pivot

VOL. 10, NO. 1

Voyages:

Traversing the White Space

pivot

An Interdisciplinary Journal

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About *Pivot*

Pivot is a hybrid academic and creative journal published annually by members of York University's Graduate Program in English.

> **"Pivot," according to the OED:**
>
> **verb,**
> **1. intransitive. To turn on, or as if on, a pivot; figurative: to depend on, to hinge on**
> **2. transitive. To provide with a pivot; to mount on, or attach by means of, a pivot or pivots; to hinge**
>
> **noun,**
> **3. a short shaft or pin forming the centre on which a mechanism turns or oscillates**
> **4. figurative: the crucial or central point of something; that on which everything depends**

Pivot aims to embody all of these meanings. On the one hand, pivoting and shifting with the times, changing according to academic ebbs and flows in theory and fashion; on the other, providing a centre around which other discourses, ideas, people, and works can revolve. *Pivot* is dedicated to lifting diverse voices and displaying a range of subjects prioritizing no period, genre or experience above another. Our goal is to promote innovative, creative and interdisciplinary thinking and to offer unique and exciting perspectives to our readership.

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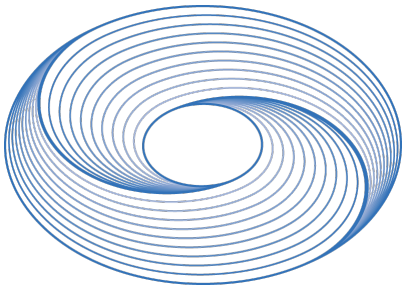

Contents

fiction

visual art

Pivot is published through Open Journal Systems (OJS) at York University.

Letter from the Editors

How we conceive of white space in our art and society, how we challenge it, embrace it, and revolt against it transforms the state of our practices. As academics and writers, we are constantly faced with the intimidation of the yawning white space of the page. In Joe Bray's reflections on concrete poetry and prose, he argues that: "It is as if the white space trumps the linguistic attempt to represent silence; it achieves what words cannot. Its dominance over language in the poem is also suggested by the way it dwarfs the text on the page, surrounding and diminishing it." White space then finds meaningful exploration in our own creative works and in the texts we consume. The Western notions of racial whiteness add yet another element to the meaning of white space. In our daily lives, our social identities, which are shaped by racial hierarchies, create challenges, barriers, and battles in which we are constantly pushing against the structures of whiteness. Lisa Corrigan and Anjali Vats advocate that: "Although, as Darrel Wanzer-Serrano reminds us, 'the overwhelming whiteness, both embodied and intellectually, of rhetorical studies is not new,' we must offer new and sustained scholarly attention to the way that racial investments structure protest cycles within the communication field and the possibilities that exist for effectively resisting them." Contemporary critical work in response has adopted lenses of inclusivity and diversity to fight back against the whiteness of academia and publishing.

In the call for papers for our 2023 issue, *Pivot* invited critical and creative work which approaches white space in an infinite variety of ways. Whether it be a poem experimenting with white space as a stylistic technique, a paper displaying deep racial awareness, or even discussions on the process of staking claim on the blank space of the page in our work, we encouraged any and ALL interpretations. The call provoked questions to consider such as: How does the implementation of white space in creative and critical works contribute to the way that we understand silences and other contextual reverberations in the work? How does the whiteness of the institutions we exist in shape our criticisms as sites of cultural representation and cultural inscription? How is the whiteness of space represented in tales of immigration or voyages and travel literature? How do artists confront the intimidation of the blank white page, and continue to dare to keep creating? Topics which deal with "Voyages: Traversing the White Space" could range from addressing the utilisation of white space as an experimental tool in creative writing to critical reflections on race in the literary canon. The work which is represented in this issue brings to life a wide range of approaches to the subject including visual art and photography that play with colour and white space, academic essays examining the systems of whiteness in literary texts, analysis of erasure poetry, and wielding of white space in creative works.

The pieces in this issue confront the concept of traversing white space through representations and recreations of race, voyages, immigration, diversity, inclusion, and much, much more. Some authors approached the topic and corresponding themes directly, taking on white space and traversing it without deviation, while others adopted a meandering attitude to it. The poetry, critical essays, a fictional story, digital and visual oeuvres of art presented in this issue all come together to encapsulate the multiplicity of interpretations white space offers.

We would like to extend our gratitude to our contributors for the daring they demonstrated in sharing their work, and for their refusal to allow genre or form to restrict them. Our thanks to our volunteers, Tamara, Braedon, Anjalee, Theo, Zohreh, and Nicola for their time and assistance in bringing this edition together. To Angie for designing our beautiful cover, and Sandra for all her expertise, thank you. This edition would not have been possible without the collaboration of all these and many more entities, and more importantly without you, our reader. We are incredibly thankful for your time and commitment to engaging with our work critically and with care.

Yours truly,

Zahra Barzegar & Aditi Parikh
General Editors
Pivot Journal


poetry

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Eyes Gone To Seed

Katie Andersen

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Katie Andersen

Eyes Gone To Seed

Blank eyes semi-conscious under the sand,
a liquid caterpillar hidden half-lidded against margins of
rippled cambium, living prisms meeting seed-wise in the canopy—
four years, in open soil yawning,

waiting for the soft bumblebee pinch,
a torn-off stinger burning in place,
honeycomb hexagons tucked away behind cobwebs
that tight-lace organs into crimson blossom-bruises,
top-billed nectar sealed in a mason jar,
the anesthetic delivered like routine hands pulling weeds,
latex glove holding your hand spread beneath a blinding sun,
watered down to grow verdant faces that shift towards the light,
rousing thoughts that the foam-green padding galls a
parted body into the cruciform flex of a sterile trellis,
(the dentist would have given you glasses and an umbrella),
but there's no time for this, blank eyes—
rain dries into blank eyes, through rootless ground falling,

two hours to draw the serum out through a silver tube,
told you later that the pliant earthy strips were
blissfully nicotine-free, gluten-free, lactose-free
cystic butterflies in silk-scarred cocoons set free,
soaring up out of a ribcage poised with latex gloves
wrapped round a beating mudslide heart.
Fog rolls above the surface of the sea foam slab,
hallway moonlight waxing fluorescent white
caught in the reflection of the tide pools, cafeteria coffee,
two sugars no milk, orange power drink in the IV hardline,
the sour face of a frog croaking your secrets to tadpoles
from behind a curtain of blue sky when your brain
ought to have been blank behind shut eyes—

forget the vacant body, nests of buried shoots curling,

for the remainder of your years a one-off merchant,
tadpoles in water-filled plastic sandwich bags tied with ribbon,
bulk-traded for market-value on the pier, one future
double helix chance-ransomed for the apiary,
for a butterfly without pins and glass,
for blank eyes waking out of dilated sleep measured by
eyelashes fluttering quiet butterfly kisses against living skin,
a mossy fingerprint honey-pressed against a bloom of wildflowers,
a parcelled field sown with time for silver leaves and figures etched on sand.

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lullaby

Roxanne Brousseau

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Roxanne Brousseau

lullaby

i used to fit (lying) across
the back seats of the car

at night
i'd sprawl there
my head strategically positioned
to observe the sky through the window
(we were always travelling
to somewhere
or other)

the car raced through space—
but the stars never stirred

they only shifted
as we changed directions
like rotating a map
around
and around

on the highway
streetlamps passed at intervals
inter spaced
the time be-tween lights
(like the pause between thunder and lightning)
gave some indication of how fast we were travelling

air in-scaped through the cr ack in the window
my only
whispered.
lullaby.

i would stay awake
for as long as i could
reeling with dreams

i was just a child...
I knew it
then

in time
the stars took me as their own
and i was lost
in the emptiness

where is
the wanderer now?
where is
the girl who could hear the song of the road?

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montréal (-) québec

Roxanne Brousseau

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Roxanne Brousseau

montréal (-) québec

riding in the backseat,
        i watch the landscape change,
or rather,
        repeat itself,
                through the water-stained window.

their conversation becomes muffled noises
        in the back of my mind.

wildflowers line the ditches along the road,
                into the seemingly endless horizon.
flashes of pink, white, and yellow
        blur together like a merry-go-round,
                and yet they remain indivisible.

they are, to me, nameless.

                the tall grass grows on the unpaved everywhere.

                we are caught—between—a tunnel of trees.

and the sky, the sky, is a wondrous blue,
        a blue that defines all blues.

yet, something lurks beneath it all.
off The Island, silence forbodes silence.
i could blow away with a single breath
        and seed nothingness.
dandelion particles, twice removed.

                forget the stars…
                (that) i can't see—
                i *need* something real.

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Sketch

Clara Burghelea

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Clara Burghelea

Sketch

after Nuar Alsadir

The snipping of the shears, the quiet thud of the stressed branches.

In my dream, we are standing in our plum orchard in Drăgoești and my grandmother has me touch the flaky barks. Amber glitters around the sunken parts. Disease disguised as decoration. Copaci bolnavi, she whispers.

"One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease." (Deleuze)

Outside my rented room in Dallas, an old pecan houses a family of squirrels. At night, the sound of other lives leeches through the walls. I doze off and the squirrels turn albino, crawling up my bed, fair lashes tickling the air. The comfort of belonging.

"The shadow escapes from the body like an animal we had been sheltering." (Deleuze)

Back home, in Drăgoești, fat mornings were all about sipping lattes and searching history tracking on my laptop. At 1:20 am on 3/15/2018, I looked for plum jam recipes, breast cancer symptoms, five stages of grief.

Whistling windows, a murder of crows, their cackling roost, a hobbling left leg.
Death is an awkward guest. At times, announcing its presence, allowing for anticipation, only to importune with its sudden swing to distort, rearrange, fracture. Did I dream the signs?

Whistling windows, a murder of crows, their cackling roost, a hobbling left leg.

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What it takes to keep the mind going

Clara Burghelea

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Clara Burghelea

What it takes to keep the mind going

The Alamo Manhattan lit crane peeking over the Bishop Arts District,
the drowsy day stretching limbs, loud pairs strolling tiny streets,
the Wild Detectives' backyard alive with flurry, poetry waiting
to spill out from the lips of my friend, Lauren, who laughs stage

fright off, whispers that writing = hookah smoking + bird watching,
a mouthpiece will cradle smoke and verses alike, the March night
sky burns a hole into my skin, a cold Mexican Coke sweating
between my thighs; in my poems, my aching heart speaks best

in this borrowed tongue, yet my best hugs are always in Romanian,
unspoken, untamed, unfinished, my children's absence nested
in skin crinkles, the way a body misremembers, shadows spilling
and lagging, inside the metaphor, always a slice of fat light,

even the ghosts in my friend's poems had once eaten happiness,
this new city pumps foreign air with torpor, breath, collapse, I, amidst.

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Drag(a) de mama

Clara Burghelea

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Clara Burghelea

Drag(a) de mama

Outside the open window,
my grandmother pruning
the carrot-top roses,
a blanket of petals
at her feet. Their scent,
heavy with loss.
My eyes searching
for patches of sunny grass,
among the tall flowers.
For days,
my mother lay in bed
and shrank into herself.
Each morning, I sat
in the burgundy armchair,
ill with waiting.
The soothing snipping
of the scissors,
my head on her belly
the way I sought comfort
as a child, in pain
or confusion.
I crave to unstitch the lush May,
rest her tiny frame,
soft and pulpy,
amid birdcall and cricketsong,
the hungry rush of hyacinths,
ease the weight
cradled behind her ribs. Everything
in a gentle way, my body
un-free from the fear
of not being alert, not paying enough
attention, missing out
on whatever slipped
from her mouth-shaped bruise,
on her sunken face.
I wanted to love and forget,

the way a wound loves its feeding tissue,
while also growing crust
to heal.
In the bursting garden, my grandmother is resting
her hands folded in her lap
yearning to hold the air.

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Magnetoreception

Nicole Dufoe

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Nicole Dufoe

Magnetoreception

Stop rubbing

your eyes. It is more than just
  dust but the pull

of the poles you are trying to scratch
  out. The geese have let it guide them,

their V a graceful
buckle to the curve. But there is nausea
in magnets: attraction

laid bare as curtains draw from party tricks
  and talking to the

dead. A submission to the North. A cold
  and guilty tug that sucks you home

each Easter.

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Headline

Sandy Feinstein

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Sandy Feinstein

Headline

"Why You Need Window Blinds"
The New York Times, 28 March 2023

Exclaims the paper of record, as if
it were your grandmother,
the interrogative that isn't a question,
the focus on exactly what you don't need
as you gaze past the double panes
where the view is cut into perfect squares,
six at the top, six at the bottom,
each box like the auto-camera
that demarcates the best shot, how
it thinks you should see.

But I do not click and save
the view from any one chipped white frame.
There is a tangle of branches, still exposed,
bright light without heat dimmed into shadows
by the every which way of old growth
and new tentative shoots, wayward vines,
my angle, and what I miss
through yet another lens,
without which I am the divider
between room and tree.

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The Invisible Woman

Deborah Herman

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Deborah Herman

The Invisible Woman

"An 'invisible,' 'non-visible,' 'hidden,' 'non-apparent,' or 'unseen' disability is any physical, mental, or emotional impairment that goes largely unnoticed."

—*The Invisible Disability Project*

What a useless power I've got. The ability
to render myself invisible.

Typical of my male creators, my character
is bombarded with cosmic rays
and mutates into
The Invisible Girl.

Sure, I can bend wavelengths of light
and disappear at will. I can't eat,
food is visible until assimilated.

My role in the group is a maternal one.
I can throw force fields around my teammates
like a pair of fleshless arms and carry them to safety,
but I can't articulate my inner rage
through random acts of violence.

I can't even run away, my footprints
trace my steps
and betray my position in the snow.

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In the Rehab Waiting Room

Deborah Herman

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Deborah Herman

In the Rehab Waiting Room

For Elizabeth Bishop

Only veterans know these things:
real soldiers never swap sea stories
and dead men tell no tales.

Montages are for the movies—
fragmented memories
patched together
to reconstruct the day your life changed forever.

There is a 1000-yard stare
that we all share.

The secret handshake
just a nod of acknowledgement—
an eyeing of the tell-tale scars on the scalp.

That's all the story you need.

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Night Vision

Andrew Oram

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Andrew Oram

Night Vision

I watch the back of the moon

like an amateur.

And form new craters with my

thoughts.

Warp speed is my walking pace

when I touch

other solar systems

with dinner utensils.

I find

the best music is

an exploding star.

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Mapping Home

Olivia Palepoi

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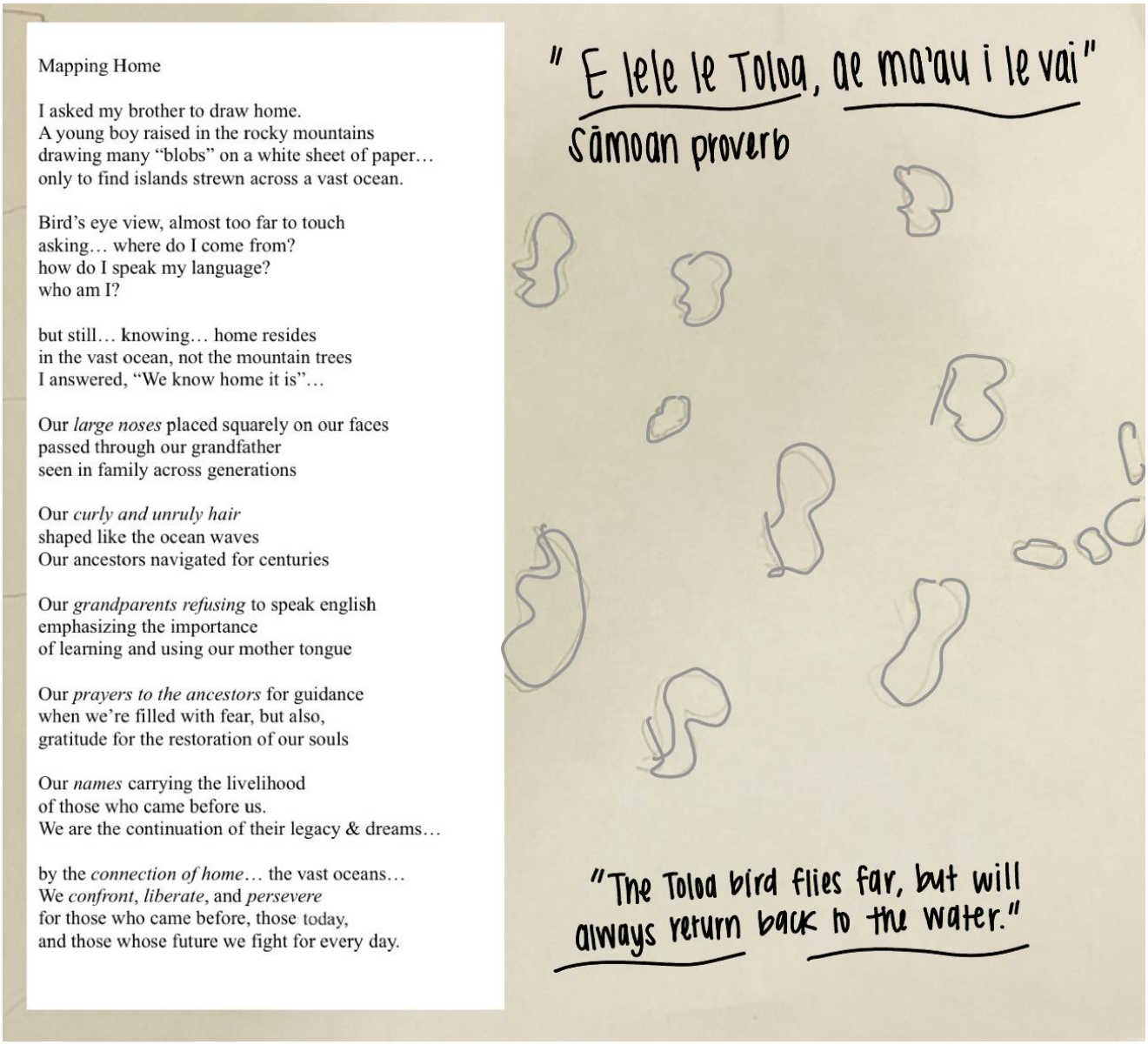
Olivia Palepoi

Mapping Home



Mapping Home

I asked my brother to draw home.
A young boy raised in the rocky mountains
drawing many "blobs" on a white sheet of paper…
only to find islands strewn across a vast ocean.

Bird's eye view, almost too far to touch
asking… where do I come from?
how do I speak my language?
who am I?

but still… knowing… home resides
in the vast ocean, not the mountain trees
I answered, "We know home it is"…

Our *large noses* placed squarely on our faces
passed through our grandfather
seen in family across generations

Our *curly and unruly hair*
shaped like the ocean waves
Our ancestors navigated for centuries

Our *grandparents refusing* to speak english
emphasizing the importance
of learning and using our mother tongue

Our *prayers to the ancestors* for guidance
when we're filled with fear, but also,
gratitude for the restoration of our souls

Our *names* carrying the livelihood
of those who came before us.
We are the continuation of their legacy & dreams…

by the *connection of home*… the vast oceans…
We *confront*, *liberate*, and *persevere*
for those who came before, those today,
and those whose future we fight for every day.

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Submit

Doxa Zannou

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Doxa Zannou

Submit

I send out blackletter bodypoems/bodystories/bodyparts
whomever feels concerned
dear editors
dear editors
dear editors
blank strangers never concerned with my blackletters in staged binary script
Please find below my story, "Carving Space in Silent Spaces." I look forward to hearing from you soon!
Kind regards,
Blackletters/blackname/blackautomatedno
white space stretches between us
takes space in pages
pushed outside margins
dear editors
respond: *We regret—many submissions—Please try again—next time—Thank you for—We encourage you—While we enjoyed—We could not—carve space for your words*
tired blackletters
scrape against concerned journal
editors
settled on carved space
[un]inhabited land
space plowed by
[un]inhabited bodies
majority somehow pushed
beyond margins
how did we get pushed so far out margins / pages / spaces / lands
we did not name / did not choose
pressed into corners of landscapes we once owned
we write our space in foreign wor[l]ds
where dear senators
kindly invade
our massive
landmass / landstories / landpoems
rescaled small
recalled outside
dominant fictions / doctrinal cessions / Mercator projections
mapped into small-scale margins

outside black-inked borders dragged through
our umber lands / umber bodies / umber inked stories
we regret
after
careful
public concern
we did not
consider you
for public
-ation
you do not represent
our dear [re] public
we cannot center
our voice and yours
nor publicize our invasive [press]ence
our readers expect colorless words
but we appreciate
your interest in our publication
next time
we encourage you to
submit

if you write in your margins
we will fit you in our press
you can always try
again next time
and remember
if we encourage you to submit

submit


critical
articles

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Scars of a Colonial History: White Privilege, Race Relations and Anti-Apartheid Sensibilities in Athol Fugard's "Master Harold"... and the Boys

Marshall Burr

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Marshall Burr

Scars of a Colonial History: White Privilege, Race Relations and Anti-Apartheid Sensibilities in Athol Fugard's "*Master Harold*"... *and the Boys*

In giving a reading of Athol Fugard's celebrated play, "*Master Harold*"... *and the Boys* that interrogates its depiction of apartheid-era South African interracial social dynamics, one must be reminded of Fredric Jameson's famous opening exclamative in the preface to his book, *The Political Unconscious*: "Always historicize!" (9). The aphorism comes to mind partly because, in general terms, Jameson's pre-eminent left-wing ideas share points of contact with the twentieth century South African Communist Party. For instance, we can consider how the Communist Party found ways to use the European colonial narratives of racial inequality that were propagated by the governing National Party as political ammunition to combat capitalism in South Africa, and gain the support of anti-apartheid activists and Black nationalists. However, generalized left-wing connections notwithstanding, what proves most relevant for the purposes of this essay, and which is implicit in the oft-recalled phrase, is Jameson's insistence on developing an adequate historical context before giving way to literary, cultural, or political analysis. For Jameson, historicization is an essential component of any dedicated investigation of a cultural or aesthetic product. That said, this essay will therefore be involved with providing an overview of South African history as pertains to its colonial roots and its development of segregationist policies before shifting to the cultural and aesthetic product in question—Fugard's "*Master Harold*" ... *and the Boys*. Once a sufficient historical framework is established, I will investigate Fugard's portrayal of the impacts of Eurocentric ideology and politically enforced racism under the system of apartheid in twentieth-century South Africa, and demonstrate the play's functionality as a wide-range indictment of the social pathologies that arise out of an oppressor-oppressed social dynamic. An interpretation of Fugard's intent and personal experiences will also feature

to help draw conclusions on the playwright's desired audience impact. Before shifting focus onto Fugard, his play and its reception, then, I will begin the first portion of this essay with a historical discussion of the system of apartheid and its ties to the global system of European colonisation.

When trying to understand how in 1948 the South African state came to draft legislation that both legally enforced segregation and created a Social Darwinist racial hierarchy with whites at the top and 'coloured' and Black citizens at the bottom, one must look to the history of European colonisation in the territory. As Nancy Clark and William Worger identify in their book, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, the roots of Afrikaner racism can be traced back to the Dutch colonisation of the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, where the colonists established an economy based on the use and exchange of slaves from East Africa and Southeast Asia (3). Even after the abolition of slavery in the 1830s, "racial discrimination continued in myriad forms as European settlement expanded, the British conquered African societies, and imperialists and settlers alike spoke of the 'civilising mission' of white rule and favoured, almost without exception, the segregation of black from white" (Clark and Worger 3). Furthermore, the historiography of the territory from colonisation into the early twentieth century (written primarily by European civil servants in the colonial administrations) reflects the typical imperialist sentiments of Eurocentrism, white supremacy, and tendencies toward a 'natural' social order which only permitted slight upward mobility for non-whites if they converted to Christianity (Clark and Worger 6-7). However, it was not until during and after the Second World War, with the growing imminence of the dissolution of Britain's control over the colonies, that Afrikaner politicians (principally those in the rising National Party), seeking support from an "Afrikaans-speaking… working-class electorate that felt exploited by British capitalists on one side and threatened by cheaper black workers on the other, engaged in a campaign of race-baiting" (Clark and Worger 4). Moreover, as Pam Christie and Colin Collins write in their essay, "Bantu Education: Apartheid Ideology or Labour Reproduction?," the National Party largely represented an Afrikaner population that were "not only isolationist but also racially prejudiced against the blacks" and viewed themselves as a "pure race which need[ed] to maintain its purity by racial segregation" (59). Apartheid, then, came as the government's solution to support the physical separation of black and white, and this separation was achieved by legislative policies and state action (Clark and Worger 4).

After officially implementing apartheid as state policy in 1948, the governing National Party sought to establish complete racial segregation in virtually all aspects of civil life by implementing pass laws (the Population Registration Act of 1950), whereby individuals were classified by their race and were required to carry identity cards (later called 'reference books') with them at all times. These books determined where an individual could live, work, travel, and even what buildings they could enter, based on their racial classification. It became known as the pass system and was "emblematic of the degree of control the government intended to exert over the African population and was a daily reminder… of the often petty but also determined repression under which they lived" (Clark and Worger 49). With this system of human monitoring in place, the National government could then use the pass system as a stepping stone towards the total control of every aspect of 'native' South African life. For example, the government could then more completely enforce other pieces of repressive legislation, such as The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (making marriages between whites and non-whites illegal), the Group Areas Act (which geographically divided the country based on race, allocating the most fertile and desirable land to whites, and forcing Black and non-white people into Shantytowns or infertile rural areas), and the Natives' Land and Urban Areas Act (giving the government the power to remove anyone deemed 'unfit' to live in one area and forcibly relocate them elsewhere). All of these laws were systematically devised to secure power and privilege for the minority white population and to roadblock the physical freedoms of Black South Africans and other non-whites.

This discussion of the South African colonial history and the history of political tactics used by the Afrikaner National Party to segregate and subjugate Black and non-white South Africans is by no means exhaustive, and it represents a small portion of the full scope of oppression experienced by the Indigenous and non-white populations throughout the twentieth century. It is difficult to adequately situate Fugard and his play in the incredibly complex national history of South Africa, but my hope is that the discussion up to this point has at least provided a historical lens through which the ensuing exploration of "*Master Harold*" might be viewed. Born to Afrikaner and British parents in 1932, Fugard (whose official birth name is Harold) enjoyed the freedoms and privileges of whiteness in his formative years, much like Hally (the play's central character) does in the play. It seems that, due to its largely autobiographical nature, to read

"Master Harold" is to read about confessional experiences from Fugard's adolescence in Port Elizabeth. As John Jordan expresses in his autobiographical reading of the play, "Fugard's *Notebooks: 1960-1977* made clear how extensively the story of Hally and Sam in the play draws upon real people and events," as Fugard recalled a "string of memories" between himself and Sam Semela, the Basuto servant who worked for his mother (462). Such memories included: "the friendship between boy and man, the memory of their kite-flying, the rainy afternoon discussions of Eastern philosophy or Plato and Socrates, Sam's proficiency as a ballroom dancer, and the shameful, culminating incident when, after a trivial quarrel between them, the thirteen-year-old Fugard spat in his friend's face" (Jordan 462). The autobiographical components are thus self-evident; the main sequence of events in the play are derived almost exclusively from Fugard's lived experience. The play should not, however, be understood as a mere recreation of real events, but instead as a retroactive reflection on a traumatic interaction that would shape Fugard's understanding of race relations and white privilege in an oppressive South African nation. The shame he experienced because of his altercation with the real-life Sam would play an instrumental role in pushing him to use his writing as a medium for anti-apartheid activism.

In an essay originally published by the *New York Times* in 1964, Fugard discusses issues of racism and racial exclusion in African theatre, offering the current reader insight into his aims as an anti-apartheid writer, and as to why *"Master Harold"* was originally banned in South Africa. Fugard refers to the theatrical communities of numerous African countries as "cultural deserts" with mainly "whites-only" theatres that represent "a hangover from the old Colonial system, from a period when Africa was a continent of 'white men and native boys'" (53). He goes on to describe the race politics surrounding South African theatre at the time as follows:

> There are three main streams of theatre activity in South Africa. On one side there is Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking theatre, both the indulgences of our white minority, operating in theatres reserved for whites only with occasional special performances for non-whites only. The third stream is a recent development, hardly more than ten years old, and reflects on the cultural front the fight at present being decided in South Africa. Put in its simplest terms, this has involved co-operation regardless of race, with mixed casts

> playing to non-racial audiences. (Fugard 53)

Although Fugard actively ascribed to and sought to advance what he describes as the "third stream" of theatre activity, his public condemnation of apartheid (voiced mainly through his playwriting and support for boycotting whites-only theatres) led to his passport being revoked by the South African government and his subsequent sojourn in the United Kingdom before settling in the United States for several years (Williams 54-5). It was because of his conflict with the South African government that he published and produced numerous plays in Europe and the United States, including "*Master Harold.*"

Originally performed in 1982 at the Yale Repertory Theater in New Haven, Connecticut, Fugard directed the play, which featured Danny Glover in its cast ("Yale to Stage Premier"). Set in the 1950s, the play depicts the relationships—strained by the racial divide embedded in the social fabric of apartheid-era South Africa—between a teenage Afrikaaner boy, Hally (also called "Master Harold"), and two Black servants, Sam and Willie, who work for Hally's family. The play opens with a dialogical exchange between Sam and Willie that divulges two key details: one, that they have both been practising for an upcoming provincial ballroom dance competition, and two, that Willie has been abusing his girlfriend and dancing partner, Hilda. This second point requires elaboration. Far from being a prejudiced attack on Willie's character—perhaps aimed at implying some erroneous notion of the degeneracy or moral shortcomings of the Black subject—Fugard is intimately aware of the widespread appropriation of epistemic violence that subjugated groups often turn to after suffering long periods of social injustice and oppression. Just as Frantz Fanon describes how the "colonized subject will first train his aggressiveness sedimented in his muscles against his own people," Fugard similarly demonstrates this issue of epistemic violence through Willie's domestic abuse of Hilda. Unable to reciprocate the racial violence he experiences from his white oppressors Willie instead redirects his anger towards Hilda and reveals that he beats her in a disturbing diatribe:

> WILLIE. … She's fucking around all the time I turn my back. Hilda Samuels is a bitch! … You listening?
>
> SAM. Ja.
>
> WILLIE. So what you say? …

> SAM. When did you last give her a hiding?
>
> WILLIE. (Reluctantly) Sunday night… (He knows what's coming)…
>
> SAM. Hiding on Sunday night, then Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday she doesn't come to practice… and you're asking me why? … You hit her too much. (Fugard 6-7)

The audience is therefore not prejudiced into identifying or sympathising with the play's Black characters simply because they find themselves in positions that make them victims of racial injustice. Instead, Fugard tries to convey to the audience the extent to which colonial and racially segregated societies produce social pathologies for both the oppressor and the oppressed, and that, unable to release frustrations on their oppressors, the oppressed will often seek to fill the role of the oppressor in their personal relationships, thereby perpetuating cycles of colonial violence.

Shortly after this conversation takes place, Hally is introduced and joins the scene in a mood of friendship. It is made apparent that he and Sam have a close relationship, evidenced by the different ways which Sam and Willie refer to Hally, where Willie always uses the term "Master" and Sam uses the more personal "Hally." Furthermore, Hally and Sam's closeness is revealed in a lengthy conversation between the two that all but excludes Willie and enters into what appears to be very familiar philosophical territory for the pair. It is during this conversation that Hally's inherent prejudice, ignorance, and moral deficiencies begin to reveal themselves. For instance, after Sam describes an incident where a magistrate sentenced him to be beaten with a cane, Hally contends that "progress" is the answer to eliminating those kinds of barbarous punishments (Fugard 15). However, he is never able to specify what he means by "progress," nor is he able to connect his suggestions toward social reform with the obvious social inequalities of the contemporaneous South African situation. As their discussion surrounding social reform continues, Sam invokes Napoleon as a model figure, referring to him as a great man who "regarded all people as equal before the law" (Fugard 18), thereby offering Hally an opportunity to sympathise with what is obviously Sam's imperative of relating the conversation to his position of social and racial disadvantage. However, once again, Hally fails to make the connection and rejects Sam's claim, saying, "Don't confuse historical significance with greatness," before ironically conceding, "maybe I'm being a bit prejudiced" (Fugard 18). In a resounding fashion, Hally solidifies himself in a position of white ignorance in his response to Sam's

proclamation of Abraham Lincoln as his selected "man of magnitude" (Fugard 20). Sam's invocation of Lincoln is extremely suggestive. Perhaps he is hoping for Hally to embrace some of the philosophies of the white emancipator, to sympathise with the subjugated Black population and to strive to work with them in their emancipatory struggle and thereby liberate not only those oppressed by racial injustice, but also himself from the bondage of bigotry and ignorance. To this, Hally ignorantly retorts; "Don't get sentimental, Sam. You've never been a slave, you know. And anyway we freed your ancestors here in South Africa long before the Americans" (Fugard 20). Hally's unsympathetic disposition towards the sufferings of his Black counterparts in these exchanges foreshadows the inevitable explosive result at the end of the play—he proves himself either unwilling or incapable of recognizing the injustice of racial oppression that occurs in South Africa and that he himself contributes to by perpetuating inequalities. His callousness poignantly juxtaposes the hope that Sam holds for Hally's own moral emancipation, and indeed, too, for those white South Africans exploiting their system of racial inequality.

Before turning to the culminating event itself, it is important to understand the various components preceding the climax that eventually enable Hally's actualization of racial violence. Throughout the play, Hally exhibits behaviours that one would expect to see in someone who has appropriated the bigoted posture of his white supremacist forebears. For instance, he slights Sam with microaggressions and condescension repeatedly, as when he imperiously states: "After your last contribution I'm beginning to doubt whether anything in the way of an intellectual agreement is possible between the two of us" (Fugard 22). Or when he imagines how he will justify writing about their ballroom dancing competition to his Afrikaner teacher: "I'll point out to him that in strict anthropological terms the culture of a primitive black society includes its dancing and singing… the release of primitive emotions through movement" (Fugard 43). These microaggressions exhibit the extent to which Hally has been tainted by a prejudiced epistemological system, that is, the greater social network of apartheid. Certainly, the most prominent figure in shaping Hally's Eurocentric mentality, as alluded to in the play, is his father. Hally's nebulous relationship with his father is mainly revealed throughout the course of the play in one-sided phone conversations between Hally and his mother, wherein he tries desperately to keep his bedridden father at the hospital and away from home. It is ultimately revealed that his father is an alcoholic who steals money from the family to finance

his excessive drinking habits, leaving Hally and his mother tightly strapped. Hally's troubled relationship with his father notwithstanding, he nevertheless perpetuates his father's racist behaviour when attempting to emotionally wound Sam as he vents his rage:

> HALLY. … You see, you mustn't get the wrong idea about me and my Dad, Sam. We also have our good times together. Some bloody good laughs. He's got a marvelous sense of humor. Want to know what our favorite joke is? He gives out a big groan, you see, and says: "It's not fair, is it, Hally?" Then I have to ask: "What, chum?" And then he says: "A nigger's arse" … and we both have a good laugh. *(The men stare at him with disbelief).* (Fugard 55)

The climax of the scene is reached when, shortly after his hideous joke, Hally spits in Sam's face. Sam's resounding lament for Hally reveals the dangers of perpetuating intergenerational racism, one of the play's most enduring messages:

> SAM. … Ja, well, you've done it… Master Harold. Yes, I'll start calling you that from now on. It won't be difficult anymore. You've hurt yourself, Master Harold. I saw it coming. I warned you, but you wouldn't listen. You've just hurt yourself bad. And you're a coward, Master Harold. The face you should be spitting in is your father's… but you used mine, because you think you're safe inside your fair skin. (Fugard 56)

Sam's monologue suggests that, because Hally cannot take his anger out on his own father, he chooses to redirect it onto Sam and continue his ancestors' legacy of racial hatred. However, as both the conclusion of the play and Fugard's adult life of anti-apartheid activism suggest (recall that this play is largely autobiographical), hope for a better future is still available if those in positions of power can recognize their own contributions to exploitative systems and instead (like Fugard himself) work towards their dismantling.

After the fallout from Hally's emotional outburst, Sam offers that they "try again… hope for better weather tomorrow" and learn from their mistakes (Fugard 59). In this way, with his lived experience serving as an authentic example, Fugard attempts to leave his audience with an impression that epistemic prejudice and violence can be overcome with compassion and a willingness to learn. However, the multifarious interpersonal repercussions that colonially rooted systems of racial oppression inflict on their subjects

and their social relations, as revealed in the characters' dialogue, indicates the complexity of the problems at hand. While Fugard's play is designed to unequivocally reveal the ugliness of white racism while simultaneously offering hope for more progressive South African race relations, such progress (to use Hally's word) is unlikely to materialize without surpassing some form of a culminating threshold. Hally's outburst towards Sam, when looked at in these terms, might be understood as a representation of the breaking point that is needed to achieve Fugard's utopian hope for the South African state. In some respects, "*Master Harold*" might be read as a plea for others in positions of racial privilege to learn from their mistakes and strive for ideological advancement before violent revolution becomes necessary—especially for those who were living contemporaneously in South Africa. Finally, the intergenerational emphasis in Fugard's play lends perhaps one last interpretive dimension. Hally's youth, and thus his potential for growth and change when compared to his father, may be viewed as Fugard's challenge for the nation's youth to rise to their responsibility as inheritors of their forebears' mistakes and make choices that favour Hally's "progress." His play therefore represents an ambitious but hopeful call to younger generations to work for a better collective future. That said, for a twenty-first century audience or readership, the analysis offered here has ideally satisfied Jameson's call for historicization in literary scholarship and provided a more holistic interpretive approach to Fugard's text. This discussion will have preferably contributed more insight to the ways in which intergenerational discursive, racial, and physical violence become self-perpetuating in colonial oppressor-oppressed social systems, and further demonstrated the influential power of literature as a mode of social criticism and discourse.

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Black Words and White Space: How Cheryl Foggo's Pourin' Down Rain *Claims a New Understanding of the Canadian West*

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Black Words and White Space: How Cheryl Foggo's *Pourin' Down Rain* Claims a New Understanding of the Canadian West

The subtitle to Cheryl Foggo's autobiographical work *Pourin' Down Rain* is *A Black Woman Claims Her Place in the Canadian West*. In "Nothing's Shocking: Black Canada," Katherine McKittirck argues that Black presence is continuously perceived as shocking or unexpected by non-Black settlers in Canada because it contradicts the Eurocentric history that Canada continues to tout as its true past. The Prairies are a space where Black presence is considered particularly shocking due to the whitewashed canon of literature emerging out of the region, even though "the prairies is the *second* most densely populated black region in Canada" as of 2016 (*The Black Prairie Archives* 22). Using the narrative form of a memoir, Foggo archives Blackness in the Canadian Prairies, revealing a repressed Black history in the "White West," and illuminating how the historical and current ideological space of the Prairies is constructed out of Whiteness ("Black Civility" 85). *Pourin' Down Rain* disrupts, challenges, and claims space for Blackness in the Canadian West by remapping the region as an area inextricably linked to Blackness.

Autobiography is a narrative form that allows for the most freedom for archiving Blackness, and especially geographical Blackness, because it allows Black people to explore their relationship to Blackness in the context of their lived spaces. In *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, Joanne Braxton argues that "the archetypal patterns and narrative concerns established in early [Black female] autobiographies renew themselves in contemporary works" (13). One of these patterns is the "maturation of consciousness parallel[ing] geographical movement," which can be traced all the way back to slave narratives, as geographical displacement brought about social and cultural displacement (186). It is important to note that *Black Women Writing Autobiography* only really looks at Black women from the United States, but because Foggo's family lived in the U.S. for some time and she has American descendants, an analysis of this literary lineage still applies to Foggo's memoir. Foggo's maturation is inextricably tied to geographical

location in *Pourin' Down Rain*. Her memoir spans from Calgary, where she grew up, to her mother's home in Regina and her grandparents' home in Manitoba. In fact, Foggo first notices the way "Black people [...] use language" to code-switch by "listening to [her family speak] when they were together in the security of their parents' home" (Foggo 16-7). Her grandparents' home acts as a transformative setting for her own understanding of Blackness and its relationship to the space surrounding it. Foggo traces her way across the Canadian Prairie provinces as she grows up and the movement between these geographical locations helps her make sense of her life.

Another aspect of Foggo's memoir that stems from this literary lineage is one even more particular to Black women's stories: an emphasis on community and family. As Foggo grows older, she writes that she has "begun to see [her] family as a group of people with a shared history that bore a great deal of influence on the life that [she] was leading" (75). Her life is in constant conversation with the lives of her family members. Unlike in male slave narratives, where Black men are more readily able to represent themselves as solitary heroes, female slave narratives tend to celebrate the collective contribution to freedom. This characteristic is due to the fact that enslaved women were more connected to the home and to childcare, meaning that they already existed in a collective. Likewise, these stories often include "the female slave (or former slave) trying to protect her family and create a hearth and home for them" (Braxton 16). This pattern is extended in "the postemancipation accounts of slaves" (Braxton 40), where "the central concerns for family and self-sufficiency do not cease but extend the ideal of service to one's community, state, and nation." *Pourin' Down Rain* is Cheryl Foggo's story, but her journey is one that brings her family's stories to light, thus participating in a movement to claim a wider history of Blackness in the Canadian West. She is creating a home for her relations in a space that has discounted the existence of Blackness and, more explicitly, its continued entry into this space. *Pourin' Down Rain* documents the presence of Blackness through a central concern for the family, the collective, and the self.

Foggo's incorporation of photographs is significant to documenting Blackness in her text. When Black communities are no longer visible, photographs become a way of reclaiming visibility and resituating space. In "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument," Okwui Enwezor explains how photography is considered both "the archival record" and "documentary evidence" (12). Photography

is immediate evidence of existence: the viewer is presented with the material reality of an image's subject. Photographs inform the reader of Foggo's age at the time of certain traumatic events. A photograph of young Foggo accompanies the story of the time she is first called the racial slur n––, captioned: "Me around the time of the experience I described to Sharon" (Foggo 38). Including this visual produces a visceral reaction because it compels readers to confront the tragic reality of a little Black girl being expected to navigate racism, which invokes sympathy in the reader. Aside from documentings the existence of its subjects, photography also serves as a way of understanding the time and place in which a photo was taken. Photographs substantiate the information communicated in writing, conveying the exact appearance of the house owned by Foggo's mother on Ottawa Street, and confirming that her Canadian ancestors were successful enough to wear nice suits. The photographs of Foggo and her family in various locations across the Canadian Prairies and the United States visually supplement her memoir's objective of claiming a place for Blackness within these spaces. Photographs add to Foggo's written narrative, but their function extends beyond their role as visual aids that merely complement the text. Rather, the images serve as evidence that she and her family existed in a particular way, lived within specific places, and left their mark on these spaces.

Aside from incorporating visual media into her written memoir as an alternative narrative technique, Foggo also employs oral storytelling to construct a counter-narrative: a narrative that contrasts the way history is typically recorded. Oral storytelling counters the written form of *Pourin' Down Rain,* and the inclusion of orality is vital to Foggo's memoir because it is the method through which Foggo learns her family's history. Foggo's understanding of her family history largely comes from her Great Aunt Daisy, whose recordkeeping, in the form of handwritten manuscript pages, provides the basis for the recorded conversations between the two relations. These recorded conversations, in turn, provide the information that Foggo organises into her published memoir. History has long privileged written records over oral histories, but Foggo combines the two methods, shaping the written form of her work out of an oral tradition. Foggo describes how Great Aunt Daisy brings the family history to life through oral storytelling:

> Rather than simply saying, "Father walked all the way to Arkansas from Texas," [Daisy] would say, "Papa travelled on, walkin' in that heat and the dust until the shoes was just rags on his feet."

> She would draw the word "rags" out for several beats and then cut off sharply on the word "feet." In this way, after seeing the overworked leather of the shoes, it was very easy to see the rest of the man [...] She would retell an encounter so that you could see the speakers and know just how black that man's face was [...]. (100)

The way Daisy tells a story speaks its characters into existence and allows that existence to survive. Foggo incorporates oral tradition into her text, and shows how incorporating the rhythms and cadences of spoken language can effectively enhance written meaning. She archives her family's history in a way that recognizes oral storytelling's role in its survival, countering the written word's hegemony within the archive.

Oral storytelling is also significant to reclaiming space. In "When Place Becomes Race," Sherene Razack refers to the sense of individualism that the Age of Enlightenment brought, defining the enlightened individual as: "the subject who maps his space and thereby knows and controls it" (12). As they map their geographical space and understand who and what is there in relation to themselves, they create a new subjectivity closely tied to the control they have over their space. In "Talk that Talk: Storytelling and Analysis Rooted in African American Oral Tradition," JoAnne Banks-Wallace claims that during the time of American slavery, "Storytelling provided an opportunity for enslaved people to commit to memory the language, sights, sounds, smells, and textures of their homeland. It also provided a means of [...] learning more about their new environment" (Banks-Wallace 412-13). Oral storytelling is closely related to how one remembers space and how one navigates the feeling of existing in a certain space. Foggo writes that "When [Daisy] remembered the Saskatchewan River that rolled through the countryside near her father's homestead, [Foggo] saw its banks, crowded with poplars that reached out over the water. [She] heard the rush and lap of the water beneath the shouts of the semi-naked Black children of the settlement who fished and hung from the trees" (Foggo 95). Oral storytelling brings characters to life, and fills the space around them with life, establishing their sense of control over their space. Incorporating traditional Black oral storytelling helps map the space where Foggo's family has been in order to claim their place in these lands.

Finally, *Pourin' Down Rain* can be understood as a counterstory in the way it resists the white ideological space of the Prairies. Karina Vernon states, "the prairies—more than any other region in Canada—has been imagined into being through a particular archive of writing," within the realist tradition, which

is "read as representative of the prairies' regional essence" (*The Black Prairie Archives* 16). Prairie realism presents a particular image of Prairie life, often focusing on the harsh, flat geography and how it informs its peoples' cultures and characters—an image dominated by the white perspective. In her book *Looking Back: Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History, and Identity*, Leigh Matthews explores the memoirs of Canadian Prairie women from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to broaden the cultural and historical understanding of settlement in this part of Western Canada. These memoirs, though, are all written by white women, which Matthews touches on when deconstructing the image of the Prairie Woman. Matthews states: "The white, English-speaking Prairie Woman image [...] assumes a precise correspondence between the label itself and some culturally understood meaning that does not often allow for differences in experience, whether those differences are accounted for by personality, cultural background, class, geography, marital background, etc." (Matthews 3). Differences in race, although not explicitly stated here, are obviously not included in the white Prairie Woman image. *Pourin' Down Rain*, while a nonfiction text, contradicts the dominant literary representation of the Prairies and the figure of the Prairie Woman by claiming a place for Blackness in this geographical and ideological space.

More specifically, *Pourin' Down Rain* opposes the common trope of Prairie isolation in Prairie stories. In *Migration and Mental Health: Past and Present*, Marjory Harper notes, "Isolation was a dislocating phenomenon for prairie settlers" (Harper 117). Notable Western Canadian author, Nellie McClung, writes about Prairie isolation in her fiction. As Harper describes, "the land itself was a harsh protagonist, wearing down the human spirit. The vast expanse of the prairie and the long distances between homesteads created a profound sense of isolation" (138). Foggo mentions the settler conditions in her own family's history that characterise Prairie isolation in white narratives, such as the harsh land, the rough climate, and the challenges of establishing a homestead and a farm. Among these trials and tribulations, though, there is an emphasis on community, not isolation. When listening to her Great Aunt Daisy narrate what Autumn of 1916 was like on the homestead, Foggo describes it as "a time for communion with neighbours, baseball, feasts, [and] barn-raisings" (Foggo 114). The story of her family on the Prairies is a story of survival in a new land, but this survival is not a solitary confinement experience. *Pourin' Down Rain* is a story of collective survival, of survival *through* the collective, and in this way, it challenges this key isolationist aspect of the

dominant literary representation of the Canadian Prairies.

Additionally, any isolation that Foggo and her family experience is due to the cultural and political landscape, not the geographical one. This landscape is political particularly in the sense that it was the Government of Canada's own actions that restricted the number of Black people who migrated to the Canadian West. Foggo's family migrated to the Canadian Prairie provinces from Oklahoma between 1910 and 1912, during a period of massive African American migration from the southern United States to the Canadian Prairies. This migration lasted until the Canadian government started discouraging African American migration to Canada in response to complaints from its white citizens. Foggo describes that when Black immigration slowed after her family arrived in Canada, they realised "it would be a struggle for their community just to survive, let alone be an example of Black success and racial harmony to the rest of the world" (110). The political landscape threatened the survival of their community. Likewise, Foggo experiences isolation as a result of the Canadian government's decision to discourage Black settlers from migrating to Canada. Foggo's sense of isolation comes from growing up in an area without a larger Black community. When she was in high-school, Foggo "began to retreat from what [she] perceived to be 'White culture'" (52). As a result of this, "[her] social circle was drastically pared down" (52). She became more isolated in her predominantly white high-school community due to her perceived indulgence in her Blackness, and she resented the way she was "raised in isolation from other Blacks" (52). A sense of isolation on the Prairies exists for Foggo and her family, but not in the same way that it does in white Prairie narratives. Rather than the geographical landscape being blamed for this isolation, this isolation is the result of the cultural and political landscape, of being Black in a predominantly white space.

Understanding how isolation appears differently in Black and white narratives ultimately reveals how Blackness and whiteness are treated differently within a space. In *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*, Radhika Mohanram states that this difference is: "First, [that] whiteness has the ability to move; second, [that] the ability to move results in the unmarking of the body. In contrast, blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing" (Mohanram 4). During the Oklahoma migration in which Foggo's ancestors immigrated to Canada, Black people had the ability to move until the Canadian government actively discouraged their movement. However, it is also important to note that

while Canada's land advertisement efforts in America played a role in this migration—with the goal of having immigrants settle the Prairies for the benefit of the nation state—Black people were also moving in response to escalating racial violence in the United States and Oklahoma's decision to strip them of voter rights (Foggo 105). The kind of movement that has motivated Black migration in North America, from the transatlantic slave trade, to the plantation slave trade that uprooted Foggo's ancestors in America and compelled their ultimate escape to Canada, is a violent and racialized movement against the Black body. Blackness can barely move, and the little inch it can budge erases it from its previous space. Blackness is made to disappear in targeted and violent ways: geographies mapped by white settlers will always struggle to be white, decimating whatever colour they need to in order to maintain this whiteness. *Pourin' Down Rain* resists this erasure by tracing Blackness through spaces that have tried to push it out.

In conclusion, Cheryl Foggo's *Pourin' Down Rain* uses memoir to archive Blackness in, and challenge the ideological space of, the Canadian Prairies. Her story contributes to a legacy of Black womens' autobiography, and it uses alternative narrative techniques that counter the way history is expected to be archived, and the way Blackness is perceived to exist. *Pourin' Down Rain* challenges the dominant literary representation of the Canadian West by claiming a place for Blackness in the Western Canadian literary canon. If the Prairies continue to be conceptualised as a white space, then it will be harder for Blackness to exist there; if people do not expect a certain group to exist in a space, no effort will be made to make the space liveable for that community. This reason alone necessitates a shift in our perception of who populates Western Canada, and for stories, like Foggo's, that archive this existence to become part of the region's literary canon. *Pourin' Down Rain* reconfigures the white space through its Black words, showing its readers that Blackness is not something that just happens to be in Western Canada, but that Western Canada *is* Black.

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Poetic Space of Intimacy and Movement: Re-Imagining the White Space of the Page in the Erasure Poetry of Carolyn Thompson, Sonja Johanson, and Lisa Huffaker

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Poetic Space of Intimacy and Movement: Re-Imagining the White Space of the Page in the Erasure Poetry of Carolyn Thompson, Sonja Johanson, and Lisa Huffaker

The blank space of the page has been widely regarded as a fundamental aspect of both identifying and reading poetry. Often, it is the exaggeration of blank or empty space surrounding poetic lines which first signals to readers that a poem is indeed a poem. In recent years, discussions about how to read these blank spaces have circulated and these spaces are often read as vital indications of silence or absence. However, the expanded field of writing—which has exploded throughout the contemporary era, expanding on avant-garde experiments in mixing media and pushing the boundaries of several distinct art forms—has seen poems, poetry collections, and artists' books which transform blank space. These new experimental works fill the spaces around language with illustrations, collages, and found objects, or in some cases, exaggerate the emptiness of the page by indicating that words are blocked out or by cutting out the page altogether. A glance at Carolyn Thompson, Sonja Johanson, and Lisa Huffaker's use of reductive or additive methods of erasure demonstrates how space surrounding the poem can be re-imagined to not only re-envision pre-existing texts but also to transform the role of poetic blank space. Through looking at Thompson's *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* and *The Eaten Heart*, Johnson's *Untitled* Erasure poem series, and Huffaker's "6 Images," this paper explores the possibility of reading blank space, not as silence or absence but instead as areas for action and intimacy.

While the blank spaces of the page are often read as silences or emptiness, these three writers invert this interpretation, redefining poetic blank spaces as evoking either action or sensuality. These *experiences* of the text are both widely accessible and transformed by individual readers. Furthermore, each of these three writers uses methods from the expanded field of writing which involve a series of techniques and materials usually considered untraditional for practices of writing. Thompson's purely reactive methods

of creating erasure differ from the additive techniques used by Johanson and Huffaker, as well as how the physical alterations of source texts bring about separate meanings based on the creative process. The transformation of these poetic spaces causes the texts to be read and experienced in new ways which are dependent on mis-en-page[1]. Michel Foucault discusses the notion of the book itself as an experience in an interview which has been recorded in the collection *Power*. Here, Foucault states, "for me my books are experiences… An experience is something that one comes out of transformed" (Foucault 239). He then goes on to describe the act of writing *Madness and Civilization* while considering general reader reactions to the text, explaining that his readership had a particular kind of experience with that text. Foucault writes, "An experience is something that one has completely alone but can fully have only to the extent that it escapes pure subjectivity and that others can also—I won't say repeat it exactly, but at least encounter it—and go through it themselves" (Foucault 245), essentially defining "experience" as simultaneously isolating and social encounters. Fundamentally, "In the book, the relationship with experience should make possible a transformation, a metamorphosis, that is not just [the writer's] but can have a certain value, a certain accessibility for others, so that the experience is available for others to have" (Foucault 244).

In a similar vein, multi-modal artist and poet Amaranth Borsuk writes in *The Book*, "Whether the volume in question is a travel guide or a romance novel, the perception that books are the same as little worlds enclosed in covers remains the same. We think of ourselves as disappearing into them only to emerge hours later, changed by what we have read" (Borsuk 84). Borsuk also describes the book "as a love token or symbol of great kinship: *Here, I loved this, and I think you'll love this too*" (Borsuk 84). Although unlike the object of the book which can be held and circulated through physical interaction, the texts discussed in this paper are encountered digitally, the quality of immersion which Borsuk points to is essential to the way that the texts are read. Regardless of how the text is circulated the notion that literary works embody within themselves some form of intimacy and some capacity for human connection is vital to considering physical indications of intimacy on the page. Traditionally, the intimacy in reading and sharing a text, despite the physical transaction of the text, is entirely psychological. However, texts which emphasize their material qualities draw attention to the fact that these intimacies between the reader and textual object are physical as much as they are psychological and emotional. Like Foucault, Borsuk describes the reading

1 The layout of the page or arrangement of the text.

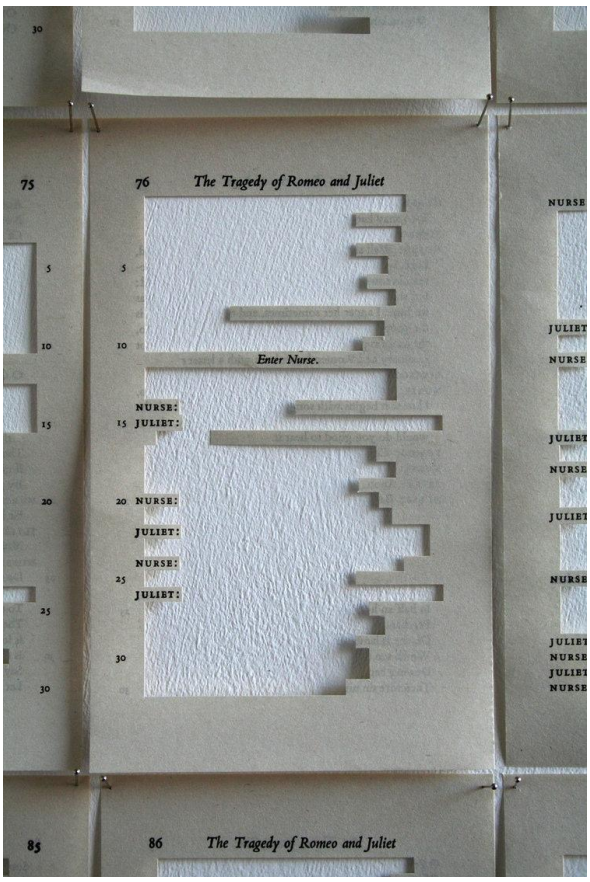
experience as simultaneously individual and social (84). Although Borsuk's discussion of the social function of texts relies on the notion that the text is transportable and shareable, her depiction of the book as a 'little world' implies a sense of shared or mutually accessed experience. To discuss the material elements of the text, such as the materiality of poetic blank or surrounding space, involves recognizing that texts initiate similar experiences amongst members of a vast audience while still also resonating differently with separate individuals—this is, in fact, the very feature which creates intimacy between text and reader. The nature of the transformations of blank space in Thompson, Johanson, and Huffaker's work all add an element of intimacy through an added emphasis on bodily interaction (an element which is signaled through visual cues and subject matter rather than physically initiated) by incorporating physical gaps, gentle textures, and natural elements or by initiating physical movement.

It is essential to frame Thompson, Johanson, and Huffaker's work in light of Erasure poetry as a genre. Erasure poetry involves a method of using found text and then redacting the text using a variety of different tactics and techniques. As a form, it involves the use of either additive or reductive methods to cut away at a source text, leaving behind fresh poetic lines and word combinations; it is a genre which fundamentally involves revisioning and adaptation. The very existence of this genre invites new approaches to revisioning and adaptation at large, prompting readers to consider how they might physically interact with a text through a simultaneously creative and destructive process. In addition to each of the poems explored in this paper being erasure works, the use of the page to emphasise the material qualities of the text aligns with the tradition of artist's books. An artist's book, as defined by Joanna Drucker, is "a book created as an original work of art, rather than a reproduction of pre-existing work… it is a book which integrates the formal means of its realisation and production with its thematic or aesthetic issues" (2). Furthermore, "an artist's book should be a work by an artist self-conscious about the book form, rather than merely a highly artistic book" (21). Each of these genres, whether distinct or combined, emphasise the materiality of the text as a fundamental aspect of the reading experience.

These forms not only prioritize materiality but also simultaneously highlight the creative process involved in constructing the physical texts. Often, the way a work is made signifies an essential aspect of how it is read; the areas in which material interventions and emphasis on the creative process come together

fill the spaces surrounding text with new meaning. The texts, which include the remaining pieces of their source material and entirely new poems in-and-of-themselves are read in light of the spaces surrounding them. The artistic use of the book or of individual pages as a medium serves as a method for augmenting a text's meaning, while the act of erasure becomes a means of re-envisioning pre-existing texts.

Carolyn Thompson's 2007 piece, *Actions Speak Louder Than Words*, uses Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as its source text and applies erasures through the use of a scalpel that physically cuts away vast areas of the original. In this series, rather than creating new poetic lines using fragments of the pre-existing text, as is most commonly seen in works of Erasure, Thompson cuts out all dialogue from Shakespeare's play. What remains of *Romeo and Juliet* is only speaker names and stage directions, implying the presence and actions of characters but removing their voices. Thompson describes *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* on her website: "By replacing the text with negative space, the work examines the ability to communicate on an intimate level, without the use of words, and the inadequacies of language as a means by which to describe emotion" (Thompson 2007). Here, the source text is essential to deriving this meaning and does so on multiple levels. Both the canonical significance of the source text *Romeo and Juliet* and the pre-existing literary tradition of genres like the sonnet, which inform the structure of the dialogues in *Romeo and Juliet*, contribute to how Thompson's re-visioning can be both interpreted and experienced.



A page from Actions Speak Louder Than Words.

Romeo and Juliet is itself a text which has widely set the standard conventions for romantic tragedies and so, the themes of expressing love as well as physical intimacy are embedded within Thompson's piece due to public conceptions of the source text. Additionally, the dialogue of *Romeo and Juliet* (which makes up the

areas which have been cut out of Thompson's re-visioning) is informed by pre-existing poetic conventions. For example, amongst these dialogues, there are several interactions between Romeo and Juliet which are written as sonnets (such as the scene when the couple first meets). These sections of the dialogue follow the fourteen-line structure and feature three stanzas of four lines rhymed A-B-A-B, followed by a rhyming couplet. These English sonnets, which are variations of the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, re-imagine but allude to a tradition of the sonnet form being used to describe tales of unrequited love. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the sonnet continues to be used to signal a tragic romance—one which is not unrequited but interrupted, prevented, and combatted due to circumstance.

Essentially, while the text *Romeo and Juliet* is a play which has helped to establish conventions of romantic tragedy, the form of the dialogue in and of itself plays with pre-existing conventions in order to convey its themes and messages. In Thompson's artist book, the removal of the dialogue, along with its poetic conventions and formations, resist the conventions used to express verbal intimacy. However, rather than leaving the white space of the page which might easily signal a silencing of the characters, the physicality of Thompson's intervention in the text implicates the body into the narrative. The visually or physically perceived cut-outs combined with the title *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* prioritise the *act* of love rather than *declarations* of it. Acts of affection are both legible and illegible within the text, as they are implied but not written. Through this implication of ongoing action, the text provides an argument that physical affection between lovers is more impactful than any form of language.

Another work of Thompson's which uses erasure is *The Eaten Heart* (2013). Unlike *Actions Speak Louder Than Words*, this text features pages layered on top of one another as though the book is closed, rather than individual pages pulled apart and displayed side by side. On Thompson's website, the piece is called an "adaptation" of Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Eaten Heart: Unlikely Tales of Love* (a story which is featured within *The Decameron*). The source text, which has been manipulated using a scalpel, is one tale told within a series of stories surrounded by a framing narrative (the tale of several youth who come together to tell stories during the black plague). The text fundamentally combines conflicting issues related to bodily experience and sensations: love and sensuality, as well as death and illness. Likewise, the text is both somatic and sensual, dissecting the body but transforming what might be a bleak biological list into

something poetic. However, all that remains of the original novel is a collection of words related to the body such as "corpse," "bosom," "fingers," and "hair" (Thompson 2013).

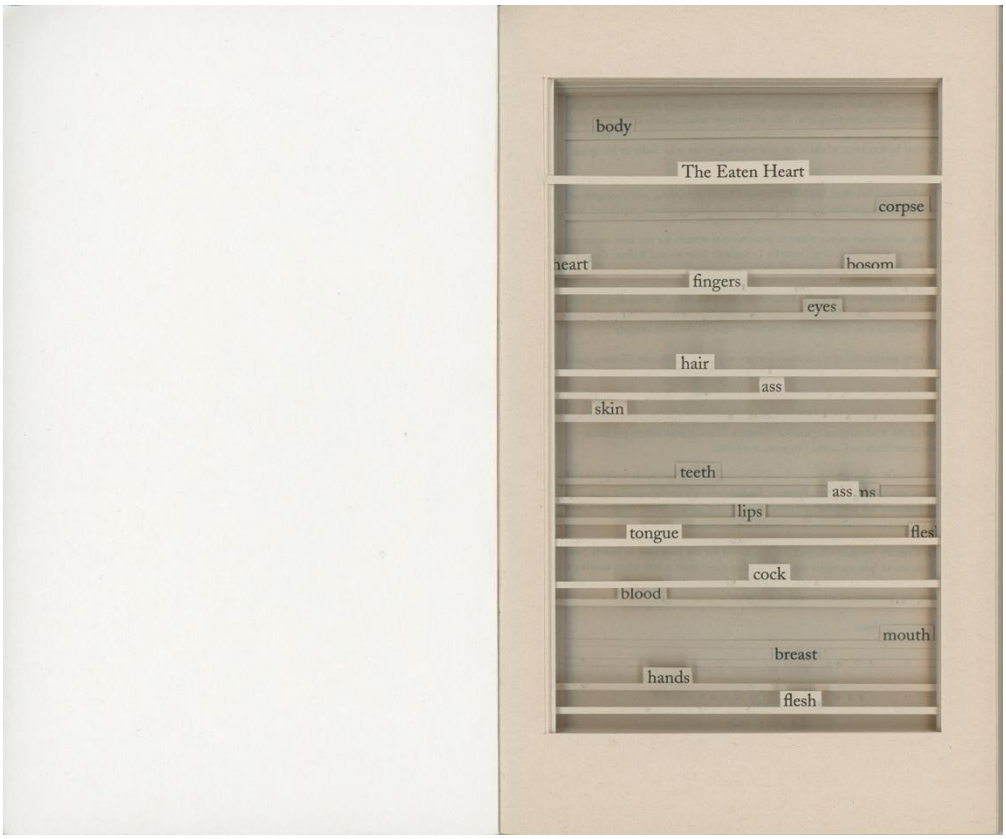


Image of The Eaten Heart.

Thompson's website explains, "By removing these words from their context and grouping them, their significance changes dramatically. The piece celebrates the abundant innuendo in Boccaccio's text" (Thompson 2013). The book itself becomes a body and the framing elements of the page hold the text together like a human skeleton or perhaps flesh. This piece effectively functions as an artist's book, drawing attention to the book as a medium while also using the material elements of the book to signify the text as *having* a body. In this way, the empty crevasses of the text become an element of the body, mimicking somatic curves, crevasses, holes, and gaps. Here, the book can be imagined as a body which is being dissected or discovered. This quality gives the poem a certain eerie and uncanny sensuality.

In an article on reductive techniques used in prose-narrative, Martin Paul Eve writes, "in following the surface-reading invitation of a literary redaction, we use [the] surrounding textual contexts as though they were cartographic metadata that give texture and depth to seemingly blank surfaces. To read

redactions on the surface is to accept an invitation to explore the deep, using the available contexts, be they historical and symptomatic or otherwise" (331). In this instance, the surrounding context comes from both the material interventions and the content of the source texts. Each of these works by Thompson uses open space to insert the human body into the text. The palpability of the empty and open space adds a tactile dimension to the space of the page, making the absences *physical*. If the open spaces within the book are read as somatic gaps, such as the crevasses and curves which exist in the forms of human bodies, then these gaps mimic the open spaces within and around bodies which can be felt and experienced through acts of affection or intimacy. Furthermore, Thompson plays with literary convention to insert these intimate possibilities within the texts by borrowing texts, which have defined lasting conventions of romance within popular consciousness and immediately signal to readers the themes she hopes to engage.

In a similar vein, Sonja Johanson reimagines Anne Rice's horror novel *Taltos* in her *Untitled* series of erasure poems[2]. The series evokes "consideration of the breakneck speed of climate change and globalisation easily observed by those working in horticulture and conservation" by combining the context of the horror novel with elements of the natural world to suggest an intervention from the earth (Johanson). In this way, wildlife becomes a collaborator within the series and this notion is reflected in the larger communal nature of the series' conception. As Johanson explains on her website, "In this way, wildlife becomes a collaborator within the series, and this notion is reflected in the larger communal nature of the series' conception." Johanson further states that,

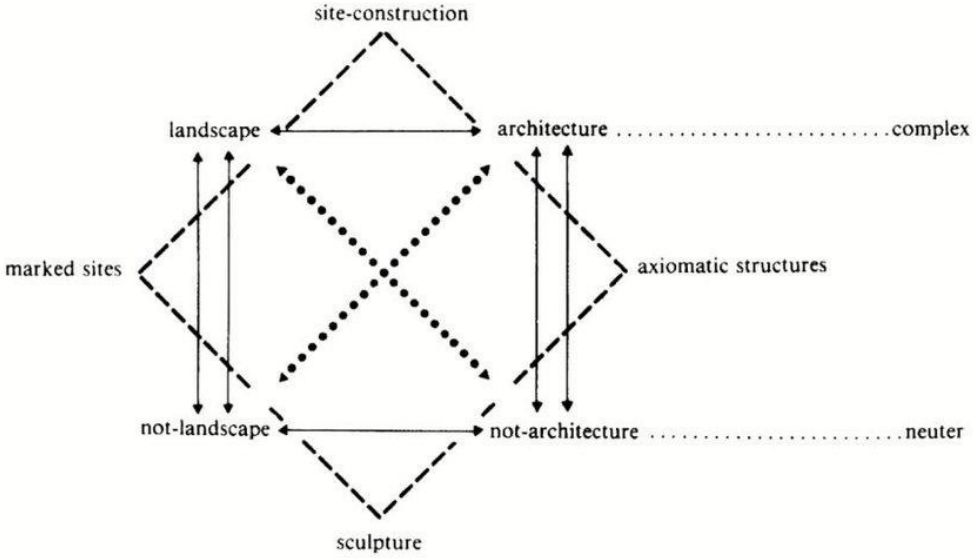
> This series of plant-based erasures was developed as part of the Poeming, a found poetry project which takes place in October. Participants are assigned a novel in the horror genre and use the text to create one found poem each day of the month. Found poetry forms include erasure, pastiche/remix, and cento.

Within the layering of plants, seeds, bark, grass, and other natural elements over the source text, it is the intersection of the material and textual elements which signal the subject of climate change, using the mix of horror and the sense of intimate collaborations with nature to evoke both affection and fear.

2 The poems discussed here are all referenced from Johanson's website on which several links are listed which each lead to several poems. The poems are published across several literary magazines, each of which uses separate methods of documenting the work and therefore the naming of individual poems/pages may be inconsistent in this paper as well.

Johanson's use of natural elements mainly consists of plants and adds an element of texture to the poems. Although the poems are experienced as two-dimensional images accessed through the internet, the signalled softness, observed layering, and perceived ridges of the plants all become part of how the poems are read. The physical quality of multi-modal works such as this one, alludes to a connection between the elements of poetry and sculpture. In his article "Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on *The Art of Sculpture*, 1956," David J. Getsy explains Herbert Read's argument that "Sculpture was not just an artform to be looked at; it was meant to be *felt*, with and through one's own experience of embodiment" (105). Recognizing the obvious and numerous limitations created by boundaries between a given viewer and the object of the sculpture, Getsy clarifies that "Sculpture does invoke the sense of touch—as well as our sense of space in general—but it does so primarily through the sense of sight and the tactile associations of which that sense is capable" (112). The notion that palpability can be signalled through the sense of sight is relevant not only to sculpture but also to visual art and multi-modal poetry, which use signalled palpability or texture to create meaning.

When thinking about how theorising sculptural elements might contribute to reading practices in the expanded field, considering the expanded field of sculpture proves helpful. In an article titled, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Rosalind Kraus discusses the difficulty of categorising contemporary three-dimensional works as sculpture: "if sculpture itself had become a kind of ontological absence, the combination of exclusions, the sum of neither/nor, that does not mean that the terms themselves from which it was build—the *not-landscape* and the *not-architecture*—did not have certain interest" (36-7). She later goes on to expand the exclusions, adding to the definition of sculpture categories like *not-landscape* (Kraus 36). Like such sculptures, Johanson's poems work to signal that which it is not-exactly; for instance, landscape is signalled, physical structure is signalled, and sculptural elements such as attention to material and palpitation are signalled.



Example of one of Kraus's diagrams to define what is sculpture using negative associations (i.e., by defining what is not sculpture).

Johanson's work uses the two-dimensional field of the page to transform the literary text into an environment. Although the text is not a sculpture, Johanson mimics the effect of signalling palpability in her erasure poems. If the traditional use of blank space surrounding text can be thought of as a way of providing structure to poetry, then transforming this space through additional material elements accentuates a pre-existing relationship between shared elements of sculpture and poetry. Both sculpture and poetry are recognisable through structural elements, use visual cues to signal palpability (even when it is emptiness or a surrounding void that creates this palpability), and each evoke a sense of environment which is either created or transformed by the content of the art piece. This shared quality is tangibly emphasised through the addition of three-dimensional materials to the page. Of course, the object of the page in Johanson's series can only be perceived two-dimensionally through photography. This aspect does not remove the sense of an evoked palpability but adds a sense of the original object's ephemeral nature. The erasure poem's ephemerality, which is bound to fade away as the natural objects decay, only further instils within the work an impending sense of doom in relation to climate change. This foreboding feeling is further heightened due to the sense of intimacy between the plants, the author, and the readers.

Conceptualising touch as something which is sensed through sight evokes the issue of superficial engagement. The text's use of natural materials might convey the softness of elements and an engagement with poetic conventions (such as the pastoral or tropes of plant metaphors). This becomes apparent from

only a surface level reading of the image of any given page. In an afterword titled "Three Superficial Thoughts on Surfaces" written for Eric Schmaltz's visual poetry collection *Surfaces*, Joseph Mosconi discusses the quality of superficiality in order to unpack and resist its negative associations. Quoting the visual artist Thomas Hirschhorn, Mosconi writes, "superficiality is not negative … Superficiality is the condition for a real engagement because if there is no engagement on the surface, there cannot be a profound engagement. To go deeply into something, I must at first begin with its surface" (qtd. in Schmaltz). Likewise, a superficial engagement evokes senses of intimacy and ephemerality. These emotions are created initially through the senses, through the perceived delicacy of the natural objects displayed on the fragile pages of the text. There is something instantly precious about the piece's aesthetic elements, and yet its fragility creates a sense of approaching doom or sorrow for the object's temporality. Intimacy is further created through such superficial engagements due to the noticeable pen and pencil markings on the pages which make the writing or creating process clearly observable to onlookers.

Beyond an initial glance at the page, the language in each of the poems describes a sensual relationship between the earth and the humans who interact with it. In one poem made from the 20th page of *Taltos* which begins, "he had / forgotten / the river," and ends, "He pictured / floods / which so often saved him," and which uses the addition of bracken fern to create erasures, the human subject is engaged in an emotional relationship with the element of water (Johanson). In another poem ["knowing that"], the lines "I longed to / touch / crumbling / parchment," combine desire with domestic materials. However, the diction of the poem is juxtaposed with thin, delicate, paper-like leaves which cover the poem making the reference to "Crumbling / parchment" a sign of human intervention in the natural world. In yet another poem, made using page 120 of the source text, the combination

of eastern white pine leaves with the lines "Resurrection / all around" accentuate the religious and spiritual associations with resurrection (which is often connected with Christian stories about the resurrection of Christ or generally with notions of redemption) through the rebirth of plants and wildlife as a result of the transition from winter to spring. Each of the poems mix references to natural elements and deeply emotional language dealing with subjects such as death, spirituality, and desire. All of these meanings, which might be derived once one reads closely and considers the text with more depth, are already initially present in a surface-level reading due to the visual cues created within the spaces surrounding the text. Like the blank space of a white page, plant life is a fundamental element of the poem, and in this instance, these spaces create the initial point of contact for meaningful human engagement with nature.

Unlike Johanson's work, which features a collaboration between additive intervention and the remaining text and imagines the two as working together, Huffaker's "6 Images" is engaged in a far more antagonistic relationship with its source text. Huffaker is explicitly aware of the act of erasure as a method of writing *against* the original text. In her description of her project she writes,

> *Fascinating Womanhood* was self-published in 1963 by Helen Andelin… Reacting against 2nd wave feminism with a gospel of self-limitation, infantilized "femininity," and doting dependence upon men, the book became the foundation of a well-organized movement spread by thousands of teachers among millions of women. I first encountered the book in the library of a religious institute as a young college girl, inwardly torn between my educational ambitions and the "God given role" I'd been raised by my culture to accept. It was the most demeaning book I'd ever read. I did what I've never done before or since: I defaced the book with the beginnings of a timid rebuttal (in pencil) and returned it to the library shelf… [I] have now returned to this book… Page by page, I am transforming the book into its own counterargument, leaving the words in their original positions on the page, but delineating an alternative reading of the text. My hope is to turn this book into a remedy for its own harms—to make it call forth the very power it was written to repress. (Huffaker).

In addition to her act of mutilating her source text, Huffaker also works by mapping a new pathway through it. Huffaker's introduction of movement to the text becomes an interference which asserts that the source text is not a stable or fixed object but instead might be shifted or rewritten. She does this by

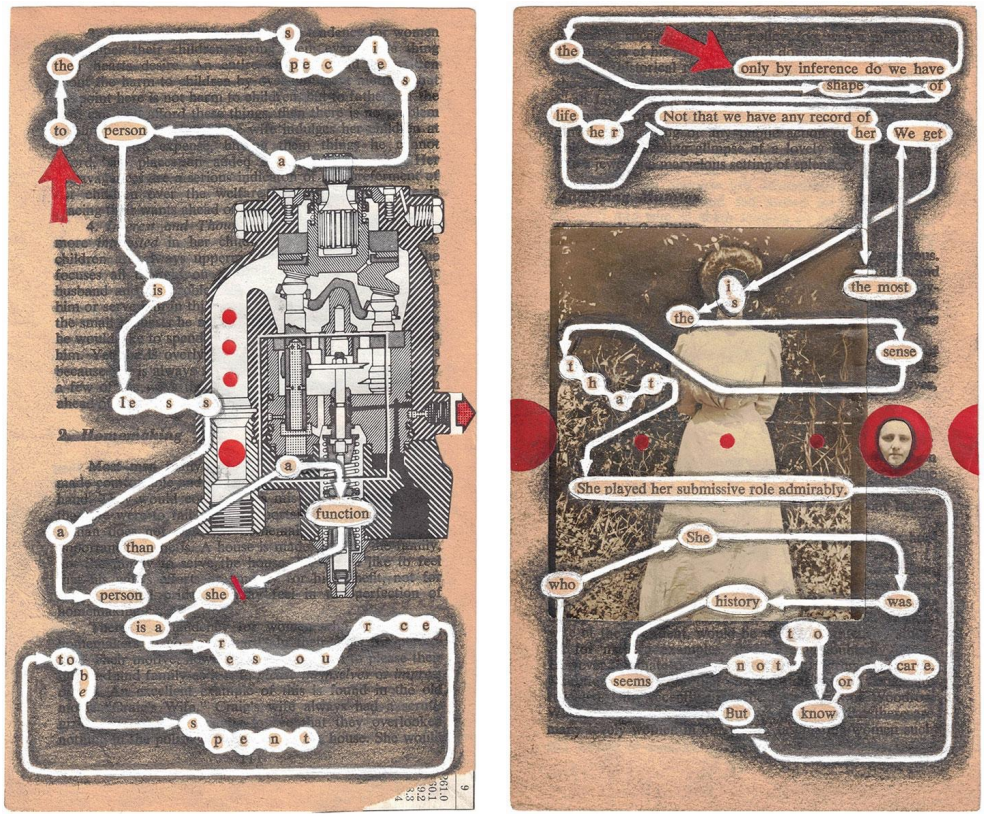
creating curving, swirling, and twisting pathways which move the reader's gaze across the entire field of the page in rollercoaster-like movements. The experience of following the winding paths becomes a practice of traveling through the text in order to trace new pathways and alter the traditional order in which one reads.

It is difficult to decipher these seemingly chaotic and disorderly pathways mapped across the page without recalling works like Guy Debord's *The Naked City* (1957) and the Situationist International's theories regarding psychogeography at large. A psychogeographic mapping of space, such as the one represented by *The Naked City*, involves mapping geographic space based on its emission of emotionally and psychologically perceived energies (Debord 1958). These maps, in the tradition of the Situationists, have been created through a practice of *dérive* which involves "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences" that help when navigating a landscape in untraditional ways (Debord 1958). In his "Theory of Dérive," Debord resists the prioritisation of chance and randomness, writing:

> Progress means breaking through fields where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favourable to our purposes. We can say, then, that the randomness of a dérive is fundamentally different from that of the stroll, but also that the first psychogeographical attractions discovered by dérivers may tend to fixate them around new habitual axes, to which they will constantly be drawn back. (1958)

It is not the randomness of the paths taken through the act of dérive which are important to track and continue, but the mapping of new pathways which will eventually lead to détournement[3], a practice of removing subjects from their ordinary context in order to alter the perception of that object. This practice of re-contextualizing is an essential characteristic of "Unitary Urbanism," which according to Debord, "is defined first of all as the use of all arts and techniques as means contributing to the composition of a unified milieu" (1957). In relation to the arts, Unitary Urbanism "must include both the creation of new forms and the détournement of previous forms of architecture, urbanism, poetry and cinema" (Debord, 1957).

3 détournement" is a term which was defined by the Situationist Internationale, which as mentioned above can be loosely defined as the practice of re-contextualizing (i.e., removing an item from its original context and putting it into an unusual or unfamiliar context). The purpose of détournement is to defamiliarize to create new associations, hence its role in contributing to "unitary urbanism."



The first two images in Huffaker's 6 Images Series.

In accordance with practices of psychogeographic cartography, Huffaker creates new paths through a pre-existing text which in turn produce a radically new textual landscape. In a similar fashion to that of the dérive, Huffaker uses the energies and resonances which exist in *Fascinating Womanhood* to write alternative paths for understanding female existence. In Huffaker's revisioning of the text, she transforms the source text from an earnest document to a satire. Lines including "she / is /a r-e-s-o-u-r-c-e / to / be / spent" or "not that we have record of her / the most / we get / is / the / sense / t-h-a-t / she played her submissive role admirable" (Huffaker), in conjunction with dull tones overlayed with red and images of faceless women or mechanical objects, imbue the text with eeriness. The language and images assign a mechanical and dehumanising quality to the gender roles portrayed while also evoking haunting and horror. If there is intimacy present, it is through the human connections made between text and image, in which female figures become the subjects of pathos but also subjects to evoke connection with the reader. The constant movement in the texts likewise adds to the reading experience, expressing a passionate intervention in the source text by creating speed and immediacy.

Taken in conjunction, the erasure works these three poets create by revisioning their source texts are fundamentally bound in their experimental approach to the blank spaces surrounding the words on the page. Meaning is made in these spaces as much as within the poetic texts. While Thompson's reductive technique—which involves creating physical spaces rather than imagined ones—evokes the body and emphasises physicality, Johanson and Huffaker demonstrate how additive techniques can be used to similar ends. Johanson's use of natural elements transforms the reading of the text, and elements such as palpability and sensual evocation create a sense of intimacy between the reader and natural objects. Comparatively, Huffaker adds movement and re-maps the page as a technique for transforming the source text's genre from theoretical to satire. For these reasons, the reading experience would be profoundly different if the physical interventions within the blank spaces of the page were encountered apart from the language of the text and vice versa. The poetic landscape of the page is re-imagined, so that surrounding space does not merely signal a void, but indicates the human body, thereby inviting action, intimacy, and interaction.

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Dangerous or in Danger? Exploring Safety, Omission, and Beauty in Rebecca Hall's Passing *(2021)*

Mathuri Sivanesan

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Mathuri Sivanesan

Dangerous or in Danger? Exploring Safety, Omission, and Beauty in Rebecca Hall's *Passing* (2021)

Nella Larsen, the American novelist, exposes the complexities of safety and danger for a Black person in her short story *Passing*, raising questions of visibility, invisibility, and the threat that comes with each. Telling the story of two Black women passing as white in 1920s Harlem, Rebecca Hall's 2021 *Passing*, an adaptation of Nella Larsen's 1929 short story, further establishes themes of safety in a visual context and, therefore, experiments with the Black body in both white and Black spaces. Protagonist Irene Redfield, a passing Black woman married to non-passing Black man, lives in Harlem in New York City, and is generally shown in darker shady areas. When reunited with old time friend Clare Bellew, Irene must encounter the tragic consequences of passing. Using lighting, Hall's adaptation explores invisibility as a means of safety and danger, exposing the complexities of *passing* and what is gained and lost in doing so.

After meeting Clare and her ragingly racist husband, Mr. Bellew, at the Bellew residence, Irene and Gertrude share their feelings of endangerment as "anything could have happened" to them even though Clare seems to be "safe" in the Bellew's home (Larsen 45). Irene goes on to solidify Clare as a person who does not "[consider] anyone else's feelings," and Clare later reinforces her own dangerous character. Clare states: "Can't you realize I'm not like you ['Rene] a bit? Why, to get the things I want badly enough, I'd do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away. Really, 'Rene, I'm not safe" (83). This last phrase, "I'm not safe," is striking. Larsen's decision to use "not safe" instead of words like *unsafe* or *dangerous* forebodes Clare's trajectory as a Black woman: her life ends in tragedy despite passing as white and having access to her desires. Larsen's creation rejects the possibility of ever being safe as a Black person, regardless of whether one can pass as white or not, as Clare's character is perceived as *dangerous* and yet is always *in danger.*

In the opening of the film, we see two white women walking into a toy store and then knocking over

a display, at which point Irene enters the screen to help pick up objects (1:36:45). When Irene first comes onto the screen, her body is completely turned away from the camera. Her eyes are hidden by her hat, and the camera continues to follow her, shifting focus from the toys in her hand to her half-concealed face. To be passing means to be contorted, fragmented, and invisible. After leaving the store, Irene witnesses a man who has fainted. Yet she appears in danger as cars speed past her. Additionally, blares of car horns and yelling amongst all sorts of loud, diegetic sounds are heard. Introducing Irene's character while she is "passing," rather than beginning with Clare's letter as in the short story, immediately contextualizes Irene's as a body in danger when in white spaces. In fact, we do not see Irene's full face straight-on until she is no longer visible for subjection by the white gaze while seated in a cab, being driven away from the "danger."

The film reinstates a notion that invisibility yields safety when Irene attends the Drayton Hotel for tea. Irene's face and relaxed composure are only revealed when she knows everyone else in that space is too preoccupied to notice her amongst them. This is visible when she lowers her face when Mr. Bellew passes her on his way out, hiding her full face from his view. However, there is a complete rupture in the practice of invisibility when Irene meets Clare, and "fear [slides]" over Irene (Larsen 17). The film renders this encounter horror-like, with the camera gliding along the dining area only to find Clare staring directly into the camera (1:32:11). This point-of-view shot inserts the viewer into Irene's body, exposing audiences to the dangers of being seen, and to the possibility of being subject to violence as a Black person.

Rebbeca Wanzo's article, *Things You can Tell by Looking*, further elaborates on the racial awareness the viewer is confronted with when watching the film. Wanzo asserts: "Hall's casting choices … never allow audiences to forget they are looking at Black actresses and thus ensure that they 'feel the weight of passing'" (69). Going beyond the audience feeling this "weight" through Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga, the viewers also face the materiality of Black bodies onscreen. Brownlee discusses the ability for film adaptation to provide a "new cultural and social imaginary . . . of the self," in which adaptation allows us "to engage materiality" through the medium of film (166). Along with the importance of casting choices, the mere act of casting Black actors exposes the Black body to material objectification and scrutiny under the white gaze: an objectification that is less immediate and vulnerable through written narratives.

There is a danger when telling Black stories of suffering and trauma, of creating, as Wanzo calls it,

"trauma porn"—a narrative that romanticizes the violence and suffering of Black persons (70). Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, returns to the history of the transatlantic slave trade, in which enslaved Black persons were seen as "human cargo," with the precursor "human" horrifically ironizing their suffering and objectification (55). The category of human then became a racist and exclusive category, with the Black person being historically marked as Other. The extortion and subjection of Black bodies is referred to in the Rhinelander case, which is briefly cited by Irene when considering her decision to hide Clare's true identity from Bellew (Larsen 105). Alice Rhinelander was accused of "having concealed her biracial identity" and was asked by courts to "reveal her shoulders and the tops of her breasts, her back, and her legs to the jury in the judge's chambers" (Wanzo 71). While "Blackness is not written on these body parts," the Black body is still inscribed with cultural notions of race (e.g., demarcation, exploitation, contortion, fragmentation), and is therefore always under the possibility of violence.

Passing refuses to subject the Black body to the white gaze, through the medium of cinema, using aesthetics, or beauty, as a means of "explor[ing] black suffering" rather than glorifying it (Wanzo 69). Beauty in *Passing* becomes a source of ontology—one that rejects conventional epistemologies and instead promotes Black personhood and lived experience (McIntire 778). The film's choice of grayscale allows for the audience to take note of the difference in light rather than difference in colour, thereby allowing for shadows and brightness to emphasise characters' experiences of invisibility as well as vulnerability. Returning to Irene's vulnerability at the film's beginning, the moments where she is in danger, where she experiences a fear of being visible, all happen in well-lit areas. The brightness and beauty of the Drayton, with its abundance of natural lighting, wide open landscape, and white tablecloths, invoke vulnerability for Irene rather than a safety of being in broad daylight. The use of light at the Drayton makes Clare's stare more menacing because Irene is fully visible here. We get another moment of danger in a well-lit space right afterwards in Clare's room upstairs, where Mr. Bellew spews racial slurs in Irene's presence. It is only after this scene when she gets home that she is safe. Irene emerges out of the shadows in her darkly lit home, with her hat finally off and in the arms of her husband (18:59). This moment of coming out of the shadows signifies a different Irene: one who is free to speak her mind, show her face, and exist as a Black woman. Irene is no longer a fragmented being in the dark lighting. The use of grayscale then focuses on light and

dark, rather than the actual *colour* of the actors in the film. Now of course, we can tell which actor is lighter, darker, or gets to pass and who does not, but I believe that this is not the point the film is trying to make, nor do I think it was Larsen's.

The film constantly foreshadows Clare's tragic fall but does so in a way that does not allow the viewer to see how it happens. We see the gentleman who fainted outside of the toy store on the ground already, but not the act of him falling (4:01). There is also the moment where Irene drops her planter out the window, but we only hear it crashing, with the camera still being on Clare (40:08). In each case, we only see the final remains of destruction rather than the process of collapse. This pattern of omission, however, is subverted near the end the movie, when Brian and Ted are talking about the lynching of John Carter. Ted tells his mother: "You got to know about these things Ma" (1:07:45). Ted then proceeds to share the gruesome details of John's lynching, in which, "they attached [Carter's] body to a Caravan and dragged it through the city" (1:08:13). This final detail of John's lynching was added in the film, but not present in Larsen's story. This is the first instance where we as viewers are given the processual details of downfall or destruction. It is only revealed verbally, and only revealed for the purposes of Ted's understanding of the world as a Black boy rather than for white consumption.

I bring this distinction up because in the ending of Larsen's story, we are unsure of how Clare really falls. Like the gentleman on the sidewalk and the planter out of the window, we only see Clare's body on a blanket of snow after scenes of guests running down to check on Clare's body, and Irene standing by the window. The two shots of Clare's corpse are longshots in which we are not privy to Clare's face, nor is there any bleeding. Only being able to see the finality of Clare's body and not how it happened, Hall and Larsen refuse the consumer's want for "neat resolution," and therefore shifts the importance of *how* Clare fell, to the fact that Clare will *inevitably* fall (McIntire 779). Whether it was Irene who pushed her, or Mr. Bellew who did, or even whether it was Clare who fell on her own volition, it does not matter—Clare died because she was Black. Clare was always "not safe" (Larsen 83). Both the film and short story's use of omission is crucially tactful because finding a singular, concrete cause for Clare's death, would be a misunderstanding of the complexity of both Clare's death and her existence as a Black woman.

Hall's adaptation brings into fruition a new way of telling stories of Black suffering without

glorifying Black trauma, but it also brings up many questions on the aesthetics of omission. How does one decide what needs to be omitted and what should be present—who gets to decide this? How does beauty in the film support Black story rather than Black suffering, and how does beauty enable omission in the film? Most importantly, when does omission become ignorance, especially in relation to Black violence? The aesthetics of omission is an astute choice by Rebecca Hall, urging viewers to see a story differently than what they have expected. Clare Bellew's death, by way of omission, the use of light and dark, and the absence of Black trauma all work together to portray the dangers of existing in a Black body regardless of whether one is passing or not.

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Self-Fashioning and Ambiguities of Revolution in Austin Clarke's "Initiation"

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Self-Fashioning and Ambiguities of Revolution in Austin Clarke's "Initiation"

"Initiation" was published by Austin Clarke in 1992 as part of a short story collection titled *In This City*. The collection deals with the complex and ambiguous position of immigrants in the city of Toronto, particularly Barbadians of the African diaspora who occupy a position of the "in-between" in their relationship to the city and to the larger national terrain (Walcott 11). The in-betweenness arises as they cease to belong where they come from and are still "othered" where they have come. In "Initiation," Clark explores the implications and ramifications of this simultaneous position of belonging and not belonging. According to Rinaldo Walcott, Clarke uses this "in-between space as a way to allow readers access to a world and a gaze, from another position which is instructive for the nation" (11-12).

The narrative is set during the late 1990s in Toronto, a time of racial discrimination and marginalisation for the African diaspora, including Black immigrants, at the social, economic, political, and cultural level throughout Canada. This atmosphere generated anti-racist activism against the authorities which in Toronto led ultimately to the Yonge Street riot in 1992 after the trial verdict for the police brutality case of Rodney King acquitted the officers responsible. The riot happened only a few months before *In This City* was published. According to Alexander and Glaze:

> While the LAPD trial verdict, and the May 2 Toronto police shooting death of a black suspected of drug trafficking, acted as catalysts, the root causes of black unrest were simmering frustration over perceived mistreatment, discrimination in employment and housing, and a school system dominated by Eurocentric curricula. (14)

"Initiation" asserts the importance of insulated spaces where identities can exist and be expressed in isolation from the volatile urban context that surrounds them. In the story, Jack, a professor of literature from York University, meets up with his student, Barrington, at one of Barrington's friends' places. Barrington presents a different side of himself to his professor, and as the night goes on, the reverse

happens. Barrington and Jack are both upper-middle class members of the African diaspora who suffer from alienation due to the pressure of assimilating into a white-dominated, heteronormative society. They experience anxiety from the white gaze that constantly perceives them as dangerous and hostile based on their race. This gaze forces Barrington and Jack to behave in ways that are restrained, conservative, and modest. According to postcolonial scholar John Ball, "the solid grip that Toronto's white community has historically held over the city's economy, institutions, culture, and self-image" expects people of colour living in Toronto to conform to the dominant culture (qtd. in Stolar 136). Both characters must comply with these expectations.

Barrington and Jack are associated with York University, a cultural institution that also functions as a vehicle for the state to engage in governmentality by engineering an "ethical incompleteness" within the minds of its community members, a sense of lack that constantly compels a desire to be "better" citizens. According to Toby Miller, cultural studies and media studies scholar, "ethical incompleteness" is the phenomenon through which "we are incited to continually contemplate our own unresolvable, evolving ethical dilemmas, and paradoxically, to try to resolve them via what Miller calls "a series of exercises of the mind" (qtd. in Wershler 111). This becomes apparent when Jack still wants to "better" himself by going to see a "Garveyite Nationalist speak" for a seminar at York, even though he just got back from the airport after travelling, got drunk, high, and is barely conscious (Clarke 46). The university, along with other sociocultural institutions, plays a huge part in stripping individuals of their cultural traits and turning them into the types of citizens it deems appropriate. After a night of freedom, debauchery, and self-fashioning, though, without cultural constraints and within the safety of a private environment, Jack feels empowered enough to say: "Fuck York!" and Barrington feels secure enough to reply: "Right on!" (Clarke 46).

Thus, the room at Barrington's friend's place and the entire west-end of Toronto becomes an outlet to fashion themselves in accord with their own personal will. According to Erving Goffman, all people tailor different "selves" to fit social roles they must play and motivations to play these roles lie in them following their own "self-interest" (11-12). Jack plays the role of a reserved conservative professor at the University and Barrington plays the role of a deprived kid from the "ghetto" as it is in both of their interests in the public sphere to stick to these roles . Jack plays the reserved and conservative professor as it becomes

a testament for his professionalism and work-ethic while Barrington plays to be a "product of the ghetto" as the white-dominant society sees him as exactly that (Clarke 31). It allows him to fit right in with the prevailing neoliberal capitalist discourse, within which progress and development are only possible based on one's own individual efforts. They both must play these roles to live up to white aesthetics of their society.

However, they both have feelings of insignificance and insufficiency because of feeling alienated from their Barbadian and Black identities which is a consequence of trying to live up to white aesthetics. Another source of their internal inadequacy comes from feeling emasculated in a heteronormative culture where masculinity is valued and centralised. According to Carl Jung, we unconsciously strive for significance and adequacy which we consciously lack (63). Thus, both Barrington and Jack (and even others in the room) unconsciously overcompensate for their internal inadequacy by striving for significance through indulging in a self-fashioning of themselves in hypermasculine ways and with aesthetics and values of the Black Power movement that would assert their race. It allows them to take themselves, at least temporarily, out of their roles in a neoliberal world, which they wish not to partake in but still do as their status is at stake. Cornel Bogle points out that Clarke shows "the failure of Canada to offer spaces for progressive black masculinities, a failure that leads to the need for a broader transnational masculinity that borrows much of its language and many of its postures from the black pride movement of the United States" (171). There is an absence of space for Black masculinity to actualize itself as Black people cannot be seen as assertive, subversive, and actively critical without being labelled by white gaze as "loud", "problematic" and "dangerous". Thus, the characters tailor their "selves" with values of hypermasculinity and aesthetics of the Black Power movement, particularly in an insulated space and an area dominated with Black people, which lies in their interest as they become vehicles for them to channel their anger, without letting it directly affect their lives. The whole talk of "revolution" (Clarke 30) and brotherhood ("brother") borrows from ideas that Elijah Mohamed and Malcolm X were propagating during the 1960s in the US through their organisation Nation of Islam. For this reason, Barrington's friend converted and became Ali Kamal All Kadir Sudan from Terrence Washington Jefferson Lincoln Lucas. Malcolm X in his interview with Austin Clarke stated:

> black people in America are well aware that the Christian church as we have known it has definitely failed us. It has failed to produce brotherhood between black and white Christians…this has produced an atmosphere or climate or season in which the religion of Islam, as taught by the Honorable Elijah Mohamed, has found fertile soil and has been very productive, with productive results. (X, "Clarke/Malcolm X" 265)

An indulgence in the above ideas allows everyone in the room to reclaim their Black identity with a sense of importance that they cannot find in the outside world of the public sphere. The discourse of Black nationalism also entertains a fervour of masculinity for the revolution it demands, which allows people in the room an opportunity to explore their otherwise alienated masculinity. Black nationalist imitations of Fidel Castro smoking the cigar also does the same thing for them because Castro, during the 1960s in the US, became the symbol of revolution after being a part of the Cuban Revolution and the poster boy of "masculine persona" as Jama Lazerow asserts "the young of both sexes, then, needed heroism" (Lazerow 92). The aesthetics of Black Power movement and the fascination with Castro serve the same purpose for all Black men in the room including Barrington and Jack, which is, the expression for a heroic sentiment in their unheroic lives where they live passively and without subversion. Batia Boe Stolar states that "Clarke's Toronto…takes the form of a translucently white female character who deters, rejects, consumes, and ejects the black immigrant who seeks to enter her" (124). This becomes apparent by the fact that all Black immigrants have been pushed to the west-end of Toronto with its poor and challenging conditions, away and outside the city's wealthy areas which receive most investments. Jack describes this distinction as they drive away from the west-end of Toronto by saying, "the avenue became wider and only one line of cars, like Barrington's aunt's, was parked in the lazy wealth and safety of Avenue Road" (Clarke 51). Thus, the city "deters", "rejects" and "ejects" by pushing them onto the margins of its city, even though it "consumes" people like Jack and Barrington by not just using their labor or investment in their institutions like the university but also by completely taking away any potential for them to have authentic "selves" in society.

Both Jack and Barrington experience perpetual alienation. For this reason, John Coltrane's saxophone comes like "a wave of rescue and destruction" (Clarke 30) because it pushes their carefully assimilated public "self" to the margins by bringing out racial and cultural parts of their Black identity that

usually remain unactualized in the white-dominated and heteronormative culture of the city. Interestingly, the saxophone is being played within the tradition of Jazz, which as a genre has a multiplicity to it as different players play different melodies in any song, creating a "broken" effect, but the different melodies permeate with each other to create a single harmony. Thus, Coltrane's saxophone symbolically provides encouragement to characters to explore their multiplicities in terms of character without fearing the possibility of a contradiction in their "selves". This makes homosociality among Black men in prose an essentiality, as both "whiteness" and women can threaten their space of freedom in terms of exploring their identities. The presence of any white individual would force everyone to put themselves under the surveillance of their own consciousness as the worry for "acceptable" behaviour would haunt them as it does in a white-driven economy, culture and everyday life. The presence of women would be just as problematic for the men in the room because they have not been able to imbibe the centralised masculine traits, of assertiveness and strength, for men in their culture. The passivity and emasculation they suffer in public life gives them the impression that they are not worthy of women's attention or presence since they have failed to adopt their prescribed role dictated by the gender-normative conventions in a heteronormative society. Hence, the men in the room would only feel humiliation and shame in their interactions with women due to fear of being judged for not being able to live up to the standards of their gendered role. The presence of women in the room would not allow the men to act with the same bravado that they do. The identity of women through relativity would make the men conscious of their own identity as men and the crisis of masculinity that they have suffered.

Therefore, when the song, "This is a Man's World", begins to play, Jack rhetorically asks himself: "Were the men in this room, and their world, of four different sizes and complexions, the men James Brown was singing about?" (Clarke 37). The answer to his question becomes obvious while apprehending that the men in the prose would only be intimidated and reminded of their own manufactured passive state in public life. Hence, according to Jack, they cannot be the "strong men" that James Brown sings about as those men enjoy their active, powerful, and capable status because of the passivity and subservience they impose on women to provide service to them. Clarke's characters are themselves passive and subservient to a system, which rather makes them vulnerable to the idea of interaction with women.

The "initiation" in question is not just happening into a room or a particular location in Toronto, it is an initiation into an alternate sub-structure which allows escape from the public sphere in terms of the freedom and safety in terms of identity that it provides. "Initiation" also stands for beginning something new, which for Jack will be a new identity that he never imbibed. Thus, as soon as the blinds on the window are pulled by the host and light from outside creeps in, the whole incident feels like a "dream" to Jack, and he wants to treat it like that (Clarke 37). The whole incident is treated like that because it is a temporary escape and not a permanent solution to issues. This is what makes everyone's relationship to any "revolution" in the narrative ambiguous.

The narrative takes a very ambiguous perspective regarding the prospect of a revolution due to two factors. First, a revolution can be very unpredictable and uncontrollable in its fervour. It can end up being good or bad. This is shown through the flashes from Harlem that the professor gets from his time there after encountering a huge crowd of protesters in Toronto. He remembers a leader of the Black Power movement in Harlem giving a speech in which he argues, "If we say that we want to form something that's based on black people getting together, the white man calls that racism. Mind you, that is right. And you have some o' these Negroes in Harlem, these white-minded Negroes running round here saying, 'That's racism.'" (Clarke 49). There is potential in this speech for uniting Black people against oppressive forces, but it also has the potential to cause divisions between themselves as Black people that do not agree with the narrative of the Black Power movement are immediately stripped of their "Blackness" by being called "white-minded". This possibility of divisive politics is what manifests Clarke's, what David Chariandy calls, "critical detachment from, American black nationalism." (9).

The second factor that creates an ambiguity for revolution has to do with the position of the professor and his student. They are both privileged members of their society, regardless of the roles they must maintain. They have something to lose. Their quest for revolution can come at the price of them losing what they have. Thus, it is quite symbolic when Barrington and Jack are quickly trying to get the car started, so that they can get away before they are swarmed with the crowds of protesters in Toronto. Malcolm X in his interview with Clarke referred to this dilemma of the privileged Black man, that Clarke in the story seems to acknowledge, when he stated that "the Negro who refers to himself as the bourgeois,

middle class or professional Negro, he is interested, but…the economic crumbs he receives come from the white man, so he has to hide his interest. He has to camouflage his interest. He has to camouflage his sympathy." (X, "Clarke/Malcolm X" 265)

Ironically, the source of ambiguities of revolution also happens to be the source of the vocabulary of their momentary self-identification and self-fashioning as rebels striving for subversion, the US during the long 1960s. The Black Power movement was at its peak during the long 1960s with activism for all kinds of different issues being on the rise. Among different strands of activism for structural change, the Black Power movement was one of them. However, the 1960s also saw the advent of a new counterculture which advocated for a playful engagement with reality and emphasised the need to discover oneself as more important than anything else. Thus, the counterculture attracted those people towards itself who had lost hope for any change or revolution. According to Lazerow, "Social critics rebelled against the conformity and impersonality of the age. Rock 'n' Roll music… raised uncomfortable issues of race and class. The beats rejected materialism and conformity, and embraced jazz, oriental philosophy, drugs, mysticism, and sex." (93)

The events at Barrington's friend's place seem to portray the history of the 1960s in its microcosm with talks of revolution exhibiting a desire for structural change but ultimately it being dropped for a free space of self-exploration amid Rock 'n' Roll of James Brown, drugs and companionship that it offers. Thus, towards the end of the story, Jack says, "I wished Barrington had already delivered this Mustang jalopy to Ali Kamal All Kadir Sudan; and I wished that his Barbadian-born aunt did not need the Benz to drive to Florida with her husband. And I wished that it was still summer, and that we could…" (Clarke 51) as he is forced to confront their fragmented states which makes him question their authenticity as people. It is for this reason that he does not finish the above quoted sentence as he does not know what they could have done but he does wish that it was not what they did end up doing that night. Jack's confrontation with this incongruity in terms of the "self" is not resolved by Clarke probably because he does not think such a dilemma or even others for Black immigrants can be easily resolved. Thus, the narrative ends when it is time to get back to York and maintains its ambiguity on different issues, like revolution versus conformism, individualism versus collectivism, and authenticity versus inauthenticity, from the beginning till the end.

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fiction

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The Phone Call

Samran Muhammad

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Samran Muhammad

The Phone Call

The names of missing persons were listed in alphabetical order. Each one had a grainy, black-and-white photograph next to it.

It had been six months since it happened. Nadia started living alone in her two-bedroom house. While the pot of water boiled in the kitchen, Nadia scanned her finger down the newspaper page.

She recognized her husband's name. His round face, bold eyes, and forced smile stared back. They didn't own a camera and certainly never posed for a photograph together. Waleed said it was too soon. She'd found his photo in an old album, shoved under his bed. It was an old photograph from before she'd met him. The distant hills behind him reminded her of the deep valleys, the tall pine trees that danced for the river which ran alongside the town. It was the only time they'd gone on a trip together. Resisting the urge to stare back at the picture too long, she checked her house address and phone number underneath the caption.

Nadia spent the winter sitting on the two-seater couch, imagining her husband beside her, watching the snowflakes burst into tiny droplets on the glass windows.

Pouring the boiled water into a mug along with a teabag, she felt a sudden urge to open the dusty shoebox resting above the fireplace. She'd watered the white orchids on the kitchen island and fed Dalia, her goldfish, who'd hidden behind the plastic ferns as if afraid of Nadia's figure looming over the bowl.

Nadia wrapped a shawl around her skinny body, put on her snow boots, and unlocked the trunk of her old Toyota, fingering through the stack of posters she'd printed yesterday. In the photograph, her husband stood next to a frozen creek.

Slamming the trunk shut, she crawled in, drove past the children's playground, and parked next to the curb. She stapled posters on the lampposts and left a handful on people's welcome mats.

Her car tires nearly skidded at the bend in the road, and she stopped at the corner shop.

The man behind the counter with stringy black hair dabbed in too much oil, pressed his lips together and shook his head in frustration.

He handed the customer a box of Marlboro before shifting his attention to her. “I told you I’m not taking any more of those flyers. Go,” he said, dismissively waving his hand.

Nadia felt her body stiffen, and her hands began to shake. No one would speak to her in that tone if her husband were here. “It’s not a flyer.” She stood in front of the large board covered in job flyers, snow removal services, an ad for an old cabinet, and other useless information with strips of numbers ready for people to grab. They covered what she’d previously posted.

“How many times have I said it. That board isn’t for the dead.”

She carried on, flipping through the ads until she found last month’s poster with a different picture of Waleed. She ripped it, replacing it with the new one.

After the door chimed shut, she watched the man through the window. He left the counter and went up to the board. Nadia was sure he’d rip the paper off and crumple it in his fist like last time, but the man stood with his arms crossed, craning his neck forward.

Nadia shivered from the cold. Her skin paper-thin. She left a few posters at the community mailboxes before parking the car in her driveway.

“You’re at it again, I see,” Mrs. Fauzia said. Nadia hadn’t noticed her neighbour sitting on her front porch. She’d stopped noticing things that didn’t matter anymore. Mrs. Fauzia marched down her steps onto Nadia’s driveway and took the last poster from her hand. The silence widened the gap between them. “Do you want to come in? We’ll have chai and something to eat. Maybe some jelly biscuits. They’re your favourite, right?”

Nadia felt the evening breeze brush through her hair.

As if the woman was in a conversation with herself, she kept talking, “Okay, maybe I can come over for a bit. Keep you company?” Mrs. Fauzia enjoyed her front porch even in the cold, spending most of her time on the rickety plastic chairs. She wasn’t the type to care what others got up to, but Nadia wished Mrs. Fauzia would leave her alone too.

“I have to go. The calls will start coming soon,” Nadia said.

Mrs. Fauzia gave her a look filled with disappointment, and Nadia anticipated the words that followed. Words that she’d heard from others many times.

"Look, I know it's been difficult for you, Nadia, but you're draining yourself. It's unhealthy. You're growing thin, waiting for something that won't happen."

"They never found it. The body."

"Nadia." She paused as if searching for the right words. "There were four other men. The report made it very clear." Her tone became a low murmur. As if saying the words brought her discomfort. "My dear, obsessing over it won't make him walk through your front door."

"You don't know that." Nadia marched up her front steps and locked the door behind her.

She shuffled into the kitchen, fed Dalia again and poured an entire jug of water into her potted orchids until the pots overflowed onto the counter.

Nadia couldn't silence her thoughts. As though her grasp on the truth had unravelled. She began to grow impatient. An hour passed, but no calls.

Clinging to the pieces of her husband was like trying to grip water in her fist. Nadia grabbed the shoebox from above the fireplace, blew the dust off the lid and opened it. A black and white photograph of her younger self smiled back. She barely recognized the woman in the picture. Beside her, Waleed stood handsome and tall in nothing but his saggy pantaloons.

She took out the newspaper from three years ago, unfolded it, and read the heading: Searchlight Coal Industries Disaster. A man in uniform with a shiny badge pinned to his chest had showed up at the door two days later and gave her the news along with the paper.

The phone rang. Nadia jumped at the sudden intrusion. She launched herself at the receiver.

"Yes?"

"Today's the day, dear." It was a man's voice, muffled, raspy, yet distant, as though caught behind a brick wall. Nadia had clearly misheard. She imagined it.

"Who's this?" She felt the sweat sliding down her hand onto the receiver.

His faint chuckle triggered something deep inside her. "You should be ashamed of yourself." She hung up the phone.

Why would he call? Why not just come home?

Pouring another cup of tea, Nadia tapped her fingernails on Dalia's fishbowl, but the goldfish

didn't budge. Her tiny fins weakly fluttered in the water, fighting to keep her from sinking.

When the phone rang again, Nadia let it ring, hoping the caller would hang up, but it kept ringing until she couldn't bear it. She set her teacup on the table and held the receiver in front of her face, close enough to make out the voice on the other end.

"Say something."

She suddenly didn't like answering the phone. "If you're not calling about the poster, don't bother because I'm not interested." Nadia wanted to slam the receiver back into place, but couldn't.

"I know you're afraid. It's okay. I can talk to you like this." The voice nearly had her, but she pulled herself back, forcing her heart to fight it.

"You can't prove it."

"July 14, 1964. The day I saw you standing outside the school gate. You braided your hair that day, tied them with purple ribbons."

The more she pulled, the more he tugged at her. "Who are you?"

"I told you. I can talk to you this way."

When she looked outside, the day had escaped from her. The sky had turned dark with the moon, only an idea behind loose clouds.

When she hung up the phone, she felt a burst of unwavering joy wrap around her heart. Every nerve in her body throbbed with excitement.

But the reasonable part of her kept fighting hard. To pull her away from the idea.

She grew thinner, started neglecting her meals, and mould began spreading on the sink dishes.

Dust collected on the kitchen tiles. Nothing mattered but the phone call.

Her potted plants drooped over the counter. The leaves had turned yellow, and Dalia swam around her bowl in erratic patterns like a prey lashing out defensively, trying to escape the inevitable.

Nadia now expected the phone to ring every morning. She wanted it to.

She combed her hair, tightly knotted it into a braid. She wore Waleed's favourite dress, blue with shimmering rhinestones embroidered on the front, and positioned herself on the two-seater beside the phone.

When it rang, she watched as Dalia floated to the surface, her orange belly facing up toward the ceiling. Nadia fixed her eyes on the stillness around her. A solitude that felt like an object without form and shadow. She felt the emptiness push itself into every crevice in the house, threatening to press itself right next to her, on the two-seater like an old friend.

She realised that humans were split into those who wished to move forward and those who chose to return.

The phone rang as snow quietly fell outside, making everything look bigger than it seemed. Nadia picked up the receiver, held it tight to her ear, not wanting to miss a single word and said, "Good morning, my dear."

visual art

Untitled
Marcia Diaz

The Dissolved
Aemun Wasim Syed

Contributors

Katie Andersen is a weekend gardener, a video game enthusiast, a sometimes-dabbler. Under another name, she was a florist, but now works as an academic editor and researcher.

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Clara Burghelea is a Romanian-born poet with an M.F.A. in Poetry from Adelphi University. Recipient of the Robert Muroff Poetry Award, her poems and translations appeared in *Ambit, Waxwing, The Cortland Review* and elsewhere. Her second poetry collection *Praise the Unburied* was published with Chaffinch Press in 2021. She is Review Editor of *Ezra*, An Online Journal of Translation.

Marshall Burr, a Calgary native, received his Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Mount Royal University in 2020. He is currently finishing his Master's degree in English Literature with a specialization in African Studies at Carleton University where he also worked as a Teaching Assistant for the 2022-2023 academic year. In 2018, his short story, "Thy Shape, oh Eternity," won him the Mount Royal University Writing Scholarship. Additionally, he is the recipient of numerous undergraduate and graduate awards including the Carleton University Vic Mallet Scholarship in English, the Carleton University Michael Thompson Scholarship, and a Canada Graduate Scholarship Master's Award for his current research in multidirectional memory and literary sephardism in Caribbean poetics.

Tara Costello is a Master's student in the Literatures of Modernity program at Toronto Metropolitan University. She holds an Honours B.A. from the University of Toronto in English, Theatre & Performance Studies, and Creative Expression & Society. Her creative work has been featured in *The Strand* and *White Wall Review*.

Olivia De Sanctis is a long time lover and writer of poetry, as well as a graduate student and teaching assistant at York University. She is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program at York and has previously completed her M.A. and B.A. with Honours at the

same university. Her research is concerned with experimental poetry, the intersections between poetry and the visual arts, and innovations in poetic media. Olivia resides in the Greater Toronto Area.

Marcia Diaz is a multidisciplinary artist and researcher with a passion for exploring the impact of digital technologies and design on society. She holds a B.A. in Design from Universidad de los Andes in Colombia, a Bachelor of Information from the University of Toronto, and an M.A. in STS from York University, where she explored the intersection of digital privacy, children's digital rights, and educational materials. As a designer, she has worked with various organizations focused on digital rights, giving her a unique perspective on issues of privacy and surveillance. Also an illustrator, you can find her work in public spaces throughout Toronto, as well as in literature magazines and educational campaigns.

Nicole Dufoe is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English at the University of Toronto.

Sandy Feinstein's chapbook was published in 2021 by Penumbra Press. Poems since then appear in *Gothic Nature, Seems, SJU Humanities Review*, among others. She is professor of English at Penn State Berks.

Deborah Herman is a Toronto poet interested in exploring the connections between "white space," writer's block, and selfhood. She received a Letter of Distinction at her graduation from the Humber School for Writers (HSW) for her collection of poems titled *Neuropoetics*, a term she coined to denote the attempt to describe in poetry and flash fiction the experience of "drawing a blank" or being silenced by a medical condition. Her work has appeared in *Existere*, *The Nashwaak Review*, *Vallum*, *Silver Apples Magazine*, *Popshot Quarterly* and *The NonBinary Review*.

Samran Muhammad is completing an M.A. in English alongside a Graduate Diploma in Creative Writing (fiction) and currently working on a novel. In his writing, he explores identity formation, culture, temporality, loss, mourning, memory and dissolution, consequences of war, and political predacity. He is also working on his poor self-control when it comes to purchasing books.

Andrew Oram is an English Master of Arts student and a Creative Writing Graduate Diploma student in the field of poetry at York University. He not only writes poetry but creative prose as well. Andrew is creative in all aspects of his life and enjoys sharing his

art with the world. His other passions include DJing and dancing and he has spent his life living in Toronto.

Olivia Palepoi is a Samoan American woman from Salt Lake City, Utah. Her work commemorates her personal and familial experiences as a second-generation immigrant navigating cultural identity amongst conflicting forms of consciousness. Currently, she is a master's student focusing on reparative oceanic futures, the regeneration of cultural traditions, and identity-making.

Mathuri Sivanesan is a Tamil Canadian literary scholar based in Scarborough, Ontario. Receiving both her B.A. (2020) and M.A. (2023) in English at the University of Toronto, Mathuri continues to study anticolonial and decolonializing frameworks in IBPOC literature.

Aemun Wasim Syed was born in Toronto, where he currently lives. He was homeschooled by his Pakistani-Canadian parents. He became interested in art at a young age, and started learning visual art with a tutor in 2022. He works mostly with graphite pencils and watercolors. Some of his favorite visual artists are: Robert McClosky, Herge, Brett Helquist, Remedios Varos, Abdul Rehman Chughtai, Patricia Polacco, and Sadequain.

Divyansh Vyas is a final year M.A. English student at the Université de Montréal. His expertise lies in Theory, postmodernism and late 20th Century American Theatre. He is currently writing his thesis within the field of U.S. during the long 1960s. Divyansh uses his knowledge of the latter field to understand why characters in Austin Clarke's story borrow the aesthetics of 1960s Harlem.

Sarraounia Seidou is a trilingual Beninese author, literary theorist, and therapist. She has a B.A. in English Creative Writing and Psychology and an M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She is working towards another M.A. in English Literature, Language, and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor. Her creative thesis project explores vodoun mystic stories through an Afropresentist framework. In her literary research she also explores Afro-diasporic spirituality, holistic wellness, and intersectional identity. Her creative work has been published in *Broken Worlds by Almond Press, Young Poets Network, FIYAH Lit Mag* and more. She grounds her work in Afro-Indigenous, West Afrikan spirituality and philosophy because these wisdom traditions can shift reality when properly understood. Through her stories, she promotes embodied, somatic healing and liberation, and she bears witness to the wisdom traditions inherent to Fon people's cosmology.