whence she hails and where she was taking a vacation. The journey ends dramatically as she is taken into custody after an unfounded search of her person and belongings at Toronto Pearson Airport elicits an enraged response from the woman, who reacts against the racist profiling of the Immigration officers.

Although a short story generically, "Caribbean Chameleon" is in fact framed like a play. Both in terms of content and form, the story begins in the manner of script headings by defining the scene's setting ("Yard. Xamaica. Jamdown. Jah. Mek. Ya. JA. Airport") and characters ("Gunman, mule, don, cowboy, domestic, refugee, tourist, migrant, farmworker, musician, political exile, business exile, economic exile, cultural exile, dreadlocks, locks-woman, fashion-dread, press-head, extension-hair, higgler"), followed by the common action of the characters ("Leaving the Caribbean for the North Star") (Silvera, "CC" 27). If the opening lines mimic an author's stage directions, the second page in the story lists its characters in order, in the style of *dramatis personae:*

> Travellers dressed to kill.
> Woman in red frock, red shoes, red extension hair, black skin.
> Dreadlocks, Clarke's shoes, red, green and gold tam, smoking one last spliff.
> Cowboy in felt cap, dark glasses, nuff cargo round neck to weigh down a plane.
> Woman in black polka dot pant suit. Black winter boots high up to knees, drinking one last coconut water.
> Tourist drinking one last Red Stripe beer inna sun hot. (28)

It is notable that the initial "roll call" of characters (Lamont 335) that appears in the would-be scene headings does not exactly match this second list of individuals provided in the makeshift *dramatis personae*. The five characters it features, around whom the story's action revolves, are described in 20 phrases divided unequally among them. Although some of the descriptors used,

like "dreadlocks" or "cowboy," are, because of their repeated use, immediately linked to one or other character, the lack of information on the travellers beyond a basic appraisal of their physical appearance leaves the task of distributing the remaining labels to the reader. The reader's lack of information to differentiate the characters that could pose an actual threat—like the "gunman"—from those who would be innocuous foreshadows the central drama of the story, that of the woman in the polka dot pant suit. This woman is criminally profiled by prejudiced border officers and driven to what is depicted as a fit of madness in response to the unfounded search of her person and belongings after she is singled out as suspicious. Because the travellers are all "stock characters" (Lamont 335) representing a cross-section of individuals who may conceivably gather at an airport at any given moment, they become empty signifiers on which the reader is free to pour their assumptions, much in the same way that the customs officers in the story do. In a narrative that is crucially concerned with outside perception, Silvera's withholding of further illustration of her characters plays with the different diegetic frames in the story to place the reader in the shoes of the Immigration officers and leave them alone to discern which of the presented individuals fit the descriptions provided at the beginning.

Beyond the scriptwriting conventions hitherto discussed, the story's connections with the stage are made explicit after all characters are (im)properly introduced: "Theatre, live at the airport" (Silvera, "CC" 28). Within this frame, this storyfied piece of theatre would consist, I argue, of three acts marked by the characters' geographical location: in Jamaica at the airport, where the story begins; in-flight on the plane from Jamaica to Canada ("[a]pproaching the North Star" [29]); and at Pearson International Airport's border control in Toronto ("Plane fly low. North Star light pretty, shining all over di land. Immigration" [30]). Already in the presentation of the different locations there are subtleties that may betray Silvera's own situatedness: Canada is positively, but arguably somewhat obliquely, referred to as the "North Star," whereas Jamaica is broken down phonetically ("Ja. Mek. Ya" [28]), as if to make it palatable or accessible to someone unfamiliar with the country. The breaking up of words is also a linguistic feature typical of Dread Talk, the speech of the Rastafari, that uses wordplay as way of bringing about new ways of understanding.[3] Breaking up the word "Jamaica" thus situates Silvera's writing within a specific social, linguistic and epistemic tradition that stresses the Caribbean roots of the story and its protagonist, foregrounding Jamaica against Canada from the beginning. The story further focalises on the Caribbean experience by only alluding metonymically to the flight's destination, Toronto, using the more indirect reference "Pearson

3. See Velma Pollard. I thank my editors for bringing this to my attention.

International Airport," one of the first points of entry for migrants into the country. The fact that the setting of the story does not move away from airports one way or another can be read, precisely, as a comment on the precarious status of Caribbean migrants in Canada, around whom the story revolves. In his influential book of the same name, Marc Augé identifies the airport as a typical instance of "non-place," which is, paradigmatically, "the traveller's space" (Augé 86). Non-places represent a break in the individual's experience of place where, against the latter's subjective inscription, there is a lack of signification that breeds both solitude and anonymity. Because "the user of a non-place is in contractual"—not affective—"relations with it (or with the powers that govern it)" (Augé 101), and because a user never *inhabits* the non-place or owns it, they are permanently threatened with expulsion. This makes the relation of the individual with the non-place precarious: if users are compelled to "interact only with *texts*, whose proponents are not individuals but 'moral entities' or institutions" (Augé 96, emphasis mine), then it follows that it is not just compliance with the norms of the institution that becomes of vital importance for those within the non-place, but, more significantly, their ability to *read and interpret* the norms of the non-place, which may or may not be explicitly stated.

In this understanding of how a non-place works, to "interpret the norms" takes on a specific performative meaning that is explored in Silvera's story. Because migrants are already in potentially fraught relations with the powers inserted in Canadian airports (like customs officers representing the Canadian state), their ability to *interpret*, that is, not only to understand the spatial text but to *perform* it adequately, becomes of pivotal importance. The meaning of "performing," in this case, is threefold:

One, it refers to the action of reading the implications of the non-place for the situated relations of the migrant with its regulating powers, i.e. to understand adequately what is expected of them in their by the governing authorities and from their unique subject position;

Two, it refers to the enactment of the assigned role in a demonstration that the migrant is aware of the norms that codify not only the non-place and the migrant's relations with it but also the norms that codify their very existence as migrants (and so, too, their relation with the powers that be);

Three, it points to the success of the former two operations, i.e. that the spatial/governmental text has been read successfully and that its expectations have been understood and adequately met.

Although all users of a non-place must successfully navigate its textual and contextual implications to abandon it and be granted access to place (which is emotionally codified and significant), the precarious position of migrants with respect to the governing bodies of their destination countries imbues the carrying out of these performances with a gravity unknown to the traveller or tourist,

whose contractual relations with the non-place are transactional and uncomplicated. The emphasis on the necessity for migrants to perform, already betrayed in the title of the story where the migrant ("Caribbean") is identified with the shapeshifter ("chameleon"), together with the story's explicit connections with the performing arts that have been already laid out, opens the door to questioning what other types of performativity "Caribbean Chameleon" may be engaging with. In resisting the prejudice of the white Canadian border officers, the Jamaican woman who is the focaliser of the story ends up transforming into the irrational "beast" which has characterised the racist representation of Black people in the discourses of modernity[4] and which has served to perpetuate the idea that Black people are inherently predisposed towards criminality[5]. In this case, her turn to animality is demeaning and oppressive, forgoing the potential positive alliances that may exist at the intersection of blackness and animality[6]. It is not just her blackness, but the gender expression of the protagonist that affects her negative perception by the Custom officers. Gender and sexual expression, particularly in the form of dress, is also inescapably tied to the Antillean origins of the woman: Jamaica's historical uses of cross-dressing complicate the symbolism of the polka dot pant suit by which the protagonist is identified, and also negatively inform the way she is perceived upon her arrival in Canada.

Animality, race, gender and queerness are constructed as forms of alterity: they are "written" by and "read" from the hegemonic normative perspective. "Animal," "Black," "woman" and "queer" are categories formed differentially that exist only from the point of view of the human, white, heterosexual subject, who controls the norms that codify them and polices the fulfillment of these norms. Because the climax on the story hinges on the prejudiced expectations

4. Smedley and Smedley explain how the term "race" evolved from its use primarily within the animal domain to reference human groups, highlighting one of the early pejorative links that colonization established between blackness and animality, for "[t]he identification of race with a breeding line or stock of animals carries with it certain implications for how Europeans came to view human groups" (38). Tommy L. Lott discusses how one of the most-used metaphors for Black people in modern discourse is the "Negro-Ape," which lives on in the popular cultural imaginary and characterizes Blacks, especially Black males, as savage, animalistic and hyper-aggressive.

5. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, in *The Condemnation of Blackness*, outlines how European colonial anthropological efforts sought to justify racism based on the "biological inferiority" of Blacks by approximating them to "beasts," and shows how, among others, the ideological efforts of scientific racism have been instrumental in criminalizing Black populations.

6. See Bénédicte Boisseron, who also thoroughly explores the negative links between animality and blackness.

of the Customs officers—their prejudiced apprehensions of "animal," "Black," "woman" and "queer"—, in the pages that follow, I aim to discuss how notions of "performing," "performativity" and "performance" are entangled in the drama that the protagonist faces as a subject whose expression—of gender, race, sex—is fundamentally and tragically misunderstood or ignored. Here, I echo Édouard Glissant's own breakdown of the word "understand" (*comprehendre*) as both "comprehend" and "take" (Wing xiv). Against Glissant's productive, relational "giving-on-and-with" (*donner-avec*) oppressive forms of understanding are bent on appropriating significance and disempowering otherised subjects by negating the validity of their manifestations of subjectivity. The white gaze, furthermore, fosters concrete notions of "performance" and "performing" that increase the pressure to which otherised subjects are submitted, being forced to *act* in accordance (comply) to what is *understandable* or *graspable* by white authority—and can, thus, be appropriated or seized by them, as the polka dot woman is at the end of the story.

My essay is divided into five parts: "Animacies and the Construction of Alterity," "Co-constituting Selves: The Animal Gaze," "Ritual, Redress and Recognition," "Queer (Cross-)Dressing," and "Chameleons and Migrants," which explore, in turn, questions on the formation of alterity, the construction of the self, the role of performance in ethical acts of affect and recognition, gender and sexual-affective performance through acts of (cross-)dressing, and the symbolism of the chameleon in the title of the story. With these, I aim to show how the diegetic and performative tensions in Silvera's story lead to the protagonist's final conversion, in the eyes of the white Canadian gaze, to the less-than-human subject which this gaze codifies for otherised identities, finding common ground with animality in the less-than-human prejudiced portrayal of alterity.

Animacies and the Construction of Alterity

In an illuminating homonymous volume, Mel Y. Chen puts forward and expands the linguistic notion of "animacies" to explore their queer and racial matterings. Chen defines animacy as "the extent to which we invest a certain body (or body of entities) with humanness or animateness" and the way it is "implicated in political questions of power and the recognition of different subjects, as well as ostensible objects" (8-9). Animacies describe broadly logocentric movements of categorisation through the endowment of relative sentience that allow us to articulate some of the ways in which otherness, particularly animal otherness, is differentially constructed (Stanescu 569). This creates a "governmentality of animate hierarchies" (Chen 12) that cements forms of oppression against the others of the naturalised white male subject. As some of the paradigmatic

others of this Vitruvian model, women, racialised and queer subjects, and animals become focal points of analysis. Because all of these categories share some degree of animacy in their construction as alterities, they offer a possibility for their combined study, revealing the ways in which multiply oppressed collectives have been differently construed as subhuman—as beasts, monsters or freaks—giving way to a long and ominous history of chimeric representation on the sliding scale of (non) human animateness.

The protagonist of Silvera's story and its presumable "Caribbean chameleon" is a Jamaican woman who is only ever identified by her choice of dress, a "black polka dot pant suit." In her identification with an animal (the chameleon) and a piece of clothing (the pant suit), Silvera is already situating her protagonist in the lower tiers of animacy: the logocentric model of animacy renders nonhuman animals, by their lack of access to human language, less animate than human others, although more so than inert matter like the pant suit. My analysis follows this order of animacy from the chameleon to the pant suit to explore how animality and dress may be related among them and to the construction and performance of alterity.

Silvera's story begins and ends with animals, from the "chameleon" of the title ("CC" 27) to the cock that crows in its final paragraph (32). The fact that animal animacies frame a story that criticises racial prejudice already raises relevant questions regarding the way race and animality have been connected through history. The legacy of representations of racialised others, in particular Black folk, with animal figures or metaphors is well-documented. It spans a broad catalogue that goes from the false "sub-evolutionary paradigms" that liken Black people, seen as underdeveloped, uncivilised humans, to simians to, perhaps more strikingly, the calls to consider Black individuals like "domestic animals" so as to garner sympathy for the abolitionist cause, exemplifying the many complications of race, animality, and affect in historical discourse (Fielder 488). The connection between animality and human alterity is one that is alive and well; indeed, Chen succinctly acknowledges an extensive body of critical and historical work in highlighting how

> vivid links, whether live or long-standing, continue to be drawn between immigrants, people of color, laborers and working class subjects, colonial subjects, women, queer subjects, disabled people, and *animals*, meaning, not the class of creatures that includes humans but quite the converse, the class against which the (often rational) human with inviolate and full subjectivity is defined. (95, emphasis in original)

While acknowledging the historical grounding of the protagonist's racialized representation as an irrational, violent animal, here I will focus on the ways

in which race and animality, as categories of "the other," have been linked in the philosophical theorization of alterity. As noted in the introduction, the negative relations of blackness and animality originate in racist colonial rule and are reinforced primarily by white scientists and philosophers, whose input has informed the representation of animals and non-whites for centuries. Indigenous and diasporic writing such as Silvera's, which destabilises the relationship between the imperial margin and centre, has enormous transgressive potential to expand and contest the epistemic tradition with which it is confronted.

Co-constituting Selves: The Animal Gaze

Jacques Derrida, in his oft-quoted essay "The Animal that Therefore I Am," sees the "absolute alterity of the neighbor" (11) reflected in his relationship with the animal gaze. It is the gaze of a cat that con*fronts* him, not only because it looks *at* but because it is *in front of* him. In apprehending that which is looked, the looker becomes ubiquitous for the self that is looked at. The spatial relationship of the self with respect to the other's gaze situates the self in the world insofar as it locates it *in relation* to the looking animal: "The animal is there before me, there next to me, there in front of me … It surrounds me. And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also … *it can look at me*. It has its point of view regarding me" (11, emphasis mine). Thus, the acknowledgement of the "absolute alterity" of the other is at the same time, and necessarily, an acknowledgement of the otherness *of one's own self*, which constitutes itself in a double act of relational regarding that is both scopic (it looks) and affective (it recognises). This simultaneous self- and otherness exists because one can only exist relationally, i.e. what we understand by 'self' is not a pure, self-contained identity that precedes its relations (Haraway 6) but something that is constructed in the hybridising act of knowing oneself to be looked at. Although the relational existence of the self is no novelty in philosophy, and is central to theories of Caribbean culture and identity (see Glissant's poetics of relation), what is unique about Derrida's formulation is that the act of co-construction of alterity and selfhood is crucially brought about by the animal gaze. Because, as mentioned above, Silvera's story is framed through the lens of animality, it seems imperative that we take into account a framework such as Derrida's in the consideration of how otherness is formed in relation to the story's animal others, and in relation to the looking others.

The story ends with the double crowing of "*the* cock" (Silvera, "CC" 32, emphasis mine). This unlikely event for the airport setting and the use of the definite article "the" point to this last reference being, in fact, a diegetic frame which, as Fraile-Marcos has argued, posits the protagonist as a Christlike figure. In "a

clear allusion to Peter's repeated denial of Christ" (Fraile-Marcos 81), the black polka dot pant suit woman's compatriots and onlookers ignore her suffering at being harassed by the customs officers, and she is carried away by the Mounted Police. The fact that, in common language, these acts of dismissal are known as "turning a blind eye" adds complexity to an analysis of the gaze in the construction of otherness. The reaction to the scene offers a list of characters and highlights their shame and embarrassment: "*Eyes vacant. Open wide.* Sister. Brother. Cousin. Mother. Aunt. Father. Grandparent. *Look the other way*" (Silvera, "CC" 32, emphasis mine). In offering the characters as a list of familial relations, the story seems to recall the supposedly affective ties that lie at the heart of the family and that are precluded in these acts of (not) looking, problematising relations of kin- and allyship which we will explore in the coming sections of this paper. In focusing on the reaction of the other characters, the story also brings to the fore the derivative relation of agency with respect to selfhood, that is, the belief that, to some degree, our capacity for acting emanates from our—and others'—acknowledgement of ourselves. In the polka dot woman's final outburst, by which she reclaims her agency over the mechanisms of oppression that police her existence in (the non-)place, she is also offered a last moment of opportunity for asserting her *self*. This opportunity, however, is lost as the gaze of the other is averted, undercutting her moment of radical resistance, which hints at the necessity for not only a social construction of subjectivity, but a hybrid, affirmative, and non-differential one. Averting the gaze condemns the polka dot woman to perpetual alterity as her self is denied recognition because it is denied co-constitution. The Derridean interpretation of the scopophilic (following Foucault) dimension of selfhood in Silvera's study is politically relevant, as recognition and visibility play a fundamental role in the identity construction of migrant bodies and their successful integration in their destination countries.[7]

Ritual, Redress and Recognition

M. Jacqui Alexander's article on the policing of sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas, which has informed a hefty volume of scholarship on Caribbean writing, including that of Makeda Silvera, uses the phrase "[to] offer up" (6) to refer to the way in which the fabric of the nation-state accesses

7. For discussions of the Black diaspora and Canadian citizenship, see for instance M. Jacqui Alexander, Wiebke Beushausen, Amaryll Chanady, David Chariandy, Andrea Davis and Patricia E. Roy.

queer bodies for their systemic mistreatment. This sacrificial language opens new links between race, queerness and animality that not only hark back to the history of human and non-human "offerings" to the God(s) but that, again, refer to ritualistic practices that cement the grounding of our analysis on the concept of performance. "Caribbean Chameleon" offers opportunities for analysing the performative and sacrificial through the aforementioned moment of martyrdom and negation that elevates the black polka dot woman to a Christ figure. The avenues for interpretation here, I think, are twofold. First, the fact of the Biblical reference bears noting in light of the relationship between Jamaica and Christianity. Silvera and others have remarked how the Bible is of paramount importance in Jamaica and other enslaved colonies, as it is not only the point of entrance of the oppressor's Western culture but tightly weaves it into the everyday life of individuals as biblical texts become the main point of access to literacy (Silvera, "Some Thoughts" 523), making colonial epistemic violence an everyday occurrence. Hence, I surmise that "giving up" the black polka dot pant suit woman as a Christ figure is a provocative way of animating race and queering the ethnocentric, patriarchal religious discourse imposed on enslaved populations. Furthermore, in carrying out this identification through the crowing of the cock ("Jesus Christ … The cock crowing once, twice," ["CC" 32]), Silvera returns the discussion of animality to these acts of queering. As mentioned, framing the story within the realm of animality and stressing the link between the construction of selfhood and otherness in the presence of the animal, it is this repeated crowing, in the manner of the cock that crows in the New Testament after Peter denies Christ, that allows the reader to understand that the black polka dot woman's own transfiguration has taken place. Second, the black polka dot woman's outburst may also be read as a recuperation of Caribbean religious-cultural traditions. Although this landscape is rich and heterogeneous, religions of the Caribbean share a relevant history of trance possessions, which serve a number of purposes such as accessing revelations, receiving force from a deity or substantiating their existence, or cementing cult hierarchies.[8] In Jamaica's Myal tradition, for instance, spirit possessions involve "trances labeled as 'getting wild' or 'senseless madness'" (Murrell 255) which fit within the scenario of the short story: "Polka dot woman mad like rass. Mad woman tek over. Officer frighten like hell. Don't understand di talking of tongues" (Silvera, "CC" 31). The "talking of tongues" that is associated with demonic possession also signals the inability to apprehend the ritualistic moment and the impossibility of communication between the black polka dot

8. See Murrell for a comprehensive account of Afro-Caribbean religions, their origins and individual complexities, which cannot be adequately accounted for within this piece.

woman and the Immigration officer, who is bent on misreading the woman and continuing their frantic search in spite of the lack of proof ("Tear away at suitcase. Throw up dirty drawers. Trying to find drugs. Only an extra bottle of white rum" [31]). The failure to communicate is stressed by the repeated mentions of the physical impossibility to articulate language ("Tongue-tie. Tongue knot up. Tongue gone wild" [31]). At the climax of the story, the polka dot woman tears away at her own clothing and "foam[s] at the mouth" (32) as she is escorted away from the scene.

The story bursts with symbolic possibility as, in both movements described, Silvera has a chance of rewriting the myths that, as per her own account, have bound Jamaican lives with racism and misogyny ("Some Thoughts" 523), and offer some redress within the confines of her narrative. In the Bible, it is Saint Peter's denial and Jesus Christ's willing surrender to his fate that ultimately offer an opportunity for redemption. And although, as mentioned, recognition is denied in Silvera's story by the onlookers' lack of reciprocity, like that of Christ, the polka dot woman's martyrdom activates the possibility of recognition for the reader.[9] The community's rejection ("Dem close eyes. Look other way. Dem shame. Black polka dot woman nah get no support" [31]) that disavows the black woman's selfhood also enables recognition without the diegetic confines, because the reader, as spectator of the story, is looking at the Jamaican woman.

Moving from myth toward the discussion of performance, I contend that the preclusion of recognition within the frame of the story is rooted in the failure of the black polka dot woman's ritual, whose redemptive function is, as a practice that is rooted in community, stymied by the black polka dot woman's disavowal by her peers. Nevertheless, the ritual does serve to build another bridge between different forms of alterity, insofar as the sacred and the abject approximate because of their "constitutive ambivalence" that both affirms and negates and reconciles "life and death" (Braidotti 65). The abject alterities of the (mad)woman, the monster and the migrant that the polka dot woman is a sign of find her expression in the ritual outburst. Even if this outburst can save neither the polka dot woman nor the onlookers from their heightened vulnerability in an environment that precludes connection, her act of possession serves to expose the shortcomings of the Canadian state: before the proverbial curtain falls, we are offered a backstage peek at the workings of a system that will not look its people in the eye. The cry "What you looking for? WHAT YOU LOOKING FOR?" (Silvera, "CC" 31) as the officer's gaze is diverted from the polka dot woman to her belongings begs us to consider where the focus of the governing powers' looking practices is, and how it denies migrants

9. I thank Dr. Ana María Fraile-Marcos for bringing this to my attention.

the acknowledgement that the ethical and actualising dimension of selfhood demands.

Queer (Cross-)Dressing

If the performative has been a fixture of language studies that has had a bearing on the construction of "race" as a working category—social, political, or epistemic—, it has also been immensely relevant in postmodern approaches to gender, particularly through the work of philosopher Judith Butler, whose theory of performativity, as expanded in her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, informs my analysis. I draw on Butler's assertion that the body "is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and that the manner of this bearing is fundamentally *dramatic* … [meaning that] One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one *does* one's body" ("Performative Acts" 521, emphasis mine). Because, as Butler remarks, the agentic I and the body are one and the same, and neither preexists the other, performing the body is an act of assertion of the self. However, insofar as material conditions influence the possibilities for a performance of the body (Butler, "Performative Acts" 521), they pose constraints to individual assertion, limiting the possibilities for realisation and, potentially, constituting their own systems of oppression. Here, I contend that Silvera's theatrical frame serves to highlight how the self is constituted through acts of performing up to the climax of the action, where the clash with authority that imposes its own prejudiced constructions of selfhood collapses the socially acceptable identity of the black polka dot woman—a legal immigrant and domestic worker—, to which she clings during the search, into what is coded as a monstrous self. The woman's struggle illuminates the possibilities for reclaiming agency as well as the constraints for the self-assertion for bodies who exist outside the normative margins of the state.

In discussing the performative with regards to the construction of gender, Butler reminds us that gender is also "constituted through the stylization of the body," and so even what she terms the "mundane way" in which individuals conduct themselves in their day to day, including "gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds," is relevant to a discussion of how ideas on gender are formed and (re)presented ("Performative Acts" 519). Dress has been one of the important loci of gendered (self-)expression and subversion, and one that has been intimately related with making explicit the links between gender, sexual orientation and performance. In particular, practices of cross-dressing, where performance and performativity play a central role (Fumagalli, Ledent and Del Valle Alcalá 15) have called attention to the artificiality of gender constructions and have very often been associated with non-heteronormative

sexual expression. Cross-dressing has historically been common in the Caribbean, where clothes have "always had a strong symbolic function" (3) and where cross-dressing has stood at the crossroads of liberation and repression (15) for marginalised and non-normative subjectivities. Ronald Cummings, in his examination of the figure of the "man royal" within the Caribbean context, points to the fact that one of the most identifiable traits of the man royal is that "she is seen in men's clothing" (136). Silvera also acknowledges the links between choice of dress and the expression of homosexuality in her account of her childhood in Jamaica; for instance, her description of her neighbour Miss Jones, who made advances toward Silvera's grandmother, underscores Jones's performance of masculinity through her appearance: she was "[a]lways dressed in pants and man-shirt that she borrowed from her husband" ("Some Thoughts" 526).

Although no mention is made of the sexuality of the central character of "Caribbean Chameleon," she is also tellingly described only by her choice of attire, which happens to be a pant suit. Writing "pant suit" as two separate realities leads us, from the beginning, to imagine not a woman's onesie but, rather, a two-piece ensemble in the style of men's suits, which is confirmed at the end of the story, when the woman takes off a jacket, shirt and pants (Silvera, "CC" 32). Arguably, this choice of attire opens a possibility for a queer reading of the protagonist, especially because "black polka dot pant suit" is the only name by which we know the protagonist woman. The lack of other descriptors also makes present the silences that loom over the story. For instance, the polka dot woman is queried at customs because of her choice to vacation in a hotel rather than stay with her family. The woman refuses to explain the reason behind this and only fires back: "What yuh saying, sir? Black people can't tek vacation in dem own homeland?" (30). Because family rejection has and continues to be one of the main problems facing LGBTI+ people, we may speculate that the polka dot woman's queerness may be what's behind her separation from her family during her visit to Jamaica.[10] This is more plausible considering the country's history of homophobia, which "exists in other Anglophone Caribbean countries but not to the same extent" (Charles 19) and which is also predicated on Christian indoctrination during slavery (8), whose cultural and legal heritage is still prevalent today (15). In summation, silence and silencing practices surround non-normative sexual/affectional identities[11] in the Caribbean, which is a point of encounter with the experience of Caribbean domestic workers—like

10. I thank my reviewers for suggesting this possibility.
11. See, for instance, Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal work, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

the polka dot woman—in the Canadian space.[12] Because, as discussed, recognition and visibility are fundamental requisites for the integration of migrants, Black, and queer folk, the silences of representation in Silvera's work echo the political silences that overwhelm the lived reality of so-called "visible minorities" in Canada and that allow for the systemic mistreatment of marginalised bodies as portrayed in the story.

Systemic oppression also features in the reading of the protagonist's attire. The woman's black polka dot pant suit seems to be intimately connected with her abilities for self-expression or lack thereof, and it functions as an ambivalent symbol of her identity. Although we know from the construction of the sentences "woman *in* black polka dot pant suit" (repeated throughout the story, emphasis mine) and "[s]weat running down woman black face" (Silvera, "CC" 31) that the black of her skin and clothes are separate, going back to the moment of her outburst or "possession" we see that, for some lines, just after the time that the text references her madness ("Woman in black polka dot pant suit gone mad," 31), the descriptors of her outward appearance begin to drop. She loses her attire to go from "*woman in black polka dot* pant suit" to "*black polka dot* woman" until the blackness of her skin and clothes seem to conflate and dissolve, and she becomes only "*polka dot* woman" (31, emphases mine). This shapeshifting as the woman gradually surrenders to her anger is also relevant to the question of animacies raised in the first section. In her discussion of agency and affect, Sianne Ngai notes how "as we press harder on the affective meanings of animatedness, we shall see how the seemingly neutral state of 'being moved' becomes twisted into the image of the overemotional racialized subject, abetting his or her construction as unusually receptive to external control" (91). In other words, in facing the Canadian state in the form of Borders and Immigration officers, the black polka dot woman enters into contact with the external control which both regulates the non-places into which she is perpetually thrust (from the airport to, presumably, police quarters) as well as the material possibilities for her realisation of selfhood. The constraints to this realisation are evidenced in the progressive disappearance of descriptive phrases that refer to the black polka dot woman: her "unusual receptiveness" to this exertion of control is, of course, not *a priori* but a result of her increased exposure to violence as a queer woman of colour and a migrant. This makes her particularly susceptible to the state's dehumanising practices that force similarly excessive acts of resistance, like her final emotional outburst, and that further situate her, in the officer's gaze, within the prejudiced white, Western

12. Indeed, Silvera's collection of interviews with West Indian women employed as domestic workers in Canada is titled *Silenced*.

conception of Black otherness as primitive and animal-like. Because her encounter with power negates her possibilities for self-assertion, taking away her belongings, her clothes, and the sense of self she makes an effort to remind herself of, the polka dot woman is only pushed more firmly into physical and psychic zones of liminality. This chimeric construction is animated in her trance, but it is also foregrounded in the variously symbolic "chameleon" of the title.

Chameleons and Migrants

As the animal known for changing colour to blend in with its surroundings, the chameleon is able to stand for a number of meanings as it pertains to race and gender. It seems telling that, in the moment when the woman becomes a "[m]onster" and a "[j]ungle beast" (Silvera, "CC" 32) the blackness of her clothes and skin stop being meaningful signifiers. This "fading into black" may be particular to the chameleon's behaviour, but, as every other symbol in the story, it too is charged with ambivalence. On the one hand, the chameleon recalls orientalist literary representations of Jamaica, most notably Truman Capote's in "Music for Chameleons[13]". On the other, the chameleon symbolises the illusion of integration and the simultaneous threat of assimilation—of a type of belonging that makes no recourse to difference but that engulfs and integrates it until it is no longer different but simply invisible. In being in*visible*, unable to be seen, to be looked at, and therefore to be articulated as a self, I agree with Fraile-Marcos that, in Silvera's story, "[t]he myth of the Canadian mosaic crumbles … as minorities are fixed in a negative distorted perception of their identity," and that these fraught acts of seeing, reading and performing "preclude assimilation" (81). The extent to which "assimilation" is what the polka dot woman reclaims, however, can be put into question. When "assimilation" is understood as full socio-political belonging, it becomes an aim of marginalised identities; however, insofar as "assimilation" refers to the fabrication of a homogeneous state metanarrative that erases difference, it stops becoming desirable. Understood in this way, processes of assimilation absorb alterity into naturalised body politics, refusing the differential existence of the other by disavowing difference

13. In the story, the white author portrays a conversation between an American man and an aristocrat from Martinique who is only identified as "Madame." As in the case of "Caribbean Chameleon," Capote's tale opens and closes with animals when chameleons gather to hear Madame play the piano. Like the narrator, the chameleons seem compelled to hear the woman, although the question lingers as to the degree to which either is able to understand her.

itself. The tension between different forms of assimilation and their representation is consistent with Davis' assertion that "the maintenance of … well-policed [geographical, cultural, and political] borders has been essential in fixing marginalized identities, in keeping them contained and restricted" (65). In this light, the polka dot woman's paroxysm can either be read as an attempt to escape from the zones of demarcation imposed by the Canadian state on migrant bodies or as a deconstructive practice that animates new habitable spaces for unhomely alterities. If the Black experience has, beginning with DuBois, been conceptualised through an understanding of doubleness, Hutcheon and Richmond remark how the immigrant experience is similarly liminal: "Caught between two worlds, the immigrant negotiates a new social space; caught between two cultures and often languages, the writer negotiates a new literary space" (9). This new, hybrid, and—to use Bhabha's terminology—"third" space is perhaps that which is opened through the polka dot woman's chimeric excesses, and yet, as uninscribed *space*, it is incapable of adequately dealing with the need for assertion of the Afro-Caribbean migrant. Still, the binary unfolding of the mad "beastly" self and the "civilised" woman who needs to perform according to the stifling standards of propriety and character imposed by Western rule persists in the form of the pant suit, whose two-coloured polka dot pattern refuses to give up completely the dichotomous tensions that permeate the narrative: "Line long. Which one to enter. Woman or man. White or Asian. Black or white" (Silvera, "CC" 30). Although I lack the means to carefully consider this here, the narrative hesitancy in this instance as well as the pattern of the polka dot woman's pant suit open interesting possibilities for a reading of the polka dot woman as being of mixed race, further complicating the processes of negotiation in which she is inscribed as well as the discussion of alterity, performativity and scopic practices, which include a consideration of 'passing' (i.e. the privileges afforded by not *looking* Black).

Conclusion

In dealing primarily with that which is coded as interstitial—queerness, animality, migrant experience—, this article explores a space of liminality populated by subjectivities marginalised against the naturalised white Canadian self. It is a space, or a non-place, because the subjects that cross it are variously impeded from enacting strategies of self-assertion—through their recognition in the eyes of the other, through their stylistic peformances—that might carry them from the interstice into signified locality. If "Canadian literature, as a representation of the collective expression by which the nation identifies itself, still relies on the landscape as a metaphor of identity" (Beckford 465), what does it say for the

polka dot woman that she is only afforded the use of the non-place, and not the habitation of landscape? If, in Silvera's story, an exit from the non-place and unacknowledgement is perpetually negotiated and never stable, and leads to the traumatic disintegration of the Jamaican-Canadian, Black immigrant self, what does this say of government and policing, as well as of those who do get to inhabit liveable places? Space and place still offer opportunities for analysis in the story as, potentially, the three-act division of Silvera's story that I proposed in the introduction bears adding a fourth act, starting at the paragraph that begins "North Star cold" (Silvera, "CC" 31). Coldness as a feature of landscape has a rich history of being used to counterpose Canadian and Jamaican weather and describe the experiences of alienation felt by Caribbean migrants in a country that feels multiply foreign and isolating. The polka dot woman's refusal to wait to be brought to a separate locked room to be disrobed and searched (32), with its regulatory patriarchal echoes, also imbues space in the story with an oppressive quality from which the main character tries to free herself even at the cost of selfhood.

The (im)possibility to assert her *self*, regardless of the conventions and regulations that police acceptable identities, is at the crux of the story. Contrary to the rest of the characters, the black polka dot woman appears unable to perform the act(s) that may secure her a safe passageway home. She becomes suspect because she does not fit the narrative imposed on her ("'Vacation. Family?' 'No. I stay in a hotel.' 'Why a hotel?' 'Why yuh mean, sir?' … 'Did you stay with family?' 'No mam, I visit dem, but I stay in a hotel.' Suspicion" [Silvera, "CC" 30]) and is unwilling to *act* in such a way as to counteract the officer's prejudice. She is denied recognition by her peers, who look the other way as she is carried away from the premises.

This article has explored some of the ways in which the performance and construction of alterity are intertwined with considerations of race, sexual orientation and gender, and how these are expressed by markers of otherness like dress and animality. The recognition of alterity and the ways in which it is performed is continuously stalled, even as the protagonist's differential traits are constantly repeated in the text—"woman" and "black." Through the woman's experience, of the mechanisms at work in the transformation of Black subjects into less-than-human, violent, criminal stereotypes. If, upon leaving Jamaica, the narrator says goodbye to "slave wage, slave food, ranstid meat, *tear-up clothes*, rag man, tun' cornmeal, dry dust" (29-30, emphasis mine), by the end of the story, the black polka dot woman is nevertheless "tear[ing] off" her clothes. Arrested for "indecent exposure," the woman struggles for one last act of self-assertion with her nakedness, which can be simultaneously an act of resistance and a show of disempowerment (Fumagalli, Ledent and Del Valle Alcalá 4). If, for Derrida, selfhood and alterity surface in the moment when one

"is seen and seen naked" (11), the woman's exposure begs this opportunity for recognition, but there is a sense of futility as her attempt falls short of achieving it within the story. Her body becomes censored, she is carried away, *un*looked at, unacknowledged. Given that performances have no meaning in isolation—without sociality—this last refusal of recognition can be read as a symbol of the crumbling self that cannot co-constitute itself and so is abandoned to the schizophrenic logics of oppressive governmentality. Still, the theatrical frame of "Caribbean Chameleon" offers some hope out of this predicament, reminding the reader that they, in effect, have seen the polka dot woman, and so their own selves are co-constituted by the efforts at self-assertion of the story's protagonist on which they fixate their gaze.

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"Usable Paradoxical Space": Negotiating Captivity and the Gaze in Michelle Mohabeer's film *Blu in You*

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ABSTRACT
To this special issue of *Canada and Beyond* on "Caribbean Canadian" cultural production, this article offers a reappraisal of *spectacular* violence in the legacy of Sarah Baartman, as explored by Guyanese Canadian filmmaker Michelle Mohabeer. Mohabeer's film *Blu in You* confronts the racist, heteronormative violences that underpin Western modernity, in particular objectification of the gaze over racialized Black and queer women, in the process situating queer Caribbean Canadian women as Baartman's resistant inheritors. This paper seeks strategies for addressing the limitations imposed on queer critical race critique by inherited and flawed systems of knowledge. In particular, it explores the paradoxes that arise in addressing the legacies of Sarah Baartman using visual art. I use Mohabeer's film and its references to Baartman and captivity, routed through feminist critical race critique, to propose ways of imagining liberatory epistemologies within compromised contexts, the critical inhabitation of delimited positions, and the exercise of transformative agency within restricted zones.

Keywords
Sarah Baartman; Black feminism; spectacle; representation; agency.

Introduction

Critical race theory necessitates identification of the interlocked layers of oppression and violence that structure our ways of knowing and being into "racial formations" (Omi and Winant 2014). Gender and sexual justice are at the root of this project, for as intersectionality theory—and experience—make clear, the modes of subordination that divide humanity according to "race," ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and other forms of classification are interrelated and mutually constitutive. As Sherene Razack (2015) notes, "the mark that gets you evicted from humanity is a roving one." Resistance to patriarchal racial formations has no singular point of entry, of course, and while many forms of resistance are direct and oppositional, the zone addressed by this article is compromised and cramped. This article engages with visual art/performance that confronts the iconography of slavery and spectacles of violence against Black and racialized women to explore the risks, limit-points, and possibilities of this confrontation. It focuses this exploration on a Caribbean Canadian experimental documentary film that stages the complexity of engaging with and undoing legacies of gendered and racist epistemologies.

This article begins with a pedagogical problem and works outward. In three consecutive offerings of a graduate-level English course on gender/sexuality and critical race studies, I have begun the course with a screening of Guyanese-Torontonian filmmaker Michelle Mohabeer's 2008 film *Blu in You*.[1] In the film, the role of gendered and racialized spectacularization is foregrounded in the conversation of the film's speakers, Nalo Hopkinson and Andrea Fatona; in its presentation of archival still and video images of Black women, especially in entertainment/performance contexts; and in the film's imagery and filmic techniques and its incorporation of queer erotica. The central historical referent of the film is Sarah Baartman,[2] also known as the "Hottentot Venus," a KhoiSan woman abducted and put on display in early 19th Century Europe in enslaved

1. I am grateful to several classes of graduate students in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Waterloo from 2012-14 who have offered their insights on this film during group discussion in my seminar "Gender and Postcolonial Literature." Of particular note are comments shared by Megan Farnel, Sarah Gibbons, Tommy Mayberry, Maša Pasovic, Maria Pop, Farah Yusuf, and Elise Vist. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *Canada and Beyond* who offered very helpful comments on this draft as well as reviewers at *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* for a previous submission.

2. "Sarah" has also been written as Sara, Saartjie, or Saartji, and "Baartman" has also been written as Baartmann or Bartman. The terms KhoiSan or Khoi are sometimes referred to instead of Khoikhoi (Magubane 2001, 832).

conditions, her brain and genitalia after her death dissected and displayed by comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier. Sarah Baartman and the image of KhoiSan women in general performed a critical function in discourses of race, sexuality, and gender at least since the sixteenth century in the Anglophone world (Wiegman 211n9). As Wiegman points out, this critical function included displacing the "threat (and actuality) of [European] interracial sexual practices with African women" (57). And Sarah Baartman marks also a critical point in the history of 20thC decolonization: the movement to repatriate her remains in South Africa followed the release of Nelson Mandela and the first non-racial elections in that country, making Baartman a "transnational postcolonial icon" (Garrett 78).

The inclusion of Mohabeer's film deliberately posed a conundrum for this graduate class, focused as that seminar was on worrying the epistemological foundations that produce racialized, hetero-patriarchal, and other colonizing systems of knowledge. How could we speak about and resist Baartman's dehumanization without reanimating the categories human/nonhuman that were at the core of her subjugation, and that continue to structure racialized and gendered hierarchies, including in our classroom? How could we address our own position as those who "look," even critically and with an interest in justice? Is there a viewing relationship of witness and critique that could overcome the spectacularization of Baartman's images? What could we do with the impulse to "re" humanize Baartman—to restore her to subjectivity—using the tools of historical critique and of creative endeavour, without thereby continuing to *use* Baartman to explore our own questions?

Mohabeer's film foregrounds the colonial and racialized history of the visual in Baartman's dehumanization, with a voiceover (speaking Mohabeer's poem "Evocation")[3] declaring she was "violated time over with their gazes," "commodified, fetishized…[the] spectacular vision of the primitive other" who has undergone a "public dissection" long after her death (Mohabeer 2008). Mohabeer strives to wrest "the visual" away from this history, working both within and against the genre of documentary film in her focus on Black women's performative play with the visual—including extended discussion of Josephine Baker, Dorothy Dandridge, and Grace Jones—and with her inclusion of queer women of colour erotic images as a way to exercise agency over the representation of Black women's sexuality. Mohabeer's film and her thematically directed dialogue between the Caribbean Canadian queer women interlocutors importantly demonstrates the many ways in which racialized and gendered modes of "looking" and being "looked at" can be challenged, ironized, and critiqued.

3. Mohabeer email to H. Smyth.

At the same time, the film prompts a continued unsettling concern about the areas of potential incommensurability and challenge in using the antiracist visual to undercut the racist visual given the endurance of racialized and gendered visual codes. In other words, along with oppositional, more openly resistant challenges to the racist and patriarchal logic of the visual, Mohabeer's film foregrounds that zone where agency is exercised from within a restricted area, where the tools themselves are compromised or delimiting, and where images of captivity are inhabited, digested, and recontextualized, in an ongoing process of transformation.

Mohabeer wields the medium of film and experimental techniques to explore the complexities of diasporic, queer, mixed-race, experiences. Many of her other films—a list that includes *Exposure* (1990), *Coconut/Cane and Cutlass* (1994), *Two-Doh* (1996), *Child-Play* (1998), *Tracing Soul* (2001), *Echoes* (2003), and *Queer Coolie-tudes* (2019)—use what Mohabeer calls "experimental disjunctive aesthetic form" (2015) to critique dominant and normalizing discourses. Tara Atluri (2009) notes how Mohabeer's films "offer a rare glimpse into the multiple layers of irony and resistance that define dissident Caribbean sexualities" and argues that her "non-traditional film techniques speak to how colonial ideas of rationality are often unable to contain the shifting bodies and broken narratives of queer postcolonial subjects" (1-2). My identification of 'compromised and cramped' spaces of resistance in *Blu in You* is prompted by the predominance of images of ropes, chains, and wooden boxes in the film, echoing the restrictive and punitive tools of slavery as well as the cramped conditions of Baartman's boxed display. Mohabeer ironizes and transforms these images through technologies of negative imaging and front projection, while also creating visual effects of repetition, redoubling, and distortion, transforming appearances with psychedelic colouring and shimmering, oceanic movement.

The following discussion will outline scholarship on Baartman's overdetermined signifying function and the role of the visual in her containment; will propose models of critique that carve out space for challenging her iconography; and will examine how Mohabeer's filmic techniques and "experimental disjunctive aesthetic form" enable a critical approach to the legacy of Baartman and images of captivity.

In the 'locus of confounded identities'

Sarah Baartman often features in critical race studies as an exemplar of the shaping of subjectivities through the interlocking and contradictory forces of patriarchy, racism, and colonialism. Greg Thomas points out this complexity in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic*

Schemes of Empire when he notes, "The entire history of our African presence in American captivity lays bare a raw sexual terror that defines the cult of white supremacy here and elsewhere" (1). While Baartman's iconicity starts from a literal captivity, scholars including Saidiya Hartman (2007), Christina Sharpe (2016), and Rinaldo Walcott (2021) affirm that Black North American experience is distinguished by continued modes of captivity and unfreedom that are not merely metaphorical but constitute "the afterlife of slavery" (Hartman, 6).

Hortense Spillers contends that in the "socio-political order of the New World" the captive body fulfills a number of discursive functions—as "the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality" and yet "in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor." Further, "in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness'" which then "translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general 'powerlessness'" (67). Spillers points out the overdetermined nature of the, in particular, captive African woman's signifying function, and its continuation in the "locus of confounded identities" available to racialized women, which are "a sort of telegraphic coding…markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean" (65). This continuation—and by extension, the continuation of Baartman's signifying function, and her encumberment by "mythical prepossession"—is enabled by a "dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation [which] remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement" (68).

In parallel with Spillers, Sharpe (2010) queries the repatriation of Baartman to South Africa as a redemptive project that relies heavily on her signifying function, asking, "what is being shored up through the retroactive subjectification of Baartman and the reclamation of her from and for history, when that work is most often connected to a cultural and national(ist) project? … What would it mean for this work to be *for* Baartman?" (72-3). She asserts,

> One can read the redemptive conferral of subjectivity to Baartman…itself as a retroactive and redeeming subjection analogous to objectification. That is, subjectification = objectification as Baartman once again is overwritten with multiple histories and used in the service of a number of national and political agendas that involve not the emergence of history but its repression. (2010, 74)

How can we think our way out of what seem all-encompassing epistemological systems? The task must take into account Sharpe's detailing of a

"subjectification" that is subjection; Spillers' claim that "there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean"; and the ways that, as Judith Wilson puts it, "race, gender, and the visual structure one another in a complex set of interlocking, epistemological feedback loops" (20). Sharpe limns the challenges and provisionality of this reading when she praises South African writer Bessie Head for her invocation of a KhoiSan woman in her novel *Maru*, through whom she "attempt[ed] to create a space *from which one might imagine imagining real liberation* through suspending oppressive social relations as they are passed on, constituted, and reproduced in the present" (2010, 70; emphasis mine). Replacing exploitative images with empowering images is insufficient to challenge the ideology behind racialized and gendered "looking" and the circulation of stereotypes.

Critics like Zine Magubane, Katherine McKittrick, and Sharpe have astutely pointed to how the continued focus on Baartman perpetuates her use and abuse as an icon, even by those who challenge the visual technologies that entrapped her. Sharpe (2010) draws attention to "the representational minefield" enacted through a 1996 South African exhibition of KhoiSan history (prior to Baartman's repatriation), arguing that although the curator "attempt[ed] to rupture being and looking like, being and doing" through an "'exposition of epistemological violence'," the exhibit only "participat[ed] in the very reproduction of the KhoiSan as object" that it set out to challenge (90). Magubane and McKittrick (2010) indicate in particular Sander Gilman's 1985 essay "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." Magubane (2001) argues that Gilman's article is "cited by virtually every scholar concerned with analyzing gender, science, race, colonialism, and/or their intersections" but that these ostensibly poststructuralist studies "valorize the very ground of biological essentialism they purport to deconstruct" by adopting Gilman's "ahistorical and psychologically determinist perspective" (816-817, 821). Magubane and McKittrick assert that Gilman's efforts to gloss over the colonizing, racist, misogynist context of Baartman's capture and display are thoroughly undermined by his reproduction of the illustrations of her medical dissection and his positioning of her as a symbol of something beyond herself, based in unexamined racialized biological assumptions. He uses Baartman to mark the historical development and intersections of multiple discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and class but does not question her pathologization and position as *other to* and *different from* a powerful norm that her dehumanization supports.

Gilman's example is a broad target, but McKittrick points out that even committed antiracist projects have tended to use Baartman to understand linked racism and sexism, or to use her as an icon of resistance, "visually brandishing her body as condemned" (2010, 119). This legacy, she argues, has perpetuated

an ongoing "visual currency" (118) in which Baartman—and by extension, the racialized and gendered bodies in the name of whom she is invoked—remains "a unitary scientific spectacle of alterity" (119). In other words, Baartman has remained iconic because of the perpetual recirculation of her image in many contexts, both supportive of and critical of colonialism, racism, and misogyny. Because Baartman always stands in for iconography that is larger than herself, she remains objectified, and the scientific racism that underpins the modes of "looking" that are associated with her are not fundamentally challenged. McKittrick's essay alerts us to the high stakes involved in any invocation of Baartman, including in Mohabeer's film.

Indeed, the nuanced work of Black and racialized women artists like Mohabeer to reclaim Baartman provides evidence of the complexity of the problem. In *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness,* Nicole Fleetwood points to the ongoing complexity of Black visibility and representation, the "simultaneously troubling and overdetermined discourse of blackness in the visual field" (15). In particular, she asserts that "the explicit black female body is an excessive body" (109). Fleetwood focuses less on "the political and cultural efficacy of a particular representation" (15)—that is, the hope that "get[ting] it 'right'" (11) or "the expectation that the representation itself will resolve the problem of the black body in the field of vision" (5)—and more on "the significance of visuality to produce and reinforce how subjects come to be racialized and come to understand the codes of racial differentiation" (15). Fleetwood identifies the multifaceted and multipurposed circulation of racialized images through iconicity, which is "the way[] in which singular images or signs come to represent a whole host of historical occurrences and processes" (2). Baartman, in other words, becomes a visual image that stands for many manifestations of racialization and engendering, and these functions shift and change over time, troubling even resistant mobilizations of her image. Fleetwood's primary structuring principle is that "the black body is always problematic in the field of vision because of the discourses of captivity and capitalism that frame this body as such" (18) and she asks, "how might we investigate the visible black body as a troubling presence to the very scopic regimes that define it as such?" (18).

'Inside and outside, captive and free'

On what grounds and in what lived context could racialized and sexualized images be circulated in ways that would *not* perpetuate this fetishization and racialized "looking"? Can Mohabeer's film escape this circuit? One way to focus on the issues arising from this problem—though by no means to solve it—can be found in Katherine McKittrick's book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and*

the Cartographies of Struggle (2006). McKittrick's nuanced work articulates the problems and possibilities of finding liberatory epistemologies within compromised contexts, the possibility of reinvention and the critical inhabitation of delimited positions. Though other models for thinking through these problems are available, I draw from McKittrick's concept to gesture to the shared circuit of Baartman's legacy that passes through US, the Caribbean, Africa, and Canada, and to situate Mohabeer's specifically Caribbean Canadian film through the visual components of McKittrick's concept of "critical attic space" (52). McKittrick engages a particularly nuanced exploration of how we might challenge the grounds of these perpetuated limiting ideologies—what she calls "ideological and geographic 'captivities'" (144) that are "recyclable, lasting, and spatially rigorous" (50). In her second chapter, "The Last Place They Thought Of: Black Women's Geographies," McKittrick reads the narrative of Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. From 1835-1842 Brent escaped slavery by hiding in a tiny attic garret in her grandmother's home on the North Carolina plantation she escaped from: a hiding place *within* slavery. McKittrick points out that Brent had removed herself from the slavemaster's vision so that she no longer functioned to affirm his own sense of his place in the world in reference to her, and she could watch slavery take place from a protected and critical vantage point. However, she suffered physical restriction and pain by living in the garret, and she was both free and unfree in her hiding place. McKittrick calls this a "usable paradoxical space" where Brent is "positioned across (rather than inside or outside, or inevitably bound to) slavery." She is "both inside and outside, captive and free" (42). Brent's story, she argues, "blend[s]…oppression, captivity, control, and agency" (39). McKittrick's analysis of Brent's story becomes a facet of her exploration of how scholars might position some of our critiques of racist misogyny across the delimited ways of thinking and systems of knowledge woven into our theories: engaging in critical race critique, acknowledging the violent epistemologies embedded in our tools, pushing incrementally and watchfully at their limits. "Across" can become a reading strategy and a means of envisioning the knowledge-creating function of our deeply flawed critical practices even while we are within them, using them to think our way out of their limits. As Brent herself writes, "[my grandmother's attic] was the last place they thought of. Yet there was no place, where slavery existed, that could have afforded me so good a place of concealment" (qtd. in McKittrick 2006, 42).

In "the afterlife of slavery" (Hartman, 6), Brent's comment can perhaps be translated to propose that there is no place that can afford a fully free critical space to undo the history of racialized and gendered looking; the "telegraphic coding" of these "markers" are "so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean"

(Spillers 1987, 65). McKittrick suggests that within a social world that delimited what was possible to do and to imagine, Brent found a space of agency, both compromised and transformative.

'Go right through it'

The concept of "critical attic space" offers a tool for exploring how *Blu in You* confronts, works within, and critically shifts the iconography of Baartman's enslavement and dehumanization. I argue that Mohabeer's film "create[s] a space *from which one might imagine imagining real liberation*" (Sharpe, 60, emphasis mine). Mohabeer addresses the legacy of racialized and gendered visual codes by, at times, operating *across* and within images of confinement and captivity. The title frame for the film, for instance, displays each word of "Blu in You" separately suspended from ropes (see Fig. 1). Knotted ropes appear throughout the film, shaped as if to tie a person's hands or feet together, or to form a noose (Fig. 2), as well as a large wooden box sided with chicken wire, perhaps echoing the box in which Baartman was sometimes displayed and caged (Fig. 3).

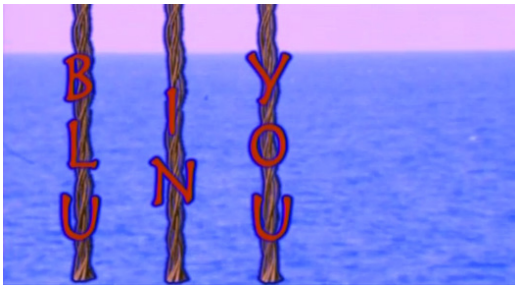

Fig. 1

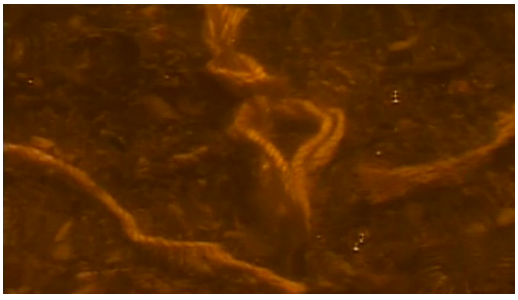

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Unlike some critiques of Baartman's captivity that show images of Baartman herself in confinement, Mohabeer's film resists the potentially exploitative and objectifying function those images might have and instead shows the images to *reference* or quote captivity without showing a woman captive. Her film is sensitive to the porous boundary line between pornography and erotica, and engages with the mixed desire, fear, and assertion of power that framed Baartman's display and exploitation in her time. Mohabeer similarly confronts the ways that medical drawings of Baartman's dissected genitalia perpetuate her exploitation and exposure centuries after her death. Instead of reproducing these images, Mohabeer references them by using filmic techniques to morph the images of confinement—and in one instance, rows of royal palm trees—into shimmering and doubling images that resemble women's genitalia (Fig. 4, Fig. 5). She manipulates visual perception with special effects and psychedelic colour to challenge the potential that the images will have a mimetic function—that is, that the images will be taken to be realistic, naturalized, representative, and even ethnographic presentations of the subjects in her documentary film, smoothly aligned with colonial and patriarchal ideologies. The rope of captivity, for example, shimmering underwater and doubled, becomes labial and aesthetically beautiful, offering a reference point for the film's transition from spectacle to queer erotica.

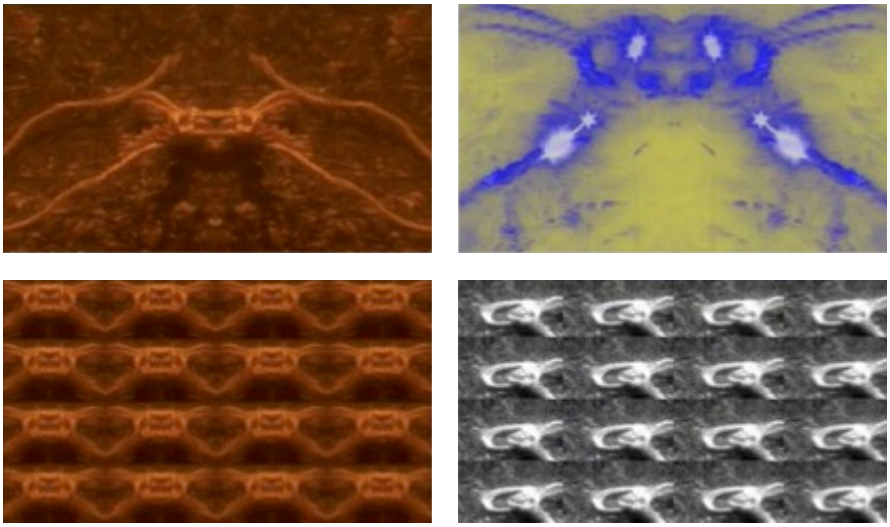

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

In her creative methods of addressing the question of what to show, display, and reveal in Baartman's iconography, Mohabeer's film bears comparison with Suzan-Lori Parks' play *Venus* (1996), which stages Baartman's life and death. Critics point to Parks' plays as "punitive scopic events," "dangerous racialized spectacles," for "she interrogates (white) spectatorship, empowering audiences

to see truths once hidden by masks" (Kolin 15). *Venus* in particular uses a "series of poetic repetitions and revisions" to "produc[e] fresh histories of the various experiences of enslavement, forced migration, colonialism and its afterlife" (Saal 67). In interesting comparison with Mohabeer, Parks staged one of the most potentially dehumanizing elements of Baartman's story—her dissection by Cuvier—during the play's intermission: both inside and outside the play's frame, in its own marginalized space. Garrett argues that this strategy "anticipates and satirizes the impulse to flee, putting the spectator in a double-bind. Neither staying nor going, the play implies, absolves anyone of the sin of complicity" (Garrett 79). This staging draws attention to the contradictions of representing Baartman ethically and refuses redemption for the audience.

Mohabeer uses the technologies of film to trouble the question of whether to show or not show the violence against Baartman and the violences of the Atlantic slave trade. Mohabeer's film and editing techniques feature movement, mobility, and multiplicity. The predominance of water in the film—ocean-like bodies of water and water's edge—invokes the continuities of the African diaspora and the shared legacies of racialized/sexualized spectatorship across its many geographies. The presence of the rope and box/cage underwater link Baartman's history with iconography of the Middle Passage and the Atlantic slave trade. However, images also appear underwater to show transition, blurring, and indeterminacy. The rope of captivity is distorted and transformed as the water moves, then is doubled and multiplied. The captivity of Baartman is multiplied to many more instances of the exertion of patriarchal and racialized power, and the doubled images begin to resemble Rorschach inkblots, gesturing to the unconscious level of both the enforcement and internalization of these forms of violence and trauma, and perhaps also to the interpretive possibilities of the images. The multiplied images may also gesture to Baartman's dismemberment and dissection. The multiplied image and use of changing colour also ironizes and puts into question the fixity of Baartman as an icon of captive dehumanized Black women. The use of negative image effects suggests reversal as well as x-ray exposure of what is hidden underneath.

The multiplying images also challenge the representational techniques of documentary filmmaking, accentuating the two-woman interlocutory and conversational format and disjunctive narrative in preference to an objective or linear presentation. Close-up shots show Hopkinson inverting her pressed palms first one way and then the other, using her hands to indicate multiple sides of the issues and to gesture to the complexity of the problems the women discuss (Fig. 6). Her hands moving together mirror the Rorschach inkblot film technique, so that her voice and body and *intention* become part of the film's transformation of images of captivity and dissection into thoughtful critique and resistance, while at the same time signalling connections between

the unconscious and the unsayable and our bodies' knowledge. The both/and of her hand's gestures and her speaking to/with and physical proximity to Fatona—foregrounding multiplicity and relationship—underscores the film's acknowledgement of the connection between absolute or closed systems of thought and the objectification of Baartman.

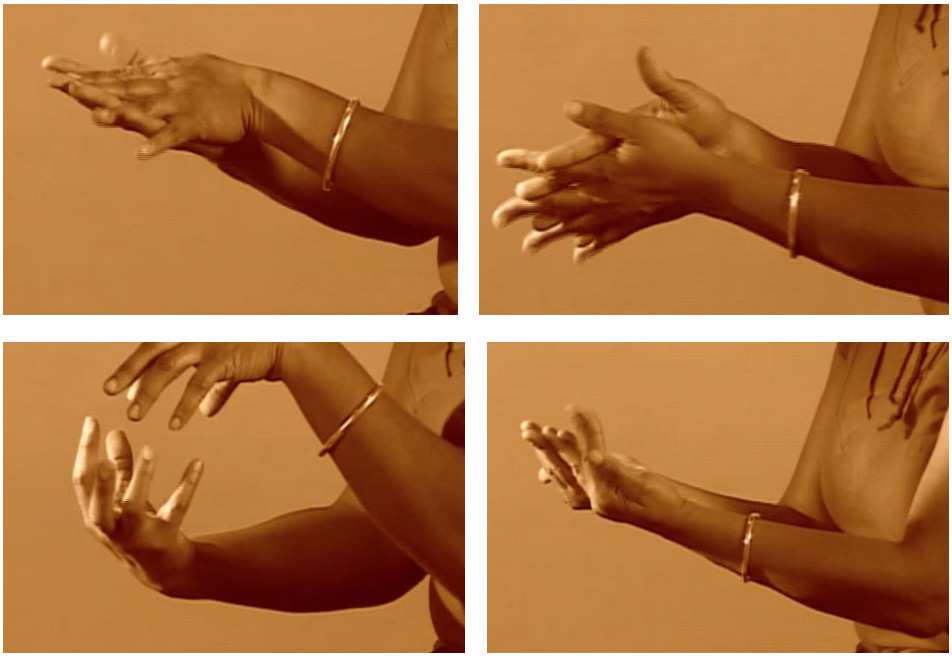

Fig. 6

Critics like bell hooks (1999) have articulated the possibilities of opposing dominant discourses of racialization, power, and "looking" and finding spaces of agency. She writes, "spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see" (308). hooks, like Manthia Diawara and Stuart Hall, among others, defines the space of oppositional spectatorship and the ways that the visual codes of a "dominant cultural order" (Hall 134) can be resisted—the "preferred meanings" of an ideologically framed visual text might be decoded in oppositional ways. In "Encoding/decoding," Stuart Hall argues that the connotative level of televisual (or filmic) signs, "though…bounded" is also "open, subject to more active *transformations*, which exploit its polysemic values" (134; emphasis in original). However, "polysemy must not…be confused with

pluralism" (134). Hall points out that the "dominant cultural order" structures the "preferred readings" of an event and marks them with "the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions" (134). "Encoding" shapes "some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate," such that even "misunderstandings" of a dominant meaning will "refer, *through* the codes, to the orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology" (134-5; emphasis in original). Hall's articulation mirrors Spillers' suggestion that codes are loaded with "mythical prepossession" (65), and his argument that even resistant meanings must "refer" to dominant orders "*through* the codes" substantiates the usefulness of McKittrick's (2006) "across."

One of the ways Mohabeer's film addresses agency is its exploration of the differences between display and performance, and the role of framing. Using the initial image of a nude Black woman figure *framed* in a window frame, viewing an ocean, the film *re-frames* display as self-contained and quotidian *just being there*. Andrea Fatona speaks to this in the film, and to the idea that ethnographic spectatorship projects racialized and sexualized frames onto what it views; in contrast, "as Black women there is a sense of the everyday or quotidian notion of how we present ourselves to the world." Fatona and Hopkinson seek places of agency and resistance and focus on performative agency with reference to Baker and Dandridge. But of Baartman, Hopkinson says, "we can never know how Sarah Baartman performed her body, because we're getting it translated." The unnamed nude woman in the frame offers a quotidian deflection of the ethnographic gaze through her disinterest in the viewer and the blurry domestic scene that surrounds her, perhaps capitalizing on what Michel de Certeau identified as the value of quotidian resistance: "the common, the quotidian, the personal, the *plural* practices" that can be "transgress[ive]," "'cutting across'" the "boundaries imposed by all totalizing systems" (Reynolds and Fitzpatrick, 63). Tina Campt's concept of Black fugitivity and the quotidian is especially relevant here. Her *Listening to Images* (2017) studies state-mandated identification photos of Black subjects to explore "quotidian practice[s] of refusal" (32). Campt's "fugitivity" is "not an act of flight or escape or a strategy of resistance" (96) but rather "a refusal of the very premises that have reduced the lived experience of blackness to pathology and irreconcilability in the logic of white supremacy… creative *practices of refusal* [are] nimble and strategic practices that undermine the categories of the dominant" (32; emphasis in original). Campt's study of quotidian photographs offers a way to imagine the framed woman in Mohabeer's film as refusing the terms of a white heteronormative scopic gaze—refusing to accept but also refusing to engage, instead resting in the film's Black queer erotic space.

Mohabeer also confronts the issue of spectatorship and spectacle by using front projection effects and introducing the figure of a Black female spectator

in the foreground of the film, played by Melanie Smith, holding a remote control. This woman watches portions of the documentary or of embedded films on the reflective screen with her back to the documentary camera, changing the channel with her remote and on occasion turning to face the viewer of the documentary (Fig. 7). While the viewer of the film primarily sees Smith's back, her early and repeated appearance in the middle ground of the film positions her as the focalizer or point of view figure. This figure speaks to the problem described here: there is always a viewer, a spectator, so can we undo the subject-object relation that has prevailed in the history of gendered and racialized looking? Is the woman with the remote in control? These questions are especially pertinent in that Smith's first appearance follows the film's textual display of a reference to Walter Benjamin quoted from Rony's (1996) *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*: "film is comparable to surgery, the instrument allowing the operator to penetrate the body of the subject while, paradoxically, maintaining his or her distance" (46). The quotation uneasily cites Baartman's surgical dissection, but perhaps also the filmic technique of suture, which in psychoanalytic film theory becomes "a metaphor for the 'stitching' of a spectator into the narrative illusion, notably through the use of the shot/reverse shot technique (which makes the spectator alternately the subject and object of the look)" (Chandler).

Fig. 7

Even as the film claims the ground of decolonization and critique, and seizing the tools of representation historically coded as ethnographic spectacle, it addresses the ongoing imperative to query the risks of engagement. Near the end of the film, Fatona and Hopkinson discuss the means available to Black queer women to own their own sexualities on a continuum that includes BDSM. Hopkinson asks, "what does the whole notion of playing with slavery and master-ownership mean for a Black woman with that kind of history?" She asks whether it implies "internalized issues" or whether it's "one way of tackling this 500 year

history." Her speech is followed by an image of the rope of captivity—or perhaps of sexual play—cut into pieces, shimmering underwater and coloured in neon blue. This image of freedom and transformation is juxtaposed with the scrolling words at the bottom of the screen, "IS THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION STILL IN EFFECT?" (Fig. 8). Fatona addresses the imperative levied on Black queer women to speak for or represent an entire identity group, saying, "given our histories, though…we still carry that burden of representation and it's a huge burden to carry." The women concur that "reading practices" and the interpretation of images must change in tandem with reorientations in creative representation, though "people *will* put on you what they want to see, or what they think they're seeing." Hopkinson addresses the ongoing potential for voyeurism in the visual, saying, "You are aware you're going to be watched…I don't think you can get away from being watched, being eroticized, perhaps being fetishized. For me one of the ways to deal with that is not to try to go around it or subvert it or prevent it but to go *right through it*." By going *right through* images of captivity, enslavement, and spectacle, Mohabeer's film works *across* a restrictive field to seek a paradoxical but usable place of queer critical race agency.

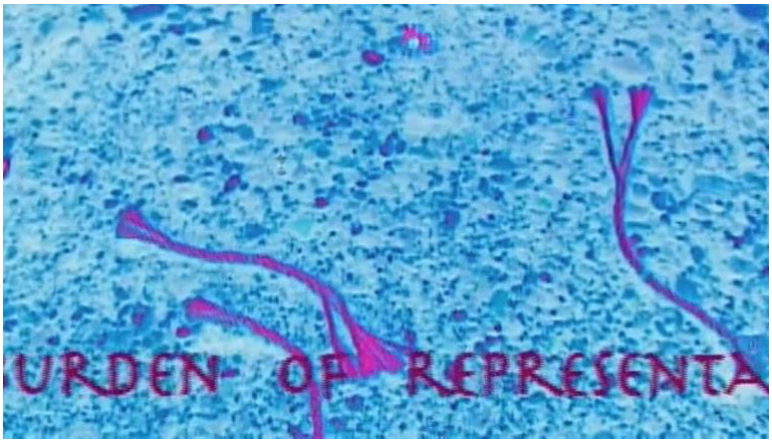

Fig. 8

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Interview

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Writing the Queer Caribbean / Canada / Beyond – A Conversation with H. Nigel Thomas

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ABSTRACT
H. Nigel Thomas is the writer of twelve books and a retired professor of American literature at Laval University. Born and raised in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, he moved to Montréal in 1968. Nigel's illustrious career includes short stories, poems and articles that have appeared in multiple journals and anthologies. His novels *Spirits in the Dark* and *No Safeguards* were shortlisted for the Quebec Writers Federation Hugh MacLennan Fiction Prize. *Des vies Cassées* (the translation of *Lives: Whole and Otherwise)* was shortlisted for le Prix Carbet des Lycéens. In this interview, Linzey Corridon explores queerness in the Caribbean Canadian diaspora, intergenerational queer subjectivities, multiculturalism, audience reception, publishing, and circulation in the Caribbean.

Keywords
St. Vincent; Queer; H. Nigel Thomas; Multiculturalism; Caribbean Canadians in Montreal.

Introduction

"What [we are] Overflows"

When the call for papers first appeared, I convinced myself that I would write a critical essay about the significant literary contributions of H. Nigel Thomas to

Caribbean and Canadian public spheres. A Vincentian who moved to Canada in 1968, Nigel represents the pinnacle of Vincentian and Caribbean scholarship. He remains a pioneer and a crucial cornerstone of Caribbean social thought and literary praxis. The *longue durée* that is his literary career is not only monumental in Vincentian and diaspora cultural histories; Nigel's work also remains fundamental to the study of queerness and the Caribbean because of the ways in which both his earliest and most recent writings continue to chart the slowly changing relationships between human beings and the worlds that they occupy. His literary pursuits investigate blackness, migranthood, spirituality and more. These subjects are explored via both adolescent and mature characters, through the most powerful and the most downtrodden beings in our societies, and through what is spoken and what remains unheard. Whether it be his latest foray into lyrical poetics with *The Voyage* (Mawenzi House, 2021), his contributions to exploring the significance of an African Canadian literary tradition in *Why We Write: Conversations with African Canadian Poets and Novelists* (TSAR Publications, 2006), or in his debut *Spirits in the Dark* (Anansi, 1993) which tells the story of one buller's[1] journey from innocence to experience, to further think and write alongside Nigel's contributions to Caribbean and Canadian writing is to challenge ourselves to not only honor his practice, but to also add to a culture of further critical and creative investigations into the human condition.

Rather than add to the lexicons of hegemonic scholarship, Nigel's work presents another legitimate avenue by which to honor and *contribute* to the many conversations that I, Nigel, and other Caribbean and Canadian writers and thinkers continue to have. To pen my own insights about Nigel's writings seems too narrow of an approach and contribution to a special issue journal focusing on the richness of Caribbean Canadian cultural productions. I asked myself *instead of writing a paper, what might manifest in my choosing to have a conversation with Nigel about some of the concerns that this special journal issue take up*? How might direct dialogue with the author further muddy or elucidate our individual, yet sometimes overlapping, insights? What might an exchange between two different generations of queer Vincentian men who moved to Canada (one making the move during the 1960s, the other in the 2010s) reveal about the categories of Caribbean and Canadian? How might both of our experiences—at once similar and differing— force readers to consider their own positionality in relation to concepts such as activism, culture, and diaspora? It is in pursuit of these overarching questions that I was led to collaborate with Nigel for this project.

1. A popular Caribbean term (derogatory in nature) used to refer to homosexual men.

The writings included here took place over a series of email exchanges between Nigel and me. We moved between formal and informal communication, tackling the questions which I had drafted in response to the call for papers, while also casually veering outside of the immediate confines of the project's subject matter in our responses. This formal-informal dialogic across digital space encapsulates the ease with which we (Caribbean people) sit together from time to time, reasoning about life. In talking (or typing) to one another over email a document has emerged that now sustains our musings beyond the initial period of contact. We have done all of this supposed talking without ever verbally uttering a single word to one another. I point this fact out to readers to suggest that ideas of discourse and a culture of orality remain complex issues for Caribbean and diaspora peoples. Being able to verbalize one's ideas is but a single dimension to the multi-faceted notion of Caribbean oral cultures. This document produced over email highlights yet another dimension to this culture. It is significant then that our email conversation appears in writing as a reminder to readers that while many in the diaspora are unable to have real-time conversations with one another (life in the diaspora often, and always intentionally, makes the goal of sustaining community challenging), there exist methods by which we might speak to one another through writing or recording our thoughts and ideas (what we would say if we had the real-time opportunity) for those who choose to listen. Our recent ancestors, if and when they could afford it, sustained conversations between Canada and the archipelago through snail mail that never arrived at the right time and over telephone calls that always ended too soon. Now, we have access to email and more immersive forms of community through conversation. To accumulate conversation through our writings further enriches both active and passive traceable oral histories of Caribbean and diaspora thought and praxis.

This newest collaboration between Nigel and me is only one of many ongoing conversations unfolding across Canada between Caribbean and non-Caribbean peoples. Other recent and important Caribbean Canadian scholarship on ideas of the conversation or the interview as a pedagogical tool and (re)membering include Rosamund Elwin's *Tongues on Fire: Caribbean Lesbian Lives and Stories* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 1997), Dr. Kofi Campbell's *The Queer Caribbean Speaks: Interviews with Writers, Artists, and Activists* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), plus numerous and ongoing collaborative projects by Dr. Ronald Cummings (McMaster University) and Dr. Nalini Mohabir (Concordia University). I invoke these scholars and their works here as a means of reinforcing that the labor presented in this critical piece remains a part of a greater movement to celebrate Caribbean and diaspora intellectual pursuits. This project is made up of voices. It also carries with it traces of the voiceless, an equal glimmer of hope and despair that acknowledges the past while holding space

for the future. Ultimately, our intellectual labor is meant to generate timely discussions pertaining to H. Nigel Thomas' ongoing critical contributions to shaping Black and queer Caribbean Canadian landscapes.

Musings

Linzey Corridon: I recently completed my reading of your latest novel *Easily Fooled* (2021) published through Guernica Editions. I must tell you how exciting it is to have access to a four-part literary saga about queer Caribbean lives, sexual and otherwise. This type of chronicling of the queer Caribbean-Canadian experience, the format of narrating these diverse but unarguably connected (hi)stories across several book-length works, it is quite uncommon in Caribbean and Canadian writing literary histories. What does it mean to you to explore the Caribbean, the queer, and diaspora experiences? Is there one that demands your attention more than another? If so, how does your literary practice address these demands?

H. Nigel Thomas: Inasmuch as we carry all our experiences in a single body and experience reality with the entire self, I cannot say that I rate the Caribbean, queer, and diasporic experiences differently. Of course, from a foundational standpoint, the Caribbean experiences that shaped and misshaped me function as a matrix. In the Caribbean, the way we are programmed to enact our humanity is one of my main preoccupations, inside and outside fiction. For example, I don't want to see a single child beaten at home or in school. I don't want children to be told that they are burdens and that their Africanness is some sort of innate liability. I don't want gifted children to be beaten or insulted into silence; I want to see their curiosity nourished. I would also like us to be more robust in our analysis of the colonial propaganda we imbibed and were forced to propagate for the benefit of Britain.

To be identified as queer in the Caribbean is to endure constant wounding, occasionally physical but constantly verbal. When one emigrates, how does s/he heal from this? Moreover, in the Caribbean diaspora, one encounters similar attitudes, which prolongs the trauma. Does one cut one's self off from the diaspora and sacrifice the nurture one finds there? Does one face the opprobrium and fight the inevitable bigotry? And how does one do so when so many of one's persecutors belong to Evangelical sects who think they've been divinely mandated to persecute queer-trans people?

The foregoing are issues that I address variously in my fiction. Since we respond individually to the phenomena affecting us, my characters have no single

way of dealing with these issues. In the Quartet,[2] my fictional strategy has been to create a few foundational, sometimes contrasting, characters that are present throughout and several minor characters who support or oppose them.

LC: When you talk about our need to thoroughly interrogate colonial propaganda, your use of the word "we" comes across as a bit ambiguous. What I mean by this is that I believe you are referring to the decolonial work that needs to be done by West Indians. That said and, correct me if I am wrong to assume this, I can't help but read into your use of "we" as signifying more than the decolonial work currently being carried out by West Indians. It is a "we" that demands of Homo Sapiens to collectively undo those benefits once hoarded by imperial superpowers. Is this a fair conclusion on my part? Is there more to your use of "we"?

HNT: Thanks for asking me to clarify the meaning of "we." Indeed, the decolonization struggle is an all-hands-on-deck undertaking. It would be naïve to think, however, that the current beneficiaries of colonial dispossession and rapine will join it. Everywhere they are busy rationalizing it. They no longer say their depredations were to "civilize the natives," because the historical facts, which they once had the power to suppress, are now known, and, as is the case in Canada, acknowledged. Germany has gone further. It offered 1.1 billion Euros to Namibia as well as an apology for the genocide committed against the Herero people in the early 20th century. Of course, as the president of Namibia said, money cannot atone for the horror the Namibians endured. It will never erase the intergenerational pathology colonialism inflicted in places like Australia and Canada. In the Caribbean the most visible aspect of this is our contempt for our Africanness. More generally, the earlier colonial attitudes are now present in the form of systemic racism that brings with it a panoply of attitudes and assumptions that result in the marginalization of Black and Brown peoples.

LC: I think of many of your literary pursuits as both writing and activism. From your continued fictional writings, and I am thinking here especially about the *No Safeguards* quartet, that draws our attention to the more sinister role of Christian religion in the Caribbean quotidian, to your equally unfiltered and witty engagement with both Canadian and Caribbean political realities in *Moving Through Darkness* (AFO, 1999), your literary career carries with it activist

2. The Quartet includes a series of four novels published by Guernica editions: *No Safeguards* (2015), *Fate's Instruments* (2018), *Easily Fooled* (2021), and a forthcoming fourth and final novel.

undertones. Do you consider your literary pursuits as a form of activism? If so, how did you arrive at a space of doing activist work in the diaspora?

HNT: I have always been uncomfortable with the term literary activism. My characters deal with the challenges life throws at them. They are like real-life queer-trans people who want to be understood and left alone to pursue their dreams (which may include advocating for legal and social justice), and they battle to remove the hurdles their haters erect. To illustrate what I mean, in the Quartet, my character Neil, who seems androgynous in appearance, is shown from time but I keep him mysterious. I show the ordeal he endures—he refuses to be a victim—but I do so only from the outside because I do not know him. All I can accomplish with him is to show the casual cruelty West Indians employ when dealing with those they've othered. He succumbs to mental illness. No one, not even Millington and Jay, attributes it to the persecution he suffers. The community thinks his illness is a punishment from God, because, in their words, he sought to be a priest without an authentic call from God. I show similar persecution with my character Stilford in *Easily Fooled* and in my earlier novels: *Spirits in the Dark* and *Return to Arcadia*. It is endemic to the point that even gay characters on the down-low who engage in it, are expected to engage in it.

Fiction is futile for activism. Pathetically so, if it's focused on the Caribbean. There are too few readers of elementary expository prose (we are reverting to oral-aural cultures) and even fewer for complex prose fiction. I don't think I've ever sold more than fifty copies of any of my books in the entire Caribbean.

LC: I am moved by your honesty in response to my question on literary activism. I fixate on your final admission about selling 50 books at a time back in St. Vincent, for example. To me those are 50 copies that end up in different households. Each reader then internalizes your writing, becoming both a reader and an orator of the narratives you create. I believe that a (re)turn to oral-aural culture might yield particular benefits still for West Indians who cannot access literature in the ways that the persons purchasing your books can. So, there seems to be a subtle and ongoing connection at play between Caribbean diaspora literary productions and our obsession with print culture, and the ever-increasing turn towards orality in the Caribbean. Would you agree that the material cultural production offered up by Caribbean diaspora, Canada being one major producer, remains useful to citizens of the archipelago, even with the decreasing numbers of immediate or readily accessible readers?

HNT: I am not sufficiently versed in the sort of oral culture West Indians consume to undertake any sort of in-depth analysis of it. But I know that almost all of it is audiovisual (with all the intellectual drawbacks of audiovisual works,

chief of which is intellectual laziness) and the focus is on entertainment, usually to entice the audience to buy products, to further the consumer society. Since those products rarely originate in the Caribbean, this sort of entertainment is another manifestation of the protean properties of colonialism—some would say economic and cultural imperialism. When oral culture was Indigenous, it taught the mores of the group and inculcated its ethics. Today's oral culture is imported. It entertains by diversion, a forgetting of the self. Serious literature, on the other hand, incites reflection.

Diasporic artists will create even against great odds and hope there is an audience for their works. Most people who paint do so for pleasure. Publishers accept manuscripts at the rate of one per thousand. But people continue to write because it's a privileged space to meditate on humanity. It would be a bonus if Caribbean countries were to embrace their authors, but without that embrace those driven to write will continue to do so.

LC: As someone who is still relatively new to the lands known as Canada, I find myself thinking more and more about how the land and my experiences of Canada now transform my own work about the queer Caribbean and diaspora experience. For example, I have been playing with ecopoetry as a way of coming to terms with the feelings of sociocultural hybridity I now carry within me. I believe that it is paramount for young West Indian immigrant settlers to take the time to recognize that they occupy these lands, but to also work towards fostering a culture of reciprocity between themselves and the land. How has life in Canada impacted your relations to the land in North America, but also to the land in your native country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?

HNT: I am glad I came to live in Canada. Its seasons, which are radically different from anything I experienced in the Caribbean, have imbued me with a profound understanding of the circularity existing within linearity. The yearly cyclical permutations in the vegetation never cease to awe me. I've always loved nature—I began to cultivate flowers from the age of six, and even as a child loved to be alone in the mountains—but here I learned to venerate nature and to understand it in the profoundest of ways, to the point of knowing how much more superior trees are to me. In the process I cemented a feeling of kinship with writers like H. D. Thoreau and William Wordsworth, writers who understood the healing power of nature.

But nature isn't prelapsarian Eden. My approach to it—and to life in general—is biological. I have little patience for phenomena that eschew the biological smell test. It largely explains my characters' rejection of Orthodox Christianity.

Before I left St. Vincent, I knew that Canada had much to offer in tertiary education that materially impoverished St Vincent couldn't. I knew vaguely that

Canada was a wealthy country with vast natural resources and that, in alliance with Europe and the United States, it exploited weaker countries. Once I got here, I understood that the label Black immigrant meant that White Canadians perceived me as a member of those groups they've designated as cheap labour. I would soon learn that Euro-Canadians resent successful non-white immigrants. This led me to explore with Bakhtinian dialogic vigour the meaning of terms like Third World, Developing Countries, colonization, slavery, the proletariat—and certainly European settler communities' treatment of Indigenous populations—which takes me to your next question.

LC: Much of your intellectual work, and correct me if I am wrong, is concerned with recording and articulating Black Caribbean and diaspora experiences. Writing Blackness, in any setting, is no small feat. We find ourselves living on unceded Indigenous territory, in a Canadian society that champions queer liberation narratives, while also failing to effectively grapple with its own brand of politely potent anti-queerness and structured racism. How has such a trifecta of realities impacted your writing of Blackness and migrant narratives?

HNT: At the core of my writing, even though this might not be evident, is the question: who are we? (Who should perhaps be what). I see colonization as a reflection of human greed and power—and all the lies, including the creation of a chauvinistic god, that justify it. The term unceded implies that there is ceded territory; and on paper, a small quantity of it is. But they are treaties that were undertaken with chicanery and signed under duress, and therefore shouldn't be considered legal. The creation of the reservations is the real story for me. These were de facto prisons governed by Indian Agents; i.e. Euro-Canadian men charged with preventing movement outside of them. The best analogy today would be Gaza. Missionaries abounded in the reservations to cleanse Indigenous peoples of their pagan ways. In the meantime, governments could proceed with populating the rest of the land with, in Emma Lazarus' words, "the wretched refuse teeming on [Europe's shores]."[3] South Africa followed Canada's example and decreed that only three percent of its land mass belonged to its Indigenous populations. Whether by decree or slaughter, usually both, the result was that everywhere Europeans settled the Indigenous populations were deprived of their lands and forced to labour for the settlers. Categorized as primitives and savages (in need of redemption, whatever that was), in Kipling's words as "half-devil and half-child,"[4] Indigenous peoples faced a second assault. This

3. A reference to Emma Lazarus' famous 1883 Petrarchan sonnet "The New Colossus."
4. A reference to Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899).

time it was on their psyches. Here in Canada, it was termed taking the Indian out of the child.[5] In effect, it meant erasing the child's culture and implanting the colonizer's. It was forced psychic matricide. Those subjected to it could only emerge with a hatred for themselves and their people, and a deep sense of worthlessness and psychic instability. It's no accident that the survivors of residential schools have been traumatized and have gone on to traumatize others.

I have reflected many times (in my journals mostly) on the fact that I have lived both here and in St Vincent on terms established by colonizers. My initial reason for coming here was to attend university. The British colony I grew up in was interested chiefly in how Britons could benefit from my labour. Tertiary education did not promote the colonial project. Cheap labour for the cultivation of sugar, arrowroot, cocoa, and coconuts did. But I would soon discover that the common Canadian perception was that Brown and Black peoples should be assigned to low-wage, unskilled, dangerous, and dirty work that Euro-Canadians spurn. Unlike South Africa, where such a perception was coded into law, here it was de facto custom. Schools, unions, and governments promoted it, and employers enforced it.

Astonishingly, even so, Canada's laws and the ethics deriving therefrom were framed by the Enlightenment doctrine that all humans are created equal. My sojourn of more than 50 years here has been in large measure my witnessing of Canada's attempt to make the doctrine of human equality a lived reality. We see these changes in LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights, the rights of children as well as a willingness now to acknowledge the wrongs committed against the Indigenous population. But the damage done in earlier times is with us, and the attitudes that promoted cultural rape and land theft are still with us. It's imperative that we join forces with those seeking to remedy the depredations of the past and to prevent them from happening in the present. Many of these issues preoccupy my fictional characters.

LC: Your collection of conversations with African Canadian poets and novelists in *Why We Write* (TSAR, 2006) is 15 years old this year. In your introduction to *Why We Write*, you share a candid experience with your readers about once being asked to speak in detail about the existence of an African Canadian

5. A reference to one of Sir John A. McDonald's many views on the "Indian problem" in Canada. In a speech on May 28, 2015, Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin invokes McDonald's words as she critiques Canada's historically poor treatment of Indigenous peoples. See https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/chief-justice-says-canada-attempted-cultural-genocide-on-aboriginals/article24688854/ for further insights on Justice Mclachlin's speech.

aesthetic. Your resolve to try and investigate further whether or not there was an African Canadian aesthetic at the time makes me wonder about the possibilities for differing branches, if we could think of these other aesthetics as branches, of the African Canadian aesthetic. I cannot help but wonder if there exists a clear Caribbean-Canadian aesthetic. Kaie Kellough was awarded the 2020 Griffin Poetry Prize for his third collection *Magnetic Equator* (McClelland & Stewart, 2019). Canisia Lubrin was awarded the 2021 Windham-Campbell poetry Prize this past March, and the Griffin poetry prize in June of 2021 for her collection *The Dyzgraphxst* (McClelland & Stewart, 2020). Dionne Brand was also recently awarded the 2021 Windham-Campbell prize for fiction. Right now, it seems to me that the Global North is captivated with the work of Caribbean diasporic writers and thinkers. Do you believe that there exists a Caribbean Canadian aesthetic? How does this aesthetic differ from the African Canadian one that preoccupied your thinking during the creation of *Why We Write*?

HNT: When we add a new element to a set, we automatically alter it (to what degree depends on the set's ability to absorb it). In that sense one could argue that the lineaments for a Caribbean-Canadian aesthetic exists. But it might be a protean task for the scholar who undertakes to define it. My own ruminations on the topic have led me to call myself multicultural. I am the sum of all that I have learned and experienced, and that has come from multiple places and cultures.

I'll maintain that an argument can still be made for an African Canadian literary aesthetic on the basis of the themes found in Black Canadian literature. It's almost impossible for a Black writer who is focused on the portrayal of Black ontology in Canada to ignore the impact of white supremacy. While it is true that most of Canada's Black authors have Caribbean antecedents, I still believe that there are not enough of us to constitute a distinct branch of Canadian literature. I much prefer a literature that brings different Black perspectives to the table: Pan-Caribbean, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Africadian, Prairie, African American, Pacific.

LC: You were one of the artist-activists interviewed in Dr. Kofi Campbell's groundbreaking collection of interviews, *The Queer Caribbean Speaks: Interviews with Writers, Artists, and Activists* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). In fact, yours is the first chapter that readers encounter when interacting with Dr. Campbell's text. You spoke briefly, and I quite enjoyed the way that you phrased your point, of a kind of muted optimism for the future of same-sex peoples in the West Indies. You also spend ample time in your interview with Dr. Campbell ruminating on your experiences since moving to Montréal, Québec. I have always been intrigued by your sociopolitical trajectory as a writer. I am thinking more specifically of the geopolitical sites that you come to occupy all at once, namely spaces in the Caribbean, English Canada, but as importantly in French Canada.

Lives Whole and Otherwise (TSAR, 2010), one of your short story collections, has been translated into French by Mémoire D'Encrier publishers for the education and enjoyment of French language consumers. Your ability to move between Anglophone and Francophone Global North and South spaces is representative of another form of hybridity that many Caribbean writers don't have access to during their lifetime. As someone who also moves through these two geopolitical spaces with some ease, my thinking with the Caribbean can no longer stem from a singular place or space of anglophone histories and epistemologies. How has your immersion into French Canadian society impacted your development as a citizen of the anglophone Caribbean, but also as a literary figure over the span of your career? Would you say that life in French Canada has shaped your practice in unique ways?

HNT: I think you've just made the best argument for why I should see myself as multicultural. I have been privileged to make a few wise decisions in my life. Mastering French is one of them. I made it quite early, and it is one reason why I did not leave Montréal in the early years. There's a cornucopia of artistic production here: literature, theatre, the visual arts … available in both languages, and I enjoy as much of it as time permits.

My knowledge of French enables me to participate in forums that aren't available to unilingual Anglophones. My knowledge of Spanish has opened up other cultural spaces too. I always wanted to be polyglot, but alas …

LC: Multicultural and not Caribbean Canadian. Just fascinating insights, truly. Your last two responses have drawn on ideas of the multicultural. I don't believe that I have spoken to another Caribbean migrant living in Canada who has used multicultural as a way to categorize the self in equally material and immaterial ways. It also seems to me that you have given quite some thought to this idea before settling on the term multicultural. I am curious. Do you perceive any immediate disadvantages to thinking of the Caribbean self, in the context of Canada and its pseudo-benevolent, dominant narratives of multiculturalism, as purely multicultural?

HNT: You frame the question as if multicultural is a negative, restrictive trope. My description of myself as multicultural has nothing to do with political multiculturalism. I am sure that I have a journal entry somewhere that reflects on human growth—or growth on the part of living things. In the case of trees, such growth is visible on the outside; in the case of humans, it's internal and occurs in the form of knowledge. The greatest value of knowledge about the human condition is the infinite number of nuances that it brings to what we think we already know. Today it's taken for granted that the rich and complex humanistic knowledge that

came out of the Mediterranean was the result of three continents offering their intellectual riches to the thinkers of the day. Most of the valuable knowledge that I possess comes from my interaction with other cultures, directly and indirectly. That knowledge has shaped who I am today. It is for this reason that I define myself as multicultural. Multicultural need not exclude Caribbean Canadian. I am not using the term to obscure my Afro-Caribbeanity. However, I know that what I am overflows—or has expanded—the perimeter of Caribbean Canadian. I could easily have defined myself as an earthling who searches in the world's myths and folklore for an understanding of what an earthling is and who, hopefully, continues to be shaped by the best of what he discovers. A Caribbean recipe that now contains ingredients from around the world is it still a Caribbean recipe?

LC: The form of the interview, in my opinion, holds a crucial power for Caribbean writers and thinkers in Canada and the US. I am thinking back to your own labors in organizing *Why We Write*, but also the labor of Dr. Campbell in *The Queer Caribbean Speaks*. I look to Thomas Glave's *Our Caribbean* (Duke, 2008) and Rosamund Elwin's *Tongues on Fire* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 1997) and observe the labor of gathering, the labor or rooting and routing Caribbeanity inside and outside of North America. I think of the work I am committed to realizing with your help through this project, and I can't help but feel like a link in what remains an ongoing chain of artists doing their part to sustain Caribbean ontological discourses outside of the archipelago. Collaboration is a key component in that work of sustaining one another. To collaborate, in a way, is to recover aspects of our experience from the archipelago, but also to recover those iterations of the Caribbean self across North American landscapes. How do you respond to such a thought? Is recovery a key feature of Caribbean-Canadian literary projects? How do you deploy recovery as a tool in your own works? Does the form of the interview or the conversation still appeal to you 15 years after the first appearance of *Why We Write*?

HNT: If most fiction writers are like me, they forget about literary theory and let their imaginations take them where it will. The interview, when it is conducted by interviewers who've read and reflected on the authors' works, offers opportunities to authors to reflect on the broader implications of what they've written. A good reader sees patterns in the authors' corpus and may help them see links between their lived reality and the products of their imagination. Of course, the literary critic goes further, and this is where your project on Caribbeanity seems pertinent.

Caribbeanity is not a subject I've given much thought to in recent times, although all of my novels and many of my short stories are set wholly or partially in the Caribbean. I was completely preoccupied with Caribbeanity when I wrote my first novel, which originated with the question: who is a West Indian?

I know now that *Spirits in the Dark* is a dialogical novel that examines the battle between Europe and Africa for Jerome's soul. The change now may be because I perceive my characters primarily as existentialists—like myself—i.e., as individuals trying to maintain their integrity while negotiating their way through life. That said, literature is where the collectivity finds a record of its psychic history. It's one reason that oral societies are put in disarray when their lore and art is depreciated or destroyed. It's possible that discerning Caribbean readers of my corpus might find something of that psychic history there. But when I create, it's because I'm under the tyranny of my imagination.

Certainly, there's much to be said about the contribution to Caribbean literature by the Caribbean diaspora writers living in Canada. Distance—either because what we know is handed down via our migrant parents and the community they interact with, or because we no longer live in the Caribbean and can evaluate it with an enlarged vision—offers a fresh perspective. I often say that in a closed room the inhabitants are smug, comfortable, and secure, but it takes an outsider to note the stench. An interesting study might actually be how the works by expatriate Caribbean authors differ from authors who never leave. Of course, I base this on the notion that the place one inhabits and the people one interacts with influence one's perceptions.

LC: Traditionally, the space given to POC writers and thinkers has been limited when marketing and publishing their work. We've talked briefly about the recent increase of literary acknowledgement and success amongst Caribbean writers in Canada. Is there a particular Caribbean-Canadian literary project or experience that you would like to see represented more in the literary marketplace? This may be an experience that you cannot articulate yourself for a litany of reasons. If so, why?

HNT: Perhaps the one I mentioned in the foregoing paragraph. I would love to see some sort of convergence between diasporic and resident Caribbean authors. Beyond the details that provide the texture for our texts, we are involved in exploring the larger human project: the search for a more humane world. Of course, a Euro-Canadian author might say: but that too is what motivates us. And my reply would be, indeed. All literature that's based on humanist concerns has the common goal of wanting to see a more just and equal society and human beings with greater awareness of themselves and others.

Creative Writing

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Cockadoodle Nonsense?

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Millington's in the window seat beside me. His face is taut, his forehead creased. I hope nothing outside the usual is gnawing at him today. I too must be careful. In the last couple of months the smallest things, like his forgetting to wipe the bathroom counter or putting the soap back in its holder in the shower stall, have been upsetting me. Was it that I'd overlooked these things before? Or did he start doing them—consciously or unconsciously—to provoke quarrels? Then again, all his years in the Methodist ministry in Barbados, he had a domestic helper to pick up after him.

I began seriously to wonder about this the last week of November. I'd gone for a drink with Dale, a colleague, after we'd both given our Thursday afternoon classes, and on the spur of the moment, we'd decided to go see a film. When I got in, Millington was already home from work and sitting in his pyjamas on the living room couch.

"I wondered where you were."

"I had a drink with Dale, and after that we watched a film."

"At his home?"

I was too surprised to answer.

"Stop pulling at your chin and answer me."

Two can play this game. "Guess if it were on DVD I might have." I paused, waited. No response. "No, at the Forum."

"In case you haven't told him, next time say that you have a spouse. And now's a chance to remind yourself too. Then again, you might be saying like Tyrone: 'Masculinity flirts with Fidelity but they'll never marry.'"

I ignored him. I was in no mood for a quarrel.

He too fell silent and went off to bed before me.

At breakfast next morning, he said, "How come I don't know this Dale?"

"He's a loner, the extreme kind … like you."

"Is that why you're attracted to him?" His eyebrows half-way up his forehead.

My coffee mug was mid-way to my lips. I almost caused a spill and quickly put the cup down.

He snickered.

"Attracted– but not in the way you think."

"Enough that you couldn't send me a text message."

While I was wondering how to respond, he said, "Is Dale gay?"

"Yes. But what does that have to do with anything?"

"Nothing." He chuckled. "Why should it have anything to do with anything? … I see now why you're often angry with me for no good reason."

I suspected that other things were bothering him. His residency visa, which he got six week earlier, had rekindled his job hunting, but all his applications had come to nought. Employers, it seems, couldn't figure out how his divinity training would match the skills they were looking for. Now he works three evenings: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, at a recycling plant. Got the extra evening when one of the part-time workers quit. I advised him then to save the extra income toward his tuition fees when he starts university fulltime next September. I convinced him too to stop taking courses in psychology and sociology and focus on improving his French. He'll need it for his professional certification when he completes his training to be a social worker.

Two mornings later–the last Sunday in November– I prepared breadfruit, stewed codfish, and a salad of mango, pineapple, kiwi, apple, and strawberry, flavoured with cinnamon and guava syrup for brunch. Food we both love. In the middle of eating, he asked, "Does Dale like this type of food?"

I didn't answer.

He chuckled. "Just trying to locate where he is in your life. You've been spending a lot less time at home."

I said nothing.

"I've been thinking…"

I waited.

"You don't want to know what I've been thinking?"

"Maybe later. I want to enjoy my breakfast and have a peaceful Sunday."

It put an end to the conversation, but Sunday was certainly not peaceful. I stayed in the study, and he divided his time between the bedroom and the living room.

When we got into bed that night, I asked him, "What were you insinuating this morning?"

"It's my turn to stay silent. You had your tit, now I'll have my tat."

"Suit yourself. I guess this is how the road to divorce begins."

He snorted. "Or how to find ways to prevent it."

"I'm not planning to divorce you, Millington." *Unless you push me too far.* "But if you're asking me to end my friendship with Dale, my answer is: I won't."

"You might not have to divorce me after all. I might save you the trouble."

"Meaning?"

"Let's not get into that right now; you have an 8:30 class."

"Alright."

I didn't sleep that night, nor did he. He twisted and turned and occasionally sighed. Around 05:00, I heard him sobbing, and when I got him to speak, he said he wanted to kill himself. Pressed further, he said he didn't want to mess up any more lives. Dead he wouldn't be an embarrassment to his mother, and I would be free to embark on a fulfilling marriage, that he thinks about Horton's suicide a lot and knows now that Horton had a point. "Alive Horton would have disgraced his family. Life isn't fun when your past stalks you at every turn and casts a pall over your present and your future. And…"

"And what?" Sounded like he was quoting from his journal.

"Horton must have died with the satisfaction that he'd been justly punished for the lie he lived and the lives he'd messed up."

Goodness gracious! This coming two weeks ahead of our trip to St Vincent to inform his mother of our marriage. Then again, Horton's suicide was still fresh, had happened seven weeks earlier. I'd felt that the trip was causing his angst. I wanted to say: what cockadoodle nonsense is this! It might have got him to the truth faster. But he might have clammed up too. Instead, I said, "Did you tell your psychologist about your suicidal thoughts?"

"No. What difference would it make? Her interventions haven't made any difference in our love life."

"You've only just begun therapy. Four sessions. You have eight more with Nadia and after that several with the sex therapist. I mean your therapy has just like started."

"And you think seeing therapists is a great way to spend my spare time?"

"I think that a wounded person who needs rehabilitation shouldn't refuse it.

"About your suicidal thoughts, if it's fear that we might be breaking up that's causing them, put that fear out of your mind. You have your pincers firmly around my heart. If you'll let me, mine would be just as firmly around yours." I kissed him then. "I'll invite Dale by one weekend, just so you'll see he's in no way your rival. He is a principled person. Even if he were attracted to me, he wouldn't act on it. His religion is based on two premises: alleviating some of the pain in the world and refraining from causing anymore. Sounds like something you might have said yourself when you were in the business of delivering sermons… What Tyrone and Lionel say about male promiscuity is true for them. It needn't be for us. Their talk is mostly hyperbole anyway."

That exchange was on the 30th of November. I'm not in the habit of keeping a journal, but I made a note of it in my agenda. Since then, he and I have been dancing around each other.

I turn my head to look at him. He's staring out the window, his headset on. Three and a half hours of flying remain. I lower my seat, close my eyes, and hope I fall asleep.

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"All your Contacts are Dead"*

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ANNE

Kigali, Rwanda, July 2010

I was not there when it happened. Like most people outside, I learned of it from the news, not even the night of the Event itself, but several days after, when one of my colleagues, Marc, a white Canadian on the building mission with me, in Kigali, brought me a newspaper with a photograph on its front page of the National Palace building fallen over on itself like an ornament on a wedding cake.

He pointed to it and said, "Isn't this where you're from?"

I peered at the headline, "Earthquake in Haiti," and then at the photograph of the broken capital building that had always stood, next to the Champ de Mars, facing Place L'Ouverture, framed by an iron fence at least nineteen feet high, interrupted every few meters by thick concrete pylons painted white, and an even taller ornamental gate that swung open to admit dignitaries (some, in the past, never came out). The fallen structure was a landmark. It had not always been there. But it had been there all of my life.

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It meant something. Now it was gone? I tore the paper from my colleague's hands.

"I'm sorry," he said, though there was nothing for him to be sorry for. It wasn't his fault.

I read about the death toll, estimated already in the several thousands of thousands a week or so into the calamity. I read about the buildings flattened, the rescue missions being deployed from Cuba, with others to join them from around the world, coming over from across the Dominican border and across the chain of mountains dividing the two countries, because the Americans had shut the airport, the most direct port of access. A chill went through me as I read, and I tried to call my grandmother, but she did not answer.

"I'm sorry," Marc said again, putting a hand on my shoulder and squeezing it lightly, but I waved him away and tried to call a different number from my cell. I called my father's cousin, Dieudonné, a fixer and driver in the capital, who always had the latest gadgets, but his line was also dead. There would be no response for several days. The problem could have been my own whereabouts, I conjectured, but later, I would find out that the problem was the damage on the ground, more severe than any photograph could convey (though the fallen Palais National was in itself a sobering reality), when I received an email from a fellow engineer on the ground, a Haitian American named Lucien whom I had connected to Dieudonné, who occasionally hired him as a driver. There was no message, no subject line, only a series of photos of the devastation, one after the other. I recognized vast open spaces of places I used to know: the church where I had been baptized marked by the cross of a crucified Jesus; my mother's house reduced to a flaked pink stoop decorating a pile of rubble; the hotel where Dieudonné and his girlfriend, Sonia, worked flattened to the ground.

There was a picture of my grandmother, Ma Lou, showing the broken stalls in the market beneath the cathedral, which was also collapsed, broken beyond recognition. I sighed in relief at seeing

Ma Lou's round, open face, her mouth open, her arms wide. I could see from her pose that she had been explaining what had happened when the photograph was taken. She was alive. A message followed saying that Dieudonné was also alive, then another stating that Lucien had witnessed a wave swallowing Richard into the sea since he had served as his driver that fateful

day. The body had been lost to the waves, he wrote, matter-of-factly, so my father was presumed dead, another casualty of the Event. The next email contained two lines. "You should come back," it said. "What Haiti needs now is builders: that's us."

We had both received our degrees at the end of the previous year, Lucien's in engineering and mine in architecture, with the hope of opening a practice in Port-au-Prince. The problem, for us, was that we both had chosen to specialize in accessible eco-building, and the likelihood of being able to get paid for that kind of work at home was slim to none. This was why Lucien took odd jobs to make ends meet, but also to network, depending on his family in the US to send him money to keep him afloat while he remained in Haiti. Both of us had been hired, right out of our master's degrees, to work for NGOs in our first jobs. Lucien had been lucky to be hired by a Canadian nonprofit locally. I had been hired by a French NGO to work in Rwanda, where more international funds had been made available to rebuild the country after the ten-year anniversary of the genocide. I would be working on affordable mixed-use buildings, the kind that could house studios, businesses, and multigenerational family units in the same place. I was especially interested in building structures that would be useful to collectives of women pooling their resources in the new economies of the Global South, with microloans and cooperatives.

These were already popular throughout Asia and were becoming popularized in parts of Latin America along with notions of architecture for the people. Lucien specialized in water and sewage systems, on maximizing clean energy. We hoped to one day revolutionize building in Haiti.

It wasn't that there weren't Haitian architects and engineers who could do the job—UNESCO sites like the Citadelle Laferrière to the north demonstrated our long history of building structures that could outwit time; there were also the wooden gingerbread houses so well constructed that they had withstood termite invasions, the Revolution, hurricanes. The rich had had their mansions built back in the mountains, many designed and built by Haitian hands, but constructed of imported materials. But as the capital became overpopulated, mostly with poor and rural folks seeking their fortunes and in need of quick housing, building codes were not, could not be, observed, and structures were built of hastily fashioned cinder blocks, many of which were hollow in the

middle, and one person would build on top of another, wherever there was room, in zigzag, up the sides of the hills encircling the city, between the valley and the higher reaches inhabited by the wealthy, one person's roof serving as another's floor. Building codes were reserved for people with means and running water. The rest took their chances. What would we be able to offer? I wondered.

Soon, the disaster vultures would descend on the island; things would spiral out of control. In our line of work, it would be the emergency shelter crowd we would see first, those with prototypes ready to go. Shelters had become a business opportunity, as more people around the world were displaced, made homeless and migratory by civil wars and famines. If someone, anyone, could roll out a compact structure that could house families of at least four, keep them dry when it rained, safe from the beating rays of the sun when heat swelled, and screened from mosquitoes—in short, designed to improve the chances of survival while mini- mizing the kinds of illnesses easily spread in the cramped quarters of an IDP camp—then that person would be not only hailed as a hero but guaranteed to reap the financial rewards for generations to come, all while having made the world a better place. We would have to watch helplessly as lesser-equipped professionals used the destitute to test their new products.

"Come back," Lucien wrote. "Haiti needs us."

It was Lucien who had been driving my father the day he disappeared, swallowed by the sea. It was Lucien who told me the details of the disappearance, and on whom I came to rely, later, when I tried to track people, starting the work of beginning again, of hoping.

I could have been there, for the earthquake itself. I had been there a few days into the new year to bury my mother. But I had already planned to be in Rwanda, after the funeral, and had left even sooner than I had planned because my father, my biological father, had said he was coming to the funeral but never showed. I was so angry. Instead of trying to track him—I knew Dieudonné would know where he was—I stayed on schedule, and joined the French architects deploying to Rwanda to build affordable structures where they were needed, because the country was now stabilized and accepting outside help, and it was the sole

French-speaking country on the list of choices I had been given. Had my father unwittingly saved me with his failure to appear?

I told Marc of my mother's death, then, of my father's disappearance. He was the person I trusted in the group. He later came back with one of the laptop computers and showed me how to create a social media account. "This is the only place I'm seeing messages posted," he explained. That was how I learned about who had died beneath the rubble or who was still being searched for, how I learned a majority of women at the head of national women's organizations—Anne-Marie, Myriam, Magalie, Myrna—women with whom I had had conversations about programs that would provide women with training to work in masonry and construction, maybe even get associate's degrees in engineering—had perished, all of them, a whole generation of activists gone in a matter of seconds, decades of work wiped out.

It wasn't long before others on my team awkwardly approached me to ask if I could track a coworker, a fixer, an intern, an in-law. These requests were followed by emails from others I had known at school, in the States, with contacts in Haiti seeking the same.

My first query, to track an intern who had been meant to join us in the field but who had decided to take an extended holiday with his family before beginning to work, was sent out like a fishing line in still waters to Lucien. A few days later, his response read, "I'm sorry, but all your contacts are dead. Your intern is alive but all the contacts you gave me to find him are dead." The phrase rang in my head for days: "All your contacts are dead." I understood immediately it would not be the last time I would have to read the phrase, or some variation of it.

I took the names down in a notebook, and the names of whomever they thought might know that person on the ground, and I would send out new queries, usually a few at once. Some of the time, most of the time, I would find the person they were looking for, learn where they were, if they were on a list for evacuation, or not, if they were safe, or not. Nine times out of ten, like that first time, it would be the contact names who would be unaccounted for, those who lived in the country full-time, or who didn't have the means to live in houses with fortified, shear walls, and I would have to make another list, one for the dead, and yet another list for the phrases I could use to relay the news, all different depending on the degree of remove the dead had from the person who had

asked. The list of the dead grew day by day, week by week. I got through those days by focusing on the living, putting the list of the dead at the back of my mind even as the list grew longer. Still, death was with me like a cloak, a second skin. My mother, the person I was the closest to, had died—that was my personal earthquake. My father, a man I hardly knew, was presumed dead, or disappeared. I was on the other side of the world, in a country where so many had perished by their neighbor's hand.

The stories haunting Kigali's mountains—like the mountains themselves, down to the sienna brown of the soil—remind me so much of Haiti, preoccupy me as if they are my own. I take long walks at the end of each day, up a hill, in the direction of the city, trying to shake things off, to think clearly, objectively. I watch myself being watched. But it is not enough to use the little Kinyarwanda I know: *muraho* (hello), *bitese* (how are you), *murakoze* (thank you). I can't blend in. Don't want to. Don't want to become part of the fabric of things. Couldn't. Can't. Isn't part of the job.

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"Caribbean Flex," "Nice for What," and "Prologue"

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Caribbean Flex

Make I come check you, my baby.
Where I from, them who drink Lean
is mostly grown men
who eat they barbecue, drive
around in they slabs,
go home and make
love into brightly-coloured stuffed animals.
I had a friend, once.
I put roses on the Panamera.
I put handclaps on the Guantanamera.
It all happened on an Instagram story whatever
hashtag DracoWeather; hashtag ThisAndThat.
Started at the bottom
and kissed on it.
Loved that bottom so much
I wanted to piss on it
(I never told you that).
Bless-up! Big-up!
These fully White-peopled cities

love recordings of dead Black people crooning
through hidden ceiling speakers above
the lettuce aisle
but don't want boojee Blacks
in the glass condo next door.
I get so lonely.
My friends are Ben and Jerry's
chunky Monkey.
I'm a chunky Negro Monkey.
We're natural, empty friends.
The empty streets are emptied
at precisely eight o'clock. Gimme
another tub Saturday night alone
watching all my Black people on Netflix
give me death!
Same ting!
Lemme put on my Black Power beret
and scream slogans into an empty
Congo Peas can. I'll drown the words out
with the engine sound of the bathroom fan.
Lemme watch so much online porn I hurt
the fleshy-ribbed crook of my hand.
Lemme blast Soca tracks way past
the rental condo 10 PM bylaw silence.
I lick my wrist. All night long
the shuttered grocery
store outdoor speaker gusts
the empty sidewalk with Grime:
Bae from India, hills of biryani,
meds so good, now I speak Gujarati.
I don't care.
I leave myself on read.
A corporation sprayed the condo walls
wet colour before I got here.
And my dog, he's on probation
another five years. Skrrt-skrrt-skrrt.
I no go rush you, my baby.
From my balcony, I spied that gyal,
outrageous ting, but she can't see
'cause I got shades and ting. Now
I like collars, I like almonds

I'm not frontin', I like shining,
I'm blunted, I'm grinding
the dankest loud
into small, chiming twists
of melty space-time
that's for me to never know
and me to plead out.
Goddess of the goddam Sea!
Goddess of the goddam Sea!
Come forth, Buttah Cyat!

Nice for What

I mean here. Is where.
The fuck. We should
always ever start.
Today, as we say to Wall Street
and the billionaire class,
Yo dawg, come thru
wit dat Fruit Roll-Up,
I still don't like maps,
me and the night sky are way too attached.
Right across the street from where we are
at this moment
is the City's largest fossil fuel power plant.
Yesterday I trimmed Bush Monster.
For all you know
I'm the United States Congress now.
That's the shit I'm talking 'bout though,
like you Prada-Man-I'm-Soda-Mouth
1000 Hemi-powered horses
direct from a factory,
the giant mushroom cap tendrilled
to everyone's head.
Be it resolved that it is
becoming a problem and let us be clear,
it is no secret that that
plant is located right next to the City's
largest public housing development,
nonetheless it was there
I learned Courvoisier and frenemies
is a Chex Mix type of a mixture—you're shitting
me—and the largest campaign rally
of primary season sprung up
on Saturday. In support of environmental
racism, the powers that be are unhappy
you're here, throwing everything
to get people repeating.
I know you like to stay low.
I've been tweetin'
what you leave under the maple.
Like a cam commandeering

a tortilla farmer
you cheesed me like a chatty man
which explains why Queen Street is poppin'
on Tuesdays. Dun kno!
Yeah, Gucci, Ozwald Boateng and Kiton,
style tighter than a squeezing python,
the one and only
Prosecco popper, the cheddar doctor,
Achebe's words call me when they lonely,
I finesse down Boundary Road.
On their fashion-less asses
I been teaching classes
vaping wizard cabbage
welcome to the Sauce God circle.
All a y'all what he called "Nasty People"
I been up so long it look like down to me.
I wonder who's in this penthouse
tonight?! Airbus 380, man,
this thing's got spiral staircase, man!
I just hit a switch. Switch! Switch!
How I score them points
and lead assists like I'm LeBron.
This the spirit in the ghost site
right now, Scarborough ting from time, style,
sucker-free shades tabled
later on a power motion
to make sure
women are not being paid
same as men. That's too old.
Times were hard in Puerto Rico.
We were dying, we are an island
surrounded by water, lots and lots
of water, ocean water, that is a quote.
This the flow.
Top left, those '97s look greezy fam,
we need to talk the "stealth exotic car" approach.
I don't know 'bout you
but now that Walcott's dead,
I feel I can write:
Oh you swaggy, huh?!
I started feelin' the burn when he came down,

no cameras. Just him in a wheelchair
and a maniacal half-smile.
This is why I been sayin,' "no new friends."
I'm so hot.
I'm so right now.
The time is now
to be uncompromising.
You know how this shit go.
Say my sobriquet, say my secret name,
when no one's checking for you
bet I'm hugged up on you,
'cause I'm about that life, paying
no mind to the chicken heads lighting
fake friend fires
all up in my face.
I don't wanna tat
my name on anyone right now
so I know it's real.
The health of forty million people
who live in poverty, let's all get a field
away from the screens,
yo nice me
a juice box dawg.
I just need a reason
not to go out every evening.
These, I stan.
She was so arms,
she said I looked fat in my Caribana outfit
when the only heart attack
we should be talking about
is the one Wall Street is going to have.
Hair did, clothes dripped,
it's too late for all that Brother Love shit,
that "I'm your homie" tip,
waste yutes always mallratting smack my head,
wherein potential totes lies.
Make you dance to this.
Make you.
Make you dance
make you dance to this—
Let there be interviews like confessions,

twitter fingers turn to chicken fingers,
and you getting bodied by a bee's stinger?!
Your boy says he's the light-skinned Keith Sweat.
Well, I'm the light-skinned Boba Fett.
I'm not upset.
Putting prices on my head
is just impersonal,
it's disrespectful disrespect.
That's social death
while September 20th
is just one of those days
when your life change
forever, in other words,
I got more chune for your ear holes
so peep how I creep on your game,
watch Da Breakdown
but wake up and nothing's wrong,
'cept Penny finna get merked
if she tries to talk to my mans again.
Fear not. Two tokes
and I'm already blem fam--dirt long distance--
I need you--Patrice Lumumba--you
actin' kinda suspect,
keep callin' me young Malcolm X –
why the sudden genuflect?
Fake diamond earrings
till I return to the wrestling ring.
To be sure, there's no unreal rest here,
that's just your deflection.
You don't link nobody no more,
you just ash me like a dead phatty,
and I be running 'round this backyard
with no pants on
like I'm skinny.
You make me wanna buy a Draco (skrrt!)
a slug proof shirt, and a Trek bike,
for the health to let the windpipe
be West Coast air freshened.
The time is now to be vocal fried.
Too much wahalla!
The time is now to be relentless.

That's a long, long way.
When I returned from it,
svelte and swaddled in a dark blue
pinstripe suit, I came to your door
and wept, right where slavery evolved
into Jim Crow
--evolved into Mass Incarceration
evolved into The Realities We Have Today,
maybe to some he's *Tio*
maybe he's something else to you:
"Liquid" means rewind,
"the Gun Shot" means forward–
you requested it
so we rewind!
That's the flow.
Yo lowkey, Comfort Zone is lit styll
you're so extra, Scarbs ain't even that bad.
You make my love seem slanted.
I just can't comprehend it.
Nobody text me while I commune with Osiris,
I needed some shit
with some boom bap in it
and since you picked up,
I know he's not around.
Since 3000 Puerto Ricans did
not open their eyes this morning.
This is not the flow
that got anything hot.
Boooooooom! Boom ! Boom! Boooooooooom!
You know how that shit go, seagulling
through the 604 with my Bose.
Yo, you dedded me, dog!
I'm on some Marvin Gaye shit.
I don't eat pork, I don't mess with cops.
I took you to the egg place,
then the Park Lane Presidential,
shout out dope piano bar
with the salted snack poles.
Someone said to me, it's like your girlfriend
is our very own Beyoncé,
I ain't g'on lie

I felt proud even
though I knew the whole time
you were hatin' me.
Every so often the place was maximum rain:
red, black and green on my body
'cause I'm dipped in the dreams
of Marcus Garvey,
I go give you every-ting
no matter from my pocket
or my grandfather's wallet.
My winter diet is champagne
and caviar, quick-delivered by Ferrari.
Yo this bee really tryna
come for me eh?! Run up freak!
This Arizona is mad bless right now.
Look, now you got me started.
Wagwan my G?!!, motorcycles scream
past the window,
Manchu Wok is lit right now,
you ain't gonna get it all
anymore-real-pathways-to-Socialism
when today unbelievably,
that's the beauty of the streets.
I'm no climate change expert.
I'm a climate change survivor.
God's plan.
Holy Summer Controlla rollin'
deep in a Duppy mind,
even when we knelt, some still felt
threatened, pelted words at us,
but them shits just slid off, meltin'—
if we ever get another chance to
we may "pull-up, pull-up" in the month of May.
You can take that to the masked
banker, police helicopters hoovering
our row houses
the whole summer
while automatic gunfire fetes
the hometown champs.
In its light we do not stunt.
For damned sure, we're turnt up:

a bomb heat cyclone
all up in our feelings.
The feeling that ate the soft zone.
The feeling that lit the clouds,
each muraled block.
In its light we still.
In its stilled light.

Prologue

Q: The title of your book, *All Black Everything*… what do you say to those who might find it aggressive?

A: I see it as quite the opposite. I think of the book's title as building a home in language for "All"—as in the totality of being and seeing and listening and celebrating: a colossal chorus and a constant syncopated timekeeping. Deepest, richest, Black-loving time. "Black"—as a notion, not of displacement or lack but of a whole embrace, fullness unfurling in sync, like coming over a hill and seeing a field of purple flowers whose names you don't know: the voices, sounds and heat of African diasporic cultures dripping together with the blooming force of creation. One become "Everything." Everything and also nothing—the vertigo of living a precarious existence on just a little spot, trying to stay on the brimming-up tip with Black joy and promise.

Q: Hmmm… so how does being a member of the African diaspora influence your work?

A: Part of you wants to resist imposing an order at all, not compartmentalize: if you're going to be a target, better to be moving. Installing a lot of doors made from planks of music, countless portals of sound, can heap enough flexibility into a book that hopefully anyone may enter anywhere. I'm thinking now of the cultures of the African diaspora stripped of languages and customs and artistic traditions and thrust onto the steaming surface of a living, serrated dream, where roles are unrehearsed and one knows one is unwanted here and one is expected to just give up and die. But one doesn't die. Instead, one improvises and lives. This is perhaps the only order the book embraces.

Q: "Improvises and lives…" wow! Can you say more about this?

A: Most of the poems in the collection are fairly recent but one piece was written just before the planes flew into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The newest poem was written in late Summer of 2020, a few months after George Floyd was murdered. In between those two poles, I took refuge in many twists and spots on this earth, while trying to make the sounds in my mind and ear– tones and pitches somewhere beyond the soft, bland drudgery of basic normie lyric life—match the sounds on the page and in my mouth. The flute of felt thought, the music of wrongness made right and bad and jagged as a look. I also think of this book as the sound-shape oral history shards of many peoples mashed in with the noise of a brash mega-set of Black culture

waves. And sometimes, just like in real life, power-sounds snuff people-sounds: money's big voice, the noise of capital flows crunching hard into bodies, like body blows. To remember those who have been lynched, we are instructed to "say their names." Maybe this book is what happens when there are too many names to say and not enough words and the words begin to melt like chalk statuettes because the rain is too much, the pain is too much, and maybe this book says the names another way.

Q: So, is this a book about race?

A: No, it is a book about clothing.

Q: Are you serious?

A: Clothes, like words, can communicate things. Literal and subtextual and symbolic and logical and emotional things.

Q: What about all the people who just throw on any old outfit and step outside?

A: Some of us are not allowed to do that. A few weeks ago, I parked my car in the rooftop parking space I had been renting since moving to Vancouver some months before. When I stepped into the late-night air, I heard a voice yelling. I turned and saw a White man leaning out the window of an apartment across the street. He shouted that he had been watching me and knew what I was about to do and there was no way in hell he would let me steal that car. "Red hat!" he kept calling me, "Red hat!"

Q: Really? I can't believe this happened. It almost seems like it couldn't possibly be true.

A: It is true I own a red hat, which matches my red Timberland boots, which matches my red car. And it is true I wore both the hat and boots that evening. It is also true that while he loudly proclaimed he knew I intended to steal my own car, I wondered if he knew he was pushing a rage into me I could feel roaring up in the form of a molten beam of shimmering axes? I guess he must have known I was brought up to try very hard to make people feel unthreatened by my presence and to always turn the other cheek—or why else would he be trifling with me? I am pretty sure he did not know that over the years I had turned my cheek so much that in this very moment of his accusing and humiliating me, my cheek had finally twisted so far that my head actually spun

off, floating up and away from the rooftop parking lot to glide between the tall building canyon walls towards the enormous, blue-illuminated, domed roof of the sports stadium. And I am positive he did not know that in the next few moments, the dome's blue light scheme would switch to red, black and green. Nor could he know this colour shift signaled the domed stadium was returning to its long-occluded original purpose: that of a spacecraft making a brief stop to pick up all the African diasporic people living in this coastal metropolis. And I was damned certain he did not know this spaceship, this love-ship was fixing to whisk the entire scattered world-wide community of Afronaut Beloveds for the convening of a Bermuda Triangle's worth of Plumed Parliamentary Soul Delegates at the largest Afrogalactic get-down the world had ever never seen.

Q: I'm not sure what this has to do with the poems in your book.

A: Exactly.

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"Man, I know 'bout you": A Reminiscence of Austin Clarke

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I first met Austin Clarke in Georgetown, Guyana, at a Caribbean Writers Conference in February 1970. I had been invited by the Government of Guyana to attend, having been a young poet from Berbice county. I recall meeting Austin decked out in his colourful dashiki, unlike the more unassuming or sedate Trinidadian-born writer Sam Selvon, who also caught my attention. I instinctively gravitated to both of them. I eavesdropped on Austin's conversation with Selvon and others; and yes, Clarke's novels intrigued me—if only because about six months later I would be living in Canada. Expectations about the immigrant's life were already forming in me, tied to the outsider's gaze subliminally with us as Guyana's political turmoil heated up. In context, Black Power and civil rights ideals were also becoming transformative. Andrew Salkey's *Georgetown Journal* presents an evocative account of that early 1970 Conference, depicting the spirit of the arts associated with Caribbean nationalism tied to a Black Power elan.

Indeed, reading Clarke's novels and warming to his narration and dialectal energy, I observed that his style seemed to me to be somewhat analogous to what American writers were doing in the Harlem literary movement. Clarke's verve and elan intrigued me more and more. However, by the time I had moved to Canada and formally studied CanLit at university, there was no mention of his work. The likes of Morley Callaghan and Hugh McLennan occupied the canon, the central fictional space. I tried to move between spaces as I brought up Clarke's name in discussions, but no CanLit professor then seemed interested. In Ottawa during the 1970s, I gradually began making my own mark as I interacted with published writers, like the Japanese-Canadian novelist and poet Joy

Kogawa, and the Jewish-Canadian poet Seymour Mayne. The latent and nurturing spirit of creative writing grew in me. During that time, I also "grounded" with many others, especially the West Indian-immigrant community.

Significantly, I directly interacted with Austin at the ground-breaking "Black Writer in the Canadian Milieu" Conference at McGill University in 1980, which was organized by the Trinidad-born English Professor Lorris Elliott. What I knew of Clarke from that first "Canadian" meeting and my subsequent interaction and friendship with him fostered an appreciation of the Black literary aesthetic. You see, Clarke became renowned as a pioneer. I reflected more on Clarke's trailblazing writing while editing my anthology, *A Shapely Fire: Changing the Literary Landscape* (Mosaic Press, 1987). This anthology aimed to foster awareness of diversity in Canadian writing. The "shapely fire" in the title derived from Guyanese poet A.J. Seymour's well-known poem to suggest my connectivity to West Indian literature, and I figured the anthology was invalid without Clarke's fiction. It was then that I'd begun to view Clarke as one of the finest short story writers in Canada.

I briefly corresponded with him over the years, and was often taken, if sometimes amused, by his demotic style and his formal calligraphy in his letters to me, sent in "officially" embossed envelopes. In these letters, he filled me with cheer because of his West Indian panache and word-play, sometimes with whimsicality. We also met a few times over the years, once notably at the Commonwealth Institute in London at a West Indian Conference, where we sat on a panel on diversity in Canadian Writing, and later when we would come across each other, in Toronto and Ottawa, at book-launch events and readings. Always down-to-earth his manner was, rooted in his rough and ready Bajan humour. I also observed the esteem the Black or West Indian community had for him—all keen admirers of his work. His playful ease was accentuated: "Man, I know 'bout you. I know you is a rass Guyanese, too. I got a story for your rass boy" (Correspondence, 19 October 1979).

I listened to him in his more measured tones deliver a keynote speech to a large audience in the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa during a commemorative Black History Month event in the nineties, where he won over all in attendance. And yes, my last memorable meeting with Austin was when I was a guest-writer at the Miami Book Fair. There, he and I along with two other writers, including the eminent Lamming scholar Sandra Pouchet Paquet, were invited by the Canadian Consulate for dinner at a local restaurant. When the time came for a thank-you speech, Austin nodded to me, but I deferred to him. He was, after all, our senior Canadian literary figure, and it was his wit and charm that I treasured on that occasion.

I noted to myself then to keep re-reading his fiction and poetry, and, to muse over the literary prizes he'd garnered over the years, such as the Rogers

Writers' Trust Fiction Prize for *The Origin of Waves* (1997), and the Giller Prize and Commonwealth Writer'' Prize for *The Polished Hoe* (2002). I would also continue to reflect on Clarke's beloved Toronto, which he was instrumental in figuring as the "Caribbean of the North." I also contemplated writing a comparison of Austin Clarke's narrative with Sam Selvon's, speaking in particular to their shaping of a Caribbean diasporic spirit in letters, through an attentiveness to voice, character and place tied to a Creole-Caribbean métier, aligned to a Canadian psyche—a showcasing of them as modern folklorists at best. My thoughts often inevitably flit back to that memorable first meeting in Guyana in 1970, walking among Austin and Sam, moments that birthed enduring contemplations of my immigrant writer's sensibility.

Cyril Dabydeen

AUSTIN CLARKE LOVE POEM[1]

--for J.H.

"Woman," Harewood, when I tell you woman,
Harewood, um, is the first time in my life
I actually fall in love with a woman,
I mean a woman-and-a-half, and
I never knew love could be so sweet.

Man, she have me doing things
I never do before in my life,
things that sweet--
things that bring-out the man,
things that bring-out the woman.

Things that true love made of,
but more than anything else
is the peace that she bring
into my life. Peace and security,
and sure-ness. And confidence, yes.

1. This poem previously appeared in *Membering Austin Clarke*, ed. Paul Barret (Wilfred Laurier University Press), 2020.

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A Writer of Relation[1]

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> 'Yes, child?'
> 'Did you really see a soucouyant?'
> 'Oh dear,' she said, still smiling. 'Whatever you think you want with some old nigger-story?'[3]

A monster to be imagined— Clever would be the person who knows what a soucouyant looks like. It is one of the mysteries of Caribbean story-telling. This *oraliture* emerged in the dark night of slave plantations. The original Caribbean story-teller only talks once night has fallen, when holding a wake for a deceased slave. The stories he will tell until daybreak aim to allow the slaves to better live their life. Here "living" is fighting against both an effective death and a symbolic death; the effective death of the man whose remains have brought us together; the symbolic death of all slaves induced by the near-ontological dehumanization inflicted by American-style slavery on its victims. The very first

1. The following text is the English translation of the introduction to the French pocket-book reprint of *Soucougnant* by David Chariandy. [Édition française originale: Éditions Zoé, 2012. Zoé Poche (97): 2020]. Please note the different English and French titles of the book: *Soucouyant* (in English); and *Soucougnant* (in French).
2. Translator's note: With thanks to Janice Flavien for her revisions and critical Caribbean eye.
3. Translator's note: All cited passages are copied from the original English: David Chariandy. *Soucouyant*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

teaching of the primordial story-teller was to make the slaves, young and old, understand that they should not expect help from anything or anyone; their only means of survival was their own resourcefulness. This is why, in Caribbean creole stories, there are no good princes or guardian angels, no good fairies or gentle beings. Our fantasy world is inhabited by monsters who have no mama or papa, each more fearsome than the next. They constitute an ecosystem of terror—not immoral, but amoral—equal in intensity to the one that reigned in the universe of the plantations. After a night spent listening to tales of this sort, children and old men reduced to slavery watched the sun rise, having been endowed with the skills to survive at all costs.

These creole monsters were numerous: *zombies, she-devils, dorlis, Bête-à-man-ibè, 3-legged horse, maman-dlo* … all as disturbing as the soucouyants themselves. Only, the story-tellers of old never provided details on the appearance of these infernal creatures. Two or three allusions *(…a creature… a ball of fire… sucks his blood… putting on its skin, syrup sounds and soft elastic snaps…*, etc.) would suffice to inflame imaginations. The absence of descriptions does not stifle the imagination of readers or listeners. On the contrary, *it unleashes it!* In a consciousness that is forced to live in imagination, nothing is more terrifying than a monster whose appearance one has fantasized drawing only on one's intimate fears. Thus, soucouyants amazed the memories of generations of Caribbean people even though no one knew what they might look like. In this beautiful work by David Chariandy, this narrative frame, typical of the Caribbean imaginary, has been respected. The narrator's mother, who "has become an old woman," has kept this amazement at the core of her memory, as both a foundational moment and as the centre from which radiates a whole set of remembrances. As her memory frays, from one failure to another, the soucouyant acquires a subtle narrative density, one that becomes clearer with the thickening of its mystery. This is beautiful art.

Metaspora – This old Caribbean woman in exile, whose memory travels on the ocean of a childhood terror (the original terror), speaks to the experience of exile that has been and continues to be shared by generations of Caribbean people. Caribbean civilization —born of the collisions between all continents, all civilizations, all cultures—has never stopped spreading to the shores of this world not only its music and dances, but literally its sons and daughters, forced to leave the confines of post-slavery islands in search of a bit of luck elsewhere. At the root of the Caribbean imaginary is this initial departure, this life lived far away that is expressed by the narrator's mother. An existence—fashioned between two countries, two languages, several histories, and worked also by the still-present flavours of a reality that is no longer there (…*rum, peppers, yams, cassava, sugar apples, taro, mangoes, medicinal plants, coconut bread, the smells of molasses and coffee*…)— that unfolds on an additional dimension.

That of a far-away country set on a vanishing line in a country-here, a childhood land carried as a source and horizon in a land-of-now, languages lost that persist in the new host language. The ebbs and flows between forgetting and remembrance, sudden amnesia and unexpected clairvoyance, sketch out a memory that comes and goes, that comes as it goes, and reflects a bulk of encounters or mixings and, in sum, this world diversity that is the primal matter of the entire Caribbean.

> She's become too sensitive, she tells herself. She's living the dream of countless people in her birthplace, stuck back there with the running sores of their histories.

But this exile did not merely engender a diaspora. The sons of a diaspora stay, in a matter of speaking, subject to the land of origin. They live its absence in pain and withdrawal, a kind of idealizing, even an essentializing that shapes their secret aspirations. They dream of one day returning. Their lives are somehow in parentheses as they wait to return. The narrator's mother sees the old home, but from the distance inflicted upon her by her childhood encounter with a soucouyant. The monster emerges for her as a prism that deforms as it sharpens, zooms out and zooms in, deconstructs as it zooms in, as would a residual terror. Thus, it derives not just from a diaspora, but rather from a *metaspora*. This notion, put forward by Joël des Rosiers, refers to a sort of rooted exile: sons and daughters of a far-away land, who have flourished, borne unexpected fruit, and for whom the desire to return is nothing more than a possible-impossible, without force or effect.

> The migration happened a long time ago, and it didn't involve circumstances that anyone had thought important to remember and pass on.

This metasporic reality—so useful for gaining an understanding of the dispersions and new solidarities in our contemporary world—is beautifully presented in this work by David Chariandy. Each day with the narrator's mother, each gesture, each dish, each bit of territory is multiplied by another, as though under enchantment, and augmented by an elsewhere that has become consubstantial with its very presence. Every moment is constituted by the presence and the ghost of another place in the world, an existential in-betweenness where one is cast adrift within oneself as well as far from oneself. It is little surprise that the other theme arising from the shock wave caused by the soucouyant would be memory:

> She tells me now that she doesn't understand that thing called memory. She doesn't understand its essence or dynamic, and why, especially, it never seems to abide by the rules of time or space or individual consciousness. She doesn't understand how a young woman, in the midst of some small crisis, can remember catastrophes that happened lifetimes ago and worlds away, remember and proclaim these catastrophes as if she herself had witnessed them first hand. She doesn't understand that at all, or else how the very same young woman, offering only what she imagines to be a cruel joke, can in fact end up remembering a catastrophe that is yet to happen.

The narrator follows the decomposition of a memory at the centre of which is an old, legendary, almost mythical encounter with a soucouyant. She who "has become an old woman" saw the monster at some point in her childhood. The event has remained carved into her entire being. It becomes a cornerstone as memories fray and intertwine, and reality flows into an ocean of uncertainties. David Chariandy's grace is in having understood that the narrator's genealogical tree, his line of descent, is lost in migrations, straddles oceans, is accompanied by the unpredictable. His mother's "soucouyantian" lineage does not assign her to any one territory, but rather opens up a whole range of places: the "territory" is part of the imaginary of a single origin and is enclosing. The "place" is multi-trans-cultural from the outset and is open. This is why the spectre of the soucouyant had to remain mysterious. What we are told about it blends several monsters in our oral literature (*the sheddable skin of she-devils, the mirror of maman-dlo*…) like a truly undefinable geography of enchanted terror:

> 'It happen …' she begins. 'It happen one fore-day morning when the sun just a stain on the sky. When the moon not under as yet. Me, I was a young girl running from home. Running 'pon paths so old that none could remember they origin. My ankle paint cool, cool by the wet grasses. I run and stumble into a clearing with an old mango knotting up the sky with it branch. The fallen fruit upon the ground. They skin all slick and black. The buzz of drunken insect.…'
> 'You saw a soucouyant, Mother.'
> 'Child?' she shouts, 'Is I telling this story or you?'
> 'Sorry, Mother.' She sucks her teeth loudly and cuts her eye once more at me.

The monster prowls through the pages, entwines itself in the lines; it structures without immobilizing, invades without showing itself. We wait for it to take shape, but it remains in its mythological over-there, endlessly revived by a race where the ankles of the child (like those of the old woman) are "painted cool." Every time the monster is evoked, details spread out to the limits of unreality and invest it with the all-powerfulness of an elsewhere glowing in the very heart of the memory-of-here:

> Something brilliant passed overhead and afterwards a silence like glass. This was when she noticed the creature. It was using, as a mirror, some water that had collected in a rusted oil drum. It was putting on its skin, syrup sounds and soft elastic snaps. It was gloving on its fingers when it rolled its eyes towards her. She didn't run, not at first. Even though the creature smiled and beckoned her to horrors. Even though the world wheeled about and everything became unreal, the sky shimmering like a mirage of blue.

The memory engendered by the metaspora—a memory of living-in-the-world between several territories, several languages, several histories—is a light one. It becomes increasingly ethereal as it unravels. It does not anchor, it diffuses. It does not constrain or lead back, it liberates. This is the legend of an entire life that David Chariandy narrates with inimitable artfulness; the end of an existence where memory becomes the unfathomable substance of living-despite-everything. The legend is embedded in the very heart of the person, forcing memory to be inherently open, like a galaxy that shapes and reshapes itself around a black hole: a remembrance that is fixed in terror and secret in its fantasy. We will never know what a soucouyant looks like, but our fear of the monster will remain intact. It appears to loom unexpectedly in the harsh, implacable and rapacious accounting of an old neighbour. She was believed to be selfless, a friend, but here she is, ruthless:

> 'What…?!'
> She leaves to fetch a notebook from her bedroom. She shows me the math. It's long and complex and my mind is still grappling with this unexpected reaction, but the subtotals are clear enough. 'In-home care at standard wages for 254 weeks.' […]
> 'Yes, she was my friend. She was my friend long before you was a small nothing swimming around in some man's stupid thing, so don't you remind me she was my friend. That not

> at all the point. You check the math yourself. Is all right and proper.'

So, it matters not what a soucouyant looks like. It is there when terror erupts, when pain strikes like lightening. It can then take any form, from the most familiar to the most foreign, and persist just beyond form. The child with the enchanted ankles had encountered it in its worst form, one of those terrible irruptions that ground an entire life in a bedrock of something that is unthinkable, impossible to overcome, impractical, and nourishes the disillusionment of youth and the lucid enchantments of our final years:

> 'She … she saw a soucouyant.'
> 'A what?'
> 'Not literally,' I explain. 'At least I don't think so. I mean, it's not really about a soucouyant. It's about an accident. It's about what happened in her birthplace during World War II. It's a way of telling without really telling, you see, and so you don't really have to know what a soucouyant is. Well, I guess you do, sort of. What I mean is, I'm not an expert on any of that sort of stuff. I was born here, you see. Not exactly here, of course. In a hospital farther west. But here, as in this land.'

David Chariandy is to be saluted. He has understood that the Caribbean is like a soucouyant—impossible to describe, impossible to define, it inhabits people without owning them, diffracts people and memories, and opens all origins to the shared spaces of the universe of possibilities. In presenting this moving diversity of the world that was celebrated by Édouard Glissant, Chariandy is a writer of relation. This is beautiful art, *twa fwa bel*.[4]

4. Translator's note: In several parts of the Caribbean the Creole phrase *twa fwa bel kont* (thrice beautiful story) is an audience response to a storyteller's introduction.

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Backbone

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Every day, light ribboning my mattress,
morning announcing itself in the flame
that turns the blinds to shadow puppets,

and in my first act of waking
my eyelashes unlock
some new vision--maybe of a woodpecker--
its red wings folded neatly as kerchiefs.

I feel the now-familiar ache of my back, my spine
twisted, it seems, like a slim road in Barbados;
yes, my body a dimly lit street, tough to walk--

maybe it is my grandmother's voice, some message
curled at the base of my spine-- my grandmother singing
or laughing or sounding my name. The syllables unraveling
like a road, moving, yes, like a small red car laced in moonlight
gingerly surmounting a hill.

Or, the pain above my hips
now leads to my grandmother's doorway,
the white door crowded with hibiscus, water lily, desert rose,
monstera leaning, even in bright, bright morning, toward late summer moon.

I can hardly walk
and my grandma is calling my hips,

my toes sunned or shadowed in tall grass,my eyes fixed on a lizard frozen to the white wall

she is calling witness to this and the slow ritual of Sundays:
wide hats lining the small curve of road
where the church door is already open.

It has been fifteen years since all of this
and macaroni pie
and coucou and still, old men slamming dominoes,

now my backbone asks me to make the walk
into the rice-scented kitchen, the stretch of okra, lime, cornmeal;

into the living room where I last saw them dance:
my grandfather's fingers soft as rain on her shoulders,
the trumpet of an old song, vining, plant-like,
their dance holds me too, like shade.

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"In the Middle of the Burning," and "This that We Have"

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In the Middle of the Burning

notice now pictures of awful things on top our head
the freight that barricades this view, how enough
how the law batter down the dogged tide we make
the world shoring its dark scars between seasons
as though to hold it together only by a flame
is here a voice to please enough the blunt
borderlessness of this grief turning our heads to rubble
the lunacy of nothing so limning as death in the streets
in these vibrating hours where the corners talk back
need I simply run my tongue along the granite sky and live

to know how lost the millionth life somewhere today
the swift shape of roads new names combust, the sum
of anthems flooding the world with the eye's sudden and narrow
saltwater and streets ziplined with screams at the pitch of cooking pots
then tear gas, then pepper spray, then militarized lies unzipping
body bags, oh, our many many there, our alive and just born,
and that is how to say let's fuck it up, we the beat and we the loud
tuning forks and the help arriving empty-handed
propping the hot news of new times on our head

days like these pleat whatever the hollow year must offer
between the not-yet-dead and those just waking up
it will not be the vanished thing that we remember
it will be what we exchanged close to midnight
like smugglers high-wiring the city, hoarding the thoughts
of ours we interrupted midway to discovering the velocity
of the burning world below
of our language in the lateness of our stuck and reckless love

where the forces who claim they love us
level our lives to crust—the centuries-wide dance
of swapped shackles for knees
their batons and miscellany
thrown at our whole lives demanding our mothers
raise from their separate rooms, separate graves, today
to save who and me? I open the book to a naked page
where nothing clatter my heart, what head
what teeth cling to broadside, roll alias after
alias with a pen at their dull tribunes and shrines
imagine our heirlooms of shot nerves make a life
given to placards and synergies and elegies, but more

last things: where letters here where snow in May
where the millennium unstitches the quartered earth
in June, how many today to the viral fire
the frosted rich and their forts, but not
the fulsome rage of my people unpeaced
mute boots with somber looks appear
a fearsome autumn ending spring, though we still hear

I dare not sing

another song to dig a hole this time for the lineages
of magnolias where the offspring bring a hand to cover
our mouth, our heaping lives, who sit who burn who drop
three feet to the tar, who eat and demolish the thing
that takes our head, the thing that is no more
the place that never was except a burning learned

just once and not again when the darker working's race

This that We Have

call the year anything / call it 3020-something

the maps can tell us nothing everything
what of this electric world where doors open
the expanse of memory freeing itself
into the diaphragm of oceans, soils we find bearable

like life or maybe language a liquid thing
we lock our heads around & hearts what to do with these
flesh-chambered engines we widen widen like the sea
like a morning no more invisible than a black shoe on a
Black foot than two black hands laced before a windowed,
night-hued city bright cluster on fingernails
enclosing the day we come
to these cracked spaces tuned,

to the lifetimes of extinctions swimming
in our mouths white-noised as
the future—a figure of speech

we are past hidden our lives, ourselves hinged to winged things
like middays and shadows ruined cities crowding at our feet
to watch what is rehearsed the waywardness of crowds

to meet again in the convoy on our way to anything
blue and scorching just as to arrive

un-fleshed
we who sound the Atlantic's long rage
call the year anything; call it 1492
every sunset, an emergency
in this world, captives

bellying their sense of the dark

as day splits open
a danger though we bow to everyone who brings a drum

a fiddle for the frenzied ringing in our bones we practice saving

ourselves from the quadrupling intoxication
sudden, inconsolable as anything the elephant's stolen tusk

the frozen plane below must crack like cymbals
in this knowledge but who can hear
what we do not the fevered incantations of the dew
way up here
the chorus tonight [we know by now] is the gurgling of seahorses
& the starfish giving up their placentas
to the wideness of the sea just as the barking dog a country away
enters its cracked femur into the log marked for saving this world

more intimate now to us
is the flammable language of maps
the silence we admire in the birth of things the effusive doctrine of birds

above us, such incandescence we move
with the desiccated graces and stones and roses
the lines we inherit
the error of floating houses

do we petition the summoners of our preventable catastrophes
whoever claims to cleanse the village
without picking sides is not believed
until the tongue pulls us together
in the middle of repetitions the shared sutures dissolving in our eye

amid our flight, our voices splotch the distance
our resplendent songs blackening

like a hurricane refusing a boat to wreck
the wounded map we dance upon
we danced it here

to the plantations at the sea's beginning bend
tell everyone the matter
is not the self which we have always had nor the caves
that in their damp and dark, know themselves
but the maps we'd move the world to make

like healers,

& crickets, to disorient the cartographer's loftiness
down to bush and flock to sunsets that hide
the lengths and breadths
we come back to; papered

with no even sense of the invisible
even empty as clay pots
we want the repaired century

nested, stained and carried in our heads then loosed to the tall grasses
where frenetic servants' visions

are ledgers of our semblances a clearing
the timbre for our reunions

look, *call the year anything* we should bring
bring a place to point to when we arrive

Contributors

Titilola Aiyegbusi is a researcher in the English department at the University of Toronto where she studies Black Canadian life writing. Her dissertation examines the life narratives of Black Canadian women. She investigates how these narratives shaped, and continue to impact, Black consciousness in Canada.

Cornel Bogle is a scholar of Black, Caribbean, and Canadian literatures and Sessional Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream in the Department of Humanities at York University. He holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Alberta, where he previously served as an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of English and Film Studies. His scholarly criticism has been published, or is forthcoming, in journals such as *Canadian Literature*, the *Journal of West Indian Literature*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *sx salon*, and *Topia*. His poetry has appeared in *Pree: Caribbean Literature, Bookmarked*, *Moko Magazine,* and *Arc Poetry Magazine*. He is currently working on a monograph entitled *As Man* which combines critical research and creative writing to engage with personal, literary, and epistolary archives of male writers in the Caribbean diaspora.

Shane Book is a poet and filmmaker. His first collection, *Ceiling of Sticks,* won the Prairie Schooner Book Prize and the Great Lakes Colleges Association New Writers Award and was a Poetry Society of America Selection. His second volume, *Congotronic,* won the Archibald Lampman Award and was a finalist for the Canadian Authors Association Award, Ottawa Book Award, and Griffin Poetry Prize. His award-winning films have screened at festivals around the world and on television. He was educated at New York University, the Iowa Writers' Workshop and Stanford University where he was a Wallace Stegner Fellow. Currently, he is an associate professor in the Department of Writing at the University of Victoria. The work appearing in *Canada and Beyond* is from his next poetry collection, *All Black Everything*, which will be published in 2023.

Michael A. Bucknor consolidated his academic career at the University of the West Indies (Mona Campus) in the Department of Literatures in English, where

he was the Department Chair and Public Orator, both for two terms. He has been a Commonwealth Scholar, a USIS Fellow, a Du Bois-Mandela-Rodney Post-doctoral Fellow and Chair of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS). He has won a number of awards including two UWI Principal's Award for research, the FIPA Award for "Outstanding Promotion of Caribbean Literature," and the Institute of Jamaica's Gold Musgrave Medal for Eminence in the field of Literature. He is a member of several editorial boards and Senior Editor of the Journal of West Indian Literature. He is also the co-editor (with Alison Donnell) of *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, has published widely and carries out research on the African Diaspora, Austin Clarke, Caribbean-Canadian writing, Black Canadian cultural production, postcolonial literatures and theory, masculinities, sexualities, and popular culture. In 2022, he takes up the position of Professor of Black Studies in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta.

Patrick Chamoiseau was born in 1953, in Fort-de-France, Martinique. His considerable body of work includes *Texaco, Solibo magnifique* (translated into English as *Solibo Magnificent*), *Éloge de la Créolité* (translated as *In Praise of Creoleness*), *Écrire en pays dominé*, *Antan d'enfance (*translated as *Childhood*), *Biblique des derniers gestes*, *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, and *La matière de l'absence*. His novels, short stories, essays, and unclassifiable pieces have been translated into several languages and have won him numerous awards, including the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe and the Prix Goncourt. His most recent works, published by Seuil are: *Le conteur, la nuit et le panier* (2021), which received unanimous critical praise, and a poetic musical meditation titled *Baudelaire jazz* (2022). Patrick Chamoiseau is one of the most influential contemporary Caribbean voices and a major world literary figure.

Myriam J. A. Chancy is a Guggenheim Fellow and HBA Chair of the Humanities at Scripps College. She is the author of *What Storm, What Thunder,* a novel on the 2010 Haiti earthquake which was named a Best Book of Fall by *TIME, The Washington Post, Buzzfeed, The Chicago Tribune, Vulture, Good Housekeeping, Parade, Thrillist, LitHub* and *Harper's Bazaar* among others. It was shortlisted in the Fiction category of the Golden Poppy Awards and is longlisted for the Aspen Words Literary Prize. Her past novels include: *The Loneliness of Angels,* winner of the 2011 Guyana Prize in Literature Caribbean Award, for Best Fiction 2010; *The Scorpion's Claw;* and *Spirit of Haiti*, shortlisted in the Best First Book Category, Canada/Caribbean region of the Commonwealth Prize, 2004. She has authored several academic books, including, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*. She served as an editorial advisory board member for PMLA from 2010-12, as a Humanities Advisor for the Fetzer Institute

from 2011-13, and as a 2018 advisor for the John S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

David Chariandy is a writer and critic who lives in Vancouver and teaches in the department of English at Simon Fraser University. He is the author of the novels *Soucouyant* and *Brother*, as well as the short memoir *I've Been Meaning To Tell You: A Letter To My Daughter*. David's books have been celebrated internationally and translated into a dozen languages. In 2019, he was awarded Yale University's Windham-Campbell Prize for a body of fiction.

Linzey Corridon is a Vincentian-Canadian who first settled in Tiotià:ke/Montréal. He currently resides in Ohròn:wakon/Hamilton. He is an emerging writer, a literary critic, and a Vanier Canada scholar completing doctoral studies in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University. Linzey's writing and criticism can be found in *The Puritan, SX Salon, Montréal Writes, Kola, Hamilton Arts and Letters* and more. His PhD research explores how we might further transform discourses about the queer Caribbean and diaspora to better reflect a complexly nuanced Queeribbean quotidian.

Lidia María Cuadrado-Payeras is an Early-Career Researcher at the Universidad de Salamanca under a fully-funded National Competitive Scholarship (FPU17/05519). Her doctoral project revolves around selected novels of Canadian speculative fiction, including including works by Margaret Atwood, Larissa Lai, Hiromi Goto and Waubgeshig Rice, and their intersection with the philosophies of the posthuman. She is a member of the R&D project "Narrating Resilience, Achieving Happiness? Toward a Cultural Narratology" and of two recognized research groups at the Universidad de Salamanca and Universidad a Distancia de Madrid. She is co-representative for the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) in Spain and member of the Centro Studi Filosofia Postumanista (Italy). Together with the Centro Studi Filosofia Postumanista, the International Society of Zooanthropology and the School of Human-Animal Interaction, she co-organised the Symposium "Posthumanism: A New Interpretative Language," hosted virtually by the Department of English Studies at the Universidad de Salamanca in 2021. She has recently co-edited the volume *Abbecedario del postumanismo* (Baioni, Cuadrado and Macelloni, eds., Mimesis, 2021).

Cyril Dabydeen is a Guyana-born Canadian writer of Indian descent. Along with several poetry collections, his recent books include *My Undiscovered Country, God's Spider, My Multi-Ethnic Friends and Other Stories*, and the anthology, *Beyond Sangre Grande: Caribbean Writing Today*. His novel, *Drums of My Flesh*

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Lizette Gerber is a queer, neurodivergent, white Afrikaans Canadian PhD candidate in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta on Treaty 6/Métis Nation Region 4 land. Her research thinks with Black theories and speculations of vampires and relations of consumption.

Lyse Hébert is a translator and faculty member at the School of Translation, Glendon College, York University. Her Spanish to French translations of poems by Haitian-Dominican poet Jacques Viau Renaud were published in *J'essaie de vous parler de ma patrie,* S. Maríñez and D. Huttinot eds. (2018). Her French translations of a collection of essays by Katherine McKittrick are in press.

Canisia Lubrin is a writer, editor, and teacher with work published in eight languages. Her books are the poetry collections *Voodoo Hypothesis* and *The Dyzgraph*^{x}*st*, and the forthcoming book of fiction *Code Noir* (Knopf, 2023). In 2021, Lubrin was awarded, among others, the Griffin Poetry Prize, OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, and a Windham-Campbell Prize. She is a 2022 Civitella Ranieri fellow and LCB Literature Haus resident. Poetry editor at Canadian press McClelland & Stewart, Lubrin has taught at universities and colleges in Toronto and at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. *The Globe and Mail* named her Poet of the Year in 2021. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Guelph, where she is incoming coordinator of the Creative Writing MFA program. She was born in St. Lucia.

Michał Obszyński is a literary scholar, romanist, and assistant professor at the Institute of Romance Studies of the University of Warsaw. His research interests include Francophone literature in its broadest sense, in particular French-language literature of Quebec, the Caribbean and Africa. He deals with such issues as French-language literary discourse, manifestos and literary programmes of francophone areas, publishing market of francophone countries, as well as pan-African and francophone congresses and festivals. His dissertation formed the basis for the publication of a monograph entitled *Manifestes et programmes littéraires aux Caraïbes francophones* (Brill, 2016, coll. "Francopolyphonies"). From 2015 to 2018, he conducted a research project entitled "The status of Francophone literature in contemporary publishing strategies and metaliterary discourse in France and non-European French-speaking countries" under

a grant from the National Science Center, Poland. He is currently researching the ideological determinants of the status of the writer and of the literary text in the debates of Pan-African literary congresses and festivals from 1945 to the present day, under an NCN grant entitled "Between the aesthetics of rebellion and the affirmation of artistic freedom: the role and functions of literature in the intellectual discourse of Black art congresses and festivals."

Heather Smyth is an associate professor in English at the University of Waterloo, Canada. Her research in social justice studies bridges humanities and social science methods. In literature studies she works within the fields of postcolonial and transnational studies, especially Caribbean and Canadian literature, with an emphasis on gender and sexuality and guided by critical race studies approaches. In community-based research she pursues qualitative data-gathering projects in collaboration with social services and nonprofit agencies. These two fields cross over in her work exploring literatures and rhetorics of advocacy and activism.

H. Nigel Thomas is a retired professor of U.S. literature and the author of dozens of essays and thirteen books: six novels, three collections of short fiction, two collections of poems, and two academic books. His novels *Spirits in the Dark* (1993) and *Easily Fooled* (2015) were shortlisted for the Hugh MacLennan Fiction Award. The French translation of *Lives: Whole and Otherwise*—Des vies cassées—was a finalist for the Carbet des lycéens award (2016). He is the founder and English-language coordinator of Lectures Logos Readings and the editor of *Kola Magazine*. In 2000, he received the Montreal Association of Business Persons and Professionals' Jackie Robinson Award for Professional of the year; in 2013, Université Laval's Hommage aux créateurs; in 2019, the Montreal Black Theatre Workshop's Martin Luther King Junior Achievement Award; in 2021, the Quebec Writers' Federation Judy Mappin Community Award; and in 2022, the Canada Council for the Arts John Molson Prize "for outstanding achievement in the arts.

Brandon Wint is a poet, spoken word artist and multi-disciplinary collaborator based in western Canada. He is presently the artistic director of Tree Reading Series. Brandon is the author of one collection of poetry, *Divine Animal* (Write Bloody North 2020), and several albums, including the recently-released *Freedom Journal: Antidotes to Violence.*

Journal Information

First published in 2011, *Canada and Beyond* is a peer-reviewed open access journal specializing in Canadian literary and cultural studies. It seeks to prompt meaningful interventions in how the literatures and cultures emerging from what is currently called Canada are perceived, analyzed, and interpreted both within and beyond Canada's borders. It also aims to place the limelight on the function of literature and criticism as transformative social forces. The journal favors a trans-national, global outlook spanning genres and schools of literary and cultural criticism that engage political, cultural, and environmental concerns. All in all, *Canada and Beyond* endeavors to make a significant contribution to the humanities.
The journal is published annually by Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, and housed in the English Department (Departamento de Filología Inglesa), Universidad de Salamanca. It invites original manuscripts all year round.

Submission Information

Articles should be between 6,500 and 7,500 words, including abstract, keywords and works cited. They should be clearly written and have a sharp and clearly-stated focus. They should follow the latest version of the MLA Formatting and Style Guide. A short (100 words) author bio-note is also required.
For more information, please check the journal's website, https://revistas.usal.es/index.php/2254-1179/about/submissions

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